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DUANG WITH YOU

1. [00 - Hey](#)
2. [01 - We Were Never Friends Anyway](#)
3. [02 - I Want to Give Back as Much as I've Received](#)
4. [03 - Today, I Feel for You Just as Much as You Feel for Me, Duang](#)
5. [04 - I Really Like Those Eyes](#)
6. [05 - I Don't Even Know Why I Like You This Much](#)
7. [06 - I've Prepared Everything to Love You](#)
8. [07 - Duang Loves You So Much That I See You Cuter Than Anyone Else](#)
9. [08 - If It's Right, It's Right. One Look and You Just Know, No Reason Needed](#)
10. [09 - Maybe Because You Made Me a Better Person](#)
11.  [Update Plans & Exam Break Notice](#)
12. [10 - Just Knowing That You'll Be at Ease Is Enough for Me](#)
13. [11 - Trying to Be A Good Love for You](#)
14. [12 - If This Is a Dream, I Don't Want to Wake Up](#)
15. [13 - I Like You So Much More, There's No Comparison](#)
16. [14 - It's Special Because He Loves Qin.](#)
17. [15 - I Don't Want Anyone to Get Close to You](#)
18. [16 - Just Want to Feel Like You're Close](#)
19. [17 - Us](#)
20. [File01 - Chiang Mai for Lovers](#)
21. [File02 - You're Not Back Yet, Duang?](#)
22. [File03 - No More a Warrior, I'll Be a Lover](#)
23. [File04 - Fluffy, Can You Not Grow Up?](#)

00 - Hey

My dad said that only losers still go to Loy Krathong with their friends.

My brother said that I was so lame, that I couldn't even bring myself to ask him to go to Loy Krathong with me.

And my friend said...

"Hey."

This trick works a hundred percent.

" ... "

"Hey."

I licked my dry lips. Damn it. What do I do now?.. The way I practiced, he was supposed to respond with something, not just stare at me like this.

"My friend likes you."

I shut my eyes and blurted it out a little louder. The sound of firecrackers and the usual noise of the Loy Krathong festival filled the air. Everyone was here floating Krathong with their lovers. Of course. First year in university, single like me... it was bound to be a little sad. No, actually, it was so damn depressing.

"Friend?"

"Uh, yeah."

Has anyone ever told him?

That he's ridiculously cute.

"My name is Buddy."

Cute with no reason at all.

Cute enough to drive some idiot crazy in love since the first day of freshman orientation.

Cute even though he's the same height as me.

Cute even though he dresses so damn carelessly—the oversized student uniform shirt that's never been ironed properly, the same old sneakers he's worn since orientation... or even those pale hands carefully holding a bread Krathong.

"Your dad's friend, my ass."

Bang!

It felt like I just got shot straight through the heart. The bread Krathong he threw hit me right in the face, his expression annoyed. I knew that look well... His friends whistled and teased us, making everyone turn to look. I bet my friends, who had been hiding behind a tree, had also come out to cheer now, blending in with the bright, flashy festival lights the university had set up.

And it was that day.

"Duang! Just go for it, man!"

"Duanggg, say it! Modern men, broad shoulders, leather shoes!"

The first day I did more than just secretly watch him practice music after class.

The first day I did more than just walk past him and sit at the back of a food stall, watching his back as he slowly ate the same meal every evening.

"So, is your name Buddy or Duang?"

The first day...

"Duang."

That saying my own name felt so damn hard.

"And? What is it?"

"Would you... mind?"

" ... "

"If we try talking?"

The first day I felt like the dumbest person alive.

I wanted to scream in his face, apologizing for being so lame... so uncool.
But yeah, would he mind?

I'm a guy.

He's a guy.

"Can you be more straightforward?"

I swallowed hard.

"Qin! Easy, son, easy!"

"Don't bully him, man. Chill!"

Any more straightforward and I'd be down on one knee proposing, I swear.
I scratched my nose awkwardly... accidentally met his eyes, and my heart
dropped like I was on a roller coaster.

I stopped asking myself whether it would go well or not because how could
it ever go anywhere if I never tried?

"Can I court you?"

I went back and forth in my head a hundred times. But after all the calculations, I figured it was better to just say it before he could either agree or reject me. And because of that, I had to gather even more courage than when I was in kindergarten and had to dance on stage in front of hundreds of people on Mother's Day.

He was more than that.

"No... I mean, Duang is going to court you."

More than a hundred people and a stage that made my knees shake.

"I changed my mind."

" ... "

"I'm not asking for permission. Just letting you know."

I'm so old-fashioned.

But well...

"Then go ahead and court me successfully."

Me and him.

Him, who sings so damn well.

Him, who always gets back to the dorm late and buys black coffee to fight off sleepiness every morning.

Him, who's unpredictable like the weather.

And it was that day... that I started courting him.

The day we started talking.

01 - We Were Never Friends Anyway

"Spacing out."

"Youuuu! Duang is hurts!"

"I meant to hurt you." Qin shrugged, ran his finger along the spine of a jazz music book before picking up the third one from the left and flipping through it. I wanted to tell him that I wasn't spacing out, I was just looking at his long legs on the day he was wearing tight black jeans, that's all.

"Why are you wearing these pants?"

He sighed.

Yeah, sighed at my face.

"And what about it?"

"Just askinggg."

"The other ones are being washed."

"You like them, don't you?"

"I told you, the other ones are being washed."

"Then can you not wear them anymore?" I said softly... It's not that they're not good, they're really good, actually. His legs are insanely pretty, and black brings out his white skin as expected from a Chinese descendant.

Yeah, I get jealous easily.

A little and my thoughts run far.

"Crazy."

"Alright, alright."

"You've been secretly looking at my legs, haven't you?"

" ... " I flinched. He glanced at me lazily. After talking for a while (more than half a year, geez), I learned many of his habits. Like that bored-looking face? It doesn't mean he's actually bored. It's just his resting face when he doesn't want to show any feelings.

I think he's been tired lately.

"Getting bold."

"Come on."

See?

I patted his head to recharge him.

"Messy, you bastard."

Qin frantically swatted my hand away. We are the same height, but I like to act like he's smaller. How should I put it? I find him endearing in an unexplainable way. And this past week, we barely saw each other. Plus, he's not the type to reply to texts all day.

If I text him at noon, he replies at four in the evening.

'Why the hell are you asking if I've eaten lunch? I'm a full-grown buffalo. If I forget to eat, then let it be.'

That's what he said.

Yeah, so I let it be.

"I told you to call me

you

." (cocochip : 'you' means here that Duang wants Qin to call him 'ter' – a softer and slightly more intimate way to refer to someone.)

"Goosebumps to death."

"Hmph."

"Did you just sigh at me?" Qin chuckled in his throat. At first, I was like a timid dog, just going along with him. But now that we're a little closer as someone talking to each other, I started to act a little rough.

"So damn sulky."

I took a sharp breath when he closed the music book in his hands and brought his face close to me. A mischievous smile appeared on his face.

I'm weak against this kind of thing... The type with fangs, who smiles with squinty eyes, with a little bit of cheek even though he's skinny as hell.

Damn it. Heart melting.

"Thinking dirty. I can see it."

"Ugh, don't move your face away yet."

"In the middle of the mall, I'm begging you."

"You moved your face in first, you know."

"You're weak."

That's what he said before walking away, leaving behind the faint scent of perfume that I know is customized. His family does a perfume business. The whole family is artsy—his mom is a photographer, his dad has a personal business, and the only son is studying music. Qin always has something to surprise me.

And he is way manlier than me, especially when he ruffles his long bangs in frustration and raises an eyebrow at me like,

What the hell are you looking at?

"Thinking dirty again."

Gulp.

I swallowed hard.

His collarbones are insanely beautiful.

And wearing an oversized shirt like this makes it even more—

Then it ended with me getting smacked on the head, scattering my dirty thoughts.

Like I said—if he lets me be more than a friend one day, I'll think about what should be what then.

For now,

Just follow my heart.

"Ramen, okay?"

"okay" (cocochip : here, Duang just reply with 'dai kha' playfully)

"What, are you a lady or something? Always talking

ka

and

kha

."

"Someone likes it though, keep acting tough."

"Oh? Have you tried it to say it's tough?"

" ... "

"Heh. Such a chick."

He smirked, teasing me as I stood stunned.

That's just how he is—top-tier at making things sound two-meaning.

Damn, I want to bite him.

But I can't. We're equally strong.

"Same as always?"

"Yes (kha)."

"You really..." Qin shook his head like he had already given up on me.

Well, what can I do?

When it comes to someone I like, I just want to talk sweetly to them.

No way am I using rough words with him.

He's cute.

And cute words suit him perfectly.

"So what time do you have to go back to uni?"

"In the evening. Are you going back to sleep?"

"Mhm, probably."

"Then I'll drop you off first."

"Are you going to sleep?"

"Whoa, are you inviting me to your room?" I pointed my chopsticks at the easy-hearted guy.

"Well, your place is far. Just let you sleep for a bit."

"You're really not being careful at all."

"Like you could do anything to me." He let out a heavy sigh like he was completely fed up with me. I mouthed words silently, watching him slurp up the ramen and chew. Even though he's skinny, he eats like crazy. Even in midnight, his mouth is still chewing. And honestly, he looks the cutest when he eats.

"Eat a lot, okay?"

Because he won't have a mouth to curse at me then.

I grinned, ruffling the head of the person who was chewing while glaring at me. So damn cute. Damn, I really have to thank myself for having the guts to ask him directly that day. And from then on, things just kept flowing naturally until we got to this point.

Just having him every day already feels like a dream.

"Let go, ai sat."

Really, though.

Qin's room was just as clean as I thought it would be. Clean, just like him. I'd seen it before on FaceTime when we hadn't met up, but that was rare, and it never lasted more than five minutes.

"What are you staring at?"

"Well, I've never been in your room before."

"It's just a normal room."

"It smells nice."

"Not everyone's a slob like you."

"Have you ever been to my place? Acting like you know."

To others, his relationship with Qin might seem as slow as a crawling turtle, but to him, it was just the right pace. If it were a car, he could be sure it wouldn't flip over or crash along the way. Someday, they'd reach their destination... not too long from now.

"You have a stuffed animal."

"From an old talking stage."

" ... "

"I swear, if you get jealous, I'll seriously kick you, Duang."

"Can't I be jealous?"

"That is just a talking stage? It ended ages ago."

"Keeping the stuffed animal means you still have feelings. I can see it."

And the big mouth really got kicked in the leg. Duang yelped, glaring at the ruthless guy before snapping when Qin threw the stuffed animal at him like he was pissed at something.

"We stopped talking—what did the stuffed animal do wrong?"

Ugh, I don't want to argue anymore.

Duang mouthed silent complaints before his eyes widened when Qin's pale skin under his clothes caught the warm sunlight filtering through the white blinds.

" ... "

That waist is insanely slim. T_T

"What the f*ck are you looking at? I have to change to sleep."

"Uh, yeah, yeah."

The clueless guy wiped his nose to check if his nosebleed was actually coming out. His weird behavior was caught by the owner of the room, who had already changed his shirt but would definitely not take off his pants in front of this perverted-minded person.

"Pervert."

"I-I'm not, Duang swears!"

"Already hard."

"You!!!"

Duang squeezed his thighs together, clutching his pants—which were not hard at all—while looking like he was about to cry. His sharp eyes followed Qin, who was walking into the bathroom with long pajama pants in hand. In the end, Duang flopped onto the sofa in the middle of the room, chanting prayers like he'd seen a ghost. If he had holy water, he'd drink it right now!

"Are you changing into sleepwear?"

"Is it bad if I sleep in boxers—"

Why the hell is everything coming at me full force today? God, I'd like to ask for permission to question this.

The art student was lost for words when Qin walked out wearing matching pajamas with Curious George on them. The print made his fair skin stand out even more. And what the hell was that messy little topknot for washing his face?!

"I don't mind. Because you're sleeping on the couch."

"Damn it!"

"Always thinking dirty. Do whatever you want."

"If I sneak into bed with you while you're asleep, will you know?"

"Don't push it. Just this much is already the biggest blessing of your life."

"I feel like crying."

"Go ahead." As soon as the other person's curt words left his mouth, Duang stepped toward Qin, who seemed to be struggling with the air conditioner remote. He took it from him, opened the battery compartment, put the batteries back in, and pressed the button to show Qin that they were just loose.

"Thanks."

See?

Even his short way of saying thanks was cute.

"Why don't you wipe your face properly?"

"Stop using polite speech. I'm not a little girl."

"If you like it, just say you like it. There's no one else here, why do you have to act tough?"

"It's not like that." Duang looked at Qin's face as he started to sulk. He wasn't entirely sure what this was supposed to mean for Qin, but for him, it was definitely sulking. And in his eyes, it was ridiculously cute.

Damn.

"So what is it then?"

Taking the opportunity while the other person was searching for an excuse, he grabbed two or three tissues from the box nearby and wiped Qin's damp face. His long eyelashes and deep-set double eyelids were so damn endearing.

"Aren't you too close?" (cocochip : Qin use 'kha' here)

Thump!

"Whoa, you!"

The dark brown-haired boy raised his hands in surrender and quickly backed away from the person who had suddenly switched to polite speech instead of his usual blunt tone. His heart was beating so erratically that he could hear the rhythm change with his own ears.

I'm about to faint.

"Don't say it often."

"So, you're saying your heart is racing?"

"..."

"Right? If you admit it, I won't say it often."

Duang looked at him fondly. That's exactly what it was. Sometimes, Qin was just like a kid. His thin lips pressed together for just a moment before relaxing again. He didn't say anything, just gave a half-hearted nod and sighed.

So he does get shy, huh?

"You're adorable."

"Shut up and go to sleep."

"So, so cute."

"Duang."

"The cutest ever. :)"

Yeah.

Too damn cute.

Qin's brown hair turned even darker when it got wet. After finishing a discussion about next year's freshman orientation, Duang had been dragged off to play soccer. Beside him sat the person who had said he'd just wait, lured in by the promise of grilled meat at a delicious restaurant. Believe it or not, food could always win over Qin.

"What the hell are you staring at?"

"You're pale."

"Fuck off."

"You smell nice."

"I'm covered in sweat."

"Love it."

Then, the person who kept teasing him got smacked on the head. Today, Qin was such a good forward that it made Duang nervous. How was he so good at soccer?

So cool, I wanna cry.

"You're so whipped."

"Jet, go away." The tall boy nudged his friend away with his foot. There were so many places to wash up—why the hell did he have to stand there watching?

"Jet loves Khun Qin." After saying that, he went and leaned against Qin's chest.

Duang nearly had a heart attack. Everyone knew Qin hated physical contact. After talking for half a year, he hadn't even held his hand yet. And where the hell did this guy come from, hugging him and resting his head on his waist?

"I'm sweating."

"Jet loves Khun Qin." Jet repeated.

"Are you an Autobot?"

Duang watched as Qin lightly patted Jet's shoulder but didn't push him away. Just let him hug him like that. So now he didn't know how to play hard to get?

"Why are you letting him hug you?"

"Don't use 'kha' here, Duang. I'm gonna puke."

"Right?"

"Right, Khun Qin."

See?!

Even you're doing it now!

"Jet, stop messing with him. He's about to cry. He's helpless, totally useless."

"Fine, sorry for being useless." Qin brushed his long bangs back and shook his head at the guy sulking next to him. He was always whining about something. Even though Jet had already let go, he was still pouting.

Not gonna console him.

Sulking for no reason.

"So we're all going, right?" One of Duang's friends asked, and Qin was the one who nodded because the guy who was still sulking kept huffing and turning away.

"I'm going in Duang's car."

"Me too!!"

Duang wanted to die.

Was there ever a time when he could drive and spend the red-light moments just quietly looking at Qin's face? He shouldn't have brought his car today, damn it.

"I'll drive."

"Just sit still. You've been playing soccer for two hours, you know."

"You're no different. Give me the keys."

"Duang is the wifeee!"

It was Jet again, blurting that out before running after Qin to the car. Duang clenched his fists... The moment Qin was out of sight, he was going to call that bastard Jet in for an attitude adjustment. This was called respecting the wife—take notes. Who would dare argue? If he could give in, he would.

"Qin is handsome, you know."

"I knew that before you did."

"No, but really. Ja and the others ask me every day—what's up with you two? Handsome and handsome, neither willing to back down, same height. Ja said that, by the book, the bottom should be shorter and have a sweeter face."

"Qin's face is sweet, though."

Duang mumbled, glancing at the broad shoulders of the person who turned to check for just a second whether he was following.

But yeah...

A dog follows its owner.

The owner should've realized by now—he's never going anywhere.

"Your face is sweeter than his, Duang."

"Disgusting."

"I'm serious."

"Do you love me, Pae?"

"How much?" Pae asked flatly.

"Two hundred."

"You're the husband."

"Understood."

They shook hands after settling on an agreement. Pae shook his head in annoyance. He always made the first move, but whenever he tried to push forward, he got ignored. But in reality, there was a cute side to it, like how two men could talk to each other.

They had to get along a lot more before they would get along.

"Buckle up."

"Yeah, yeah."

Jet nudged the friend beside him, gesturing toward the two sitting in the front seats. Their conversation about which playlist to listen to was adorable

—one, a music major, was talking about the mood and tone of the songs, while the other kept saying how great the lyrics were.

"Then let's go with the middle playlist. This is me compromising the most for you, okay?"

"Who asked you to compromise?"

"I'll remember this."

"Sulking over nothing."

"Yeah, sure. Like I even have the right to."

Qin sighed and reached over to flick the forehead of the guy who never shut up. Before long, the so-called middle playlist started playing.

And that playlist? It was a mix of both their favorite songs.

"Damn."

"First song already hitting me hard."

"Why do I have to smile when in truth, we should be sad~~"

Duang nodded along to the cheerful beat, but the lyrics stabbed deep. Nothing was more painful than the friend zone.

All he could do was steal glances at the person next to him every now and then, only to see that Qin still had that usual blank expression and was focused on driving.

"Just being close like this, even if I never exist in your eyes, doesn't matter to me at all~!"

"Crush me more, Jet! Crush me more!"

"Khun Qin, any thoughts?"

"On the song?"

"Yes, sir."

Even though the singer's voice filled the car with an upbeat melody despite the heart-wrenching lyrics, the three of them felt like someone had turned down the volume, leaving an awkward silence.

"It's a good pop song, has an '80s dance vibe."

"Oh, come on, Khun Qin!"

"Not like that, man! Relate to the person next to you a little, hahaha!"

Pae laughed so hard that he had tears in his eyes.

Yeah, what did they expect? Asking a music student, of course he'd answer like one.

Duang looked so tense he might as well stop breathing.

"This song and Duang, huh?"

" ... "

"Hmm... We were never friends to begin with."

They say water dripping on stone every day...

"We're talking."

...And the stone just admitted they were talking.

Yet somehow, he still managed to smile.

"Awwwwww!"

"Duang, hold yourself together! Huffff, you're smiling so wide your face is gonna split open, you idiot."

Right at that moment, the song ended and a new one began.

This time, it was the one Qin had added to the playlist.

Duang met the eyes of the person who softly pressed the brakes. Qin's long bangs covered eyes that Duang couldn't quite describe in terms of shape, but if he were to look at them artistically—

He thought they were beautiful.

"Looking back on 2009 when people said that it was raining all the time... I see sunshine 'cause I know that you are mine."

And Qin's voice—one he rarely heard—was beautiful too.

"Cheers!"

"Happy birthday again, phi!"

"Strong, big, long – blessings! That's my wish for you."

"Cheers!!~"

After grilling butter until I was dizzy, I went back to my dorm to take a shower and change clothes before heading to the bar. It turned out to be a senior's birthday party in my faculty. At first, I actually thought about going to pick up Qin.

He doesn't drive a car because he says he's too lazy to find parking, so he has an expensive imported pop car from Japan, which can only seat one person, for getting around. And honestly, I don't really feel okay with him driving to the bar and then driving back by himself.

Nakhon Pathom has tons of traffic, and he's all alone too.

"What are you looking for, Duang?"

"Qin."

"Khun Qin is over there, at the naughty kids' table."

"He's already here? How did he get here?"

"Go ask him, dude. You know he doesn't like replying to messages."

I shook my head. I had already learned that lesson, and besides, I didn't want to disturb him while he was with his friends. As long as he got here safely, that was enough for me. But if he got drunk, I might have to step in and offer to take him home and leave his car here.

Not sure if he'd agree, though. He guards that car like a mother cobra protecting her eggs.

"Hey, Duang! Still no girlfriend, huh?"

"Come on, phi, I'm talking to someone."

"Talking till your next life, maybe. I asked you back when you were a freshman, and now you're about to welcome new freshmen yourself, and you're still 'talking'?"

"I'm in no rush, phi."

I clinked my glass with the birthday senior's and chatted about life. Honestly, when people ask me about this often, I start to feel a bit unsteady.

And what if I end up just being 'talking to someone' forever?

Damn it, Duang. Why don't you ever get enough?

"Duang, Duang!"

"Oh, hey, Gaem."

I snapped out of my thoughts, answering my classmate a little absentmindedly. She leaned in close to my ear since the music in the bar

was pretty loud. That's just how it is with live music—it's always intense.

"My friend likes you. She's at the table near the stage, wearing a white shirt."

"There are three people in white, Gaem." I laughed.

"Sorry, white spaghetti-strap top."

It was just basic manners. At the very least, I shouldn't embarrass any girl like that. So I gave her a small smile before Gaem told me that her friend wanted my LINE because she had already messaged me on Instagram, and I hadn't replied.

"You don't have a girlfriend yet, right, Duang?"

"Nope, nope."

I glanced over Gaem's shoulder and caught someone's gaze on me—like a cat eyeing its favorite toy.

He was there, under the warm lighting, wearing a nylon shirt, just the way he liked. The fabric draped over him, contrasting against his pale skin.

I smiled slightly and spoke my next words.

"But I will soon."

"Wow, so you're talking to someone?"

"Something like that."

Gaem's face fell. She turned to look at her friend, and it seemed like both of them understood why I couldn't give my LINE. And why I hadn't answered the Instagram DM—it was simply because I rarely checked it.

"That's okay then. I'll go comfort my friend."

"Please apologize for me."

"See, you're cute just like this, Duang." I high-fived Kaem a few times as a farewell before shifting my gaze to see if Qin was drunk yet, but he had disappeared from his seat.

"He went out to smoke."

"You're always nosy, aren't you?"

"Hey, you should be thanking me, you dog-faced idiot." Jet snapped at me, but I ignored him.

I walked out of the bar, looking for someone who wasn't exactly a heavy smoker but had always smoked nonetheless. I never had the annoying urge to nag him to quit. I believed Qin knew his own limits—if he wanted to quit, he would do it himself.

I just took care of him in the ways he allowed me to, without making him uncomfortable.

"You."

I touched his waist, telling myself it was a little moment of luck. He glanced at me briefly before turning back to cup his hand around the flame of his lighter. The fire flickered in the wind, so I stepped in to block it, making it easier for him to light his cigarette.

"Thanks."

"It's nothing."

He sat down on a long bench, and I did the same, leaving a small gap between us so he wouldn't feel crowded. Qin glanced at me before speaking in a tired tone.

"Mosquitoes will bite you."

"They won't."

"So, what do you want?"

" ... "

"I'm just asking, not scolding."

He's adorable.

I told you already.

"I wanted to ask if you drove here."

"No, I came with Cho."

"Good. I don't want you driving back alone."

"I knew that, so I came with Cho."

And I would keep telling you over and over again...

The simple truth is that you're adorable.

"You nag a lot."

Some people had told me that Qin wasn't really interested in me, that in the end, I'd be waiting for nothing. That this would be a one-sided thing and I'd only end up disappointed.

But that wasn't true.

I knew better than anyone.

He cared about me—

In his own way.

And he cared about me as much as someone like him possibly could.

"Someone asked for my LINE earlier."

"I saw."

We locked eyes.

He put out his cigarette after blowing out the last bit of smoke.

I wished this moment could last just a little longer.

"But I didn't give it to them."

Being able to meet his gaze like this—

"I already have someone."

Then, his cold hand landed gently on my head, ruffling my hair lightly with that usual unreadable expression. I figured maybe his charm lay in that kindness hidden deep within, given out selectively to different people.

At least for today, I was happy to be one of them, and it didn't matter what place I ranked in his life.

As long as he was here with me, that was enough. :)

02 - I Want to Give Back as Much as I've Received

Staggering

That's how I'd describe Duang's arrival—a real troublemaker. He was completely wasted, head lolling as he was dragged in by Jetana and Prachai. I used to think music students drank hard, but after seeing this, I might have to rethink that.

"Thanks, Pae. You too, Jetana."

"Not fair, man. You call him Jetana but don't call me Prachai?"

"You sure you can get him to his room by yourself, Qin?"

"We're the same size," I said lazily. I was so damn sleepy. I'd been waiting for his call to say he got home safely, but instead, I got a call from his friend saying he was wasted. When I asked where he kept his dorm keys, he wouldn't tell me.

Still sneaky, even when he's drunk.

What a headache.

"Take care of my friend, yeah?"

"If he crosses the line, just smash a bottle on his head," Pae said, pointing to his own head. I nodded. No worries there—he and I are evenly matched. Every time we arm wrestle, we take turns winning and losing.

"Drive safe. See ya."

"Yeah, yeah."

I turned around and started walking, struggling a bit because Duang was too drunk to stand on his own. Tomorrow, I was definitely going to have a talk with him. If my friends drank like this, I'd scold them—

Let alone someone I'm talking to.

"Heyyyy, youuuu."

I slapped my hand over his face, pushing him to look the other way because he reeked of alcohol. His face was flushed red, ears too. Hopefully, he wouldn't die from alcohol poisoning or anything like that—my life's chaotic enough as it is.

I supported the drunk person all the way to the front of the room, telling him to rest his head properly on my shoulder. If he tripped and fell, he'd definitely crack his head open—no need to think about it. Unlocking the door was quite a struggle because he looked like he was about to fall backward several times. I let out a breath as I pushed Duang down, leaving him half-sitting, half-lying on the couch, before dropping down to sit as well.

Not long after, he crawled onto my lap.

"You smell good."

"Still flirty when you're drunk, huh?"

"I'm thorough with everything," he laughed to himself in a really annoying way before settling into a steady rhythm of breathing on my lap. I shook my head, exasperated, and gently ran my fingers through his dark brown hair. I figured I'd let him sleep it off a bit before waking him to shower—he'd sober up better that way. I didn't want him slipping and cracking his head open in the bathroom.

I spent quite a while sitting there, listening to nearly the entire jazz album and watching his long eyelashes as he slept soundly. Maybe this is what people mean by 'exception.'

"..."

He's my exception in so many ways.

He came into my life like he could leave easily—but that's not true. He's still here. And he's here in a way that makes me feel like he's not suffering from how I am.

The way I am.

"Duang."

He murmured softly in response, like a child.

I smirked to myself, thinking I wouldn't mind if he just slept forever like this... It's kind of cute.

"You (ter)."

"Hey!"

But no, never mind.

He's cute when he's noisy too.

"Can I get another one, pleeease?"

"Get your ass in the shower." I stood up, letting his heavy head thump against the couch, which wasn't even that soft. He let out an exaggerated groan. I'm used to it—his attention-seeking habits.

Duang stood at his full height. I met his gaze as he looked like he was about to cry, still swaying a bit from the alcohol, but at least he seemed more coherent than half an hour ago. Honestly, I liked that we were the same height.

Same height—so much so that we once measured ourselves seriously against the sports science kids because they always teased us, saying whoever was shorter was the 'wife.'

Even calling him my 'wife' feels ridiculous.

"I'm hungover."

"Serves you right. Dumbass."

"You're so mean."

"Hurry up and shower so you can finally go to sleep."

I sighed, walking over to grab a glass of water to cool my temper. He hung his head and held out his hand for a towel. I jerked my chin toward the wardrobe, telling him to get it himself and that he could wear whatever he wanted. I also mentioned that there was a new toothbrush on the shelf by the bathroom mirror, and then he disappeared to freshen up.

I picked up my Marshall headphones to listen to the music I had to study for next week's exam. I still didn't fully understand the sheet music—at least not on a deeper level. I was absorbed in my own world when he came out in pajamas.

I squinted at him as he mouthed something, but I couldn't hear it since the noise-canceling feature blocked out everything except the jazz music playing in my ears. In the end, he was the one who came over and pulled the headphones off me. Normally, I'd get annoyed if anyone did that—but like I said, he's an exception in many things.

"Duang's not wearing underwear."

"Bastard."

I kicked him away with my foot. He laughed, clearly pleased with himself, as he stood at the foot of the bed, towel-drying his hair. I gathered the scattered music books lying on the bed to clear some space. There were already two pillows since it was a king-size bed—I didn't like an empty bed much, so I always kept two pillows and two bolsters.

"When you're done drying your hair, turn off the lights."

"Got it, got it."

"I'm sleeping on the left."

"Whatever you want. It's already a blessing that you're not making me sleep on the couch."

"You better be grateful."

I pulled the blanket over myself, inhaling the soft scent of fabric softener that always made me feel sleepy. Before long, the room went dark. I could faintly see him through the light from the street outside, and then he dropped onto the bed beside me. Our arms brushed under the blanket—closer than ever before.

"Qin."

"I'm listening."

"Just so you know, Duang's not drunk."

The closest we've ever been.

Closer than anyone else.

"I like you, you know."

"..."

And it feels like we're only getting closer.

"I still like you—just like the first day I realized I did."

I hummed in response, not saying it back, but deep down, I knew he understood my silence. I reached out, loosely holding his middle and index fingers, and with my eyes closed, I told him in a voice softer than the accidental brush of fingers over a keyboard.

"Goodnight."

And he answered by intertwining all his fingers with mine.

He, who is an exception to everything.

And who will probably keep being an exception in ways I can't even begin to predict.

I watched Duang twirl the car keys, humming the song that had just played in the car, before nudging my shoulder and asking with wide eyes... I didn't respond because my mind was still stuck on what happened this morning.

"Qin."

One bolster wasn't enough to keep him on his side, or maybe I just got annoyed and kicked it away. In the end, I woke up to find Duang snuggled against my stomach, his arms wrapped tightly around my waist—while I loosely held him in return.

This is insane.

"Qiinnn."

I snapped out of it and looked at him, now transformed into a three-year-old, pointing eagerly at a bubble tea shop. I rolled my eyes—he acted like he had completely forgotten why we even came to Siam in the first place.

"We're gonna be late."

"Late for what? Weren't you here to buy clothes?"

"You're here to get a tattoo, Duang."

"Huh?"

I laughed softly, watching his face go pale like a boiled chicken.

"Qin, Duang's not doing it."

"You told me to remind you—I even wrote it in my notes."

"Be serious."

"Come on, let's go to Lido."

"Qiiiiiiin." He whined, clinging to my shoulder like a kid. I met his eyes—he looked like he was about to cry. Why the hell was he chickening out now? Especially when it's the day of the tattoo and he already paid the deposit.

Forgetful as hell.

"I remember now—ugh, I was drunk. I drew the design myself, and then a senior dared me to get it tattooed."

"Act tough, then take responsibility."

"Ugh, it's just a few bucks."

"It's still money. Move it."

I grabbed his wrist and pulled him along. He needed to stop dragging his feet. By the time we made it to the staircase leading up to the second floor of Lido, I already had a headache from all his whining—about being scared of needles, feeling faint, asking if the hospital was far, and why the hell he had to come all the way from Thap Kaew just for this.

"Come on, Duang."

His lips trembled.

I wished other people could see him like this—wearing the black graphic tee I bought in England last year, dumb jeans, and sneakers he didn't even bother to wear properly, crushing down the heels.

Everything was almost fine—except his damn face.

"You're already here, what's there to be scared of?"

"Can I hold you?"

"Stop being annoying."

"Come on, Qin, it's an emergency—I'm not thinking anything dirty, I swearrr."

"Don't be a coward. It's just a tiny design—I'll sit with you."

"Youu (terr)..."

"Don't 'you' me."

"Then... can I hold your hand?"

I seriously wanted to smack him—always running his mouth like I was some vendor at the market. I sighed and gave a small nod since we were already standing in front of the tattoo shop.

"But Duang confirmed two designs."

"That's your problem."

"I'll tell him to do just one, but... damn, I'm kinda bummed. It's so pretty." He mumbled, smiling awkwardly as he pulled out his iPhone and scrolled to show me the designs.

One was a pine forest with the sun.

The other was the sea with the moon.

"I'm just showing you—I'm not chicke..."

"I'll get one too."

I didn't meet someone's eyes when I said that—maybe because my heart skipped a beat at my own decision and his wide smile.

"Duang didn't force you."

"You can't force me."

"Are you thinking something about me?" The person next to me started getting giddy. I looked at his warm hand resting on my thigh. It's his habit—when he talks to someone, he likes to place his hand there, sometimes stroking, tapping, or squeezing. When he saw me staring, he pulled his hand away, so I quietly told him it was fine.

And yeah.

He put his hand back, but higher this time.

"You're getting bold."

"Heh, sorry."

"Hey, are you the one who booked for 1:30?"

"Yes."

"The same design you sent me on Line, right?"

The person being asked nodded vigorously before going over to point at things on the tattoo artist's Mac screen. They were probably discussing the design. Then he waved me over to take a look.

"This looks good, right? I think it would look nice on the ankle."

"I was thinking the inner ankle too."

"Whose design is whose now?"

"You choose first. Anything's fine with me."

We locked eyes for a while before I told the artist I'd take the left design, and I caught a small smile forming on the person who drew it.

"Who's going first? Hop on the bed, lean against the wall, and put your foot up here. I'll go prep the needles and ink."

As soon as the artist left the tattooing area, his face fell immediately. His warm hand shook mine repeatedly before he started whining again.

"Qin, Qin, I'm gonna pass out for sure."

"It shouldn't hurt that much—like falling off a bike."

"Falling off a bike doesn't hurt where?!"

"I read somewhere that the ankle doesn't hurt."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Did you even do any research?"

"Sorryyyyyy."

"Want me to go first if you're that scared?"

"No way. I wanna try first. If it hurts too much, you won't have to do it."

As soon as he finished speaking, he sat down on the tattoo bed. I sat beside him, holding out my hand before turning to meet his eyes. When the tattoo artist came back with the equipment, he slumped like a sad puppy.

"Hand."

"Huh? What?"

"Do you want to hold it?"

I'm a straightforward person.

And I know that about myself.

I don't smile easily, but I'm not that hard to make smile either.

"Qin."

I keep a private world that I don't let people into easily. But does he know?

He's already in.

Just like when I started leaving the blinds open in my room, letting the warm sunlight in—until I realized that my eyes are actually dark brown, my skin is pale enough to show my veins, and that outside this world, there's him.

"Thank you."

He's like another sun.

Like a tattoo that seems like I let him choose—but I didn't.

I chose the moon because the sun didn't suit him.

"Gladly."

He is the sun.

To me... he is the sun.

"Shit, it feels like cutting my leg with a box cutter."

"Is it really that bad, Qin?" Jet widened his eyes as he asked the pale guy quietly eating minced pork congee with salted egg.

"Not that much."

"You're just weak."

Duang kicked his friend under the table. They say everyone's pain tolerance is different, but still, when the artist went over the tattoo to add color, Qin unconsciously squeezed his hand.

Cute, huh?

"What are you smiling at?"

"Nothing, kha."

Everything he does is just too cute.

"You're so annoying, always speaking 'kha' and 'kha'. Such a flirt."

"I only talk like this with Qin, okay? Give me a break."

"You never talked like this with your ex though, did you?"

"I've never had a lover, idiot."

"Liar, you'll go to hell, Duang," Jet said while focusing on his congee, completely unaware that he had just dropped a massive emotional burden on someone else. Duang swallowed hard and gave a dry smile to the pale guy staring at him quietly.

See?

Just like a cat—always staring.

"I really never had a lover before. I told you already."

"Really?"

"Really, really."

"You're quite the charmer."

"Don't trust Duang too much, Qin. He might drop you off at your dorm and sneak off to someone else's room afterward."

Bastard! Duang raised his hand to smack his troublemaking friend sitting next to him. This guy was so good at stirring things up—he better not slip up, or Duang would make sure to get back at him.

"If you hit Jet, it means you're guilty."

"Why are you defending him?"

"Blah blah blah!"

"Just finish eating. We have class early tomorrow."

"Your class starts at 10:30, though."

"You're the one with class at 8:30."

"You remember my class schedule?"

The person being cared for looked innocent. He never thought Qin would remember something like that. To say it was one-sided love wasn't an exaggeration because, truthfully, he did love Qin one-sidedly. All that 'getting to know each other' stuff? You can't really rely on it.

He's tried. But sometimes, he still falls short... wanting to give even more.

"I remember."

And sometimes, Qin seems to be able to read his thoughts.

"If you can remember my schedule, then I can remember yours."

"..."

In the end, he realized this wasn't a race toward a finish line where the other person was waiting as a reward... it wasn't that at all. Instead, it was running, it was the journey, it was pushing through everything together.

Starting, moving forward, maybe falling, maybe getting up again, but through it all—

"I want to give as much as I'm getting from you."

Everything happened at the same time.

Both love and hate. Yeah, that's him and jazz music. At first, he intended to major in performance music, but in the end, he chose jazz. And having to drag himself out of bed to study jazz theory in the middle of this scorching heat just made him even more irritated.

"Qin."

"What?"

"Did you see that? Your little lovebug."

"Damn, why'd you call him that? Makes him sound so cheesy."

"Well, he's always acting cute around you. My friend just ignores him like a nun swatting away temptations. Every time he flirt, you brush it off. Every time he tease, you brush it off."

Qin took the phone from his friend and saw it was a photo album on the university's Facebook page, posted just a few minutes ago.

'Duang is not picking you up today. I'm helping a friend with a photoshoot.'

Must be that. Qin thought to himself as he scrolled through the pictures.

"Whoa, there's eye contact and everything."

"He was just following the brief. Why are you stirring things up?"

"Qin doesn't care anyway."

"I do."

Qin's response made his friend stop laughing... Honestly, he didn't get why people kept saying Qin didn't care about Duang. He did care—more than anyone else. Of course he did, it's been half a year with Duang by his side.

He wasn't heartless.

"But it's just work."

"Don't tell me you actually get jealous. Wow, my friend has feelings."

"I'm human." The person who is in the completely non-regulation student uniform because he is too lazy to grab a proper belt or leather shoes, rolled his eyes. Just because he only said what was necessary and showed what he could didn't mean he was heartless or cold.

After all, matters of the heart took time and he still wanted to spend more time with Duang.

Step by step... moving forward slowly.

"If Duang knew this, he would be very happy."

"Whatever."

"Still, it's sweet. No matter how much time passes, Duang still likes you. Never gives up."

Qin looked at the projector at the front of the room as the professor pointed to old jazz instruments that he had seen before while studying for university entrance exams. How should he put it? He had seen Duang before because their tutoring places were near each other, but back then, Duang didn't notice him. He didn't think much of it either.

He remembered because they were about the same height.

He dressed well.

He was kind.

"It's not like I don't like him."

And he always walked his female friends to the train station after late classes, even though he took the bus home. That's what made Qin remember him—because he did it consistently. That kind of kindness.

The kindness that makes Qin still wanted to spend time with and prove to himself... that it would last.

"I like him too."

"Heyyy, Duang's sorry."

"Mm, it's fine."

"I didn't forget, really!"

"I know. You've been texting me every ten minutes." I held up my phone in front of him as he rushed over to me under the faculty building, sweating. He was panting, hands on his thighs. I reached out and patted his head lightly a couple of times before complaining.

"So sweaty."

"I went to a bunch of places. Got errands to run."

"Let's go eat."

"But my friends are coming too, is that okay?"

"Whatever."

He had a lot of friends, compared to me. I wouldn't exactly call him friendly—sometimes he was just so clueless it felt like he doesn't know how to say no. Whatever someone asked, he did. Whatever someone needed, he just smiled and agreed. I told you, he's kind.

"Qin!"

And that kindness—that's the scary part.

"What's up?"

"You look so good today, rolling your sleeves up like that."

"Get out of my car."

I gave Jet a faint smile as he leaned out of the back window to tease me. Over time, Duang's best friend naturally became my friend too. I reached out to open the front door, but Jet shook his head quickly.

"Hey, there's another friend of Duang's. You probably haven't met her yet. Her name's Yim."

"Hi, you're Qin, right?"

I closed the door and dropped into the back seat next to Jet, nodding and greeting her back. That was when I noticed someone watching me through the rearview mirror.

It was the first time I had sat back here, and there was this quiet weight settling in my chest. I froze for a moment, trying to process my own feelings. The girl sitting next to Duang was the same one who had taken promotional photos with him for the university's shirt earlier today. I saw her place her hand on Duang's thigh while talking about her favorite movie as he drove.

I turned my face away, shifting my gaze to the roadside, letting our shared playlist play softly in the car. And I realized—on this road we were traveling, I didn't own anything.

That was when I knew I couldn't stop myself from liking him. I couldn't control who he liked or didn't like. And I couldn't stop others—

"Have you ever seen

A Star Is Born

, Duang?"

"I missed it when it was in theaters."

—from liking Duang either.

"Oh."

"Well, actually, I did watch it. On DVD. With Qin... Qin studies music, and he likes it, so I wanted to borrow it and—yeah, I whined until Qin let me watch it with him. Right?"

But today, I learned one more thing—

I didn't have to worry about anything in the relationship we had.

"Huh? Duang, you're talking so politely to your friend?"

"Oh, no. Not a friend."

Because he would always be there— Not too close, not too far from me.

"Qin's the one I'm seeing."

Reminding me, over and over, that this was the one thing I never had to doubt.

"Whoa, I had no idea."

"Haha, I was the one who chased after Qin."

It was the one thing I never had to question— because the answer was always clear.

"Hey, is the air conditioner reaching you?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, we'll eat at the place you like."

"Honestly, anywhere is fine. You guys can pick." We locked eyes again through the same mirror. He smiled when he saw that my mood had lifted, and I wasn't surprised that he could read me so well—

Because he really had been paying attention to me all along.

"Jet wants to eat chicken rice."

"I'm in! Let's go to Tumthong."

"Chicken rice it is, then. No backing out now." I just went along with it. Like I said, I could eat anything. It was always him who spoiled me, and before I knew it, the car had already pulled up slightly past the shop. We had to cross a busy road to get to the famous chicken rice place.

"I missed you."

He came with that warm, pinewood scent. I had different scent memories for everyone—probably because I grew up around perfumes due to my family's business. But the fragrance he wore mixed with his natural scent always made me think of a pine forest.

Our shoulders brushed from how close we were. I turned to see him smiling wide, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

"What do you want me to say?"

"Anything sweet." He answered while scanning the road for a chance to cross. When it was clear, I stepped forward first, gently pulling the only girl with us along to cross together.

"I missed you too."

"..."

"Is that sweet enough?"

"I heard that! Why are you two so cute?"

Yim teased with a smile that seemed a little bittersweet. At least, that's how I interpreted it. She quietly thanked me for helping her cross before trailing after Jet to order chicken rice. Seeing that, I walked past the table to grab glasses and scoop some ice.

"Hey, I almost died back there."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I still want to live to hear you say cute things like that."

"Cheesy." I frowned, wondering where he kept coming up with these lines.

"I thought you'd be mad and make me sit in the front."

"I'm not that petty."

"It's because I care."

"I know. I care too."

"Why are you so cute today? Are you trying to make me fall for you?" He took the glass from my hand, grumbling softly. I felt the distance between us shrink as he stepped up behind me—very intentionally, I might add. When I didn't scold him for resting his chin on my shoulder, he just stayed there. Then, pressing his nose against my wrinkled shirt like he was in a daze.

"You smell so good, Qin."

I turned to catch a glimpse of his face, and he didn't pull back—even though if I leaned in any closer, our noses would touch.

"The photos with Yim turned out cute."

"See?"

"What?"

"You sound jealous. With feeling and everything."

"Feeling, my ass. Move your face away. You've hit your quota for today." I elbowed him hard in the stomach, balancing two glasses of ice while narrowing my eyes at him as he still tried to inch closer.

"Auntie! There are people flirting in your shop!"

And today was another good day— a good day because he was still right here beside me.

"Jet! You little shit!"

And that was enough.

03 - Today, I Feel for You Just as Much as You Feel for Me, Duang

"Ahhhhh! Nong Qin!"

"Dude, Jo's muscles are so tight. One dunk and my heart's shattered."

"Fuck! Left side, idiot. That was so dumb!"

The loud cheers from the crowd made me frown. I kind of wish I had other friends too, but it's always just Jet and Pae hanging out with me. Same old story today—Jet, that animal-faced guy who keeps flirting with Qin, and somehow, he's the only one Qin doesn't find annoying or brush off like he does with me.

Just wait, man.

"What are you mad at me for now?"

"None of your business."

"I'm writing it down, like those tattle-tales back in primary school. I'm gonna report you to Khun Qin."

I shoved his head while he was chomping on a sausage, almost making him fall over. He kept calling him 'Khun Qin' over and over, but honestly, the title really fits him.

Does he even touch the ground when he walks? Why does he seem so high up...

Way out of reach.

"So many people are screaming for Qin. How are you gonna guard him all the time?"

"But he only talks to me."

"How do you know?"

"You love stirring things up. And seriously, stop spreading rumors that I have girls, that I'm double-timing, or that I've had a lover. Sometimes, he really gets upset."

"Qin? Pfft—cough, seriously?" Jetana's eyes widened in disbelief. I nodded. That's his cute side—when he's sulking, he'll sometimes ask who someone is. But even just asking makes me panic.

Yeah, he's cute. But I really don't want him to feel hurt over stuff like that.

"Why aren't you two official yet? Waiting for your dad to cut the ribbon or something?"

"I don't know... I just feel like I'm not good enough."

"Dude, if you were any better, you'd be a saint."

"I can't ask... Who'd have the guts to..." I trailed off, watching him dribble the basketball with ease. The faculty games are so intense it's scary. He's been practicing late into the night all week. It's no trouble for me to pick him up and grab dinner, but I worry about him.

"Hey! Did you just shove my boy?!"

"Shit," I muttered as Jet dropped his sausage bag and looked like he was about to storm the court to punch the guy who knocked Qin down. I'm fine with everything—just don't let him get hurt.

But his knee's already scraped.

Fuck.

"Referee, you blind?! Kick that guy out—he totally did it on purpose!"

"Boo!!!"

Things got chaotic when the seniors from both faculties started arguing while the injured one, Qin, was still limping off the court. I raked my hair back in frustration, realizing I'd already walked right up to the edge of the court.

"You."

"I'm fine."

"How is this fine? You're bleeding." My eyes fixed on his knee where blood was dripping down. Maybe because his skin's so pale, the bright red stood out even more, and it pissed me off.

If it wasn't intentional, it is fine.

But I was watching him—I know he wouldn't fall unless it was a hard hit.

"Calm down."

"Calm down, my ass, Qin."

"Duang."

I exhaled sharply, realizing I'd snapped at him. I shut my mouth, afraid I'd say something worse. I dropped down to sit beside him as he got subbed out—he clearly couldn't play anymore. It was already the second half, and he'd scored a ton of points.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too."

"..."

"I promised last night that I wouldn't get hurt, but I couldn't keep it."

"I'll clean the wound for you." I didn't say anything else because everything I feel for him runs so deep, so wide—it aches a little inside in my heart.

I don't want us to be like this.

"It's just a small wound. It'll heal soon."

"Does it hurt?"

"It doesn't hurt."

"It hurts, though. Duang knows." I grumbled as I gently dabbed the blood away after rinsing it with plain water once. Thank goodness for the basketball team having a first aid kit like they knew someone would get hurt. Otherwise, I'd be even more panicked if he didn't get treated right away.

"It doesn't hurt, kha."

My heart started beating faster—off rhythm in a way I could clearly feel.

I met his gaze. He was sitting on the chair while I had moved myself down to the wooden floor of the gym to clean the wound on his knee, and he was saying such sweet things to ease my worry.

I finally smiled.

"Your ears are red."

I couldn't hold it in.

"Don't tease me."

"Is it like a sacred phrase or something?"

"Yeah. It's not like you say it often. Since we started talking, you've only said it twice."

"You're keeping count?"

"I count everything. You've said you miss me three times."

"Why does that sound so pitiful?"

I froze when his cool hand softly touched my cheek. My heart pounded wildly. His skin was so fair it almost hurt my eyes, and I was ridiculously possessive over him wearing a basketball jersey like this. Honestly, he was beyond cute today—with those flushed cheeks, chasing after the ball, and even tying his front hair up.

"All done. Duang's hand is gentle, right?"

"Very skilled."

"That sounds like you're praising a dog."

"Well, it's kind of true."

"Woof."

He let out a soft laugh before focusing back on the basketball game. His department was already leading by a wide margin, but all my attention was on him. My eyes followed the curve of his beautiful nose, his lips as he sipped an electrolyte drink, and his fair skin peeking out from the oversized jersey. His collarbone—God, how much I was possessive over that. His left ankle, where the tattoo of a moon floating above the sea that I drew with my own hands, stood out. And if my gaze shifted just a bit...

It was my right ankle, with the tattoo of the sun.

"What are you smiling about?"

"Nothing."

"I can see you smiling."

Qin spoke without even turning to look at me.

And, seriously—I couldn't stop smiling.

"You're ridiculous."

Just having him close by makes it impossible to stop smiling.

"Hey."

"Hmm?"

"Duang is hot. Can I take off my shirt?" The owner of the room nodded in approval before turning back to focus on the MacBook in front of him, still working. After the basketball game ended with a landslide victory for the jazz kids, Duang took the person with the scraped knee out for a nice meal to cheer him up. And since they had to go to Bangkok together tomorrow, Duang ended up staying over at Qin's place again, by chance.

Just seeing those pale legs while hanging out in the room was already worth it.

Lucky as hell that Qin was wearing just a t-shirt and boxers today. Pure blessing.

"Qin, I'm checking your wound."

"Mmm." The person responded absentmindedly, still focused on his work.

"See, I told you not to get it wet."

"..."

"Qin."

Qin pulled his hands away from the work in front of him because Duang's voice sounded unusually stern. His dark eyes shifted to the person sitting on the floor, inspecting the wound on his knee. That slightly damp brown hair and the smooth face reflected softly under the warm glow of the single lamp in the room.

Cool fingers brushed against warm skin as Qin reached out to gently push aside the strands of hair falling over Duang's eyes while softly murmuring:

"You're scolding me over this?"

"It'll get infected."

"I'm sorry kha."

"Oh my God, Duang is gonna die—You said that twice today, Qin! That's a double kill!" Duang blurted, scooting back from the pale-skinned guy with that distinct scent that always tested his sanity. Every time Duang saw Qin, one thought echoed in his head:

I like him.

I want to be his boyfriend.

"I have something to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Will you be mad?"

"Why? Is it that bad?"

Duang hugged his knees, his expression turning serious.

How bad could it be?

Whatever it was—just don't stop talking to him.

Please, no.

"I'm hungry."

"Huh?"

"I'm hungry right now."

His face was calm, but his voice was dead serious. So serious that he was sitting there rubbing his stomach in the office chair. Duang bit back a smile.

And with Qin's standards, there was no way he'd settle for a quick snack from a convenience store—he'd want proper late-night porridge from a good restaurant.

And at this hour? No way he'd ride his motorcycle there himself. No matter how tough or smart he is, he still loves his comforts.

What should I do?

"It's late, you know."

Come on, just hold on.

"..."

"Want some milk? I can grab you one."

It felt like slow motion.

Duang didn't know if it was the warm orange lighting or something else, but suddenly, Qin was settling down right in front of him—bringing with him that intoxicating scent that made Duang's heart skip a beat. And those eyes... they had a soft, pleading look that was impossible to resist.

"Please? Let's go get something to eat."

Hold it together, Duang.

You can do this.

You've got this.

"Are you gonna take me nicely, or do I have to use force?"

Damn.

The person being threatened looked stunned when the unpredictable one leaned in close, grabbing the collar of his shirt as if he was ready to start a fight if he wasn't taken to get rice porridge.

Gulp... So white.

"Duang."

I can't take it anymore.

Why is the collar so stretched out?

"Duang?"

"Y-You're so white."

"..."

"Really white. Can you back off a little?"

"You're such a pervert."

Duang got scolded straight to his face, but it didn't hurt one bit. He just realized how much more thrilling it was to see things peeking out here and there—his shoulder, his collarbone... and his chest.

He had all the same body parts as anyone else, but damn...

"You're thinking dirty again. Get up."

"Ow, ow—I'm going, I'm going!"

"You give me a headache."

"I want to say you nag like a wife, but I won't."

Duang said while watching Qin put on jeans over his boxers but still wearing his sleep shirt. He must be so hungry he didn't care about anything else.

"Asshole."

And me, what's wrong with you, Chiwin?

Liking it when get scolded.

"You drive. I'm sleepy."

"At your command, Princess."

"You really want to get hit, huh?"

"Hit by what? Watch your words, hey."

"My damn foot."

"Oh, that's fine. I thought you meant... Mm, better not say it."

Qin smacked the troublemaker on the head, but he just kept laughing—still in a good mood as they got in the car, during the drive, and even when they arrived at the restaurant.

But seriously, it was almost 1 AM. Why was the place still packed?

"Do you want the same as usual?"

"Yeah. Order the salted egg salad too."

"Huh? You don't eat that."

"You do."

"So sweet. I'm running out of heart, Qin."

"Don't be dramatic."

The hungry and annoyed one glanced at Duang's messy handwriting as he scribbled down their usual orders—most of it was for Qin. Duang probably wasn't even hungry, just here because Qin told him to come.

"Are you just giving in to whatever I want?"

"Huh? Me?"

"Yeah, who else but you?"

A simple sentence, one that probably didn't mean as much as how Duang interpreted it in his head, yet it still brought a wide smile to his face.

His warm fingers brushed against Qin's, which were absentmindedly stirring the straw in his drink.

"Not really."

Our eyes met—

In a bustling rice porridge restaurant, with the clock ticking past 1 AM.

"Duang wants you to get plenty of rest, eat the things you like, and do the things you dream of. It's not called spoiling you."

" ... "

"I only have you. Spoiling you like this isn't a big deal at all."

But it feels more special every day.

Even more special with each passing day.

Qin glanced at the time on his phone. Duang hated the sound of an alarm clock—he preferred someone shaking him awake rather than hearing something blaring and forcing him to get up for work. And somehow, Qin ended up sitting here watching him sleep under the faculty building because Duang wanted to nap before continuing to paint the faculty's cut-out board.

He didn't know why he did it—but he already had.

Duang had been resting his head on Qin's lap for nearly forty minutes.

"Khun Qin, do you w—" Jetana who was about to ask if Qin wanted a fried hot dog was cut off when the person in question pressed a finger to his lips,

signaling for silence because someone was sleeping.

No one would believe it, but Duang had the highest potential in their year. That's why he was entrusted as the head of the cut-out board team for the upcoming faculty sports event—the final task before they finished their first year and moved on to their second in just a few months.

Time passed quickly... but some relationships moved slowly.

Jet figured it might be like a chemical equation—something needed to act as a catalyst to speed up the outcome. But in the end, he didn't really know what was missing in their relationship.

Or maybe... what Duang and Qin had was already enough.

"How long has he been sleeping, Khun Qin?" Jet whispered.

"Five more minutes and it'll be forty-five."

"He's dead asleep. Last night, he drank two cups of 7-Eleven coffee."

"I thought he said it was one."

"Well, looks like I accidentally exposed him," Qin shook his head in exasperation. He'd already told Duang—if you're sleepy, just come nap in my room. But no, instead, Duang stayed up late and downed two or three cups of coffee.

He glanced down at the peacefully sleeping figure, hand tucked under his cheek like a child, and couldn't help but reach out to brush through the messy hair. When Duang was asleep, at least he wasn't being a pain.

"Duang," Qin gently shook him awake, but Duang just groaned and buried his face against Qin's lap, curling up like a little kid. Jet, who is munching on his sausage, struggled not to lose his composure—it was just too cute.

He wanted to scream and declare that Duang is a wife, but he didn't want to break his friend's heart.

Seriously, Qin was beyond cool, warm (to someone special) and utterly dreamy.

"You've slept long enough. Wake up and let's go eat."

"Mmhh..."

"Chiwin, wake up already."

"Yes, Ma..."

"DUANG IS A WIFE!"

Jet blurted out while pointing an accusing finger at his friend, who had just opened his eyes and flashed a playful smile—teasing Qin by calling him 'Mom,' just like how a kid would address their mother when being woken up.

You will never be the dad!! Never!!

"Shut up, you idiot."

"Since you're awake, go eat. I'll finish this up—the others will be here soon."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm going."

"Alright, see you later, Khun Qin!" Jet waved dramatically as Qin nodded back before pulling Duang up to go grab dinner and then return to work. Dinner would probably be at the nearby food stall since they didn't have time to drive out for anything fancy.

Qin listened to Duang complain about the senior assigning work. He watched the long eyelashes of someone as tall as him catch the last rays of sunlight while they walked side by side—going about their lives and daily routines that had gradually become something they shared.

He never really thought –

"They gave me a job with the scale of a million but only paid me twenty baht. Guess if they deserve to be scolded?"

—that in this vast world, someone like this would cross paths with him.

That we would meet.

And get to know each other.

...And we keep orbiting together.

"I'm so freaking tired..."

The one complaining nearly stopped breathing when the other reached out to hold his hand. Even though their fingers weren't fully intertwined, just holding hands like this made him feel stronger—strong enough to take up a little more space in Qin's heart, bit by bit.

"I probably can't help much because I can't draw well."

"..."

"But...you have me."

It was such a simple sentence—no sweet gaze, no change in tone. All of it was Qin, 100%, who he loved.

Just knowing that he had Qin was already more than he had ever dreamed of.

"If you're tired, you can come and complain to me."

"Thank you."

"Mm, it's nothing."

"And you? Are you tired of anything?"

Qin shook his head, watching Duang swing their joined hands back and forth like the motion of a swing. Somehow, it put him in a good mood in a way he couldn't quite explain.

It must be a bit strange—two tall guys walking hand in hand.

"I haven't really taken care of you lately."

"It's okay."

"Just... don't go giving your heart to anyone else, okay?"

That sentence wasn't answered with words—it came through actions.

Qin intertwined all five fingers with the warm fingers of the person who tended to overthink things.

Overthinking again.

"Talking to you is enough for me."

"Marry me." Duang grinned widely.

"Marry your dad. I meant I'm tired enough already."

"Well, that's fine. I'm not against it."

"Smartass."

Qin grumbled as he shook off Duang's hand when they arrived at the diner. Duang whined and followed the person whose room was clean but wore a wrinkled shirt every time they met because, according to Qin, cleanliness and neatness were two different things.

We sat across from each other, scanning the menu like we always did—ordering our own dishes and picking a shared soup for the table.

Classic Khun Charasmi style.

"You drive my car back later, okay? When I'm done, I'll have Pae drop me off. So you don't have to walk back or hail a motorcycle taxi."

"I'll just come pick you up."

"No, it's too late."

"You don't have to do everything for me. I want things to be fair."

"But I'm the one who asked you out."

"That's your problem. I want it this way."

Duang wanted to revise that sentence.

It's your problem, but I want it this way—and you have to go along with it.

Yeah, that's how it was.

"But it's late. You should just sleep—I've got the key already."

"So what if it's late? I come to campus every day, and I drive just as well as you."

"Well, I'm worried about you."

"And I'm not worried about you?"

Fine, you win.

Take the house, the car—whatever you want.

"Hmph."

"Eat your food. Hurry up, your friends are waiting."

"Yes, yes, yes." The person who is all grown up but always whines answers repeatedly before scooping up a bite of his rice topped with pork panang curry and an undercooked fried egg. Qin starts eating his food as well.

"Eat a lot."

A piece of fish from the clear seafood tom yum is placed onto the plate of the person mumbling to himself. Qin shakes his head in exasperation at the childish and spoiled behavior of the person sitting across from him.

"Stop whining already."

"Alright."

"Or not. Just focus on eating."

"Are you a soldier or something?"

"Eat."

"No, I'm just playing hard to get. I want you to yell at me like, 'Or do you want me to feed you?' Something like that."

"Give an inch, take a mile. Hurry up, your friends are waiting."

"Got it, sirrrr."

"Chew thoroughly, too."

"Why is it so complicated? Eat fast, but chew thoroughly."

"Stop asking questions. You're giving me a headache."

Seriously.

Such a wife-like attitude. Why can't Jet see this side of him? Duang buries his head in his food while chewing exaggeratedly to show the person who looks like he's about to scold him any second. He knows Qin doesn't want him to be late and have their friends accuse him of ditching them to eat with him, but still—he's so fussy, just like a girl.

Anything that spills, he immediately wipes it.

Eat from the left side first.

Spoon and fork must be paired together.

"Your mouth is dirty."

And if he eats messily, Qin immediately wipes it off because he hates seeing anything dirty.

See?

How is this not wifely behavior?

"What are you staring at?"

"You're so strict."

So freaking cute.

"Strict like a wife."

"You're gonna get it, Duang."

Seriously, though.

[Battery's dying, Khun Qin. Come get him back already. I'm begging you.]

"Okay, I'm about to drive over."

[So damn stubborn. He's overworking himself. I'm seriously worried he'll drop dead.]

"What's Duang doing?"

[Bossing his friends around and helping with the work. It started with the cutout section, but now he's involved in every department. Come take him

home to sleep already.] Jet's sharp voice clearly shows his patience is running out.

He was the same way.

So don't ever call him stubborn—it's Duang who's the most stubborn of all.

"I'll see you at the faculty then. That's all, Jet."

Qin hung up and sped up as he entered the university grounds, now that he was off the phone. He exhaled softly to himself. At first, he thought it wouldn't go past 2 AM, but it was already 2:30 when Jet called to tell him to take Duang home—because no one else could get through to him.

Isn't it something to worry about?

Always pushing himself too hard like this.

"..."

Even with him too.

"Duang."

Qin didn't realize how fast he had been until he felt slightly out of breath, having run from the car to the faculty building. There, he saw Duang walking unsteadily, looking like he might collapse at any second.

"You... it's not even time to leave yet."

"Go back to the room."

"Qin."

"Go back to sleep."

Duang pressed his lips together.

Whose fault was it anyway?

He knew he didn't stand a chance.

"Get out of here already, you idiot. You've been working overtime for too long—we're about to leave soon anyway."

"Yeah, Duang, you should go. You've been at it since the night before."

Before he could process it, someone had already walked up and grabbed his wrist, pulling him along. Duang looked at Qin's back—pale skin peeking out from the oversized t-shirt he always wore to bed. Good thing he wore long pajama pants tonight; otherwise, he'd definitely get scolded.

Getting bitten by mosquitoes wasn't enough— but I also have to go and be possessive again.

"Hey, I'm leaving already, see?"

"Don't be stubborn."

"..."

He lost.

Completely and utterly lost.

"When I pull all-nighters, at least I do it at home. I can pass out anytime and it's fine. But if you collapse, what do you think will happen, Duang?"

It was the first time Qin had spoken so seriously, explaining his thoughts in a long-winded way like this.

He knew it wasn't appropriate to feel happy, to have his heart race, or to smile.

But he couldn't help it.

"What the hell are you smiling at?"

"Qin, stop being so cute."

Duang said that and pulled Qin into a hug.

He never thought he'd be brave enough.

Never thought Qin wouldn't push him away—instead, Qin hugged him back loosely, his hands awkwardly resting on Duang's body, as if unsure where to place them.

Liking Qin felt like winning the lottery.

Realizing he could actually pursue Qin—it felt like hitting the jackpot.

"As much as you want me to be okay, I want the same for you."

Everything just felt so lucky.

"You're not the only one trying, you know."

Qin whispered to him and the darkness as Duang buried his face into the crook of Qin's neck, knowing full well he was being selfish—but believe him, he wasn't trying to take anything.

Even if he got nothing in return, it didn't matter.

Not even a little.

"Who's the one pursuing who? who's the one being pursued?"

"Qin."

Maybe, all you need is to spend your life with someone—

Even if it's just for a short while.

"It doesn't matter at all."

But to his heart, it already meant everything.

"Today, I feel the same for you as much as you feel for me, Duang."

04 - I Really Like Those Eyes

"How close is 'beside the heart,' huh?"

"What's wrong with you?" Jet complained. I sighed, waving my hand dismissively to tell him to forget it. Useless as always. The only thing he's good at is drawing.

Yeah, same as me.

"What's wrong with you now, man?"

"Have you ever listened to the song

'Being Everything for You, Even If I Can't Be Yours'

?"

"Whoa, is that really the title of a song?" Both Pae and Jet shook their heads vigorously. I hadn't heard it before either, but last night Qin played it in the room while we were working separately. I was sitting there shirtless, painting, while he sat with his headphones on, tapping away on his computer, refusing to eat anything.

But then, he took off his headphones.

'Duang.'

'Yeah?'

'Listen.'

And that ridiculously long-titled song—longer than some novel titles I've seen in bookstores—started playing and just kept looping in my head. My first question was whether he played it because it was a good song or because it meant something.

But, well, trying to figure out Qin is harder than figuring out anyone else in the world.

"What were the lyrics?"

"I only remember one line. It goes, 'A friend by your side, no matter how good they are, is just someone beside your heart.'"

"Friend zone."

"Hurts like hell."

"Exactly."

"Who even made you listen to that? Why is it so depressing? Like, listen to this—'No matter how good they are, they're just someone beside your heart.' Bro, getting kicked in the face would hurt less than that line. Seriously."

"Jet's got a point." I let out an even longer sigh. Maybe I'm just overthinking it. No wonder Qin always says I'm as dramatic as a girl. Honestly, I never overthink anything else—it's just when it comes to him.

"So, who gave you the song?"

"Qin, obviously."

"Damn, that's tough. Maybe he just played it because it's a nice song?" Jet said, munching on a snack. That guy's mouth is never empty—eats like a champ. I should sign him up for one of those competitive eating contests Pae loves to watch.

"You're just overthinking it, man. Why not ask him directly?"

"Wow, yeah, because that wouldn't be awkward at all," I snapped.

"You already asked him if you could court him."

"That was, like, a year ago, and you're still stuck in the same place."

"Dumbass, it's only been six months!" I argued fiercely. Time tests all things, dude. Even if it takes until I'm sixty, as long as the destination is the same, I'll wait.

"By the way, weren't you supposed to go somewhere at 6:15? It's five minutes past already."

"Shit!"

"Definitely picking up Qin, no doubt."

"Service with a smile."

"Water dripping on stone every day—except the stone calls you his chauffeur." (cocochip : this book really like to use thai idiom 😂 it also can be interpret as "You're being all sweet and persistent, but to him, you're just his driver.")

"I'll kick your ass." I lifted my foot toward my friends before scrambling to the car. I know how punctual he is—always early. And now, here I am, running late to pick him up.

I sighed.

Honestly, it's been a mess since last night after the song ended. He went to bed before me because I was still working. I didn't crawl into bed until almost 3 AM. When I slipped under the blanket, he woke up just enough to pat my head a couple of times. By the time I woke up, he was already off to class. We only exchanged a few texts—mostly about me picking him up so we could have dinner together.

A day with him is simple... just like friends.

Yeah, like that 'friend by your side' the song mentioned.

"Hey, sorry I'm late."

"It's fine." He shook his head, stomping out his cigarette before bending down to toss the butt in the trash can properly. The last light of the day

softened his pale skin, making it glow. I smiled faintly—he was wearing his usual backless slippers, a wrinkled shirt, and had come to class with nothing but a single blue pen.

So cute.

"Did you wait long?"

"My friends just left a minute ago. I finished my cigarette right as you showed up."

"How many cigarettes today?"

"Three," he counted on his fingers before answering as we walked side by side to the car. I reached over to brush the hair covering his eyes and softly told him it would make his eyes red.

He gave a curt 'thanks' before moving closer, his nose brushing against my upper arm.

"That's my perfume."

"Heh."

"Unbelievable."

"I only used a little."

"We smell the same now," he murmured like a child after sniffing himself. So, I sneakily pressed my nose against his shoulder. It was that perfume scent, mixed with a faint chill of cigarette smoke.

"Real smooth."

"Just a little, Duang missed you. You didn't even tell me you were going to class."

"You were sleeping like you were dead," Qin rolled his eyes.

"Really?"

"Yeah, I even pinched you, and you didn't feel a thing."

I widened my eyes, stopping mid-step to ask him in a startled voice. "What? Where did you pinch me?"

"Your cheek," he answered with a blank expression, but my heart pounded hard in my chest. If this were a romantic movie, I'd be the shy girl crushing on the cold-hearted senior who secretly touches my cheek while I'm asleep.

Holy shit.

"Why?"

"You— You actually touched my cheek?"

"Pinched. I pinched."

"Same thing."

"Pinching is like this."

I winced when he actually pinched my cheek, but it didn't end there... I almost forgot how to breathe when he said, in a warm voice, while his cool fingers brushed against my skin, gently tracing my cheek:

"And this is touching."

Can I scream?

He's so freaking cute.

"You're such a softie."

"You're the soft one! Running away like that."

I teased him back because I couldn't hold back the wide smile that spread across my face when he stood there rubbing my cheek. When our eyes met,

he cursed at me and walked ahead, light on his feet.

Shy, huh? That guy.

"Hey, my

special someone

, wait for meee!"

"Too loud."

"My

special someone

!~"

"Do you want to die?" Qin asked, pretending to be stern, but with the way I see him, he's just like a puffed-up cat trying to act tough. I shrugged, opened the driver's side door, and got into the car. He let out a soft breath as the cold air hit him—he hates the heat, even though he's always cool to the touch.

I glanced at him as he connected his phone to the Bluetooth to play some music. Not long after, the same haunting melody from last night began to play.

Seriously?

"You don't like it?"

"N-No."

"You're flustered."

"I'm not... It's just—why are you playing this song again? This is the second time."

"So?"

"It makes me overthink."

"Overthink what? Are you a game for me to sit here and guess?"

"Come on, you make me guess everything about you too."

"If you want to know, just ask. Stop overthinking... stop imagining things," he scolded, making me shrink in my seat.

When the light turned red, I glanced over at him—only to find him already looking back at me.

It was as if he was waiting for the question, and his eyes revealed that he would really answer it—

Every question I was about to ask.

"The song feels like a friend zone."

"You've never been my friend."

"Wow."

"Told you a hundred times, you're my special someone."

"Don't even—I'm counting, okay? You've only said it a few times. Once, to be exact."

"I told other people."

"..."

"What? I've never hidden it. If people ask, I tell them. You're always glued to me anyway."

I started feeling warm and reached over to turn up the air conditioning. I heard him chuckle softly, like he was teasing me for having such a weak

immune system.

Yeah, well, when it comes to immunity against him, I never had any.

"I let you listen to it because it's a good song. It's not mainstream—the lyrics are nice, and the melody is great."

"And here I was overthinking."

"Which part of the lyrics got to you so much?"

"This one—'Just a friend of yours, that's all I am. No matter how good I am, I'm still just the person by your side.'"

"Hmm, okay."

"Don't overanalyze everything like you're some tough kid around here, okay? We're talking about sensitive stuff! I'm water, and you're a rock—you wouldn't understand, hmm?"

I placed my hand on his head and gave it a playful shake. He shook me off gently before punching my shoulder hard and telling me to focus on driving.

"Stop using that joke already—'a drop of water wears down a rock'—seriously?"

"Well, what does the rock say? Answer that first."

"The rock says, 'I'm hungry. Drive faster.'"

"Whoa, you're actually playing along!"

"Idiot."

I laughed softly.

It felt like we were sitting closer together, even though we hadn't moved an inch.

Everything felt special when it came to him.

Even the ordinary became the most special thing.

"But actually, there's one part of the song that really fits reality." I said, watching the sun slowly disappear over the horizon.

I didn't even know if Qin was looking at me... but in the next moment—

"I'd be everything for you, even if I can't be yours."

He placed his hand on my thigh as if to say—

"If you don't love me, that's okay."

He's still here.

At the very least, he's letting me love him.

Duang stretched, slipping off his jeans until he was left in just his boxers. He draped them over a chair, letting his eyes sweep over his messy room, and suddenly thought of the room of the person he had been staying over for a long time recently.

He should probably do some merit-making to balance things out—

Of course, how many merit had he used up just to get Qin to let him stay over?

Honestly, he was secretly grateful to his older brother for buying a place so far from the university—it gave him an excuse to crash at Qin's place more often. Even though Jet's dorm was closer, there was no way he'd ever set foot there.

White—yeah, everything in his heart was pure white every day.

That person... he's so careless.

"Shit, tough as hell to kill," the tall guy muttered to himself because he had just been thinking about his brother a moment ago. Damn it... what was he calling to nag about now?

"Hello? What's up, hia?"

[Come home sometime. Your liver's gonna give out, Duang.]

"Hiaaa, I'm busy studying, okay?"

[Isn't it because you're busy with a girl?]

"Heh." Duang tilted his head back and drank some cold water before walking over to the sink to refill a spray bottle. He hadn't watered the plants in his room for ages—were they even still alive?

[My sources tell me you've got someone you're talking to. Who is it?]

"Well, it's not a girl."

[I'm asking seriously here.]

"Whatever my heart tells me. If it's a guy, so be it."

[Must be really cute then—you're totally whipped.]

"Honestly, hia? He's even hotter than me." He laughed softly to himself—yeah, hotter for sure. Paler, better built, better posture. And that smile? It could kill.

Damn, he was thinking about him again.

[You're probably his wife by now.]

"No way."

[Don't ruin the family name.]

"I don't know... if he's not into that, I'm fine with it."

[I'm gonna die. Seriously, I bet you love him more than our parents, huh?]

"You're exaggerating."

[Here's the thing—can you even win him over? Focus on that first.]

"Damn, you really underestimate me, Funan."

And oh yeah—people might be wondering why he's named Duang and his brother is named Nan. Here's the deal: their dad was an archaeologist, and so was their mom. They'd been obsessed with ancient coins forever. So when they had kids—boom, firstborn was Funan, second was Phod Duang.

[Anyway, nothing much. Just telling you to come home, mutt.]

"Okay, okay. I'll come by soon."

[Bring your 'almost boyfriend' to try Mom's cooking. Just pretend if you have to.]

"Can't pretend with this one. I'm serious."

[At least get him to come over first, big talker.]

"Guess I learned that from you."

[I ought to kick your ass.]

The younger one chuckled softly. After exchanging a few more words, he hung up. The shirtless Duang walked around the room watering his plants before taking a deep breath and starting to clean. He'd grown used to Qin's perfectly tidy place, and by comparison, his own room was a mess.

He organized books and sketchpads on the shelves while gathering dried paintbrushes into a basin, turning on the tap to wash them carefully, one by one. With a sigh, he realized that no matter how much he cleaned, it felt like he'd barely made a dent. But he kept at it, working steadily until it was almost 10 p.m.

"Ugh."

He sighed, slumping against the bed with a long groan.

Whoever said cleaning clears your mind must have been lying—this was only making him more stressed. So much stuff, and he hadn't even been living here for a year yet. Maybe he should ask his brother to take some of his junk back home.

His sharp eyes landed on a guitar he found while cleaning. It probably belonged to Funan, his brother had been using it to woo girls since high school. As for Duang? He couldn't play a single chord. He'd told everyone that drawing was the only thing he was good at.

Well... there was one other thing he was good at—

"Damn."

—flirting with Qin.

[Come down.]

"Huh?"

Duang swore over and over again. In a million years, Qin would never randomly call him like this. Seriously, people like him still exist—someone who isn't glued to social media, who has an Instagram but only uses it once every three months, and who leaves messages on Line unread for days. Some people might get left on read for a month. But today, someone like that actually called him.

"Where are you going?"

[They won't let me in. They said I need a keycard.]

Wait.

Hold on.

"You're at my dorm?"

[Yeah.]

"Hey, are you okay? I'll come down. Are you alright? Stand somewhere bright." The tall guy grabbed a random T-shirt from his closet while frantically searching for his keys. His fumbling around must have been loud because the person on the other end calmly said—

[I'm fine. No need to rush.]

"Of course, I'm rushing. You've never been here. Hold on, okay? Don't hang up—I'm getting in the elevator." His full lips pressed together as he realized just how slow the elevator was. By the time it finally reached the ground floor, he was practically jogging to tap his card at the entrance. And there Qin was, standing with two packets of Hainanese chicken rice and a container of soup.

"Eat."

"How did you get here? It's far."

"Jet brought me."

"How did you run into him?"

"I was buying chicken rice, then I saw him, and asked where your dorm was."

"And then what?" Duang took advantage of the moment while Qin was thinking and smoothly grabbed the chicken rice from him. Up close, he could tell the other guy had already showered—and was wearing pajamas. Don't tell him...

"Jet said it's far. If he let me come alone, you'd get mad."

"So, you came to eat chicken rice at my dorm?"

"No. I came to sleep over."

Damn it, Duang.

You're one lucky bastard.

"Are you trying to kill me or something?" he muttered softly while gently guiding Qin into the elevator and pressing the button for the tenth floor. He noticed Qin glancing around before murmuring—

"This isn't a dorm. It's a condo... and only four rooms per floor."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever you say."

"Which one's yours?"

"Zero-two."

"Your room's a mess."

"No way. I just finished cleaning. It's weird—I must've sensed you were coming," Duang joked cheerfully as he opened the door. The warm chicken rice packets were set down on the coffee table. Qin looked around, noticing how everything was neatly divided into different zones like a typical studio suite. The owner of the room stood there, grinning dreamily at him.

"What?"

"Did you come because you missed me?"

"..."

"Not answering means yes."

And Qin didn't answer.

Because, well, it was true.

"It's weird."

"What it is?"

"A room without you in it."

Duang wanted to collapse right there—face down on the floor—and cry because words couldn't capture how ridiculously good it felt to hear Qin say stuff like this in his usual deadpan tone, as if it wasn't anything special.

"Addicted to Duang already."

"Nonsense."

"Coming over for chicken rice—bet you get hungry every night."

"Well, it's tasty."

"Do you want something other than water? I have fruit juice—it's probably not expired yet." The owner of the room leaned on the fridge door while the visitor peeked past his arm and spotted a beer.

"I'll take the beer."

"If you get drunk, I'm gonna take advantage of you."

"Me? Drunk?"

"I'm hoping, okay? People survive on hope."

"Just bring it here, hurry up."

"You start eating first."

"No."

There it is—that stubborn face again.

If they don't eat together, he won't eat.

Duang plopped down across from the guy who was holding his utensils, waiting to dig into the chicken rice. Qin's order—no skin, extra liver, no

cucumber. When Duang started sipping the soup, the other finally began eating, carefully pouring the dipping sauce over his rice one bite at a time.

Honestly, Duang wasn't even hungry. He was just pretending to eat so the person who went out of his way to bring chicken rice wouldn't feel bad. When it came to Qin, he always wanted to give him the best.

"Is it good?"

"Yeah."

"Want more chicken?"

"Yeah."

"Fatty."

"Your dad's the fatty."

"I'm just kidding~" He wasn't fat—he just had cute cheeks. But you couldn't tease him about it, or you'd get punched. Duang watched as Qin devoured the food like he hadn't just seen him at 4 PM—when he had already treated him to Vietnamese noodles.

Such an appetite.

"Stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you're fond of me."

"Oh, so you

know

this is my fond look? That means you secretly find me cute too."

"Big mouth." Qin stuffed a spoonful of rice into Duang's mouth, annoyed by his endless teasing. And him? Well, he had dragged himself all the way here—absolutely ridiculous.

"Hey, I found a guitar."

"Yeah, I saw. It's nice."

"I had no clue—it's Funan's."

"Your brother's, right?"

"You remember?"

"Both your names are weird."

"And yours isn't?" Duang scrunched his nose at the soup-sipping guy.

"What's weird about it? It's just Qin."

"Never heard it before in my life."

"Actually, it has two meanings—Qin can mean 'fault' or 'beautiful.'" Duang loved learning new things about Qin. Even if it was just a simple late-night chicken rice conversation, he loved it. He loved that Qin was finally starting to talk about himself because, until now, he had always just been the listener.

"It can mean something bad, or something good... Mom said it's normal—everyone has good and bad in them. That's why I'm called Qin."

"That's special."

"You're biased."

"Of course I am—I like you," Duang grinned widely, proving his point by piling his own chicken onto Qin's plate. He liked him so much he'd give him all his chicken. Honestly, eating with him... he didn't even need the food.

But he wouldn't say that—he'd just get smacked.

"At first, I thought you were named Qin because you had Chinese ancestry."

"I used to think that too."

"Chinese boy~"

"Annoying."

"Wow, you finished everything—not a single grain of rice left." Qin wanted to punch the guy who could tease him even about the way he ate. If he didn't already know Duang was trying to flirt, he'd think he was just here to mess with him.

With his pale hands, Qin picked up his empty plate and, without forgetting, grabbed Duang's too. He shot a glare, signaling that he'd wash them himself—don't interfere. All Duang could do was watch the familiar back of the person who always seemed so adorable to him, standing there washing the dishes with full focus.

"You."

"What?"

"I want to see you in this room every day."

"..."

"I mean it."

Just the thought of waking up in the morning to see Qin's sleepy face, refusing to get out of bed, made him feel happy. And imagining having breakfast together every day made his heart race uncontrollably.

"Same here."

Duang locked eyes with the person who had just finished doing the dishes—and was now doing something incredibly endearing, like avoiding his

gaze after admitting he wanted to see him in the room every day too.

The tall guy got up from the chair, pulled off his t-shirt, and tossed it into the laundry basket. Taking advantage of the moment while someone was internally battling between his cool side and his cat-like side, Duang moved closer and pressed his nose gently against Qin's shoulder, murmuring softly,

"I'm gonna take a shower."

"Mm."

As that broad, bare back disappeared from view, the pale-skinned man dropped himself onto the sofa in the middle of the room. He closed his eyes and let out a deep sigh because his heart was pounding so hard—he was afraid the other person might hear it. He knew that wasn't possible, but he didn't want to seem so flustered and clumsy in front of that teasing bastard.

His delicate hand rested on his chest, realizing that his heart hadn't slowed down in the slightest—just because of that warm touch on his shoulder. There wasn't much going on between them. Holding hands happened only occasionally, and Duang rarely initiated contact because he knew Qin had a habit of pulling away.

It wasn't intentional—he just wasn't used to being touched.

But that just now... he kissed your shoulder, Qin

Damn it.

"Shit."

He cursed softly to himself, grabbing the neck of the guitar to inspect it—anything to keep his mind from spiraling. Otherwise, the moment the guy finished showering, he'd get teased mercilessly. He hated it.

Duang, who showered ridiculously fast, strolled out of the bathroom with wet hair and a towel slung over his shoulder. He had already dressed inside the bathroom. Today, he had teased Qin enough—he didn't want to push it

further and make him hiss like an angry cat. Not because he was scared—he just felt sorry for him.

"..."

It was probably the first time he'd ever seen Qin play the guitar.

Since Qin studied jazz, the work he brought home rarely involved practicing instruments—those were too big, and he usually practiced them on campus. Duang knew Qin had a good voice. Actually, it was ridiculously good—because his major was

vocal performance.

He was a singer, for god's sake.

No way that could be ordinary.

"I'm so in love with those eyes... I love your smile, I love the days and nights."

Duang realized he was getting payback.

Qin met his gaze, singing that line from the sofa casually as if it was nothing special. But there was no way it wasn't special—not when it was coming from the most special person in his world.

Duang sank into a chair further away.

He wanted to watch Qin from a distance—just like he always did.

Because it reminded him how special he was to be allowed this close.

"I love the times when we meet—it's like a fading dream that slips away."

And that's when Duang knew—this song was about him.

It had to be.

From the look in his eyes.

From the lyrics.

From the silent message his heart conveyed.

"On nights when the sky is full of stars, there's a pair of eyes on the ground that shine the brightest."

And then Duang smiled.

The widest smile he'd ever worn—when the final line arrived, accompanied by the soft strumming of the guitar.

Between them, it was a private song.

And he was sure of it.

"I'm so in love with those eyes..."

When Qin smiled.

05 - I Don't Even Know Why I Like You This Much

"Aren't flowers too basic?"

"Then what do you want? A Brand's gift basket, you idiot?" Jet snapped at his best friend. Duang had been thinking all week about what to give Qin after his music performance tomorrow, which was like a mini-exam. It was driving him crazy—no matter what he suggested, nothing seemed good enough.

"He doesn't like flowers."

"Then I don't know anymore, you slut."

"You're so vulgar. It's like you grind rocks before you speak."

"Yeah, I learned from you. It's exhausting."

"I'm more exhausted than you. Every idea I suggest, you shoot it down. What a pain." Duang wants to die. Consulting Jet never helps, and where the hell is Pae? He's been leaving Duang alone with Jet almost every day.

"Or should I take a picture of him while he's singing and give it to him as a gift?"

"That could work. You already shoot film, he might like that."

"But he's not the type to post pictures."

"Then he won't post it. He'll just keep it for himself."

"Sounds good. I'll shoot the picture, give him the film, and then casually suggest we go develop it at Siam."

"Damn, you're going all the way to Siam? Chill out. You live in Thap Kaew—there are plenty of places to develop film."

"I'm tired of Konthom. I wanna stroll around Paragon."

"I'm gonna smack you—smack, smack!" Jet pounds his fist into his palm as if demonstrating how much he wants to hit Duang. Sure, Jet is from Bangkok, but he doesn't go out as much as others. Meanwhile, Duang is a rich kid from Thonglor, and Qin? He's also from Bangkok, a former all-boys school student in navy shorts.

"Hey."

"What?"

"Did you ever run into Qin before? You were both in the Chaturamitr schools, right?"

"Oh, yeah." Duang's eyes widen.

"I'm tired of idiots. Never ran into him, huh?"

"Never. If I had, I'd remember. I only met him once at the open house, and I chose to study here because of that." Jet shakes his head. These people transferring schools just to chase a guy—he should report this!

"When I saw him again during the freshman welcome event, my heart melted, Jet. He's so cute."

"He's hot—open your eyes! He's ridiculously handsome."

"I know, I know. But he's cute... on the inside."

"Gross!"

Duang shakes his head furiously, clarifying that he didn't mean it that way. God, talking to Jet makes his head pound like he's about to get a migraine. He wants to cry.

"So, the photo idea, right?"

"Yeah."

"Good. Let's end this nonsense. You've been asking all day, and rejecting every suggestion."

"Can't I apologize?"

"No forgiveness. People like you are called sluts."

"You're definitely one." Duang sighs. This must be it—the moment his friend finally comes out.

"I am."

"Right? That's cool. It's the modern age, man."

"I could be your boyfriend." Jet shoves Duang's head with all his strength before strutting off to find something to eat. Talking to Duang is useless—he's a hopeless romantic who only thinks about Qin all day long.

Pathetic.

"Duang!"

"Pae! Where the hell have you been?"

"Had stuff to do. Where's Jet?"

"He's over there."

"Ah, okay. Anyway, I just passed by xxx and saw the jazz kids setting up the stage."

"Huh? Qin didn't tell me anything."

"He's probably busy. I saw him carrying a speaker, but he seemed in a rush, so I didn't say hi."

"Alright, I'm gonna go. Gotta help my boyfriend."

"Sure, friend. No status, but your heart's already gone."

"You sound like Jet. I don't want to talk to you anymore." Pae shook his head, watching the sulking guy walk quickly to his car. The power of love always drives this man—the number one lover of Nakhon Pathom.

"Oh, when did you get here?"

"Just now. Duang left already—to see Qin."

"Like a dog, huh? The kind that only loves one owner."

"Yeah, that's accurate."

"So annoying."

"By the way, what did you do to tease him?"

"Just scolded him. I've been updating my vocabulary lately—spending too much time online."

"Sigh, I'm exhausted," Pae sighed, watching his friend's white car drive away from the faculty. Well, what do you expect from a hopeless romantic, right?

A white Mazda was parked in front of the Faculty of Music. It wasn't for anything else—Duang just couldn't decide on a film roll. He planned to hang around and secretly take pictures of Qin since the stage setup. Maybe capture some candid moments, but he'd pretend it was for collecting reference photos for his artwork. He wasn't sure if he could fool Qin, though, because he was notoriously clumsy.

The white university shirt fluttered in the wind. Sharp eyes gazed at the curtain of trees blocking the vast sky. This was what he liked about Qin's faculty. It didn't take long to reach the courtyard where Pae said the jazz kids were setting up the stage. Duang spotted Qin first—not because he was so pale, but because his eyes seemed to automatically lock onto him.

Duang chuckled softly to himself when he saw Qin kicking his friend's leg irritably. The next moment, Qin's gaze slowly shifted toward him as his friends started talking about the 'love bug.' It sounded ridiculously cheesy, but if Qin—his future-boyfriend—called him that, well, he could only laugh along.

"What brings you here, Duang?"

"What wind blew me in? Give me a satisfying answer."

"What kind of answer are you hoping for?" Duang teased Qin's large group of friends back.

"Enough."

"Come on, I was hoping for something like the wind of love."

"Get to work. It's boiling hot," Qin said, turning back to look at Duang with a raised eyebrow, confused by how much he was smiling. His eyes shifted to the Contax T2 in Duang's hand, making him even more suspicious.

"No photos."

"Are you crazy? I'm not even taking pictures of you."

"Don't let me catch you."

"Of course not. But—but—but, I'm not taking pictures of you. I'm here to capture the atmosphere for my artwork," Duang said, watching Qin nod in understanding before turning back to talk with his friends about where to place the equipment. Duang snapped a few photos of Qin from a bit of a distance, including some general shots when the scenery looked nice.

Through the camera, Duang watched Qin plug the bass into the speaker to test the sound. His eyes lingered on the delicate veins running across Qin's arms and hands as he plucked a simple melody. The long fringe falling over his face and that crumpled shirt somehow became even more attractive under the golden light of the setting sun.

Duang slipped the camera back into his pocket—he needed to save the rest of the film for tomorrow. Taking too many pictures might get him caught, and that would be bad.

"Are you hungry?"

"Not yet," Qin pressed his lips together, glancing between his work and the person he'd promised to have dinner with. He wasn't the type to make someone wait, and he didn't want Duang to hang around like this—but at the same time, he wanted him to stay close.

He was getting spoiled.

"Are you bored?"

"Not at all. Do you need any help?"

"No, just need to check the wiring and the lights. Another thirty minutes."

"I can wait, don't overthink it."

"Then stay close... I'm tired." It was rare to see Qin acting clingy, but he deserved to be—Duang had seen how hard Qin had been working to prepare everything these past few weeks. He wanted to ruffle his soft hair as a comfort, but he'd learned by now that Qin didn't like being touched in front of others.

So instead, he reached out and gently held Qin's index and middle fingers, offering a smile.

"Feel better now?"

" ... "

"Let's go eat something delicious."

They say some people climb entire mountains just to see a single smile at the top... or if there's a faint smile from Qin on the other side of the wall,

Duang thinks it would never be a waste of time to devote himself and try to cross over.

Qin may not be a prize.

To him, Qin was never a prize.

"Just hold on a little longer, my smart one."

But a gift.

A precious gift he knows he must cherish with all his heart.

They say the chance of someone you like liking you back is one in a hundred. So what are the chances of the person you like throwing themselves into your arms and staying quiet like this for nearly half an hour?

The room isn't exactly quiet because as soon as they came in, Qin turned on the speaker in the middle of the room. Now, that room holds just the two of them, wrapped up in each other's arms in silence. Qin had disappeared into the bathroom for almost twenty minutes, coming out with damp hair and an oversized pajama shirt. Duang remembered that he was about to ask if Qin wanted some warm milk so he could heat it up, but instead, the other just collapsed into his arms like someone who had run out of energy.

Duang absentmindedly pressed his nose against the soft, drying strands of Qin's hair. It's so hard to hold back—like having his favorite cake, the last piece in the entire world, placed right in front of him. And, for heaven's sake, he hopes Qin doesn't mind the sound of his heart pounding too loudly when the other person rests his face against his chest like this.

"Qin."

"Hmm?" That soft, lazy voice replied. Duang only tightened his embrace, pulling the other's slender frame closer—thinner than he expected. Much thinner than how it looked when Qin took off his shirt, and it made him

want to hold Qin tighter. But he was afraid of making the pouty one uncomfortable.

"Do you want to talk about anything? I can just listen."

"Just tired, that's all."

"Then... do you want anything?"

"Sing me a song."

"You... I can't do that." Duang held his breath when Qin tilted his eyes up to meet his. Even though their builds weren't all that different, Duang couldn't help but feel like Qin was as small as a kitten or a puppy. No matter what anyone else said, he always saw Qin as someone tiny enough to fit in his arms.

He wanted to squeeze him until he cried, but if anyone was going to end up crying, it would probably be him.

Either he'd get punched or kicked—seriously.

"Hurry up."

"Actually, there's this one song I really like, but I never dared to send it to you. I didn't even add it to my playlist."

"Why?"

"Because I'm shy."

"You? Shy?"

"I'm always shy around you. Don't you realize?"

"Can you sing it already?"

Duang wrinkled his neck because it tickled him when Qin rested his chin on his shoulder. It was all so awkward—but not uncomfortable. In fact, this

was their first real hug. If you don't count the times they accidentally hugged while sleeping, whoever woke up first would know, but neither of them ever mentioned it. Because it was just too embarrassing.

Like that song says—

don't be surprised if I'm still shy.

Yeah... don't be surprised.

"Are you serious?"

"Stop stalling."

"Ahem, ahem."

Qin pressed his chin harder into Duang's shoulder, making him yelp from the ticklish feeling, but when he stole a glance at him, he realized Duang wasn't actually stalling—he was just nervous. His ears were burning red.

"Even if the world is cruel..."

Qin hid his face against Duang's neck because he couldn't hold back his smile.

His voice was as bad as he said it would be—off-key and everything. But damn it, his heart was pounding so hard it made him mad at himself. All he could do was scoot closer to the warmth of the person singing for him, unsure of what else to do.

"I've been through so much alone, it hurt, but it's okay—really."

It's a song he hadn't heard in a long time.

A song he knew was beautiful, but it never really meant much to his heart.

Not until someone handed it to him—infusing it with new meaning.

"As long as I have you, just you... that's enough. I don't need anything more."

In his heart.

"Just you and me... just the two of us—that's already better than anything else."

And it's true—just like the song says.

As long as he has this, it's enough.

"Feeling better yet?"

"A little more."

"Duang can't sing another song for you. I'm already dying of embarrassment here."

Qin thinks that if relationships are like growing a tree, in order to make it grow and blossom, sometimes you need to add a little fertilizer to keep it thriving.

And he thinks Duang deserves everything.

"You troublemaker... seriously, you. I'm calling you that from now on—always up to something..."

If the chance of someone you like liking you back is one in a hundred...

What are the chances of that person kissing you first?

As long as I have you... just you.

It's this line from the song that echoed in Duang's head when Qin leaned in and kissed him.

Soft lips brushed against his in a lingering touch, moving slowly—just like when he would sit quietly, sketching a butterfly onto heavy paper. If he had

to paint the first color, it would be blue—because the moment he closed his eyes, that was the color that filled his mind.

Qin's kiss felt like it was below zero degrees, because while Duang's heart melted into liquid, Qin somehow reshaped it—again and again—each beat stronger than the last. Duang pulled Qin closer by the waist, feeling an overwhelming warmth in his chest as Qin straddled his lap in a position that made his breath hitch.

"Don't bite."

"Sorry..."

Duang said that after kissing back and accidentally biting Qin's lip—he couldn't help it.

Who told him to be this cute?

But whatever—Duang wasn't about to waste another second lost in the haze that made his heart race like this. Who knew how long this feeling would last? And that's exactly why he didn't hesitate to press his lips against Qin's just as he seemed about to say something.

"Mm..."

Qin let out a soft moan against his mouth.

It was too much—too hot. That teasing tongue was making his head spin.

He never thought Duang would kiss so well—or be this bold.

But then again, he never really planned for what would happen next between them.

For either of them.

"You... stop—"

Warm hands pressed against the other's waist to stop him from moving. Qin couldn't control himself because Duang's kiss made it impossible for him to stay still, and the hardness beneath the jeans of the person he was sitting on made him understand the meaning of the word 'stop.'

Their heavy breaths filled the air—loud enough to chase the butterflies away.

But Qin knew... they would always come back.

"Endure it."

"If I make it through today, I might just reach enlightenment."

Duang's face felt hot because Qin was laughing with his eyes squinted, not far from him. Their faces were still so close that if he moved just a little, he could press his nose against the other's cheek. There were so many thoughts running through his head—one of them was to push the other down onto the sofa.

But no, better not.

"Good boy."

To him, Qin was worth far more than those things.

"What's wrong with you? This is your favorite place. I'm begging you." Jet wanted to pour cold water on the person eating like a picky cat who kept flinching like a flustered girl every time Qin glanced his way.

"Duang, what's wrong with you? Just say it straight."

"I'm okay."

"You're not okay, honey. You're not even falling into shrimp paste

(You're totally losing it)

."

"..." Qin looked at Duang, who refused to answer and just kept avoiding his gaze. When Jet pressed him again, he pouted toward Qin, as if saying that

he

was the reason he was acting this way.

Such a sulky baby.

"Can I ask Khun Qin something? What happened to your heart? You can't control anything."

"It's nothing." Duang already knew that Qin wouldn't talk about the kiss to anyone because it was way too personal. And he wouldn't either—how could he possibly say it? The reason he was acting weird was all because of that kiss. It wasn't easy to sit there and keep himself together when he felt so damn uncomfortable.

Uncomfortable... down there.

Down there

T_T

"Alright then. If you two are sulking, make up quickly. Duang's acting like someone who got tricked into being screwed."

"Watch your mouth, Jet."

"Am I wrong? You're acting way too obvious."

"..."

"Or!!" Jet suddenly yelled. Qin shook his head, laughing softly at Jet's imagination as he pointed back and forth between him and Duang, his eyes wide in realization. Qin took the opportunity while they were arguing to

place a shrimp dumpling into the bowl of the sulking boy. In return, he got a shy smile that made Duang look like a little kid in his eyes.

"Duang's the wife!"

"Shut up, Jet."

"You're acting so suspicious, please. People can tell."

"God, can we just eat in peace for once? I shouldn't have run into you outside Qin's dorm."

"Even if no one invited me, if I saw you two sitting together, I'd still come over!" Honestly, Duang had a headache. He had no idea what had gotten into his friend to make him this hyper. He massaged his temples before quietly eating his shrimp wonton noodles, knowing that arguing with Jet was a waste of time.

And when he went quiet, of course, Jet turned his attention to bother Qin instead.

"Khun. Qin, are you excited? Tomorrow's a big day."

"Not really excited—more like nervous."

"You can do it! What time is your band performing?"

"Six in the evening."

"I'll definitely be there! What songs are you singing? Can you tell me in advance?" Qin nodded before answering.

"My Cherie Amour.

The other performers are doing a jazz version with a female friend of mine. The other song is jazz-pop—this one I picked myself. The original version is sung by a woman. It's called

Cup of Tea.

"

Duang smiled to himself. He loved it when Qin talked about music because he would go on and on, filled with passion. Honestly, he could hardly wait for tomorrow—it would be the first time he'd get to see Qin perform seriously on stage.

His talented guy.

"The last song is by Tom Misch. I chose this one because it's got a groove to it. The audience can sway along. The charm of jazz music is in the improvisation and the imagination of the musicians and singers at that moment—pushing it as far as it can go. It's exciting. It keeps you on edge, wondering what's coming next."

"Want to be your wife."

"Wait, wait." Qin laughed softly because Jet was resting his chin on his hand, looking at him dreamily before blurting that out. But it didn't take long before Duang smacked him on the head, and they started arguing all over again.

The meal ended in a chaotic mess because the two of them wouldn't stop bickering. Qin simply followed behind Duang, who reached out to grab his wrist like he was afraid of getting lost, all while still cursing at his friend.

"I'm not scared of you, Duang."

"Don't mess with Qin again."

"You can race boats, but you can't race fate—don't even dream of it."

"Look at Jet, seriously."

The number one sulker.

Qin shook his head, exasperated by the one who only seemed grown on the outside. Before he realized it, they had already arrived at the dorm. It took

some effort to finally part ways with Jet, who clearly enjoyed riling Duang up. And this guy—he seriously couldn't take even the slightest teasing.

"Jet was just joking."

"Well, you're the only one I have—of course I'm possessive."

"Funny how you're not shy when it comes to this, huh?" He teased the person pressing the elevator button nearby. Duang turned to glance at him, ears flushed red, and then went back to being the same shy person still hung up on that kiss.

"Maybe I should do it again—it might cure you. You're showing serious symptoms, dude."

"You! How can you even say that? Do it again. Duang is dying here!"

"Pathetic, all talk."

"And what if I'm actually good—wanna find out?"

"..."

"What's wrong, Mr. Talented? Or do you wanna test if there's something better than just talking?"

Qin found himself backed into a corner of the elevator. Thank God no one else was inside. And even with the surveillance camera there, this shameless guy didn't stop teasing him.

Yeah, he totally understood now what it meant to be

this

embarrassed.

What could be better than talking?

This asshole...

"Back off."

"You're just as flustered—I can tell."

"Stop fooling around—this is the elevator."

"So, it's fine if it's in the room?"

"You're unbelievable." Qin clenched his fists tightly.

Play with a dog, and it'll lick your face.

He really shouldn't have messed with him—it just made him bolder.

"Hey, let's brush our teeth."

The owner of the room gazed at the person now wearing his pajamas. Freshly showered, but still dragging himself out for a late-night meal with him. It had become routine to stand side by side like this, brushing their teeth together.

Qin took the toothpaste Duang handed him as he was about to put the toothbrush in his mouth, thinking to himself—

What would it take to keep seeing our reflection together in this mirror, over and over?

How could he make that happen?

"Qin, focus when you're brushing."

"Naggy."

"I'll make you brush properly—don't be lazy."

What would it take to keep them together, when he wasn't good at holding onto anything?

"Duang."

"Yeah?"

"Do you want me to change anything... I mean, if it would make us better?"

The person being asked furrowed his brow. The cool mint flavor in his mouth shifted into something else when he heard the uncertain tone in Qin's voice.

They say words are the root of all misunderstandings.

"And right now, isn't it already good?"

Qin realized that wanting to have each other for a long time might start with opening up about things that make you feel too ashamed or too shy to say—whether it's out of pride or just because of their age.

But if they could get past that...

It would be even better.

"It's not like that."

"..."

"Out of nowhere, I just thought... if one day I didn't have you anymore, how bad would that be? And how can I make sure I get to have you for a long time?"

"You'll always have Duang."

Qin lowered his gaze to the bathroom floor. He felt more vulnerable than usual—maybe because of work, maybe because their relationship was moving forward while his heart still worried about the day it might hurt.

When the truth is, no matter how good things are—

There will be pain.

There will be mistakes.

There will be falls.

"I can't guarantee that it'll always be good."

But they had to grow.

"But I can guarantee that you'll have me... No matter how bad things get, I'll still be right here with you."

"Yeah."

"Does that make it better?"

"It's better. And what about you?"

Some people smile when asked a simple question like that—one that really means the other person cares more than they let on. Even though Qin often came off as tough, Duang knew deep down that this was already something special.

It was already so, so special.

"Of course, it's okay. Everything's been okay since the day you told me to just keep trying until you said yes."

"You still remember that?" The pale-skinned man in his favorite pajamas muttered lazily as he finally started brushing his teeth.

"I remember everything about you. Honestly, I was scared as hell that day."

"That was you scared?"

"I practiced in front of the mirror for a whole month."

"What did you even like about me that much?" Duang laughed, his voice teasing.

"Good question. I don't even know what made me like you that much."

"But honestly... I might understand you."

The brown-haired man with playful eyes glanced at the other through the mirror. Our pinkies touched lightly under the dim bathroom light as the two tall guys stood side by side, brushing their teeth together—just like every day before.

"Because I ask myself the same thing every day."

"..."

"I don't know what made me like you this much either."

Hi everyone! If anyone's interested in sharing the cost for the book

, feel free to DM me on X/Twitter (@liu_rya). Payments can be made via bank transfer or QR for Malaysians, PayPal or Wise for overseas, and GoPay for Indonesians (but preferred PayPal). Thank youuu so much

06 - I've Prepared Everything to Love You

They say nothing makes your heart race like falling for a musician... Duang knows now that it's true—so much so that his heart skips a beat when he sees Qin pushing his hair back while smoking beside the hall where the performance will be held. It's almost six in the evening, and his talented guy is dressed so well that it's breathtaking.

The slim figure is wearing a black satin shirt, unbuttoned three buttons down, revealing the necklace he always wears with a locket holding a picture of his family—it's so dreamy it's insane. He pairs it with black high-waisted, straight-leg pants with subtle details, a thin leather belt, and leather shoes that Duang didn't even know Qin had.

He looks like he just stepped out of some Western movie, and Duang is the fool hopelessly in love with everything about him.

"Hey, Duang's here. Okay, talk for a bit—5:45, meet me backstage."

"Yeah, see you." Qin puts out his second cigarette halfway—maybe because the person he doesn't want to expose to the smoke has just arrived.

Duang, who's still in his university uniform because of his classes today, smiles wide as he hands Qin a cup of coffee, because Qin had sent him a message saying he wanted an iced Americano.

"Are you okay? You look worried."

"You can tell?"

"Yeah, I pay attention."

"Always gotta look good in front of me, huh?" Qin pushes against the forehead of the cheeky guy, taking the coffee and sipping it while

answering the random questions Duang throws at him—oddly enough, it helps calm his nerves.

"If you're worried no one will enjoy the show, I'll send Jet to the front row."

"Please, no." Duang laughs, trying to comfort the other person who looked stressed to the point that he wanted to hug him.

"People will love it, trust me. Your music is amazing—and so are you."

"Thanks."

"No problem."

"And you... where will you be standing?"

"You won't find Duang? I'm hurt."

"It's dark."

"Just kidding. Probably somewhere in the back. Left corner sound good? Let's set it."

Qin nodded, watching Duang take the empty *Americano* cup he had finished, like someone who always volunteers to do little things—even though the trash can wasn't far away.

Why is he like this?

How did he grow up?

"You're so cute."

So warm, it makes his heart ache.

"Wait a second."

"Really cute."

Duang feels like crying—what kind of wind blew in to make Qin say something like this right here, right now? As if that wasn't enough, he reaches out to ruffle his hair. But before Duang can say anything in return, Qin speaks up again.

"I have to go. See you inside. I'll look for you."

"You've got this! you're the best, Qin. I'll be waiting to hear you sing."

And once again, someone's smile feels like magic that can heal everything.

Qin nods, and we hold hands lightly before letting go as the time draws near. Duang looked at the back of the other person who disappeared into the hall through the side entrance reserved for the jazz performers. Regular attendees like him, though, have to enter through the main door.

The tall guy sighs softly—when Qin is stressed, he can't help but feel stressed too. But he can't let it show. As long as he can handle it, he'll carry Qin through anything—he never wants him to feel disappointed. Not in anything. Not even in him.

"Chiwin, are you coming or what?"

"Yeah, yeah—you came all the way to get me?"

"I thought I'd run into Khun Qin."

Pae scratches his head while his friend stares at the door, still clutching the iced Americano cup which is now only filled with ice. He guessed that they had met already because Duang only drinks stuff like this when he's working himself to the bone.

"How's he doing?"

"Stressed, obviously. Makes sense, though—it's his first big performance, and it counts toward his grades too."

"Did he sleep last night?"

"Yeah, but not until almost morning. Good thing his friends scheduled the meet-up in the afternoon today."

"I comforted him like crazy." Duang thought before nodding, not sure if the word 'comfort' was the right one, but he held Qin all night until his arm went numb... No, it felt like his arm had completely disappeared, but he didn't complain because it was totally worth it.

Getting to hold someone he felt so much for in his own arms.

"Hey, did you know? The performance order is based on their singing scores for the whole semester."

"I didn't know. Qin didn't say, but I'm not surprised. He's obsessed with jazz music."

"A friend of my friend studied with him in high school. They said he's always been this talented but just doesn't show off his skills much."

"I've heard him sing—like, really sing—only once. Not counting the humming in the car or the times I accidentally overheard him practicing before we even started talking." Duang smiled to himself. That's why everyone came today. Everyone wants to hear Qin sing. He's someone special without even trying.

"Pae! Duang!"

"Whoa, Jet! It's a concert, not a movie. Why'd you bring popcorn?"

"Mind your business." Pae raised his hand to smack the friend who could never hold a proper conversation. That's just how he was.

"Are we going in? I wanna hear Khun Qin sing already. I overheard a girl at the True café saying Qin looks so good today it's making her wet."

"Did she really say that?" Duang snapped.

"Yeah. Like, literally wet. I sat there and listened to the whole thing."

"That's normal. He's famous, you know. But he doesn't really hang out with people or crave attention."

"If I were as hot as him—oh man, I'd be showing off in every faculty!" Jet said dramatically. Earlier, while waiting for his iced chocolate, everyone was talking about Qin and his singing.

That's why Duang was so anxious. It's not that he was afraid Qin would like someone else—he just didn't want anyone else to like Qin. But that was impossible. Jet saw his friend sigh and slump his shoulders as they walked into the hall, wondering why he was getting so down about it.

"Duang, listen to me."

"What now, you idiot?"

"You've already beaten hundreds of people. He's only talking to you."

"..."

"For real, even if a hundred people like him—so what? Are they the ones sleeping in Qin's bed like you do?"

Duang felt his shoulders lift as his confidence surged. Jet was right. Why was he stressing over little things? Yeah... who else gets to see Qin's clingy side like he does? This must be the biggest blessing of his life. He could die after graduation and have no regrets—he'd already used up all his merit.

"It's starting!"

"Aaaaaah! Qin~~~"

"Jazz kids are the best!"

"This is insane—the lighting is amazing!"

Duang raised his compact camera to capture the atmosphere, thinking Qin would probably want to see it later. He looked toward the stage. It was a bit

far, but he was sure Qin would be able to spot him because he was quite tall, and they had agreed on the left corner.

The bassist was the first to step on stage, warming up the strings and testing the sound. The girls' screams were loud enough to break glass, and the chatter filled the hall, buzzing non-stop until the singer would arrive.

"Damn, the whole jazz department is here!"

"It's a big deal."

"Even the saxophone section is here, I wasn't expecting that. Not at all!" Jet clapped in excitement because the band was huge—so big that it made him want to carve 'I love you' into the floor with his blood.

As a concert lover, he was impressed, but before he could dwell on it, the whole hall erupted into screams because Qin had just stepped onto the stage, looking unbelievably cool.

"I wanna be his wifeeeeee!"

"You damn fool." Duang put Jet in a headlock, covering his mouth tightly. He felt a sharp pang of jealousy, burning inside as he stood in the back and realized that everyone liked Qin.

"Oh my God, he's like a dream."

"Seriously, my friends and I all agree—Qin is the best."

"Ahhh, it's starting!"

Duang stood there with cold hands, even though his body usually ran warm. He had no idea how Qin was feeling on stage right now. From where he stood, he felt so nervous for him that he couldn't stay still. But the moment he heard Qin's familiar voice greet the audience through the speakers, his heart pounded wildly.

And honestly—there were probably many hearts skipping beats because of this man.

"Hello."

Qin was announcing the event's name and thanking everyone for coming in such a large number. Duang thought Qin chose his words well and managed his time before starting to play surprisingly smoothly because, normally, Qin wasn't much of a talker. Maybe it was because it was a formal event.

But he liked that he got to see new sides of Qin.

And every time he saw them, he fell for every side of him.

"The music vibe is so damn good," Jet muttered.

"For real. And they're only freshmen, this is already giving me chills."

As the sound of the saxophone and piano faded, playing a rhythm that made you want to sway along softly, Qin's voice came through the high-quality speakers. Duang smiled wide because his heart felt like it was about to burst.

"Oh my God, my heart."

"So good, seriously."

"It's like a dream."

Everyone was saying things like that. They weren't loud, but Duang could still hear them—and he thought the same. How could someone be so dreamy? And now that he was singing right in front of them, his heart couldn't take it.

Where did he get all this charm from?

And damn, he knew how to work the stage.

And that face he made while singing the line.

"Oh, cherie amour, pretty little one that I adore. You're the only girl my heart beats for. How I wish that you were mine."

Who the hell taught him that?

"You're awfully quiet," Jet teased.

"Can't stop looking at him."

"You're even more gone than before. My friend here—a hopeless romantic," Jet shook his head in mock disapproval, watching his friend respond absentmindedly while keeping his eyes locked on the stage. Duang raised his camera to snap a few shots of the person singing over there. Jet figured he'd probably push his way to the front soon—because, of course, he had to get closer to his 'life partner.'

Yeah, 'life partner' really fit at this point—Duang was looking at Qin like he'd gladly die for him.

"Dude, listen to that high note."

"I'm gonna lose my mind," Duang swore under his breath, running a hand over his face because it was just too much. How was falling for a musician this intense? And Qin wasn't just playing—he was singing. When he got into the song, he'd sway a little, tease with his expressions—it was nothing like when he was just sitting around. This version of him? Absolutely lethal.

There was no way out of this.

"Damn, this song is so good."

"For real. It fits Qin's voice perfectly."

"I'm about to faint, I swear."

"Stay strong, my friend. Today is not your dying day."

"You can't die yet, Duang. Not until he's yours."

Duang wanted to lie down on the floor and cry when Qin spotted him in the crowd. And even though the song wasn't that suggestive, the music and the

way Qin's face looked while singing—it was so intimate, it was insane.

The tall guy walked from his original spot to the front to take a picture of the person singing and doing a little dance that was so tempting to cuddle.

What even is this guy's deal?

And now—now he was looking at him, too. Looking so much that people nearby started noticing and glancing his way. His face felt hot—not because of the venue's temperature. Duang just silently thanked the jazz club for keeping the hall dim. If it weren't for the lighting, everyone would know how red his ears were.

How can someone be this sexy while wearing a full outfit?

"How could I think to myself that you're the only one for me?"

Duang watched him through his camera lens. The purple lights made Qin look even more like a dream. A soft smile crept onto Qin's face when he noticed how much the audience was enjoying the performance.

It was in that moment—when the double bass hummed along with the keyboard—that Qin, playful as ever, pointed directly at him like it was just part of the performance.

Maybe to everyone else, it seemed like a natural move—just a performer going with the rhythm. But Duang knew better. It wasn't that simple. Not for them.

There was meaning behind it—a meaning just for the two of them to understand.

"You're my cup of tea."

Just the two of us.

It was me who bought food and waited for him in the room because he had to come back to change clothes after handling the musical instruments once the event was over, before going out to drink with his faculty friends. I wanted to go too—not to drink, but just to sit and keep an eye on him—but since it's

friend's day

, I didn't want to overstep that much.

Being a good boy and waiting for him in the room seemed like a better idea.

"Duang."

"Oh, you're here earlier than I thought."

I turned and smiled at him as he walked into the room, unbuttoning his shirt and tossing it aside. My breath hitched because of his beautiful collarbones and the locket resting against his fair chest. He raised an eyebrow, glancing at me with a curious look before walking over to the fridge to grab a drink.

"Are you in a hurry? If you are, eat first and shower later."

"I'm in a hurry, but not too much."

"Hey, are you messing with me?"

"I can be late—I want to be with you first."

Maybe it's because my mind is dirty, but I swallowed hard when he slowly unbuckled his sleek belt, rolled it up, and tucked it into his Hermès box. His hair was starting to grow long enough to tuck behind his ear. Neither of us had plans to cut it, but his hair had grown far longer than mine.

I poured his favorite food onto a plate while sneaking glances at him. He seemed hot, fussing around looking for the air conditioner remote and checking his phone to answer messages. I couldn't help but smile at his irritated expression.

"What's so funny?"

"You're like a kid—if you're annoyed, sit down and cool off."

"It's hot."

"What's Duang supposed to do? Just wait for the AC."

After setting the food on the plate and waiting for him to eat, I grabbed the thinnest jazz book he owned and fanned him. He pouted, pointing for me to sit next to him, so I did—but I kept fanning him without stopping.

I told you—I'd be anything for him.

Anything I possibly could be.

"Not stressed anymore, huh? You're just cranky because it's hot."

"Why did they make us wear black? It's hot as hell."

"You're like a different person on stage—flirting with your eyes and all. I was clenching my fists the whole time."

"You're overreacting."

I immediately straightened my back when he rested his head against my chest... him, with his bare upper body, his skin touching mine directly in a way it never had before. I pressed my lips together, took a deep breath, and stopped fanning when I realized the air had cooled down.

"You were amazing today. Really."

"Mm. Thanks."

"Everyone was praising you. I'm so possessive of you, but... I also want people to respect how talented you are."

"Since when are you so reasonable?"

"Maybe since I fell in love with you."

I held my breath when I realized I had said it out loud... and he froze for a moment, long enough to make me wonder what to do next. I decided to pull out a finished roll of film from my bag, placing it in his hand before saying,

"This is for you."

"Hmm? Film?"

"Yeah. I took pictures of you and the atmosphere—but mostly you."

"I thought you said you wouldn't take any."

"I lied."

"Smartass."

He swore but smiled, and I smiled back before pressing a kiss to his hair. He tilted his head up to glare at me. Yes, he did it even though he was leaning down against my chest.

And at that angle,

With the light like this...

"Thank you."

"..."

"For everything."

And it was me who was bold enough to kiss him first.

I kind of knew that once there was a first time, there would inevitably be a second—but I didn't think I'd be the one to start it. I smiled against his lips when he allowed me to kiss him, when he kissed me back.

The sound of our tongues sliding against each other was wet and messy. My hands touched his skin—it was smooth, soft, and fragrant when I pressed my nose against the crook of his neck. I kissed his chin reverently before moving back to claim his lips again. Qin started to get playful, pushing things even further by teasingly biting my lip.

I wasn't sure if he was teasing me or if he just couldn't help himself...

But now I was straddling him.

"Calm down."

"You're the one—... you're unzipping my pants, Qin."

"I'm not—I'm just holding you back."

He argued, but that wasn't true. I could feel my zipper sliding down, the buttons of my jeans being undone smoothly, and that unfamiliar smile on his face.

He was such a tease.

"Don't do this."

"I'm helping."

"Qin..."

"Hold it in."

"Can Duang help you too?" Well, we're both guys—why wouldn't I know? He stayed quiet for a moment before nodding. I slid my hand over his waist. It was so slender that I wanted to leave kisses all over it, but all I could do was think about it.

"How long can you stay late?" I asked after pulling away from the kiss and softly kissing the corner of his mouth. His eyes were hazy and dreamy, even more than before. I felt satisfied that no one else could see him—no one

else could see this. He was shirtless and about to have his pants taken off. He was definitely going to be teased by me.

Qin wrapped his arms around my neck, lifting his face to kiss me softly before saying,

"As long as I want."

And he really did get teased by me.

"I'm not leaving yet. If you're in a hurry, eat without me. I'm fine like this." Duang glanced at the person who had already changed into new clothes. Damn it. We showered together. I want to die. I want to disappear from this world.

And now, just looking at the sofa in the middle of the room makes my face burn, especially since I was the one who slipped my hand into his pants first. I still remember his breathless moans, the way he kept calling my name over and over again with those half-lidded eyes while I pressed him down into the sofa. I felt so much that I ended up biting him a few times as he reached his peak.

Thank God it's a leather sofa—otherwise, we'd be cleaning it forever.

"What are you staring at?"

"You."

"Eat."

"It's cold now—whose fault is that?"

"Yours. Can't get enough, can you?" Qin scolded him relentlessly, once again becoming the most hot-tempered person in Nakhon Pathom. It made me want to dive in and kiss his head, especially seeing him eat stir-fried squid with salted egg like a thug, his wet hair falling messily over his face.

"But you're so pale."

"..."

"And you smell so good."

"Asshole."

"Marry me."

"I haven't even asked you yet."

"Marry me." And of course, Duang got a cucumber thrown at him—but as usual, he wasn't bothered. Because when Qin acts like this, it means he's embarrassed. Definitely.

"Shameless."

"Don't act like I did it all by myself. You unzipped my pants first."

"You put your hand in my pants."

"Whatever. This is what they call mutual wrongdoing."

"No self-control."

"Wow, you can actually say that out loud." Duang, who was about to argue, got a finger pointed at his face by the pale guy.

"Just eat. Don't talk."

"Yes, yes, yes."

As Qin ate, he kept glancing at the person who seemed unusually cheerful. Honestly, when he was singing, he barely took his eyes off Duang—even though he really shouldn't have done that. He'd probably lose points for not scanning the entire hall like he was supposed to. But whatever—how many points could they even take off anyway?

"Where did you leave marks?"

"Not on your neck—I didn't want people to look at you the wrong way."

"At least you have some sense."

"Oh, by the way, Duang's going to Hua Hin on Saturday—to paint for an assignment."

"With who?"

"Pae, Jet, and two other girls."

"Who?"

Holy shit.

Just like a real wife... which he is.

Why? Who's going to argue with that? Duang held back a smile. Did Qin know that the way he looked and the tone he used when asking 'who' was so damn jealous? It was adorable—so freaking adorable. Oh, God.

"Paeploy and Kee—you probably don't know them."

"They don't like you, right?"

"Uh, how would I know that?"

"Shitty answer. Try again."

"Damn it."

"Answer again."

The pale guy put down his fork and knife, clasping his hands under his chin while staring at the other intensely... If Duang fumbled even once more, he wouldn't let him breathe peacefully.

"Whether anyone likes me or not, I don't know. I only like you."

"..."

"Is that good enough for you?"

"Are you just saying this to please me?"

"Qin!" Duang cried out before bursting into laughter because this version of Qin was new to him too. So cute—how could anyone be this cute? Was Qin really that determined to win this? Duang didn't want to go anywhere anymore—screw the drinking plans.

"Drive safely—you're coming back the same day, right?"

"Yeah, we'll take turns driving."

"Don't sit next to the girls."

"Qin, are you serious right now?"

"What? I can't be possessive?"

"Qinnn!"

How could he even say that?

He's crazy.

"Calm down, my heart can only take so much."

"If I'm jealous of you, you can be jealous of me too."

"..."

"You said I'm your only one."

Duang locked eyes with Qin, who said those words with such seriousness that his heart pounded as if it would break free from his chest. It overflowed

inside him—the realization that everything Qin had been doing and saying was his way of showing that they were equals.

No matter who started this first, Qin always tried to keep things fair between them.

"You're my only one too."

That's why Duang kept saying—

Qin was unbearably cute.

"If you don't stop, I'll get up and kiss you, and you won't be leaving this place ever again. That's final."

"Do I look like I'm scared of you?"

"Don't push it. I get it—you're jealous. I understand completely. Should I send you hourly photo updates?"

"Do I seem that fussy to you?"

"Nope. Because if I asked, you'd do it too, right?"

"Yeah... you're always so clingy."

"But I'd never ask for anything that makes you uncomfortable. And whatever you ask for—I'll do it happily. It's no big deal, so don't overthink it."

"I don't want you to force yourself for me."

Qin placed more food on Duang's plate, his gaze lingering on the eyes that always warmed his heart. He wanted to keep things just like this—warm and steady. He wanted it to last without either of them having to change.

Because no one should have to bend over backward for someone else.

"With you, I never have to force myself."

"..."

"Is it too cheesy if I say it feels like I've prepared everything just to love you?"

At that moment, Qin let his guard down.

Maybe he had already done so a long time ago.

"Really?"

Because the truth was—

"I've prepared everything just to love you too."

He had already given everything to love the person sitting right in front of him.

07 - Duang Loves You So Much That I See You Cuter Than Anyone Else

[What are you doing?]

"I'm about to go eat."

[You woke up late. Did you call me as soon as you woke up?]

"Mm."

The person still sitting on the bed in pajamas yawned. He didn't really think Duang would actually send a message every hour like he said. But when he woke up, there was already a selfie from Duang reporting what he was doing. Some photos even showed Jet in the background doing a mini heart while smiling brightly alongside him.

It was good that Duang got to go on a trip. Even if it was for an art assignment, Qin knew that drawing was what made Duang happy.

"Make sure you eat on time, or you'll complain about a stomachache again."

[Don't worry, we have a car full of snacks.]

"Let me know when you arrive. I'm going to shower now."

[Qin.]

"Hmm?"

[Send me a picture of you. I miss you.]

"I don't like taking pictures."

[Come on, just one.]

"Later. Tell Jet to drive carefully and focus on your drawing."

[Okay, okay. You eat a lot too, okay?]

Qin smiled because of that simple sentence. Was he going crazy? Just hearing Duang tell him to eat more made him smile so wide.

After hanging up, he stood in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing his long hair back. His pale hand grabbed his red toothbrush and squeezed toothpaste onto it. His eyes fell on the yellow toothbrush next to it, and he sighed softly.

When you're always together, you get used to it.

The only time they were apart was during classes. And even then, if the professor wasn't too strict and Duang had free time, he'd come sit with Qin. Qin did the same. He didn't know why they kept doing it.

"..."

It made him think of that song by Jamie Cullum. The one that starts with the line:

'I'm telling you now, don't mess around with love. I'm telling you, you won't last a round with love.'

Don't mess with love. It's a headache.

Don't expect it to last forever.

But the song ends with the line:

'I'm telling you, you can't hide away from love.'

In the end, you can't escape love.

"You woke up late again."

"Mm, I was watching a movie last night." Qin, who had washed his face, brushed his teeth, and showered and changed into a new set of clothes, walked down from the dorm with messy hair down to find something to eat. He answered Mi, one of his close friends who studied in a different department—music, specializing in the double bass.

"Where's Duang? You guys are usually glued together."

"He went to Hua Hin to draw."

"That's far. Is he going with some girl?"

"Don't start."

Qin, being pulled into a side hug by his friend, let himself be led along. Mi didn't really care which place they ate at—he just didn't want to eat alone.

"By the way, did you reply to that senior yet? The one who asked you to model for them."

"Not yet."

"You're such a slow replier. Do you even answer anyone?"

"Duang."

"Oh, wow."

Mi ruffled Qin's hair even more, only to get swatted away. If they hadn't been friends since high school, Qin probably wouldn't let anyone touch him—he was that particular.

"Speaking of messages, I bet you haven't checked the school group chat."

"Why? I'm not going anywhere."

"Yeah, I figured. But you should come to this one—it's for Mr. Panya's retirement."

"He's retiring already?"

"Yeah."

Had time really passed that quickly? Qin thought to himself as he looked eyes with his friend sitting across the table. It was probably going to be the same as always—some simple stir-fry dish. Without Duang around, he didn't feel like going far to eat. He was too lazy to drive. Too lazy to do anything.

He'd gotten too comfortable.

What a bad habit.

"Let's go next Saturday."

"Mm, fine. I'll go."

"He wants to see you, you know? He asks about you all the time. If you're free, text him back. And if you don't want to talk, just tell him, so he won't have to wait."

"I never asked him to wait."

"I don't know what kind of 'waiting' you mean, Qin. But he's still the same... and I already told him that you're not."

"I'm the same."

It wasn't something he thought about often—not because it used to hurt, but because it was already in the past. And once something passed, Qin wasn't the type to dwell on it. He stayed here, in the present, constantly reminding himself to do things right.

He wanted to do things right.

"How could you be the same? If you were, you two would still be talking."

"Talking wouldn't change anything. I didn't like it that way."

"..."

"I just felt good. That's all it ever was."

Jamie pressed his lips together before asking, "Is it the same feeling you have for Duang? You just feel good, but never take it further—like what happened with you... and Tiw?"

"I understand you might be worried."

"Yeah, I am."

"But Duang and Tiw aren't the same."

Jamie had never seen that look in his friend's eyes before. Qin never had a boyfriend or girlfriend, but people were always drawn to him—both girls and guys. Maybe because they grew up in an all-boys environment, liking guys didn't seem that strange. Every relationship started as friendship, blurred into something without a label, and eventually faded while still remaining undefined.

"I never wanted to be more than friends with Tiw—or anyone else."

"..."

"But with Duang... I want to be everything I can be."

It was strange to say something like this out loud—especially when the person who should hear it wasn't here.

The one who was probably cracking stupid jokes and making their friends laugh.

The one who was probably still waiting for a picture from him, even after all the times he left Duang on read.

"I want to give everything I have—just like how he's been giving to me, little by little."

But would Duang ever know...

How much he meant to him?

No explanation.

No conditions.

No reason.

"Whether it's slow... or fast..."

He was already falling—

Falling too deep.

"And in the end... we'll get there together anyway."

And he kept telling himself, over and over again, that he would see this through to the end.

With him.

With Duang.

With

us.

"What's wrong, dude? Why the long face? The sea's right in front of you—get painting! The teacher wants artwork, not tears."

"I'm not crying."

"Your voice is shaking." Pae and Jetana took turns teasing the guy who kept checking his phone every ten minutes. Today, Duang was acting like an old man on a tour—any spot that looked like a senior citizen's dream photo op,

he'd stop to take pictures. Said he was gonna send them to Qin, and honestly, someone needs to ask if Qin even wants to see them.

Sigh.

Exhausting.

"Have you ever waited to see a whale and it didn't show up?" Jet quoted a line from a life insurance ad to tease the guy who was gloomily painting while staring at the sky and sea—because the person he was waiting for hadn't replied.

"You sound like Som-Som, Pala's girlfriend."

"Hormones, man."

"Are you seriously gonna quote every single episode? Does one person need to impersonate every character, Jet?"

"This is my happiness." Jetana smeared a shade of blue onto the damp paper, watching the pigments spread out like clouds. His eyes flicked toward another artist sitting not far away, painting the soft texture of the sand. Maybe not the best in their class—but damn, his skill was impressive.

Just like Duang said: apart from loving Qin and painting, he wasn't really good at anything else.

"Duang, your Line's buzzing."

"For real?!" Jet snickered to himself as the lovesick fool tossed his brush aside and scrambled for his phone. If you're wondering where the girls were—they had gone to buy snacks, leaving the boys to paint by themselves.

"Look at him! He hasn't even read the message, and he's already smiling like an idiot."

"A true lover boy—Duang never disappoints."

"Oh my God, I'm gonna die!"

"What? What?" Jet lunged to see the screen, but Duang clutched the phone to his chest and shook his head, shoving Jet away with trembling hands.

"Don't look, you idiot!"

"What? What did Qin send?" Pae, who had been watching the whole thing, was dying of curiosity. The more secretive Duang got, the more they wanted to know. His ears were bright red—was it...

"Dude... did he send nudes?"

"Screw you! This is Qin we're talking about—hello?"

"No, dumbass!" Duang added, half wanting to slap Pae's head off for even thinking that. But holy shit—his heart almost leaped out of his chest when he opened the chat and saw two messages from Qin.

The first one was a short text that simply said

"Focus."

He figured it meant to focus on his painting.

The second... was a selfie.

Even though Qin had the latest phone—because his dad randomly bought it for him—his tech skills were basically zero. The only thing he was good at was music apps. And maybe that's why the selfie was so damn cute. T_T

"He sent a picture of himself... I'm done for."

"For real?"

"Qin is everything to me."

"Man, you've got it bad—true lover boy." Pae and Jet shook their heads as Duang kept his hands cupped around his phone, staring at the picture over and over again.

"Did he do the peace sign?"

"Nah, just a straight-on selfie. His shirt collar's all stretched out—so cute, I'm gonna lose my mind!"

"He's the ultimate soft boy filter."

"Right? Every time I see Qin, all I can think is, 'Damn, he's so hot.' I'm just a damn mutt next to him."

"You're wrong—he's cute." Duang was quick to argue, heart and soul in it.

And listen—he might let other things slide, but if you said Qin wasn't cute? No way in hell was he letting that go. Because seriously, who on this planet could be cuter than Qin?

"Is he only cute to you, or are you just too in love, dumbass?"

"Damn, Jet—bars."

"Uh, I was insulting you."

"No, no—you said he's only cute to me. That's the part I'm talking about."

"Ugh, you're insufferable. I'm going back to painting. Anyone who makes noise is paying a fine."

And with that, they all went back to quietly working—earphones in, lost in the sound of waves and the colors spreading across their canvases.

But the wide smile on the boy painting the sea never faded.

"What's up?"

[How do you unsend a picture?]

"Too late—Duang already saved it."

See?

What part of this isn't cute... He's so cute it's driving Duang crazy.

Cuter every single day.

[Delete]

"Youuu, it's too cute. Duang's gonna keep it."

[You can buy it off me—Pay via PromptPay.]

"I'll delete it if you pay me with ten kisses on each cheek." Duang grinned as he worked.

[Asshole. Just keep it, then.]

"What did you eat with your meal?"

[Just a regular order. Ate with Mi—ran into him in front of the dorm.]

"You definitely had stir-fried fish with Chinese celery."

[...]

"Am I right?" Duang asked, unable to stop smiling when he heard Qin sigh before admitting that he was right. Sitting here painting by the sea made Duang wish Qin was here with him. Honestly, he wanted to go everywhere with him.

"You, let's come to the sea together next time."

[Yeah.]

"Do you have any work to do later, or are you just going to rest?"

[I'm going to finish the movie from last night. Nothing else to do today.]

"Okay. Don't set the air conditioner too cold, Qin. You always forget to adjust it when you get caught up in a movie."

[Bossy. Next time, just don't go anywhere.]

"Wait, are you being clingy right now?"

[Clingy, my ass.]

"Okay, okay—I'll stop teasing. Go watch your movie... Wait! Don't hang up yet. Do you want anything from Hua Hin?"

[No, I don't want anything.]

The sound of the waves crashing against the shore echoed loudly—so loud that Duang was sure Qin could hear it on the other end.

Deep down, he hoped Qin would understand it too...

Because he was just like those waves.

[Just come back safely.]

No matter how rough the sea gets—

The waves always find their way back to shore.

Qin rarely gets sick, and even when he does, he always wakes up in a VIP hospital room anyway. What can he do? His mom and dad are always willing to spend money on the family's health, and when he gets sick, it's always serious. And because he's never had to take care of himself or anyone else when sick, that's exactly why he's struggling now—thanks to the sea breeze and the scorching sun, Duang ended up with a fever. And here he is, jolting awake, pacing around the room looking for fever medicine.

It's 3:37 AM when he wakes up in the same person's arms. Duang had returned with a starfish mobile and a couple of snacks. They shared a late-night meal before going their separate ways to shower and then sleep. But

he was startled awake because it was unbearably hot, making him wonder if the air conditioner had raised the temperature by itself.

When he opened his eyes and saw the person mumbling uncomfortably from the fever, everything became clear.

"You... mmh, where are you going?"

"Don't get up yet. Just stay still."

Qin, who was sitting there searching the internet out of desperation, didn't know who to ask—no one else would be awake at this hour. After scanning through the information, he had one, two, three options in mind.

"Let's go to the hospital. I'll help you up."

"You, it's just a little fever."

"It's not 'just a little' anymore. Put on something warmer first."

"You..."

"Duang, can you not be stubborn?"

Duang had never seen Qin like this before. Even though the bedside lamp was the only light on, he could clearly see the worry on Qin's face. Qin held his hand while handing him a t-shirt to change into for the hospital. Duang smiled softly and said:

"You, Duang is okay. If I take medicine, I'll be fine. I'm not being stubborn—I can handle it. It's just too much sun, that's all."

He comforted Qin like he was soothing a child—and he meant it. He wasn't forcing himself or worried about troubling Qin by going to the hospital. It was just a regular fever, something he'd had many times before. Two pills, a sponge bath, and he'd be fine by tomorrow.

He was tough enough for this.

"You were really scared, huh? I'm sorry. Come here—look, you already brought the medicine and water. I'll take it right now, okay?"

"Mm."

They faced each other as Duang took the fever medicine from Qin and washed it down with water. Seeing Qin's face up close, Duang realized he looked like he was about to cry... Damn, how adorable.

"Were you scared I'd die?"

"Die in my bed—should I be scared or what?"

"Stubborn."

"I'm not."

The person holding the glass almost dropped it when the one who claimed not to be stubborn, leaned in and kissed him softly to prove it. Duang stammered as he scolded Qin, who sat there with a sullen face like he had no idea what he did wrong.

"Qin, you'll catch my fever."

"So what? You said it's 'just a little fever,' right?"

"The only stubborn one here is you."

"I'll give you a sponge bath—wait here."

"Do you even know how to do that?"

"I read about it online."

"Smart guy."

Duang lay back down, feeling the world spin from the fever. He smiled softly and closed his eyes. He heard Qin rustling around, and before long, Qin returned with a damp cloth. The coolness made Duang squirm more

than usual, which only made Qin feel worse—every time the cloth touched his skin, Duang flinched, and it broke Qin's heart a little more.

"Is this okay? You're shaking all over."

"This is fine. Don't worry—just go slowly. It's because of the temperature difference. The heat needs to escape."

Qin didn't want to understand any of that. He just didn't want Duang to be sick.

Didn't want him to go through this.

"Feeling better?"

"Much better."

"Duang."

"Hm?"

"Can you not get sick anymore?"

The way Qin said that, along with the look on his face, made Duang's heart melt. He reached out to hold Qin's hand, softly thanking him for taking care of him. He kept repeating his gratitude until Qin finally felt better about it. And in return, Qin pressed a long, lingering kiss on his forehead.

"Get well soon."

If possible, Duang wants to get rid of the fever right now.

Seriously.

"Go to sleep. I'll get a basin and put it next to the bed. If you get a fever again, I'll wipe you down. In the morning, I'll buy some cooling gel patches, but if it gets worse, I'm taking you to the hospital. No arguments."

"You're so cute, you know that? And you're just this small."

"You're the same size as me—sleep."

"You're not allowed to cuddle me, or you'll catch my cold."

"You're the one who better not cuddle me."

The sick person laughed softly and closed his eyes as the medicine started to kick in, mixed with the weakness from the fever.

Tomorrow, he would definitely get better—just wait and see. And then he'd kiss Qin for a long time as a reward for taking such good care of him.

The best in the world.

A bowl of minced pork congee was poured into a cup, the delicious aroma filling the air. But it didn't spark even a bit of appetite in the sick person. Even though the fever had eased, Duang's body still felt hot on and off, especially when it was time for the next dose of medicine. Qin stayed glued to him, watching closely for the moment he'd finally have to drag him to the hospital.

Stubborn as hell.

"Come eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"Duang."

"You're so bossy... and I'm sick."

"Eat so you can take your medicine."

"Aren't you going to feed me? Like in the dramas?"

"Keep dreaming."

"Youu..."

"You're grown up—eat by yourself."

When Duang was sick, he got extra sensitive. His tears welled up just because Qin refused to feed him. If anyone found out, he'd die of embarrassment. Qin sighed, looking at Duang's pouty face and how he acted like a whiny kid. In the end, he gave in to himself, picking up the bowl and feeding him.

Dramatic or not—whatever. Seeing Duang like this, there was no way he could be heartless.

"Open your mouth."

"I don't want to eat."

"I'm already feeding you—come on, just a little."

"I feel like crying."

"Please eat some, kha."

"Youuu," Duang dragged the word out, but eventually, he opened his mouth and let Qin feed him.

He was so weak for this. Qin using sweet words? Damn. Could he stay sick forever? He didn't want to get better anymore. This was important, okay?

"One more bite—hurry up, chew faster."

"It's not tasty."

"It is—it's from your favorite place."

"Try it yourself—it's not good."

"Stop lying to me. One more bite."

"..."

"Duang, don't be stubborn. Please."

Qin never thought he'd have this much patience for something like this. Was Duang sick, or did he take some anti-aging pill? If he could pry Duang's mouth open, he probably would.

He wanted to scold him.

Wanted to tell him off.

But seeing his face all pitiful like a puppy with drooping ears—he just couldn't bring himself to do it.

"If you eat one bite of rice, I'll give you one kiss on the cheek."

Guess he had to play along and sacrifice a bit.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Then scoop a small bite, but I'll eat the whole bowl."

"Damn it," Qin cursed, scooping the congee and feeding the guy who opened his mouth cheerfully. He seriously wanted to kill him.

"Where's my kiss?"

"I'll kiss you all at once when you finish eating."

"No way, you'll cheat."

Qin was so tired of how well Duang could read him. He took a deep breath, thinking—he had to feed him and kiss him too. This was such a losing game. Please, no more sickness. Next time, he'd drag him straight to the hospital without a word.

"So refreshing~"

Duang said with a smile like he was already cured when Qin pressed his nose softly against his cheek with a sulky face. And his mood lifted even more when Qin stuck to his word and kissed him every time he took a bite of congee.

And damn it, he really did finish the whole bowl.

"I've kissed you so much I don't know how to do it anymore, Duang. Enough."

"No way, it's the last one."

"I'm going to kill you."

"Haha!" The sick boy laughed when Qin smacked his arm lightly. Qin stood up with the now-empty bowl, while Duang quietly took his medicine, watching as Qin washed the dishes and tidied up the trash. When the pale boy realized he was being watched, he snapped.

"What are you staring at?"

"Just looking at someone cute."

"Such a pain in the ass."

"You know, Jet told me that the reason I always argue with people when they say you're cute is because you're only cute to me."

"..."

Qin didn't reply. He turned his back and started washing an empty glass that didn't even need cleaning—maybe because he wanted to hide the nervousness creeping up on him.

Only cute to Duang, huh?

Yeah...

Maybe that was true.

"And he said there's another reason."

That's why Duang was an exception in so many things for him.

And why he'd be everything he could be for him.

"It's because I love you too much, so I see you as cuter than anyone else."

And when Qin thought about that reason...

Honestly, he couldn't argue with it.

"But I think it's both things together."

Or maybe... love didn't need that many reasons.

Just knowing who and why you're doing everything for was enough.

"Did you take your medicine?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good."

"Aren't you tired of taking care of me?"

"Are you tired when you take care of me?"

The one being asked shook his head in response. How could he be tired? Being able to do something for Qin was always something that eased his exhaustion.

Always had been.

"Same here."

And if possible...

He wanted to take care of Qin forever.

"Thank you."

"Yeah, go to sleep now."

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, I'm just going to sit here and work."

"Can you sit here instead? I want to hold your hand."

Qin looked at the spot on the bed that Duang patted, signaling for him to bring his MacBook over and work there. After thinking for a moment, he nodded and agreed. Being close would help him monitor if the fever came back anyway.

He couldn't stop worrying.

Because there was only one Duang.

"You know what? I can't even smell the congee, but I can smell you."

"And is that a good or bad thing?"

"Good, duh. You smell amazing."

"..."

"Being close to you is so comforting."

Qin shifted closer to the sick boy bundled under the blanket, who had closed his eyes, worn out from the fever. He smiled quietly to himself because their hands were still intertwined.

And in that moment, while Duang might not have heard him, Qin traced his fingers gently across Duang's flushed cheek and whispered something in response.

"Same here."

Same here.

It was comforting having Duang around too.

08 - If It's Right, It's Right. One Look and You Just Know, No Reason Needed

I looked at Qin, who was driving while humming along to the jazz-pop music he liked, before shifting my gaze to our hands clasped together. It was my hand resting on his lap, and he was holding it loosely.

Feels like a dream... because everything is just so cute.

"Where should we park? I'm too lazy to keep driving around."

"MBK, maybe? I think there are a lot of parking spots."

"Hmm, okay."

Today, we came to Bangkok. There are a lot of things to do, but one thing for sure is that I'll be sending him home. Well, more like to the front of his house—since I've never actually been inside.

"What do you want to eat?"

"Up to you."

"What do you feel like eating?" His voice softened. We barely saw each other this past week, but since neither of us had classes this Friday, we decided to come to Bangkok together. My mom has been asking about me every day, and tomorrow, Qin has a reunion with his high school friends.

My heart pounded when we stopped at a red light, and he moved our clasped hands to gently touch my cheek.

"Greyhound? You like it."

"Have you ever thought about what you'd do if I pounced on you in the car?"

"I think about dumb stuff like that all the time."

"Then stop being cute."

"I just asked what you wanted to eat and suggested Greyhound—how is that cute?"

I laughed softly because he was starting to get annoyed. We talked about random stuff—the weather, the traffic (even on the expressway), and how it was still jammed as we approached the left turn into MBK.

"Just remembering is already cute, isn't it?"

"And you, remembering everything I do or don't eat at every place—what's that called?"

"Ah, go ahead. Compliment me. I'm waiting."

I grinned excitedly and pressed his hand tighter against my cheek, like a dog waiting for praise from its owner. He sighed before speaking, just as he pulled his hand back to keep driving.

"Cute... very."

"I could die happily now. I don't need anything else."

"Okay, I'll crash into the barrier up ahead then."

"You're so funny."

"Smartass."

It warms my heart.

Honestly, every time he insults me, it warms my heart.

It didn't take long for Qin to find a parking spot—he always has luck with stuff like this. We walked side by side toward the elevator, and when I spotted students from my school wandering all over MBK, I asked him something that just crossed my mind.

"You graduated from XX, right?"

"Yeah."

"Hey, haven't we met before, Qin? We've been to Chaturamitr many times."

"I don't like participating in activities. Never saw you at Chaturamitr."

"I carried the school flag, you know!"

"I didn't carry anything. It's hot. It's tiring."

Classic Qin. I laughed softly and ruffled his hair, even though he looked like he wanted to punch me. But something about his earlier answer felt a bit off.

"So, if you never saw me at Chaturamit... have you seen me somewhere else?"

"...Yeah."

"Huh?"

"Around the tutoring center. You studied at MMM, right?"

I nodded, completely dumbfounded. My first memory of him was during our university registration. He was pale and tall—tall enough for me, who was about the same height, to spot him easily in the crowd. Back then, he seemed annoyed to me, but after getting to know him, I realized that's just his usual expression—he's always hot and hates chaos.

We had planned to develop film at Yelo House before grabbing lunch and shopping. Qin refused to use the photo lab near our university, saying, "There's only one roll—if it gets messed up, there's no getting it back." He

wanted to use a place he trusted, which made me smile because it meant he genuinely cared about the things I gave him.

See? How could I not call that cute?

"You actually remember Duang?"

"Well, I saw you a lot. You were always dropping off your female friend at the BTS."

"Sounds like a love story—like in a romance movie."

"Self-centered. I remember because you dressed flashy and had a sassy face."

"Well, yeah. I put in some effort when I went to tutoring. Dressed up a bit in case I ran into someone cute."

"You're as flirty as you claim to be."

"That was back then, okay? Back then."

"Come on, stop fussing." He scolded me as I rubbed my face against his shoulder while we were alone in the elevator. The distance from MBK to the film development shop was quite far—maybe because of the heat. Even I, someone who doesn't mind the heat, felt it was too much. I couldn't imagine how Qin, who absolutely hates the heat, must be feeling.

"Are you okay?" I reached out to shield him from the sun. The light hitting his pale skin made him glow like a light bulb. He was wearing a plain white shirt, jeans, and sneakers—but damn, everyone was looking at him.

"You walk ahead."

"Okay." I was confused about why he wanted me to go first, but when he placed his hand on my waist and moved closer behind me, I realized he was using me to block the sun. I chuckled softly.

We're the same height—how much shade could I really provide?

"Tiptoe a bit."

"Calm down, will you? Haha."

"I'm hot."

"Do you want to wait at the art gallery? I'll go to the shop and come back."

"No. Let's go together." I turned to look at him, already starting to pout. We walked for a while until we found a shaded alley. Seeing him drenched in sweat made me feel unexpectedly sympathetic.

Poor little rich kid.

"So, have you ever come here with someone else? How do you know about this place?"

"A friend."

"A

friend

—really?" I teased, but his expression changed, and then he told me something I had never heard before.

Come to think of it, we never really talked about things like this.

I guess it's because I was too focused on just

us

.

"A friend who didn't just think of me as a friend."

" ... "

"But I wouldn't exactly say we were talking. I was probably the one being thoughtless and cruel." He said as he pushed open the door to Yelo House. The cool blast of air conditioning brushed against my sweat-damp skin.

And suddenly, pieces of the puzzle started coming together in my head.

"So, does that mean you'll see him this Saturday?"

"Pretty much."

"And you haven't spoken to him again since, right?" I asked softly. He nodded before explaining.

"When he told me how he felt, I said I only saw him as a friend and didn't want to take it further. After that, we stopped talking, even though we used to be close and hang out all the time. Was that cruel?"

"Yeah, a little." He pressed his lips together, looking uneasy at my answer.

I wanted to tell him that I didn't really think he was cruel—at least, not to me. Not to

us

. And not permanently. He was just cruel to someone else in a particular moment.

But honestly, when one person's feelings race far ahead, being upfront like that is probably the kindest form of cruelty.

"Go drop off the film first. I'll wait here."

"Okay."

Qin walked into the small shop alone. I watched him through the glass as he calmly handed over the film I had taken. His cheeks were tinged with a faint pink, and I couldn't help but smile as it hit me—whatever happened before, I have him

now

. And he's still here with me.

"All done."

"It should be ready by 2 PM. This place works fast."

"Do you think the photos will turn out nice?"

"When you're photographing someone you like, even if it's blurry, it's still beautiful." Qin rolled his eyes.

We walked back to Siam together without speaking much. I figured it was better to let him process everything on his own.

When our eyes met, it felt like there was a ticking time bomb between us.

I slid into the seat across from him in a dimly lit restaurant, even though the sun was blazing outside. And then he finally spoke.

"Ready to listen?"

"Yeah."

Qin told me, in a straightforward way, that his friend was from a different academic track, but they had grown close and hung out together often. And like the idiot I am, I finally realized—he went to an all-boys school. So, the friend he used to talk to was a guy.

He went on to say that he's talked to both girls and guys before, but he never really wanted to pursue anything serious with anyone.

It was just like any other one-sided love, and in those kinds of relationships, Qin was always the one who ended up being the heartbreaker.

"I didn't really want to go, but the teacher I'm close with is retiring."

"Maybe he's already accepted it, I'm guessing."

"Not yet... Yesterday, he was still sending me drunk texts, rambling as always."

"Oh, I'm starting to get jealous."

"I don't like him. I've never liked him like that."

"What kind of 'like' then?"

"Like how I like you, maybe."

I was frustrated with myself for not being able to pull him into a hug right then.

"And stop looking so sad already. You're not the only one in love here."

"..."

"You're not the only one in love with me, Duang."

The way he tries so hard to protect my feelings—even though he's never done that for anyone else—

Isn't it something worth holding onto tightly?

"Not the black shirt."

"Huh? Why not? I think it looks okay on me."

The tall guy in the fitting room argued with me in front of the large mirror. Qin shook his head—not because it looked bad, but because it looked

too

good.

"You need to give me a reason. It's not even expensive."

"It is."

"Wow, coming from the guy who wears 30,000-baht shoes—are you even allowed to judge me?"

"You're such a pain in the ass."

"Give me a reason. If it makes sense, I won't buy it."

"Then just buy it."

See? This is exactly how he is.

Duang laughed to himself—he already knew Qin was being possessive. His older brother always said he looked good in dark-colored shirts, too. Stubborn as ever. Fine, if he doesn't want me to buy it, I won't.

"Are you going to try this one on?"

"Yeah."

Qin pulled off the shirt he was wearing as he answered. No matter how many times it happens, Duang would never get used to seeing that fair skin and that stubborn face. He swallowed hard, watching Qin slowly put on the light blue sweater. Qin mentioned he'd be going to Japan with his family next month, and since the weather would be cool, buying it wasn't a bad idea.

"Is it okay?"

The owner of the dark brown hair watched someone through the mirror. He had never seen Qin wear blue before—he looked ridiculously cute. Softer, sweeter...

God, he was going insane.

"Not okay?"

"It's okay. There's something I want to say, but you probably won't like it."

"Good. Don't say it then."

Duang placed his hand on Qin's hip as the other took off the sweater and tossed it into the basket where they agreed to put the clothes they wanted to buy. Anything they didn't want, they'd return.

Before he realized it, Qin's back was pressed against his chest—maybe because Duang had pulled him closer. He pressed a kiss to Qin's bare shoulder like he was intoxicated. Qin smelled so good, his skin soft and smooth. Duang trailed kisses up to the nape of his neck, overwhelmed with how much he missed him.

It was Qin who turned his face slightly and told him to stop. But when Duang saw those pretty lips, he couldn't resist leaning in for another kiss.

"You're crossing the line."

Qin pulled back to scold him, but Duang kissed him again—deeper this time. The white-skinned boy parted his lips, letting him sweep his tongue inside. Qin's movements were slow and natural. The kiss lingered longer than usual—maybe because they missed each other.

A warm hand slid lower—low enough to touch the curve of the other's backside through his favorite pair of jeans.

"Asshole," the one being groped whispered against his lips.

"Do you think people outside would know?"

"..."

"Would they know that your face is all red, you're panting like a puppy, and you're getting bullied by me like this?"

Qin didn't answer. Instead, he pressed a third kiss to get back at the person treating him like he was some little kid. Duang's back hit the fitting room wall. The black shirt he was wearing—the one he probably wouldn't get to buy because someone was too possessive—was being unbuttoned one by one.

Qin's lips trailed downward, nibbling gently on his lower lip before kissing along his chin, down his neck, and further until he reached the center of his chest.

"Your heart is beating so fast."

And Duang knew it pounded even harder when he saw that teasing smile on Qin's face. A sharp jolt of pain spread through his body when the other bit down on his right chest, leaving a red mark behind.

"Now the one getting bullied is you."

"I wanna drag you back to my room."

"Keep dreaming."

"I wanna go right now and not let you leave for three days straight."

"Don't touch me. It's hot," Qin snapped, swatting away the hand reaching for his waist. But Duang didn't care—he rested his chin on Qin's shoulder, watching as the pale boy shook out his t-shirt to put it back on.

"Already got me, then tossed me aside, huh?"

"When did I ever get you?"

"All the time."

"Get out and pay already. You've been in here forever,"

Duang finally pulled back to let Qin put his shirt on and took his own shirt when Qin tossed it over.

"I wanna stay and deal with a certain brat."

"You can't do anything to me. Weakling."

"I'm serious, Duang's hard right now."

"Gross."

"Wanna try being on the receiving end?"

Qin kicked at him when Duang lifted his shirt to show off the fresh kiss mark on his right chest, smirking like an idiot. Not that Qin was much better—he'd gotten his fair share of marks too—but no one was as easy to rile up as Duang.

"Get out."

"I'm so uncomfortable."

"Go to the bathroom."

"You want me to take care of it here in Siam? People are gonna think I'm a pervert."

"Well, aren't you? You get turned on too easily," Qin grumbled, carrying the basket of clothes to the counter to pay—using his own card. Duang's eyes widened as he fumbled to grab his wallet, but it was too late. He'd been planning to buy them for Qin.

"I have more clothes. I'll pay for them myself."

"How's that fair?"

"I can buy them for you. It's not a big deal."

"This is almost seven thousand, you know?"

"It's just two items."

"You..."

"Who told you to wear expensive stuff?"

"Your stuff is over ten thousand, Qin. Be serious," Duang muttered, wanting to drag him back and scold him. But Qin, looking all smug, just ignored

him and walked ahead with the shopping bag in hand.

"Hey."

"Hmm?"

"What time are you going to school tomorrow?"

"Probably late morning. I'll go when I wake up."

"Want me to take you?"

"Are you gonna pick me up?"

"Do you want me to? I can."

"You really want to, don't you?"

He liked that.

That we both care about each other, even though sometimes the way we show it might be a little different.

"Duang wants to go."

"Then come pick me up. You can come a bit early and have breakfast together first."

"Huh?"

"What?"

"You're letting me into your house now?"

"I didn't let you in before because the traffic would be bad on the way back, so I told you to leave quickly."

"Then Duang will get to meet your mom and dad, right?"

"Not yet. They're not home. They went to check out some perfumes."

Duang nodded repeatedly before grabbing Qin's wrist and turning left because he wanted to stop by and buy new watercolor paints and brushes. We chatted about random things, and when the topic of family came up, it reminded him of something.

"Hey, hey. On Saturday, can Duang come pick you up too?"

"Are you that free, or are you lonely?"

"No! I just want to pick you up and drop you off everywhere."

"Keep doing it forever then."

"Duang's been doing it all along. Don't you know that?"

"Well, I know... And I'm thankful every time too."

"See, so cute."

A warm finger poked Qin's cheek, which he immediately swatted away. Qin raised his hand like he was about to hit him. Duang shut his eyes tight, pretending to be weak, but only got a light kick on the leg before the pale-skinned guy walked into the art supply store first.

"Qiiiiin~"

"What now? You're giving me a headache."

"So, if I pick you up, can we have lunch at Duang's house?"

"..."

"Mom and P'Nan want to meet you. Dad won't be home."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course, I'm serious. I've never brought anyone home before, you know? By the end of the year, we can even get married."

"Marry your face."

Qin pretended to be annoyed even though, in reality, his heart was pounding, and his hands were starting to get cold—something he couldn't control.

Are we really at this point already?

"What will you introduce me as?"

"Not a friend because you said we never were."

"Mm. Good answer."

Duang watched as Qin picked out his usual brand of paintbrush, even knowing the exact number he preferred—like he remembered Duang complaining about the old one being worn out and not working well.

We locked eyes.

Long enough to make Duang's heart race.

"I'll introduce you as my soon-to-be boyfriend."

And that's just it.

I still like him just as much as the first day I started liking him.

"So, how are you doing, Qin?"

"Same as always. You?"

"It's tough. Shouldn't have chosen medicine."

"You chose it, so it means it's the right choice. Hang in there."

I told my friend that. We were sitting by the soccer field where we used to play almost every evening. I had just met several teachers who were retiring this Monday. Time passed so quickly that I only just realized I was about to finish my first year of university.

Next year, I'll have to welcome the freshmen, even though it still feels like I was just a freshman myself yesterday.

"Has Jazz killed you yet?"

"Almost... but it's not too bad. My friends are great."

"You'll survive. If you get into a good social circle in university, you'll be fine."

"But nowhere's gonna be like this place."

I looked at the school flag fluttering in the wind.

The familiar atmosphere brought back memories—both the good and the bad—but I made it through everything. That was when someone dropped down beside me. Looking back on most of my high school years, his presence was always there in some way.

"Hey, hotshot."

"Hey."

"Reply to my texts sometimes, will you?"

"You drunk-text nonsense. It's annoying."

"Got a boyfriend yet?"

"Will have one soon."

"Be serious, Qin."

"I am serious."

His name is Tiw, from 'Tiw Khao' (mountain ridge). I don't really know how popular he is, but he's been modeling for magazines since we were in grade 11. Whenever we went to Siam, I got so bored having to wait while he chatted with his fans. But in the end, it was me, the one he confessed his feelings to.

I liked him too.

But not more than a friend.

"I'm heartbroken, just like that."

"Haven't given up yet?"

"Nope, but I'm not gonna bother you anymore. I've figured things out."

"..."

"Sorry for making you uncomfortable. I guess I can't change anyone's heart."

I sighed and turned to look at him staring blankly at the sky. I remembered how we had a pretty bad fight. He couldn't understand when I said I didn't like him that way. He kept asking why I was so nice to him if I didn't feel the same—asking while crying like that. I didn't know how to answer without making things worse.

Because we're friends.

And friends aren't supposed to cross that line.

"Did he drop you off this morning?"

When someone already has feelings, no matter what you do or where you go, they'll overthink everything.

"Yeah."

"A guy, right?"

"Do you see him as a girl?"

"Why isn't it me? I'm asking myself—you don't have to crush my feelings."

Tiw laughed softly before turning to look at me. He stared for a long time, like he was reminiscing... and maybe he was. It showed in his eyes.

"Can I ask... why is it him?"

"And if I answer, then what?"

"In case I might finally give up for real... You've never been like this before, Qin. Posting him on your Instagram story while he's sleeping. At first, I thought he was just a friend—I even felt sorry for him, thinking maybe he was just a friend like how you let me be."

I looked down at our sneakers—still the same model.

That day, when I bought them and Tiw bought them too, I didn't think anything of it. I just figured we probably liked the same things. But after a while, I started to understand—he wanted something special between us.

And in the end, I became the perfect villain.

"But the longer I saw him, the more I saw him, I knew he wasn't. He's more special than everyone else."

Duang once told me that we're always the villain in someone's story. And at the same time, we can be the most precious person in someone else's world.

"I can't answer why it's him."

"..."

"Even though he came into my life just like everyone else... Somehow, I just knew that one day, I'd be smiling, laughing, crying with him—and I

wouldn't regret a single moment. If it's right, it's right. One look in his eyes, and I knew. I don't know if there needs to be any other reason."

That's what I said.

I said it because I really didn't know any reason.

Why Duang? Why him?

"With him... I want to try. I want to do things. I want to give."

Or maybe there are too many reasons—so many that I'm tired of explaining them.

"No conditions at all."

"Has he changed you this much, Qin? You're not the person I used to know."

"No, Tiw. I haven't changed."

Because it's true—I haven't changed at all.

I'm not forcing myself to be anyone else.

I'm still me. It's just that everything is slowly being unlocked. If I'm the padlock, then he's the key. He opens me up, revealing parts of myself that have always been there.

"It's just that... I've never shown this side of myself to anyone before."

That's how it is.

"Does he treat you well?"

"Well enough that I'm spoiled now."

I shook my head, exasperated, thinking about how he brings me breakfast even though I've told him there's already a housekeeper to cook for me. Or

how he kneels down to tie my shoelaces while my friends are blowing up my phone, telling me to hurry.

"Then I guess I should feel relieved."

"Grow up, Tiw. No matter how much it hurts, you still have to move forward."

"You're consistently heartless, huh?"

"I'm just being honest."

"I hope you cry your heart out because of him."

"Duang would never make me cry, Tiw."

I smiled softly to myself because I truly believe that the last thing Duang would ever do is make me cry—at least, not from something bad. He carries almost everything on his own. He rarely does anything to make me feel bad. He does everything without needing to change a thing.

It's just me and him.

"Because there's nothing I'm more sure of than us."

And I believe that there won't be any tears because of something bad...

It's just us.

09 - Maybe Because You Made Me a Better Person

"Qin, drink some orange juice first. Mom squeezed it in the afternoon, and Duang did too. It's in the insulated bag on the back seat. You can grab it yourself."

That was the first thing Qin heard when he got into the car. He looked at Duang, who was driving with one hand, whistling along to the upbeat song playing in the car before turning to flash him a wide smile.

And it was that smile again.

"You look so refreshed."

"Really?"

That made him smile too.

"Maybe because I get to see you."

"Wow, you've leveled up your flirting skills."

"Met so many people today. I'm exhausted."

"Ohh, poor thing."

Duang thought it was a really cute privilege—being able to touch Qin as much as he wanted. But getting to this point had been a long road of ups and downs. He ruffled the hair of the person sipping orange juice from the glass bottle he'd spent ages squeezing, tasting over and over again until his mom scolded him, asking if he'd ever been this considerate toward her.

Oops.

Mom, come on.

"Is it okay?"

"It's good."

"Really? Be honest, Qin."

"A little salty, but still good."

The one steering onto the highway held back a smile. He wanted to kiss his cheek until it sunk in. Even when it was salty, he still said it was good. And even after admitting it was salty, he still praised it again.

Ugh, just wait.

"So, how was it? Meeting your old friends?"

"It was nice... Everyone's doing well. Most of them just asked if I have a boyfriend now."

"And what did you say?"

It was like a wave of silence washed over the car.

Everything faded into zero decibels.

For a moment, Duang couldn't hear anything, as if his brain had shut down his senses.

What the hell? He was the one who asked, and yet...

"I will soon."

"..."

"Right?"

Duang's heart pounded when he realized the answer was way beyond what he expected. And that teasing sparkle in Qin's eyes only made his face heat up like an idiot.

He hummed vaguely in response, cleared his throat loudly like a fool, then awkwardly sped up the car—only to get laughed at softly.

"Why are you so shy?"

"Just—hold on."

"Oh, now you're running away?"

"Give me a sec. Duang is about to crash the car."

The guy in the gray t-shirt whined.

He wanted to hug Qin tightly so bad, but right now, all he could do was drive and sit there with his racing heart while the other guy kept teasing him.

They talked about the weather, politics, food, work, dreams, and family.

"When I was a kid, I didn't talk much, so I didn't have many friends. Teachers would always report that I wasn't social, so Dad and Mom took me to see a child psychologist. Turns out, my nanny used to tell me to be quiet whenever I asked too many questions. It became a whole mess of switching nannies."

"You..." Duang called out to him softly, feeling a little helpless.

Why had he gone through so many cruel things?

I wish I had met you sooner.

I would've protected you so no one could ever hurt you.

Damn it.

"It's okay. It was a long time ago. I was just sharing."

"Well, now you have so many friends. And you even talk to Duang a lot."

"Yeah. Thanks."

"Hmm? Thanks for what?"

"For making me a better person, maybe."

"..."

"From someone who never talked much to someone, to who talks more than ever before. From someone who never did anything, never thought of giving anything to anyone... Today, I've given something to you."

"Qin."

"Sometimes I want to apologize, too—for making you wait or for making you answer questions."

We looked into each other's eyes.

Long enough to know that there was something steady floating between us.

"But believe me, I've never been like this with anyone else."

Long enough for Duang to know that it was never meaningless.

It always meant something, even if, in the end, Qin would not accept that love.

"I want you to believe in me."

Even if it doesn't end with him and Qin.

Even if it doesn't end with Duang and him.

"And I want you to believe in yourself, too."

Every feeling has always been real.

And it always will be.

"Really? That's wonderful. So, you've been learning to sing since middle school?"

"Yes, but I've been learning piano since I was four."

"Oh my, how talented! As for Duang, his dad sent him to learn guitar, hoping he'd look cool like the singers he liked. But the poor kid came home crying, saying his fingers hurt."

I watched my mom, who was chopping vegetables with Qin helping her nearby. It seemed like she really liked him—a lot—because he had multiple musical skills, which amazed both my mom and dad.

Just then, a pair of warm hands landed gently on my shoulders and gave a light squeeze.

"Hia, I'm shocked."

"What are you sneaking around for... Oh, watching Mom and your *boyfriend*

? Aw, little puppy."

"I'm not!" I protested, eyes wide.

"Sure, sure."

"And don't call him my boyfriend. Qin might overthink it—we're not even together."

"Alright, little bro. Not together, huh? Yet you've already brought him home." My brother rolled his eyes like he was teasing me—

If you're like this when you're not together, what's it gonna be like when you are?

If we ever do get together, I'll do something even bigger.

I'll buy a billboard on the Bangna-Trad expressway and announce to the whole world that he's mine.

Just wait and see!

"I heard you're pressuring me—ow!"

"We're siblings. Talk nicely. Mom says it every day."

"Oh, and you're not using polite words?"

"Are you talking back?" Then my brother punched me in the head until I screamed in pain. A few seconds later, he got scolded by Mom for acting like a kid in front of my guest.

I could only give a dry smile as I glanced at Qin, who raised an eyebrow at me. He mouthed, 'Go sit properly and wait.'

In the end, I walked out with my head down and sat down at the dining table to wait.

We didn't have a housemaid because, well, my mom

was

the housemaid. Dad didn't let her work; he wanted her to stay home, and whenever she wanted to spend money or travel anywhere, he'd take her himself.

"Hia."

"Huh?" P'Nan, who was chewing on grapes, raised an eyebrow at me.

"If you had a wife, would you let her work?"

"Well, depends if I'm in debt at the time. If I am, we'll pay it off together first. Once it's gone, I'll let her just relax."

"Ugh, come on."

"Who's gonna be rich like your dad? Letting his wife quit her job to stay home, raise kids, bake, do yoga, scuba dive, and plant coral reefs."

"You're gonna get smacked talking like that."

"Heh, why are you even asking?"

I shrugged before answering, "I just want Qin to live comfortably."

"He's not even your boyfriend yet, and you're already thinking of him as your wife."

"I'm just thinking!!"

"And you're so sure he'll agree to be your wife? You two are the same size, same build—he's even manlier than you. And you still whine like a kid sometimes. So annoying."

"I'm your little brother, Hia!"

"Loud, loud, loud."

I exhaled loudly at these dream-crushers and had to sit up straight when the first dish was served. Qin walked out of the kitchen wearing my mom's cute apron. He had his usual blank expression as he placed a plate of garlic shrimp on the table. Our eyes met, and I gave him a wide smile.

"Duang, you're like a dog."

"Hiaaa!"

"The moment you see your owner, your tail starts wagging. Qin, just bear with him, okay? I feel for you."

"Okay."

"Hey! And why are you agreeing with him?!" I almost slapped my forehead as both Qin and my brother ganged up on me. I caught a glimpse of Qin smiling to himself while I bickered with Hia.

"Qin, sweetie, can you come help me taste this?"

"Sure."

"Hey, hey, hey, if you're tired, don't push yourself, okay?"

"I'm fine. I'll go." He replied before heading back to the kitchen, leaving me and Hia watching his retreating figure wistfully. I popped a grape into my mouth to chase away the loneliness while P'Funan spoke up.

"What's got you so in love with him, Duang?"

"I don't know, Hia. The moment our eyes met... it's like that song by P'Jae, you know? 'When I see your face, my heart's in chaos, and I can't stop thinking about you.'"

"What did you think when you first saw him?"

"Pale skin."

"And then?"

"Liked him a lot. Wanted to be his boyfriend."

"Ugh, you idiot."

"Hey! I'm your little brother!"

"Such a drama queen. No wonder he's not into you."

"Who says he's not into me?! He's here having dinner at our house, and I didn't even force him!"

"Well, congrats then, you reckless little shit. Just... don't get your hopes up too high."

"Too late, Hia."

I watched as Qin stepped back through the doorway carrying a bowl of fragrant soup. He raised an eyebrow slightly as if he was trying to connect the dots to what I was saying. But still... I didn't want him to know.

I've never held back—never once guarded my heart—when it comes to him.

Duang wanted to bow down and thank the sky, the rain god, Yu Shi, or whatever else caused the unseasonal heavy rain around 8 PM. Normally, if it rained heavily, Qin wouldn't let him drive anywhere. And now, he had to drive Qin home—of course, he was smiling. Smiling

very

widely when Qin told his mom that he could stay over, it's no problem because no one was home at Qin's place.

The owner of the dark brown hair opened his bedroom door. Let me tell you, in his entire life, no outsider had ever entered this room—not counting his mom, his older brother, and his dad.

Qin was the first.

"It's a hundred times cleaner than your dorm."

"Of course. My mom loves cleanliness."

"I figured. The whole house is spotless."

"Future mother-in-law."

"I'll kick you." Qin raised his foot, pretending to kick the guy who, once he stopped being scolded, started to get cheeky. He picked up a framed picture of the owner of the room when he was a child, wearing full winter gear, smiling brightly in the middle of the snow.

"This was in Switzerland. Dad and Mom took me when I was six or seven. I don't remember anything. When I got older, they wouldn't take me again because they said I'd already been. Haha."

"That's cute."

"This one's from when I did Taekwondo—but I quit after three days."

Duang said jokingly, thinking back to his childhood when he rarely stuck with anything for long. Luckily, his parents wanted him to try a variety of things. If he didn't like something and told them directly, they wouldn't pressure him to continue. His dad always told him not to waste time on things he didn't enjoy.

Don't feel guilty about failing—if you're brave enough to try again.

"Did you ever take Taekwondo?"

"Red belt."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah, and horseback riding too."

"Jeez, is there anything you

can't

do? Hm?" Duang ruffled Qin's hair while he was still looking around the room as if inspecting every little detail—something Duang found quite cute.

"Well, I'm already taking care of you, aren't I? It's a miracle you haven't dropped dead yet."

"When I was sick, you were the best."

"As expected."

"You're so good at pampering me. I kinda want to get sick six times a month."

"Next time, I'll just dump you at the hospital. That's it." The room's owner laughed softly as he walked over to grab pajamas for his special guest, handing them over for Qin to shower.

"You don't have to wear underwear to bed. I'll wash and dry them for you to wear tomorrow."

"Risky."

"Come on, I wouldn't touch you if you didn't give me permission."

"You

would

—even if I didn't allow it, you'd still do it."

"Heyyyy!" Duang dragged out the word, feeling flustered. His cheeks grew warm as the memory surfaced—honestly, it had been a while since that night when he pinned Qin to the couch and they showered together afterward. Yeah... nothing like that had happened again since, and he hadn't really thought about it until Qin brought it up.

"You're thinking dirty thoughts again."

"You brought it up!"

"I just mentioned it, didn't I?"

"Wanna shower together? Ow! That hurts :("

"Dream on."

"You sound like a soap opera character. Where'd you even learn to say stuff like that, huh?"

"I just watched it with your mom earlier."

"Aww, that's so cuteee." Duang pretended to lean in for a kiss on the cheek, but Qin dodged and pointed a finger at him as a warning. He wanted to remind Duang that they were at

his

house—with his mom and older brother around, so he couldn't just act all touchy-feely.

"No touching."

"Hey, Duang missed you."

"You already got plenty yesterday in the fitting room."

"I could go for more, though. Let's shower together, we can save the planet."

"..."

"Have I won you over yet? Or do I need to beg on my knees?"

"If I let you shower with me, once we're out, we're going straight to bed—no funny business, okay?"

He said it—if you're a hustler, you gotta be sharp. Duang nodded eagerly to the offer. He watched as Qin walked into the bathroom first, swallowed hard, and—of course—being a man of action, he marched over to lock the bedroom door to prevent any interruptions! He even turned off the room lights, only leaving the bedside lamp on so his mom would think he was already asleep.

Now then—

That guy's mine tonight!

"What?"

"N-Nothing, kha."

Shit.

I'm weak.

Duang nearly fainted when he entered the bathroom and saw Qin already pulling down his pants after tossing his shirt aside. His sharp eyes glanced at the floor as he undressed—shirt, pants, and finally his underwear—all into the laundry basket. Duang held his breath as he took in the sight of Qin's bare body under the showerhead.

The steam fogged up the clear glass in the bath area, making Qin look insanely sexy when he glanced back at Duang from over his shoulder. His pale skin flushed pink from the hot water—and turned an even deeper shade when Duang grabbed his hips roughly.

"..."

"Your skin turns red so easily."

"Just shower properly."

"I

am

." Duang's voice dropped to a soft murmur as he pressed his chest against Qin's back. He liked that they were the same height—because when he trailed kisses along Qin's shoulder, neck, or spine, it all lined up perfectly.

They fit together seamlessly.

Like tectonic plates splitting apart only to reconnect.

Like a lost puzzle piece finally found.

"Duang, don't bite."

"Just a little."

He said it as if he were coaxing a small child. Duang heard Qin hum softly when he nipped and sucked marks onto his back and shoulders. That face—one that had always captivated him—was now adorned with droplets of water. Duang captured his lips in a kiss when Qin turned to face him.

Both of them were bare.

"Haa... E-enough for now..."

"One more kiss."

Duang's gaze lingered on Qin's now-swollen lips. He was sure his own didn't look any better. Qin was a good kisser—he could lead or follow seamlessly. Duang brushed his nose against Qin's cheek, leaving a trail of kisses toward the corner of his mouth while his hands absentmindedly caressed the soft, wet skin.

"Please?"

Qin didn't answer—he simply tugged Duang down by the neck for another kiss. This time, it was so deep and intense that Duang didn't think it could get any more heated—but with him, things always went beyond expectations.

They kissed until Duang had to pull away first, breathless. His warm breath clung to Qin's skin, lingering between their faces, which remained just inches apart. Finally, Duang dropped his forehead against Qin's shoulder and whispered softly—

"Qin... Duang can't take it anymore."

"..."

"Can you do it for me, please?"

Qin wondered if he was too easy.

Maybe he was.

"Just... your hand is enough."

"Let's try."

But who could refuse that pleading face and soft voice?

Who could possibly resist?

"Then, can we go to the bed? I'll do it for you too."

"You're unbelievable."

"Please?"

Damn.

"Come here, give me a hug."

"I'm not hugging you."

"Qiiin!"

"Get away, it's hot." Qin who's still shirtless, waved off the other who was desperately trying to get a hug from him. He could hold his arms out all he wanted—Qin wasn't giving him a damn thing.

"You bit me all over—are you a dog or what?"

"Well, do you like dogs?"

"And if I do?"

"Then I'll bark for you—woof woof!" Duang lay on the bed hugging a stuffed animal—the one his mom had bought for him and his older brother on Children's Day last year. She said it reminded her of when her two sons

were little, back when they weren't as rebellious and came home more often.

The thought made him smile.

Mom, seriously.

Click.

"Hey! What are you taking a picture of?!"

"You, hugging a stuffed animal and smiling like a kid who just stopped drinking from a baby bottle."

"Wow, you're teasing me? But my mom bought it for me!"

"Duang, you asshole—did you have to go this hard?" Qin suddenly shifted the topic, pointing at his neck. There was a bright red hickey standing out against his pale skin. Duang let out a dry laugh, pressed his hands together in a prayer gesture, and bowed down on the bed three times while mumbling, "I'm sorry."

"Sleep."

"Aww, come on!"

"No 'aww.' Move over."

Qin nudged Duang with his foot, annoyed. Today had been exhausting—he had already wasted too much energy doing reckless things with this annoying little shit.

"Your lips are so cute."

"Do you have a death wish?"

"What? I can't even compliment you?"

"Pervert."

"See? That means you're still thinking about it."

The pale-skinned boy, now wearing Duang's pajamas, clamped his mouth shut. At this point, he couldn't even look at or touch his own lips without feeling self-conscious.

Is this too much?

And it's not like he could tell anyone.

They're not dating.

Not officially.

But he already used his mouth for him.

"Are you sulking?"

"No, I'm just thinking."

"Thinking about what? Can you tell me?" Duang scooted closer, grabbing Qin's cold hands under the blanket they shared. His eyes followed Qin's long eyelashes as he blinked, and their gazes met under the soft glow of the only light in the spacious bedroom.

"Do you think we should have sex before we start dating?"

"... "

"I think it's important. If we date and the sex doesn't work, it might not seem like a big deal, but it would definitely bother you."

"QIIIIIN!"

Duang shot up on the bed, screaming.

What the hell.

Is he a person or a damn ruler? Why is he so straightforward?!

"What?"

"That's too much—way too much!"

"What? I'm just being honest because I think it matters."

"I wanna die right now."

"You want me to help?" Qin sighed lazily, watching Duang scream into a pillow. What was so exciting about this? It was just sex. He had done it before... and obviously, Duang had too. After everything they'd already done, there was no way he'd believe Duang was still a virgin.

"Or... have you never done it?"

"... I-I have!"

"And you said you didn't have a lover?"

"... Or have you not done it?"

"I have."

"With who? A girl or a guy?"

"A girl."

"Same here..." Duang mumbled quietly. Could he even bring this up? Should he ask right now or just let it go? He loved Qin enough to give in if that's what it took.

But damn it.

"Hey."

"What now?"

"Uh... Duang will... I mean, if you want or if you're scared, I can..."

Qin watched Duang wrestle with his thoughts, clearly overthinking everything.

But Duang was easy to read—he always had been. So Qin took the chance to push him down on the bed, straddling him. This little habit of his made him the perfect target for teasing.

"What? Are you saying you'll let me top you?"

"Yeah... If you don't want to, or if you're scared, I can do it."

"Really?" Qin blew warm air into Duang's ear playfully. The truth was, he pinned Duang's hands to the bed just to keep him from touching his body—not for any other reason. He just wanted to tease him a little longer.

Why is he so flustered all the time?

"Idiot."

"What's with you? I'm being serious!" Duang held his breath as Qin leaned down, brushing their lips close. No matter how much he got, it was never enough. He had a hundred kisses earlier, but now, he wanted a thousand more.

It would never be enough.

Not with Qin.

"I don't like being the one on top."

"... "

"It's tiring."

"T-Th... you..."

"I tried it once like I told you—I didn't like it."

"Qin!" Duang yelped, his face burning when Qin finally let go of his hands.

"But I've never tried being on the receiving end either."

Duang felt like he had been holding onto a jackpot prize this whole time without realizing it was something everyone else wanted. He pulled Qin down into his arms, letting Qin's face rest against the crook of his neck. Pressing a kiss to the nape of his neck, he whispered that he would try his best to make it good.

And damn it—

He was one lucky bastard.

"Duang, you asshole."

"I'm notttt," Duang dragged out the word, hugging Qin even tighter to keep him from getting up. And well—he also wanted their bodies to be a little closer. Close enough for Qin to feel exactly how far his brain had let his body react.

"It's hard—go to the bathroom."

"Heyyy, didn't you say we should try? Try!"

"I was just talking. I didn't mean we'd actually do it."

"You're such a tease!"

"Get up." Qin's voice was stern as he tried to push the clinging octopus off of him.

"Nooo."

"You literally just came a while ago, and you're already up again?"

"Yeah—came in your mouth too—ow!"

Duang yelped when Qin smacked him hard on the chest, then squeezed his shoulder before moving to pinch his cheeks roughly. After calling him a pervert, Qin finally managed to shove him off the bed, sending him sulking

toward the bathroom. Duang turned back to look at Qin, who was now bundled up under the blanket, and asked in a small voice:

"You're really not gonna help?"

"I'm going to sleep."

"Your hand will do."

"Don't you have your own hands, Duang?"

"Yours are softer."

"You've done it yourself before—do it again."

"You're so cold!"

"Shut up already—I'm trying to sleep."

"Qiiiiin!"

Duang huffed to himself as Qin pulled the blanket over his head and flipped him off without even looking.

The fate of someone who loves you too much...

Is sitting in the bathroom, jerking off while thinking about how hot you are—when you're right outside.

Damn it.

Such a loser, Duang :(



Update Plans & Exam Break Notice

As I mentioned before, next week is my final exam week for this semester at my university, so I want to ask for your suggestion. I actually finished translating up to Chapter 13 a few days before. I've been publishing one chapter a day because I still want to keep updating despite being busy with my exams. I'd love to hear your thoughts—would you prefer I continue posting one chapter a day until Chapter 13 and then pause updates until my last paper on 8/3/2025, or should I release all the chapters up to Chapter 13 at once and take a break until 8/3/2025? Either way, I want to remind you that there will be no updates after Chapter 13 until my last paper is done.

10 - Just Knowing That You'll Be at Ease Is Enough for Me

We sat holding hands in silence as the end credits rolled. I glanced at Qin, who was listening to the music and lost in thought. He always did this every time we watched a movie he liked—he would appreciate everything: the visuals, the colors, the script, the music. He would stay until it truly ended, unlike me, who never did that no matter how much I liked the movie.

I grabbed some popcorn with the hand that wasn't holding his and popped it into my mouth, chewing while watching his face. It wasn't long before he got annoyed, probably because I was staring at him like he was the movie itself.

"What? What did I do to you, hmm?"

"You're annoying."

"You say that every day."

"Because you really are annoying."

He grumbled before shaking off my sweaty hand when the theater fell completely silent—the movie had truly ended. I casually followed Qin out while carrying the popcorn bucket. Today, he was wearing the student uniform which I had ironed for him. I told him to let me do it since he had a presentation and I didn't want the professor to get mad.

And honestly, when he was sitting around shirtless this morning, waiting for me to finish ironing—he was so damn cute.

"Hey, hey."

"What now?"

He looked up at me because we were standing on different steps of the escalator. I shook my head like it was nothing—I just wanted to tease him.

It was right then that my phone buzzed in my pocket. The number was saved under 'Don't Answer' because every time we talked, it gave me a headache. Seeing him at school was already exhausting—now he had to call while I was watching a movie with Qin?

Fine.

"What do you want, you pain in the ass?"

[Duang! You slut.]

"Go find yourself a partner instead of bothering me. I'm with Qin—I'll give you fifteen seconds to talk."

[Wow, fifteen seconds? Not even enough time to curse you properly.]

"Just say it. What's the big deal?"

[Good news. I've got some tea.]

"What? Did you win the football pool?"

And that earned me a pinch on the side from Qin for talking about football. I quickly shook my head to reassure him—"Not me, it's Jetana!"

See? Always causing problems for me.

[Do you know the 'Hot Guys of Our University' page?]

"Yeah, I've seen girls freaking out about it. What about it?"

[Well, some eagle-eyed bastard spotted your ankle tattoo and paired it with Qin's.]

"..."

[And now, the internet is losing its mind. It's wild.]

"Be serious—what do you mean by 'wild'?"

[Everyone knows you two have something going on now. They even traced it back to the tattoo shop. Remember when you guys got your tattoos and let them post a picture of your matching ankles? No one knew whose feet were whose back then. But now, with the page stirring things up, people did some digging and pieced it all together.]

"Dude, my heart is racing."

[Congratulations, champ. The whole university knows you're secretly hooking up now.]

"Just as I wanted."

I grinned widely while Qin, who was picking out household items, gave me a confused look—he had no idea what I was talking about with Jetana. I touched his waist to remind him to grab more fabric softener. He nodded and moved along, grabbing things here and there. From where I stood, I could confirm—he was so wife material.

Amazing.

What a great day.

Blessed.

[Oh, and apparently, there are people from both your faculties commenting that you two have been talking since freshman orientation. They don't know the details, but those close to you guys already figured it out.]

"Of course they did. I'm with him almost all the time, and people still think we're just friends—idiots."

[Well, duh. Qin's such a manly guy, and you're just... insanely hot. Daddy's proud.]

"Obviously. I'm on another level."

[I give you one compliment and you blow it way out of proportion.]

"I'm satisfied. At least people will stop bothering him now. I've been chasing him for almost a year—those little puppies can take a break."

I wanted to scream out loud from sheer joy. This was the best—I loved it when people finally realized Qin was mine. Officially.

[By the way, I'm still confused—how did they even get a picture of your ankles? I didn't even get to see your tattoo when you first got it.]

"Right? Their eyesight is crazy sharp."

[Anyway, just wanted to let you know. Tell Qin, too—he might be surprised if people start asking questions.]

"Got it, thanks, Jetana."

[Goodbye, then~]

I hung up the call, unable to stop smiling, which earned me a side-eye from Qin.

"You should see a doctor—I can take you."

"Huh? Why?"

"You keep smiling like that, you're scaring people."

"Ter, ter, listen to me first."

"You've been calling me 'ter', 'ter' all day," he grumbled while reaching for shampoo and tossing it into the cart. I pushed the cart along, tugging at the hem of his shirt repeatedly to get his attention.

"Someone found out about our ankle tattoos. They compared the pictures and even pulled up the ones from the tattoo shop—it's on the university's

cute boy fan page."

"And?"

"Uh... aren't you surprised?"

"Hm."

"Why are you so calm?"

"People ask all the time."

"What?" I gasped. He didn't seem to care much, he just kept comparing the labels on two coffee brands while casually replying as if he'd answered this question a dozen times already.

"Yeah, people always ask—did you get matching tattoos? Are you two talking? Stuff like that."

"And you just tell them the truth?"

"Yeah, why would I hide it?"

"But I thought you didn't want the hassle."

"It's our business. Other people are the ones poking their noses in."

" ... "

"But whatever. As long as you're at ease, that's enough for me."

I let out a soft sigh—not for any particular reason, just because he was being too good to me. I couldn't resist leaning in to press a light kiss on his shoulder and murmuring a quiet "thank you."

We kept shopping, loading up our cart with all sorts of things until we ended up in the condom aisle. I nearly tripped over my own feet when Qin stopped there and asked me.

"Which one?"

"Qin!"

"What? Safe sex, right?"

"Are you—are you planning to have sex with me?"

"I'm just buying them. I'm not letting you go raw," he said with a straight face, while I, on the other hand, was blushing so hard that I wanted to crawl under the cart. He casually picked up different boxes of condoms and lube, inspecting them one by one.

Holy shit. Is this really my life right now?

The guy who's supposed to be on the receiving end is out here asking me what size condoms to buy.

"Size 56 mm."

Did he just underestimate me?

"Are you fooling yourself?"

"We can measure it in the bathroom right now if you want."

"Shut up."

"As if you've never touched it before."

"Asshole," Qin muttered, his cheeks flushing pink as we bickered over condom sizes right there in front of the display. Eventually, he tossed the selected boxes into the cart.

"I'm getting K-Y. My friend said the other brand stings after a while."

"Qin, you even asked your friends about this?"

"Yeah. Why are you so curious, Duang?"

"If you're not comfortable, we don't have to do it. I'm serious."

"It's not that I'm uncomfortable—I just want to do it right."

" ... "

"We'll try it out first and adjust as we go."

"You're really sweet to me, you know that?"

"If you call me sweet one more time, I'll use the entire box on you myself," he threatened, pushing the cart toward the checkout counter. My heart pounded in my chest—because damn, that line was way too hot.

I'll write it down right now.

I'm definitely saving this to tell him later.

Just wait and see!

"So, uh... on Pornhub, do they have guy-on-guy videos?"

"I want real-life experience, though."

"I've never done it with a guy! Should I go try it out for your sake, you slut?" Jet groaned dramatically.

"Or should I read through Pantip threads instead? What do you think, Pae?"

"I don't think it's that different from doing it with a girl—but you gotta prepare properly because of, well... anatomy."

"Oh wow, and now we've summoned the health ed teacher," Pae snarked, giving Jet a light smack on the head for joking around at the wrong time. Honestly, Duang had been stressing about this topic since last week—he even called to freak out because Qin had bought condoms and lube, then left them in his room.

Seriously, he was buzzing with excitement.

"He's pretty bold, huh? You're not even officially dating yet."

"Right?!"

"I was shocked too. But Qin said he's a guy, and besides, you won't know until you try. He said he doesn't want it to become an issue once we're together—he wants us to be as ready as possible when we make it official."

"I get where he's coming from, though. Honestly, he's super careful about this relationship."

"Of course—look at him. You know how artists are, right?"

"Yeah. When they love, they love hard. And when they hurt, it wrecks them," Jet nodded knowingly before adding,

"And you're no different, Duang. If you mess it up, and he dumps you, you'll cry your heart out too."

"He's not gonna dump me!"

"Keep telling yourself that. So, do you know what you're doing or not, huh? Got any hands-on experience?" Duang locked his close friend's neck before using his fist to make it all over his head. He had run out of patience.

"Do your research, Duang—know your enemy, win every battle," Pae said, gripping Duang's shoulder with a dramatic look of determination.

"I heard if he's on top, it won't hurt as much. And you can help him out too."

"Dude... just imagining it is making me lightheaded."

"Same," Jet groaned, collapsing onto the table. This was insane—suggesting Qin be on top? Why did he even say that? Just lock him up already—he's too far gone.

"But hey, the view's probably amazing, right?"

"Pae, shut up. I'm weak. I can't handle this."

"Hey, hey—Qin's here," Pae suddenly pointed out. Duang turned to look in the direction Pae was gesturing. Wait—Qin? At his faculty? Normally, if Qin planned to visit, he'd give a heads-up. But earlier, when they were chatting, all Qin did was ask where he was—then he left Duang on read without replying.

"Khun Qinnnn"

"Hey."

"I missed you so much~"

"Wow, Jet—you can even mess up your words when you're talking, huh?"

"I can do anything for love."

"Get lost," Qin muttered, but Jet ignored him, wrapping his arms around Qin's waist. Qin, ever calm and sweet-smelling, gave him a brief hug in return, patting his shoulder lightly. What a softie.

"Don't let him hug you like that," Duang pouted.

"Share a little—your friends are lonely too, you know,"

"Shut up, Pae."

"Duang."

"Yes?" Pae burst into laughter as Duang's voice and expression softened immediately. People always seem to have a different tone when talking to someone they like—and Duang was no exception. Honestly, it was impressive that Qin hadn't smacked him for being such a handful.

"Are you free?"

"I'm free now. My classes are done, and I don't have any work left."

"Go shoot the MV."

"Huh?"

"Duang is the female lead in the MV!" Jetana screamed.

"Qin, let me ask you seriously."

"Get up."

"Terr, Duang doesn't like being in front of the camera. Can I not go?"

"It's important. Get up first."

"Qiiin!"

Pae and Jetana watched their best friend being dragged away by his situationship. The way Duang was acting all fussy made them wonder—could he really be the husband in this relationship? But who knows... maybe in bed—

"Are you thinking the same thing I'm thinking, Pae?"

"Yeah."

"Do you think he can handle it? I kinda want to step in and supervise."

"You're just being nosy."

"It's like being a porn director. 'A little harder, please. Move to the left. Not yet—hold on, hang in there. You've got more in you!'" Jet burst into laughter at the thought of actually having to direct Duang on what to do in bed.

"Stuff like this, you gotta go with the flow."

"What surprises me the most is that Qin agreed."

"I'm not surprised. I think he's the type who prefers not to do the work—too tiring."

"Adorable, huh?"

"They call it fate—if you're meant to be together, you won't be apart."

"They just click perfectly."

"Now all that's left is for you to get a wife, Jet."

Pae looked at his friend with hope.

A guy like Jet...

"Ugh, I don't want one. Those girls, ugh."

"Whatever, man. It's up to you."

Could this guy really get a girlfriend?

"Do you understand the brief?"

"..."

"Nong?"

"Youu..." Duang, like a child, tugged on the hem of Qin's shirt. He didn't answer the senior from Qin's faculty who kept repeating the question about whether he understood the plot. Suddenly being cast as the male lead in an MV—he was losing his mind.

Just smiling in front of the camera was already nerve-wracking enough. The fact that he managed to get through the university photoshoot last time was nothing short of a miracle.

"Can I talk to Duang for a second?"

"Yeah, sure. Let me know, and be quick—the light's going to fade soon, and we need to shoot the sunset scene."

The senior walked out to prepare things outside the room of someone Duang didn't even know. The atmosphere inside felt like a loser's bachelor pad—scraps of paper, photos, cigarette packs, beer cans, and clothes scattered all over the floor. Qin said the senior had already set up the scene, they just needed the actors.

"Qin, I can't do this. It's too hard."

"Just be sad."

"But I'm not sad!"

"Then I'll dump you."

"I'm already crying! Apologize! How could you say that? You jerk."

Qin chuckled softly, ruffling the hair of the guy slumped on the bed. He understood that it was too much to ask from Duang. But he was here helping his senior direct the MV because the artist was also an alum of their faculty. Even though they used people from other faculties to shoot the MV, everything was still interconnected. The original male lead had broken his leg in a car accident the night before.

Qin couldn't think of anyone better to play the role of a heartbroken guy than Duang, the one who always smiled at him.

"You, this is really too difficult."

"Just listen first, okay?"

"Qin..."

"Okay?"

It's always me.

Duang wanted to lie down and cry while the camera filmed him right now. He had no choice—the moment Qin reached out, intertwined their fingers, and looked at him with those sweet eyes asking to explain, he was doomed.

Qin plugged in his earphones and played the song. The lyrics and melody made Duang's chest ache, even though he had never been heartbroken before. It was a beautiful song, and he finally understood why Qin wanted the MV to be perfect.

The story was about a man who could never forget his first love during the rainy season, forever trapped in a winter filled with lingering memories. The bass solo and the singer's soothing voice made Duang certain—the song was definitely going to be a hit.

"I recorded the bass myself."

"What? When did you sneak that in?"

"The senior asked me to help. It's his band."

"You're so talented. Why don't you just perform yourself? You look good even when you're just sitting still."

"Nah. I've never been the main picture. How about you?"

The faint smile on Qin's face made Duang's heart race.

He lowered his gaze to their intertwined hands and whispered that he'd try his best. But if it didn't work out, he wanted Qin to find someone else, or they'd waste time on an amateur like him. Qin nodded in agreement and told him to follow him out to the balcony.

It felt so real—the room and the balcony filled with bougainvillea pots.

"There's a smoking scene. I know you don't smoke."

"My mom's gonna kill me."

"It's just for the MV. If she yells, I'll talk to her. Okay?"

"She loves you—of course, she'll listen. I'm just like a stray dog."

"Stop whining."

Qin ruffled Duang's hair as he handed him a cigarette he had tapped out of the pack. With a concentrated look, he taught Duang how to light it because fumbling too much would obviously give away that it was his first time.

"When you see the flame catch, inhale—yeah, just like that."

He stole a glance at Duang, who carefully took in his first puff. Soon after, Duang exhaled a plume of pale smoke into the air. Qin had already told him not to inhale too deeply—just take it in and let it out.

"I almost choked, but you taste so sweet."

"Sweet?"

"Yeah, no wonder. Every time I kiss you, it's always sweet on my tongue."

"Shit."

"Alright, I'm ready. There's no crying scene, right?"

"No, but it's like he almost cries, and then they cut to another scene."

"Is it the lingering kind of sadness? Stuck in a loop?"

"Yeah, just think about something that makes you sad—like a memory you wish never happened—and let yourself sink into that thought. You don't even have to look at the camera; it'll capture everything you're feeling. The director's good, and you're good too."

It's strange how just one person's words can make you believe you really are as good as they say...

Maybe it's love that's pushing life in this direction.

Duang watched Qin's back as he walked out to check in with the senior. After a bit more briefing, the first scene began.

Duang, who was only wearing jeans, stood in front of the sink. His eyes fixed on the mirror in the bathroom as the music filled the loser's apartment. He let his thoughts drift while splashing water on his face, wiping it away with his palm, quietly thinking to himself—being a loser isn't so bad.

Just knowing you've lost and accepting it is already cool enough.

At least he did his best.

"..."

But still, he lost anyway—what else could he do?

"That's good... really good."

The director praised him, the same guy who had been yelling half an hour ago, saying he couldn't act. But look at him now. It was like he was mocking himself for being heartbroken and stuck in place—his lips curved into a bitter smile, but his eyes... they were heartbreakingly sad.

Qin watched Duang through the monitor. The room fell into silence as they all observed Duang walk to the fridge, grab a beer, and take a sip. Qin had no idea what was running through his head, but when Duang collapsed onto the sofa and covered his face, crying—Qin's heart felt like it had disappeared somewhere.

The song kept playing, telling the story of a man trying to live his life to forget the past, but never being able to.

Memories from the rainy season always came back to hurt him in the winter.

That's what the song said.

"You okay?"

"Huh..." Duang shook his head, eyes red and puffy from crying so hard that even after the director called 'cut,' he still couldn't stop. Qin walked over, cupping Duang's tear-streaked face.

"Wipe your tears first."

"I can't stop crying."

"What are you thinking about? Can you tell me?"

"You told me to think about you leaving..." Duang confessed with a whiny voice.

"I said to think about the thing you'd least want to happen."

"Well... that's you leaving me. I—I don't want it to happen. Even the beer tastes bitter."

"Isn't it always bitter?"

Duang sobbed like a child, and all Qin could do was stroke his hair to comfort him. The next scene needed him to stop crying—he had to be someone who was used to loneliness, someone who let the weight of sadness settle on his chest, living each day just to get through it, even though he never truly did.

"You did amazing—really amazing."

"Really?"

"Really."

And Qin knew he would never let their story end up like that.

"You're the best, Duang."

No one would ever have to shed tears over this relationship they had both nurtured and protected so carefully.

"Drink with me."

"Pass it here."

"But don't get drunk."

"Just one can of beer—who's gonna get drunk?" Duang shrugged, still shirtless since they were waiting to shoot the next scene. His sharp eyes watched the person beside him take a big gulp of beer before lighting a cigarette. Lately, he hardly saw Qin smoke, maybe just during class. Duang never tried to stop him or tell him to quit.

He trusted that Qin knew himself well enough.

"Tired?"

"A little. Feeling sad makes everything feel heavy."

"I'll take you to get some food later."

"You probably just want to eat yourself, fatty."

"Fatty your ass."

"Careful, or I'll take you to meet my dad." Duang threatened back, but Qin wasn't scared. The pale-skinned boy kicked him lightly to make him scoot away. At this point, there weren't many people on set since most of the crew had gone out to get something to eat, so there was no reason to be all over each other.

"There's no one around. Can I lean on your shoulder?"

"Leaning's fine. Anything more, and you're getting kicked."

"So mean."

"Hurry up and lean already."

He liked it—being able to act weak so Qin would comfort him, or resting his head on Qin's shoulder. The faint smell of cigarette smoke drifted in the air before being replaced by the scent of Qin's cologne. They didn't say anything more, just quietly watching the sun slowly sink lower.

"Qin."

"Hm?"

"Don't break my heart, okay?"

The one being asked didn't answer.

Qin put out his cigarette and softly ran his hand over Duang's head as he continued leaning on him.

"I love every day I get to spend with you."

Sometimes, verbal promises don't mean anything.

Not leaving means not leaving—simple as that.

Because without Duang...

"Like today, I thought I wouldn't be able to do it, but I did... because you were here with me."

Qin wouldn't be able to go on either.

"You're amazing, you know."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

They say love doesn't need to follow a formula.

Qin never planned to fall in love.

He didn't plan how their story would unfold, but as long as they were together...

As long as there was him and Duang...

"You made me love you this much."

"..."

And they would keep going, just the two of them.

"How could you not be amazing?"

It was the first time Duang ever heard Qin say 'I love you.'

Even though sometimes, he would wake up in the middle of the night to find Qin watching him while he slept—pressing a gentle kiss to his forehead, telling him to close his eyes and go back to sleep.

Duang didn't know exactly what Qin was doing, but he could guess—it was just another way for someone who wasn't great with words to say 'I love you.'

Or maybe... Qin wasn't bad with words. He just spoke when it really mattered.

"Crying again?"

"How could I not?"

Qin chuckled softly, adjusted Duang to stand properly, and cupped his face, wiping away the tears again with his thumb. He had planned not to make him cry anymore... but it wasn't so bad, right? It wasn't like he made Duang cry out of pain.

Instead, he made Duang cry because he was happy with the present moment.

"No more crying, okay? My good buy."

Maybe it was because the sun was about to set.

Maybe it was because of the cool breeze that wrapped around the two of us.

...Our lips touched like the sun meeting the horizon—slowly, gently, over and over again. In that moment, neither of us realized that the beer can we let fall to the ground, just to make the kiss even deeper, would become the final scene of the music video we had been shooting all day.

11 - Trying to Be A Good Love for You

"Ter, are you okay?"

"Just a moment."

"Qinnn, Duang is totally fine. Come here and cuddle." The large hand knocked on the bathroom door, signaling the other person to come out already. Don't say he's the only one preparing—Qin already knew what to prepare if they were going to have sex.

We just went to get tested together three days ago. It was just a formality... clean in both body and heart. He is, at least.

"Youuuu."

"Shut up."

Qin shouted from the bathroom, leaving Duang to sigh alone. Alright, if Qin wants to try, it has to be today—tonight, for sure.

Shit, just thinking about it makes his hands cold.

"Do you want Duang to come in and help?"

"I'll punch your mouth."

The tall one laughed to himself because Qin kept scolding him non-stop. At this point, all he could do was sit cross-legged on the sofa. Oh right, that MV where he randomly got cast as the lead had already been released. The view count exploded because of the final kissing scene that the director begged Qin repeatedly until he nodded that he would let him use it.

Who knew they secretly filmed from that angle?

Now, it's become a gender-neutral love song. Whether it's a man and woman, woman and woman, or man and man—it doesn't matter. Love itself is already hard enough. Why worry about the gender? In the end, they had to shoot extra scenes of the old memories the characters shared.

When the crew saw that he and Qin had matching tattoos, they filmed our ankles for the tiptoe-to-kiss scene, the lying-together scene, and even the video thumbnail.

The sun in the forest and the moon falling into the sea.

Brutally romantic.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Took you long enough."

"Why don't you try doing it yourself, then?"

"Don't give Duang false hope. I'm already imagining too much."

"You're so shameless," Qin shook his head. He shouldn't have told Duang that he didn't want to be the one on top—it really was tiring. But honestly, if it weren't Duang, he wouldn't let anyone else do it either.

"Come watch the movie already. You don't need to prepare anything. Geez."

"It's your fault. You can't keep your hands to yourself. Always touching."

"Well, you always let me."

"Shut up."

"Okaaay," the two of them moved up onto the bed to watch a movie on Netflix together as they had agreed that they wouldn't do anything tonight, after surviving a hellish week. The workload felt like they weren't even freshmen anymore, and just thinking about the future made them want to cry.

"Next time, Duang has to draw someone again. You be the model, okay?"

"No way. I sat so long that my legs went numb last time."

"Alright, this time you can lie down while I draw you."

"And what do I get for being your model?"

"What do you want?"

"Can I have you?"

"Qin!" Duang shrieked, hugging himself tight. He's said things like this so many times already. Is he really going to give in to Qin? T_T He promised not to get his hopes up, but here he is, hoping again.

"Stop talking. Watch the movie."

"Yesss," the tall guy drawled, sneaking an arm around the other until Qin eventually rested his entire body against Duang's chest. They cuddled like that, watching the movie on the MacBook screen in the chilled, dimly-lit room, just like always.

Duang listened to the English dialogue between the main character and his father. He pressed his nose into Qin's fragrant hair. After they'd both showered, their bodies moved closer together until they were pressed against each other.

"I love this scene," Qin whispered as the movie reached that moment.

The scene he had watched ten times and still loved every time.

"We rip out so much of ourselves to be cured of things faster than we should that we go bankrupt by the age of thirty."

Duang watched Qin's pretty lips move along with the character's dialogue without making a sound. He was captivated by the way Qin got captivated by things such as books, music, jazz, movies, sneakers, the taste of cigarettes.

And before he realized it, they'd lost themselves in each other, enough to make the movie's dialogue fade into near silence. Qin's corn-colored T-shirt was pulled away, leaving pale skin exposed to the chilly air and the mingling scent of both of them becoming one.

Maybe it was the desire wrapping them together.

"Lift your hips a bit."

Qin was so obedient that Duang felt his heart melt. If someone asked when Qin was the cutest, he wouldn't know how to answer, because there was never a moment that wasn't the cutest. Every time he looked, Qin seemed even cuter, even when being teased until his whole body trembled. Pale hands tangled in Duang's hair while Duang bit down on the inside of Qin's thigh with no small amount of force. Then he glanced up at the person leaning against the headboard and their eyes met.

"Are you okay?"

"Don't be cocky."

"But am I really good at it?"

"..."

"Duang's mouth, is good, isn't it?"

The answer was the inarticulate moan rising from Qin's throat. It slipped out gradually, like water overflowing from a glass. Qin whimpered, watching the person between his legs pleasure him thoroughly, making his whole body tremble with the realization that tonight, they'd go further than ever before.

Far enough to almost touch the edge.

"Duang."

"What is it?"

"Kiss on"

There's nothing Qin has ever asked for and not received. Because the moment the words leave his lips, he gets kiss after kiss from someone who's always a little wicked when they're in bed. Duang strips off Qin's shirt, followed by his underwear the very next second. They hold each other close like that—skin to skin, breath to breath. Qin feels like everything around him fades into a blinding white.

White—like the paper Duang uses to draw.

"The first finger, Qin."

"Mm."

"If it's too much, tell me, okay?"

The first touch feels intense—so intense that it makes him squirm, even though Duang uses plenty of lubricant. It's not easy, no matter how much they try. But soon, the skilled artist softens the bold strokes, blending them gently until the intensity fades—eased by soft, soothing kisses. The second finger follows, slipping in just as Qin holds his breath.

"Relax a little."

"Duang... It's—"

"You're so tight."

His cheeks burn, just as hot as the warmth between Duang's legs when Qin reaches out to touch him. The rhythm they move with, the way their bodies guide each other toward a shared destination—it feels like a love song he's never heard before.

The sound of their kisses mixes with the slick, wet noises filling the air. Duang smiles in satisfaction when Qin's hips push back against his fingers, eager and pliant. There's something about the way Qin looks—so delicate and yet so tempting—that makes it impossible to resist. His fair skin flushes a vulnerable shade of red, while a thin sheen of tears glimmers in his eyes.

Duang presses kisses everywhere he can—his forehead, the bridge of his nose, his cheeks, his lips—never missing a spot. His voice drops to a whisper, guiding Qin gently through every step. When he finally pulls his fingers away, the absence makes Qin lift his hands to cover his face, as if trying to hide his flustered expression.

"You're so cute."

"Duang... don't."

Qin's voice trembles slightly as he protests the next kiss—this one pressed to his ankle after Duang props his hips up with an extra pillow and lifts one of his legs over his shoulder. It's too much—too intimate. He feels utterly exposed, his body turning soft and pliant under Duang's touch. It's beyond just being embarrassed—it's overwhelming. Qin doesn't even know where to place his hands anymore, his flushed face turning away from the eyes that drink in every part of him.

"Ah..."

"You bastard."

"I just want it to be even harder."

"Damn it... ah—"

Qin gasps, biting down on his lower lip as he watches Duang slide a condom over himself, using his teeth to tear the wrapper open. The sensation when Duang presses the tip against him—slick and cool—makes Qin's body tremble with impatience.

"Duang, don't tease me."

"Qin, you're..."

"You—" Qin interrupts, because the flood of emotions inside him is too much to contain.

"What is it?"

"Just... put it in already."

"..."

"I don't want to wait anymore."

Everything felt difficult—the effort to control his strength, to hold himself back from finishing too soon. The moment Duang slowly pushed himself inside Qin, it felt tight, hot, and overwhelmingly pleasurable. Duang let out a low moan, gripping Qin's hips firmly while the other bit his own lip to stifle any sound. They didn't move right away, staying still to let Qin's body adjust to the intrusion.

Duang kissed Qin everywhere he could think of—his forehead, the tip of his nose, his cheeks, his lips, his Qin, the center of his chest, his delicate collarbone, and the small beauty mark on his shoulder.

"Duang is going to move."

"Mmh, slowly... please, go slow,"

"Okay," Duang laughed quietly. He liked it like this—when neither of them rushed or demanded too much from each other. He began to move gently, as tenderly as he had always wanted with Qin. It was a slow, intimate rhythm that made Qin moan softly against his lips. Duang captured those sounds with more kisses, their tongues tangling until a thin trail of saliva slipped from the corner of Qin's mouth.

They kept kissing—over and over—until the pace naturally grew deeper and more intense.

"Duang... ah... you... it's....,"

"Does it feel good?"

Qin didn't answer, instead burying his face against Duang's neck. The more Duang moved, the more Qin's legs spread wider without realizing it, inviting him in. Duang kissed the shell of his ear, whispering words of love and gentle reassurances as he continued to guide their movements. He

thrust into Qin as if he'd lost control for a moment, but the other let him take advantage without protest.

"You... it's too much... ah!"

Qin had no idea where Duang had learned to do something like that—quicken his pace until the obscene sounds echoed through the room. When he pulled out, it left Qin feeling empty, only to push back in fully again.

The pale-skinned man moaned incoherently, and before he knew it, Duang had already lifted him onto his lap. Duang gazed at Qin's trembling, weakened body with eyes that made the other's heart race.

"You're already so good at this," Duang murmured, holding Qin's hips firmly as the other started to take control.

He had guessed the view would be incredible, but he never thought it would be

this

good—the sight of Qin moving on top of him, the expressions on his face, the way he bit his lip and called his name, the soft, pleading words that reminded him of a cat craving its owner's warmth and affection.

Without realizing it, Duang's warm palm cupped the side of Qin's cheek. Qin kept moving, his body rising and falling steadily, and it was almost too much for Duang to handle. The unrelenting motion of Qin's slender waist pushed him dangerously close to the edge.

"Qin... I can't hold on," Duang gasped.

"M-Me too... just a little more..." Qin's voice trembled.

Their position shifted again as Duang locked his arms around Qin's waist and leaned back against the headboard. Qin winced at the sensation—it was so deep and tight that it was almost too much to bear. His lips, flushed red

from trying to suppress his moans, parted wider when Duang thrust upward to meet him.

Qin whimpered like a child when Duang held his arms down, preventing him from touching himself. Duang continued to move, again and again, the sound of skin meeting skin echoing through the room. And in the final moment when his mind went blank, Qin realized he had reached his climax—without even needing to touch himself.

A warm sensation bloomed deep inside him.

"Duang loves you, Qin,"

"Hah..." Qin panted, feeling the warmth spreading inside him despite Duang wearing a condom. Duang gave a few more slow thrusts, and Qin's gaze fell on the milky white mess on Duang's stomach—evidence of his own release.

It was good sex.

"What are you staring at, my good boy?"

"I love you too."

"..."

"I love you, Duang."

It was the kind of 'good' that came from love—

Built on intention, desire, and readiness.

In the end, there was only one word.

One word that filled his heart.

"Thank you."

It was the one word they both said simultaneously before holding each other close.

Thank you—truly.

Duang yawned so wide that his eyes teared up. Anatomy class—both human and animal—was making his head throb. But the upside? Everyone knew the professor was super chill. You could bring anyone to class if you wanted, like right now, with Qin fast asleep beside him.

Their hands were intertwined beneath a slightly damp jacket, but neither of them seemed to care.

Duang didn't know what to call this—

But whatever it was, it had stuck them together like glue since that night.

"Hey, Duang, Khun Qin's waking up."

"Shit."

Jetana nudged him, pointing at Qin, who looked particularly uncomfortable and, honestly, very confused. Seriously—why hadn't he just gone back to his own room? But please, lately, the two of them were glued together like gum in someone's hair.

No joke—Jetana was stressed.

"A real lover boy," Pae whispered, nudging Duang to check out how he was gently stroking Qin's hair in an attempt to soothe him. Only fifteen minutes left until class ended—hang in there, Qin.

"Duang is a number one—no runner-up. At this point, my friend's standing alone on top,"

"Jet."

"Yeah, Pae?"

"Do you feel the

aura of love

?"

"Always. But Duang's? It's blinding."

"No, seriously—there's

something

going on between those two."

"Wait—you're saying...!" Jetana's eyes widened dramatically.

"Khun Jetana?"

And just like that—karma hit.

"Stand up and answer the question. If you get it right, I'll let everyone out early."

"Jetttt!"

"Dude, focus."

"Jetanaa!"

Meanwhile, Duang—who had just finished coddling Qin—let out a quiet laugh. Watching the class clown squirm under pressure? Priceless.

"Duang."

"You're awake? I was so proud of myself for getting you to fall asleep."

"I'm hungry."

"Aw, Qin."

And just like that—Duang's heart melted again. He wanted to kiss him right there, but this was still class. Instead, he handed Qin a bottle of water while letting go of his hand to start packing up, confident that Jetana could totally nail this.

"What's the slogan of Phrae province?"

"Wait—what?!" Jetana gawked.

"Come on, Jetana. What's the answer?"

Qin who is now fully awake and catching up on the chaos, figured that, like everyone else, Jetana probably had no clue. Otherwise, why would he put up with being manhandled like that?

"Mor Hom, teak wood, the land of Phra Lor's love, Cho Hae, the city of wonders, and kind-hearted Phrae people!" Jetan rattled off confidently.

"HOLY—MY GUY!"

"Dude, he didn't even guess—I was Googling it the whole time."

"JETANAA!"

"Unbelievable," Duang muttered under his breath, laughing softly. Trust Jetana to pull off something like this—memorizing provincial slogans despite being a born-and-bred Bangkok kid. What a legend.

"Come at me—Jetana, the walking encyclopedia!"

"I'm impressed, man," Pae admitted, shaking his head as the professor sighed in defeat. True to her word, she released the class a whole ten minutes early—thanks to Jetana's bizarre knowledge. If it had been a question from the lecture, he'd have failed for sure. The guy spent the entire period playing Mario Kart.

Classic.

"Can you two stop flirting already?!"

"Shut up—Qin just woke up."

Duang raised a hand to smack Jetana on the head for his teasing. It wasn't like they were holding hands or anything—at least, not in public. Maybe outside of school, but even then, it was just casual proximity. Yet, somehow, everyone still managed to tease them nonstop.

"Why are you so sleepy, Khun Qin?"

"I pulled an all-nighter working last night."

"And you had class this morning?"

"Something like that, but the professor let us go early—he had something to do. It was like he just came to take attendance. If I had known, I would've skipped. I was too lazy to go back to the dorm, so Duang told me to sleep in class."

"I'll take you out for garlic shrimp at noon." Duang said.

"You always bribe him with food."

The person being criticized just shrugged—told you, food can buy Qin over. The love he has for food is pure and true!

The four of us split up when we reached the faculty exit. Jet had to go to the bank, Pae went to have lunch with their partner from another university, and Qin and I had to go all the way out there for garlic shrimp—almost to Bangkok. But a promise is a promise. We're both free in the afternoon, so we can do whatever we want.

"I'll drive."

"Are you still sleepy? If you are, I can drive—I went to bed way earlier than you last night."

"It's fine. I'll drive."

"So stubborn."

"It's just driving," Qin said as he reached into Duang's pants pocket for the car keys. He never used to do things like that, but ever since that night, he's been more touchy-feely—even in public.

It's such a win—I could cry T_T

"I forgot to tell you. We're going to It's Bar tomorrow."

"Oh? Is it someone's birthday, or are you just going to hang out?" Qin, who was turning the wheel to exit the university gate, shook his head before answering.

"A senior asked me to play bass for them."

"I don't approve."

"Don't be silly, they asked me for a favor."

"I'm just jealous, okay? Playing bass is cool."

"Please."

"Qinnnn," Duang wrapped his arms around Qin and buried his face against his shoulder while they were stopped at a red light. Qin let out a long sigh and gently patted Duang's head. He wanted to scold him, but he also understood why he was being possessive. He felt the same way about a lot of silly things too. But when a senior asks, you can't exactly say no—especially as a freshman.

"You'll survive, Duang. You'll be a sophomore soon enough."

Fine, I'll come to watch you then."

"Bring your friends too. They're offering free drinks—I'll share some with your table."

"Don't accept drinks from anyone else. I don't want you getting drunk—you get all clingy when you're wasted."

"Don't exaggerate. I got spiked that time—who could stay on their feet? You're no better when you're drunk."

"Don't argue, don't argue, don't argue!"

"Are you raising your voice at me?"

"Shit. Sorry. I'm scared now," Duang pressed his hands together in a prayer-like gesture. And yeah, he really was scared—scared of Qin more than his mom. If anyone called him whipped, he wouldn't even bother arguing.

"Don't overthink it. I'm just playing bass."

"Fine. As long as I get to watch you, it's okay."

"Mm. Thanks for understanding."

"Don't be this sweet, Qin—my heart can't handle it."

Qin didn't reply, letting their playlist play softly in the background. When he glanced over again, Duang had already fallen asleep. Truth was, last night while Qin was working, Duang said he'd stay up to keep him company—and he really did, all the way until almost 2 AM. Qin had to force him to go to bed, or neither of them would have made it to class.

He loved this kind of consistency from Duang like crazy.

It didn't need to be more—just staying the same as the first day was enough.

"I feel like I've just woken up from someone else's dream, Life feels returned to me, some parts that were lost..."

The song playing was an old one by Stamp—yes, that was the name of the track. Qin found himself softly singing along. It was an old song, but the meaning always touched him whenever he heard it. The reason he put it on their playlist was because he wanted Duang to hear it too.

"What I didn't know before, you let me understand through your embrace— That the thing I've been searching for all this time... is you."

Qin smiled to himself, thinking back to the Loy Krathong festival last year. That bread krathong Duang insisted he buy—even though neither of them planned to float one—they were just passing through to get some cold drinks at the university fair.

Last year during Loy Krathong, he was still a freshman, wearing a name tag around his neck as part of the hazing tradition.

"Hey, hey—my friend likes you."

He still remembered Duang's silly face that day, but when he looked deeper into his eyes, he saw all the possibilities—and it made him hold his breath without realizing it.

And today, those possibilities had become reality.

"When you turned and smiled at me, I understood then—everything beautiful in this world is just an illusion, Except for you, standing right here in front of me."

"You!"

"What? Why are you so loud?" Qin asked in a voice that sounded like he was trying to soothe, because he wasn't quite sure whether Duang had a nightmare that startled him awake or if it was something else. Sensitive as ever, that one.

"I was just shocked that I fell asleep, hehe."

"I thought it was something serious."

"You're worried about me, huh~~"

"What are you doing this evening?"

"Can we do that?"

"Do what?"

Duang bit his lip, his face turning red, ears flushing... Could he really ask for this? Honestly, after that night, he and Qin had been doing it pretty regularly. It was like an addiction. But over the past couple of days, Qin had been swamped with work, so Duang hadn't been bothering him much.

"Well... like, have sex."

"Sure."

"Whoa, just like that?"

"And why not?"

"Can I scream?"

"We're both getting something out of it. You're happy, I'm happy."

"Qin... I'm about to cry, you know?"

"Enough with that. You're such a crybaby. I promised myself I wouldn't make you cry, but you cry over every little thing. You wail like a kindergarten kid."

Duang loved it when Qin nagged like this—it was so wife-like. It made him want to grab him and kiss him just to shut him up, but if he did that now, he'd probably get kicked.

"It's just... it feels so good, like I'm dreaming."

"No, you deserve this."

"You mean... you?"

"Yeah. Me. I'm trying to be the kind of love you deserve, so I won't take it back. Whether it's me or a good kind of love—it's all the same."

God, he wanted to hug him.

Why was Qin like this?

"What's that face for?"

"My 'holding it in' face. Do you even realize how cute you are?"

"Stop exaggerating. We're almost at the restaurant—this alley, right?"

"Yeah. You want to eat a hundred shrimp?"

"How much money do you even have?"

"A lot. I just tricked some cash out of Hia Nan."

"Unbelievable."

Qin smoothly parked the car, turned off the engine, and just as he was about to get out, Duang tugged on his arm and pulled him in for a soft kiss—nothing too deep. That bright smile of his made Qin smile back again.

In the end, things were still simple.

"Let's eat."

Happiness.

Falling in love.

Love itself.

"Yeah."

A good kind of love.

"Eat a lot, my strong guy."

"You too."

"Because tonight, you're gonna need the energy. I'm thinking three rounds sounds just right."

"Asshole."

"Three rounds, three rounds."

"You'll be wiped out first. Don't push it—one round is enough."

They bickered all the way to the restaurant, keeping everything simple—saying what was on their minds, understanding each other clearly, meeting halfway. Not forcing things, not rushing ahead blindly, but still moving forward without losing themselves.

Holding hands.

Preparing everything to be just right.

"Hey."

And when that day comes—

When we reach that place—

"What?"

"Thanks for being so sweet to me every day."

We'll know with all our hearts how lasting it will be.

How steady it will stay.

"Yeah. Thanks to you too."

We know best.

12 - If This Is a Dream, I Don't Want to Wake Up

"Nongggg!"

I squinted at the shrill voice, which sounded like someone calling a kitten or a puppy—it was Qin's relative. If it were anyone else, I might've snapped at them, but when I saw who it was, I really couldn't bring myself to do it.

T_T

"Nong kaaaabbb!"

"Dao Nuea, don't be so loud."

"Are you scolding me? Oh! Are you scolding meee?!"

I started to feel stunned... Yeah, it was the kind of feeling that made me open my eyes wide and take a better look at the three of them standing together. Whoa—what did their parents feed them when they were kids? The whole family looks ridiculously good.

"Phi Fah, hello."

"Hey, how are you? When you paid respects to Dao Nuea's grandfather at the beginning of the year, you seemed tougher than this. You must be in love, huh?"

"Can you not tease him? Nong kaab, what do you want to eat? Phi Dao Nuea has money. Lots and lots of money!"

As I stood there quietly trying to figure out all their relationships, I gathered that the tall guy standing just above my ear level was named Dao Nuea. He seemed very extra because as soon as he claimed to have money, he reached into the pocket of the other guy's pants and pulled out a wad of thousand-baht bills to show off.

Uh... Why does he carry that much cash?

"Dao, stop playing with money."

"You nag so much."

"Phi Dao Nuea, how have you been?"

"Hmm? I'm good, of course. How about you, nongggg?"

He really talks like he's talking to a dog.

I held back a laugh because I'd never seen Qin act like this with anyone before. He seemed ridiculously fond of his older brother, talking in a soft, gentle voice. Meanwhile, that other guy kept calling Qin 'nong kaab' every single time.

Every. Single. Time.

But all of that wasn't as surprising as the guy standing next to me right now—how the hell is he this good-looking? Damn it. How is no one jealous of Dao Nuea? His boyfriend is ridiculously handsome. Is he even touching the ground right now?

"We're siblings."

"H-Huh?"

"My name's Khua Fah—I'm Dao Nuea's older brother."

"..."

Holy shit.

Why do they not look alike at all?

"Different dads."

"Phi, I didn't even ask yet—how did you know?"

"It's written all over your face, kid."

"Whoa... Is it that obvious, phi?"

"Are you Qin's boyfriend?"

"Damn."

I cursed under my breath twice. Not only could he read minds, but he also seemed to know everything without being told. I swear I just met him today. I swallowed hard and made eye contact with him—he's so handsome that, honestly, if he exists, the world doesn't even need any other men.

Seriously.

"Nong doesn't usually bring anyone to meet us."

"Uh, we're just... talking for now."

"Well, be patient. Qin only does things when he's ready. Like how he didn't decide to study jazz after just two or three years—once he made up his mind, he got serious about it."

"Yeah, I can wait, phi... If it's him, I'll wait as long as it takes."

"With an answer like that, I gotta give it to you."

"You'll understand when you love someone a lot, phi."

"Well, I love my wife."

"You're married, phi? Damn, I feel bad for the rest of the world."

"That's a bit much. But yeah, I got married—since my wife was eighteen."

"Please."

"I'm serious." I opened my mouth in disbelief as he laughed and nodded for me to follow Qin and Dao Nuea, who were chatting about something I

couldn't catch. Honestly, it was more like Dao Nuea doing all the talking—he kept sneaking glances at me and pulling cute faces.

He's really not scary at all—he's so tiny, only as tall as my waist.

"What are you looking at, nong?"

"Dao Nuea?"

"Can you stop scolding me in front of the kids?"

"Come here, you."

"Don't choke meeee!"

"Sorry I didn't get to introduce anyone properly. That's Phi Fah, and the other one's Phi Nuea—my cousins from my mom's side. They happened to have business around here, so we arranged to have a meal together."

"It's okay. Phi Fah already told me. At first, I thought they were a couple."

"Yeah, everyone does. They're ten years apart, and Phi Fah takes really good care of Phi Dao Nuea."

"If his brother gets a partner, won't he be super possessive?"

"Yeah, probably." Qin thought about it and nodded. He bit his lip for a moment before continuing. I brushed back the strand of hair falling into his eyes. The wind was crazy today, and the sun was blazing hot—my hands were busy taking care of him.

"Phi Nuea is in his final year of university. He's been with his boyfriend since the first year until now, but Phi Fah is still possessive. I think he'll always be like that. Even though I'm just their relative, I still feel possessive over him."

"Well, you should. Just look at him."

I chuckled softly, watching the older brother and younger brother in front of me start bickering again about random things. From just scolding each other in front of the younger ones when they were kids, now it had escalated to arguing about how Phi Fah refused to read bedtime stories on the second Friday of September—complete with the Buddhist calendar year, no less.

Alright then.

"I want to sit with Qin."

"Oh, sure." I bowed my head slightly, about to walk around to the other side to sit with Phi Fah when we arrived at a famous Thai restaurant. It wasn't far from the university, but Qin and I didn't eat here often because it was expensive.

"You're a good kid, huh? But no, it's fine. Sit together. I was just teasing."

"What's with you? Hmm? Weren't you just complaining about how Nong couldn't be trusted, but now you're changing your tune just because he let you sit with Qin?"

"Why do you meddle with me so much? I'm going to tell Prince."

"Again?"

"Yes! I'll have Prince scold you. You'll shrink and go quiet. People who are scared of their partners are like that."

I was starting to lose track of the conversation. First, he said he'd tell Prince. Then, he called him a Prince again. Alright then.

Duang is confused.

"Same person."

"Oh."

I nodded along as Qin explained. He casually flipped through the menu like he was already used to his two brothers constantly teasing each other. Since

I wasn't used to it, I just sat there and observed. I mean, they were both really good-looking.

It was entertaining.

"Yeah, I'm scared of my wife. I admit it right here."

"Phi Fah! You should say 'boyfriend,' okay? There are kids at the table! Red card! Red card!"

"They're all old enough to have sex already, Dao Nuea."

"Cough, cough."

"Phi Fah." I pounded my chest as I choked on the pandan water the server had just brought over. Qin chuckled softly and gave me a teasing look, making me feel even more flustered.

"Order whatever you want, kids. It's on me."

"Always spoiling us."

"Didn't you say you'd take care of me until I die? See, you want to treat Nong, but you have to pay because you said you'd take care of me."

"Yes, yes. I give up."

"This is normal. Don't be shocked."

"Sorry." I whispered to Qin, who pointed at the menu to show me the dish I liked. As soon as I nodded, he ordered it for me. I glanced over at Phi Fah, who couldn't stop sniffing and kissing his younger brother's head. I guess in his mind, his brother was still a four-year-old. I'd never seen brothers this touchy-feely before.

"Oh, Qin, Phi Klueen wants some scented candles. Is your aunt still making them?"

"Not really, but if Phi Nuea's boyfriend likes them, I can ask the staff to prepare some at the store next week."

"Thanks, Nonggggg." Qin got his cheek rubbed again. Not only did he let it happen, but he also gave Phi Dao Nuea a small smile.

"Seeing this reminds me of when we were kids. Phi Fah took care of both Dao Nuea and Qin. We used to play together almost every day. If anyone had to leave early, they'd end up crying. We always played until we fell asleep."

"Yeah, Nong Qin was so tiny back then."

I couldn't help but smile hearing about Qin's childhood. He sat there quietly, laughing occasionally and responding softly. It felt so heartwarming to be a part of these little pieces of his life.

We ate in the cool breeze while the conversation increasingly turned toward me. I nearly choked a few times at the direct questions from both Phi Fah and Phi Dao Nuea.

They were both so straightforward.

"So, are you guys living together?"

"Uh, yeah. My dorm is far away, so I'm staying with Qin."

"Fast, fast, fast." Phi Dao Nuea warned like a father. He seemed pretty protective of Qin, but I believed he could tell that I really loved his brother.

"Safe sex."

"Phi Fah, there you go again! Nong Qin is a good boy, right?"

"..."

And the fact that Qin didn't answer and even avoided eye contact—that's what made Phi Dao Nuea's eyes widen. He turned to glare at me like a thug, even though he honestly looked more like a kindergarten kid.

"You're really something!"

"And what about you? Aren't you just as bad?"

"Oh, come on. You're the worst one here."

"I admit it. But I only love my boyfriend. If my boyfriend is anywhere, just know that I love him very much."

"Grossssssss."

And just like that, the conversation shifted. I wanted to thank the heavens that they finally stopped grilling me. But honestly, I knew they understood. After all, they grew up with Qin.

"So, what do you think of my relatives?"

"They're too good-looking. Duang is shocked."

"Yeah, I'm used to it. I've seen them since I was a kid. Phi Fah is beyond."

"You're right. But Phi Dao Nuea is a whole different flavor. Like a baby just learning to walk."

"Cute."

"Don't praise other guys in front of Duang. You're talking to the most possessive person in Nakhon Pathom." Qin pushed my face away playfully as I leaned closer while we parked the car at the dorm.

"Wanna go to 7-Eleven? I think your water bottle's empty."

"Yeah, let's go."

The pale-skinned guy held my hand as we crossed the street to the 7-Eleven before heading to the dorm. Qin was especially cute today—he still hadn't let go of my hand even after we reached the other side of the road.

Duang smiled softly, following behind the cute person who kept putting snacks into the orange basket. Qin was thin, no matter how much he ate, he never gained weight. That was why Duang never objected when Qin wanted to eat something, but maybe he should take him to exercise sometime, right?

Or... maybe just exercising in bed would be enough.

"Done yet?"

"What is done? If you mean the water, it's finished."

"No, condoms."

"G-Gone too."

Duang answered shakily.

Is he going to buy them?

If so, there's hope for tonight... No, maybe even right now.

"You always think dirty."

"Well, you keep selling me dreams."

"Let me sleep first, then we'll see."

"You said it, okay?"

"So horny."

"I admit it. I won't even argue."

"Alright." Qin tossed two boxes of condoms into the basket before heading to pay. This time, Duang slipped a thousand-baht bill ahead of him. Qin was the type who didn't like others paying or treating him, but he himself was incredibly generous, leaving Duang confused. Just the other day, he went to Bangkok with friends and came back with a Gucci bag.

'For you.'

He said curtly and tossed the bag at Duang, who was lying on the bed playing games... and it turned out to be the slippers Duang was wearing right now.

"Told you it suits you."

"Huh?"

"The Gucci."

"But it's tens of thousands."

"I saw them and thought of you. Wouldn't you do the same?"

"I want to kiss you right here. How much do I have to pay for that?" Duang whined, tugging at Qin's shirt as he led them back across the street. Qin didn't answer, but when they entered the elevator and the doors closed, his soft lips pressed lightly against Duang's.

"Once we get to the room, I'm changing into pajamas immediately. So, don't even think about whining."

"You... this is outside. You're okay with kissing outside?"

"Yeah, why? This building belongs to my family. Let them see if they want." Qin replied casually, strolling out of the elevator when they reached the sixth floor. Duang watched the sleepy-looking Qin toss his clothes aside, wash his feet and face, change into pajamas, and dive under the blanket.

Always so cute.

"Goodnight, my smart one."

"...Where are you going?"

"Changing clothes. I'll be right back to sleep with you."

Duang leaned closer to the person closing his eyes, planting kisses on his forehead, the tip of his nose, and ending with a soft peck on his lips. This must be the same feeling a father has for a mother.

The kind of love that grows more every day.

"Hug me."

"Huh?"

"Come hug me when you're done."

"Stop being so clingy."

"Duang, hurry up."

"As fast as possible."

Sigh.

"Ma, this is Duang."

"Hello, son."

"Hello, Ma."

"You really know your stuff, huh?" Qin's mother said approvingly when the person her son brought home for dinner immediately called her Mama. That confirmed it. Normally, Qin never brought anyone home—not even close friends.

"Pa is cooking in the kitchen. He'll be out soon. I'll go help him. You two sit and wait; the housekeeper will bring everything out."

"Ma, Duang doesn't eat bok choy."

"You've told me three times already," his mother teased before disappearing into the kitchen, leaving Duang grinning like a fool because Qin was just the cutest in the world. He shattered all the rankings.

"Mama is so pretty, just like you."

"Please, don't call me pretty."

"But you really do look like Mama."

"You haven't even seen Pa yet."

"Oh, true."

Duang glanced around Qin's house—it was definitely a rich person's house, with modern and stylish decor. The furniture was sleek, and there were childhood pictures of Qin, smiling brightly while holding an ice cream cone next to a California beach sign. Duang wanted to get a copy made so he could keep it for himself.

He was fair-skinned, even as a kid.

"Pa and Ma love to travel. I always get dragged along."

"It's great, but Duang went often too. When we were kids, mom and dad were really active."

"But you don't remember anything, do you? I remember, but I somehow forgot parts of elementary school—like grade four or five."

"Why did you have such long hair when you were a kid?"

"I watched

Tarzan

and liked it."

"Qinnnn, I'm begging you."

"I kind of wanted to lie."

Duang laughed until tears came out. Damn it, growing his hair long because he wanted to be like Tarzan—was he serious? So pinchable.

"Kids, Papa is here~"

"Hello." Qin held back a smile, watching Duang spring up from his chair to greet his father. He could've just stayed seated, but oh well—better to overdo it. He understood that Duang was probably nervous since both his parents were of Chinese descent and might be a bit strict about this kind of thing. But he'd already told him not to worry. Pa and Ma both graduated from America—they met there and came back to live in Thailand. Plus, they had plenty of friends who were men dating other men.

"No need to be tense. We're all family here."

"That's right. Pa and Ma have been waiting to meet Duang for a long time. Qin never brings anyone home."

"Ma, I was busy studying."

"Pa told you to go to Mahidol, but you didn't listen."

"It's no different. Still far away."

Duang listened to the conversation, noticing how close Qin seemed with his family. Meanwhile, he sat quietly, answering questions about his studies and his interests. The topic drifted far from the thing he was worried about—whether they'd accept a relationship between two men. That reassured Duang because it meant Qin's parents didn't think it was a big deal at all.

"Oh, Qin, next week Pa and Ma are going to San Francisco."

"Why not just buy a house there, Pa? This is the fourth trip this year."

"See? Our son is scolding us."

"We just like the city. Duang, have you ever been?"

"Not yet."

"Come with us next time—with Pa, Ma, and Qin. Just bring pocket money." Duang's eyes widened... They invited him to Hua Hin, and he already felt awkward. Now they were inviting him to San Francisco and even said to only bring pocket money?

Please.

The whole family is so generous.

"Ma is really happy that Qin has Duang."

"Pa too. He talks a lot more now, seems more lively."

"You're teasing our son, aren't you?"

"Love is like that, Qin. Just look at Pa and Ma."

"What can I even say to that?"

"Sigh. This kid... Duang, eat a lot. I made this myself—it's a restaurant recipe. I ate there often and memorized the taste." One dish after another was served onto Duang's plate. He smiled wide, thanking them each time, feeling that Qin's family was so adorable. No wonder their son turned out this cute.

"Duang, stay over tonight and keep Qin company. Pa is taking Ma to a late-night movie."

"Pa, you're such a show-off."

"What? Can't I take my lady out on a date? Qin, you got a problem with that?"

"Ma even dressed up so nicely. I thought it was just because Duang was coming over."

"Duang's only here for the food. As for the fashion show, that's all for Pa."

Duang smiled fondly at how much Qin seemed to bicker with his parents about their affection for each other.

You're the best at making my heart race.

"Stay over, Duang."

"O-Okay."

"Take care of each other. We're heading out—don't want to miss the popcorn."

"Drive safely, Pa. You always drive fast." And just like that, Qin got his hair ruffled by Pa, who teased him about being a kid who fussed too much. The two of them exchanged glances while the housekeeper cleared the dishes.

It was Qin who stood up first.

"Upstairs."

"..."

"Follow me."

We walked up the stairs to a room on the left wing of the house. When Qin opened the door, it was clear that the room was huge, partly because there was also a music practice room inside. Everything was neatly organized and styled exactly like Qin. Duang's heart pounded as he took in the room, seeing bits and pieces of Qin's life through the way things were arranged.

He could play so many instruments.

The grand piano in the middle of the room completely blew him away.

"Play the piano for me."

"What song do you want to hear?"

"If I tell you, can you really play it?"

"Not sure, but I'll try."

"

Ordinary People.

"

"

John Legend

?" Duang nodded, settling next to Qin by the black grand piano. The first note rang out as Qin hummed softly, as if recalling the melody.

The dark-haired boy leaned in closer to the personal pianist, prompting him to sing louder.

"I know I misbehaved and you made your mistakes, and we both still got room left to grow."

"I like the next part the most," Duang whispered.

"And though love sometimes hurts, I still put you first, and we'll make this thing work, but I think maybe we should take it slow."

The part where he sang: 'Even though love hurts, I still put you first. We'll make it work for sure, but can you trust me? Let's take it slow together.'

"Maybe we'll live and learn. Maybe we'll crash and burn. Maybe you'll stay, maybe you'll leave... maybe you'll return."

He watched Qin's slender fingers touch the keyboard naturally. Qin kept singing with a voice that made him feel like he was the luckiest person in the world—absolutely the luckiest.

"Maybe another fight... maybe we won't survive, but maybe we'll grow, we never know. Maybe you and I."

"You."

"What?"

The last note faded, and we locked eyes on the chair Qin once thought was spacious—but today, it felt noticeably smaller with Duang sitting close. Warm hands cradled his face, gently stroking his cheek with a thumb, and those sharp eyes held a message.

"What is it?"

Qin smiled softly, his heart pounding without a clear reason—or maybe, it was just like a runner approaching the finish line.

He and Duang had spent the past week thinking of a way to change their relationship status. Of course, Qin knew because he overheard Duang talking to his friends about ordering flowers and balloons for days. But in the end, he heard Duang say while talking on the balcony:

'Never mind. I don't think it's Qin's style, and it's not really what I had in mind either.'

And now—

At this moment—

This very second—

"If I don't ask you now, Duang is seriously going to lose my mind."

He kept asking himself—is this it? Is this what Duang had in mind?

Because for him—

"Will you be my boyfriend?"

"Will you date me, Duang?"

—this is it.

"Qin..."

"You didn't even put in any effort—having someone else sing and sneaking in a confession like this."

"Hey... Don't. I'm going to cry."

"Don't cry yet. Answer me first."

Qin's smile widened enough to make Duang cry harder. Qin gently held Duang's tear-streaked face, thinking how cute this crybaby was—honestly, between the two of them, Duang was definitely the more adorable one. Always had been.

"Will you be my boyfriend?"

"O-Of course."

"Come on, hold it together."

"I can't—I'm so happy. If this is a dream, I don't want to wake up. I could stay asleep forever."

Qin kissed away his tears while wrapping his arms around him. All those teasing words—Duang always had a way of saying things that made his heart ache in the best way. Duang buried his face into Qin's neck, whispering his love over and over, trying to express all the gratitude swelling in his heart.

"I love you like I'm under a spell, Qin."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I can't stop. Just waking up and seeing you every day feels like enough—just being able to take care of you, seeing you do the things you love. But now that we're here... it's not enough anymore."

It was the kind of confession that only grew cuter every time he heard it. It was precious—always had been to his heart.

"I want to be a part of every part of your life. I want to be with you in every moment, everywhere... I want to be Qin, all the time."

Because no matter where it all began—

He was grateful to Duang for bringing them to this moment.

...The moment he realized the possibility he had always seen in Duang's eyes—

"I feel the same."

—it had all become real.

"I want to be Duang, all the time too."

It had truly come true.

13 - I Like You So Much More, There's No Comparison

"Study hard, okay? See you in the evening."

"Mm, you too."

Duang didn't even realize how wide he was smiling while standing there holding Qin's hand in front of the other's classroom. He had to admit that he was a bit giddy. Even though being in a relationship didn't change much (because everything already felt special from the start), he still couldn't help feeling excited.

He and Qin had agreed that every month they were together, each of them could request one thing, and the other had to fulfill it with no conditions. Of course, he made his request almost immediately.

"You."

"What is it?"

He asked Qin to refer to himself as 'Qin' and to call him 'you' in return.

Damn it, that's so cute. T_T

"You put your phone in my pocket."

"Damn, when did I do that?"

"Go on now, or you'll be late."

Duang watched Qin's back as he waved goodbye before disappearing into the classroom. If it weren't for common courtesy, he would've already announced their relationship over the university's PA system.

And he meant it, too.

"Hey, Loverboy, why are you just getting here?"

"Sent my boyfriend off."

"Wow, bold of you. Loud and proud."

"Boyfriend. Emphasize it. Highlight it. Triple asterisks around it—
Boyfriend."

As soon as Duang parked his car at his faculty and shut the door, he ran into Jet. Honestly, Jet already knew they were dating—the Instagram post kind of made it obvious. Well, maybe it wasn't that huge, just a photo of Qin sitting behind a grand piano, flipping him off with the caption:

"A drop of water on a stone every day—fine, I'll be your boyfriend."

The best part wasn't even teasing him in the comments. It was reading through the flood of heartbroken replies from others.

Well, no wonder—Qin is the kind of guy people dream about.

"So, how's it feel to be official?"

"Same as before, really."

"Thought so. Nothing much could change—you two were practically a couple already."

"But I'm so, so happy."

"Yeah, your face says it all. You're glowing like a satellite dish."

"Well, I've got a boyfriend, man. Of course, I'm happy."

"Listen to me, the real reason is that it's definitely 'coming soon.'"

"I hope so. You're just messing around too much."

"I'm not a lover, dude—I'm a warrior."

"Maybe if you had someone to care about, you'd be normal for once."

"And what's so abnormal about me?"

Duang sighed, pushing the classroom door open as they walked in together. He waved hello to a few friends who looked half-asleep. The lecture might be dragging, but Duang felt like he was floating—probably because he snuck in a quick kiss with Qin before getting out of the car. Ah, the perks of being in love.

"Ugh, Duang's annoying to look at."

"Agreed."

"Duang's the worst, I swear. I mean, we all knew he'd win him over, they're practically glued together. but now that it's official, it's unbearable."

The target of their teasing didn't care. He couldn't stop smiling—not even for a second.

"So, how'd it go, meeting his parents?" Jet whispered while the professor entered the room, arms full of supplies. Today's drawing class was going to be tough, and they still had a Thai art critique lecture in the afternoon. Just thinking about it made Duang want to collapse on the floor.

"Qin's parents are super nice—like, really sweet."

"Man, everything's going great for you."

"Well, I picked the right person."

"Yeah, yeah, keep gushing." Jet rolled his eyes. But honestly, Duang had been hyping Qin up since before they even started talking. Now that they were official and practically living together, it was nonstop.

"I like that your story isn't complicated—just happy all the way through."

"Why make it hard? If there's something on our minds, we talk about it. It was a bit awkward at first since we didn't really know each other, but he's always been kind to me. He made me realize I couldn't just give up."

"You're right. I still remember the day we had lunch with him and his friends. You were slower than molasses."

"I still think about that. Never thought he'd actually talk to me."

"Did you ever ask why he did?"

Jet asked while sketching, his ears still tuned into the lecture. Duang paused for a moment to think before replying while tracing lines on his paper.

"He said he saw potential in me."

"When it's meant to be, it just is. Sometimes, one look is all it takes."

"Damn, Jet—didn't know you had it in you to drop wisdom like that."

"Consider me the class philosopher."

"Ugh, this is exhausting."

"Quit gossiping and focus on class if you want to pass," Jet cut them off, but Duang knew once lunchtime hit, he'd be grilled all over again.

"Not single anymore, huh, hot stuff?"

"The love bug finally got serious."

"Duang really did it, huh?"

I got teased like this all day long.

It really was the whole day—since he dropped me off at the classroom until he left. Even after classes stretched late into the evening, my friends kept

teasing me to the point where I kicked them a few times. Not because I was embarrassed—just annoyed.

I stopped being shy a long time ago because we've always been like this.

"Wanna grab a drink tomorrow? Eight o'clock, same place."

"Let me ask Duang first."

"Damn, you're whipped. But hey, I'd be too."

"We're together now—why would I do anything to ruin that?"

"I'm jealous of Duang. And you too."

I didn't respond. But if I had to choose, I'd probably be jealous of myself.

It's hard to believe someone like him exists—someone who's consistent in both words and actions. Someone who supports you all the way. Someone you can be with without feeling suffocated. Someone whose mindset aligns with yours. Someone who doesn't overlook the little things.

It's the kind of love I've always wanted to have and be for someone.

And then Duang came along.

"There he is—lover boy."

"Yo, Duang! Look at that big smile."

"Hey, Tong. What's up?"

"Damn, you're always on time. Ever been late before?"

"I just don't want Qin to wait. If nothing's holding me back, I'll be on time."

I got up from the bench and grabbed his hand to walk away together. My friends were getting out of hand with the teasing, and Duang, being the shy type, would probably want to disappear into the ground if they kept going.

"Wow, dragging your boyfriend away, huh?"

"Smartass," I called back, flipping them off for good measure.

"You seem a little tense—did they tease you a lot today?"

"All day."

"Aww, poor thing."

"How was class? Tired?"

"Seeing you makes it all better."

"..."

"What? Too cheesy?" He reached over to pinch my cheek while we sat in the car. I rolled my eyes—tempted to curse at him, but hey, our agreement was to respect each other.

"What do you want to eat?"

"Something simple. I've got work to do later."

"Same, I've got a drawing assignment."

"Okay, how about stir-fried noodles?"

"Sure."

"I'll eat the kale stems for you."

"That's your job anyway."

"You're cute."

"You say that about everything." I tightened my grip on his hand as he held mine.

The day rolled on, slow and easy, but never boring. Life doesn't really need much more than this.

"Are you staying up late? I'll buy coffee if you need it."

"If you sleep, I'll sleep."

"Aww, you just want cuddles. You've been so clingy lately."

"Maybe I'm hooked."

I glanced at him—his ears were turning red. I love seeing him get flustered, how he bites his lip when he's embarrassed or jolts when he catches me staring at him.

"You good?"

"You love teasing me."

"Well, look at how you react."

"Is it weird that I still get butterflies even though we're together?"

"Not at all."

I reached over to ruffle his hair while we were stopped at a red light. He leaned into my hand like a puppy. We chatted about classes, exams, and the upcoming Loy Krathong festival next week, where we planned to make our own biodegradable ice krathongs.

"Oh, I heard your faculty's hosting a concert."

"Yeah, the seniors. Some of them are already in bands like Gump and No Bad Days."

"It's gonna be packed with all those big names."

"If you want to go, I can get tickets."

"Of course I want to go, it's your faculty. By the way, didn't you say you liked that Japanese guy?"

"Shinta?"

"Yeah, him."

"I just like his vibe."

"Do you like me?"

"Are you seriously jealous right now?"

"I'm jealous of everyone, can't help it."

I laughed softly. When we reached the noodle shop, he insisted on going down to buy the food while I waited in the car. I shook my head—I just wanted to go with him.

Actually, there's one more thing I want him to know.

"I like you so much more, there's no comparison."

"Good answer."

"Your reward is that you're doing the laundry today."

"Okay, I'm already the househusband."

I mean, I'm totally stuck on him.

A stained paintbrush was dipped into a water jar. Duang was busy painting. The most important thing was how to convey the emotion. They drew lots in class this morning. He got a watercolor assignment where he could only use blue. When it comes to blue, it has to be about sadness, obviously... He played music to set the mood before working. He glanced at Qin, who was

sitting on the other side, from time to time because he was afraid the sleepyhead would doze off.

Duang stood back to view his work from a wider angle. He was satisfied. Now, all that was left was to wait for it to dry.

"..."

The tall guy took off his headphones. Qin, who wore noise-canceling in-ears while fussing over music notes, made him smile. He's so charming when he works... and now he's free. Might as well do the laundry and tidy up his side of the room. He didn't want to walk over and let Qin know he was already finished.

Otherwise, he'd end up being cute and abandoning his work just to keep him company again.

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, you noticed... Laundry." The pale guy sitting with his knees hugged in front of the computer nodded before telling him to hurry back up. Duang agreed and took the laundry down. At that moment, he spotted a roti cart passing by the dorm. Without hesitation, he ran after it to buy some because Qin loved this kind of thing—

Chubby, sweet, milky.

Perfect. He'd fatten Qin up and make him all soft. Just the thought of it made him smile.

"Take a break, Qin. You've been working for hours straight."

Duang pressed a kiss to the top of Qin's head as he sat there, wide-eyed and focused. He placed a plate with bite-sized pieces of roti, drizzled with sugar and condensed milk, next to Qin. It was just a suggestion to take a break—Qin could rest whenever he wanted. Duang knew Qin was the type to get completely absorbed when working.

"Come eat with me."

"Whoa, are you seriously stopping?"

"Come eat."

I love it.

The privileges of being a boyfriend.

"Let me lean on you."

"Tired?"

"Yeah, headache."

"Want me to give you a massage?"

"Your hands are big. You'll crush my head."

"You're ridiculous. Come here." Duang pulled Qin into his arms, letting him rest against his chest and eat roti like a king. Whatever—he was Duang's boyfriend. He could be as spoiled as he wanted.

"Our hair's getting long, Qin. Both of us."

"I thought we were competing to see who could grow it out longer?"

"You grow it alone. I wanna cut mine. It's hot, and I have to use all these conditioners or whatever." Duang scrunched his nose, looking at Qin, who gazed up at him with those puppy eyes.

"Can you keep it long a bit longer?"

"You."

"I want to see you tie your hair up." And with that, the pale guy gave him a soft kiss that knocked everything else out of Duang's mind. Duang nodded, stuck out his tongue to lick his lips, and tasted the faint sweetness of condensed milk from the kiss.

"Want some?"

"Nope. Watching you eat makes me full."

"When I'm done working, let's make instant noodles."

"Seriously? We just had rad na at 7:30pm, Qin."

"Can't we?"

Duang wanted to die.

Where did Qin pick up skills like this? Must be that guy—

That kindergarten-level cousin of his.

"Who taught you to blink like that?"

"Phi Dao Nuea."

"No wonder I can't win the lottery. Do you two talk often?"

"He texts me, so I reply."

"What about the other one?"

"Not really. Phi Fah's busy, even though he quit being a doctor." Duang's eyes widened as he blurted out,

"Wait, he was a doctor?"

"Yeah, he's super smart. Actually, he's good at everything."

"Damn, I respect that."

"And you? Do you talk to Phi Nan?"

"Tch, he only texts me when he wants to scold me or make me do stuff. I mess with him sometimes. Last time, I bragged about dating you—that's

all."

"Does it have to be that extreme?" Qin laughed softly before shaking his head in exasperation.

"Duang told Dad and Mom everything. If I could put up a sign on the highway, I'd do it."

"So freaking dramatic."

The empty plate of roti that Qin had finished made the guy who ran after the cart to buy it feel ridiculously pleased. Duang pressed his nose against Qin's cheek several times before letting him get back to work. Meanwhile, he tidied the room and prepared ingredients to make instant noodles for Qin later—some meat, a few vegetables, and two cans of beer.

A bedtime snack to make sure he sleeps well.

Duang put Qin's guitar and bass back in their cases. He figured Qin probably forgot because he was so busy. As the tall guy moved around the room, every time he passed by Qin, he would drop a kiss—sometimes on his head, sometimes on his shoulder.

"Duang have brought the laundry."

"Mm, thanks."

"No problem."

We exchanged soft smiles before Duang took care of both his and Qin's laundry. He shook out the clothes before hanging them on the balcony. He wanted the laundry to dry in the sun, but there was no time to wash it in the morning. At this rate, they'd probably end up buying a dryer.

"Here, let me help."

"Hey, just finish your work. I can do it myself."

"I'm done already. Give it here."

The pale guy quietly took the laundry, shaking and hanging the clothes. Duang worked on the left side of the rack while Qin handled the right. Before they knew it, their shoulders were brushing together as they hung the last piece.

"The weather's nice."

"Winter's probably coming soon."

"Does Thailand even have winter?"

"Youu," Duang laughed softly, pulling Qin into his arms from behind. He rested his chin on Qin's shoulder and pressed a kiss next to his ear.

"At first, I thought it was cheesy—those lines people say about missing someone even when they're right in front of you."

"Please."

"But it's true. With you, it is. Even when I'm holding you like this, I still miss you."

"Such a hopeless romantic."

"You're so good at teasing me."

And just like that, we stood there kissing on the balcony. It wasn't too deep, but it was the first real kiss of the day—more than just a peck. Duang pulled back first, worried that it would go further. He wanted Qin to eat the noodles, take a warm shower, put on comfy pajamas, listen to his favorite music, and fall asleep without any worries.

"Alright, who wanted instant noodles?"

"Qin."

"Cutest thing ever."

And that was really all there was to it.

Duang looked at Qin's pale, smooth back, glistening with water droplets, and held himself back... They often showered together—it wasn't unusual. If they had classes at the same time and one of them was too sleepy to go first, they'd end up getting ready together.

But this time, it felt different. Fully awake and aware.

"I know what you're thinking."

"I don't want to be selfish with you."

"You can be as selfish as you want with me... It's the same for you, too."

"..."

"You can be selfish with me."

It was like a thin thread of restraint snapped. Duang grabbed Qin's slender waist, and the soap Qin had been rubbing on himself was now shared between them as their bodies pressed together. Duang completely lost control of his hands, kneading every inch of the pale skin that made his heart race. When their lips touched, it felt like time stopped.

The sound of warm water running down their bodies and hitting the floor became nothing more than a faint background noise. All their focus was on the kiss—deepening, growing rougher and hotter with every wave of emotion. Duang let out a low moan when Qin bit his lower lip before pulling away.

"Impatient."

"Not as much as you... Mmm."

Qin sucked on Duang's neck, deliberately leaving marks that would stay for days. The smug little smirk and the way he raised his eyebrows made Duang pull him in for another kiss.

"You're impossible."

"Why?"

"Such a tease."

"Well, I know you want me."

"Qin."

"Yeah?"

Duang mentally repeated the word 'patience' a hundred times, but it was too late when Qin kissed his chin with those playful eyes. Just the brief touch of Qin's hand brushing against him had Duang painfully hard.

Honestly, he'd been turned on since he first saw Qin naked. Come on, how could he not realize that?

"Don't ever talk like this to anyone else, okay?"

"Who else would I talk to? There's only you."

"Do you even know what you're saying?"

"I do."

"And do you know what happens when you say things like this?"

"Show me, then."

It's really over.

Duang turned the tease around. After doing it often, it became easier, and they understood each other more... So much that when Duang smacked those pale thighs and heard the moans, his length grew so hard that he used it to rub against Qin's hot, twitching entrance that was eagerly demanding him to go all the way in.

"Troublemaker."

"Mmm... You, don't."

"Don't what? Just tell Duang."

Duang held Qin's hands behind his back to stop him from moving. He kissed his shoulder, the back of his neck, his back—biting every spot his lips passed—while his right hand pressed his own arousal against Qin's entrance without pushing inside.

He wanted to tease him until he cried.

He loved it so much.

"Put yourself inside."

He loved it when Qin begged.

"Duang, hurry."

"I'm not going easy on you today, Qin. You're the one teasing me."

"We'll see."

"I love it when you challenge me... It's raw, okay?" Qin felt like dying hearing those two sentences that didn't match at all, and even if he wanted to open his mouth to tell Duang to stop or to put on a condom, it was too late... It was too late for both his desire and Duang's patience.

It was so tight.

But the sensation was different from every other time.

"Breathe slowly, it's so tight."

"Is it all the way in?"

"Yes... Mmm, Qin." Duang scolded him for pushing back on his own. Duang was watching as Qin's body swallowed him whole. It was an obscene sight, and it made his heart race so much that everything felt like it was in slow motion. He couldn't control anything anymore, and this first-time sensation made him feel so good that he couldn't hold back his excitement.

Duang kissed Qin's cheek, tilting his head to capture his lips. The kiss was deep, and they both sank further into their feelings. It overwhelmed them until nothing could stop it. Duang started moving his hips, slow at first, then faster and harder. Qin's legs trembled, barely able to hold himself up—if it weren't for Duang's arms supporting him, he would have collapsed from the intensity.

The sound of skin slapping echoed throughout the bathroom. Qin struggled to catch his breath because every time Duang thrust into him and pulled out fully before slamming back in again and again... it stole every bit of air from his lungs.

"Qin, you... You okay?"

Qin didn't answer. It was as if he'd forgotten how to speak because Duang was hitting all the right spots, driving him closer to the edge. Before long, he came, panting against the wet bathroom wall. His whole body trembling as Duang followed, releasing himself deep inside.

Duang leaned in, kissing every part of Qin's face before pulling out. The emptiness where Duang had been made Qin feel hollow. His legs weak, he let Duang clean him up, and the next thing he knew, he was being led out of the bathroom, receiving a kiss on the forehead by the bed.

"What's wrong? You're so quiet."

"..."

"Was it not good?"

Qin shook his head as an answer, burying his face against Duang's waist as he dried his hair. They were both completely bare... Qin didn't know what to say. His face felt hot.

It wasn't enough.

He was addicted now.

"Duang."

"Yes?"

"Can we go again?"

The dark eyes watching him saw Qin swallow hard... That was probably his answer. Qin thought to himself as he reached out to touch Duang's length, which was already starting to harden again. He moved his hand up and down in a rhythm he knew Duang liked.

That's why he said sex is important.

"What if you can't get up for class tomorrow?"

"I already submitted my work by email."

"You're being too naughty, Qin."

"Isn't that a good thing?" As he asked, he pressed his cheek against the growing heat in his hand. Duang felt like his mind was spinning, his breath hitching in a way that Qin definitely noticed—and enjoyed—because he made it even deeper.

Duang ran his hand through Qin's damp hair while watching him use his mouth on him, unable to look away.

He promised himself he wouldn't be selfish.

He promised he'd stop.

But Qin was just too damn good at teasing him.

"That's good... Just like that."

The pale-skinned boy sitting at the edge of the bed playfully nibbled at the tip of Duang's length like a kitten playing with a toy. It was the most erotic and alluring sight Duang had ever seen. In his mind, he was already planning how to torment Qin on the soft bed next.

Without wasting time, he pushed Qin onto the bed, turned him around, and bit his soft skin as a punishment for being too mischievous.

"You're such a pervert."

"I'm going to bite you all over."

"Not this position, I'll come too fast."

"I'm begging you."

He flipped Qin over to face him, straddling him, and leaned in to whisper against his lips. At first, Duang thought they'd finish showering and head straight to bed after such an exhausting day—but clearly, that wasn't going to happen.

"I'm not stopping until the sun comes up."

"Such a smart mouth."

"You better watch yourself."

"So bossy."

"Only in bed. Can you handle it?"

"Such a big mouth."

"I love it... You're such a brat."

Qin let out a soft moan when Duang kissed his ear and bit down on the soft skin of his neck with clear intent. Their bodies were pressed together, leaving no doubt about what was coming next. Pale fingers traced along Duang's broad back before pressing a kiss to his cheek.

He didn't care about getting any sleep tonight.

"I'm even more of a brat than you think, Duang."

"You'll find out soon enough."

And in the end, they really didn't get any sleep.

14 - It's Special Because He Loves Qin.

"Hello, what's up?"

[Where are you?]

"Just parked. Do you want anything from 7-Eleven?"

[No, hurry up and come.]

"What's going on? Are you sulking?" I used my side to push the door shut and fumbled to lock it with the remote. My hands were full with a picture frame, model sketches, and textbooks.

[No.]

"Okay, fine. I'm getting in the elevator. Do you want me to stay on the line until I reach the room, or should I hang up?"

Qin didn't answer immediately. He seemed busy with something. After a while, he said I could hang up and ended the call. I smiled to myself... He's so clingy. T_T

I hummed the song Qin played for me last night. He said this kind of music is called funk, and if you don't sing and dance along, you won't really get the vibe. I stretched as I stepped out of the elevator, my back aching from a whole day of drawing.

I don't even want to think about my second year. How much harder is it going to be?

"I'm back~"

I locked the door behind me and heard Qin's footsteps approaching. Everything seemed to move in slow motion as I turned to see him wearing a loose white T-shirt with a saggy neckline, his front hair lazily tied up, staring at me intensely—while holding a fluffy little creature in his arms.

"Say hi to Uncle."

"You!"

"Don't be loud, or you'll scare it."

Damn it.

He's such a little devil... He bought a corgi without telling me?!

"What? This is the thing I wanted for this month."

"Youuuu... I'm going to cry."

"Is it cute?"

"..."

I had planned to scold him a little because raising a dog in our apartment isn't easy—it's not that spacious. We'd have to take it out to play every day. Plus, corgis are super sensitive to heat. I'm not worried about the electricity bill, I'll keep the air conditioner on all day if I have to, but what if it gets sick?

But all those thoughts disappeared when the ridiculously cute dog placed its tiny paw on my arm.

"Isn't it cute?"

I lost.

How am I supposed to fight against this?

"It's cute."

"Good job. See? Uncle is nice," Qin cooed, talking to the puppy in his arms. He carried it to the couch, cuddling and petting it with a soft smile. I put down my heavy bags and plopped onto the seat beside him.

"What made you buy it, huh?"

"Yesterday, I took my friend to a corgi farm. It's a Taiwanese-owned farm, so they guarantee the dogs won't have spinal or disc problems. That way, as it grows and gains weight, it won't suffer."

"How much? Confess."

"Seven."

"Seven thousand?"

"Seventy thousand."

I lightly smacked his arm, but he just shrugged... Is he insane? This dopey-faced dog cost almost a hundred thousand baht?! Oh my God, how am I supposed to touch it without feeling guilty?

I'm so jealous—it's snuggling up to Qin like crazy.

"I picked this one because it doesn't bark."

"Huh?"

"When I stood there watching, it didn't bark and just made this funny face. So, I chose it... Just like me, right?"

"Qin, I'm melting. Why do you have to be so soft and love animals? I'm hopelessly in love with you."

"Really kha, Uncle?" I knew he wasn't the one talking—he was speaking on behalf of the fluffy white-and-light-brown corgi. And the way he kept using "kha"—yup, no doubt he chose a female one.

The more I looked at it, the cuter it seemed. It barely made any noise, just a soft whimper when Qin moved around. And when I stared at it for too long, it waddled over to play with the hem of my pants.

"What are you doing?"

I bent down to pick up the puppy, which Qin had placed on the floor while he set up a cozy bed and filled a water bowl. The little thing sniffed me curiously, stuck out its tongue playfully, and nestled against my chest.

It really is adorable. T_T

"Qin, what's its name...? It's so clingy."

"I haven't thought of one yet."

"It's chewing on my shirt button!"

"Let it be. It's still a baby."

His sweet voice floated over as he squatted down in front of me while I played with the puppy on the couch. Qin gently stroked its head, and his smile grew wider as it licked his hand.

I couldn't help but smile too, Qin doesn't usually smile much, but having this puppy around seemed to make him so happy. And when he's happy, he's even more adorable.

If I'd known it would be like this, I would've bought one for you ages ago.

"What should we name you? Why are you so fluffy? Hmmm?" I pressed my nose against the tiny head in my hand. Now that I was used to it, I was already thinking of fattening it up into a huggable ball.

"How about 'Fluffy'?"

"Wait, you're seriously going with that?"

"Well, you've been mumbling 'fluffy' over and over again."

"Someone's eavesdropping."

"Fluffy."

"Bark~"

"Hey, it responded!" I laughed softly. This dog really knows what's up. I was beyond happy when the puppy barked at its own name. Qin smiled so wide that his eyes nearly disappeared.

"Is your name Fluffy?"

"..."

"You're the cutest!" He petted his little puppy before scooping it into his arms, talking to it in a soft, playful voice. From what I caught, he was planning to ask Uncle Duang to take it to buy a collar tomorrow.

Damn it. I gave the dog its name, and I'm still just the uncle?

"If Duang is the uncle, then what are you?"

"Obviously Papa," Qin said proudly, acting like a little kid when it came to the puppy.

"But I'm your boyfriend."

"You're still the uncle."

"I want to be Pa too."

"Then you have to be the one to take Fluffy for vaccines and walks when I'm busy."

"That's it? That's all Papa has to do?"

"And love her a lot," he said, planting several kisses on the puppy's head until it whined softly in annoyance. Eventually, Qin let it down to explore

the room. I reached over to stroke his long hair before leaning in for a long, gentle kiss that didn't go too far.

"You're already Papa now, huh?"

"Well, just the same size as you," he teased.

"You're too cute, seriously. Cuter than the puppy. What even are you?"

"Move your face away. I need to watch our baby."

"You're so obsessed with her now. Am I not important anymore?"

"Don't be dramatic. Help me put together Fluffy's toys," Qin said with a laugh, nudging my foot softly. My exhaustion faded when I saw him crouching down and chatting with Fluffy as if she could understand every word.

Life feels so good. :)

"Hey, little one. Where are you from?"

"I told you already, Taiwan."

"You should speak Chinese to her, then. No wonder she doesn't listen to me... Fluffy! Go fetch!" Jet threw a toy bone not too far away, but the fluffy corgi just tilted her head in confusion, twitching her ears as if she didn't understand the command.

"Come on, go fetch!"

"Damn, even the dog is biased." Duang shook his head, laughing softly. Honestly, he agreed. This dog was ridiculously biased. Fluffy barely listened to anyone except Qin. Even during her vaccine appointment, when she normally wouldn't bark at anything except birds on the balcony, she suddenly started howling at the vet. But the moment Qin picked her up, she went quiet.

Mother and child, I get it.

Just don't let Qin hear you call him 'mom.' He insists he's the dad, while I'm the uncle... or the dad too, depending on his mood.

"Jet, be gentle. This dog is worth a hundred thousand."

"Seriously?!"

"Yeah. Didn't you hear Duang say it?"

"Ugh, I just want to squish her," Jet grumbled as he playfully squeezed Fluffy's chubby belly. She had grown so much since that first day Duang posted a video of her lying belly-up on Instagram. It was like she was on growth hormones.

"What do you feed her? She's getting huge."

"Ask Qin. He orders all sorts of stuff for her."

"Just like her mom—I mean, dad. Always eating, huh?"

"Watch it, Jet."

"Okay, okay. She's just like her dad. Fluffy's Papa."

Qin watched Fluffy bounce around excitedly as she explored outside for the first time. 'Outside' was just the garden near Duang's faculty, but it was safe—no cats or other dogs around to bother her. She still looked so small to him, and if another dog bullied her, he'd definitely be pissed. Everyone's protective of their babies, right?

We talked about classes, the weather, Fluffy, and the upcoming Loy Krathong festival next week. At first, Duang and I thought about making ice krathongs to float, but if too many people did that, it could lower the water temperature and harm the fish and plants. So, we decided to float

them in a basin in our room and let them melt to water the plants around our dorm instead.

"Hey, Qin, do you remember Duang's face when he asked you out?"

"Of course."

"He rehearsed with us so much I was sick of it. And he still had the guts to use that cheesy 'Hey, my friend likes you. My name's Buddy line.'"

"No joke, I begged him to pick a better one," Jet added.

"I thought it was funny," Qin said, smiling softly.

"See? If it's meant to be, it's meant to be."

"Can't help it. Qin loves me," Duang declared proudly, but yelped when Fluffy bit his finger a little too hard.

"Honestly, I think Qin loves Fluffy more than you now," Jet teased, earning a pout from Duang.

"Not true!"

"You're so needy, Duang."

"Don't tease him too much," Qin said, still focused on watching Fluffy.

"Yeah, or he'll start whining again about how you love the dog more than him."

"Even with dogs, he's like that. Qin, be careful. You can't trust people like him."

"But I'm already dating him, aren't I!" The person holding a puppy in his arms argued fiercely.

"So, how is it, Qin? Has he changed since you started dating?"

"No... but he whines a lot more,"

Duang pouted, feeling sulky from being gossiped about right in front of him.

"Oh, you little crybaby."

"And do you spoil him, Qin?"

"Of course, he's my boyfriend."

Duang beamed at the answer. If he could pull Qin in for a kiss right now, he would. Before he could compliment Qin for being cute, Jett, who had been scrolling through his phone, suddenly exclaimed with wide eyes.

"Someone secretly took a picture of us!!"

"Let me see... 'Freshmen Qin and Duang took their puppy for a walk in the park, playfully teasing each other.'" Pae read aloud from a post on the university's 'Hot Guys' page. The photo showed Duang and Qin from a distance, with glimpses of Jett here and there, though their faces weren't clear. What kind of camera did they even use?

Such flattering words.

"I'd like to object to the word 'playfully teasing,' okay?"

"This picture of you is so cute, Qin. Save it and AirDrop it to me."

"Is this really the time to be admiring your boyfriend, Duang? Continue reading, Pae."

"Okay, it says someone whispered that Qin's corgi costs nearly a hundred thousand baht, is female, and her name is Fluffy."

"Holy shit, they know everything!" Jett burst out laughing. Who even are these people? Even he and his friend just found out the dog's price today. Who's eavesdropping on their conversations?!

"They ended the post by saying, 'Mom and Dad took their daughter out for a walk—such a warm little family.'"

"..."

"Qin is clenching his fist."

"They mean you're the dad, and I can be the mom," the tall one tried to comfort the clearly displeased Qin, but things only got worse when the comments flooded with people gushing over how cute Fluffy's mom was.

And just like that...

"Are you really going to comment?"

"Yes. I'm mad."

"Oh my god, I can't with you," Duang tried not to laugh along with his friends, fearing that Qin would get upset. But honestly, how could he be this cute? All this fuss over being called 'Mommy'—he just couldn't let it slide.

Absolutely not.

Charat P. – she doesn't have mama. She has two Papa."

And of course, that comment only made the teasing worse.

This adorable little fool, seriously. T_T

Duang gently stroked the soft cheek of the person resting his head on his arm. Qin was fast asleep, breathing steadily. The room was cool and quiet, lit only by the bedside lamp. Soft jazz music played in the background, like every other night when Qin would drift off after a song or two.

He pressed a kiss on Qin's closed eyelids, carefully slid his arm away, and adjusted the blanket and pillow to make him more comfortable.

Duang couldn't sleep.

Just like last year, when he couldn't sleep either.

'I can't do it. I'm too scared.'

'Duang, take a risk or lose the chance. It might turn out better than you think.'

Jett's voice from that time echoed in his head. He still felt as nervous now as he did back then—when he first gathered the courage to talk to Qin.

It felt like Qin was so far away. Not only far, but like he was perched on a high tower. Duang used to think they were just like that song by Stamp:

'But the ice won't melt, it won't turn into love. I'm not warm enough, and you still only see me as an acquaintance... until my heart has no strength left. The Ice Princess, she's so cold.'

But once he got to know Qin for real...

Qin was never cold to him. Not even once.

"Duang..."

"Oh, why are you awake?"

"Why aren't you asleep yet?" Qin mumbled, eyes barely open, but still trying to stay awake. Tomorrow, they didn't have any classes because finals were coming up—just some projects to submit on time and a few in-person exams that weren't take-home.

Time flew by so quickly.

It had already been a year since they first crossed paths.

"I can't sleep."

"Is something wrong? Want to talk about it? Want a hug?"

Duang loved how attentive Qin always was. He nodded and snuggled into Qin's embrace. Qin pressed his nose into Duang's soft hair, breathing him in.

"So, what's on your mind?"

"Did you know? Last year, around this time, I couldn't sleep either."

Qin stayed quiet, gently running his fingers through Duang's hair, always wanting to hear everything Duang had to say.

"I kept thinking... the next day, I'd see you, talk to you, try to be part of your world. Everything felt so difficult. I felt so small. If you had rejected me that day, I don't know if I'd have spent every night after drowning my sorrows in beer."

"Who told you to like me that much?"

"Right? Just one look at you, and my heart was gone."

"Hmph," Qin chuckled softly, pulling Duang closer like he did when he couldn't resist their puppy, Fluffy, which currently sleeping soundly on the mattress.

"I remember everything about you—every little thing. It's crazy. On your registration day, you wore Vans. During the freshman welcome, you wore the same pair. It's lucky you were a first-year, or else I'd have had a hard time finding out your name."

"Then why did you confess in person? You could've just texted me, you already had my LINE."

"Well, of course, I did. I've been typing and deleting on your chat screen since the first day I got it. But I know I have no right to text you first. Besides, I'd rather talk to you face to face. I'm sincere, you know. When I look into your eyes, you'll know it too."

"I already know... that's why I agreed to talk to you."

"See? And look at today, it's like I'm dreaming."

"Love-struck people."

"I admit it, I really love you."

"I love you too."

"Qin."

"Hmm?"

"Be honest, did you have a lot of people hitting on you back then?" Duang pursed his lips. He kind of already knew the answer. There were probably a lot—both guys and girls—because Qin was so unisex. If you stared for too long, you might just fall for him without realizing it. He wasn't exaggerating.

"There were some, but I didn't really pay attention."

"Is that so?"

"At first, I thought relationships weren't that important. I didn't want to be responsible for anyone's feelings. Even though I knew this world is cruel, where no one takes responsibility for anyone else's emotions, I also knew that if I ever loved someone, I wouldn't be able to stop myself from holding onto their heart."

Duang likes listening to Qin talk. He likes hearing his perspectives. He likes the way Qin saw the world. Maybe that's what he fell in love with... the things he would never have known were so beautiful if he hadn't discovered them.

"When I met you, I thought I'd give it a try. I didn't know if there was more to it than just seeing the possibility. But when I saw you, I thought it had to be you. The longer I stayed with you, the more I knew it could only be you. Otherwise, it wouldn't work. Not everyone understands me. Not everyone says they can wait and actually wait like you do."

"Your relatives told me you're the type who only does things when you're ready."

"Yeah, that's true."

"Like studying jazz—you thought about it for years."

"I just didn't want to mess it up. If I'm going to do something, I'll do it for real. I won't give up. I'll do my best, and I have to be sure I can stick with what I choose forever. I don't like hearing the words 'burnout' or 'losing passion' anymore."

"..."

"People should stop doing things based solely on passion. Once you've chosen something, that's it. If you can't do it well, just quit and choose something else. Be brave enough to give yourself another chance. If you fall, get back up. Don't use passion as an excuse. But for me, I know once I've chosen, it's final—just like choosing you. I don't look at anyone else."

"I really like it when you talk like this."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You're not like anyone else."

"If I'm special, it's because you love me."

Duang smiled widely, pulling away from Qin's arms, sharing the same pillow, and giving him a soft kiss as a thank-you for saying such sweet things before bed.

"Go to sleep now. It's three in the morning, Duang."

"Okay. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

That night, Duang dreamt that he shrank down to the size of a child, just like Qin when he was in elementary school—the way he'd seen in the pictures when they had dinner at Qin's house. We played together on the beach, building sandcastles and watching the waves wash them away with smiles that said, even if everything crumbles, we can rebuild it together. As long as we have each other, that's enough.

"Fluffy, this is a krathong. Do you like it?"

"Bark~~"

"You do, huh? It's cold too. Here, Papa says you can touch it."

I watched Duang chatting with Fluffy about the ice krathong we were about to float in the tub. Fluffy hopped around like a rabbit. I smiled to myself, picked up my phone to snap a picture, and posted it on my barely-used Instagram before putting it away.

Duang looked up at me as I brought some treats for Fluffy. Once we finished floating the krathong in the room, we planned to go find something to eat and later drop Fluffy off at a female friend's place. Tonight, both Duang and I, along with our other friends, had to go to a bar to celebrate a senior's birthday.

"Fluffy, listen to Papa sing a song. Remember it and sing it with your friends, okay?"

"..."

"Full moon in the twelfth month, dogs play drums, monkeys play cymbals~"

"Duang, please." I scolded him when he started getting carried away. He just laughed before we began floating the krathong, doing the ritual half-seriously. Meanwhile, Fluffy looked thoroughly confused, wondering what these humans were up to.

"Done. Sathu."

I've been observing Fluffy for a while. Normally, dogs are very attached to their owners, but since Fluffy has two, it seems he genuinely favors Duang. I tend to buy him lots of treats but rarely let him eat them—I'm afraid he'll gain too much weight, and then I'd have to put him on a diet. He's so tiny but already chubbier than the other dogs his age. Duang, on the other hand, doesn't buy much because I always scold him, but he's the type who sneaks Fluffy treats all the time.

"Come on, follow Papa. Let's go, little one. Right this way."

Duang called Fluffy over to put on his leash. He stood there debating whether to carry him or walk him, and in the end, he called out to me as I stood by the balcony watching our ice krathong slowly melt.

"Qin, I'm going to carry our baby. I don't want to walk him—I'm afraid someone might step on him."

"Okay."

"Hey there, want to go out?"

"Bark!"

"See? Your kid is totally programmed. Just say 'go out,' and his ears perk right up." He grumbled while scooping Fluffy into his arms. I turned off the air conditioning, switched off the lights, did a quick check around the room, and locked the door before following him to the car.

"The traffic is so bad," I complained. Maybe it's because people from outside are coming to float krathongs at the university. There are events, food, and photo spots. Duang nodded repeatedly, turning the steering wheel to find a parking spot while Fluffy clung to the car door, watching the view outside. It seemed extra cheerful, probably because it got to go out. Suddenly, I thought about renting a house with a yard for Fluffy to run around in.

"Hey."

"What?"

"Let's rent a house."

"You're going too far."

"Seriously. My room is a mess and packed with stuff. Yours too. Plus, there's all of Fluffy's things. I want Fluffy to have space to run around."

"Then it has to be a one-story house. I read somewhere that corgis shouldn't go up and down stairs."

"I'll ask Pa and Ma. They probably know some places. We can move during the semester break."

"You're totally giving in for our kid, huh? Fluffy, Papa is going to move to a new house for you."

I guess it was Duang's excited tone that made Fluffy so happy—it even jumped onto Duang's lap.

I chuckled softly, watching the father-and-child duo chat away about gardening and home decorating.

Seeing him enjoy himself makes me happy too.

"Don't be naughty, okay? I'll carry you myself."

Honestly, after that page posted a picture of us with Fluffy, people started asking to take photos with it. But Duang knew I didn't like strangers touching my dog if they weren't close to us. So, he'd always smile politely and say, "Fluffy is shy with strangers. I'll hold her. You can stand next to us."

Since then, he took on the role of posing for pictures with Fluffy and other people.

"Oh my god, it's Duang and Qin!"

"Ahh, Duang's smile is so cute. Seeing him holding a puppy is melting my heart. He's totally dad material."

"Calm down, he's here with his boyfriend."

"Qin doesn't even seem human anymore—he's like a dream."

Duang smiled faintly at a few people calling out to him, some were friends, others seniors. The photo requests didn't stop. Some people were polite enough to sneak a shot from afar. By the time we reached our friends, Fluffy had been around so many people that its ears drooped... Poor thing.

"You're here!"

"Ahhh, the baby~~" Duang handed Fluffy over to Preaw while I offered a small smile as a greeting. Jettana immediately hugged me tightly. He always acted like he was small despite being three or four centimeters taller than both Duang and me.

"That jerk Pae isn't coming. He ran off with his girlfriend. Qin, can you hug me to comfort me?"

"It's okay," I patted his shoulder lightly. Duang glared at our friend without stopping. He always told me Jettana was trouble... and honestly, I could see that. He was pretty sly.

"Find a partner quickly, so Duang will stop being jealous."

"Oh, please. Duang would be jealous of anyone near Qin. If Fluffy were a male, Duang would be heartbroken."

"Seriously?"

"Yes! No one loves Qin more than me."

"Can you stop hugging my boyfriend for a minute?"

"I'll answer that right now, Duang—no!"

"Qin, come over here. Fluffy's going wild—I can't handle it anymore." My friend called me over, rescuing me from the ongoing war between Duang and Jettana. And yeah, Fluffy really was hyper. It was nipping at everyone's fingers. Even though its teeth weren't that sharp, I knew it hurt. I leaned in closer to the puppy cradled in my friend's arms.

"Don't bite people, okay?"

"Ahhh, Duang, your boyfriend... T_T"

"What now?"

"Qin just called Fluffy 'sweetie' and spoke so gently. My heart can't take it."

"Hey, you."

"Here I come, the ridiculously jealous one."

"Don't be cute in front of other people."

"What did I do?"

"That! You're doing it again!"

Jettana clutched his head in mock despair, thinking to himself how last year, these two were strangers. Now they were dating and even raising a dog together. Damn, he was so happy for them.

As for him?

Hah—he didn't care about finding a partner.

The only thing he was asking the water goddess for tonight was to win the lottery jackpot so he could just buy happiness instead.

Awesome!

15 - I Don't Want Anyone to Get Close to You

"You... listen to Duang first."

"I don't want to talk right now."

"What should Duang do? I already pushed her away."

"I'm being irrational, Duang. Just go."

"You..."

"Go."

"Can you not push me away?"

Jetana leaned against the pole, watching the two of them being tense with each other—more than he'd ever seen—wiping the sweat off his brow. Today was really a mess... At first, everything was fine. They were drinking together, snuggling in a way that made people tease them. But when Qin went to the bathroom, some drunk girl from another table dropped herself onto Duang's lap. He was so shocked that his glass almost fell.

I mean, my lap was empty. Why didn't she drop herself here?

"I know it's not your fault, but I don't want to take it out on you."

"Duang can endure it."

"It's not something you should have to endure, is it?"

"I just don't want to be away from you. Why do I have to leave? I can sit quietly."

Jetana heard Qin curse under his breath, turning his face away to light a cigarette. Duang just looked at him with sad puppy eyes. It's like his whole world was falling apart. Maybe he really does only love Qin. And even though it wasn't his fault—since the moment that girl landed on his lap, he immediately and politely pushed her away—the bad timing was that Qin came back and saw it right then and there, which set him off.

They're both jealous of each other.

Honestly, Qin is a pretty possessive person. He doesn't even let anyone touch Fluffy unless they're close. So, it's no surprise he's like this with Duang, even if he doesn't talk about it much.

"Is he okay yet?"

"Pae!"

"Shhh, keep it down," Pae, who had come looking for Jetana because he'd been gone for too long, pressed a finger to his lips, signaling his friend to stay quiet. Is it a sin to hide and watch people fight?

"You."

"What?"

"Don't talk to Duang like that."

"What?" Qin repeated, his voice softer this time. Jetana and Pae started to feel relieved because Qin seemed to calm down after finishing his cigarette.

"Do you want to sit in the car? The mosquitoes might bite you."

"I'm fine."

"How do you feel? Can you tell Duang?"

"I'm jealous... I understand she was drunk, but I don't want anyone getting close to you."

Jetana clutched his chest.

How can someone be this cute?

They're both still the same—Qin is Qin, and Duang is Duang. Maybe that's how it is when someone is the right one. Everything feels easy. They understand each other, and they can go through anything together.

"Come here, Duang wants a hug."

"..."

"Come on."

Now they understood why Duang always bragged about how cute his boyfriend was. Seeing this side of Qin, a side that only Duang got to see, it was impossible not to think he was adorable.

"I almost cried when you told me to go."

"Sorry."

"It hurts my heart."

"I'm sorry kha."

Wow.

Pae wrapped an arm around Jetana's neck, pulling him away. Qin was hugging Duang tightly, speaking softly. They had calmed down, and it was all good now.

Enough already. No one wanted to see a love fest.

"We shouldn't have followed them."

"I thought they were going to have a big fight—I saw Qin walking out," Jetana grumbled.

"Yeah, his face was like 'I'm done,' and that girl had no clue. His boyfriend is super possessive."

"See? People who say Qin loves Duang less are wrong. He loves him so much. It's not just Duang giving his all, Qin does too."

"True. Let's drink. No girlfriend means no problems."

"Tonight, one of us is going home with someone—maybe two, I don't mind."

Pae and Jetana laughed and headed back to the bar, while Qin and Duang stayed behind, still talking things through. Duang had never seen Qin this jealous before—maybe because he'd always been extra careful to avoid making Qin uncomfortable. If something might upset Qin, Duang always tried to avoid it.

But this time, there was no avoiding it.

"Do you want to keep drinking, or go home?"

"Can we go home?"

"Of course."

"We can pick up Fluffy too. He's probably restless."

"Ah, so you're just worried about the dog, huh?" Duang leaned in, pressing his nose to Qin's cheek, cupping his face gently. His eyes were full of affection—because, well, he really was that fond of Qin.

"Sorry for how I spoke earlier."

"Duang understands."

"I'll be calmer next time."

"There won't be a next time. Duang's lap, it's only for you to sit on." Qin felt annoyed at the sparkling eyes the other person gave him and the way he

stroked his waist. So, he cut off the bad behavior by elbowing the other person's chest.

"Let's go say goodbye to the seniors first. They probably won't hear a phone call."

"Okay. You're in a good mood now, right?"

"Yeah. I want to eat bua loy."

"Okay."

"Is there anything I ask for and didn't get?" The person wearing a simple t-shirt muttered softly.

"Like asking Duang to stop loving you or asking Duang to go far away."

"Sigh."

Duang looked at the person who sighed and smiled faintly before pulling his hand to walk back into the shop together. They said goodbye to their friends and the birthday senior. It took almost fifteen minutes to get away because, once they said they were leaving, they got pushed to drink another glass, and another.

"I'll drink instead of Qin. Let Qin drive."

And it was that sentence that made the person pouring the drinks make Duang's shots extra strong out of spite. It left Duang leaning against Qin's shoulder the entire way to the bua loy shop. At first, they planned to eat there, but since Duang seemed pretty drunk, they decided to buy it to-go and pick up Fluffy at a friend's dorm.

"Picking her up so soon? She hasn't even played enough yet."

"Next time. Thank you so much."

"It's fine. You can leave her here anytime. She's so cute!"

Qin took Fluffy into his arms before walking back to the car that was still running not far away because Duang had already passed out. It wouldn't be fair to call him a lightweight—he just couldn't drink as much as before. The reason? Work kept him busy, and he clung to Qin so much that he barely went anywhere.

And now, with the puppy, he really didn't want to leave the house unless he could bring her along.

"You, we're here... Can you walk on your own?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm just sleepy."

The one being shaken awake nodded in response. Qin definitely wouldn't let him carry Fluffy right now, considering how tipsy he was. He was even swaying slightly. Everyone had really gone overboard with the drinks—almost pure alcohol.

"If you eat bua loy, will you get even more drunk?"

"Duang will just watch you eat."

"Okay. And then I'll take you to shower."

"Are you going to shower with Duang?"

"Yeah. I'm afraid you'll die. You're drunk, you know that?"

Qin, who was pouring the bua loy into a bowl, pointed the spoon at him before glancing over at Fluffy, who was playing with her toys on the bed nearby.

"I drank over five glasses for you."

"You're so manly."

"Well, I'm your husband— ow! Qin!"

"Sit quietly." Duang pouted after getting his foot stepped on when he blurted out the word 'husband.' He rested his chin in his hand, watching Qin eat the bua loy like it was the most delicious thing ever. Honestly, everything looked delicious when it was Qin eating. Next year, he should sign Qin up for a competitive eating contest.

"Are you hungry? Do you want some? I'll feed you."

"No, Duang's not looking because I'm hungry. Just watching you eat."

"What should we do tomorrow? I'm free all day."

"Want to go home? We can leave Fluffy with my mom."

"Sure. My Papa and Mama aren't home. Otherwise, I'd leave her with them. They really want to meet her."

Duang nodded eagerly. He remembered the time they FaceTimed Qin's mom—she had squealed so loudly when she saw Fluffy. She originally called to scold Qin for spending seventy thousand baht, but once she saw the puppy's dumb, cute face, all was forgiven.

"Want to go on a trip during the break?"

"If you invite me to San Francisco, I won't go. I don't want to trouble Papa"

"Chiang Mai is fine. Phi Khua Fah invited us."

"Oh, really? Does he have a house there?"

"No, his boyfriend does... His boyfriend is a noble."

"Whoa, seriously? Does one person's profile need to be that over-the-top?"

"Yeah, it's wild. But that's just how it is. Don't overthink it. Prince is pretty normal. You'll understand when you meet him."

Trying to make me curious, huh?

They kept chatting about their plans for tomorrow in Bangkok while Qin finished the bua loy, cleaned the bowl, and took out the trash. Then, he motioned for Duang to follow him to the bathroom.

They showered together like they often did, but today Duang was too drunk to mess around. Qin's pale skin still had faint kiss marks on his back, waist, and chest—marks that hadn't faded much compared to Duang's. Since Qin's skin was fairer and more delicate, his bruises lasted longer.

"Brush your teeth properly. I'll take you to bed."

"I'm so sleepy."

"You're such a drunkard."

"I drank for my boyfriend. What's wrong with that?"

"Stand still. I'll brush for you... Open your mouth."

The last time someone brushed his teeth for him was back in kindergarten, and that was his mom scolding him every morning. Duang obediently did as Qin said, standing still and watching his kind-hearted boyfriend who, today, was brushing his teeth for him.

Being your boyfriend is the best.

"What are you smiling about?"

"I'm happy."

"Rinse your mouth and go to bed first."

"No way. I'm going with you."

Duang, now washed up and freshly brushed, hugged Qin from behind, burying his face in his shoulder like a clingy koala that wouldn't let go. Qin sighed, brushing his teeth while struggling because of the extra weight leaning on him.

"Your mom probably didn't love you as a kid."

"My mom loves me—but this is my wife. I want to hug."

"If you say that again, Duang..."

The one being scolded laughed softly. Duang didn't know if Qin was shy or what, but every time he said the words 'husband' or 'wife,' he would get physically attacked. The two of us walked out of the bathroom after finishing our business. Qin had Duang clinging to his back as usual, and by the time we reached the bed, we were already sweating.

"Go to sleep."

"Kiss my forehead once."

"..."

"Please? So I can have sweet dreams."

Qin pressed his nose to the forehead of the clingy one before turning to switch off the light, pulling the blanket over them, and telling Duang to sleep. The drunk one mumbled for a while before falling asleep. Only then did Qin move closer to let his body absorb the warmth of the other, just like every night before.

"Oh my gosh, the little one!"

"Mom, quiet, or you'll scare her."

"What is this? Tell me first."

"It's Grandma."

"I have a grandchild already? Oh my, how cute! And it doesn't even bark... So, what's your name, sweetheart?" I shook my head, laughing softly at how my mom didn't greet anyone else and had already carried Fluffy inside.

Qin, who had just finished organizing things in the car, walked out looking confused because my mom had disappeared.

"She already took Fluffy inside. She's so excited that Duang is shocked."

"Where's Phi Nan?"

"He's probably at work. Dad went golfing. He keeps asking about you, by the way."

"I brought Dad a Miles Davis record."

"When did you two even talk?"

"Mind your own business."

"Alright, alright, I'll mind my business. I'm the nosy one, it's my fault."

Qin walked into the house carrying the Miles Davis record along with a basket of Fluffy's things. He turned to give me a look that told me to hurry up and follow. I grinned and walked in, finding my mom having a full-blown conversation with Fluffy on the sofa.

"Wiggling your little butt, huh?"

"Hello, Mom."

"Hello, Qin. Where did you get this little one? So cute! Is this a corgi? I love it."

"Yes, Mom. I got them from a farm in Taiwan. Actually, they flew here on a plane."

"Oh my, oh my. So, do we have to speak Chinese for them to understand? Ni hao~"

"Mom, you're too much."

"What, Duang? I don't even know her name yet."

"Fluffy," Qin answered as he plopped down on the plush seat next to my mom. I walked into the kitchen to grab a cold drink and found that my mom had baked butter cookies. I brought some out for Qin. Honestly, both my mom and my boyfriend are just too cute.

"Seventy thousand baht? Well, it's okay. As long as she's healthy, it's worth it to prevent problems when she get older."

"Yes, Mom. I thought the same thing. I didn't think it was too expensive."

"Exactly. Look at how cute and well-behaved they are."

I sat there listening to my mom and Qin shower Fluffy with compliments. When I nudged Qin gently, he grabbed a cookie to eat. The moment my mom asked if it was delicious, he quickly smiled and nodded.

So cute.

"Duang, drive Qin to a nice restaurant later."

"Money, Mom."

"Come on, I gave you so much. How did you run out so fast?"

"I spent it all on Fluffy."

"Really? Then I'll transfer you more. How much do you want?"

Life is good. I grinned while Qin gave me a look of disapproval for using Fluffy as a scheme to get money from my mom. When the money hit my account, I kissed my mom on both cheeks twice. She told me to take Qin out for a nice meal and promised to take excellent care of Fluffy. Qin kissed his daughter several times before telling her that Papa would be back soon.

Fluffy watched us with big, sad eyes, but when my mom called her over to play with some toys, she ran off immediately.

That's how it is with friendly dogs—and she's a little silly too.

"Papa is sending Fluffy off to kindergarten for the first time."

"Smartass."

"Hey, my vet friend said you could start training at three or four months."

"We can drive her to class on weekends."

"Wow, we really have to go all out for Fluffy, huh?"

"She can't fall behind others. She has to be the best," I loved hearing the excitement in Qin's voice. The whole drive to Siam, he was busy searching for dog training classes near my house or his.

That's how it is when you're a parent.

"There's one near my place."

"Then let Fluffy stay at your house while she trains. I'll stay over at your place too."

"Okay. Mama will lose her mind. She's wanted a dog for ages but is never home enough."

"Perfect. Grandma and Grandpa will love Fluffy. She'll definitely get lucky money this year."

"Always finding ways to make money. Are you a student or a con artist?"

"Gotta cash in before sending my kid to kindergarten. I have responsibilities, you know." And then Qin pinched me. We didn't really have a destination, so we just wandered around Siam. Qin wanted to shop for clothes. Normally, I'd complain, but I understood his love for fashion. I used to care about dressing up too, but now I'm too lazy. It's more fun watching him.

We decided to eat at a Japanese restaurant because we were too lazy to think. Qin devoured his tempura and even stole several pieces of my sushi. I couldn't help but laugh—he looked angry and hungry all the time.

"I'm thinking of buying new headphones."

"You bought one last month."

"It's not the same."

"Whatever, rich kid."

"Was that a tease?"

"No way, who would dare?" I widened my eyes dramatically and got a slap on the head. Even though we're already dating, he still likes to rough me up. So impressive.

"Nong Qin?"

"Oh, Prince... Hello." It seemed my time had come sooner than expected.

I turned to look just as Qin raised his hands in a wai to Prince, Phi Khua Fah's boyfriend. Okay... I understood now why people say he gives off that noble aura. Just one look from head to toe, and I already wanted to kneel down and bow instead of giving a wai. T_T

"Who are you here with?"

"With Duang, my boyfriend."

"Oh my... you two look so, so, so cute together~"

"T-Thank you." Then I heard Qin speaking fluent English with him. I took the opportunity while they were chatting about a trip to Chiang Mai during the break to check out Prince's outfit. He really had a knack for dressing up, but it seemed like everything he wore was beyond my reach—designer brands, every piece. Even his ring was from Maison Margiela.

I was completely blown away.

"Sorry I can't treat you two to dessert. I have to see my doctor at Gaysorn Village."

"That's totally fine. See you next time."

"Bye-bye, nong Duang. See you again, kids."

My heart pounded because of Prince's smile. T_T I mean, he's so pale.

"You're staring."

"I only love Qin."

"Feeling guilty?"

"Come on, he's so pale. What am I supposed to do? His body is amazing."

"I understand. When he walks with Phi Fah, everyone stares."

"How did they even meet? I'm so confused. You said he's the same age as Phi Dao Nuea, but he looks way older."

"I heard they met in Omkoi."

"That's so random, haha."

"You can ask Phi Fah when you see him. He's not scary."

"I can't talk to him much—he's too handsome. I feel inferior."

"You're adorable."

Qin looked at me so seriously as if to say that to him, I was really, truly adorable. I smiled, thanked him, and we spent the rest of the day shopping together.

"Let's stop by Yello House, Qin. I heard they have booths selling cameras and film."

"Buying another one? The camera you used to take my picture last time was already perfect." Oh, right—I forgot to mention that the photos I took of Qin as a gift had been developed a while ago. He seemed to love them. He

even printed some to stick around his room. He said I had a good sense of lighting, angles, and timing.

And when he compliments me, it makes me want to do even better.

"I want a panorama camera."

"Can you stop spending money recklessly?"

"Excuse me, but look at these shopping bags. They're all yours."

"Fine, do what you want."

"It'll be great for our Chiang Mai trip."

"Alright, but don't buy too much, Duang. You already have over four cameras."

I don't know if I'm crazy or what, but I love it when he nags me. I nodded eagerly, and we walked together to our destination. Qin followed me everywhere with his arms crossed, worried I'd sneakily buy more cameras than necessary.

"Duang."

"Sorry." I almost raised my hands in a wai when he pinched my waist because I picked up a fifty-thousand-baht camera. I hadn't even asked the shop owner about its specs before getting scolded.

"Too expensive."

"But it's a limited edition."

"Even non-limited ones can take the same pictures."

"Qin..."

"Nope, pick another one."

I'm scared of my wife. Yep, terrified—I'll admit it. My dad always said, 'If you don't trust your wife, who else will you trust?' So, I backed away from the limited edition cameras and checked out the panorama cameras instead. In the end, I got one of those and a small rangefinder camera for quick snaps.

Once we had everything we wanted, we decided to grab some craft beer at The Street. It had been a while since we last enjoyed good craft beer together.

"You know, we could share clothes," Qin said while we were stuck in traffic in front of Terminal.

"I've been sharing your clothes for ages. You just realized? I steal your shirts all the time. Some cost twelve thousand baht and you only wore them once. Want to guess which one?"

"Don't complain."

"No need to sweet-talk me."

"Well, some things are must-haves."

"Duang's cameras are the same."

"They're not the same at all." I shook my head with a smile, giving in to him. Why argue? If he says no, I won't buy it. It's just a small thing. If it's something necessary or if I really want it, I just need to ask him nicely, and he'll give it to me. I understand that he does it because he cares.

"You're hot?" I said while adjusting the air conditioner for the person sweating next to me.

"Yeah... It's already November. Why isn't it winter yet?"

"How cold do you want it to be? If you want to wear a turtleneck, forget it."

"So cold that we have to cuddle. Like that."

"Why do you sound so cute these days, Qin?" I stroked his cheek while he grumbled about the heat, pouting like a kid. He and Fluffy are the same. First, they get hot easily. Second, they're clingy without realizing it. Third, when you're with them, you have to pay attention only to them. You can't be on your phone too much. Fluffy is the same—if you're cuddling and pick up your phone, she'll keep kicking your arm non-stop.

"Your mom sent a picture to me, said Fluffy played with Phi Nan until he passed out. He's asleep now."

"Hia Nan must've been messing with Duang's kid, for sure."

"It's good for Fluffy to play rough sometimes. He must be so excited to meet new people."

"When you were a kid, did you play rough? Duang had an older brother, you know. Got a cracked head, split chin—been through it all. Played so recklessly until my dad scolded me."

"Not really. Phi Khua Fah kept a close eye on me. When I played with Phi Dao Nuea, it was just drawing, coloring, building Legos, watching cartoons, and kicking a soccer ball sometimes."

"But you're good at soccer. Seriously."

"Well, I played in high school."

"Duang didn't play much in high school—too busy with activities. I was a cheerleader in Grade 11 too. My friends pressured me."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. I'll show you the video when we get home."

"Do the dance for me at The Street."

"You're teasing, teerak. I don't remember any of it."

"You? Dancing? I can't picture it."

"The girls screamed their heads off."

"Because you were handsome?"

"Because they couldn't handle it! I rolled off the stage, messed up every flip and spin. I couldn't catch my friends in time. Haha." I laughed, and Qin laughed too... I love every day that we get to talk like this about random things.

The last light of the day brushed against the face of the person humming happily in my car.

I can't imagine a future without him.

He's in everything—every reason, every plan I've made.

"You."

"What?"

"Thank you. Today was really fun."

I don't know what else I could possibly want in life.

I have me.

I have him.

I have us.

"Thank you too."

It really is as good as it gets.

Oh myyy, I'm so sorry for the late update! I just got back yesterday from a staycation with my friends as a little self-reward 😂. That's why I finally have some free time today—enjoy reading!

16 - Just Want to Feel Like You're Close

I stood watching Qin, who was trying out the bass on stage. He was tucking his long hair behind his ears, and my dark gray T-shirt on him looked ridiculously cute. I smiled softly at him... Today is an important day—a big day for Qin. He was rehearsing for the real performance tomorrow, which is the faculty's major event. Honestly, I was a bit confused as to why a vocalist from the jazz department was playing bass for a first-year band. He didn't know the reason either.

Qin is the kind of person who says yes without hesitation when it comes to music. I'm happy he gets to do what he loves. Actually, he's singing one song too, but he already rehearsed with another band in the afternoon.

That's my talented boy.

"Start with

Cool With It

, then go straight into

Knots

. Phi Prae, a second-year, will sing here, and you finish with

Deep

. After this, you can step down and rest before singing with Pae's band."

My cute boy nodded.

He raised his eyebrows at me playfully before strumming an unfamiliar tune on his bass. He really was born to be on stage—no matter what

instrument he touched, it was like he was made for it. And when he sings? The dreamy atmosphere just wraps around everyone's hearts.

Damn, I'm so possessive over him.

"You're staring like a lovesick puppy."

"Wait—how did you even get in here?"

"I hooked up with the door guy once, so I slipped in easy."

"Seriously? Yam, Qin's classmate?"

"Dead serious."

"When did that even happen? I'm begging you, Jet."

"I told you, I'm not a lover—I'm a fighter." I shook my head, exasperated. Jet plopped down on the high chair next to me, watching Qin and the band as they started getting serious.

"One hair flip and I'm done for."

"That's why he grew his hair out."

"..."

"To keep me wrapped around his finger."

"Duang, please—those cheap jokes again? Have you ever loved anyone for real? If you love me, stop it."

"Asshole," I cursed under my breath, but he ignored me. We both kept our eyes on Qin. Jet leaned closer, whispering about how hot the drummer's body was, so I smacked him on the head.

I'll admit it—I wasn't looking at anyone else. My eyes were glued to Qin, and I felt guilty toward the vocalist. T_T

"That drummer, though..."

"Calm down. Is that even a guy? Do you go for guys too?"

"I go for everything. I'm a warrior."

"Alright, alright, fighter," I chuckled, still amazed. Honestly, I never pried into his sex life, but I knew Jet was the type to have fun. He was raised like a Western kid—totally carefree.

"Are you part Western or what?"

"My stepdad's American, what about it?"

"Wait, really?"

"Yeah, I never told you?"

"You never did, dumbass."

"And my nickname isn't even Jet."

"You son of a bitch." I turned to him in shock. He smirked and patted my cheek lightly.

"My real name's Jetana, but you guys just started calling me Jet."

"Then what's your actual nickname if it's not Jet?"

"If I were you, I wouldn't ask. Have some manners, kid."

"Idiot." We started bickering while the band moved on to their second song, and he still wouldn't tell me his real nickname. Maybe it was true—he always referred to himself as Jetana with Qin and hardly ever called himself Jet. And during the freshman orientation, his name tag was written by a senior anyway. Jetana does sound pretty badass, though.

My head hurts.

What's my friend's real nickname, for real?

"Give me a hint—what's your name?"

"Two syllables."

"Too hard. What does it start with?"

"Not telling, dumbass. If you wanna know, ask my mom."

"Fine. Don't let me meet her, though."

"You won't—unless you're my wife, then maybe I'll bring you home."

"I'm gonna puke."

"Same. Just thinking about doing the dirty with you gives me the creeps."

"The creeps?"

"Don't ask. It's official language."

"Official language, my ass," I muttered. I always told him to stop learning weird things from the internet. His vocabulary was getting out of hand—especially when he got obsessed with some random joke. He'd repeat it like a broken record, copying voices and everything. I had no idea why he did it.

Is someone like this even gonna find a girlfriend? Seriously.

"Damn, Qin's so pale."

"Watch yourself, man."

"Can't I even compliment him? Fine, I'll change it."

"To what?"

"I really like him. I wanna be his man."

"You idiot, is that my line?"

"If you're that possessive, go copyright it. You're so dramatic."

"Wow, now I'm the bad guy? But still, no one else gets him—he's my boyfriend."

I raised my fist at him while he made a playful face and complained that I was possessive. But seriously, can you blame me? I can't say this in front of Qin—I can only vent to Pae and Jet.

Please, I'm begging you.

"They're playing old songs too."

"I've never heard any of them."

"Well, you don't really listen to international music."

"Pretty much. But since being with Qin, I've listened to tons of music."

"Tough boy, huh?"

"Seriously tough—I secretly bought a camera and got scolded like crazy."

Yeah, I really shouldn't have had it delivered to Qin's dorm. I should've sent it to mine and pretended I brought it from home. But no, he opened the package right in front of me with Fluffy on his lap. That day, the scissors almost stabbed me in the stomach. My boyfriend spends money like crazy, while I barely get to pay for anything.

'You already have one like this—just in silver.'

Can I cry?

His memory is so good, I wanted to die on the spot.

"I'm not talking to wife-fearing guys."

"You're a warrior again, huh?"

"Yep, exactly."

"They're done!"

"Good, I'm starving."

"Wait, who said you're eating with us?"

"You'll see... Hey, Qin looks so fair-skinned."

"If I ever find out you have someone, you better be scared. I'll roast you forever—even after I'm dead, I'll carve it on your tombstone so people can keep roasting you."

"Someone like me would never be scared of anyone."

"Asshole," I cursed at him as he ran off to hug Qin's waist, resting his face against Qin's chest while shooting me a 'mistress' kind of look. I rolled my eyes—fine, whatever.

The moment Qin's not around, I'm gonna break his face.

"Did you wait long?"

"Nope."

"How did Jetana get in here? Did he tell them he's a friend?"

"Nope, they just let me in." Jetana said.

Liar. I hate how fake he acts in front of Qin. Why not tell him the same thing you told me, you bastard—that you hooked up with the door guard? I glared at him while he stood there all innocent. But the moment Qin reached for my hand and sweetly asked where I wanted to eat dinner, my mood flipped instantly—like I had bipolar disorder.

"What do you feel like eating?"

"Ooh, your voice got all sweet."

"If you're gonna be a third wheel, don't talk, Jet."

"Qin, he's bullying me."

"Talk nicely... I feel like eating crab fried rice."

I nodded and wrapped an arm around Qin's waist, leading him to his favorite seafood restaurant. Jet trailed a few steps behind us, seemingly talking on the phone with his mom. I slowed down—I wanted to eavesdrop and find out what name he used when talking to her. If he used his real nickname, I'd finally know.

"What are you doing, acting all sneaky?"

"Did you know Jet's nickname isn't actually Jet?"

"Yeah, I know."

"...What?!"

"Why?"

"Wait, wait, wait—how do you know?!"

"Jet told me."

"!!!"

I turned wide-eyed to look at the guy still on the phone with his mom—and he was speaking fluent English. Seriously, are we even real friends? We've known each other for a whole year, and I had no idea he could speak English like that.

Is he undercover or what?!

"So... what's Jet's real nickname?"

"I can't tell you."

"Qin!"

"I promised Jet I wouldn't tell anyone."

"Why did he tell you, though?"

"I overheard him talking to his mom once, and he referred to himself by his real nickname. You wouldn't catch it unless you were paying attention. And since he was speaking in English, I asked, 'Whose name is that?' and he said it was his."

"..."

"You really didn't know?"

"Not at all—I always thought Jet was short for 'Jetana'."

"Ridiculous," Qin said, pulling my car keys out of my pocket. I stood there with my arms crossed, watching that sneaky bastard laugh while chatting with his mom. I swear, he really is a foreign kid. When he hung up and noticed my judgmental stare, he immediately protested.

"What? Why are you staring at me so much? Dumbass."

"Did you tell my wife what your real name is?"

"I tell everyone who's hot. I'm easy like that sometimes."

"You idiot."

"But I'm not telling you. Or Pae. Or anyone else. I'll let you all stay confused—it makes me seem like a mysterious and charming guy. Gotta keep up the character."

"Whatever. I'll find out eventually. Just wait and see."

"Be my guest."

He slammed the car door and got in. At least he didn't annoy me by sitting in the front. Otherwise, I would've fought with him and given Qin a headache again. Damn it.

"You, can you grab brush number eight for me?"

Qin nodded, walking over to fetch the brush for the person who hadn't stopped painting since we got back from the restaurant. Apparently, it was the last project before the break—a huge canvas with an image Qin couldn't quite make out. He figured he'd ask Duang later but didn't want to interrupt for now.

"You, can you get me the blue paint? The lapis shade—no, wait, cobalt is better."

"..."

"Qin?"

"Duang, what's lapis?" Duang wanted to bite his tongue when he turned and saw Qin sitting on the bed with an open book, looking completely confused. Even Fluffy tilted her head in curiosity, probably wondering what his owner was asking for. Shaking his head with a fond smile, Duang walked over, planted a firm kiss on Qin's cheek, and nuzzled Fluffy's furry head before grabbing the paint himself.

"Don't stay up too late, okay?"

"Are you going to bed already?"

"Not yet, but I'll probably sleep before you do... Fluffy, keep an eye on your Pa, okay? If he stays up too late, wake him up." Qin turned to talk to the dog like it was a serious conversation. Duang, watching the two of them play on the bed, couldn't help but smile. Working didn't feel tiring at all when his life was this happy.

"Duang."

"Yeah?"

"Happy anniversary."

Duang just realized... it really could be this simple.

To be happy. To be in love.

"Is it midnight already?"

"Yeah."

"I don't want to work anymore. I just want to tackle you onto the bed."

"Come on, then."

"Qin." Duang scolded, but he couldn't stop smiling. Like he'd said before—he still liked Qin just as much as he did on the first day, and he loved him more and more every day, to the point that no words could describe it.

It was overwhelming.

"The project's not due tomorrow, anyway."

"Are you inviting me?"

"Can't I?"

"..."

"Come and get me."

Duang knew he was doomed—he couldn't hold himself back. Every time Qin teased him, it always ended with someone getting bruised. He couldn't resist biting him everywhere he could think of. And now, Qin had the nerve to toss his sleep shirt onto the floor and send Fluffy back to his bed.

She clearly had no idea what was coming.

"Qin, you have work tomorrow."

"Ever heard of vanilla sex? Not everything has to be rough. And one round is enough."

"Try being me for once. When I go easy, you tell me to go harder—I'm about to lose my mind." Duang climbed onto the bed and straddled Qin. Honestly, he wanted to mess with Qin every day, but on days with early classes, he worried Qin wouldn't wake up on time. Even though Duang was the one doing all the work, Qin always seemed fully recharged by morning.

"No more... I'm tired."

"You're so damn tempting, do you know that?"

"I haven't even done anything."

"I'm already hard."

"Asshole."

"Watch your language." Warm lips pressed against his, moving into a deep kiss as Duang eagerly welcomed Qin's tongue. They kissed for a long time before Qin tugged off Duang's T-shirt, with Duang lifting his arms to help.

"Qin."

"Hmm?"

"Thank you for being with me."

"I should be the one saying that."

They locked eyes, long enough to know they still had a long way to fall.

They weren't even halfway down this endless freefall of love yet. And they could love each other even more—more than anyone could possibly imagine.

"Thank you for being you, Qin."

"My pleasure."

Duang pressed his nose against Qin's cheek, his hand sliding to grip his hip before slipping under his short boxer briefs. Qin's legs spread wide enough for Duang to reach deep inside.

And that was only the beginning.

The owner of the sharp face leaned in to whisper against the other person's ear.

"Lift your hips up first."

"..."

"Vanilla sex, Duang can give you that anytime."

Qin's heart pounded hard.

He loved Duang in many aspects that the other person showed.

"But about the 'only one round' thing..."

Come to think of it, he loved him in every aspect.

"No promises."

He loved everything about Duang.

It's true that they don't allow beer on campus, but trust me, sneaking it in isn't hard at all. Especially at a music event like this. I'm wearing an oversized light blue polo shirt that Qin had bought last month. He wore it once and then tossed it to me again. We share clothes to the point that everyone around us knows and teases us about it.

The only thing left is shoes. I'm one size bigger than him. Otherwise, I'd wear his too. His shoes are more expensive than my entire life.

"Duang, can we take a picture together?"

"Oh, sure."

I nodded, Jetana stopping and waiting with a look that seemed to tell me, 'I'm watching you. If you mess up, I'll tell your wife immediately.' But he won't get the chance to tattle. I'm super careful.

I stood with my hands behind my back, leaning down slightly to be at her height but keeping a respectful distance. I gave a small smile, and once she finished taking the photo, she thanked me.

"So... um, didn't you come with Qin?"

"Qin's backstage. He'll be performing at 7:30. You can check it out."

"Oh, thank you!" She smiled brightly, her face turning red as she walked away.

"Dude, she doesn't like you. She likes Qin. But since Qin isn't here..."

"Asshole."

"He has you as his husband, but he can have anyone as his wife."

"I'm gonna punch you, Jet."

"I'm joking! Geez." He playfully flounced around when I raised my hand to smack his head. This time, it was his turn to have someone ask for a picture. Being the smooth single guy he is, he casually put his arm around her and gave his most charming smile. The prettier they are, the more he stares like he's about to eat them alive.

Pathetic.

"You know, I really want you to have a girlfriend."

"Geez, what's your problem? You keep saying that. You, Pae, all our friends."

"I just want to know what kind of person could tame you. What kind of person could make you settle down like a puppy?"

"No one!" Then he switched to English, saying that such a person doesn't exist.

"Why not? What kind of person do you like?"

"Like your Qin—ouch! I'm joking! You're too possessive, Duang."

"When it comes to my boyfriend, there's no such thing as too much."

"I like people who are confident and don't care about me."

"Masochist, much?"

"I like people who aren't crazy in love with me. Not like you, okay?"

"Geez, stop dissing me." I took a sip of beer through a straw in the bucket, pretending it was Italian soda. Everyone does it. The beer smell is strong as hell.

"I like people who love me but could leave me. Someone who can live without me, whether they want to or not. But that kind of person doesn't exist... I'm too awesome. Who wouldn't care about me?"

"..."

"Am I wrong? Everyone wants me."

I pounded my chest because I choked. It's both funny and pitiful.

How can someone be this self-deprecating? I slung my arm around his neck as we walked. He grumbled, telling me to stop before people thought I was his wife. But seriously, Jetana...

"Dude! It's Gump!"

"Isn't that Moo? Damn, he looks fine as hell with that buzz cut."

"The only guy who can pull off a buzz cut. Usually, people just look like eels."

"Including you?"

"Me too. My face isn't sharp enough." He laughed out loud. Speaking of which, where's Pae? He hasn't called. Probably arguing with his girlfriend again. She's a bit clingy.

"So, where did you leave Fluffy? Who wouldn't want to come to this event?"

"With Qin's literature friends. School friends."

"Oh, everyone wants to play with your dog."

"Shit, this guy really showed up."

"Who?"

"Shinta. Qin likes him. Says he has a good vibe."

"Jealous yet? Go stab him with a pencil."

"I can't. He's too damn tall."

"Is he here with his boyfriend? They're holding hands." I looked at the small guy being held close. I don't know how old they are because I don't follow them, but they all seem super grown-up now.

"Dude, he looks so soft when he's with his boyfriend, petting and fussing over him non-stop."

"Yeah, his boyfriend is pretty cute too."

"I'm noting this down to report to Qin later, gotta earn some points."

"Enough already. Sometimes Qin actually gets sulky, and I end up having to coax him for a whole day, you idiot."

"I'm just stirring things up."

"Qin always believes whatever you say, though. I don't get it at all."

I smack the head of the guy laughing like a maniac. Sometimes, all it takes is him dropping a comment during lunch that I complimented a senior's legs when she wore short shorts, and next thing I know, I'm practically begging Qin in our room to talk to me.

If I ever lose him, I'm dead. I really am the guy Jet always says I am—hopelessly in love.

"You gonna eat anything? It's almost 7:30."

"Nah, let's hurry and get to the front so Qin can see me."

"Ugh, sure."

"My boyfriend's cute."

"Can't argue with that. Ever since that day when someone sat on your lap and you went out to clear things up, I've believed it with all my heart."

"Huh? You followed me?"

"Duang, why are you grilling me? I'm just a simple man who loves my country, religion, and the monarchy with all my heart."

I could honestly facepalm at how ridiculously my best friend dodges questions.

"You seriously followed me?"

"Yeah, yeah. I dragged Pae with me, too. Don't just get mad at me."

"Damn it."

"When I saw Qin apologizing to you that day, I knew he's really sweet."

"I'm gonna make you forget about that."

"Jeez, you're so dramatic—possessive much?"

"Can you blame me? Look at him."

I nod toward the stage where the screen behind it shows the band's name and the members who are about to perform. The crowd is screaming like crazy. And when it's Qin's turn, as soon as his serious face appears, people lose their minds.

Why does my boyfriend have to be so popular?

I'm pissed.

"If you're gonna be mad, be mad at yourself for loving him too much."

"That's so unfair."

"I mean, who wouldn't like him? He's the definition of a dream."

"Honestly, every time I wake up next to Qin, I feel like I'm still dreaming."

"Such a show-off, bitch!"

He insults me in English. I don't fully understand it, but from his tone, I know it's definitely not a compliment.

At that moment, my phone buzzes in my pocket. I quickly answer and nudge Jet, telling him I'll be right back. I slip away to a quieter spot, worried Qin won't be able to hear me.

[Duang.]

"Yes, what's up?"

[You.]

"Are you okay? Is everything alright? Do you want me to come over?"

[...Come backstage, I'm waiting.]

"Don't hang up yet. What's wrong? You can tell me."

[...I'm feeling pressured.]

As soon as I hear that, I immediately say okay. Qin always feels like a little kid when it comes to things he's serious about. I speed-walk through the crowd until I reach the back of the stage. The staff guarding the area seem to recognize me, and there he is—waiting for me. He's supposed to go on in just ten minutes.

Oh, my adorable little guy.

"Come here, let me hug you."

"..."

"Come on."

Without a word, he walks into my arms, not caring if anyone's watching us. I press a kiss to the top of his head, murmuring about how amazing he is—how it's okay to mess up, to hit the wrong note, or even to miss a high note. I rock him gently, trying to warm up his cold body with mine.

"Feeling better?"

"Mm."

"Did you use my perfume today?"

He nods. I stroke his cheek, thankful for the dim lighting. Otherwise, we'd definitely be catching everyone's attention.

"I just wanted to feel like you're close to me."

"You keep saying things like that, and I'm gonna grab a chair and sit right next to you on stage."

"You're being dramatic."

"Your hands are freezing. If you play the bass like this, your fingers are gonna fall off."

"Then hold my hand. You should hold my hand."

I feel like I'm melting inside. I tighten my grip on his hand and bring it to my cheek. He quietly complains about the crowd and says that after the concert, he wants to leave right away to avoid people asking for pictures. I nod and promise to find something tasty for us to eat later.

"Do you want to eat anything from the festival? I'll get it for you."

"I want Tokyo pancakes."

"Okay, how many?"

"Ten."

"Whoa, ten?!"

I talk to him like he's a little kid. He smiles because I'm complaining about Jet. Soon enough, I have to let go of his hand because a staff member comes to fetch him. I give him a quick kiss on the head and tell him I'll be watching like always—there's nothing to worry about.

"If you feel bad, look at me."

"Okay."

"Okay, my good boy."

I watch him walk away with the staff until he's out of sight, letting out a sigh because I wish I could take care of everything for him. He's so fragile... It takes me forever to push through the crowd and get back to Jet.

"Here you are, you slut. They're about to start—where'd you go?"

"To find my wife."

"Ugh! I hate you."

"Qin was feeling a bit stressed, so I went to comfort him."

"Why couldn't it be meee that day?!" I shrug, telling him to shut up because Qin's band is taking the stage. He looks amazing as always—if anything, even dreamier because of his lucky necklace that he always wears when performing.

"He's so freaking good."

"Yeah, seriously."

I reply dreamily to Jet. With his longer hair, Qin seems even more ethereal. Besides playing the bass, he also does backing vocals sometimes.

I hear the girl next to me screaming herself hoarse for him.

Should I scream too?

"Is he going to sing next?"

"Yeah, just one song."

"Then what?"

"We're leaving right after. Qin said he doesn't want to meet anyone."

"Makes sense. You should leave too—your face steals my spotlight."

Jet says, turning his attention back to the concert. Not that I'm any different—I answer him, but my eyes never leave Qin.

And then, it happens. Our eyes meet. The girl next to me screams at the top of her lungs, shaking her friend and claiming Qin just smiled at her. I glance

over, amused, but her friend shuts her down with a deadpan voice.

"Girl, he smiled at Duang."

"Where's Duang?"

"Right next to you, duh."

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry!"

"It's fine." I replied to that girl.

I laugh it off. She's not wrong—Qin really did smile at me. Part of me swells with pride that people love him for his music, his voice, for simply being himself. But another part of me? I'm so possessive it drives me insane—I want to keep him locked up where no one else can see him. He's my whole world.

"Qin's going backstage now."

"I'm nervous, man."

"Why?"

"I don't know what song he's gonna sing. He practiced with the next band while we were in class."

"Lowkey hoping he sings for you, huh?"

"He sings for me every night."

"God, I hate you. I wanna cut you off, Duang."

"Tough luck, Jet. You'll never be me."

"Asshole."

He stomps his foot in frustration just as the MC announces the next band and—of course—people lose their minds when Qin's name is mentioned

again. I sigh and shake my head.

Whatever.

It's the last day.

When break starts, I'm taking him back to Bangkok and keeping him all to myself. Ordering delivery for every meal. Just wait and see.

"Hello, everyone! We have a special guest singer joining us today. I'm sure you've all been waiting for him!"

"KYAAAAA!!!"

"QINNNNNN!!!"

"I wanna be your wife!!!"

"He already has a boyfriend! He's taken! My heart's broken too!"

I widen my eyes, clapping a hand over Jet's mouth as he yells at the top of his lungs. I'm not embarrassed—just worried we'll draw too much attention. I'm literally just standing here minding my own business, damn it.

"What? I'm just being a voice for the people."

"Shut up."

"Please give a warm welcome to our special guest singer today!"

I kick Jet as he keeps chanting 'Sing! Sing!' while the crowd erupts into deafening screams. Looking around, I can tell everyone's genuinely excited as Qin steps onto the stage. Up there, he transforms—there's no anxiety, no fear. Just freedom.

We lock eyes again. I smile at him, knowing he'll see it.

He grabs the mic, and the crowd goes wild.

Everyone says he's got an incredible voice and total stage presence—but that's not his dream. His real passion is jazz. He wants to make music for his Mama and Papa, who love jazz more than anything.

That's what he told me.

My sweet, sweet boy.

"This song is for you."

I don't even know who's screaming louder, Jet or the girls around us. He's hitting me non-stop because Qin really means it when he says the song is for me.

My heart is pounding.

Just like it always does.

"There comes a time in a young man's life, he should settle down and find himself a wife... but I'm just fine 'cause I know that you're mine."

And I am his.

Just like the song says.

"Looking back on 2009... when people said that it was raining all the time."

And he's mine.

Qin is mine.

"I see sunshine 'cause I know that you are mine."

We belong to each other.

17 - Us

The morning sunlight filters through the window.

The Christmas party last night, along with the neat whiskey that Papa handed him, left his head feeling heavy. His broad arm swept over the bed, searching for the person he was sure had been lying there all night, but found nothing. Qin had disappeared from the bed, because once he was home, he became that little bird who always woke up early.

Duang opened his heavy eyelids, stretching lazily on a bed that still smelled like Qin. He looked around—past the musical instruments, photography books, and everything that had shaped Qin as he grew up. He smiled widely to himself... it wasn't a dream.

Having Qin...

"Are you awake?"

"You... why did you leave me?"

"Mom called me to make pancakes. You told her last night that you wanted to eat some."

"Really? I was drunk. I only remember you kissing me once before bed—that's it."

"Yeah, that's right. I wanted to try making some for you, so I got up early. Sorry."

Still in his pajamas, Qin pulled Duang up to take a shower. It was another morning where they showered together—nothing more than snuggling in the warm bathtub. The pale-skinned boy got out of the tub first, knowing if he didn't, Duang would keep clinging to him endlessly.

"You're so pale."

"Annoying."

"But you really are."

"Still not used to it?"

Duang watched as Qin, wrapped in a bathrobe, patted his face dry with a small towel and turned back to look at him with a curious expression. While stretching his legs in the tub, Duang answered, "How could I be? I fall in love with you every day."

"Cheesy."

"Someone's blushing—I know it... Hey, why are you walking away?" Duang laughed to himself, finishing his shower, brushing his teeth quickly before stepping out to find Qin standing there, choosing his outfit for the day.

That evening, his parents and Qin's Pa and Ma had planned an important dinner together.

Our relationship kept progressing. Steadily moving forward, never falling behind. It was something that grew when everything was ready, ready for every feeling, every understanding, always supporting each other and never pulling each other down.

Duang thought this relationship was filled with positive energy, and he felt incredibly lucky to have it.

Lucky enough to not want anything more than this.

"What are you looking at?"

More than having Qin...

Having a family who understands...

A smooth life...

And even on bad days, there's always a hand to hold.

"You."

"Hm?"

"My friend likes you."

Duang knew some people still thought this joke wasn't old yet.

Because every time he played this dumb joke, someone couldn't hold back their smile.

He locked eyes with Qin through the large mirror built into the wardrobe. Qin's pale cheeks flushed a bright red. Duang would bet that Qin's heart was racing, and he loved that he could still make him feel like this—just like the first day they talked.

"My name is 'buddy.'"

Duang laughed because Qin's face was bright red. Soon after, he had to dodge a pillow Qin threw at him. They quietly finished dressing, with Qin handing Duang his own shirt to wear. Lately, he enjoyed dressing Duang like a doll.

"Qin, relax. We're just going to have dinner at EmQuartier."

"Wear this. I'll grab the ring for you."

"You're having fun, huh? You really enjoy dressing me up these days."

"Well, you have a nice body."

"We're the same size."

"You're bigger. your legs are longer."

"Good thing your torso is long. You've got a slim waist, I like that. I want to be your boyfriend."

"Aren't you already?"

"You cutieeee!" And Duang knew Qin hated that word—because he glared at him like he was about to punch him. He had picked it up from Jetana, who still hadn't revealed his real name.

And who was still hopelessly single.

"Bangkok's not going to be cold anymore, huh?" Duang grumbled when he spotted a turtleneck in Qin's closet.

"Well, you already got to wear warm clothes when we went to Chiang Mai with Phi Nuea and Phi Prince."

"That trip was insane—we lived like a noble."

"Phi Prince is loaded."

"Can't argue with that. He's so rich I feel like a stray dog next to him."

"He's beyond rich. Come here. I'll roll up your sleeves."

The tall guy walked over to the person, who was technically the same height but looked smaller due to being thinner. Qin carefully rolled up his sleeves, adjusted his clothes, slipped a ring on his finger, and stepped back to admire his work. He always thought Duang looked good every time he wore a shirt.

It was a light blue shirt that fit loosely on Duang. Rolling the sleeves up made it less baggy. He paired it with beige straight-leg trousers and a thin silver ring Qin had bought during a trip to Korea last year but never wore because he thought it didn't suit him. Plain white sneakers completed the look.

A perfect outfit for dinner with the adults.

"Stay still. I'm taking a picture."

"Damn, are you making this a whole collection?"

"Well, it's nice." Duang scrunched his nose and smiled at the camera. Qin had started using Instagram more often, mostly posting on Instagram Stories, but he blocked anyone from sending him teasing messages, even his friends. He said he was too lazy to reply.

"Did you tag me?"

"Of course."

"Wow, I'm so handsome."

"Don't check your hair. Leave it as it is, just a little messy looks better." Duang watched as Qin uploaded the picture and tagged him. The hashtag everyone probably saw almost every day because they were on university break and spent their time wandering around while Qin dressed him up every day.

#DailyLifeWithChiwin

That's what he called it.

And Duang just went along with it.

"What are you wearing?"

"I don't know yet. Want to go eat pancakes first? It'll probably take a while."

"Nope, I want to watch you get dressed."

"You're such a creep," Qin muttered as he took off his bathrobe. Duang almost lost it, good thing Qin was already wearing underwear and boxers... but those pale shoulders with his bite marks?

Absolutely killer.

"What a view."

"Stop being annoying."

"Take your time. I'm loving this."

"Shut up," Qin scolded the shameless pervert. Duang whistled softly while watching Qin hold up three or four shirts against himself, still undecided. Having a fashionable boyfriend had its perks—especially when he only dressed up like this around Duang.

It was a delightful sight.

"You."

"Hmm?"

"You've got a hickey on the back of your thigh."

"..."

"Pancakes sound great. I won't bother you anymore. Let's go~~~" Duang heard Qin cursing under his breath as he left—not because he was scared of getting smacked, but because he figured Qin would choose his outfit faster without him around to distract him.

"Fluffy."

"Bark!"

"Where have you been playing? You're covered in grass."

"Duang, Ma can't keep up with your daughter. She ran off to roll in the gardener's cut grass."

"She's gonna get scolded by Pa for sure."

"Come here, Mama will brush it off. Otherwise, Qin will see and you'll lose your treat again."

"Morning, Ma."

"It's already late, son. But good morning. Pa went out for breakfast with his friends. We'll meet at EmQuartier this afternoon, okay? Can you drive me there?"

"Of course, no problem."

"And what's Qin doing? Go tell him to come down and eat pancakes."

"Getting dressed. He's also picking out clothes for me."

"Spends money like his dad. That boy's got four closets already."

Duang laughed. Hearing stories about Qin from his mom always made him smile—just like how Qin always smiled when his mom talked about him.

"I'll check on the kitchen for a bit."

"Okay, I'll take Fluffy to eat."

"Such a good boy."

Duang got a kiss on the cheek from Qin's mom before lifting Fluffy, who had grown much bigger, into his arms. Her little ears twitched as if she knew it was mealtime.

"Fluffy."

"Yip..."

"What mischief were you up to?"

Busted.

Duang had only just started brushing the grass off Fluffy when Qin came downstairs, wearing a turtleneck that matched Duang's outfit. He really shouldn't have mentioned the cold—of course, Qin had to go all out.

"Don't scold her."

"Get down, Fluffy."

"Qin, don't be mean to her."

"Fluffy?" Duang reluctantly set Fluffy down. She sat quietly, whimpering softly under Qin's stern gaze and pointing finger. These dogs really understood everything—seriously, she was a pro at the puppy-dog eyes. And it didn't help that Duang could never say no to Qin either.

"Should you lose your treat today?"

"Bark!"

"No? Is that what you're saying?"

Duang sneakily recorded a video of Qin talking to their dog like she could answer him. One moment he was scolding her, the next he was giving her kisses and brushing the grass off. When Qin turned to give him a sharp look, Duang nearly dropped his phone.

He was in deeper trouble than Fluffy.

"Don't post that."

"Come on, my boyfriend is cute. I gotta show off."

"You always look grumpy when I take photos."

"Not true, I'm super cute!" Duang plopped down beside Qin after they finished feeding Fluffy. In the end, the puppy didn't lose her meal—of course not, she was Papa's beloved. That scolding was just for show.

"See? Look at this."

"I'm only cute in your eyes."

"If that's the case, then good! I still haven't settled the matter about that night at the bar when someone asked for your LINE."

"I didn't give it to them. I even told them I already have a boyfriend."

"I don't know... I'm keeping count of everything."

"You're so sneaky."

"I'm just paying you back for making me so jealous all the time."

"I didn't even do anything!"

"Ohhh, are you trying to say you're naturally super cute?"

"You're the one saying all this." The tall guy pressed his nose against Qin's soft hair, glancing left and right to make sure no one was around before stealing a quick kiss on his cheek and wrapping his arms around him from behind. Duang rested his chin on Qin's shoulder, the scent of his cologne making Duang's heart race.

Honestly, everything about Qin did.

It was strange, Duang knew he wasn't the best, yet somehow, he still got the best person in the world.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing."

"We've been together for ages. You think I don't know when you're lying?"

"It's just... I'm so ordinary, and you're the best. How did I end up with you? I feel lucky—but also like a total cheater."

"I already told you, Qin is special because you love me."

"..."

"And even if you really were just ordinary, I never wanted the best anyway."

It was a love confession without the word

love

.

Duang tightened his embrace, pressing a soft kiss on Qin's shoulder as the next words fell softly into the air.

"Just being you is enough. I don't want anything else."

"Same here."

It was another bright morning.

Simple.

But never the same.

"I don't want anything else in this world either, because I already have you."

Ordinary, but still the most special thing for the two of them.

And it would always be that way.

Hiii! We've reached the end of

Thank you for sticking around until now. But don't worry, the story isn't over yet! There will be 4 special chapters coming your way soon. Stay tuned! 

File01 - Chiang Mai for Lovers

"Hello, Phi Prince."

"Hello, give me your bag, and I'll have someone carry it to the car."

I nod and hand over the single rolling suitcase we brought. It's not too big, and inside are both my clothes and Qin's, mixed together as always since he already planned my outfits. I turn to look at Qin, who stands nearby rubbing his eyes.

Last night, he stayed up late working on music for a senior. We took an early flight from Don Mueang at 8:30 a.m., arriving in Chiang Mai around 10 a.m. He slept the whole way, using my shoulder to the fullest, but he still looks far from fully awake.

"You okay, kiddo?"

"Sleepy," Qin says softly, still groggy. He shuffles over and rests his forehead on my shoulder. I hold his waist loosely, afraid he'll topple over backward. Phi Prince keeps glancing at me teasingly, and all I can do is smile sheepishly.

It's not my fault—he's really pale.

Yeah, I'm totally weak for that.

"Nonggggg... Oh— ._."

It's Phi Dao Nuea, suddenly appearing from who-knows-where with a cup of iced chocolate. Behind him stands a tall, expressionless guy I don't know. They're both wearing matching glasses and shoes—no need to guess, clearly a couple.

But where's Phi Khua Fah?

"Phi Fah is waiting at home. He's helping my mom cook."

"Oh, I see."

Damn.

Can these people read minds or something? Both Phi Khua Fah and his boyfriend?

Or maybe I'm just that easy to read.

"What's wrong, kiddo? Sleepy?"

"Hello, Phi Dao Nuea... Hello, Phi Prince ."

"Phi Nuea will hug Nong Qin like this."

I watch as he acts like he's about to scoop Qin up in his arms. His small hands keep shaking Qin's arm non-stop. My boyfriend tries to respond, but his brain is barely functioning. I'm standing there, while Phi Dao Nuea wants to play, and Qin's mind is already in bed.

"Dao Nuea, stop bothering him."

"Why are you scolding me, Klueen?"

"Dao Nuea."

"Why are you scolding meeee?" He turns to shake his boyfriend's arm instead. I swear he's supposed to be four years older than me... My head's starting to hurt.

Before they can keep bickering, Phi Prince tells us to get in the car so Qin can finally get some rest after breakfast.

The pale one stumbles along behind me. I hold his hand tighter and ask now and then if he's okay.

"Did you mess with my younger brother last night?"

"No, I didn't."

"Can I trust that?" Phi Dao Nuea narrows his eyes suspiciously at me. He looks like a mischievous kid learning to talk. He keeps asking the same thing until his boyfriend drags him to the back seat and makes him sit still. I even catch them sneaking a kiss.

Damn.

Shameless as hell.

"Qin."

"Hm?"

"Do you want to nap on my lap? Phi Prince said it's a long ride."

"Mm, thanks."

He settles down, adjusting himself until he finds a comfortable spot. By the way, this van is super fancy. totally fitting for the kind of people Phi Prince hangs out with.

I hear Phi Prince speaking in a sweet Northern dialect with the driver. If he and Phi Khua Fah ever stand together, I swear I'm taking a picture. I need to prove to Jet that these kinds of ridiculously good-looking people actually exist.

I absentmindedly stroke Qin's hair while watching the scenery outside. We've barely left the airport, but buildings and houses already stretch along the road. In the background, Phi Dao Nuea is bragging about how this is his fifth trip to Chiang Mai this year—sometimes alone, sometimes with Phi Fah, but mostly with Phi Kab Kluen.

I'll have to ask later what 'Kab Kluen' even means.

"Duang, do you want to go to the Night Safari?"

"..."

"You wanna go, right?"

"Uh..."

"Let's go, okay?"

I can't resist his puppy-like face and sweet voice, so I nod even though I already went to the Night Safari as a kid.

"Duang."

"Yes, Phi?"

"Your hair color looks just like mine when I was a kid. Is it natural?"

"Yeah... Whoa, Phi, you really do look like a baby."

"Of course! Baby face!" He strikes a pose with two fingers like he's in a commercial. I'm genuinely impressed by how someone can be this radiant. But honestly, I prefer Qin—calm, a bit confused, and only cute for me.

"Klueen, talk to the kid a bit."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Just ask the usual stuff."

"His name is Duang—I already know that. What else should I ask?"

"What's with you?"

"What's with you, Dao Nuea? Sit properly."

And with that, the couple in the back starts bickering again over why Phi Klueen always scolds him. Meanwhile, Qin falls asleep on my lap. The next thing I know, I wake up when Phi Dao Nuea flops his head onto mine, sliding his hand into my hair and giving it a playful tug.

"Dao Nuea."

"Heh-heh, I'm going nowww." I watch his back disappear quickly after being scolded by his boyfriend.

"Sorry about Dao Nuea . He's just a bit excited."

"It's okay, Phi."

"Alright, if you need anything, just let me know."

"Thank you. I'll wake Qin up and follow you inside."

He nods before walking after Phi Dao Nuea , who has already dashed off somewhere. If I were his boyfriend, I would probably have a constant headache—it's like dating a kindergarten kid, seriously.

"Qin... We're here."

I gently touch the cheek of the person sleeping on my lap. He stirs sleepily, clutching the hem of my T-shirt tightly and burying his face against my thigh like a clingy cat. I help him sit up properly, telling him that he needs to wake up and have some breakfast since the elders have been preparing it since morning. After that, he can go back to sleep—no harm done.

"Get yourself together."

"No."

"Qin, don't be fussy, okay? I'll let you sleep afterward."

"No."

Here we go.

The automatic mode I like to call 'Ultimate Hug Magnet' is now activated. And at the same time, he is so bratty it makes me want to punish him until he cries. Just look at that pouty, stubborn face saying 'no' to everything I suggest—this is it.

"Qin, don't be stubborn."

"No."

"Okay, Duang won't listen anymore. You really want it to go that way, huh?"

"No."

I take a deep breath.

Endure.

I must endure.

"You're really not going to stop being stubborn, are you?"

"Mmm... Uh."

Yeah, like I can endure that.

I press my lips against his in a hard kiss, even giving him a light bite because he's just too much right now. Qin whines, trying to hit my chest weakly, but in the end, he can't resist me. I kiss him until he goes all soft, and finally, he lets me hold him quietly. I place a final kiss on his forehead—he always gets clingy when he's sleepy—but I don't want the elders to think poorly of him for skipping breakfast to go straight to bed.

"Eat breakfast first. ten bites, and Duang will let you sleep. Okay?"

"Mm, fine."

"Good boy. Come on, let's wash your face."

"I'm so sleepy..."

"I know, my smart boy." With him in this state, you have to be gentle and patient. If he really doesn't cooperate, only then do I scold him. Trust me, once he goes to sleep, he'll forget all about this morning. He might even be confused about how he ended up in Chiang Mai.

We greet Phi Prince's mother. She wears a cotton dress, her hair is tied in a bun, and she wears simple jewelry. But the way she speaks, eats, and moves makes me realize—this is not an ordinary woman. She's up there. Just like Phi Prince, who is currently scolding Phi Khua Fah for drinking two cups of black coffee this morning.

"Don't you think that's too much?"

"Bae, it was just two cups. Just two cups."

Phi Prince switches to English, practically spitting fire at Phi Khua Fah. I don't understand a word, so I just swallow hard in sympathy for Qin's cousin, who is already being dragged by the ear in front of everyone.

The cool image he had when we first met? Gone without a trace.

"Prince, you're so done for."

"Watch your words."

"Phi Fah won't let you off easy."

"I'm not listening anymore. Eat your breakfast."

"Nongggggg." In the middle of the war between two absurdly good-looking men, Phi Dao Nuea squeezes himself onto the long bench between me and Qin. He settles in with a bowl of rice porridge, which is obviously loaded with extra toppings that he must've charmed the kitchen staff into giving him.

"Let me feed you, okay?"

"I can eat by myself, Phi."

"No way, no way. You're so tinyyy." He gestures with his hands, estimating Qin's height as if he's only about three centimeters tall. In the end, I sit quietly while my boyfriend clumsily opens his mouth to accept spoonfuls of porridge.

"Is it good? I made it myself."

"You're such a show-off."

"Why are you always picking on me, Phi Fah?"

Round two of the sibling war erupts. I chew on a piece of Chinese donut, listening to the back-and-forth banter while Phi Dao Nuea 's boyfriend sits calmly—clearly used to this chaos.

I've been observing for a while, Phi Dao Nuea only refers to himself as 'Dao' when talking to his brother. It's kind of cute, honestly.

"Are we at ten bites yet, Duang?"

"Not yet. Two more."

"I can't do it anymore," Qin mumbles, burying his face against my neck. When Phi Dao Nuea sees this, he widens his eyes and makes a dramatic throat-slitting gesture to me, warning that I'm doomed once Qin is fully awake.

He's a little menace, seriously.

"I see you, Dao Nuea ."

"Kluen!"

"They're dating. Let them be."

"I can't get over it. Qin is just this small," he gestured with his hands again. I chuckled softly before telling everyone that Qin really couldn't take it anymore—his battery was so low it couldn't get any lower. The others understood and told the housekeeper to lead Qin and me to the bedroom.

"Rest comfortably."

"Oh, thank you," I said, understanding enough to raise my hands in a wai to thank the housekeeper who guided us to our destination. Honestly, seeing

just one side of Phi Prince's house was already impressive. Calling it a mansion would be an understatement. A palace? No way, but it was massive and incredibly ornate.

I overheard during dinner that this wasn't the house he grew up in, it was only recently built.

"Duang, I can't take off my shirt."

"Oh, you," I looked at him fondly. Qin hadn't even unbuttoned his shirt before trying to take it off. So, I had to help him change into his pajamas. I tucked him into bed, and he fell into a deep sleep. Seeing how exhausted he looked made me feel sorry for him. I pressed a soft kiss to his cheek, carefully slid my arm out from under him, and replaced it with a pillow for him to rest on.

"Sweet dreams."

I got up because I wasn't that sleepy yet. I leave Qin to sleep as I planned to help the others clean up after dinner. Just coming here was already such a burden on them. But before I could even step out of the dining room, Phi Dao Nuea, realizing Qin wasn't there, shouted my name at the top of his lungs while pointing a knife at me.

"Duang!!"

"Yes, Phi..."

"Come here and get interrogated—now!"

Sigh... here we go.

Qin blinked several times, waking up in an unfamiliar room. The only memory he could clearly recall was Duang kissing him goodnight. After thinking for a bit, he realized he'd been to this house before. The next thing he heard, after listening to the unfamiliar birds chirping outside the window, was the lively chatter of his relatives.

His feet touched the cold floor as he walked over to put on his slippers. He cracked the door open slightly and found everyone fiercely playing Mario Kart in the living room.

"Duanggg, did you ever really love me?"

"No, Phi, see! You took that hit straight on!"

"Who throws a turtle shell like that? What kind of heart do you have?"

"Dao Nuea, sit properly."

"Hey, have you seen my bookmark?"

Qin's arrival didn't catch much attention, probably because he didn't say anything. He just stood quietly, watching the Mario characters battling it out on screen.

It was Duang's favorite game.

"Phi! Don't leave my character behind!"

"Dao Nuea, you're cheating. Why are you bullying the kid?"

"What, what, what?"

Qin felt cold. That was the sensation that lingered... So, his legs carried him to the person leaning against the sofa while the others sat around. Qin plopped down on Duang's lap, nuzzled into his warm neck, and dozed off again.

"..."

Everything fell silent as the others witnessed a side of the youngest cousin they had never seen before. Prince clicked his tongue in approval while Khua Fah, annoyed by his boyfriend's teasing nature, pulled the other's cheek until it stretched.

"Nong..."

At that exact moment—when Duang was so startled that he dropped the game controller—Dao Nuea should've won the game, but he dropped his controller too. The struggles of being an older sibling.

No wonder Phi Fah was so protective.

My precious little brother (T^T)

"Qin, what's wrong?"

"Woke up and you weren't there."

"Okay... I'm sorry, Qin. I just came to help the others and got distracted by the game. I didn't think you'd wake up so soon," Duang apologized while tightening his warm arms around Qin's slender frame. Everyone watched the clingy display with fondness. Usually, Qin didn't act like the youngest at all. When they met, he was quiet and only spoke when spoken to. No one had ever thought he'd have a significant other. It didn't seem like something he was interested in. But they were sure he understood love.

Seeing this side of him—snuggling and clinging to Duang—was unexpectedly adorable.

"My heart is melting."

"I finally get Phi Fah now. I wanna cry."

"Why do cats get so clingy when they're sleepy?" Khua Fah grumbled, ruffling Prince's hair as he sat reading an English book, lost in his own world as usual.

This one was cute in his own way, too. He even spared a smile despite probably not hearing a word of the conversation. Otherwise, he'd definitely retaliate—no way would he admit to being like a cat.

"Do you want Duang to take you back to bed? Your back might hurt sitting like this."

"No, I'm fine."

Duang pressed a kiss to Qin's soft hair while Qin wrapped his arms around Duang's neck. Once he felt warm enough, he finally woke up fully and noticed the teasing gazes from the others. Realizing he had clung onto Duang in front of everyone, he slowly loosened his grip.

Oops... I acted all clingy in front of them.

"Why won't you cuddle me like that, huh?" Dao Nuea pouted.

"Qin is big now."

"You're still this small," he gestured again, motioning for Qin to come over and hug him too. Kab Klueen sighed, Dao Nuea was such a doting older brother. He only had one little brother his whole life, and even though they rarely saw each other, he never stopped doting. Before this trip, Dao Nuea had been stubborn until Kab Klueen threatened not to bring him to see Qin, only then did he behave.

He loved his little brother to bits.

But Qin really was like a cat... and Dao Nuea was just another cat slave.

"Are you hungry, Nong Qin? Do you want to eat anything? Phi will get it for you."

"It's okay."

"Did you sleep well? Phi secretly checked on you—Nong Qin was sleeping soundly."

"Yes, Phi Prince's house is as comfortable as always."

"Really? That's great."

Qin got his cheek stroked. Seriously, who wouldn't have their heart race when they see that smile from Phi Khua Fah's boyfriend? That guy's sex appeal is insanely high—he looks seductive even when fully dressed. No wonder Phi Khua Fah kept softly stroking the other person like that.

"Is it too high?"

"High?"

Qin pretended not to notice that Phi Khua Fah's hand teasingly moved even higher. Honestly, they're the most shameless couple in the world—

really

the most. Like last New Year, when we celebrated at Phi Khua Fah's condo. When everyone was tipsy in the living room and about to watch a movie, he volunteered to heat up some popcorn. Turns out, we caught them having a love scene in the kitchen.

Actually, it should be called a

make-love

scene.

"So, how is it, Duang! Got a taste of my boyfriend?"

"Dao Nuea, you're gonna fall off the couch. Be careful."

"Phi Klue is such a beast! I can't keep up with him. Seriously." Duang huffed. Why do these quiet types always have some hidden talent? And yeah, he was a bit surprised to learn that both Phi Dao Nuea and Phi Klue were the faculty's heartthrobs. Hearing about their long-lasting love story since high school made his relationship with Qin feel so ordinary.

Well, it

is

ordinary, but he really loves that about it.

"What should I do?"

"Duang, save your boost. Phi Kluen will drop to second place soon because the bot will push him down."

"This is stressful. I've been winning until Phi Kluen joined."

"Calm down."

"Come on, Kluen. Go easy on the kid," Phi Khua Fah complained.

"I don't know how to lose."

"Oh, give me a break."

Hearing that from someone who's usually expressionless (except when he's with Dao Nuea) was almost too much. As the oldest one there, he scanned the room. Seeing the family he grew up with always made his exhaustion disappear.

"What are you smiling at?"

"Are you secretly watching?"

"I'm not sneaking a look."

"I just wanna pinch you."

"Well, I'm not sneaking—I'm just looking openly."

Khua Fah listened closely, curious about what his adorable boyfriend would say next.

"Because you're mine. I can look at you however I want."

And that answer made him grab Prince by the neck and kiss him. Who told him to be so irresistibly cute? He couldn't help it.

"Phi Fah!!!"

"..."

"Don't look."

"What's going on, Qin? What's happening?" Duang, whose eyes were now covered, shouted in confusion. Not only could he no longer play his game, but he was also dying to know what all the commotion was about.

"Dao is going to tell Dad! Tonight, I'm going to dream and tell

Otousan

what kind of person you are, Phi Fah!"

What even is this T_T

"Phi Fah! A giraffe~~"

"Yeah, yeah... Dao Nuea, I told you not to run."

There he goes. I watched the kind-hearted older brother chase after his younger brother like he was wrangling a kid on his first zoo trip. Phi Dao Nuea's boyfriend seemed resigned to it all, just watching quietly. When Phi Khua Fah finally caught his boyfriend, he simply turned back to discuss global economics with Phi Prince.

I've figured it out—Phi Khua Fah speaks politely with 'ka' and 'kha' when talking to his boyfriend (He used to speak like this with everyone—Phi Dao Nuea told me so—but after getting a boyfriend, he softened up right away. He's more scared of Phi Prince than his mom... Honestly, hearing that made me feel a bit shaken. When it comes to being scared of my boyfriend, I'm no different. T_T).

Meanwhile, Phi Prince calls Phi Khua Fah 'Khun' (a formal 'you') and looks annoyed every time he gets called 'Nong.' And seriously, these two kiss

a lot

. I've caught myself staring wide-eyed so many times that Qin pinched me and told me to mind my own business.

Phi Klue and Phi Dao Nuea refer to themselves by name with each other, though sometimes they use their real names. They're an age-appropriate couple. Occasionally, Phi Dao Nuea gets clingy, acting like a grade-schooler.

As for Phi Dao Nuea and Phi Prince, their dynamic feels like they're dating all over again. It's wild. Phi Prince seems much more mature, even though they're the same age. They're constantly cuddling, and I can't think innocent thoughts for even a second. Meanwhile, Phi Klue and Phi Prince speak casually, using 'gu' and 'mueng' like regular friends. I heard they've been close for a long time, even before Phi Khua Fah started dating Phi Prince.

This whole group is ridiculously interconnected.

"Do you like giraffes?"

"Duang likes lions."

"Me too... They have some here, but they're kinda skinny. I don't really like going to zoos, feels bad for the animals. But we come sometimes so the zoo can earn money to buy better food for them."

I smiled softly and patted Qin's head as he finally woke up fully. He was wearing a plain T-shirt, loose jeans, and flip-flops. Such a lazy-day outfit. He clearly didn't feel like dressing up.

"Nonggg kabbb"

"Yes."

I couldn't help but laugh at how Qin, despite Phi Dao Nuea's bright and playful tone, still responded in his usual calm voice. I know he's not annoyed, he actually likes Phi Dao Nuea. Otherwise, he wouldn't let him drag him around like this. Watching him feed long beans to the giraffe right now? It's adorable.

"Hey, hey, stay back."

"You wanted to see it, didn't you? Should Phi Fah hold you in place and let the giraffe lick your face?"

"Nooo! Please, Kluen. Phi Fah is so mean!"

"Hang on, I'm talking to Prince."

"Duang! Help me!"

I stood there laughing. I wasn't going to help. With how stubborn he was, he deserved a little teasing. In the end, he screamed when the giraffe stuck out its long tongue, and Phi Khua Fah laughed so hard but still pushed his little brother away when the giraffe got too close.

I watched the older brother hugging and comforting his younger brother, and I couldn't help but think of my own brother.

Would someone like him ever comfort me? If there were a tiger in front of us, he'd probably use me as bait and run away himself. Seriously, that guy tormented me in every possible way when I was a kid.

"Thinking about Phi Nan?"

"Yeah, he messed with me all the time."

"Phi Nan once told me that he made you hit your head and then told you not to tell Mom that he did it. If you didn't tell, he'd give you a Gundam."

"Well, I wanted it, so I told Mom I rode my bike too fast."

"Do you think Mom believed you? She knew, obviously."

"What about you? Did your brothers ever mess with you?"

"Heh, all the time. But I'm not the type to whine about it."

"Really?" I teased. He flipped me off before walking over to hold Phi Dao Nuea's hand as they actually went to buy tickets for the Night Safari. Honestly, the place hadn't changed much from my memories. I remembered there were two sides to explore, if you came in the evening like us, you could see both the day-active animals and the nocturnal ones.

"Duang, want some ice cream? Phi Dao Nuea will treat you."

"It's Kluen's wallet, though."

"Same thing, same thing."

"How do you even eat to get it all the way over there?"

"I swear I'm careful! Why does Khun Monrut always have to wipe it off for me?"

And there they go, being all lovey-dovey right in front of me again. I walked over to the ice cream cart while Qin stood by with money in hand, waiting to pay for me. After picking our ice creams, we went to wait for the tram tour to see the daytime animals. I let Qin sit on the outer seat because he said he wanted to touch the animals in the petting zone when the staff gave permission.

Me? I wasn't touching anything. I was scared. T_T

"Are you scared?"

"Yeah, Phi. When I was a kid, a monkey almost bit my hand," I laughed awkwardly. Phi Prince gave me a sympathetic look before saying we should just let the brave ones do the touching. Naturally, Phi Dao Nuea will practically climbing onto the roof of the tram if his boyfriend hadn't been holding him down.

"Have you been with Qin for a long time?" Phi Prince asked. "Is it okay if I keep using 'kha'? I'm used to it with younger ones."

"It's fine. It suits you," I replied, avoiding eye contact for too long. He was just

too

bright,

too

handsome—everything about him was dazzling. I was afraid his boyfriend might punch me, and even more afraid Qin would pinch me later.

"We've been together for a while, but we've been talking for almost a year now."

"That's nice. You made the first move, right? Qin doesn't seem like the type to approach anyone first."

"Yeah, I had to muster up a ton of courage."

"I know. He looks like a dream come true, right?"

Phi Prince nodded toward Qin, who was softly smiling as he watched a large herd of deer. When the staff said we could touch them—but only gently on the middle of their heads, not their antlers—Qin calmly followed the instructions.

So. Damn. Cute.

Seeing him like this made me want to buy a deer and take it home. But I didn't want to make Fluffy jealous, so I held back.

"Do you want to touch one?"

"No, I'm feeling good on my own."

"What a naughty boy here, hmm?"

I sat up straight because the couple beside me was starting to get cozy again—not too much, though.

There were kids and parents everywhere.

"Duang."

"Yes."

"Wanna try feeding them?"

"No way! It'll bite me for sure."

"Relax," Qin said, guiding my hand to hold the carrot properly. I stared wide-eyed at the deer aggressively chomping down on the carrot and yanked my hand back immediately, making Qin chuckle softly.

"Scaredy-cat."

"Hey, I've got a partner and a family to take care of. I value my life, okay?"

"Good, good, Duang," he teased.

"A partner and kid," I corrected.

"Mmm." Qin gave me a playful but stern look.

And right before the tram started moving again, Phi Dao Nuea, who's sitting behind me, raised his hand for help. We all widened our eyes as he sheepishly explained to the staff.

"Phi, my phone was stolen by a deer."

"..."

"I'm serious! I was about to take a picture, but the deer took my phone and ran off ._."

I laughed so hard my nose flared. Qin pinched my waist to stop me because Phi Dao Nuea genuinely looked distressed. Meanwhile, his boyfriend scolded him for not holding onto it properly. Phi Khua Fah shook his head in exasperation, saying they'd just buy a new one. But Phi Prince was arguing fiercely that they had to get it back, because no deer should be walking around with a phone!

Seriously, what kind of trip was this?

So freaking funny.

LOL.

File02 - You're Not Back Yet, Duang?

[Hello... Mmm, better not say.]

"You idiot, what's wrong with you?"

[You're not back yet, Duang?! I'm serious, why are you staying there for a whole week? What's so great about Chiang Mai? Just admit it already!]

"Oh, I forgot to send you a picture of Phi Prince. Here, check Line—I sent it to everyone. I brought my camera, so I took a bunch of photos for them to post on IG."

[Who's Phi Prince again? I forgot. There are too many people. There are like six people on this trip, right?]

"Yeah, Phi Prince is Phi Khua Fah's boyfriend, Qin's relative. Phi Khua Fah is Phi Dao Nuea 's older brother."

[Hold on, I'm putting my AirPods in... holy shit.]

Duang chuckled softly as the read receipt popped up on Line, and right after that, Jetana started screaming incoherently upon seeing the pictures of Phi Prince , Phi Khua Fah, Phi Klue, and Phi Dao Nuea in that order.

[I'm leaving

right now

. I'm gonna run myself to the airport.]

"Calm down, dude."

[Jetana never backs down. I'm meeting you in Chiang Mai.]

"You just wanna come after seeing their faces, huh?"

[Let me ask you seriously, Duang. Are people like this even real? They're
so

hot, and they're all couples?! Just thinking about it is too much. I'm dying.]

"You're so gross, idiot."

[When are you coming back? I wanna go see the lights at CentralWorld.]

"I'll come back when you get a girlfriend."

[You bastard. Just move your house registration there already. You're never coming back to Nakhon Pathom again.]

Jetana kept grumbling, complaining that everyone needed to stop pressuring him about getting a girlfriend. If it were meant to happen, it would. but it probably wouldn't.

Why, you ask?

[I'm a warrior, not a lover.]

"I'm a warrior, not a lover."

[How did you know I was gonna say that?!]

"Who wouldn't know? You say it all the time."

"Duang, Phi Prince asked me to call you. Come try the ribs he marinated."

[Khun Qin!!!]

"I heard Jetana. You're talking to him?" Qin asked, hearing Jetana's voice loud and clear through the phone. No doubt the guy was yelling as usual.

[Duang, let me talk to Khun Qin! Please, please!]

"No way."

"Give it to me."

Duang clenched his fists.

He wasn't scared of his boyfriend. he just handed the phone over immediately.

Heh...

"What's up, Jetana?"

[Waaah, I miss you so much!]

"Really? ...Where are you? Bangkok or Nakhon Pathom?"

[I'm always in your heart.]

"Seriously?"

At that point, Duang completely lost track of the conversation because they started spitting English back and forth like a firestorm. Just like when Qin talked to Phi Prince . As mentioned before, Qin's parents had studied abroad and had always tried to speak English with him since he was a kid, so he grew up fully bilingual.

His boyfriend really was raised well.

"Duang, try this for me."

"Sure. whoa, it smells amazing."

"I'm not confident in the taste, though."

Duang stood there, tasting the marinated ribs made by the household's master chef. They seriously took care of everything. Now he truly believed they were loaded—who even owns this many houses? Some properties

were just for growing flowers, raising horses, or having riverside picnics for fun.

Please...

I'm begging you...

"It's delicious, Phi. Seriously the best I've ever had."

"Phew, I was worried the kids wouldn't like it."

"It's honestly the best I've ever eaten."

Duang complimented with a smile, and Phi Prince beamed back.

"Qin, Duang said it's delicious. Aren't I amazing?"

"You're amazing, Phi."

"Now, can you go find Klue and Nuea for me? They're probably by the pool."

"What about Phi Khua Fah?"

"I'll go wake him up myself. He's probably napping upstairs."

Duang and Qin nodded as Phi Prince headed upstairs to get his boyfriend. Duang pulled Qin into a hug when he handed the phone back. Suddenly, he just wanted to hold him tight.

"What's with the clinginess, hmm?"

"No, I just want to hug you."

"We hugged all night last night."

"It's never enough with you."

"Mmm... I miss Fluffy."

"Same here. No matter how much we FaceTime, it's not the same as getting to sniff like this." The tall guy pressed his nose against the other's cheek and held it there. Qin didn't pull away since there was no one around. Honestly, after that day when he got all clingy because he was sleepy, he hadn't done anything too bold in front of the others again.

He admitted it, he was shy.

Not like Phi Fah and Phi Prince, who are sneaking kisses everywhere.

"Let's go find the others."

"Okay."

"Wanna go for a drive today?" Qin asked as they walked toward the swimming pool. Prince's house was pretty big. At first, even he was confused—so many rooms everywhere.

"Sure! Duang wants to go somewhere more local."

"Then let's take the motorbike. I saw the housekeeper has one."

"Duang can't drive, though. What do we do?"

"I wasn't gonna make you drive. I'll take you instead."

"I'm gonna hold on tight to your waist, okay?" Duang said cheerfully.

"I'm begging you." Qin laughed softly, following behind Duang, who was being a tease all the way to the pool. When they arrived, Dao Nuea and Kab Kluen were there, heads down doing something until they almost dunked themselves in the water.

"Nongggg."

"What are you guys doing? Phi Prince asked me to call you for lunch."

"Playing 'Where's Waldo?' Remember, Qin? We used to play it when we were kids."

"The one where you find the guy with glasses?"

"Yeah! Come join us. Prince won't come down anytime soon if he has to wake Phi Fah." Dao Nuea scrunched his nose, thinking about his troublemaker of a brother. He definitely won't let him come down easily.

"Phi Kluen, you okay? You seem out of it."

"A little. Dao made me play. My eyes hurt from all the searching. It keeps getting harder."

Duang laughed because Kluen really did look tired but was still humoring his boyfriend anyway.

The four of them sat huddled together by the pool, agreeing that the loser would have to wake up early to cook breakfast for everyone tomorrow.

"I really can't find him. Kluen, did you?"

"Not yet. But I'll definitely find him before Dao."

"Wow, that's some trash talk."

"Phi, I think I found him."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. I have eagle eyes."

Duang was giving it his all. No way was he letting Qin wake up early to cook. Besides, he was pretty good at these 'spot the difference' or 'find the hidden object' games. Every time he played with Hia Nan, he never lost.

"Here he is, Phi."

"Whoa! You're right!"

"Good job." Qin smiled softly and tugged gently on his boyfriend's ear in praise.

Dao Nuea, who was desperate to win, flipped to the next page with a determined face. It really did keep getting harder. The images became so detailed that finding the man in glasses and a red hat was almost impossible.

"Found him."

"Whoa! Kluen, are you gonna lose to the kids?"

"Three out of four. Chill." Kab Kluen wrapped his arm around his boyfriend's waist to keep him sitting properly. When Dao Nuea got too excited, his hands and feet would be all over the place. One wrong move and he'd be falling into the pool.

To be fair, Kluen had been playing with Dao Nuea for hours before the others joined, and his eyes were already strained.

"Duang, cut us some slack, will you?"

"No way, Phi. My boyfriend doesn't like waking up early."

"He's doing it for love." Dao Nuea teased.

"Of course. Plus, I want to try the breakfast you guys make."

"Kluen's a good cook, really."

"Then I'm definitely winning because... I found him. End game." Duang clicked his tongue and pointed at Waldo triumphantly.

"Whaaaat!?"

"Heehee."

Kab Kluen chuckled softly and shook his head. Sharp eyes, no doubt. But honestly, the reason was cute, he just didn't want his boyfriend to wake up early. If anything, Kluen wanted to lose so that Dao Nuea would finally get up early for once. That guy had been sleeping in all week. So stubborn.

"Let's go eat the ribs. It'll comfort the losers."

"Phi, I'm counting on you."

"What? What!?"

"Tomorrow's breakfast."

"Kluen, let's go buy ingredients this evening. Come on, I'm not gonna lose. Master Chef Dao Nuea~"

Duang smiled to himself as he listened to Dao Nuea babbling while holding onto his boyfriend's arm. The four of them walked to the dining table but didn't see the person who had been so eager to marinate and roast the ribs.

"Phi Fah's at it again!"

"Don't bother them. Let's eat first. Prince will probably take a while."

"This early in the day, Phi?"

"Something like that. It's Phi Fah, after all," Kab Kluen replied to Duang, who still seemed not quite used to that scandalous couple. It would probably take a while because things could get even more obscene.

"Sigh... Let's eat, Nong Qin. I'll feed you, okay?"

"..."

"Ahh~"

And it seemed like Duang still wasn't used to seeing his boyfriend being treated like a five-year-old by someone older who acted like a three-year-old. LOL.

"You're heavy."

"Can you handle it? If I knew we'd tip over like this, I'd have just taken the car," Duang pointed toward the luxury cars parked in the garage. But Qin shook his head and said he could handle it. Duang trusted him but still reminded Qin to drive slowly.

The cool breeze brushing against their faces and flowing past them felt different from their usual outings—it was better. Duang smiled widely, watching Qin focus as he rode. Qin said he'd take him to Ang Kaew and find something delicious to eat around the university.

Actually, Duang once wanted to study fine arts here, but somehow, he ended up in Nakhon Pathom instead. Oh, he just remembered why and couldn't help but smile—because of Qin, of course.

"Did you know? I once wanted to study fine arts here."

"Why didn't you? Didn't pass the exam?"

"I remember my score was enough, but you weren't here, so I didn't come."

"Hopeless romantic," Qin laughed, teasing Duang with a phrase he often used. Talking like this today, Qin felt that sooner or later, something between them might change.

[Qin]

'What's up?'

[What's the difference between liking and being fond of someone?]

He didn't tell Duang about these things—afraid the other would overreact. Some things are better learned slowly, without rushing.

"How do you know your way around the university?"

"I've been here many times. Phi Nuea likes to bring me. When I come with friends, they like to come here too."

"What do they do here?"

"Chill, check out girls, take photos."

"Check out girls, huh?" Duang huffed.

"Sometimes."

"Oh, come on. Seriously."

"Always so dramatic."

"I'd punch any girl you look at."

"And not punch Qin? Qin's the one looking."

"My boyfriend can do no wrong," Duang declared. Qin shook his head at how indulgent Duang was. Sometimes, he wished Duang would be more selfish, but Duang always said that his happiness came from spoiling Qin, not from being spoiled.

Qin parked the motorbike in the designated area, and when Duang saw the view of Ang Kaew, he gasped in amazement. It seemed to be his first time here. Honestly, it would've been nice to have brought some beer to enjoy, but that probably wasn't allowed on campus.

"The weather is so nice. I'm glad we came in December."

"Satisfied now? This is the cold weather you wanted," Qin teased.

"It's just cool during the day, but at night, I do get chilly."

"I'll take you for a walk. Over there is the zoo."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You can even hear the animals."

"Good thing I brought my camera. I didn't expect it to be this beautiful. I mainly brought it to take photos of you," Duang grumbled. He hadn't gotten

many pictures of Qin throughout the trip. This roll of film would be just for his boyfriend.

"Why haven't I seen this camera before?"

"..."

"Duang?"

"It's Phi Nan's. I borrowed it."

"You do realize you're a terrible liar, right?"

"Sorry... I bought it before our Chiang Mai trip. Eighteen thousand baht.
T_T"

"Do you have a death wish?"

"Come onnnn."

"You already have too many cameras, Duang."

"Don't be mad. I can make it up to you. I just don't want you to be upset."

"I'm not. If I nag too much, just tell me. Sometimes, I think I worry about you too much," Qin said, making Duang feel guilty. And honestly, Qin was right. When Qin bought clothes, at least they could share them. But Duang's cameras? He already had more than he could use, some just sat there collecting dust.

"If you want to collect them, just tell me. I'll understand."

"Don't be so cute, seriously."

"There are probably more than ten cameras already. Or are you buying them for investment?"

"Here 'she' comes, the business-minded 'girl'."

"Who's the 'she' here?"

"Sorryyy."

Qin rolled his eyes and nudged Duang to follow along, stopping occasionally to let him take photos. Along the way, a lot of people were glancing at Duang while Qin, who wasn't doing much, spent all his time observing.

Duang was the type who didn't realize how good he looked. Maybe not striking enough to turn heads everywhere, but his charm... it was so much that it surprised Qin.

"Qin, come sit casually for me."

"Take a candid shot yourself, I'm not going to sit for you."

"You're so mean. If it were Phi Dao Nuea, he'd be shaking my shoulders, making me take endless shots, and already have angles planned out."

"He has been like this since we were kids" Qin smiled softly as he thought about Phi Dao Nuea.

"No wonder Phi Fah is so possessive. That day when the deer stole his phone, I was dying laughing."

"I thought he wouldn't get it back. Otherwise, Phi Fah would've just dragged him to buy an iPhone 11 on the spot."

"True, he spoils him so much. Phi Klueen is way stricter."

"Not true. Phi Klueen is the real spoiler—but only when they're alone." Qin shared because Duang probably hadn't seen how Kab Klueen acts when it's just the two of them. Qin once stumbled across them by accident, and yeah, Kab Klueen was just a warm, easy-going guy who was soft only for his boyfriend.

"But Phi Prince and Phi Fah though, I can't deal with them. That morning, I got up to drink water and saw Phi Fah making pancakes without a shirt on.

His back was covered with long scratch marks."

"That's nothing. I once saw handcuffs on the sofa when I went to their condo."

"For real?"

"

Daddy kink

."

"Whoa... Want to try it? Come on, call me daddy." The little tease earned him a smack on the head. Deep down, Duang already liked their sex life as it was. It wasn't completely plain, but his tastes didn't go that far. Just the thought of tying Qin up or using toys made his heart ache.

Even now, whenever he accidentally got too rough, he still got mad at himself for not holding back.

"Forgot to tell you, Ma has found a house. We can move in as soon as we get back."

"Wow, Ma works really fast."

"She was going to rent, but since I'll be staying there for years, she decided to just buy it. At this rate, Ma and Pa probably own houses all over Thailand." Qin's tone was light-hearted.

"I'm talking to a rich kid. I keep forgetting. My apologies, Khun Qin."

"Stop teasing me."

"But moving quickly is good. It'll help Fluffy adjust. He's used to your room. Whenever he's in a big space like my parents' house, he just whines." Duang wrinkled his nose.

"I want Fluffy to have a friend, but I also don't want to take care of another pet."

"That's just like you... and just like Fluffy."

Duang glanced over at Qin, who was waiting patiently while he took photos of people strolling and chatting. With the cool breeze, the winter chill, and the sun setting on the horizon—it was all perfect.

"Possessive. Doesn't want anyone else around."

It really was perfect.

I grabbed a beer from the fridge. In this big, empty house, it was just the two of us, cuddled up in the home theater watching our favorite movie instead of hanging out with the others. I heard the friends from Bangkok had arrived and were going to Warm Up. Phi Khua Fah had a mischievous smile when he mentioned it, but I had no clue what kind of history he had with that place.

'Go change right now. Don't even think about leaving the house in that shirt.'

'But it's long-sleeved.'

'It's thin. I can see through everything.'

That conversation between Phi Khua Fah and Phi Prince still played in my head. I can guarantee—super revealing. The whole daddy kink thing I joked about? Probably 100% true.

With an age gap of ten years like that... T_T

"About time, huh?"

I handed a beer to Qin, whispering for him to come down. We sat cuddled together on the wide sofa. I pressed a kiss to his shoulder, where the loose

floral T-shirt he loved wearing to bed hung off him. We had already showered, but we still sat there, sipping beer and watching a movie.

I love days like this, the kind where I don't have to think about any unfinished work.

Just holding him close, finding something to do together...

That's all it takes to make me happy.

"I really like the hero's dad."

"Same here."

We chatted quietly while watching the movie. This was better than any theater. Qin and I talked about everything. If we disagreed, we'd open our minds and try to understand each other's point of view.

"When we move into the new house, should we get one?"

"I've wanted one for a while too."

"Okay, I'll find a store."

I made a mental note to look for a projector. That way, we could watch movies every Friday night, just like the characters in the film. I tightened my arms around him and kissed his soft cheek.

The movie played on until the scene where the hero traveled back in time to court the heroine again and again, until everything fell into place just the way he wanted.

And I thought, I was so damn lucky. I couldn't go back and redo anything, but everything I did led me to have Qin today. Led us to this moment.

Then Qin started crying. It was during the scene where Jim, the main character, traveled back in time to walk along the beach with his father one last time. And when Jim said that line, Qin cried even harder.

I hugged him closer, brushing away his tears with gentle kisses.

"I just try to live every day as if I've deliberately come back to this one day, to enjoy it, as if it was the full final day of my extraordinary, ordinary life."

"Duang is like that."

"Like what?"

He sobs against my chest.

Even crying because of a movie—I still don't want him to cry... I've never wanted him to cry, not even a little.

"My extraordinary, ordinary life."

I smile faintly, tilting my face to kiss him as

How Long Will I Love You

starts playing along with the end credits. I cradle him in my arms, his body pressed close to mine... At what point did a comforting kiss turn into something more intense? I can't figure it out—I only know that if I don't love him tonight, I'll probably go insane.

I pull off Qin's t-shirt. He's very cooperative. I kiss the hollow of his throat, letting my lips trail lower, claiming the peak of his chest while he mutters to himself that he can't believe we're actually doing this in someone else's home theater.

I laugh softly, pressing kisses further down until I reach his pale stomach, unable to resist nipping at it hard enough to leave a mark.

"Every time I watch a movie with you, it always ends like this."

His grumbling voice turned into a moan when I didn't hesitate to take him with my lips. Qin's fingers penetrated my hair. He kneaded and twisted naturally on the sofa, while I got down on the floor, kneeling in front of him

loyally. He panted, begged and pleaded for me to stop, but I insisted on staring at him until he reached his dream.

"You finished so fast."

"Want to try it yourself? You never take a break, Duang."

"Your mouth is so small, I don't want to tease you there... I'd rather tease

here

."

I glance at his backside with a gleam in my eye, pressing a kiss on his thigh and flicking my tongue against his skin. It smells so good—soft and irresistible.

"Can you use a condom? We might mess up someone else's house."

"Duang didn't bring it."

"Then let's go to the room."

"No."

I acted stubborn. He made a face like he was going to scold me, but when I nuzzled his neck, bit his shoulder, and pampered him with a kiss, Qin finally complied. I did it without rushing, licking him slowly as if I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to absorb all the feelings between us. I told him I loved him over and over as I thrust myself deeper into him.

It was warm, hot and tight that I could barely control myself.

Everything seemed rough and messy at first. That was because I used saliva instead of a lubricant. It was a sex that happened out of nowhere. I didn't plan to make love to him so hard here.

Qin pressed his face against the pillow. He screamed when I thrust all the way in. His hips were beautiful, his waist was small, and his white back was

covered in kiss marks when I sped up. I leaned in to kiss his cheek repeatedly. He was in my favorite position, turning his back, arching his back, and looking so cute.

"You're so cute."

"Duang, stop it."

He's the type who doesn't like being complimented, no matter the situation. But I know that deep down, it makes him shy... His warm, tight channel clenched around me so tightly that I had to take a deep breath, murmuring softly near his ear in pleasure.

The vanilla sex he likes drives me absolutely crazy.

"Mm... Duang... Ah... Ahh..."

The sweeter I am to him, the more he responds with an overwhelming amount of cuteness.

I pull myself out, watching Qin pout like a little kid before thrusting back in again. I repeat the motion over and over until he comes, and I speed up my hips, chasing my own release right after.

Qin covers his face with his hands, looking displeased because he feels uncomfortable. I glance at the evidence of my release dripping out of him, and I can't bring myself to calm down.

"Go get some tissues and wipe it off."

"Stay still. I'll clean you up and carry you to the shower."

"I told you to wear a condom."

"I'll wear one for the second round."

"What's the point now, damn it." He grumbles, then glares at me when he realizes I just mentioned a second round. Qin raised his middle finger at me and buries his face in the pillow. Once I'm sure the couch is completely

clean, I scoop him up. We're about the same size, which makes it a little funny, but he's much lighter than me.

Getting to the bedroom is quite a struggle. He complains the entire time we're in the shower about how awful I am.

I press him against the wall, telling him to stay still as I scoop out the evidence of our activities from inside him. Qin pulls a face, letting out a helpless moan when I slide my fingers in deeper to get every last bit out.

"Are you okay?"

"Mmh."

"Wow, you're turned on again."

"Look at yourself first."

"...So, can we go another round?" I ask, testing the waters.

He turns his face away but gives me a small nod.

"Wear a condom this time."

Sigh.

How can you be this cute, Khun Charasmi. :(

File03 - No More a Warrior, I'll Be a Lover

"Fluffy, Pa will be back soon, okay?"

"Woof! Woof!"

"So clingy now, ever since we moved here." It's been almost a month since the semester started and nearly two months since he and Qin moved into this neighborhood—not too far from the university. They drive there anyway, so it's just a matter of waking up a little earlier. They still shower together like before, and the only difference is that Fluffy is super happy with the new house.

"Stay home and be good, okay? I filled your water and food. Don't forget to eat. Good girl, be a good girl."

Duang started the car engine, waiting for Qin to lock up the house. He waved goodbye to Fluffy, who barked repeatedly as if wondering why they weren't taking her along like usual.

"She looks so sad. You're worried about her, huh?"

"It's her first time staying home alone, Duang."

"You literally bought cameras to watch her 24/7. If anything happens, we'll know right away. Relax, okay?" Qin, who had been fussing with worry, got his hair ruffled by Duang's big hand. Qin had actually bought four surveillance cameras for the house and downloaded an app to monitor their 'daughter' while she was home alone.

What a doting mother—uh, I mean, father. :p

"Good luck, second-year student."

"Tell yourself that. You've got more classes than I do."

"Heh."

"You'll be stuck at the studio all day and probably won't even come home."

"I'll come home, promise. School comes second. You always come first."

Duang steered the car into the university entrance, dropping Qin off like he always did since Qin's classes started earlier. After that, he'd usually go hang out with Jetana, who came to study because he always complained that sitting alone in his room was depressing.

Second year was rough for Duang. The elective credits were through the roof, and the new subjects like Visual Composition and Applied Drawing were already making him sweat just thinking about them. But whatever—he'd get through it. His first-year grades were good enough to make his mom shower him with cash, which made Hia Nan throw side-eyes. Being the favorite child sure has its perks.

"Study hard, okay? See you this evening."

"You too."

Qin tousled Duang's hair until it was a mess before hopping out of the car. Duang, ever the lovesick fool, watched until Qin disappeared from view before driving off. At a red light, he pulled out his phone, deciding to annoy Jetana.

"Where are you, you idiot?"

[In Korea, duh.]

"Funny. Seriously, where are you?"

[I'm in Korea. Seoul. Want me to narrow it down? I'm eating ice cream near Yeonnam. What's up?]

"Jetana, today's the first day of school, you asshole."

[Listen closely, Chiwin.]

Duang pulled over but left the engine running. There is no way this conversation ending quickly. There had to be a good reason why Jetana was in Korea, especially since he had been totally MIA during the break. Unless...

[I'm no longer a warrior. I'm a lover.]

"Jett, who the hell did you fall for to chase them all the way there?"

[Not telling. Let it drive you crazy. ...Hey, why you wake up so early?]

"Wait, is that... an international student?" Duang shouted, as if his friend were right next to him. He could hear Jetana talking to someone softly in English but couldn't make out the words. If only Qin were here, he'd translate for Duang's dumbass.

[Nope. Thai. Well, half-Chinese, actually.]

"Fair-skinned?"

[White as snow, bro.]

"Yeah, you're definitely hooked."

[I never miss my shot, Duang.]

"I'm seriously shocked. You flew to Korea for that person? When did you even meet? You didn't tell us anything!"

[Calm down, man. It's not like that... I'm just here on a casual visit. No big deal.]

"Casual my ass. You're in Yeonnam, you dumbass."

[Why do you even care? It's too late. I only see you as a friend, okay?]
Jetana teased dramatically.

"I wanted to grab some food with you before class. You're usually early, right?"

[Sorry, I flew out last night.]

"Screw you. Are you even planning to study?"

[It's the first week. No one studies. Professors just hand out the syllabus and let us go. Don't make me teach you basic stuff. I'm hanging up. Don't call again. We're done. Done, Duang.]

Duang wanted to scream in frustration. Jetana had already hung up before he could interrogate him further. From a warrior to a lover, huh? What the hell.

"Duang!"

"Shit, Pae. You're early too?" Duang waved over another close friend who approached with dark circles under his eyes.

"Yeah, my girlfriend got up early to make merit, so I figured I'd come straight here."

"Did you know Jetana's in Korea right now?"

"What for? Is he trying to be a ghost worker?"

"He's chasing after some girl."

"For real?" Pae nearly choked on his coffee. Jetana—of all people.

"Yeah, he was talking in English like crazy. I wanted to eavesdrop so bad, but I couldn't understand a thing."

"Man, he must be serious if he flew all the way there. Wild."

"Since when did he become the type who has to get what he wants?"

"I don't know, man. But why did he go so far? Or is he just messing with you while on vacation?"

"Exactly."

"What can you even do about him? You can barely understand what he says. It's like he's always high even though he's clean as a whistle—he doesn't even smoke."

"True that. Talking to him gives me a headache."

"Maybe he's just traveling with his family and teasing you."

"I'm gonna think of it that way. The jerk called me stupid for coming to class today. He said the first class is just for handing out the syllabus."

"Just wait and see, Duang. Your department's professors will probably assign ten tasks in five minutes."

"Right? I'm waiting for him to suffer by the weekend. He'll be drowning in work for sure."

"Yeah, let's go. The others are already in the building. I just saw them. Guess they were bored at home."

"Figures."

Duang walked into the faculty building with his friend, still thinking about Jetana.

If he really does have a lover... Damn, that'd be wild.

"Jetana?"

"Yeah, Duang's like, don't waste the light in my eyes."

"What does that even mean?"

"You know, the light in my eyes, Qin. It means I'm pissed that he won't tell me."

Since the new semester started, I've been picking up new slang left and right. Qin just shook his head, exasperated by my endless nonsense. He chewed on his noodles for a bit before speaking again.

"Remember when we went to Chiang Mai last December?"

"Uh-huh."

"When you were on the phone, and Jetana asked to talk to me—do you remember that?"

"I kinda do."

I scooped a shrimp dumpling into his bowl, it's a habit now. No matter how little I eat, my boyfriend has to be well-fed. That's my life motto.

"Jet asked me how liking someone and being attracted to someone are different."

"And what did you say?" I almost choked.

Seriously?

Jetana—

that

Jetana—asking such a deep question?

"I told him that if you're just attracted, it doesn't matter if you get them or not. There will always be someone else you're attracted to."

"..."

"But if you like someone, you probably wouldn't want to let them go."

I clutched my chest.

Oh no.

We're all doomed, Khun Charasmi. T_T

"Hey, he really is in Korea. I saw it on his Instagram story."

"Maybe he went with his family and is just teasing you. You always overreact."

"You sound just like Pae, but I really think he has a wife."

"Well, we'll see... It sounds fun."

It's not fun at all.

I held back tears. We're all seriously doomed. If he's in love, he's going to go all out—way more intense than I ever could. And you know what they say: First love, first heartbreak. Not everyone's as lucky as me.

I do

not

want to be the one comforting our class clown when he gets his heart broken.

"Don't overthink it."

"You, though..."

"Let it be," Qin said, lifting Fluffy onto his lap and giving her a big kiss on the head.

"Fluffy, look how much your Papa loves you. He even buys food to eat at home, making me wash all the dishes."

"I can do the dishes myself."

"I'll do it. I drank milk this morning—the glass was mine anyway."

"You said it."

"Yes, sir! I'll take care of you."

"Fluffy, did you thank Pa yet? ... Thank you, Papa~"

I melted. That soft baby voice Qin used for our dog? I was a goner. Totally, completely, head-over-heels obsessed.

I accept all charges. Guilty as charged.

"I was watching the camera this morning. Our baby plays by herself so well."

"Just like you, huh? Haha."

"Exactly. She's totally like me."

"Of course. You're the one who picked her from the farm."

I laughed while rinsing the noodle bowls, spoons, chopsticks, and glasses, tidying up the kitchen as I went.

If my mom saw this, she'd probably cry tears of joy.

She always says,

'Having a son is exhausting—they love their wife more than their mom.'

I always want to argue, but, well... She's kinda right. I'm a total traitor. T_T

"Got a lot of work yet? First day?"

"Loads. They assigned stuff months in advance. What about you?"

"I've got jazz ear training. I'll need to practice a lot for that."

"The stuff you're listening to?"

"Yeah, sometimes it's too hard. The professor acts like the kids here are born prodigies."

"You're cute when you complain."

"It's tough... And there's also jazz keyboard skills. Good thing I brought my keyboard from home. First year wasn't too heavy, but second year is full-on. I'm so bored."

I listen to him complain. I could listen forever—I just want to know everything going on in his life.

After finishing the chores, I walk over to sit and watch TV with Qin and Fluffy. Our kid is lying on Qin's lap, already so big that I think by the time she's a year old, she'll probably be way bigger than the other dogs her age.

"Do you think our kid is too big?"

"Not really."

"See, it's like how Phi Dao Nuea looks at you. What kind of person is nearly three centimeters tall?"

"Speaking of Phi Dao Nuea, he just complained yesterday that Phi Fah is so mean."

"Huh? What did they fight about?"

"I was confused too, so I texted Phi Fah to ask because I was afraid it was serious, but then I remembered that they never actually fight. Turns out, Phi Fah ate Phi Nuea's last piece of chocolate, and he cried his heart out. Seriously, he cried so loud that Phi Fah recorded a video of it."

"Adorable, like a kid."

"Right?" Qin sighs and shakes his head with a small smile, as if he can't imagine anyone not finding them adorable.

We keep chatting aimlessly. Qin mentions that someone in his class dropped out because they got pregnant. He tells me to remind Pae to use protection because he doesn't want to be an uncle just yet. I guess he doesn't really like kids that much.

"Don't you want to have kids?"

"We already have one." His long fingers point to Fluffy, who is snoring softly on his lap.

"A baby, Qin. Marriage."

"I've never wanted one."

"Me neither."

"It's not because I'm dating you that I say this, but I feel like I can't take responsibility for something that huge. And I don't really want to get married either."

"But I want to marry you."

"Date me for ten years first before you say that."

"Ten years? I was thinking we'd get married as soon as we graduate."

"With what money? Save up first. Be patient."

I smile to myself. It means he's thinking about a future with me too.

I keep playing with his hand while watching TV and scrolling through my phone until it's time to shower. We shower together because we both have early classes tomorrow, and if we stay up too late, we'll be wrecked.

"Goodnight, Duang."

"Goodnight."

"Thanks for today."

And that's how a day with Qin usually goes—simple, but the happiest.

"Thank you for today too, my good boy."

It's already the best.

"Where's my souvenir from Korea? You were there for a week, Jetana."

"I asked him what I should buy to bring back for people in Thailand."

"Uh-huh."

"He said not to buy anything—it'd be a waste of money."

"..."

"What the hell? Who says that? So bold."

"Not telling." Jetana sticks his tongue out and rolls his eyes.

"Someone mysterious, huh? Don't tell me... you're a mistress?"

"Definitely not. He doesn't want anyone, and he doesn't want me either."

Duang laughs, the same time Pae bursts out laughing. Honestly, poor Jetana—but damn, he's exactly his type.

"Hey, Jet."

"What?"

"So, this is exactly what you wanted, right? You told me you like people who don't care about you."

"Yeah, well, he's really not caring now. Happy?" The self-proclaimed romantic lets out a half-hearted laugh.

"See? I told you it wouldn't be fun."

"It's still fun for now... It's just a crush."

"A crush, and you still went all the way there? Seriously?"

"I was on vacation, okay?!"

"Where'd you go, then? Tell me."

"All over, dumbass. He's into fashion—checked out art exhibits, drank coffee, bought designer clothes."

"Sounds fancy as hell."

"I felt like a dog, honestly."

"You already are one. I won't argue." Jetana smacks his friend, sighing as he remembers everything. It feels chaotic, but somehow it's not the bad kind of chaos.

Why does he let it happen?

He can't find the answer.

"He spends a hundred thousand a day."

"A hundred thousand won, I think I can tolerate that."

"A hundred thousand baht, you idiot. Buying clothes non-stop."

"Even more than Qin?" Duang laughed.

"Way beyond. Wears unisex clothes—just imagine. Buys both women's and men's clothes, buys everything... At first, he carried them himself, acting all proud. But later on, he tossed them for me to carry. If that's not heavy, I don't know what is. He's the size of a cat."

"Wow, does he talk like a novel's male lead or something?"

"Jetana's definitely got it bad, that's all I'm saying."

Duang couldn't help but laugh. Why is he like this?

How does he make everything sound so funny?

"Hey, hey! Qin's here."

"Qinnnnnn!" He's gone over there. Jetana wrapped his arms around Qin's waist, burying his face in Qin's chest and spreading his legs wide to seem shorter. Qin patted his shoulder lightly as a hug in return, making Duang glare daggers at his boyfriend.

Always a lover—jealous of everyone, just so you know. :(

"Jetana, watch out, Duang might punch you."

"For you, Qin? Bring it on. Even if it's not glass, it can still break, you know."

"I told you not to read too many quote pages, didn't I? Come here." Pae locked Jetana in a headlock to keep him from acting up. Duang felt genuinely grateful, and it was Qin who nudged his shoulder.

"Are you here to eat at Duang's faculty?"

"Something like that."

"Be honest, Qin."

"What? Can't I miss you?"

"Wow... I haven't heard that in ages. Can I cry?"

"We're together all the time. When would I even get a chance to miss you?"

"I miss you all the time, even when you're right in front of me."

"Mm... Let's eat."

Duang cheerfully followed his boyfriend while whispering to his friends to stay away—no clinging, no nothing—because this was their quality time.

"Are you ditching your friends to eat with me, Qin?"

"Yeah, saw Kim eating rad na and thought of you, so I walked over."

"And you didn't call? I could've picked you up."

"Surprise."

Qin answered with a straight face, but to Duang, he looked unbearably adorable. We picked out food together, bought drinks, and sat at our usual table. Before long, Jetana and Pae joined us.

"Hey, lover boy."

"Whoa, Qin's teasing me!"

"Heard you went to Korea. How was the weather?"

"Chilly, but warm when someone hugs you."

"

That sounds so you

."

Jetana laughed. It was strange how he could casually talk about these things with Duang's boyfriend. Maybe it was because we were all close, but somehow, Qin seemed to understand love better than anyone else.

He understood it—but whether to have it or not didn't matter to him.

Having someone doesn't prove you know how to love. Some people are in relationships but are terrible at loving.

But no, he didn't love that person—just to be clear.

Yeah, not in love.

"Still doing okay?"

"I'm fine, nothing to worry about."

"You can always talk to me."

"Of course. Who else would I talk to? Look at my friends. Who can I rely on?"

"I can hear you," Duang protested, unlike Pae, who was focused on his noodles, totally confused about the conversation. Qin smiled softly at the three of them... He only worried about Jetana now.

As for Duang—

"He can take care of himself."

We worked in different corners of the room. Even though the house was big, we still wanted to see each other nearby. Qin might've gotten used to it from living with Duang in the dorm. The room wasn't big—just a glance away, and he'd know what Duang was doing—rinsing brushes, painting, thinking, or crumpling up paper.

"Are you okay?"

"My brain's stuck."

"Come here, I'll hold you."

"Are you free?"

"Of course."

Qin lied.

His work was just as urgent, but Duang came first.

Spending just a few minutes on a cuddle was better than letting him sit there stressed out.

"Don't pressure yourself. Just do what you can."

"I don't want to suck at this."

"You won't... You never have."

Qin kissed his cheek for a long time, pressing his nose against Duang's forehead while showering him with all the compliments he could think of—just like Duang always did when he was feeling down.

It really helps.

When the person we love repeatedly tells us how much we matter, even though we know we don't gain our value from anyone's words, it feels like a form of healing. Just hearing about our good qualities from someone by our side...

It's cute.

Giving and receiving. On the days when one person is too tired to give more than forty, the other will give the rest to make it a hundred. Sacrificing sometimes isn't that hard.

Because it's love.

"Duang is already the best."

Loving them so much.

"You're so cute."

"I learned it all from you."

"When you're done working, let's go grab something to eat, okay? Take Fluffy with us too."

"Sure."

"You can put my work aside. The deadline's still far away. No need to push myself. I should wait until I'm ready."

Qin nodded in understanding, gave Duang another light kiss, and pulled back to let him tidy up his things while he returned to his work.

Qin sighed, noticing that almost two hours had passed since Duang had come over to whine. Now that his work was done, he turned to see Duang asleep on the sofa with Fluffy curled up next to him.

His pale hand picked up his phone and snapped a photo, posting it on Instagram—the first time in almost three months.

When he's with Duang, he doesn't feel the need to touch his phone. Being together so much, spending nearly all their time side by side, deepens their bond.

He can't imagine a day without Duang.

"Duang, let's go eat."

Because he'll never let that day come.

"Hmm... Did Duang fall asleep?"

"Yeah. Does your head hurt?"

"A little."

"I'll give you a massage, and you can rest a bit longer."

Qin replaced the pillow with his own lap, gently massaging Duang's temples. Duang always got headaches when he napped in the afternoon, unlike Qin, who could sleep anytime without issue.

"How was the freshman welcome event today?"

"Every freshman is a little shit. Not like my year. We were so scared of our seniors."

"Are you okay being the one in charge? Who even picked you for that? It doesn't seem like you at all."

"If Jetana can do it, why not me? He yells so loud until his voice cracks. The whole crowd went silent."

Qin chuckled softly, able to picture the scene clearly.

"Don't make people respect you out of fear. It's enough if they respect you because they genuinely see you as someone mature."

"You're too good, you know that?"

"I'm not. I'm just saying what's real. If any senior acts immature, I wouldn't bother respecting them either."

"I don't care. I take your side no matter what."

"Just enjoy the event, don't overthink it."

Duang opened his eyes, offering Qin a soft smile before nodding in agreement.

"And how about you? How are your freshmen?"

"They're fine. Same tough-kid vibe as always."

"Anyone hitting on you?"

"Who would? I already have a boyfriend."

"How do they even know that?"

"How much did you pay Kim and his friends? They yelled on the first day that 'Qin in year two already has a scary partner who kicks dogs and cusses women.' No wonder no one dares approach me."

"Those jerks. I only bribed them with one bottle of Black!" Duang burst into laughter, pleased with their handiwork.

"My head hurts now."

"Well, you're my only one."

"Don't you trust me?"

"I do, but better safe than sorry. I know you won't like anyone else, but I won't let anyone else like you either."

Qin shook his head at the childish reasoning, pulling Duang up from the sofa to head out for a late-night meal. He crouched down, beckoning Fluffy over to clip on her leash.

"Let's go get something delicious."

"Pa's treating us."

"Which 'Pa'?" Qin asked with a small smile.

"You, of course. I'm broke this month. I spent too much on art supplies."

"I thought you were secretly buying a new camera."

"No way."

"Not suspicious at all."

"I really didn't!"

We left the house together—Qin, Duang, and Fluffy. Qin double-checked that the door was locked while Duang led their furry daughter to the car, reminding her not to pee inside Papa's car.

It's simple like this.

Still easy, still happy.

...As long as we have each other.

Looks like Jetana finally found someone he

likes 😊. The moment I found out he had a crush, I immediately went looking for Jetana's book in the author's book list—just in case—and guess what? There is a book for him, and I can confirm his crush is a guy. When Duang first mentioned,

he clearly had no idea it is a guy since Jetana usually chasing after girl. Oh, by the way, I finally found out Jetana's real nickname!

File04 - Fluffy, Can You Not Grow Up?

"The owner, please wait outside."

"...Okay."

I held back a smile, watching Qin's face fall as the staff led Fluffy into the training room. Besides learning new skills, there were also other puppies of the same age for Fluffy to socialize with. I was starting to understand how parents feel when they secretly watch their kids on their first day of kindergarten. Fluffy glanced left and right, starting to panic when he realized both his dads were gone.

Fluffy and Qin are like two peas in a pod. If you put Qin in a room full of friendly, hyper people eager to make new friends, he'd be the only one sitting quietly, observing what everyone else was doing without starting a conversation. Fluffy was the same—he just flopped down, completely uninterested in whatever the other puppies were up to.

I watched the trainer working with each puppy. They were starting with the 'shake' command. Fluffy was half-cooperative—sometimes he listened, sometimes he didn't. There were some classes where owners could join in the training, but today wasn't one of them.

And there was Qin, sitting there looking worried and stretching his neck to peek at his 'daughter' the whole time.

"Calm down, Papa."

"I feel bad for Fluffy."

I laughed softly and patted his head a couple of times. In the end, Qin sighed and said,

"Let's just wait at home. Seeing her looking so sad like this hurts my heart for some reason."

I nodded and led him to the car. It took less than ten minutes to drive from Qin's house to the dog training school.

"You're back so soon, kids."

"Hello, Ma. Qin's feeling down because Fluffy isn't warming up to anyone or playing with the other puppies, so we decided to come back home and wait."

"Ah, it's probably breaking his heart. Qin was the same when he was little. Always playing by himself."

"Ma, you're making me sound so pitiful."

"Alright, alright, come inside. I'm heading out for lunch with my friends, and Pa has errands to run. Behave while you're home alone, okay?"

We each got a kiss on the cheek before watching Qin's mom, all dressed up and cheerful, drive off in her car.

"You're so much like your mom."

"Yeah, Ma loves socializing. Pa's no different."

"Are you going to the café this evening?"

"I'll drop by for a bit when we go pick up Fluffy."

"Alright. What should we do until then? Want to play a game?"

"Sure."

Qin led the way inside, setting up the game console on the big TV. Lately, he'd been obsessed with retro games we used to play as kids, especially

Metal Slug

. He was so serious about it that on nights without work, he'd play until sunrise.

"Don't lose focus, Duang."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm trying."

"Set an alarm, or you'll forget to pick up Fluffy."

"What time do you want to leave?"

"Let's leave early and wait there, so Fluffy won't feel abandoned. Bring some treats as a reward too."

I smiled and nodded in agreement before we got lost in a world full of soldiers, zombies, mummies, and even aliens. Each level was ridiculously hard—enough to drive anyone crazy.

I laughed every time Qin cursed, whether in Thai or English.

"Calm down, terrr!"

"I can't calm the hell down!"

"You're so funny."

"Let's change our strategy. Here's the plan..."

I watched his pretty lips move as he quickly explained the strategy for the stage we kept failing. Maybe I stared too long because he had to ask several times if I was even listening.

I leaned over and gave him a quick kiss before saying, "I'm listening."

He sighed.

"Alright, let's go again. I got it this time."

"You didn't even listen properly."

"I did!"

I repeated his whole plan back to him. He looked satisfied—so satisfied that he leaned in and kissed me as a reward. We got back to focusing on the game, so much that I started wondering—damn, am I even this serious about my studies?

Not long after, I cheered loudly while Qin cursed as the word

CLEAR

finally appeared on the screen.

Holy crap—I thought we'd be stuck on this level until graduation. T-T

"Happy now? You play like you're trying to win the world championship."

"I'm just serious."

"So am I. Especially when it comes to you."

"You never stop flirting."

"And I never will. I'll keep doing it just like the day I first asked you out."

"Oh, you mean when you kept sneaking glances at my collarbone?"

"Shut up."

Qin rolled his eyes at me, probably remembering that time. Back when we first started talking, it was awkward as hell, like we were figuring each other out bit by bit until we finally clicked.

It all began with me bringing him snacks. Told you—food works. At least it got him to sit still with me for a while. Then came soccer games, befriending his friends, offering to walk him back to his dorm, and getting scolded every time I pretended to 'accidentally' stay for dinner. I kept sneaking glances at his collarbone until he smacked me on the head. And eventually, helping him with his work.

He gave back to me in his own way—just as awkward, just as Qin-like.

"Hey, we still haven't gone to the beach together."

"Well, we're both free tomorrow, and there's no class on Monday."

"Let's go then! We can take Fluffy and drive straight back to campus afterward."

"Alright, I'll book a place. Somewhere pet-friendly."

Qin decided on his own, grabbing the MacBook from the sofa to search for accommodations. I just went along with whatever he said, so long as I got to pay.

"Half and half."

"No, you've spoiled me enough already, with all these expensive things."

"If it makes you happy, nothing is too expensive."

"Who am I even talking to right now?" I pretended to lie absentmindedly on the floor, only to get a loud thump on my chest from him. In the end, I had to sit up properly and hand him my debit card from my wallet so he could pay for the accommodation—a pool villa by the sea, and most importantly, every area allows pets.

Qin looked really happy as he started packing things for his daughter's first beach trip. Let me tell you, his fashion sense isn't just limited to me or himself—Fluffy's collar alone? Countless styles.

"Which color should we take?"

"Blue."

"Might as well take them all."

I wanted to say,

then why even ask me

, but I held back. His hands are heavy. T_T

"Qin, it's time to pick up your daughter."

"Okay, let me grab some treats."

"I'll wait in the car, okay?"

"Yeah."

And I'm really curious what the trainer will say about my and Qin's daughter, lol.

"Fluffy is very smart. The trainer said she listens well and has better focus than other puppies her age. She can already give a paw sometimes—Khun Qin, try asking for her paw often, so she remembers the lessons." Qin nodded, glancing at Duang, who was sitting not far away, playing with Fluffy and smiling.

Just like her papa.

A reward is definitely in order.

"You're in trouble now, Fluffy. I bet the trainer said you were naughty."

"Duang."

"Huh?"

"Let's go."

"See? We probably need to drop out of school—why else would your papa rush us out like this?"

"Even with a dog, you tease."

"Look at her face, though!"

Duang laughed out loud at Fluffy, who seemed to understand human language because she looked sad, glancing back and forth between him and Qin. If she could talk, she'd probably be asking,

What did I do wrong, Papa?

So adorable.

"Why do you keep kissing her, Duang?"

"I can't help it. She's just like you."

"The trainer said Fluffy listens well and stays focused. You're the best girl, aren't you?" Qin said as he turned the steering wheel, driving away from the training school and toward the family business. Duang pressed his nose against Fluffy's head repeatedly, praising her and teasing that Papa was just joking earlier.

Qin listened as Duang started chatting with Fluffy about their beach trip tomorrow.

"Fluffy, do you know what the sea is?"

"..."

"Tomorrow, we're going to the beach. Pa will take you on a banana boat—how about that?" Duang gestured animatedly.

"You're so random."

"I want her to be a bit bold. She's a girl, but she should play like the boys."

"Isn't she bold enough already, Duang? You buy her the weirdest stuff without thinking."

The one being scolded just laughed. He loves it—whether it's squid-shaped hats, army outfits, or anything silly—if Duang sees it, he buys it for Fluffy

without hesitation.

"Oh, by the way, did you know Jetana went to Korea again?!"

"Maybe he's just traveling."

"I doubt it. He's flying back and forth like a maniac. And in business class too. Is his family selling drugs or something?"

"I'll find out for you."

"That's the spirit. We're on the same team, right?"

"Or maybe Jetana will tell us when he's ready." Qin shrugged.

"He's so secretive."

"Maybe he doesn't want anyone to take it too seriously. If things don't work out, it's easier to pretend nothing ever happened."

Duang thought about it and sighed. In the end, he just didn't want his friend to get heartbroken. But how can you control anyone's heart? And if Jetana really had a partner in another country, how would that even work?

I mean, look at me, I can't even be apart from Qin for a day without losing my mind.

"Fluffy, do you miss Uncle Jetana?"

"Bark~~"

"See? She definitely misses him. Should we FaceTime him later?"

Duang shook his head, but Qin immediately chimed in, "What can we do? Our daughter is already head over heels for Uncle Jetana."

Duang wanted to argue, but—well, it was true. Jetana had a way of making Fluffy go wild. Normally a quiet puppy who doesn't play with anyone, the

moment Jetana shows up, it's like someone hit the turbo button. And once Jetana leaves, Fluffy is so exhausted that she just lies on the floor panting.

But Qin always smiles the whole day afterward—he likes seeing his daughter burn off some energy. With how chubby she is, she definitely needs the exercise.

"My leg's gone numb, Fluffy."

Next month, we're definitely getting scolded by the vet—both Fluffy and your Papa. Qin scrunched his nose, playfully annoyed at Fluffy, who whimpered softly.

"Alright, let's put the leash on. We're almost at Papa Qin's shop."

"What should we eat tonight, Duang?"

"Up to you. I'm fine with anything, but we'll probably need to get takeaway. I doubt they'd let Fluffy in around here... Right? Right?"

And then Fluffy got smothered in kisses until she had to twist around and playfully nip at Duang's hand, trying to stop the endless cuddling.

When we parked in the lot, Duang took charge of walking Fluffy while Qin checked the inventory with the staff. Duang waved goodbye to Qin, telling him not to worry. He strolled along with Fluffy until they unexpectedly ran into another corgi, something that didn't happen often.

"Chill, chill."

Duang crouched down, hugging Fluffy, who looked like she was about to pounce on the other dog. She was definitely her dad's daughter—so feisty. The other dog was a male too.

What if our baby doesn't like boys?

"Oh, isn't she cute~"

The tall guy crouched down to pet Fluffy's head gently. ...He looks familiar.

Have we met before?

"Hey, can you not tease other people's dogs so much?"

"But she's adorable. What's her name?"

"Ah... Fluffy."

"Whoa, that's such a cute name! But actually, this is my boyfriend's little brother's dog—his name's Koro."

Finally, Duang realized who the guy was—it was that couple he met at the big concert at Qin's faculty. And the casually dressed guy with long hair and a ton of accessories? That was Shinta, the bassist from

No Bad Days

.

Whoa... If Qin had been here, he'd probably be blushing like crazy. He's totally got a crush on the bassist.

"Fluffy looks so strong and healthy!" Dr. Aei gave a thumbs-up to the proud owner, who was beaming. Duang made a mental note to tell Qin—he'd been going above and beyond to find the best food to nourish their daughter.

"Is this corgi imported? It doesn't seem like it's from a Thai breeder."

"Yeah, my boyfriend imported her from Taiwan. There's a farm here, but they bring them in from Taiwan."

"Same here! Koro's from Tokyo!"

"Ah, that makes sense. He totally looks Japanese."

"Well, Koro's owner is Japanese."

"I see. He's so well-behaved—much calmer than Fluffy." Duang gave a dry laugh.

"Koro's a scaredy-cat. He doesn't have many friends."

"Fluffy's the same, honestly. Haha."

"But it looks like they want to be friends."

Duang watched as the handsome, cream-colored corgi named Koro sat calmly while Fluffy excitedly sniffed around him. Shinta, still holding Koro's leash, raised an eyebrow as the dogs slowly warmed up to each other.

"They just want to play together."

"Is that what you think?"

The guy being questioned didn't answer—instead, he squatted down and started speaking to his dog in Japanese. Duang started to sweat a little. Even their dog was bilingual, just like Qin. Honestly, they could be twins. Qin's mom spoke English to Fluffy, and Qin himself sometimes did too. Their daughter could understand both Thai and English.

Meanwhile, this other dog seemed to understand Thai, Japanese, and English.

T_T

"So, did you really meet him yesterday?"

"For real! I was sitting there waiting while Fluffy played with that boy for ages. You missed it."

"Fluffy, can you promise not to grow up?"

I burst out laughing because Qin looked so heartbroken that their daughter had been playing with a boy for almost thirty minutes. Honestly, yesterday, I only chatted with Dr. Aei briefly—just about dog care, behavioral observations, and upcoming vaccine schedules.

"Fluffy, Pa's asking if you'll stop growing. Will you agree?"

"I don't want Fluffy to have babies."

"You're getting way ahead of yourself. She just played with a boy for a bit."

"I don't want her to have a boyfriend either."

"You're about to cry, aren't you? Haha."

I scooped Fluffy up for more cuddles. Poor thing—her legs were probably sore. And really, I couldn't figure out why her dad was so overprotective.

Oh, by the way, we're almost to Hua Hin. We left at the crack of dawn, planning to let Fluffy stretch her legs on the beach. She's probably super excited since it's her first time seeing the sea and so much sand.

"Hey, can we stop by 7-Eleven?"

"Hmm? What do you need to buy?"

"Condoms."

"..."

"What? I paid for the pool villa, so we better make it worth it, right?"

"You're giving me a headache."

"Or you could skip it, but no complaining later."

"You're such a tease." He flicked on the turn signal and parked in front of 7-Eleven, sighing as he took Fluffy from my arms. I blew him a playful kiss—earning myself a middle finger—before hopping out to buy condoms.

And while I was at it, I grabbed some lube too—just in case we went for a few rounds. I mean, I'm nothing if not prepared. T_T

"I'm back. Got you some fruit juice too."

"Thanks."

"Aw, you sound so sweet~"

I gave him a quick kiss on the cheek before shutting the door and buckling my seatbelt. We drove for a little while longer before finally arriving at the villa.

It was as luxurious as expected, and they took excellent care of our dog. There were even dog massage services, a mini spa, and a salon. Qin looked pleased as he handed Fluffy's leash over to the staff for her to get a massage and unwind after the long car ride.

"Yes, as long as my wife is happy, I'm happy too."

"The room is so spacious, you could bring eight more friends to sleep over."

"The swimming pool is okay too."

"Come here and let Duang give you a hug first. You've been driving all day. Thank you, my good boy." I opened my arms, waiting for Qin to walk over. When he finally did, I hugged him tightly, kissed his cheek and the top of his head. Then, repeatedly thanked him.

The two of us started unpacking and putting things in place. I brought watercolors and all kinds of drawing supplies. We'll probably go sit by the beach, enjoy the sea breeze, and find something to do while waiting to take Fluffy for a massage. Qin said he wanted to take a shower because he felt a bit tired. I guessed he might sneak in a little nap.

"If you're still not sleepy after your shower, come find Duang outside, okay?"

"Okay."

"Or should I help you shower?"

I got scolded for that. I just laughed and carried my things outside to paint. The cool sea breeze lifted my spirits. The sea at this time of year was so

clear that I quickly grabbed my film camera to capture it. I wanted to keep these memories both as photographs and as paintings.

I sat mixing colors, sketching with a pencil, listening to the sound of waves hitting the shore, and watching a bird glide back and forth, playing with the cool air... everything felt so perfect.

"I'm sleepy."

"Oh, you're done already? That was quick."

I was busy painting the blue hues when I asked without turning around. Qin slipped his arms around me from behind, resting his face against my back and mumbling about being sleepy. I told him to lie down on my lap, and he obediently did just that.

"Should Duang stop painting and take you to bed?"

"No, keep painting. I want to see your picture."

"Then, once I'm finished, Duang will carry you to bed."

"You can just nudge me. I can walk on my own."

"No way, I want to carry you."

"Look at my size, Duang," he said slowly, and then he fell asleep. I brushed his hair gently, letting the cool breeze and the sound of the waves lull him into sweet dreams.

And when I finally finished my painting... I ended up carrying him to bed anyway. :)

"Will you be okay, Duang?"

"Of course, as soon as I catch her, I'll hold on tight. She won't drown." Already in the pool wearing just swim trunks, I reassured Qin to stop

worrying.

But how could he not worry? This was his precious little girl.

"Fluffy, come here, come to Pa."

"Woof!!"

"Let her go, Qin. She won't sink, trust me."

Qin sighed before releasing Fluffy into the pool, which the accommodation had assured us was pet-friendly. The only problem was that Fluffy had never swum in a pool this deep and wide before.

"Good girl, come here, quickly."

The one wearing a thin T-shirt smiled widely, dipping his legs into the pool, watching the father and daughter play in the pool, realizing to himself that happiness is as simple as this.

Fluffy paddled her way to Duang, licking her other owner's face before barking loudly to urge Qin to join them. But the pale-skinned one shook his head, unwilling to get wet because he didn't want to bother showering again. Instead, he grabbed his phone to record Duang and Fluffy playing. Once he was sure Fluffy could really swim, he began tossing her into the water again. That silly dog, easily excitable, demanded to be thrown in again and again.

"Fluffy, don't bump into things too hard."

"Swim! Pa's scolding you."

"You should play gently too. You're acting like a boy."

"You're just like my mom, Qin. Always fussing over the smallest things. My dad would just say, 'Go on, kid, if you hit your head, we'll stitch it up later.'"

"I can't do that. Fluffy is still small."

"Then how about we swim back and forth together, or would you like to race with Papa?"

Qin sighed, watching his boyfriend race a dog in the pool. Honestly, Fluffy was already six months old, but to him, she was still that tiny puppy sitting blankly among the other corgis.

Just like how he still saw Duang as the same person who had nervously asked to date him on that first day.

"What are you looking at?"

"At you."

"Why? What's wrong with Duang? You're looking at me like you're about to cry. Are you okay?"

Duang carried Fluffy out of the pool, and the little corgi seemed to know playtime was over as she shook off the water, drank a little, and lay down, watching her two dads as they suddenly turned serious.

"I don't know."

I really don't.

"Maybe I'm just happy you're still here."

"And where else would Duang go?"

I don't know anything.

When I have Duang, it feels like I don't need to know, don't need to guess, don't need to worry... I don't even have to think about whether tomorrow will be good or bad.

"I told you from the beginning that I prepared everything to love only you."

Because I'm sure that today, I have Duang.

We have each other like this.

"So cheesy."

"But someone's ears are turning red."

"Thank you for bringing me to the beach, Papa."

"I'm going to melt. Should we stop now?" Duang laughed as our noses brushed together, and we tilted our faces just right—both knowing what came next. The kiss was as perfect as always.

"I love you, Duang."

"I love you too, Qin."

"Woof!!"

"Okay, okay, I love you too, Fluffy." We both burst out laughing when our mischievous corgi barked right after our love confession. She stayed there, looking expectantly, until Duang had to address the person sitting with his legs dipped in the pool—who had just leaned down to kiss him—and say,

"You have to tell Fluffy you love her too. She's not giving up."

And as always,

"Sigh..."

Duang and Qin.

Just the two of us.

"Papa loves you, Fluffy."

"Woof~~"

With the simplest happiness in the world.

Oh my, I'm just

excited to finish this novel. I even stayed up translating until 4 AM! 😄

And with that, we've reached the end of

Thank you so much for reading and for patiently waiting for my updates!

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