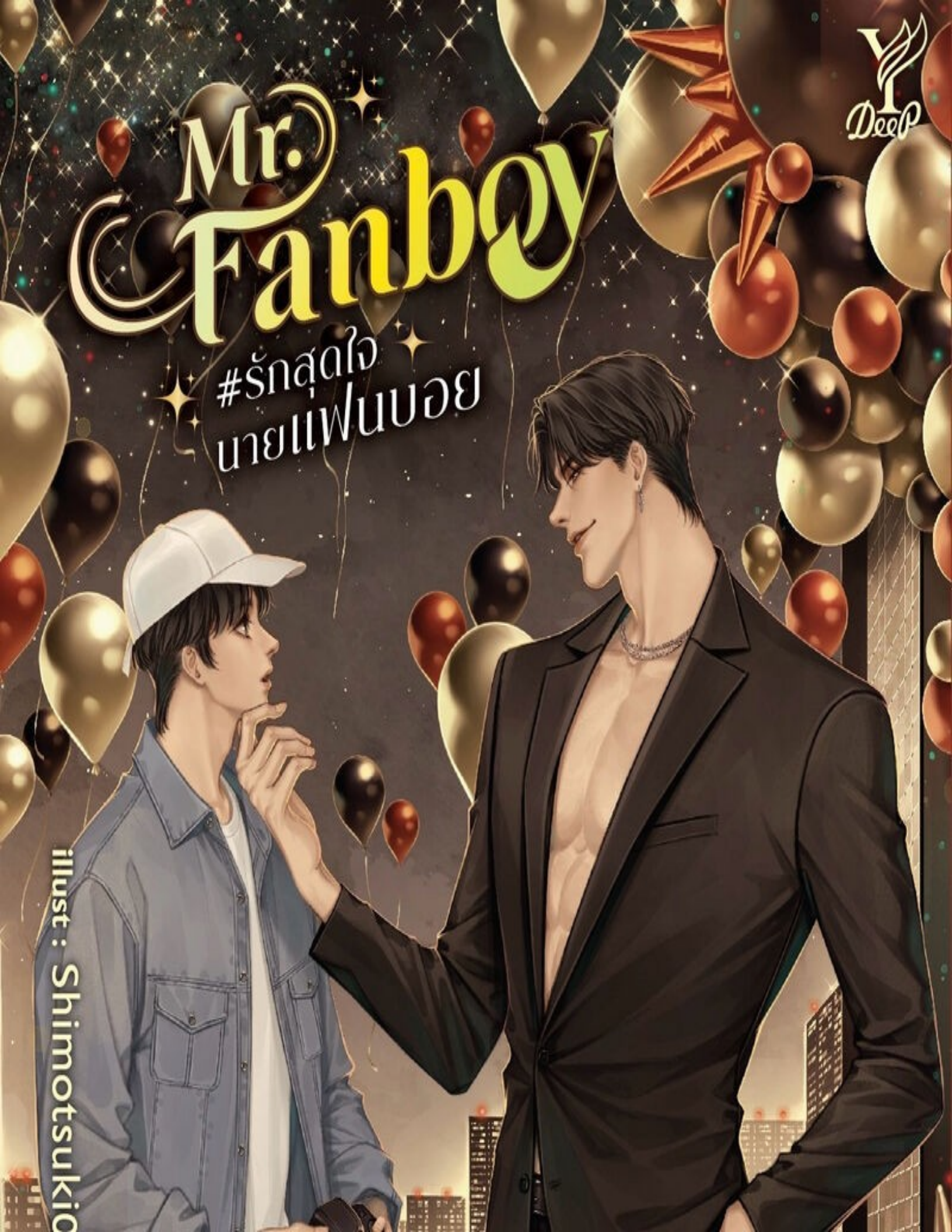


Mr. Fanboy

#รักสุดใจ
นายแฟนบอย

illust : Shimotsukio



Take 1, Action!

"Aaaaaah!!! Eeeeeek!!!"

The shrill screams piercing my ears didn't startle me in the slightest. I was used to this kind of environment. Oh, and that numbness creeping up my legs after standing for a full three hours, too.

"Nong Nine!!!"

"Aaaaah, you're so beautiful!!!"

"Nong Nine! Fighting, son!!!"

And all kinds of high-pitched noises around me blending into a chaotic mess. Luckily, my height of 178 centimeters became an advantage amidst the dozens, if not hundreds, of young women packed into the narrow space that the event organizers had designated for fans of the artists attending the launch of a supplement brand at a famous shopping mall in the heart of the city.

Even though I was considerably taller than the girls around me, I still tried to stand on my tiptoes, raising my DSLR camera equipped with a 70-200 mm zoom lens to capture the best angles. The rapid clicks of the shutter competed with the fans' screams. As I fired off shot after shot, I couldn't help but quietly admire the model in front of me.

That's awesome. Today, Nine stood out under the spotlight as usual. It's no surprise that someone with an aura like his is at the top of the industry. No wonder he won the Best New Actor award this year.

I hid my smile behind the black mask covering my face, my eyes and hands still busy with the camera, firing the shutter continuously. From where I stood, I could only see the side of him from a distance with my naked eye, but thanks to the power of the zoom lens, I could clearly see even the tiny mole next to his ear.

Even his mole is adorable. He's my bias, my bias!!

"Nine!!!"

"Aaaaaah!!!"

The screams from Nine's self-proclaimed mommies grew louder when he turned to wave at his fans after finishing the press photo session. Event staff came to guide him to the special seating area prepared for the artists and VIPs attending the event. Fans quickly shifted their cameras to capture photos and clips as the event officially began.

Damn, it's hot. It's freaking hot! No matter how strong the mall's air conditioning is, it's useless when you're crammed in with a crowd for hours. Still, it's better than an outdoor event. That's why I hang in there, using my camera lens as my second pair of eyes. My finger continuously pressing the shutter when Nine playfully waves at the fans. My heart and hands trembled when I realized Nine was looking straight at my camera.

Aaaagh!!!

Of course, that was just me screaming internally. If I screamed out loud, I'd probably startle everyone around me. I couldn't scare the girls nearby, so I did my best to keep my cool. No one knew I was grinning like a fool under my mask. My legs were still numb, but I wouldn't complain anymore! I could stand here for another half-day if it meant seeing him.

When the artist I love is right in front of me, all the exhaustion and discomfort from the past few hours become meaningless.

Nearly an hour later, the event came to an end. I rapidly clicked my shutter as Nine and the other artists took a group photo with many important people whose names I couldn't remember. As soon as they left the stage, reporters swarmed Nine, as expected of a rising star. After finishing the interviews, he waved to the fans for a few more minutes before heading back to the artists' lounge.

The crowd around me immediately scattered like ants. Some fans chased after Nine, who left with his AR team and security guards, while others, including myself, stayed back and watched from afar. I was a bit disappointed that there wasn't a fan interaction session today. But, it didn't matter, just seeing Nine for thirty minutes was enough to give me energy for the entire week!

"Hey, are you a fanboy of Nine?"

While I was craning my neck to catch a last glimpse of my bias, a girl approached me with another friend by her side. The phone case she held had a polaroid of Nine, which meant she was part of the same fandom.

"Uh... yeah."

"Aww, cute! See you at the next event," they said sweetly with a smile.

"Yeah." I pulled my mask up a bit higher, nodding shyly and waving back awkwardly.

"Wan! Hey! Over here!"

Barely three seconds after the girls left, I heard a familiar loud voice calling my name. I turned to see Jay, my classmate, waving enthusiastically and signaling me to come over.

"Did your Pink leave already?"

"Gone already. Probably left a bit before your Nine," Jay, who is also a stan (he's a stan for girl groups), said while craning his neck to look in the direction I just came from out of curiosity. We came to the event together today because his bias was attending the same event as mine. "So, when did it happen? Did a girl hit on you or something?"

"They just said hi. We're in the same fandom."

"Oh, really? Damn, I thought you were finally getting a girlfriend," Jay laughed, throwing an arm around my shoulders. "Come on, Wan! Let's grab some food. I need to sit down and upload photos. Pink looked amazing today. She even did a cat-paw pose at my camera!"

"Nine looked at my camera, too."

"Dude! We're both lucky today, huh? Our bias both gave us moments!" Jay clicked his tongue in excitement. I smiled so wide under my mask that my jaw hurt as we walked side by side toward the food court.

Naturally, our conversation over ramen was all about our beloved artists. Jay and I took turns bragging about the moments we captured. Even the tiniest glance at our cameras became a point of playful debate. After about ten minutes of arguing, I emerged victorious by pulling out the timestamp data. Nine had looked at my camera three seconds longer than Pink had looked at Jay's.

Sounds silly, right? But everyone needs a little silliness to spice up life, don't you think?

"Hey, have you decided on your research topic yet?" I asked as we walked through the mall's parking lot toward our motorbikes.

"Not yet. You?"

"I have. We have to submit it tomorrow, you know."

By the way, despite how I seem, I always manage my studies without falling behind. I owe it to my parents for supporting my education. As for Jay, he always sneaks out after attendance to see Pink. He once stayed out so late after a concert that he almost missed an exam the next day. From sophomore year to senior year, nothing's changed.

"Crap, I'm not sleeping tonight," Jay groaned, ruffling his already messy hair.

"Alright, I'm heading back to work on my paper. See you tomorrow."

"Yeah, later. Drive safe."

"You too." He straddled his motorbike and rode off.

I turned to my beloved black scooter, grabbed my helmet from under the seat, and rode back to my condo near the university which is about five hundred meters from the train station. Even though I had my motorbike, I always had to think about the other person living with me, who couldn't ride one.

"P'Wan! You're late!"

As soon as I pushed open the door to my room at 9:30 PM, a shrill voice called out my name. Three seconds later, a cute girl who bore a strong resemblance to me walked out of the bedroom, arms crossed, frowning at me with a disapproving look, just like a nagging auntie.

"Wow, look at you. Did you go fanboying or go to war? Why do you look so drained?"

"Why don't you try standing on tiptoes for four or five hours and see how it feels? Even a guy would be exhausted," I replied to View, my biological younger sister who always acts like she's my mom, as I trudged toward the sofa.

Honestly, as much as I'm fully dedicated to supporting my bias, I'm not exactly thrilled about standing around on tiptoes for hours. Back when I first started taking freelance photos of celebrities, I didn't really understand fan culture. I once arrived an hour before an event started, only to find that all the good spots were already taken. Sure, my lens can capture even the tiniest pores, but if I don't have a good angle, the photos won't turn out great.

Geez. Isn't it time to change already? When will everyone stop reserving spots half a day before the event starts, huh...

"Ouch!"

"Oh, oh! Clumsy again," my dear little sister teased when I stubbed my toe against the sofa leg, making my face twist in pain. "And have you eaten yet?"

"I've eatennn."

"Good, because even if you hadn't, I wouldn't get you anything anyway," she curled up the corner of her mouth, letting out a haughty 'hmph' like a snobby princess in a cartoon.

I rolled my eyes upward, already used to our sibling conversations where three sentences in, we've already exchanged ten snarky remarks.

"And don't sprawl around like a snake like that. P'Wan, after you come back from outside, hurry up and shower. You stink."

"Are you my sister or my mom, View? Go do your homework."

"I already finished it! You're the one who shouldn't be slacking and forgetting your work. Be careful, so you don't fail to graduate!"

"Yeah, yeah, I won't forget. Go, go read your books, or you'll fail the university entrance exam," I said lazily, waving my hand to shoo away the annoying little brat.

She flipped her hair and marched back to her room. I sat and rested until the fatigue wore off before getting up, going to my bedroom to grab a towel, and heading to the shower. Once my body was fresh and clean, I returned to my desk in my bedroom, opened my laptop, launched the photo editing software, uploaded the pictures I took today, and happily started editing the best shots.

Oh! I've been rambling for a while, but it seems like I forgot to introduce myself. Alright then. Hello, my name is Achawin Sukkoson. My nickname is just what Jay and my sister call me. I'm currently twenty-one years old, a fourth-year student majoring in Public Relations under the Faculty of Communication Arts. But I'm not some important figure contributing to the nation, so my biography is probably not as interesting as the story I'm about to share.

I'm a fangirl—well, fanboy, to be precise. Yes, I'm a fanboy of a rising male actor, Nine Nopphanat!

My journey as a fan began about two years ago. Back then, I was a second-year student doing freelance photography for fan events. I already loved taking photos and, being the good child I am, wanted to help lessen my parents' financial burden. So, I saved up and invested in an expensive zoom lens to take celebrity photos and sell them to fans who couldn't attend events themselves.

You might wonder, does such a job really exist? Well, let me tell you, it pays quite well. That day, I was at Siam Square to photograph a famous BL series actor. Since the series was airing at the time, he was incredibly popular, and the place was packed with fans, making

every alley and corner crowded with excited girls stepping on each other's toes.

I stood on the outer edge, almost at the very back, zooming in as much as I could to capture photos. Even so, people kept squeezing in to find a better angle, pushing and shoving constantly. At one point, someone bumped into me so hard that I lost my balance.

"Careful!" Before I could fall flat on my face, a hand grabbed my arm just in time.

"Like –" I looked up to thank the person, but the words caught in my throat because the one who helped me was the most attractive guy I'd ever seen.

His skin was smooth and fair, with large, bright eyes partially hidden under a black cap. He wore an oversized white T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. His features were a perfect blend of handsome and beautiful. He gave me a small smile, and when he smiled, his eyes curved like a crescent moon.

He was, without a doubt, ridiculously cute. My friends had told me I had a sweet face, but this guy outshone me by a mile. No, a hundred miles.

"Th-thank you," I stammered, still feeling embarrassed and a bit dazed. When I sneaked another glance at him, I couldn't help but wonder if someone this good-looking was even real. Even the celebrity I was there to photograph didn't hold a candle to him.

"Are you an Ozone fan?" he asked casually.

"Ah... uh... yeah," I replied absentmindedly. It would be too weird to explain to a stranger that I was just there for a photography gig.

He turned to look at the stage again. From where we stood without a camera, the performer on stage looked like an ant. Yet, he gazed

at the celebrity intently for a while before turning back to speak to me, who was still absentmindedly staring at him, forgetting my job for a moment.

"He's really outstanding, isn't he? You know, I want to be like that too."

"..."

"I'm working hard for it. One day, I'll be like him," he laughed softly, flashing a smile that made his eyes crinkle with warmth.

"...Good luck," I said after being stunned for three whole seconds by that dazzling smile. Seriously, even as a guy, I felt flustered. I could already picture him charming audiences on stage.

"Thanks. I'll be going now," he said with a smile before walking away.

Amid the deafening cheers, the loud music from the speakers, and the bustling crowd at Bangkok's most famous shopping district, his retreating figure was the clearest thing in my vision.

For a moment, he shone brighter than the actual celebrity on stage.

That impression took root in my heart and grew instantly. After returning from Siam that day, I tried to find out who he was. Unfortunately, I wasn't familiar with the entertainment scene and barely knew any celebrities. Even when I asked my female friends, they could only guess he might be a net idol, a trainee, or an extra in some series.

In the end, I couldn't figure out who he was. I regretted not taking a photo of him that day. Without any clue to follow, my search was fruitless. But I promised myself that if I ever saw him again, I would support and cheer for him with all my heart. Part of it was gratitude for his help, but more than that, I admired his determination.

Besides, he had an adorable smile. I guess you could call this... liking someone.

And then, one day, fate brought us together again. When he debuted in his first acting role as the protagonist's friend (basically, an extra), I finally learned his name—Nine, a rookie actor. It felt like unlocking an SSS-level mission. I followed his Instagram immediately and, of course, watched the series he was in.

Even as a newcomer, Nine's acting was so natural and smooth, even better than the main lead. I'm not exaggerating, he truly had star quality. Before I knew it, I was attending his events, taking photos, and supporting him without anyone needing to hire me.

Nine isn't just a pretty face, he's talented and hardworking. He didn't become famous overnight but climbed his way up from minor roles through sheer effort. I admired his dedication deeply.

Now I've become a full-fledged fanboy. Normally, I'm just a casual music fan or someone who watches performances in passing. I even tend to like girls more. I never thought I'd become so seriously obsessed with anyone like this. At first, I wondered if it was weird for me to like a male celebrity to the point of following him to events.

But then I thought, I'm not bothering anyone, right? Life is short, so why not do what makes me happy. If I want to obsess over a celebrity 24/7, that's my business. Even my parents don't mind, so why should I care what other people think.

But, well... it's easy to talk big when I'm alone, haha. In reality, when I go outside, I still get self-conscious about how others might see me. Most of the fans in my fandom are girls, so whenever I attend events, I always wear a cap and a mask to cover my face, playing the role of a lone wolf, without a single friend in the same fandom.

Because of Nine, I saved up for almost half a year to buy a new camera lens worth fifty thousand baht just to photograph him. But I also take photography gigs for other artists, so I consider it an investment in my career. Oh, I even created a secret account just to help trend hashtags and vote for him. I also buy official merchandise from his company and have been following him since he only had a few dozen fans. Now, whenever he shows up at events, there are hundreds of people supporting him.

Nine seems to be doing really well on his path as an actor. Over the past two years, he's gone from playing minor roles to supporting roles, and his latest project has been a huge hit. People on Twitter are raving about his acting skills. It even went viral! Just last month, there was news that he's about to land a lead role in a BL series!

You know what, I'm so freaking proud of my bias! Nine has everything it takes to be number one—good looks, a sweet personality, and a polite demeanor that makes everyone adore him. His acting skills are top-notch, and if you've ever heard him sing during live streams or events, his voice is amazing. With the upcoming BL series, he'll probably release music too, and then the 'muggles' will finally see another side of his talent. With all these qualities in one person, the number one spot isn't too far off. My bias is seriously awesome!

As for me, my job as a fan is to push him toward his dreams, to help him go as far and as high as he can. Bring on the hashtag trends, I've got a dozen secret accounts for that. I go to almost every event to cheer him on. I do wish I could participate in top spender events, but I'm just a student with lots of expenses and a younger sister to take care of. I'd feel guilty using my allowance to drop tens or hundreds of thousands on fan projects. Still, I help promote him by taking high-quality photos and videos, editing clips, and sharing them on Twitter, Facebook groups, and TikTok to reach a wider audience.

Is it tiring? Of course, it is. A camera body plus a lens as big as a dog's leg isn't exactly light, you know. Even as a guy, waiting at events for four to five hours—sometimes since morning for an event that starts at 7 p.m.—takes a toll. Cramps, back pain, and then coming home to edit photos and videos. It all takes time.

But all my exhaustion is so worth it, just to see Nine's smile. Just to see his face, to hear his soft voice speaking while smiling. Those feelings of exhaustion just disappear as if they were never there.

This is the love of a fan. Underline the word 'fan.' Let me tell you first, I have never thought of him in a romantic way. People who have never been a fan wouldn't understand that all of this is genuinely goodwill without any hidden motives. I just want to see him succeed, that's all. And I don't know how long this love will last, but in the meantime, I will give him my all. So that one day, when he grows up and succeeds, with so many people who love him, I can let go and watch him from afar, just like I intended.

I click the mouse to edit the photos while admiring my own photography skills. The lighting in the mall is hard to capture, you know. But I still manage to take beautiful pictures. By the way, Nine really has amazing skin. I barely need to retouch anything. Sometimes I wonder how someone with such good looks and perfect skin can actually exist. I'd better upload this set of photos quickly. Everyone in the world should know just how good my bias looks.

"Shit, is it already 1 AM..." I mutter when I glance at the time on the bottom of the screen. If it weren't for the fact that I have an 8 AM class tomorrow, I would have stayed up editing videos for TikTok a bit longer.

I close my laptop, drag my feet to switch off the lights, and collapse onto my bed, falling asleep almost instantly.

"Damn, you must be feeling good now that your research topic got approved!" Jay's rough, half-sarcastic voice rings out the moment the professor leaves the room.

"Good my ass. What part of doing research is easy?" I let out a sigh, resting my face on the desk because I'm still feeling a bit sleepy.

Every senior student in every faculty cannot escape the hell known as research. The research topic I chose is 'The Image of BL Series Actors and Its Effect on Social Media Publicity.' Let me clarify, I chose this topic because it's interesting, not because I'm a fan!

Just thinking about how I'll have to stay up late fixing drafts like 'Final.docx,' 'RealFinal.docx,' and 'I-Swear-This-Is-Final.docx' makes me want the world to end. But at least I can rest easy on one thing, I don't have to come up with a new research topic. Too bad Jay isn't as lucky as me.

"My topic didn't even get approved. Help me think of something, Wan. Please~"

"Yeah, yeah, I got it," I sigh deeply, feeling helplessness.

Fine, I'll help this poor puppy out. Maybe it'll even help me get an A in this class.

"That's what I'm talking about! That's true friendship right there." Jay's eyes sparkle as he grins enthusiastically. Feeling annoyed at his overly cheerful face, I shove my notebook into my bag, sling my backpack over my shoulder, and walk out of the classroom, intending to grab lunch at the cafeteria.

"Oh, hey, Wan. Look at this," Jay suddenly smacks my arm a couple of times, making me turn to look at his phone.

"What is it?"

"Check this out. They're holding BL series auditions." He shows me the screen, which displays a Facebook page from a production company announcing auditions for a new BL series.

"Deep Dive: Into Your Heart. Doesn't the name sound familiar? Isn't this the series where your bias got the lead role? The one you've been blabbing about all week?"

"Yeah, yeah," I nod enthusiastically.

This series is about swimmers, friendship, competition, and some love triangle stuff, which Nine, my bias, will play a leading role as another male lead. Or, as BL fans call it, the bottom, but really, it should be called male lead and another male lead. Makes sense, right?

"Here's your chance, Wan. You should try auditioning."

"Huh!?" Jay's words make me stop in my tracks, my eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

"What? Why would I audition?"

"Why not? I even tried once, but I didn't make it," he pouts, recalling his less-than-glorious past.

See, Jay once wanted to break into the entertainment industry. He said it seemed like an easy way to get rich (he probably forgot that only ten percent of people succeed in this field). But no matter how many auditions he went to, he never passed. It's not like he looks bad. He doesn't, but either his character didn't fit the role, or his acting just wasn't good enough.

I shake my head. "Not happening."

"Come on, trust me. They care about looks first, and you've got the look—big eyes, sweet face, the whole 'popular uke' type. Use your

face to make a living, man."

"Even if I look the part, if my acting sucks, it's pointless. I can't act," I roll my eyes. Just because I'm a communications major doesn't mean I know how to act. My program is more focused on marketing, not performing arts.

"Nobody's born knowing how to act. If you pass the audition, they'll send you to acting workshops," Jay keeps pushing.

"No—"

"Look, your research is about BL actors, right? If you get the part, you'll have firsthand experience for your thesis. Plus, you'll get closer to Nine. Who knows, you might even get famous, and then you won't have to worry about job hunting after graduation. It's a win-win!" My best friend is practically a paid advertiser for this audition.

"Come on, Wan. I wanna have a celebrity friend."

"...Nope," I insist, though my eyes start to dart around uncertainly.

His argument is kind of tempting, but I have no acting experience, no connections in the industry, and no one to guide me. I'm just a regular fanboy. Even if I audition, there's no way I'll make it.

"Wan, opportunities like this don't come around often."

"...No."

"Wan—"

"No, no, no. Drop it. Let's go eat," I hook my arm around Jay's neck, cover his mouth with my hand to shut him up, and drag him toward the cafeteria.

Stop overthinking. Stop fantasizing. The entertainment industry is way too competitive, and I was never interested in this path anyway.

Me, auditioning for a BL series?

Not a chance in hell...

Take 2, Action!

No way, where would that be...

"Numbers 070 to 075, please get ready." The female staff member walked around calling the audition participants to prepare to enter the room for their test in front of the judges.

I, wearing a name tag with the number 073 written in the center of my chest, took a deep breath to calm my nerves while standing up to join the line, preparing myself to enter the slaughter room.

That's right. In front of Jay, I acted tough, but when I got back to my condo, I lay down with my hand on my forehead (actually, I wanted to use my foot, but it couldn't reach) and thought about it for three whole days. In the end, I decided to attach my photo and an introduction clip with the application form and sent an email to the organizers.

I weighed the pros and cons and found that there were indeed more advantages. If I passed the audition, I would gain career opportunities, research material, and the chance to work with actors I admire. I might even discover my true dream. If I didn't pass, it would still be a life experience. There's nothing to lose.

When I sent the email for the preliminary audition, I didn't think I would pass. I sent it with a bare face, unstyled hair, and recorded the introduction clip in my bedroom. When I received the email calling me to audition today, I was shocked. Since they went through the trouble of calling me, I decided to give it my all. I even asked a friend majoring in performing arts to tutor me in a crash course, just enough to understand the basics of acting.

The friend who helped me said I had potential. Acting requires a certain sense, and I learn quickly. When Jay heard that, he pumped me up, saying I would definitely pass. I really want to drag him here to the hall right now. What am I going to pass with, huh? All the guys around me are handsome and striking. I look like a chick among champion fighting cocks worth hundreds of thousands or even millions. You get the picture, right?

But whatever, I didn't expect anything anyway. Oh, I forgot to mention, the role I'm auditioning for is 'Sky,' a supporting character who is basically the villain. I chose to audition for this role because the physical description of the character matched me the most. Besides, if I'm going to try, I might as well aim for a prominent role! If I'm going to be bold, I should go all out!

"Oh!"

While I was clenching and unclenching my fists, taking deep breaths to focus, I suddenly heard a commotion around me. When I turned to look, my heart pounded so hard that it echoed in my ears, because the two male leads of this series had just walked through the door.

Of course, my eyes automatically focused on my bias. Today, Nine was wearing an oversized hooded shirt, jeans, and glasses (probably fashion glasses), and he entered the room with his familiar polite smile before stopping at the front.

"Hello, I'm Nine. Today, Third and I are here to cheer everyone on." He spoke with a smile and his signature crescent-shaped eyes.

I pressed my lips together to hold back a smile, my heart racing with excitement and joy. I kind of guessed he might come to surprise us, but seeing him in person made me so happy. It's a shame I didn't bring my big camera today. The moment I saw his face, my fan spirit kicked in. I wanted to take his picture so badly!

Honestly, even though Nine didn't have his hair styled or wear a full face of makeup like at events, just a little lip balm, his aura still shone brightly like golden light radiating from him. It made everyone else in the room look dim in comparison.

"I hope to work with you all. Good luck, we're rooting for you," he said with a slight whine at the end of his sentence, which made even the guys feel fond of him.

Just seeing Nine's face and receiving his well-wishes pumped me up. I completely forgot that I only intended to try it out. Now, all I can think about is giving it my all. I have to land this role!

"Do your best. I believe everyone here has prepared thoroughly for the audition and is very dedicated. I wish you all..."

The other actor who came with Nine, a handsome and serious-looking guy named Third, was also encouraging the participants. But I couldn't hear him because my entire focus was on Nine. I was so dazed that I didn't snap out of it until the female staff member pushed me forward to enter the audition room.

Crap. What were my lines again? I forgot! Shit, shit, shit! God, spirits, anyone, please help me!!!

Some supernatural being must have heard my prayers because the audition went smoothly (I think).

Okay, to be honest, it wasn't perfect but not terrible either. When I walked in, I slipped up a bit, and I stuttered slightly during my introduction. I mean, come on. Standing in front of experienced producers, directors, and staff would make any newbie like me nervous.

But I did well (I think) during the script test. The scene was an argument with 'Copter,' the main character. I poured all my emotions into it. At least someone in there praised me, saying I had good potential and my gaze conveyed emotions effectively. The whole thing probably took less than ten minutes. Before I knew it, I was bowing in thanks and walking out.

I felt kind of dazed, wondering, 'That's it? I waited nearly six hours for this?'

Once it was over, I felt both relieved and anxious. If I passed, I would sign a contract with the production company. It would be great if I got it, but if not, that's fine. I wasn't expecting much...

"Wan, you're really talented."

At that moment, something unexpected happened. As I walked past the two main actors sitting near the exit observing the auditions, Nine suddenly looked at my name tag and said that. He even gave me a thumbs-up and smiled at me.

"T-tha... thank... thank you!" I froze for a second in shock before stammering my thanks.

Am I dreaming? Or did he recognize me as his fan? No way. I always wear a hat and mask when following him to events, and I've barely spoken to him.

But Nine complimented me! My bias watched my audition and said I was talented! Aaaaahhh!!!

At that moment, my brain almost short-circuited from happiness. I wanted to talk to him a bit more, but I didn't want to hold up the line, so I quickly walked out of the room. Before leaving, I glanced at the other lead actor sitting next to Nine. That guy just kept his eyes on the next contestant and didn't even glance at me.

My heart was still fluttering with excitement as I left the room. But at the same time, I furrowed my brows in thought.

Other than Nine, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' also got 'Third Tharit Charaslecha,' another rising star actor, to take the lead role as well. He had acted in the same series as Nine before, but they were not paired together. He was just the main character's friend, that's all. His acting was also outstanding and talked about, no less. And there were quite a few fans who shipped him with Nine when the series aired. Plus, they are under the same agency. The agency probably saw the opportunity to make money, so they got to play the lead roles together in this one.

When it was announced, I remember that the fangirls squealed and cheered so much that the hashtags 'ThirdNine' and 'ThreeNine' trended on Twitter. From a rowing boat, it became an official ship, a cruise ship, or something like that. But personally, I'm not a BL fans. I don't ship Nine with anyone. I keep it solo, keep it main. Whoever he works with, I'm ready to support them all.

But I'll make an exception for this one person. I really don't get along with this Third guy at all.

Ah, ah, before you say I'm biased—yeah, maybe I am. But I feel weird about this guy. Like, I follow Nine to events often, right? And this other guy also appears with Nine a lot. I don't know if it's just me, but I feel like he keeps a distance from my bias. Nine seems to approach him, starting conversations and all, but he gives short answers. Not just at events either. Even when I watch interview clips or behind-the-scenes footage, I still feel the same way.

Let me say, it's not just me who thinks this way. Some fans from our side think the same. It even reached the point where a fan from our side commented on Twitter that Third seems cold towards Nine. But fans from the other side defended him, saying Third is an introvert, speaks little, and may not be good at building relationships with

others. So, there was some back-and-forth, but I didn't join in. My main account is just for posting pictures like a fansite. My alt account is only for trending and voting. I don't use it to follow these dramas.

But I agree with what people are saying. I think this guy acts cold toward Nine. Even though they're under the same agency. Seeing it with my own eyes like this makes it even clearer. Does he not want to work with my bias or what? Hmph, but who cares? I believe there are plenty of people who would love to work with someone as talented as Nine!

This guy is probably just arrogant, thinking he's so handsome (even if I don't like his face, I have to admit he's ridiculously good-looking), his acting is passable (like, it's fine), and he has quite a lot of fans, so now he wants to act superior or something! In this industry, just having a pretty face won't get you far if you have an unpleasant personality like that! And I haven't even mentioned his overall image, which leans a bit towards the bad-boy vibe. In front of the camera, he likes to do that smirking thing like some edgy anime character, you know what I mean? Which is not my style at all.

Anyway, I don't like this Third guy, and I don't want Nine to be shipped with him. Especially now that people are paying extra attention because using ships as a marketing tactic is disrespectful to the LGBTQ+ community. Profiting off other people's identities like that, trying to make fans fantasize unnecessarily, doesn't feel right. Plus, there could be problems if it's revealed that either of them has a partner.

For me, Nine is too talented to waste time playing along with these ships. It's 2024. The era of fooling BL fans is over! But I guess the agency thinks having a ship will bring in more couple fans to support them in addition to the solo fans. From a business perspective, sometimes the drive for social issues weighs less than the profit. So,

if it's absolutely necessary to sell a pair, I wish it were someone else. Not that walking block of granite.

I turned around, then leaned my face toward the window to look inside the room and see the situation. I saw Nine tilt his face to whisper something to Third, but that guy kept a completely blank expression, not speaking, not responding. He only kept his eyes on the person casting and didn't even glance at Nine.

See! Isn't that annoying?!

I exhaled sharply in irritation, but there was nothing I could do. The production already decided to make the series for these two. Besides, I had watched Third's acting before and had to admit that he's a skilled newcomer. In terms of performing as an actor, I admire him. But other than that, he seems like a lost cause.

"If you finish casting, you can leave right away. We will announce the casting results on our page next week," the female staff member said to me while I was retrieving the bag I had left, smiling sweetly.

I figured she probably wanted to clear people out of the area as quickly as possible. Come to think of it, I only just realized how many people want to become actors. For this project alone, there were seven roles to cast, but no less than four hundred people came to audition. Well, if you become famous from acting in a BL series, you'll have enough to live off for a lifetime. Just landing one product endorsement can earn you millions, and if you get several, multiply that. Plus, fans from our side and abroad spend a lot. Like for Nine's birthday event, there were extravagant money bouquets and branded gifts from head to toe. Whatever he wants, fans buy it. He hardly has to spend his own money, and he gets this kind of treatment at every event he attends.

Money, and only money, rules everything. But that's normal. Everyone wants money because poverty is terrifying. However, one truth about this industry is that not everyone succeeds. Only ten to

twenty percent can reach that level, and even at their peak, their career usually lasts just four to five years before it stabilizes and their popularity gradually fades over time. It's a highly competitive industry, especially in the BL sector, where new faces pop up every day. Consumers these days have countless choices.

High risk comes with high reward, which is why everyone wants to try their luck. But I don't think I'll be one of those lucky ones. Just seeing Nine today, getting encouragement from him, hearing him say my name, and even complimenting me, my life is already complete!

Bzzzz

My phone vibrated in my bag, alerting me to a new message. When I took it out, I saw it was from Jay, asking for an update.

[Have you finished the casting yet?]

[Tell me quickly, I want the scoop.]

[I finished. I got to see Nine, too.]

[Damn, lucky bastard. So, how did you do? What did the judges say?]

[Some people complimented me, but I probably won't make it. There are too many talented and handsome people.]

[Hey! If they complimented you, it means they've got their eye on you. Trust me, you have a shot!]

I smiled at my friend's message. Jay sure knows how to hype things up. I bet he really wants a friend who's a celebrity.

[Results come out next week. Let's wait and see.]

[But there are hundreds of people auditioned for my role. I probably don't stand a chance. If I make it, I'll eat dog food.]

I typed confidently.

One percent chance of passing. Ninety-nine percent chance of failing. If this were the lottery, I'd definitely hit the jackpot this round!

[Got it!]

[I'm taking a screenshot, Wan. Even if you delete it later, it's too late. 55555.]

Jay's teasing didn't faze me in the slightest. Let him tease all he wants. I'll never have to eat dog food anyway!

I had heard people say the famous life principle, 'The only certainty is uncertainty,' countless times, but I never thought it would apply to me today...

"Woof woof! Wan, what would you like to eat? Beef flavor? Liver flavor? Or how about wet food? There's chicken in gravy too. What do you like? Hahaha."

Jay laughed heartily, thoroughly enjoying himself while we stood in a pet supply store near our university after class.

"Hey, hey, how about this one? Salmon flavor with a fur-enhancing formula!"

"I'll choose it myself," I snapped through gritted teeth while scanning the shelves.

Yep. I had said I'd eat dog food if I passed the audition, and now it's happening. Yesterday evening, the production company posted the

casting results on their Facebook page. Turns out, the role of 'Sky,' a supporting character in the series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart*, went to me—Achawin Sukkoson.

Damn it, I actually passed! How the hell did that happen? When I saw my name, I screamed so loud until my little sister rushed in with a baseball bat, thinking a burglar had broken in. But when she found out I passed the audition, she screamed louder than me.

"P'Wan!!! What! How! When! When did you audition, and how did you pass? Tell me, tell me!"

"I don't know!!!"

I didn't know how to answer her because I genuinely had no idea how I passed. At first, I thought there had been a technical error, maybe they listed the wrong name. But about an hour after the announcement, I received a call from the production team inviting me to discuss signing the contract tomorrow.

So, no mix-up. I passed the audition and am officially going to be in a series.

"So, what do you want to eat?" Back to the present, Jay stood with his arms crossed, smirking and pressuring me to pick out the dog food I promised to eat.

Mistakes are part of being human. I messed up once but won't mess up again. So, I did some research on dog food that humans can safely eat without torturing their taste buds.

And I found it!

"I'll take this one," I said, smirking as I grabbed a pack of goat's milk tablets from the shelf. Humans can drink goat's milk too, right? And I checked, this brand only uses human-safe ingredients.

"Hey, hey, what's that?" Jay's face changed as he glared at me.
"You're cheating, Wan"

"How is this cheating? This is dog food. Phi, this goat's milk tablets for dogs, right?"

"Yes," the store owner confirmed from behind the counter.

I smirked triumphantly as I walked to pay. See? I kept my promise.

"You bastard," Jay cursed as we left the store.

"What? I didn't break my promise. I said I'd eat dog food but never specified what kind." I tore open the packet and popped a goat's milk tablet into my mouth, casually flashing a victory sign.

I bet Jay wanted to record a video to embarrass me online, but sorry, I'm too clever for that. Hahaha.

"Tastes good, actually. Want one?"

"...Can humans really eat that?"

"Of course. It's sweet." I munched on another tablet, enjoying the taste. Honestly, it was just like any regular milk tablet. But don't try this yourselves, guys. Normal milk tablets are cheaper than the dog version.

Jay, curious as always, grabbed one and tried it. So now, we had two fourth-year university guys standing in front of a pet store eating dog food. What a sight.

"Still, who would've thought you'd actually pass the audition?"

"Wait, didn't you say I'd definitely get the part?"

"I was just encouraging my friend. I saw how hard you worked," he said, patting my shoulder, his eyes shining with genuine happiness.

"But when I found out you passed, I was so relieved! This is your chance, Wan. If you're lucky and the series gets popular, you'll be set. This is the first step that could open up so many more opportunities for you."

"...Honestly, Jay, I'm still not sure," I sighed.

I mean, I'm happy—of course, I am. But to be honest, I've never really wanted to be an actor. Now that the opportunity is here, I feel unsure. I don't know if this is the right path or what I should do next.

"It's okay. Life is all about trial and error," Jay said, as if he could read my mind, offering a comforting smile.

"...Yeah, you're right." I finally managed to smile back.

After all, I got this role fair and square. No connections, no shortcuts. Since I've been given this opportunity, I should give it my all. Who knows? Maybe I'll discover a new dream along the way.

Besides, this is a golden chance for me to get to know Nine beyond the artist-fan dynamic. We'll get to talk, work together. It's more than a dream come true, isn't it?

I'm starting to get excited. I can't wait to start filming the series!!!

Take 3, Action!

Sometimes life takes an unbelievable turn in the blink of an eye. Take me, for example. Two weeks ago, I was just a fourth-year university student buried in stress over my research topic, worrying about whether I'd be able to find a job after graduation. But at this very moment, I am standing and stretching my neck in front of a grand house in the Bangkok Greta area to sign a contract as an actor for a series production company.

Sometimes, the word 'house' might not be sufficient to describe the grandeur of the building in front of me. It might need to be called a building, a mansion, or a villa—something like that. But let's just say it's huge, way too big to be just a residence in my perspective, having grown up in a three-story shophouse. Maybe it also serves as an office for the company.

I send a Line message to P'Cher, the AR who called me the other day, to let her know I've arrived. After standing awkwardly in front of the house for about two or three minutes, someone comes to open the gate for me.

"Hello," I quickly raise my hands in a respectful wai to the woman in front of me. P'Cher is a beautiful woman with sharp eyes and a model-like figure. She wears gold-rimmed rectangular glasses, giving off the image of a strict female character from a drama.

"Hello there. You can park your vehicle in the lot over there. That parking area belongs to our office," she points to the left, where a small parking lot is. So, I lead my beloved Scoopy to a shaded spot before quickly following P'Cher into the house, trailing her like a chick following a mother hen.

"Let me formally introduce myself. I'm Cher, an assistant to P'Jarin, the manager. I'll also be the AR taking care of everything for you from now on. P'Jarin will be here at four in the evening. I'll take you to introduce yourself to him then."

"Okay..." I respond briefly. I'm not someone with excellent social skills or great at chatting with new people. It takes me a while to warm up to someone I've just met.

P'Cher leads me into a reception room so grand that it could rival a hotel lobby. I see a young man sitting on the sofa, looking strikingly handsome. He turns to look at us and gives a slight smile.

"Wan, this is a junior actor under the same agency. Get to know each other. You're the senior, right? I think you're two years apart."

"Hello, P'Wan. I'm Ren," the young man stands up and gives me a respectful wai, which I quickly return.

As soon as he introduces himself, I recall seeing his name in the casting announcement. Someone named Ren was also cast in a role, playing the protagonist Copter's friend. Being two years younger than me means he's only nineteen, but he's so tall that I have to tilt my head up to look at him. He must be at least 190 cm tall.

"Renji," P'Cher suddenly says.

The young man gives a sheepish smile and quickly responds, "Yeah, yeah, I'm Renji. Sorry, I'm still not used to it."

"Uh... What do you mean?" I don't quite understand.

"They added to his original name to make it more unique and avoid duplicates. His full name is Jirapat, so they decided to use Renji. From now on, whenever someone asks, introduce yourself with that name, okay? That way, you'll get used to it quickly," the AR emphasizes the point to the new actor in the agency.

Renji nods obediently, while I just stand there blinking.

"Then... do I have to change my name too?"

"We'll discuss it later. Why? You don't want to change it?"

"Well... yeah." I nod.

I've been using the name Wan, given by my parents, for twenty-one years. I've never thought about changing or adding anything to it. Besides, I'm already slow to respond. If my name changes, I probably won't even react when people call me because I won't recognize it as mine.

"It's fine. Let's talk about something else first," P'Cher changes the subject before turning to the young man. "Renji, wait here to meet P'Jarin. I'll take Wan to discuss the contract in the office."

"Okay," the young man nods obediently and gives me a smile.

I pat my junior's shoulder lightly and tell him we'll see each other later before following P'Cher into a room that's been set up like a conference room.

After we sit down and the housekeeper serves water, P'Cher who's sitting across from me, immediately gets to the point.

"Alright, first, tell me about yourself in detail."

"Sure. Uh... my name is Achawin Sukkoson. My nickname is Wan. I'm twenty-one years old and currently a fourth-year student in the Faculty of Communication Arts, majoring in Public Relations. I have one younger sister," I start recounting my rather unremarkable life history.

"And... I'm from Ayutthaya. My parents are merchants, they run a boat noodle shop. I studied in Ayutthaya from kindergarten to grade

nine. When I was about to enter high school, my parents sent me to study in Bangkok, where I took the entrance exam for a public high school. Back then, I lived with my uncle, who was my guardian. But when I entered university, I moved out and rented a condo near Phaya Thai. Then, when my younger sister started high school, she moved in with me."

"..."

"That's all." I scratch my cheek awkwardly.

"Do you have any special skills? Singing, dancing, rapping, playing sports, playing instruments? Or any hobbies?"

"Uh... I can play the guitar. I can sing decently, but I'm not good at dancing. I don't play sports often, but I'm okay at badminton and table tennis. As for hobbies, uh..." At this point, I pause. Saying that my hobby is being a fan who follows artists around would probably sound weird. So I decide to give a safer answer.

"I take photos. I've done some freelance work as an outdoor photographer."

"That's great! Then you probably already have a foundation in this field," P'Cher smiles slightly. The moment she smiles, she transforms from a strict disciplinary teacher-like figure into a kind older sister.

"Do you have an Instagram? You didn't include it in your application."

"Oh, I have an IG, but it's just for general photos," I show her my Instagram, which mainly features landscapes and sceneries with no photos of myself, hence why I didn't put it on the application.

"Do you have an Instagram where you post pictures of yourself?"

"No."

"That's fine. After signing the contract, set up an Instagram account. It'll be your portfolio for clients." She quickly concludes before getting up to grab a file from the shelf, pulling out two copies of a contract, and placing them in front of me.

"This is the artist contract, one original and one copy. Both have the same details. It includes terms, profit shares, restrictions, and other conditions. Let's go through it together, and I'll explain the details page by page. If you have any questions, feel free to ask."

The next twenty minutes are spent reading and explaining the contract details. P'Cher is very kind and doesn't rush me or show any signs of annoyance, even though I ask about almost every clause. Since I know nothing about the entertainment industry, I have to ask a lot to ensure I don't put myself at a disadvantage.

While we are discussing the contract, P'Jarin, my manager, arrives at the office. He is openly gay and introduces himself briefly before we return to discussing the contract. Both of them also take the time to explain various aspects of the entertainment industry to me.

"P's, I have a question," I decide to ask before signing the contract.

"What is it? Go ahead," P'Jarin prompts.

"I want to know why I passed the audition." I look at both of them, waiting for an answer. Hundreds of people auditioned for this role, yet somehow, I—a complete beginner in acting—managed to beat ninety-nine others. I want to know what the judges saw in me.

"Hmm... That, you'd have to ask P'Wut, the agency owner, and P'Phai, the director."

"Oh... I see." I give a dry smile. That makes sense. I'd have to ask the ones who made the decision.

"But if you ask me, your looks played a big role. You stand out a lot. And I watched your audition clip, you have potential. You might not be perfect yet, but there's something charming about you that makes people stop and look."

"Yeah, I felt the same way," P'Cher nods in agreement.

"Exactly! Good-looking people are everywhere, but those with a strong character and natural charm are rare. Even more so when they can bring that charm into acting. That's a talent, and not every actor has it. P'Wut and P'Phai must have seen that you were right for the role, which is why they chose you."

"Y-yes... thank you," I smile in relief.

The words of both of them made the heavy stone that had been weighing on my heart for days dissolve. I had always wondered if I was truly good enough to be chosen. Had I taken away the opportunity from someone else who was more suitable, who deserved the chance more than I did? However, upon receiving confirmation that I truly had potential, I felt much more at ease.

"How does my character look?"

"Hmm... looks a bit clumsy, but still cool. Approachable, but also seems like a receiving type. Like, naturally so... I can't really explain it. Let's just say it's rare to find someone with this kind of character so clearly in one person."

"..." I was at a loss for words upon hearing P'Cher's explanation. I could understand the other things, but what did they mean by 'receiving type'? These things have types too? Like, does this appearance look like a 'top,' and this one like a 'bottom'? Isn't it that anyone can be anything?

"Let's put that aside for now. Let's get to the important matters before signing the contract." P'Jarin switched from a sweet smile to

a serious expression, making me tense up.

"Uh... Yes."

"Wan, have you ever done anything bad?"

"Huh?" I blinked. Suddenly, I felt like I was being interrogated. And what does 'something bad' mean?

"Have you ever bullied a friend?"

"Huh? N-no, I haven't." I quickly shook my head. Do I look like someone who would bully others? I think I look more like someone who would be bullied instead.

"Have you ever used drugs? What about marijuana? Pot?"

"Never!"

"Have you ever gotten into a fight, used violence against someone? Have you ever physically harmed a partner? Have you done anything bad that could potentially be exposed later?"

"Never." I answered. I mean, I've slapped mosquitoes and flies before, but all those things they mentioned shouldn't be things to do to other people, right?

"If there's anything, tell me honestly right now." P'Jarin urged.

My brain finally caught up, and I understood their purpose. They were checking my background to see if I had any past actions that could be exposed on social media and tarnish my reputation, affecting the agency. Nowadays, celebrities get exposed all the time. The agency has to take precautions.

"I have never done any of those things. Really." I insisted. Though, sometimes I might not follow the Five Precepts completely, like lying

to take my mom's milk money to buy toys, drinking alcohol, slapping mosquitoes, but that's all I've ever done.

"That's good. But the agency will still run a background check. Also, we'll need all your social media accounts so we can help scan for any past posts that might be risky. If there's anything that should be deleted, better do it now to avoid problems later." P'Jarin switched back to a sweet smile, making it easier for me to breathe.

P'Cher asked in a neutral tone, "Have you ever had a partner?"

"Yes." I answered truthfully.

I mean, at this age, it's not surprising that I've had a partner before. But it was just one person, a female classmate in high school who transitioned from a friend to a girlfriend. But in the end, we broke up in our senior year because I realized I didn't feel any different between being friends and being in a relationship.

"Did it end well? Any chance of them exposing anything?"

"...I don't think so. My ex and I are still friends." I assured them.

I did like her, genuinely. I was even the one who pursued her first. But after we got together, I didn't feel any difference from just being friends. I later realized that maybe I never saw her in a romantic way, it was just admiration. She felt the same. In the end, we broke up on good terms. She even has a new partner now. We still occasionally check in on each other.

"What about now? Do you have a partner?"

"No."

"If you do, you can tell us."

"I really don't." I emphasized firmly. My studies were already exhausting, and combined with my fanboying, I barely had time for anything else. Twenty-four hours in a day weren't even enough for everything I wanted to do. Where would I find time for a partner? Even if I had one, we'd probably break up anyway because I wouldn't have time for them.

"Okay." P'Cher and P'Jarin seemed relieved and smiled.

"Alright, do you want to read through the contract again, or are you ready to sign?"

"I can sign now." I picked up the pen.

I had just checked that both copies had the same details. There were no issues, so I pressed the pen to the last page and signed my name with a heavy, pounding heart.

I've really become an artist now, haven't I? Who would've thought my life would reach this point?

"Alright, let's go sit and chat in the lounge. I still have a lot to discuss with you and Renji." P'Jarin got up with a sweet smile, linking arms with me as we walked to the lounge together.

The close interaction made me a little tense, but they weren't strangers anymore. Besides, it wasn't excessive skinship to the point of feeling uncomfortable. So, I let P'Jarin link arms with me, telling myself that I would try to get used to it quickly.

"You're not in a rush to leave today, right? Both of you?"

As soon as we sat on the sofa, P'Cher switched back to the strict older sister mode. Even though she said it like a question, her eyes clearly said, *Don't even think about leaving early.*

"No."

"Okay. We'll order some food, and in the meantime, P'Jarin and I will explain the basics of how to conduct yourselves in this industry, like how to interact with seniors, fellow artists, journalists, and fans. Whether you remember it all or not doesn't matter yet, but just listen. We'll guide you when the time comes."

"Exactly. And you'll also be sent to personality development and speech courses. I noticed that both of you speak too fast and not very clearly. You both had braces before, right?"

"Yes." Renji nodded, and so did I. I had never noticed that I spoke unclearly, but I guess it was a habit from wearing braces.

"You'll also need to visit the clinic. For Renji, I've looked into it, and you might need a slight nose enhancement to perfect your look. But it won't be in time for the series shoot since they're on a tight schedule. So, for now, makeup will have to do."

When P'Jarin said that, I, who had been listening idly, suddenly froze. I had never planned to enter the entertainment industry, so I never thought about cosmetic surgery before.

Am I really going to have to get something done?

"As for Wan..."

"..."

"Your facial features are already perfect, but you need to take extra care of your skin. First, you'll need laser treatments. Maybe a little filler here and there. I'll take you to consult a doctor. This clinic is top-tier, celebrities use it all the time, so don't worry about quality." P'Jarin smiled sweetly. Meanwhile, I started sweating because all of this sounded expensive.

"Who... will pay for this?"

"The agency, of course. But sometimes clinics sponsor it, so we just post reviews for them on Instagram..."

Hearing that, I secretly let out a sigh of relief. My family isn't wealthy, so if I had to pay for it myself, I wouldn't be able to afford it.

Now that I think about it, an agency probably spends a lot to develop an artist. Sending them to various classes, training them... But if they become famous, the revenue must be much greater than the investment, right? Otherwise, why would production companies keep scouting and signing new actors all the time?

"Ah, let's start with the first thing, which is how to carry yourself in public. Keep this in mind, as long as you're not in your own condo, no matter the situation, you must smile. No making faces. No sulking or frowning. Absolutely not. And then..."

And for the next two hours, a flood of information poured out from P'Jarin and P'Cher. Renji seemed to handle it easily since he had some experience in the industry, whether in modeling or as an extra on set. But for me, I was a complete newbie. I hardly knew anything at all, just sitting there with a blank expression, listening to the massive amount of information. My brain could barely process it, and for a moment, I even thought 'can I still cancel the contract now?'

Being an artist doesn't seem easy at all. Can I really do this?

"Alright, let's call it a day for now. See you on the profile shoot day." P'Jarin said while popping a piece of pickled mango into his mouth as the digital clock next to the TV showed 7:30 PM.

I placed my empty milk tea cup, which had been ordered via delivery, on the table. The empty cup reflected my current state of mind, completely blank.

"Oh, if there's any scheduling matter, like when you need to attend classes or go somewhere, P'Cher will be the one to notify you. You'll get a daily work schedule summary every night at 11 PM, and there will also be a weekly schedule. Okay?"

"Yes."

"Oh, almost forgot. Both of you, I'll send the pilot script in Line. Try reading it and getting familiar with it." P'Cher spoke while quickly tapping on their phone, sending us the file.

"This script was written specifically by the production team. There's no original novel. P'Phai, the director, just approved the first draft. Read and get familiar with it first, and on the 16th, there will be the first workshop class with other actors."

"Okay." I nodded, starting to feel excited because that meant in just two weeks, I would get to meet Nine up close, as a coworker!

"If you have any questions or anything you're unsure about in the meantime, feel free to message me or P'Jarin. See you on profile shoot day, Saturday at 8 AM. Don't be late." The female AR wrapped up before finally letting the two of us go home.

I pressed my palms together in a respectful wai to the older seniors before walking out of the office with Renji. I still felt like I was floating. I couldn't believe I was about to enter the entertainment industry...

"P'Wan, how are you getting home?"

"I rode my motorbike here," I told the junior as we walked towards the parking lot together. I was thinking that if Renji needed to book a ride, I could drop him off at a train station or even at his house if it wasn't too far.

Since we're in the same company and acting in the same series, we'd be working together for a long time. I needed to build some connections, so I'd have someone to share my struggles with.

"Okay, I thought P'Wan came alone. I was going to offer you a ride." The other person smiled gently, looking at me like a puppy that hadn't been weaned yet, while pulling his car keys out of his jeans pocket.

The sound of a car unlocking echoed in the parking lot. I gave a weak smile when I realized that the car responding to the sound was a white metallic Porsche Taycan. If I remembered correctly, that car was worth over seven million baht.

Kid, whose son are you?! And here I was thinking about giving him a ride on my motorbike. Have some self-awareness, Wan!

"See you on Saturday, P'Wan." The junior waved at me warmly.

"Ah-haha, see you." I waved back rapidly, forcing a smile to hide my embarrassment as I watched the luxury sports car drive off. Then I let out a deep sigh.

And this was just the first day... How am I going to survive this? Sigh.

Two weeks passed by in the blink of an eye.

Maybe because ever since I signed the contract, I had so many things to do. Aside from starting to write the first chapter of my research paper for my professor, I had to take personality development classes, speech training, visit beauty clinics, shoot profile pictures, and so much more. Normally, I wasn't the hyper-alert, high-energy type to begin with, so nowadays, the moment I

got back to my room, I would drag my exhausted body to the shower and almost pass out instantly.

"P'Wan, you come home drained every day. Are you going to die before you get famous?" View teased me.

I was wondering the same thing myself, was I going to die before making it as an artist? It seemed like it would take some time before my body and mind could fully adjust to this new routine. Lately, every time I heard my alarm, I'd whine a little before dragging myself out of bed. But not today.

Today, I shot up the moment my alarm rang, rushed to the shower, and got ready without hesitation, because today was the first acting class for the cast of *Deep Dive, Into Your Heart*. Today, I would finally meet Nine!

Ever since I passed the audition, I hadn't had time to go take pictures of Nine at his events. I was totally bummed out about not seeing my favorite actor. But as the old saying goes, good things come to those who wait. Today, I'd get to be closer to Nine than even his top-tier fans had ever been!

I had been psyching myself up for days, telling myself to stay calm, not to act weird or make Nine uncomfortable. I barely slept last night from the excitement. I kept staring at our group chat, reading and rereading Nine's message '*See you all tomorrow.*' probably over twenty times!

"Wow, you're glowing today. If I didn't know you were going to an acting class, I'd think you were going on a date." View commented as I grabbed my backpack. My little sister had just woken up, her hair messy, but she still dragged herself to the door to see me off.

"Of course. If you were meeting your favorite person, wouldn't you be happy?"

"Sure, sure. Hope you get lots of moments with him." She rolled her eyes but smiled slightly.

I clicked my tongue at her before stepping out of my room with my heart soaring. I prayed that today would go smoothly and be a happy day for me.

Have you ever had expectations, only for things to not turn out the way you hoped?

Because I have. All the time!

"P-Please... huff... Studio ATZ is in this building, right?" I panted, completely out of breath after sprinting four hundred meters from the parking lot, and stammered out my question to the security guard at the entrance.

"Yes, son. It's on the third floor."

"Tha—huff—thank you!" I quickly pressed my palms together in gratitude before dashing towards the emergency staircase. I wasn't going to waste time on escalators, because I was already twenty minutes late!

I could blame it on bad luck, but honestly, it was mostly my own stupidity.

See, I'm originally from the countryside. Even though I've lived in Bangkok for over six years, I rarely travel around. I only know places near my home, school, university, or event halls.

Last night, when P'Boe sent the acting class location, I skimmed through it and thought, 'Oh, I know this place. It's in Lat Phrao.' But I was dead wrong, it wasn't Lat Phrao. It was Lat Pla Khao. And on

top of that, I overestimated my own sense of direction and didn't use a map.

So yeah. Jackpot.

By the time I realized I was in the wrong place, I had only twenty minutes left before class started. I had to channel my inner street racer, weaving through traffic like a menace. **B**ut still, I ended up being twenty minutes late.

"I'm... here... huff!" I gasped as I pushed open the door, giving a sheepish smile as all seven actors and staff turned to look at me at once.

Just then, my heart-fluttering moment was shattered by a deep, steady voice from someone. I could feel a piercing gaze from the side and found that the owner of that gaze was Third Tharit, the other lead actor of this project.

"Okay, okay. Now that everyone's here, let's get to it. Each of you introduce yourselves again, and then we'll warm up. Alright, starting with Renji." P'Luang, the acting coach, spoke up, beginning the ice-breaking session before getting into character.

Third's sharp eyes were still on me. That gaze, filled with obvious disapproval, made my face heat up with embarrassment. I quickly looked away and took a deep breath, focusing on the lesson in front of me before I got scolded by the director or acting coach.

The acting lesson went on for about an hour and a half. Then, P'Luang announced a ten-minute break, letting everyone go to the restroom or relax their posture.

"P'Wan."

The moment the break started, Renji quickly walked over to greet me and plopped down beside me, tilting his head and looking up

with wide, innocent eyes like a puppy looking for a playmate. That alone made me, someone who still barely knew the other actors, feel relieved. It made me want to raise my hands and wai him right away.

"How's the lesson going? Can you keep up?"

"Well... maybe." I gave a weak smile. This was my first time seriously studying acting, so I had to try much harder than the others, who already had a foundation or prior acting experience.

"Wan."

Then, a familiar, gentle voice called my name. My heart pounded as if someone was beating a drum in my chest when I saw Nine walking toward me. His incredibly perfect face held a friendly smile.

"Can I just call you Wan? When we introduced ourselves earlier, I saw that we're the same age."

"Y-yes..." I stammered, my ears burning hot. The shining star on stage, the person I used to only admire from afar, was now the one approaching me first. And now, he was sitting right next to me. Not even half a meter apart. Aaaahh!!

"I heard you got lost before coming here. Where did you end up?"

"Uh... I took the wrong route from Lat Pla Khao and ended up in Lat Phrao." I answered awkwardly, rubbing my neck in embarrassment. From now on, I won't rely on Luang Pu Mun anymore. Bangkok is cruel. Huuu...

"Sorry for making you guys wait."

"It's alright. Everyone makes mistakes." Nine smiled with squinted eyes.

Just that gentle smile made me feel light, as if I was floating. Like I was lying on a soft, fluffy cotton candy cloud. Encouragement from my bias is the best thing ever!

"Mistakes happen because of carelessness, don't they?"

But then, suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck the cloud I was lying on. The once bright blue sky turned into a stormy gray, as if a tornado was about to destroy the city.

I turned to meet the owner of that voice. Of course, it was none other than the ice-cold lead actor standing nearby with his arms crossed.

"If you paid more attention to today's lesson, you wouldn't have made such a simple mistake like getting the location wrong."

"Third," Nine warned.

The man in question let out a soft scoff before striding out of the room. His off-camera personality was as cold as ice, completely different from the friendly bad-boy image he showed in front of the media.

Nine let out a long sigh. Renji turned pale, while I sat frozen, my whole body going numb with embarrassment.

"Don't take it to heart. Third is just really serious about things. He doesn't like it when people are late," Nine told me.

"...Okay," I replied softly, my brain still unable to fully process everything. But there was one feeling that stood out clearly.

I don't like that guy!!!

Call it childish if you want, say I'm holding a grudge over nothing, but come on! I know I was wrong for being late, but people make

mistakes sometimes, don't they? It's not the end of the world! Even P'Phai and P'Luang didn't scold me, so why was he making such a big deal out of it? Has he never made a mistake in his life? Did he really have to rub it in that hard?

"I'll step outside for a bit," Nine patted my shoulder lightly before getting up and walking out of the room.

Meanwhile, I leaned back against the wall and closed my eyes in frustration.

"P'Wan... P'Third is scary," Renji whispered, his imaginary ears and tail drooping even though he wasn't even the one being scolded.

"Like a Rottweiler." I gritted my teeth and muttered. I know talking behind someone's back isn't good, but for that guy, I'll let it slide this once!

See? My instincts weren't wrong. I already knew it, there's no way that guy and I could ever get along!

Take 4, Action!

Click!

"You're back, famous star! How was it? How was today's acting class?"

As soon as I arrived back at the condo in the evening, my mischievous little sister, who had been at tutoring all day but was still diligently sitting on the floor in front of the sofa, practicing TGAT English exam questions, lifted her face and asked me with a look of eager curiosity.

"How was it? It sucked, obviously." I let out a sharp sigh, threw my bag onto the sofa, and plopped down. The delicious shabu I just had for dinner didn't help ease my lingering irritation at all. The more I thought about that guy's tone and expression, the more pissed off I got again!

"Huh? What happened? What's wrong?" View was confused because it was rare for me to show this level of frustration so clearly.

"...Nothing. Just a little annoying thing."

"What thing?"

"Nothing much. Forget it." I replied evasively, not wanting to dig up the irritating topic. If I started talking about it, it would go on forever.

Actually, after that, the cold-hearted leading actor didn't say anything to me again. To be precise, he didn't even glance at me.

So, the acting class went by smoothly. As soon as the class ended, the great one immediately excused himself and left, saying he had an evening event to attend, so he needed to go prepare. Nine also left with him. The other actors all went their separate ways. Since Renji and I were both free, we decided to go to the mall, eat shabu, and then head home.

My day was almost a happy one, if not for that damn Third saying something so irritating. I made a firm resolution that from now on, I will never be late again. I will focus on acting, diligently memorize my lines, and even as a newbie, I will give it my all. I won't be a burden to the production or a target for snide remarks.

And that guy, just wait. If he ever makes a mistake, I will roast him mercilessly!

"Okay." View seemed to sense that I didn't want to talk about it, so she didn't push further. That's one good thing about her. Even though she can be spoiled, as the youngest daughter who's always pampered by our parents, she knows how to read the room and rarely makes things difficult for me.

"So, how was it? Did you get a lot of moments with Nine?"

"He actually talked to me. We just call each other by name now since we're the same age. He even encouraged me."

The moment I mentioned my bias, my sulky face immediately transformed into a bright, beaming smile. Nine is genuinely adorable both on and off camera. He's a celebrity who isn't arrogant or stuck-up in the slightest. So calm and always cheering others on. A true human vitamin.

I'm so proud. I really picked the right person as my bias!

"That must've been such a thrill!"

"Yeah! I was so nervous. I kept debating whether I should tell him I'm his fan. But I was afraid it'd make him uncomfortable." I rambled on.

I mean, I already told him that I've been following his work, but I didn't dare admit that I like him so much that I go to take photos of him, collect his merch, and help trend hashtags for him. Because now, we're colleagues. I don't know if he'd feel awkward knowing that I'm actually a hardcore fan.

"Maybe you can tell him after filming wraps. Like, surprise! From a fan to a co-star! I think he'd be happy that his fan has succeeded." View suggested.

I agreed. I'd tell him at the wrap party. I'd even mention that I had met him before when he wasn't famous yet. I bet Nine would be so surprised.

"Hey, hey, I wanna know something." My little sister suddenly sprang up from the floor and plopped onto the sofa next to me, leaning in close with sparkling eyes. She asked excitedly, "How about Third? Is he super handsome in real life? Is he nice?"

Click!

The veins on my temple immediately bulged at the mention of that guy's name. That icy expression of his, as if he was above everyone else, and those judgmental eyes were still engraved in my brain.

"He's only got his looks going for him. His personality is absolute trash."

"Huh?! Are you serious?"

"Dead serious. Listen to me, just stop liking that guy. I'm telling you, he's not as great as he looks on screen!"

Being triggered, I lost control. Even though I originally planned not to talk about it, I ended up venting everything to my sister. I told her how I went to the wrong place and ended up being late for class, how Third scolded me, and how he kept giving me those sharp looks even during break!

"Ohh, so that's what happened." View, who had been listening attentively, nodded in understanding. Meanwhile, my throat felt dry, so I got up to grab a bottle of water from the fridge and chugged it down.

"I mean, yeah, he was a bit too serious, but it's understandable. Some people are super strict. If someone's late and causes delays, it can be frustrating."

"What!?" My sister's words made me freeze. I turned to glare at her. "Are you siding with him, View?"

"Maybe? I don't know. I like him, okay? Among the fans, it's well known that he's like this. Honestly, it's no big deal. And you were actually late, weren't you?" She tried to reason with me, defending her favorite actor.

My face darkened. I didn't want to hear a word of it.

"But it's not like I committed a crime, right? Did he really have to make such a big deal out of it? You didn't see the way he looked at me, View. I felt like a tiny ant under his gaze. Do you get that?" I grumbled, feeling frustrated. In all my life, no one had ever made me feel this humiliated. He was the first!

"Maybe you're overthinking. Maybe he was just looking normally. He has a naturally stern face."

"No! He straight-up scolded me. How is that me overthinking? Don't be biased, View!"

"Really? Hmm... Maybe he's not as nice as I thought." My sister's large eyes reflected hesitation.

I immediately felt victorious, puffing out my chest. "Exactly! Not nice at all. But Nine, on the other hand, is just as sweet as he looks on camera."

"Oh..." View replied briefly.

I narrowed my eyes at her suspiciously. "What? Why that tone?"

"What? This is just how I talk! Stop being so suspicious." View furrowed her brows at me.

I raised an eyebrow, unconvinced.

"What, are you still mad that I said I didn't like your bias? That was ages ago!" View sighed dramatically before explaining in an exasperated tone, "I already told you, I don't hate him. I just don't feel drawn to him. But it's not like I despise him or anything. When I said I don't like him, I meant I'm just indifferent. He's not my type, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it." I replied half-heartedly.

To be honest, View and I had already fought about this before. I love Nine so much, right? But when I told her, she just went, 'I don't really like him.' That led to a long argument, and I even ignored her for a whole day until we sat down to talk it out. That's when I finally understood what she meant.

Sounds dumb, huh? But siblings fight over dumb things all the time. Once I understood her reasoning, I let it go. Still, I couldn't help feeling a little annoyed whenever it was brought up. You know how when you really like someone, you want the people close to you to like them too? It's kinda like that.

But my sister, man... She doesn't like an adorable, kind person like Nine, and instead, she goes for some guy who's only good-looking but talks like he owns an entire farm of attack dogs. It pisses me off so much!

She probably only likes him because he's (very) handsome. Sure, he acts well, but there are plenty of other good-looking, talented actors out there.

Why the hell did my sister have to like that guy!?

"Anyway, just go like another actor. Don't like this Third guy." I concluded. View nodded absentmindedly, but I had a feeling she was just humoring me. She'd have to experience it herself to understand.

"Did you eat yet?"

"I did. What about you?"

"Alright, my friend treated for her birthday," my sister said while glancing at my state, both my hair and clothes reeked of shabu.

"You should go take a shower and get some rest."

"I'm not sleeping yet," I returned the water bottle to the fridge and stretched lazily to the right and left, my eyes filled with determination. "I'm going to read the script for a bit."

"Whoa, so hardworking!"

"Of course, I can't let anyone call me a burden," I scoffed under my breath. Let me tell you, my grudge has ignited the flames of my learning spirit to the max!

"Don't overwork yourself, take some rest. I want my brother to be a star, not a zombie."

"Yeah, yeah, I got it. Just watch, View. Your brother is going to be more famous than that Third guy," I declared so loudly that my voice echoed through the small living room.

Normally, I'm a slow-life kind of person, not someone who enjoys competition. But with that Third Tharit, one day, I'll shine brighter than him!

After taking a shower and changing clothes, I sat in front of the vanity mirror and holding an iPad. I read my script, and trying to practice my facial expressions, gaze, and voice according to what I had learned. For someone like me, with zero acting background, it was quite difficult, but I put my all into it, relying on sheer determination. I was set on perfecting the role of Sky!

I glanced at the printed photo of Nine that I had taken myself and pinned onto my desk grid. Whenever I felt exhausted, like right now, I would always look at my idol's picture for motivation. Nine's smile still had the power to make me smile.

Aside from working hard so I wouldn't look down on myself, I also wanted the first project where Nine got a lead role to be as perfect as possible. No matter how much I disliked the other lead actor, Nine was more important. As a devoted fan, I had to give my all for my idol.

I would never give up!

The past two or three weeks could probably be called the most exhausting period of my life. It didn't even compare to the stress of preparing for university entrance exams.

Besides attending workshops with the other cast members, the agency also arranged for me, Renji, and four other newly signed actors to take additional acting workshops twice a week. There were

also personality development and speech training classes, plus trips to beauty clinics for various procedures. Now, small modeling gigs and product promotions were starting to come in. Sometimes, P'Jarin would take us to meet clients and pay respects to senior figures in the industry to build connections.

On top of all that, I was still a fourth-year university student who had to dedicate time to my research report. Even though I was advised to take a break if things got overwhelming, but it was my final semester. I was so close to graduation, why would I drop out now and waste time? I wanted to graduate with my friends. So, after finishing my packed daily schedule, I had to stay up late working on my research.

These days, I got a maximum of four hours of sleep per night. The dark circles under my eyes were practically screaming, 'I can't take it anymore, please sleep!' But I had to submit progress reports to my professor every class. Even if I wanted to sleep, I couldn't.

The lack of sleep made me feel groggy and sluggish at times, to the point where Jay said I looked like a sloth.

Ugh, I missed my slow-life days. Did I make the right or wrong decision by auditioning for this series? It was all because of Jay's persuasion.

"Hello, Wan."

Nine's gentle voice greeted me when I stepped into the small studio.

Today was a fitting session for the actors to try on their costumes before the official fitting two days later. So, everyone had gathered at my agency's office. But since I had a class in the afternoon, I informed them I'd be an hour late.

By the time I arrived, everyone was already in their costumes and making final adjustments.

"Hello," I immediately smiled upon seeing my favorite artist. Any lingering hesitation disappeared from my mind.

I had made the right choice by auditioning for this. Otherwise, would I ever get to chat with Nine this casually? Normally, I'd be lost in a sea of fans at an event, barely distinguishable, and Nine wouldn't even notice me.

"You look tired. Didn't get any sleep?"

"...Oh...yeah, I was working on my research last night," I admitted. I had probably only gotten two hours of sleep. My sluggish brain took two whole seconds to process Nine's question.

"No wonder, your dark circles are so bad," he chuckled softly.

I instinctively touched my under-eye area, which must have been in terrible shape. The makeup artist was definitely going to scold me for using too much concealer. But I couldn't help it, I had allergies, and when I lacked sleep, my dark circles got even worse.

"Wan, don't get carried away chatting! Come take this outfit and change, then come see me," P'Waen, the famous stylist in charge of the costumes for this series, called out in her sharp voice, beckoning me over. She shoved a shirt and pants into my hands and pointed toward the restroom outside.

Dragging my feet, I headed in that direction, eyes half-closed from exhaustion. As I was walking with my head down and eyes shut, about to turn a corner.

BAM!

"Ah..." I shook my head in a daze. Lack of sleep plus back-to-back morning classes had slowed my brain function significantly.

When I looked up and saw who I had bumped into, my sleepiness vanished instantly. It was like an electric shock ran through my body as I locked eyes with those sharp, cold, piercing eyes glaring at me.

With over twenty cast and crew members present today, my bad luck had to make me bump into Third of all people!

And there it was again! That same icy stare, brimming with disdain. If this was just his natural expression, I genuinely wondered how this guy managed to survive 21 years of life when he looked like he was picking a fight with everyone.

"Sorry," I forced myself to say gruffly. After all, it was my fault for not paying attention while walking. I had enough manners to apologize.

Third furrowed his brows, staring at me in silence. His gaze was filled with disapproval, just like that day in acting class. It instantly reignited my frustration.

"Can you move? I need to change," I said curtly. If there was enough space, I would've walked around him, but it was a narrow hallway, and he was absurdly tall and broad.

"You," he said in a cold voice. I heard him let out a sharp sigh, sounding irritated. Then, his strong hand grabbed my wrist and pulled me aside.

"Do you have a problem with me?" he asked the moment he dragged me into the kitchen area, looking around to make sure no one else was there.

I yanked my arm free and snapped back just as firmly, "Shouldn't I be asking you that? Do you have a problem with me? Because it seems like you don't like me."

"Oh? Maybe," he replied nonchalantly.

His bluntness caught me off guard. I didn't expect him to admit it so easily.

"Wait, hold on. We've never met before. What did I do to make you dislike me?"

"I don't like weaklings like you," Third said flatly, his sharp eyes scanning me from head to toe, making my face burn with anger.

"You showed up late on the first day. You seem distracted in class, always fidgeting. Today, you bumped into me and gave a half-hearted apology. Is that enough reason for me to dislike you?"

"I—"

"Are you really serious about becoming an actor?" Third didn't give me a chance to defend myself. He shot out a question that hit me right where it hurt. "Or do you just want fame and recognition, so you're using BL series as a stepping stone? Doesn't matter if you act stiff or terrible, right? Because you know you're good-looking, and sooner or later, you'll have fans supporting you anyway."

"You—!!!" My eyes widened in fury. His condescending words made my blood boil.

Okay, fine. Maybe I didn't come to this audition because I dreamed of being an actor. But that didn't mean I wasn't taking my role seriously. I never intended to disrespect the audience. Yet here he was, judging me before I even had the chance to prove myself.

"What is it? Are you angry because you're not like that? Or are you angry because I saw right through you?" He smirked. It was a cold, lifeless smile that somehow made his already handsome face seem even more devoid of warmth.

"There are so many people who enter this industry just for fame, without caring to improve their skills. Meanwhile, there are just as

many who genuinely dream of becoming actors, yet they lose opportunities because the first type of people takes up all the space. To be honest, I don't care what your reason for joining this industry is. But what I do despise is the unprofessionalism you're displaying right now."

His long-winded criticism made my ears ring with anger. So this was what it felt like to be prejudged by someone who didn't know a damn thing about me. But I guess it was fair, because I was prejudiced against him too.

"Fine, maybe I've made some mistakes. But don't you think it's a bit much to judge me without even giving me a chance to prove myself, Mr. Famous Actor?" I deliberately stressed the last part mockingly, meeting his gaze without backing down.

"I had no prior acting experience before this. This is my first time learning how to act. You might think I'm not serious, but I'm giving my all to this opportunity. I might not be naturally talented like you. I might take longer to improve. But I won't stop trying. I never intended to drag anyone down. So if that's what you're worried about, you can rest assured."

"Good. I hope you keep your word through actions, not just empty promises." He lifted the corner of his mouth, but his eyes remained cold.

"Hurry up and change your clothes." Third strode away immediately, leaving me clenching my jaw in frustration, watching his broad back as I cursed him in my head.

That bastard!!!

This was straight-up an insult. There was no way I'd ever get along with that guy. I absolutely hated people who judged others before even getting to know them.

But I refuse to be the failure he expects me to be. I'll prove to him that I can be just as professional as anyone else. I'll become an actor that people recognize and respect!

Take 5, Action!

Two days after Third and I had a big argument, the day of the fitting and press conference for the series 'Deep Dive : Into Your Heart' arrived.

I forced myself to wake up at five in the morning, booked a Grab, and arrived at the photo studio in Lat Phrao at six-thirty, a full thirty minutes before the appointment time, so no one could say I was late. I even arrived before P'Cher, my own AR. When I got there, I saw the most excellent and outstanding person in all three worlds, our series' male lead, already sitting and waiting. He was the first actor to arrive at the studio.

"Hello, P'Chuchan, P'Waen. Hello, everyone," I greeted with a smile, raising my hands in a respectful wai to the makeup artist, stylist, and other crew members. But I didn't greet Third.

He glanced at me briefly before closing his eyes, allowing P'Susan, the makeup artist, to continue enhancing his already handsome face. I didn't pay him any mind either. I hurried to change clothes and then sat in the dressing room to get my hair styled. Other actors gradually arrived, and soon, the dressing room was packed. The room was filled with chatter while everyone ate breakfast and prepared themselves so they wouldn't be late.

"Are you excited, P'?" Renji, who had just finished getting his hair and makeup done, came to sit beside me. I was the first to finish dressing and was now scrolling through my phone on the sofa outside the dressing room.

"Very excited," I replied.

Honestly, my heart was pounding, and my hands were ice-cold. I was scrolling through my phone to calm myself down. Even though I had done some modeling before, today was different because reporters would be there to observe, take photos, and shoot videos for news features. I couldn't help but be nervous since this would be my first media interview.

I'm still quite awkward and clumsy. I just hope I don't embarrass myself in front of everyone.

"I'm nervous too. I usually just play extras," Renji said, shaking his hands restlessly. If someone with experience on set was this nervous, what chance did I have?

Renji slipped his hand into mine, interlocking our fingers. His hand was just as cold as mine, making me laugh.

"It's okay. Just do your best. P'Phai and the photographers will help set the mood," P'Cher, who was sitting nearby, said in a calm voice.

I was usually a bit scared of her because she was strict, but today, I felt relieved to have her around. It was like having a mom with me.

"Okay! Let's do this!" I told Renji.

"Yeah! P' too!" He grinned widely. Even though he looked like he had just recovered from an illness, once you got to know him, he was like a fluffy Samoyed puppy. And not just any puppy, he was the pampered kind because he was the son of a famous department store owner. His family was ridiculously rich.

Renji squeezed my hand tightly as if seeking encouragement. I squeezed his hand back twice. If his hair hadn't been meticulously styled, I would have ruffled his head. He was just too adorable, this little kid. Aww.

By eight o'clock, the fitting photoshoot began. Naturally, the first pair to go was the two leads, Third and Nine, for their first set of photos. Since the reporters hadn't arrived yet, the atmosphere was more relaxed.

They started with individual shots before moving on to couple shots. Technically, Renji and I, along with the other actors who weren't scheduled yet, could wait in the lounge, but I dragged Renji to watch from the studio instead. I wanted to observe and prepare myself. But mainly, I wanted to see Nine at work.

"Move a little closer. Third, put your arm around Nine's waist. Pull him in closer. A little more. Yeah, just like that."

P'Phai, the director, shouted instructions that echoed throughout the studio, accompanied by international music playing softly in the background to set the mood for the actors. My eyes focused on Nine. He looked so focused and natural. No matter how the director and photographers guided him, he executed everything perfectly. Plus, he always had a bright smile, showing no signs of exhaustion.

My bias is such a professional. I'm really proud of him. As for the other one, well, whatever. He has to act professional because he's already made a big deal out of me (indirectly). If he didn't behave well now, he'd embarrass himself.

"Lean in a little more. Almost touching lips. Yes, just like that!" P'Phai shouted, while the photographer rapidly clicked the shutter.

I frowned and whispered to Renji, "Does it really have to be that close? Their lips are almost touching."

"I guess they're using it for promotion," Renji guessed, while I grimaced in confusion. 'Deep Dive : Into Your Heart' is supposed to be about competition, chasing dreams, and friendship. The romantic subplot isn't even that prominent. If they were using this for marketing, it seemed a little off from the series' actual plot.

Weird.

"They usually take a lot of photos first and then select later. These pictures can be used for merchandise, like photo books. It's all about marketing. They say BL fans love this stuff," Renji explained when he saw my furrowed brows.

Oh, so it's all about money. That makes sense.

Once the main leads finished their shoot, it was time for a break and a wardrobe change. Then, it was time for the supporting roles, including me. I started with solo shots. At first, I was a bit stiff, so the director and P'Cher had to step in to guide and encourage me closely. But after about five minutes, I started to settle in, embodying my character Sky, a deceptive noble brat, with ease.

"Good, now look more arrogant. Yes, just like that. Give me a condescending gaze."

A condescending gaze? Got it. My mental reference? None other than the look that our so-called righteous male lead gave me the other day!

"Okay, that's a wrap. Wan, take a break. You'll be called back for a shoot with Third and Nine when the reporters arrive."

After about twenty minutes, my session was done. I sighed in relief, bowed to thank the crew, and went to rest. I didn't forget to fist-bump Renji for encouragement before his turn.

"Wan, how was it? Everything okay?" Nine, now dressed in a new outfit, greeted me as soon as I walked into the lounge.

"Yeah," I automatically smiled at him, completely ignoring the other lead actor sitting alone on the couch. He didn't acknowledge me either, just sat there with his AirPods in, lost in his own world.

"Around eleven, the reporters will arrive. It'll be a bit crowded, but don't be nervous. Just stay calm," Nine reassured me in his usual kind and charming manner. I nodded eagerly, my eyes sparkling. I liked him even more now.

After that, we didn't talk much since Nine had to focus. I also went to change outfits and sat quietly, preparing myself as he did. After a while, a crew member came to call us for the shoot.

"The reporters are here. Watch your expressions and body language," P'Cher whispered as I was about to step out of the room.

I nodded and followed Third and Nine outside. As soon as I stepped into the studio, I was shocked to see a crowd of thirty to forty journalists surrounding the set.

"Hello, everyone. Welcome!" Nine, who was leading, flashed a sweet smile at the reporters. I followed his lead, bowing slightly and smiling at them. Meanwhile, Third, walking at the front, gave a small smile, turning on his full professional charm, completely different from his usual cold demeanor.

Professional actors, huh?

"Let's start with a trio shot, then we'll do a couple shoot with Third and Nine," P'Phai instructed. I stepped onto the set with the other two, my heart pounding. This was my first time being surrounded by so many cameras, all focused on me.

Normally, I'm always the one taking pictures of other people. I've never been the one getting photographed, so I felt a bit stiff. But I tried to act natural, pretending not to care about my surroundings, only listening to P'Phai shouting directions. I held my breath a little when I had to stand next to Third.

I'm 178 centimeters tall, which is considered quite tall by Thai male standards. But our leading man is nearly ten centimeters taller than

me, so I felt like a Smurf standing next to him. And when we were directed to look at each other with Nine standing in the middle, I got even more annoyed. Being shorter made me feel like I was being looked down on.

"Hey. Third, Wan, great inner emotion! Keep going, don't drop it!" P'Phai shouted encouragingly. I immediately glared at that guy, while he looked back at me with a teasing expression, just as the script required.

Of course, my emotions had to be intense, it's not like we liked each other to begin with.

After that, my turn was over, and they moved on to another photoshoot set with the lead actors, finishing off with a group shot of the entire cast. That nearly hour-long session drained me more than I expected. Having to stay in character and project emotions was way more exhausting than just being myself. But even though we were done shooting, there was still no break. We had to head straight to the press conference.

"Yes, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' is about chasing dreams, competition, friendship, and love within the swimming club."

Nine's smooth, pleasant voice rang out as he answered the reporters' questions in front of the crowd and numerous cameras. The interview was flowing effortlessly. Standing on Nine's left side, I glanced at him, smiling slightly in admiration. Who would've thought that from just watching his interviews on YouTube, I'd end up standing next to him in an actual press interview today?

"There has been a buzz about you two as a popular on-screen pair since your last series. Now that you're officially acting together in this one, how do you both feel about it?" a female reporter asked.

"Ah... Nine answer first, okay?" Nine turned to smile at the camera when he glanced over and saw that the other person being asked

had no reaction.

I glanced at Third. His facial expression and eyes looked emotionless.

"I've seen that there has been a hashtag created by fans since the previous project. I really want to thank everyone for adoring the two of us. Also, I'm grateful and happy that the seniors gave us this opportunity. Third and I are both very happy to be able to act in this series together. Right? Like, we were already very close, so there wasn't much adjustment needed. Just looking into each other's eyes, we already understand each other. Acting together probably made us even closer."

Nine laughed shyly while glancing at the person on his left.

I thought to myself that this kind of answer would make BL fans go crazy. When I go back and check Twitter, this clip will definitely be cut and spread everywhere.

"And how about Third? How do you feel?" The reporter shifted the focus to the lead actor of the series.

"I want to thank the fans for their support, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to work with the director, the crew, and talented actors. As for the script, from what I've read, it's very interesting and has every emotion. It should allow the audience to see the acting skills of all the actors."

He explained with a small smile before his eyes became more serious as he spoke the next sentence.

"As for the ship, I don't want people to focus on whether Nine and I are a real pair or a fan-created ship. We are actors, so I want people to focus on the acting more. We are determined to showcase the chemistry between the characters we portray for everyone to see in the series."

Those words made me, who was listening, feel slightly uneasy, but I managed to keep my expression perfectly composed, offering a small smile while listening to the reporters continue with other questions.

I didn't turn to look at the reactions of others, but inside, I felt conflicted.

On one hand, I felt that Third's answer was too harsh. Maybe because Nine had just talked about their closeness earlier. And I knew Nine said that because the company had briefed him to do so. After all, BL series inevitably have to sell the chemistry a bit to attract the BL fans fanbase. But Third chose to answer differently, focusing only on work, which made me feel like Nine got embarrassed a little. I could already predict that some fans would think the same way since there had been previous drama about this.

But on the other hand, I also thought what Third said was true. Even though I don't particularly like him, I'm not a child who can't separate logic from feelings. An actor's career should focus on acting skills, not on ships.

From a business perspective, it does help with marketing, increasing fan support. But it also has drawbacks, making people expect that you should always be paired with the same person.

Some fans can differentiate, but some can't. If things are done in a way that makes people think there's something more than just coworkers, it'll become troublesome later.

I think someone as serious as Third chose to answer this way to avoid future problems. Even though his personality isn't the best, it's clear that he really wants to be an actor. He wants to showcase his skills and be recognized.

It's hard to say which side is right. But as Nine's fan, I do feel sorry for my bias for setting things up just to be brushed aside. Couldn't

Third have found a better way to avoid the question? I don't know...

"I heard this is Wan's first series too. A complete newbie! How excited are you?"

While I was still torn over someone else's business, the reporter suddenly targeted me.

I quickly put on a big smile, just as P'Boe and P'Jarin once advised, to always smile a lot. Then, I answered as briefed.

"I'm very excited, but I'll do my best. I'll focus on learning acting properly. I'll be the character Sky in a way that won't disappoint the audience!"

"And how was it working with the other actors?"

"Everyone is very kind. Whenever I don't understand something, they always help. Nine especially helps explain things and gives me acting tips. The others too."

I turned to smile at Nine, who smiled back with eyes nearly closed. In moments like this, of course, I had to praise my bias' kindness in front of reporters. I want everyone to know that behind the scenes, he's truly a good person.

The interview continued for about twenty more minutes. Then, it was time for solo interviews. I was pulled aside for interviews with two or three other media outlets, while the two lead actors had a queue of reporters waiting to interview them one by one.

Supporting actors like me finished work first, so we could go eat before taking a few more photos, then change and go home.

"P'Wan, those two are still being interviewed."

Renji, who had already changed, gestured toward one corner of the studio. Third and Nine were still giving interviews, smiling, though they were probably tired since they hadn't had lunch yet.

"That's what happens when you're famous. You have to accept the exhaustion. Who knows? Maybe one day, we'll be like them too."

I teased Renji. No one knows what will happen. If we perform well and get lucky, we might rise to fame too.

"I'll go change real quick," I said.

After the fitting, Renji and I planned to go to the clinic. He was getting lip fillers, and I was getting laser treatment. So yesterday, he told me not to bring my motorbike, saying we'd go together and he'd drop me off at my condo afterward.

As I went to change and return the outfit to the stylist, I overheard voices coming from a rarely used dressing room.

Curiosity made me stop in my tracks and listen instinctively.

"We've already talked about this. I've told you so many times, Third, not to answer so bluntly like that," a woman's voice said.

If I'm not mistaken, it's P'Sunny, the AR for Third and Nine. They're from the same company. The company owner, P'Pitch, is also an artist manager and a friend of my company's owner, P'Wut. That's why they co-produced this series, in order to let their trainees act while my company got to debut new talents. A mutually beneficial deal.

"Answering like that will cause more problems. Your fans are already fighting all the time. Right now, we need the shipping fanbase to make the series popular. Can't you just force yourself to say something that suggests some chemistry?"

"I don't like giving people false hope about something that will never happen. If the script is good and the acting is good, the series will become successful on its own," Third's deep, indifferent voice responded.

No need to say, he was talking about shipping. It seemed like the AR was upset that Third didn't answer as briefed.

"And if I'm going to have fans, I want them to like me for who I really am."

"This industry isn't that easy. And being realistic doesn't guarantee fame, Third. Being yourself all the time isn't always a good thing. Right now, we have to do whatever it takes. If you're really that uncomfortable, just fake it a little at the beginning, and later—"

I walked away before hearing the rest.

Once again, my mind was split.

If it were me, what would I choose?

Would I sell the ship to make the series popular?

Or would I be myself and let the quality of the series and my acting speak for themselves?

But wouldn't the latter take longer to pay off in the long run...?

I took the outfit to the stylist and then went to grab my own bag in the resting room. The other actors were gradually coming in to pick up their own belongings, preparing to go home as well, including Nine and Third, who walked in afterward.

Nine was still smiling, while Third had a neutral expression, as usual, impossible to read.

"I'm leaving first. See you all at the workshop class the day after tomorrow," Nine cheerfully bid farewell to everyone. I saw him walk over to nudge Third and say goodbye.

Third's reaction was to grab his own brand-name bag, sling it over his shoulder, and walk out of the room amidst the gazes of the other actors and staff, who all fell into an awkward silence, exchanging uneasy glances.

"What was that?" I unconsciously mumbled my thoughts out loud, watching the back of the person who walked away without even glancing back, feeling displeased. This guy has such bad manners. And today was already the second time he acted unkindly toward my bias.

Such a bad attitude!

"Don't be mad. He's probably irritated about something. When he's angry, he's always like that, silent. He probably doesn't want to take it out on anyone," Nine leaned in and whispered to me, who was fuming on his behalf.

See? Even now, Nine was still making excuses for him. Isn't he being too nice?

"Or maybe he just doesn't want to talk to me," he continued with a sad smile. From my observation over multiple instances, Third really did seem to avoid conversations with my bias. It wasn't just my imagination. Only Nine was the one constantly trying to approach him.

That only made me even more annoyed at Third!

"Don't pay attention to it. There are plenty of people who like you, Nine," I comforted.

The other nodded, giving me a gentle smile before saying goodbye and leaving with his AR.

"P'Wan, are we going now?"

"Let's go, let's go," I told Renji, the puppy-like guy who was obediently waiting. His eyes were still watching Nine until the other got into the car and left. I let out a deep sigh.

During the series shoot, I probably need to act as my bias' guardian knight for a bit. If that Third guy wants to pick a fight with Nine, he'll have to step over my dead body first!!!

"I'm backkk!"

"P'Wan! I watched today's interview too!" View rushed to the door just as I was taking off my shoes, shoving her phone at me, which was playing a clip of the press conference. "You answered so casually, just like a real actor. You've really become one now."

"Really? How was it? Was I cool?"

"Eh, so-so. There are lots of other handsome guys," my cheeky little sister tilted her chin up, the corner of her lips curling into a mischievous smile. "Like this one. The tall one, with narrow eyes, the one named Renji."

"Oh, this guy is really nice. He even drove me home today."

"Really?! Ahhh! Why didn't you tell me?! I want to take a picture with him!" View shrieked, but I think it's a good thing they didn't meet. Not because I'm an overprotective big brother, but I'm worried about Renji instead.

My sister is crazy and chaotic. Let Renji go find a good person instead.

"So, how's the feedback? I haven't checked Twitter yet."

"It's great. It even trended. Most of the hype is from Third-Nine fans, but a lot of people are saying you're cute too. Looks like someone even made a base fan account for you."

"Really?"

"Yeah, look." View held out her phone, showing an account page of my base fan club.

Even though the followers weren't even a hundred yet, I couldn't help but feel warm inside, knowing that there were people cheering for me.

"Alright, I'm gonna go shower first. Feeling sticky."

"Okay. I'll go read my book. Oh, and don't forget to call Mom. She's been complaining that you haven't called her much lately."

"Okay, okay."

That little rascal ran off into her room. I quickly took off my clothes and went to shower since I had been out all day. After freshening up, I called Mom first to keep her from worrying and told her about the fitting today. After hanging up, I sat at my desk, opened my laptop, and checked the feedback on today's series fitting press conference.

There were quite a few people complimenting me, saying I looked good, and they were looking forward to my performance. So far, I hadn't seen any negative comments yet. As for Third and Nine, just as expected, some fans thought that Third had humiliated Nine,

causing a minor drama. If those fans had seen how Third ignored Nine when going home, like I did, they'd probably be even angrier.

My eyes locked onto the handsome face of the male lead in the clip, who was answering questions. I scoffed, closed Twitter, and opened my photo editing program instead.

Just looking at that guy's face annoyed me. I'd rather edit pictures of Nine to calm myself down!

Take 6, Action!

Even though time has passed so quickly that it's hard to believe, from the day I signed the contract to become an actor under the company until today, it has already been two months.

It has been two months where my life has been filled with new things, trying out many things that I had never done in the past twenty-one years of my life. Now, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' has already finished filming the pilot, and it is currently in the editing process, waiting to be released next week.

That's right. I had the opportunity to act in front of the camera for the first time, but it was only two scenes. They were short scenes, with each scene having only one line of dialogue. I did my homework diligently before the shooting day and received compliments from P'Phai, the director, saying that I did well for a newcomer. I'm quite satisfied with my performance. The rest is just waiting to see the feedback from the audience.

P'Cher told me to prepare myself to receive criticism. I'm not too serious about that. As a public figure, it's unavoidable anyway. Criticism is useful as it helps me improve my acting.

But if you ask if there's anything I regret about filming the pilot, I do regret a little that I didn't get to absorb the atmosphere of life on set. Because the day of the pilot shoot coincided with my midterm exam, as if fate (or my professor) intentionally made things difficult. P'Phai decided to shoot my scenes first so that I could go take my exam. So that day, I had to film the pilot in the morning, and as soon as my scenes were done, I had to rush back to university to take my afternoon exam. The life of an actor is not easy at all. But

P'Cher told me not to feel bad about it because once the actual filming starts, I'll be on set so much that I'll get sick of it.

For the past month or so, I've felt that twenty-four hours in a day pass by so fast. Or maybe it's because I have too much to do. I study and work at the same time without knowing what day it is. I rely on Jay to remind me what day it is, what classes I have, and what assignments I need to submit. It's funny because I used to be the one reminding him for over three years, and now our roles have suddenly switched. But Jay helps me a lot. He says he'll take care of me fully so that when I become famous, I won't forget him. And when I go for interviews, I shouldn't forget to mention him.

That reason.. uh... he's probably joking.

The period before the pilot shoot was the busiest time for me. Of course, I had to work on my research paper while also reading scripts, attending filming, taking acting classes, doing modeling gigs, and more. I was so exhausted that I almost threw up. I came home every day looking like a wilted vegetable to the point that my younger sister kept asking if I was okay. Luckily, after the pilot filming was done, I had some time to breathe before the real filming begins in two weeks.

"Let's go, Renji," I grabbed my backpack, speaking to my junior, who was kind enough to drive over to pick me up early in the morning. Then I pushed the car door open and stepped out of the luxury sports car. "Let's go get slaughtered."

"It's just a read-through, P', not a slaughterhouse," Renji laughed as he locked the car and walked alongside me toward P'Phai's studio. P'Phai, the director, had scheduled a read-through for the first half of the script with the eight main actors at 8 AM today.

It was only 7:30 AM. When I entered the studio and headed to the meeting room, I found that P'Phai had already arrived, along with

the assistant director and two scriptwriters, who were busy ordering food from a delivery app.

At first, I thought Renji and I were the first two actors to arrive, but just as we were about to sit down, I saw Third's tall figure entering the room in an oversized t-shirt and sweatpants. His sharp eyes met mine for a split second before he looked away and sat down in the opposite seat, which already had a bag placed on it.

In the end, I still couldn't arrive before this guy. I felt a bit annoyed for some reason.

"Good morning, P'Third," my well-mannered junior, Renji, greeted the senior actor with a polite wai.

Third gave a small nod and exchanged a couple of polite words. As for me, I pretended to scroll through my phone, ignoring their conversation. Just hearing Third's deep, arrogant voice made me irritated.

Speaking of my relationship with Third over the past month, we still don't get along. We just ignore each other to avoid conflicts on set. But I have to admit, this guy is really disciplined. Until now, he has never once been late, no matter how early the call time was, 5 AM, 6 AM, or how far the filming location was. Most of the time, he arrives about thirty minutes early. It seems like he drives himself instead of coming with the company's vehicle.

When he's on set, he's focused on his work. Even though I was only on the pilot set for a short time, I saw him reading the script and meditating before filming. He often nailed scenes in one take. He's truly a professional. It's normal for people to have both strengths and weaknesses, but for me, his discipline and work ethic don't make up for his flaws.

Third still speaks in an unpleasant way, his expression always indifferent. His social skills are so bad that the makeup artists and

stylists gossip about him, calling him 'the cold prince.' He doesn't joke around with the crew and is straightforward when giving feedback about makeup, hair, or outfits if they don't match his character. The staff, like most senior figures in Thai society, prefer easy-going people, so they don't really favor him. They smile at him in front but gossip behind his back.

Honestly, I don't think his personality suits the entertainment industry. Even though I've only been in this industry for two months, I feel like connections are crucial. If he makes the behind-the-scenes crew dislike him, his future might be tough. But on the other hand, he's just trying to make sure the production is at its best. In the end, it's all about perspective. I try not to get involved in others' issues, handling my own problems is already exhausting enough!

After Renji greeted Third, the room fell into silence. P'Phai and the staff were outside discussing work, leaving just the three actors sitting in awkward silence. But fortunately, a few minutes later, the other actors started arriving, so we didn't have to endure the awkwardness for too long.

The clock on the conference room wall struck 8 AM. P'Phai and the scriptwriters took their seats, but one lead actor was still missing.

"Is Nine here yet? Where is he?" P'Phai frowned as he sat at the head of the table.

"Not sure, he hasn't replied to messages yet," P'Jern, the assistant director, answered.

"Try calling him. If he doesn't pick up, call the AR or his manager," P'Phai ordered. While his staff made the call, he spoke up, "In the meantime, let's read the other parts first to save time. Today, we'll cover episodes one to four so that next time, we can finish episode eight all at once."

"Okay, P'," everyone responded.

I glanced toward the door, feeling worried about whether something had happened to Nine or if it was just traffic.

The script reading began, but with the absence of the lead actor, who played a crucial role in driving the story, the flow was disrupted. At first, I thought maybe the morning traffic was bad, and he'd arrive in ten or twenty minutes. But an hour had passed, and Nine was still nowhere to be seen.

When we contacted the AR, they said they'd check, then disappeared again. By then, P'Phai's irritation was becoming obvious.

"Enough, enough! Stop! Let's eat first. We'll restart the reading from the beginning once Nine arrives," the middle-aged director announced after over an hour of unproductivity. P'Phai shot up from his chair, pulled a cigarette from his pocket, and stormed out of the room with a visibly displeased expression.

I swallowed hard, making a mental note never to provoke P'Phai's anger.

"Alright, kids, eat up! Who wants what? We have basil chicken and garlic pork," P'Jern called out, gradually easing the tense atmosphere.

"I'm here!"

Just as we were halfway through our meal, the door swung open at Nine's hand, drawing everyone's attention toward the lead actor. He flashed an apologetic smile as he made his way to the empty seat beside Third.

"Sorry, everyone. I set my alarm, but it didn't go off. When I woke up, it was almost eight, and I couldn't get a ride, as no one accepted my booking," Nine said softly to P'Jern, looking genuinely remorseful.

"It's alright, just eat first. Only the garlic pork is left," the assistant director said as she reached for a meal box to hand him.

But Nine shook his head with a small smile. "I'll order something myself instead."

"You sure?" P'Jern hesitated slightly.

I stayed quiet, eating while observing. I figured she wanted everyone to eat quickly so we could get on with the script reading without further breaks. But as a fan, I knew Nine didn't like food with garlic, which was why he chose to order his own.

As he scrolled through the delivery app, Nine asked, "So, how far have you gotten in the script reading?"

"Not far, because we couldn't read," Third's deep voice answered on behalf of the team. His sharp, onyx-colored eyes held an icy glint as he cast a glance at his fellow cast member.

"It's because of me?" Nine's face fell. "I'm really sorry, my alarm didn't go off."

"Let's hope that's really the case," the other replied with disbelief, making my ears perk up as I immediately looked up from my meal. A surge of irritation welled up inside me at the way my favorite was being doubted.

"Why would you say that?" Nine hesitated for a moment before asking back.

The tension between the two lead actors became so thick that the entire room could feel it. But before things could escalate further, P'Jern quickly stepped in to mediate.

"Alright, alright. Whoever's done eating, help clean up the table. Go to the restroom, finish up everything properly. P'Phai said that in five

minutes, we will start reading the script."

Inside the meeting room, things returned to normal. Those who had finished eating helped clean up the trash. Some went to the restroom. Meanwhile, I scooped the last bite of basil rice into my mouth just as Third abruptly stood up and walked out to the restroom.

This guy's foul mouth really can't be fixed. I get that he's upset that Nine was late, but shouldn't he have talked to him privately? Not scold him in front of so many people.

Even so, I have to admit that this time I can't completely blame Third. Because Nine wasn't just late, he was late by twenty minutes. A dozen actors and crew members had to sit and wait for just one person. Well...

I let out a long sigh and got up from my chair, intending to throw away my lunch box and go comfort Nine a bit. However, I froze when I saw the way he was looking at the door that Third had just walked out of.

Everyone else in the room was busy and didn't notice, but from where I stood, I could clearly see Nine's expression. His eyes were filled with simmering anger and dissatisfaction, enough to call it hatred.

I was stunned and froze in place, but in just a fraction of a second, Nine's expression returned to normal as he turned to the sound of P'Jern calling him.

"P'Wan, are you throwing away your trash? I'll do it for you." Renji snatched the lunch box from my hand and went to throw it away before turning to help the staff wipe the table.

I walked back to my seat, still confused about what I had just seen. The more I saw Nine's small face when he quickly walked over to

P'Phai, who had just come back, to apologize, the more I hesitated. Did I imagine that? Normally, Nine is extremely calm. He never gets angry, whether on camera or off. How could he make such a hateful expression toward someone? Even if it was foul-mouthed Third, that was still...

Maybe I was just sleep-deprived and hallucinating. Yeah, that must be it.

"Alright, let's start reading again from the first scene," P'Phai ordered loudly once everyone had returned to their seats.

I took a deep breath, focused, and waited for my scene. In the meantime, I listened carefully to Nine's smooth voice as he read his lines.

"Nine, read it again. Put more inner emotion into the character. The voice I briefed you on before isn't like this," P'Phai's stern voice rang out immediately after Nine finished reading the first scene.

"Okay," Nine smiled sweetly before starting again.

"Put more emotion into it."

"Okay."

Since it wasn't my turn yet, I watched my bias read his script quietly. I couldn't help but think that today, he seemed tired. And... it felt like he was just reading for the sake of it. I don't know, it seemed like he wasn't very focused. Normally, Nine delivers much better emotion than this.

But he's human, after all. Everyone has days when they feel tired or unmotivated. Or maybe he wasn't feeling well.

"Third, go ahead. No need to wait for me to tell you," P'Phai said.

A deep, dreamy voice that could make girls swoon filled the room. I glanced at Third, who was sitting across from me. He still looked as focused as ever, his tone, expression, and eyes were serious. He perfectly embodied the character Copter, even though this was just a script read-through.

"Episode One, Scene Five-Point-Two, Sky." P'Jern, who was helping with the script reading, called out my character's name.

I took a deep breath, embodying the deeply scheming nobleman character, using the tone of voice briefed to me by the acting coach and director. But I still stumbled a little while reading, so P'Phai had the script team note it down to see if they could adjust some words to fit me better. He told me to keep reading.

After two chapters, I felt increasingly pressured. Even when I practiced reading at home, there were some parts where the character's emotions were quite complex, and I still didn't fully understand them. I felt like I wasn't conveying them well enough. If this continued into filming, there might be issues. So I marked the difficult parts, planning to discuss them with the script team later.

Reading through all four episodes took four and a half hours. When Nine read the last line of the final scene of Episode Four, everyone let out long sighs. Some slumped onto the table, visibly exhausted.

"That's it. Thank you, everyone. See you next week," P'Phai said.

I locked my iPad screen and leaned back in my chair, feeling so tired that it felt like my soul was leaving my body. Even so, my business wasn't finished yet. I watched as two scriptwriters walked over to talk with P'Phai, planning that I would go to the restroom quickly before coming back to ask them my questions.

"Everyone, I'll take my leave first. I need to go greet a client," Nine said as he swiftly shouldered his luxury-brand bag.

I saw Third glance at him and ask in a neutral tone, "You have work today?"

"Yes." Nine was still smiling before he went to politely say goodbye to the director and crew, then left the studio.

I watched him leave, thinking that we barely talked today. And today... Nine seemed a little strange.

While I was spacing out, Renji came over and nudged me. "P'Wan, are you going home?"

"Not yet. I need to talk to the scriptwriters."

"Then I'll wait for you."

I shook my head. "No need. Don't you have a work meeting with your friends this evening? Go ahead."

"How are you getting home?"

"I'll hail a taxi," I shrugged. If no taxi was available, I could take a motorbike taxi to the train station. No big deal.

"You sure?" Renji hesitated, but after I reassured him, he left. Other actors also said their goodbyes and headed home.

I went to the restroom and finished my business. When I returned to the meeting room, I rolled my eyes upon seeing that the scriptwriters had been snatched up, by none other than the lead actor, who was seriously discussing his script.

Okay, my bad for being slow. I had to wait for my turn. But how long was Third going to talk with them?

I went back to my seat, rested my chin on my arm, and observed the room. The lead actor was still his usual workaholic self,

meticulously discussing script details, even asking if changing certain words would affect the intended meaning in specific scenes.

The more I listened, the more I felt that Third was incredibly detail-oriented. It seemed like he was trying to fully embody Copter's character. His passion for acting was intense. Maybe that's why he was so charming in fans' eyes and why P'Phai often praised him. People with passion for something always have a certain charm.

Wait, what? Did I just think this guy was charming? That's ridiculous. My brain must be fried!

"Alright, I'll note this down and consult P'Phai again. Anything else, Third?"

"No, but if I have questions later, I'll message the group chat," he said, closing his iPad.

I glanced at the clock, he took thirty whole minutes. But he noted everything down in detail. If I were P'Phai or the script team, I'd probably appreciate his dedication.

"Wan, you're still here?" one of the scriptwriters asked.

"I need to ask you something about the script. There are parts I don't understand."

"Just a sec, let us go to the bathroom real quick," she replied, and then the two of them walked out of the room together.

Now, it's just me alone with the famous leading man, who, as always, keeps a blank expression.

I have to say, the atmosphere is incredibly awkward!

"Still here?" Third remarked casually while stuffing his iPad into his backpack.

"Why? Am I not allowed to be here? Or did you buy this place?" I raised an eyebrow, answering in a deliberately teasing tone. Call it looking for trouble if you want, but I just don't like him. Whenever we talk, the words just naturally come out snarky.

Third didn't seem the least bit angry. He simply lifted his head and looked at me with that same emotionless face.

"I was just asking normally."

"And I wasn't answering badly, was I? Also, Mr. Leading Man, you're not the only one here who takes their work seriously," I shot back. Since he wasn't snapping at me, I took the chance to act cocky. I'm a man of my word. I've already said I wouldn't be a burden to the production, and I will prove him wrong for ever calling me lazy and unprofessional.

Third's response was a subtle curve of his lips, a faint smile that gave away nothing of his true thoughts. He slung his backpack over his shoulder and spoke one last line before leaving the room.

"Well, that's good to hear."

The door clicked shut, but my eyes lingered on it as if I could somehow see through to the person who had just walked out. I scoffed. Why does everything about him, his words, his face, his whole demeanor, have to be so damn smug?

But... was this the first time we talked without him throwing jabs at me?

Or maybe he did throw a jab? I don't know. He's impossible to read. But whatever, I couldn't care less about him anyway.

"Alright, alright. What do you want to ask?"

As soon as the two scriptwriters returned to the room, I pushed all thoughts of Third aside, quickly opened my iPad, and refocused on work.

This is my debut as an actor. My first series.

I'm going to give it everything I've got!

Take 7, Action!

"Oh, Wan, you're here early."

"Hello, P'Jern."

"Hello. Go get your makeup done while you wait. P'Susan! Wan is here!" Phi Ngern, the assistant director, shouted to the makeup artist, who was walking out of the actors' resting room, about to head to the bathroom. Meanwhile, I took long strides in that direction, taking deep breaths to calm my excitement.

Today was the first filming day of the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart', the first scene of the shoot. P'Phai, the director, had scheduled me, who had one of the earliest scenes, to arrive at the filming location, which was a college in the suburban area of Bangkok, at 5 AM. The shoot was taking place near the bleachers. P'Cher, the AR, had the company's van pick me up from my condo at 4:30 AM.

Waking up early wasn't a problem for a merchant's son like me. Back when I was in Ayutthaya, I would wake up at 3 or 4 AM to help carry goods at the market and assist my parents in selling noodles. But the real challenge now was my own state of mind. I was extremely nervous! Even though I had already filmed the pilot, but this was the official shoot. The feeling was like taking a midterm before, but now it's the final exam that determines my grade. The real deal had arrived.

"Hello, Phi Boe."

"Hello, Third." My AR nodded in response to the greeting from the lead actor, who was currently getting his hair done. In his hand was a cup of green tea (I heard he doesn't drink coffee).

I glanced at the tall figure who, after greeting the seniors, went back to closing his eyes and meditating. Third and I still weren't on good terms, but lately, he had stopped glaring at me with disdain. I couldn't be bothered to care either, I didn't want to make the atmosphere on set awkward for others, so I tried to stay away from him as much as possible.

That being said... he was here early again today. Even though it was the first shooting day, he still arrived before the 5 AM call time.

"Hey," he suddenly spoke.

I looked left and right. In the dressing room, there were only me, P'Rin, the hairstylist, and P'Cher. The last two were seniors, so he wouldn't have spoken to them like that... which meant he was greeting me?!

Damn, did it snow in Thailand today?!

"...Hey." I mimicked his words, still stunned and too shocked to respond properly. But was this a good sign for bonding? Because normally, Third barely spoke to me unless necessary.

"What scene do you have today?" he asked in a flat tone, eyes still closed.

P'Boe had gone to get coffee, so I had no escape. I had to answer.

"Around six. I think I have three scenes in the morning." I replied as I sat down on the chair, feeling a little wary. Why was he acting weird today? Starting conversations and all. Did he take the wrong meds or something?

"Do your best," Third said, still in the same emotionless voice before returning to his silent state.

I blinked rapidly, staring at the sharp side profile of his face, wondering if our lead actor had hit his head or something. He seemed... friendly. Well, as friendly as he could get.

After waiting for a bit, P'Susan, the makeup artist who had gone to the restroom, returned to the dressing room. She started applying skincare to prep my face while chatting in a high-pitched voice with P'Rin and P'Waen, the stylist.

"The other day, King was gossiping about that guy again. That kid from the big agency. Heard he took another boy to his condo."

"Which guy, damn it? There are too many of them in this industry. I can't keep up anymore."

"That one! The one from yesterday's scene!"

"Ohhh, the main lead, right? I heard about it too. The gossip was wild. Apparently, their top found out and went after the side piece at the hotel, causing a whole scene. And as for the 'husband,' who knows what kind of bullshit he's spinning this time? Just yesterday, he posted all lovey-dovey on his private IG, taking his 'wife' to buy Chanel in Singapore to shut them up nicely."

"Too much drama! But you'd never guess from how innocent he looks in front of the camera. He acts like the sweetest bottom ever, but damn, he's got the skills. Even smoother than real trans women like me! If the fans found out, it'd be trending for three days straight."

The lively gossip continued above my head as I sat with my eyes closed, letting P'Susan apply makeup to my face. Even though I had AirPods in, playing music, their sharp voices still pierced through, forcing me to unwillingly absorb all the industry gossip.

Most of the hairstylists, makeup artists, stylists, and crew members were freelancers, not tied to any single company. Since they took jobs everywhere, they got to meet many actors and hear countless stories. This was what they called 'insider gossip.' Most of their conversations revolved around relationships, who was backstabbing whom, who was straight, who was secretly gay. Just within thirty minutes of makeup time, I felt like I had already learned half the entertainment industry's secrets.

Wait, does that mean they gossip about us when they work on other sets too? But as long as I behave well, they'll probably talk about me in a good way, right?

Forget it for now. I had bigger things to focus on. Soon, I would be shooting my first scene, which was the third scene of the day. It was a conversation between Sky and Noel, played by Nine, in front of the swimming club. And it was an emotional scene. What a tough start for my first day.

Even though I had taken plenty of acting lessons which are almost every other day before the shoot, but I was still a rookie compared to others. I wasn't confident in my skills yet, so I had to concentrate and memorize my lines perfectly. I didn't want to slow down the set. If I got it right quickly, I could go home earlier. But if I kept messing up, making the hundred-person crew and my co-stars wait for me, that wouldn't be okay.

"Wan, eat first."

"...P'Cher, I'm not hungry." I glanced at the bowl of porridge and the neatly cut watermelon slices that the AR had brought from the catering outside. When I was nervous or stressed, I couldn't eat, and I always ended up with a stomachache.

I knew breakfast was important, but I really couldn't eat right now. Ughhh.

"Force yourself. Otherwise, you won't get to eat until the afternoon."
P'Cher scolded.

I reluctantly took a spoonful of porridge, while she sat beside me, sipping her coffee.

"Don't stress. It's the first day. Even if you mess up, P'Phai won't get mad. Every newbie goes through this. After a few shoots, you'll get the hang of it."

"Thank you."

"But don't mess up too much."

"Oh." I was stunned. I was almost relieved just now, but in the end, I'm back to being stressed again. Ugh.

While my mind was still spiraling out of control, other actors scheduled for the morning shoot started arriving. Since I had already finished my hair, makeup, and costume change, I went to sit outside, waiting for my turn to shoot. Feeling restless, I sat quietly with P'Cher, since the waiting room was too cramped. I kept reciting my lines to stay focused.

"Wan!" Suddenly, at eight in the morning, P'Jern walked in and called me. "Scene order change. Wan, you'll be filming with Third for the first scene. It's Scene 3, 9/2."

"Huh!?" My eyes widened. Wasn't the first scene supposed to be the lead actors' duo scene? Why the sudden change!?

"Nine was late by half an hour, so he's still getting his makeup done. P'Phai doesn't want to waste time. Wan, go get ready for your scene now," P'Jern explained quickly before hurrying off.

P'Cher patted my shoulder to snap me out of it. "Go, quickly."

"...O-Okay." I rushed after the assistant director, sighing heavily as my nerves kicked in.

When filming a drama, movie, or series, scenes aren't shot in chronological order as written in the script. Instead, they're scheduled based on location and actors' availability. For example, if today's shoot is set at a swimming pool from 8 AM to 10 PM, then all scenes featuring the pool as a backdrop will be filmed that day, no matter where they appear in the storyline. This means the scene order jumps around, one moment you could be shooting Scene 19 from Episode 1, and the next, Scene 3 from Episode 8. On top of that, the emotional tone of each scene could be vastly different.

Originally, according to the schedule, my first scene of the day was supposed to be a conversation with Noel (Nine) back when we were still best friends before our rivalry started. But since Nine wasn't ready, and P'Phai didn't want to waste time, they swapped in an afternoon scene instead, where I argue with Copter (Third).

Crap, this is bad.

P'Cher had told me before that anything can happen on set, and you always have to be ready to adapt. But I've always been someone who likes to plan everything in advance. So when something changes at the last minute, I start to panic.

No choice. Now that I'm here, I have to face it head-on!!!

"Episode Three, Scene 9/2, Take One. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

".. You still... still don't realize, do you? That you and I are on completely different levels!"

"Cut!! Wan, do it again! Don't stutter!" P'Phai's voice shouted from the monitor.

I swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and locked eyes with Third, who stood before me, listening to the countdown from the assistant director to prepare for the second take.

"Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"You still don't realize, do you? That you and I..."

The moment I met Third's eyes, the next line vanished from my mind, like someone had hit the delete button. In my head, I thought, Shit, Wan! Then followed immediately by P'Phai's voice shouting 'Cut!' again. My face heated up, and I started getting frustrated with myself.

What the hell? I was doing way better in acting class.

"Again," the person standing before me spoke softly, but his expression and gaze didn't show any annoyance. It seemed like Third understood my nerves.

"Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

In the end, a short five- or six-line dialogue ended up needing six takes. It was a complete mess. Some takes had unclear pronunciation, some lacked the right emotion, and P'Phai wouldn't let any mistakes slide. He was doing his job as a director properly.

But I... I wasn't doing my job as an actor properly...

"P'Cher, I'm going to the bathroom," I whispered to my AR before getting up from the bench and heading toward the restroom behind the bleachers. The set was currently filming Third's solo scene, and even though my scene had just wrapped, I still felt unsettled.

I didn't know what was wrong with me today. The more I focused, the worse it got. I wanted to do well, but instead, I ended up causing endless retakes, wasting both the crew's and my co-stars' time...

I could feel someone's gaze following me. Probably P'Cher. I walked over to the sink and washed my hands, taking a deep breath to regain my composure. I wanted to splash water on my face to clear my head, but if I did, P'Susan, the makeup artist, would definitely chew me out.

Calm down, Wan. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. P'Phai hasn't even scolded you. Don't stress too much!

I returned to the set when I was called for my next scene. This time, it was a solo scene, and yet I still messed up with countless retakes, just like before.

The director still didn't say anything to me, but I felt even worse.

"Hey."

As I sat anxiously at the front of the set, trying to focus since my next scene was coming up soon, the emotionless leading actor, who had just finished his scene, suddenly strode over and sat down beside me. Something he had never done before.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

And he had never asked me something like that before either.

"I... I'm fine. It's nothing."

I lowered my gaze to the floor, avoiding Third's eyes. I felt both embarrassed and guilty at the same time. I had confidently promised that I wouldn't be a burden to the crew, but I failed to keep that

promise. At worse, I made Third waste so many takes because of me.

I heard a sharp sigh from beside me.

"Relax," Third leaned in closer, and I caught a faint whiff of his cologne. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "It's your first day. You're not doing as badly as you think."

"..."

I glanced at him, surprised. His face remained serious, but there was no trace of mockery or condescension.

Was he... comforting me?

"P'Phai is a meticulous director. Sometimes, he makes us do multiple takes just to pick the best shot. If he isn't scolding you or getting frustrated, it means you're not doing badly. You can relax."

"..."

"Go get a drink. Calm yourself down," he said before standing up and heading toward the makeup artist who had called him for a touch-up.

I blinked, feeling an indescribable emotion stir inside me.

Unbelievable. I thought he'd be irritated that I made him redo so many takes, but instead, he came over to encourage me. So this guy can be nice to people after all...

"Wan! Get ready for your scene!" P'Jern called out. I quickly pushed thoughts of Third aside and focused on my script.

The burning frustration in my chest slowly faded, replaced by a surprising warmth that I hadn't even noticed creeping in.

In what felt like no time at all, the sun had climbed high in the sky. At the set, the crew was adjusting the lighting for the final outdoor scene before the lunch break. In the afternoon, we would move to film at the indoor swimming pool.

"Third, Nine, Wan. Get ready for your scene," P'Jern said.

As the makeup artist touched up my lips, I started feeling nervous again. This was my first scene of the day with Nine. And the very first scene we'd have together... was a fight scene. Classic love-triangle vibes.

My character, Sky, secretly liked Noel, who used to be his best friend, but a twist of fate turned them into rivals. When Noel got close to Copter, Sky felt both jealous and angry, like his beloved possession was being taken away. So every time he saw the two main leads together, he would always lash out with sarcastic and harsh words.

In short, my character was the ultimate asshole.

"Let's get through this quickly so we can eat," Nine said with a smile, his gaze directed at me.

"Mm," I hummed, my voice low, feeling nervous about messing up again. I could handle solo scenes to some extent, but the moment other actors were involved, the pressure on me as a rookie felt unbearable. The more people in the scene, the more anxious I got, afraid of wasting everyone's time.

"Relax," Third chimed in.

For some reason, hearing his deep, emotionless voice made me feel a bit more at ease.

Weird. What's up with me today...?

"Take one. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"Sky, if something's wrong, just talk to me. Copter has nothing to do with this," Nine, as Noel, said with a shaky voice. His gaze, fixed on me, no, on Sky, was full of disappointment and heartbreak. Just seconds ago, he had been cheerful, but now he had completely become the character.

"Talking is a waste of time. People like him don't understand words," Third, as Copter, scoffed and grabbed Noel's wrist, ready to pull him away.

I stepped forward to block them.

But unfortunately, I tripped slightly and lost my timing.

"Cut! Do it again," P'Phai immediately ordered.

"Sorry, sorry," I apologized with an awkward smile to my co-actors.

"It's fine," Nine replied with a smile.

But because I was too focused on preparing for the next take, I didn't notice that his eyes didn't smile along with his lips like they usually did.

"Take two. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"Sky, if you have something to talk about, just talk to me. Copter is not involved."

"Talking is a waste of time. People like this can't be reasoned with." Third grabbed Nine's wrist, while I stepped forward, forcing my voice through clenched teeth.

"Friends are talking, what is an outsider interfering for!?"

"Cut! Wan, it can be more than this. I want more aggression, stare at Third like you want to punch him."

"Okay!" I shouted back and took a deep breath.

"Take three. Five, four, three, two, one, action!"

"Friends are talking, what is an outsider interfering for!?"

"Cut!! One more time. Wan, pronounce 'R' clearly."

"Yes!"

"Take four. Five, four, three, two, one, action!"

"Cut!! One more time!" Even though the performance was flowing smoothly, the director wouldn't let it pass easily if it wasn't at least ninety percent to his liking.

At this point, I started sweating. I could tell my face probably didn't look so good anymore.

"It's okay. He's not complaining, which means the next take will probably pass." Third, standing beside me, whispered. His sharp eyes weren't as cold and emotionless as usual. Maybe because Copter, his character, was more open than his real self. When Third acted as Copter, his personality changed slightly.

Maybe I like him better as Copter...

I glanced at Nine, hoping for encouragement from my own bias. But instead, I was stunned to see him clicking his tongue, rolling his eyes, and looking annoyed. When he noticed I was watching, he quickly changed his expression into a sweet smile.

"Do your best, Wan! Hopefully, this will be the last take so we and the crew can finally eat."

Even though he said 'do your best,' I felt embarrassed, uncomfortable, and pressured enough to avoid his gaze. I even heard Nine sigh heavily. I wasn't naïve. I understood his expression.

Was he annoyed that I was taking too long and not getting the scene right?

"Don't stress. Just do it like before." Third whispered one last time before stepping back to his designated spot, while the crew's countdown before action echoed.

I locked eyes with Third and saw him nod slightly, the corner of his mouth twitching as if sending me encouragement. That image strangely reassured me. Maybe because right now, I wasn't Wan, and he wasn't Third. We were Sky and Copter.

We became someone else, so it was easier to get along than being ourselves...

I took a deep breath to regain my confidence. When the action cue was given, I let the atmosphere consume me and released my emotions completely.

"Cut!!! Great job! Take a break and eat now!" P'Phai removed his headphones and set down his walkie-talkie.

The crew cheered, quickly packing up and heading towards the catering area where food was ready. I smiled in relief, knowing I had finished half of my scenes for the day.

I hope I do even better in the afternoon. Keep fighting, Wan!

"Third, the couple's fans sent a food truck for us. Let's go take pictures." Nine nudged the person he called.

"Then go take them." Third replied coldly.

As I accepted a cold towel from P'Cher, I secretly listened in, unable to resist my nosiness.

"We have to take them together. It's for our couple."

"I'll go take them myself."

"We have to take them together, Third."

He stood with his back turned, so I couldn't see Nine's face, but I could sense the tense atmosphere. In the end, Third let out a deep sigh and followed Nine.

I blinked in confusion. I couldn't understand their relationship. They were from the same company, so they should be close, right? But Third seemed distant from Nine, like he didn't want to talk unless necessary.

As for Nine...

I don't know, but he seemed strange today. Everything felt off.

"Wan, the fans sent food support. Want to check it out?" P'Boe asked, snapping me back to the present.

"Me? Someone sent it for me too!?"

"Of course! You have a fanbase too, so why wouldn't you get a food truck?" P'Cher laughed, playfully tapping my head, making me feel both embarrassed and flustered.

I really didn't expect this. I don't even have any significant work yet, but there are people willing to support me enough to send food to the set. Knowing this, my heart swelled with happiness. I was fully motivated for the afternoon shoots!

I took pictures with the food support my fans sent and helped distribute the food, snacks, and drinks to the crew to avoid food

waste. I carried a boxed meal from the fans and sat with the crew and other actors. I noticed Third sitting with the crew at another table, while Nine and P'Sunny, his AR, were nowhere to be seen.

"Where did Nine and P'Sunny go?"

"They probably went to eat somewhere else." P'Cher replied, sipping coffee before leaning in to whisper. "He never eats with the crew. I heard he's like this on other sets too."

"Why?"

"Not sure." The AR shrugged.

From my observations, it seemed like P'Cher and P'Sunny weren't on the best terms. They talked and smiled at each other, but there was always an awkward tension. Renji once told me that the entertainment industry had a lot of drama. People could chat and smile in front of each other but gossip and backstab behind the scenes. They could be both colleagues and rivals. Maybe this was one of those cases.

But I just found out that Nine never eats with the crew. Why?

"P'Boe, why is there a separate drink section over there?" I nodded toward the catering area.

On the table, three large beverage dispensers were set up. One was labeled 'Soft drinks for actors, directors, staff.' Another was labeled 'Sweet drinks for actors, directors, staff' as well. The last one wasn't labeled but was meant for the general crew.

"Maybe that's just how this production organizes things. Some sets separate meals, making it clear that actors, directors, and senior staff shouldn't eat with the general crew."

Hearing that, I instinctively furrowed my brows. I had heard Renji talk about class divisions on set before and read about it on Twitter. But I never thought I'd witness it myself.

I mean, come on. Everyone is human, right? We all do our jobs. No one is more important than anyone else. How can something like social class still exist in this industry? Imagine if there were no small crew members, would the production run smoothly? Without extras, would the final product look complete? Every role is equally important.

"But as far as I know, P'Phai isn't that kind of person. Maybe it was the crew's decision." P'Cher whispered. From what I'd seen, P'Phai was friendly with his team and never gave such orders.

And I was right.

Ten minutes later, P'Phai came for lunch. When he saw the separated food and drinks, he loudly scolded the crew. It turned out that one of his assistants had arranged it. P'Phai immediately ordered that from now on, everything should be shared equally. My respect for him grew even more.

It was still break time.

P'Cher stepped away to take a work call, and I felt like getting some fresh air. I found a quiet spot under a tree and chatted with Jay on Line.

[Almost died, but I'm still alive.]

That's what I texted back. At the same time, I felt a bit lonely. Renji had no shoot today, or else I'd have someone to chat with during break.

Thud. Thud...

The sound of approaching footsteps made me look up from my phone, and my eyes widened in surprise.

Third, in his school uniform, walked toward me holding a bottle of orange juice. His sharp gaze locked onto me.

"Is something wrong?" I asked when the other person walked up and stopped in front of me.

To be honest, even though we'd known each other as colleagues for over two months, I still couldn't read this guy's emotions at all. His expression was so blank that no one could tell what he was thinking.

"What are you doing sitting here?"

Instead of answering, he asked me a question in return.

"Just... hanging out."

"You're not overthinking things, are you?"

That question surprised me even more. Who would've thought this guy actually cared about his colleagues? Turns out, he has a surprisingly good side to him.

"No, I'm fine now. I think I'm starting to get a grasp on P'Phai," I said, accidentally letting a smile slip. Maybe Third thought that if I was stressed, I'd keep messing up my takes and waste his time, so he was trying to help me relax.

But whatever the reason, it still felt nice to have someone comfort me.

Alright, I'll try to forget about our past issues and start seeing him in a better light.

"Good," the taller guy muttered. I had a feeling he wanted to say something else, but in the end, he didn't.

"Huh?"

While I was scrolling through social media with my head down, I suddenly heard Third's voice. When I looked up, I saw him holding out a bottle of orange juice toward me.

"Drink it," he said, shoving the bottle into my hand before walking away, leaving me sitting there, completely bewildered.

Wait... what? He just gave me this out of nowhere? Was this his way of showing friendliness? Seriously? He's so stiff, no softness at all.
Hahaha.

I smiled to myself.

When I looked down at the bottle in my hand, I noticed a sticker on it. Third's face with a small smile, along with the name of his fan club.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I opened the cap and took a sip. For the first time today, I truly felt relaxed.

The orange juice was pretty good.

I guess I should thank the person who gave it to me.

Take 8, Action!

"Wan, hey Wan."

"...Huh?"

"Are you going back to the condo? You look like you're about to die." Jay, my best friend, frowned while looking at me who is lying face down in a near-death state on the lecture table while waiting for the professor.

"How would I go back? I've already used up my full quota of absences for this class." I spoke while yawning, my eyes half-closed, about to shut completely. It was truly karma that back in my first year, I decided to postpone taking my elective courses. At that time, I was chill about it, thinking I'd just take them in my fourth year when I had more free time. (Free time, where?) So now, I had to pay for that decision in my final semester like this.

"Then just check your name and sneak out. Wanna go? I'm too lazy to sit through this class." Jay didn't give up. In the end, he didn't actually care about me. He just wanted to go back to sleep.

"You already came all the way here, so sit through the class, will you? Have some sympathy for your parents." I smacked his head just as the professor walked into the room, ending our conversation.

Even though I told Jay to pay attention in class, I couldn't do it myself because my body simply wasn't cooperating. As soon as I checked my name, I dozed off for almost an hour. These past few days, I had been on set almost every day. Yesterday, we wrapped up at 10:30 PM, and by the time I got back to my room, it was already

late. This morning, I had class at 8 AM. The fact that I hadn't collapsed yet was already a miracle.

But at least I only had one class today. That's good. After this, I could go back and sleep. Basically, retreat from the world for a while.

"Are you P'Wan, the one acting in *Deep Dive*?" After class, before I even had time to pack my stuff, a group of first-year girls approached me.

"Yes, I am."

"Eeeek! I'm looking forward to seeing your work! Can I take a picture with you?" The girl who spoke looked at me with hopeful eyes.

"Sure."

I didn't want to crush her expectations. Plus, the production company didn't have any rules against it. So, I took a selfie with her and then took pictures with four or five other people before leaving the classroom with Jay to find something to eat.

"You're getting famous, my friend. Soon, you won't even turn around when I call you, right?" The taller guy nudged me with his elbow. He was more excited than I was when people came up to take pictures.

"You're exaggerating. I don't even know if I'll become famous or not." I laughed lightly, still feeling drowsy. Honestly, I wasn't even sure what I was doing with my life. I didn't have a clear dream. Acting, I could do it, but I wouldn't say I liked it that much.

And I was about to graduate soon, yet sometimes, I felt like I couldn't see the path ahead. I didn't know which direction my life should go.

"Famous or not, you're still getting benefits. At the very least, people know you. You can use those connections to build your career. Plus, you get to be close to the person you idolize. That alone is already worth it." Jay started listing the benefits of being an actor.

I unconsciously pressed my lips together under my mask. Before, I thought the same way as Jay, that at the very least, I'd get to be close to Nine, the artist I had admired for years. But after actually working together, seeing different sides of him that I had never seen before, I started to feel... strange. I couldn't explain it.

I had heard people say that when you're a fan of someone, it's best to only know as much as they want you to know. So now, I was wondering, should I not have auditioned for the series in the first place?

I knew Nine was just a normal human being, not always cheerful and adorable. But seeing things I never expected, like how he never ate with the crew, never touched the on-set meals, or how he sometimes sighed when other actors took too many retakes. Those things surprised me.

"Wan, what do you want to eat?"

"Pork blood soup, I guess. I feel like eating something hot." I replied, not even realizing we had already reached the food court.

While waiting for our food, I let out a deep sigh. I wouldn't say I was disappointed in Nine. But if I had a choice... I wouldn't want to know that side of him.

Today was another day where I had an afternoon shoot. So, I arrived on set at 11:30 AM with Renji and P'Cher. The filming location was the college swimming pool, as usual.

As soon as I arrived, I went to get my makeup and hair done, then waited to change into my costume closer to my cue, since the crew was about to take a lunch break.

While getting my hair done, I opened my iPad to go over the script for today. It was another set of emotional scenes, three or four in a row. My character was jealous, frustrated, and annoyed in almost every scene. Honestly, he wasn't someone you'd want to be friends with, he was the villain after all. But I had to portray him properly because I was an actor.

I glanced at the lead actor of the series, who was sitting with his eyes closed, meditating before his scene. The more we filmed, the more I wondered, what kind of person was Third, really?

At first, he seemed to dislike me. He was cold, sharp-tongued, and indifferent. But over time, I started to see his good sides. How he always encouraged new actors, not just me, but everyone.

Also, he never got annoyed when his scene partners messed up. He would often buy drinks or snacks for the crew. He wasn't overly friendly or chatty, but he never acted superior either. He always ate at the same table as the crew and regularly checked in on others. The on-set caterer absolutely adored him because he often ate the food she made instead of only eating the fan-sent meals.

He seemed hard to approach, but not unreachable. Seemed heartless, yet still warm.

Why was this guy so contradictory?

During the lunch break, everyone scattered to eat. Nine disappeared with P'Sunny, his AR manager, as usual. Other actors and crew members gathered to eat together. As for me, Renji, and P'Cher, we had already eaten before coming, so we sat and snacked on the treats Renji's fans had sent.

"P'Wan, do you want more?"

"That's enough." I shook my head when Renji offered me another cupcake, then pulled out my iPad. The afternoon scene was with Third, so I planned to review my lines.

I had once declared to his face that I wouldn't be a burden to him. So this time, I aimed to finish the scene in no more than three takes. Hopefully...

"I'm going to sit inside for a bit to read the script." I told P'Cher and Renji, who were busy enjoying their cupcakes.

"I'll go with you—"

"You stay here. Don't bother Wan." P'Cher grabbed the tall kid's arm, stopping him from following me, even though he still had food in his hand.

Renji pouted but nodded reluctantly, afraid of getting scolded by his AR.

"I'll be back soon." I smiled reassuringly, patting the kid's shoulder before heading to the empty dressing room to focus on my script.

Sky and Copter, my character and Third's, couldn't stand each other, so almost every scene we had together involved sarcastic remarks, arguments, or even fights. The fight scene was scheduled for the evening, so I needed to memorize my lines well while also focusing on safety.

As I was reading, I heard the door open. Looking up, I saw my co-star walking in.

"Reviewing your lines?" Third asked in his usual monotone voice.

"Mm, well, the first scene in the afternoon, the one I have to shoot with you (*nai*)... khun." I quickly corrected my pronoun. We were the same age, but we weren't close, so I didn't want to seem overly familiar. Even though he always called me 'nai' instead of my name.

"Just talk casually." He said, sitting down in the chair beside me and opening his own iPad.

"Okay." Since he said so, I wouldn't argue.

"Wan."

"Hm?" I raised an eyebrow. Was this the first time he called me by name instead of "you (*nai*)"?

"Let's rehearse together."

"Huh?" I turned sharply, staring at him in surprise "With me... Me? What made you think of that?"

"Well, I have a scene with you. Who else am I supposed to rehearse with?" Third raised an eyebrow, looking at me like I was crazy. He propped one elbow on the table, resting his head on his hand while opening the script file on his iPad.

This guy really has to act cool in every situation. Seriously.

"Oh... uh, sure." I scratched my cheek, feeling oddly awkward. I had rehearsed lines with Third before, but there was always a director or an acting coach present. This was the first time we were practicing alone, without anyone forcing us to do it.

I scrolled back on my iPad to the scene we had to shoot after the break. It was a scene where Sky went to pick a fight with Copter (again). The conversation wasn't very long, but it required full emotional intensity.

"Let's start. Put some emotion into it too, so we know what to adjust." Third said.

I cleared my throat and began speaking my lines. "Hah. So this is the so-called promising young shark that Coach keeps hyping up? But from what I see, you're just a loser who couldn't even pass the club's qualifying round."

"Shut up." A deep, restrained voice responded. Even though it was just a script, I couldn't help but think that if this guy were actually angry, he'd be pretty scary. Just hearing his voice sent a shiver down my spine.

"Why? Can't handle the truth that you're a loser?" I snapped, curling my lips into a mocking smile. "You're all talk. That win of yours was just a fluke. Too bad it'll be your last."

"..."

"What? Why are you staring at me? Angry? Or just can't handle the truth?"

"..."

"Try harder, struggle more. I love seeing your face when you're disappointed. It makes you look like such a loser. Haha" I let out a satisfied laugh, completely in the zone. Practicing like this felt less pressured than when we had the director or acting coach watching. It made acting feel easier somehow.

The next line was Third's, so I stopped and waited for him to speak. But when no sound came, I looked up from my iPad, only to find him staring at me.

More importantly, the corners of his lips were slightly curved up.

"Hey... why are you smiling?" I suddenly felt uneasy. We weren't exactly on friendly terms before, and even now, we weren't that close. Sitting here and smiling at me like this. Even if Third looked great when he smiled, it was still...

Wait, this is weird... Why does my chest feel all fluttery?

"...Nothing." He quickly straightened his face, let out a small cough, and shifted his gaze back to the iPad, starting to read his lines.

I also looked down at my script, reading along with him, but that strange feeling in my chest didn't go away. It wasn't exactly a bad feeling... I just suddenly found myself unable to meet Third's eyes.

What the hell is wrong with me...?

"Oh? You guys are here by yourselves?" P'Phai, the director, opened the door to the break room. Seeing the two of us reading the script together, he raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Rehearsing lines together? Whoa, you two are close now, huh?"

"It's just work." Third answered nonchalantly, his sharp eyes briefly flicking toward me before continuing in an even tone. "So we don't have to do too many retakes when filming. That way, no one will make you frustrated."

"That's right." I flashed a wide, innocent smile, completely contradicting my next words. "For example, the person who just spoke."

"You two, seriously..." P'Phai let out an exasperated sigh and rolled his eyes.

Everyone on set knew that Third and I had some minor issues over something before. But what they didn't know was that we were...

probably fine now. At least, I didn't dislike him anymore. As for what Third thought, I had no idea.

I glanced at him, only to find him looking at me too. Even though we were just teasing each other a moment ago, I didn't feel like Third was being antagonistic this time. It was more like playful banter.

That thought was confirmed when I noticed the slight upward curve of his lips. His dark eyes no longer held that usual cold or sharp look.

"Alright, go wait on set now." P'Phai shook his head and walked out.

We got up to follow, with Third walking ahead. My gaze absentmindedly fell on his broad back, my mind still replaying the smile he had just given me.

That smile, both on his lips and in his eyes... If we're not counting when he's acting, this might have been the first time I've seen him smile like that from the heart.

And I couldn't deny that it was a damn good-looking smile.

"Cut!!! Great job, Wan! You're getting better and better!"

P'Phai praised me after my solo scene in the afternoon wrapped up.

"Thank you!" I pressed my palms together in a respectful wai, grinning so wide my face almost split in half.

Getting a compliment from the director in front of the entire crew and cast was like a divine blessing for a rookie actor like me. Finally, all my hard work, practicing intensely every day, rehearsing in front of the mirror (so much that my little sister, View, kept knocking on

my door because she thought my murmuring was a ghost), had paid off. I didn't have to do multiple retakes anymore!

"Alright, go get changed. Third, Nine, Renji, get ready for the next scene!"

While the director called the next set of actors, I headed off to change into swimming trunks and a warm-up jacket for another scene.

"Congrats, P'!" Renji, who was waiting with Third and Nine, gave me a thumbs-up, grinning like he had been the one getting praised.

Nine also gave me a small smile before turning away, probably focusing before his scene. As for Third, he nodded at me. His expression was neutral, but there was a faint trace of a smile in his eyes that made me feel unexpectedly happy.

"Alright, time to show off your body!" P'Waen, the stylist, shoved my next costume into my hands and pushed me toward the dressing room.

Since this show was about a swim club, there were naturally shirtless scenes. I had spent the past two months controlling my diet and hitting the gym as hard as I could to get in shape for this. Fortunately, I already exercised regularly, so it wasn't too difficult.

I might not have a six-pack as defined as Third's or Renji's, the kind that makes girls scream, but at least I had some visible muscle definition. My little sister confirmed it! (Or maybe she was just trying to cheer me up, who knows...)

"Wan! Get ready!"

"Got it!" I replied to P'Jern, the assistant director, while P'Susan, the makeup artist, did a quick touch-up. Then I rushed to the set.

This scene was where Sky accidentally ran into Noel's group by the pool. Seeing Noel and Copter together, he got possessive and started stirring up trouble.

As soon as the action cue was given, I waited for my timing. When I heard P'Phai's command over the radio, I strode straight into the scene, ready to cause trouble.

"I'm hungry. Let's go get something to eat—" Noel, played by Nine, spoke his line while stepping back.

According to the brief, Nine was supposed to bump into me lightly before turning around to exchange words. But the impact was stronger than I expected, and since I was mid-step, I lost my balance...

Splash!!!

"Cut!!!"

The loud sound of water splashing filled the set, overlapping with the director's call to cut. I heard panicked voices from the crew as I surfaced from the pool, followed by Nine's alarmed voice rushing over.

"Wan! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to!"

"It's fine, it's fine!" I waved my hand while wiping water off my face. Other than being a bit dazed from the surprise, I was perfectly okay.

Nine reached out to help pull me up, apologizing repeatedly while the staff hurriedly wrapped a towel around me. I reassured him that I wasn't mad at all, accidents happened all the time.

"Are you okay?" A deep voice sounded above my head. Third scanned me as I sat on the floor with a serious expression.

"I'm okay," I answered briefly while Nine kept mumbling apologies.

"I'm sorry."

"It's really fine," I chuckled softly. Even if I wanted to be mad, seeing that downcast face and hearing that soft voice, plus the fact that he's my bias, how could I possibly stay angry?

However, Third, who was standing over me, suddenly shot a sharp glare at his fellow labelmate, making me furrow my brows. Was he annoyed because the accident delayed the filming? But things like this happen all the time. There was no need to be so upset with Nine.

"P'Wan, are you okay?" My beloved little brother, Renji, hurriedly walked up as the staff led me to change my clothes. He looked like a sad puppy as he took in my completely soaked state.

"Yeah, I'm totally fine. Go wait for your scene," I patted his shoulder and hurried inside to change my clothes, unaware that another pair of eyes, filled with a faint trace of concern, had been watching me the whole time.

An hour later, we were finally able to reshoot the same scene, which went smoothly. After several takes, the actors had settled into their roles, getting into character without needing long adjustment periods like in the beginning. This helped keep the shoot running on schedule. It was only 8 PM now, and there were just a few scenes left. I secretly hoped I could go home before 10 PM today...

"Third, Wan, get ready for your scene!"

Finally, it was time for the last scene (for me) that I had been waiting for, the argument scene that Third and I had rehearsed during lunch break. Before the actual shoot, we had to go through a briefing in front of the set to determine which angles to throw the punch from and how to execute it safely. In this scene, only Third would get hit because when the protagonist raises his fist to punch me back, the other club members step in just in time to stop him.

"Just graze him slightly like this, and Third, dodge this way. Okay, let's try it, punch, dodge... yeah, just like that," P'Phai briefed us for a while before heading back to sit in front of the monitor, ready to call for action. I took a deep breath. Hang in there, Wan. After this scene, you can finally go home!!!

"Five, four, three, two, one... action!"

"Heh, so this is the so-called rising star that the coach keeps hyping up? All I see is a loser who couldn't even pass the club's qualifying rounds," I, now fully embodying Sky, strode over to mock the protagonist, who sat dejectedly by the pool.

Third—no, Copter—lifted his head and glared at me, gritting his teeth. "Shut up."

"What? Can't handle the truth that you're just a loser?"

"..."

"All you're good at is running your mouth. That one win you had was just a fluke. Too bad it was probably your last," I smirked wickedly, my eyes gleaming with pure satisfaction. At this moment, the person in front of me was no longer a co-star but a sworn enemy I utterly despised. I had to dig deep into my darkest side to bring Sky's character to life perfectly.

"What? Why are you staring at me? Mad? Or can't accept the fact that I'm just speaking the truth?"

"..."

"Keep trying, struggle all you want. I love seeing your face when you're disappointed, it makes you look even more pathetic. Hahaha!" I laughed maniacally like a deranged person.

The entire set fell silent, engrossed in the intense scene unfolding before them. Meanwhile, Third followed the briefing, rising to his feet and slowly approaching me with deliberate steps, his gaze filled with scorn.

"I might lose in swimming this time, but in everything else, I won't lose," he said in a low voice, smirking.

His incredible performance sent a ripple of energy through me, fueling Sky's anger and pulling me even deeper into the role.

"Are you sure it's just about swimming? Or is it because Noel chose me and not you?"

"You—!!" I growled, snapping as he hit a nerve.

I clenched my fist and swung it as the director had instructed. But completely immersed in the role, my emotions ran high, and the force behind my punch grew stronger than intended. By the time I realized my fist was moving too fast and too hard, I could no longer stop my arm.

"Hey!"

Thud!

Take 9, Action!

"Hey!"

"Cut!! Third! How are you?"

The commotion among the crew rose immediately. Many people rushed over to check on the person who got punched and fell to the ground. Meanwhile, I, the one who threw the punch, stood frozen like a rock. My body trembling, hands shaking, my face paler than A4 paper. My heart dropped to my stomach when I realized that this was the first time in my life I had physically hurt someone, even if it was unintentional.

"S-Sorry! I'm really sorry! I didn't mean to!" Once I came to my senses, I rushed to Third, raising my hands in a wai frantically over my head. My eyes widened when I saw blood seeping from the corner of his mouth.

Shit, shit, shit! I punched him! I made someone bleed! What do I do, what do I do?! Someone, please help me—ugh!

"It's fine," the other person said in a calm voice as he lifted his hand to touch his mouth where my punch had accidentally landed.

Luckily, Third was quick to react, so my fist only grazed his face. But even so, it still left a cut that was bleeding. No doubt by tomorrow morning, it would be bruised. And for a rising actor who regularly attends events, this was definitely not a good thing.

"Let's take a break. Third, go get your wound treated," P'Phai let out a deep sigh before turning to call for a break loud enough for the

entire crew to hear.

"Come on." P'Sunny, Third's AR, quickly rushed over to support his actor while shooting me a sharp glare as they helped him to the dressing room. I shrank back, feeling like my face had shriveled to two inches. I suddenly wanted to cry.

"P'Phai, I—"

"It's okay, it's okay. Sometimes, there are mistakes in timing like this," the middle-aged director patted my shoulder a few times. He didn't seem angry about what had happened. Then P'Phai walked off to the dressing room to check on Third, while I stood there with my head hanging low, letting P'Cher and Renji come to comfort me.

"What happened? You didn't do it on purpose, right?" P'Cher whispered with a serious face, knowing full well that Third and I didn't get along.

"No! I really didn't mean to! At that moment, I couldn't hold back in time, I..." I raised my hands to clutch my temples in distress.

I swear, a million percent, that this was truly an accident. Even though we had problems before, I'm not someone who mixes work with personal issues. And I would never use acting as an excuse to do something just for satisfaction.

"Okay, okay, it's fine. Just wait until Third finishes getting treated, then go apologize to him again," P'Cher cut in, squeezing my shoulder.

Renji hovered around, checking on my mental state with concern. Honestly, I was fine. The one who got hurt was Third. But if his face got so bruised that he couldn't attend events, my company might be in trouble for having to compensate for damages...

Shit, shit, shit! Why didn't you be more careful, Wan?!

"Sunny, can Wan go in and talk to Third?" P'Cher took on the role of negotiator and went to speak with the AR of the other party. After asking around the crew, they confirmed that Third had already finished treating his wound.

"Go ahead," P'Sunny stiffly replied, looking at me with clear displeasure. Uh, actually, very displeased. But they still allowed me to enter the dressing room, while P'Cher nodded at me encouragingly.

I took a deep breath as I stepped inside. Third was sitting in the same spot where we had rehearsed our lines together during the lunch break. The corner of his mouth was slightly swollen, his face expressionless.

"...Does it hurt a lot?" I asked, my voice small as I walked hesitantly to sit beside him. In my entire life, aside from squashing ants and slapping mosquitoes, I had never used violence on anyone. Seeing him injured made me feel so guilty.

"You sure pack a punch," the person being asked let out a dry chuckle but winced slightly as it aggravated his wound.

"I'm really sorry! I swear I didn't mean to!" I raised my hands in a wai over my head again. Even if we were the same age, I didn't care. I wanted him to know that I truly felt guilty.

"Mm, I understand."

"Sorry."

"It's fine."

"I'm really, really sorry, from the bottom of my heart."

"I already said it's fine. Accidents happen," this time, his slow, calm tone carried a slight hint of annoyance. His sharp eyes narrowed as

he looked at me. "Or did you punch me on purpose?"

"Are you crazy?!" My eyes widened. Why was everyone asking me that?! What kind of person did they think I was?! "It was really a mistake! I would never mix personal matters with work!"

"If that's the case, then I have no complaints." Third let out a small huff, his dark eyes gleaming with amusement. "I accept your apology. Now stop apologizing already. You keep repeating yourself, I'm getting a headache."

"Mm..." As the wronged party confirmed his acceptance, the heavy weight in my chest gradually eased. Even so, I still felt uneasy seeing his handsome face marred with bruises.

"Do you have any events coming up soon?"

"Not in the next couple of days. My university has exams, so I asked my agency to avoid booking any jobs this week."

"..."

"But even if I had to attend an event, I could just cover it up with makeup. The makeup artist said a bruise like this can be concealed." He spoke in such a casual tone, as if he already knew what I was worrying about.

I let out a deep sigh, mentally thanking my lucky stars. At least I wouldn't have to pay millions in compensation.

"You look relieved."

"Well, yeah! I don't have money, you know?" I pouted. I wasn't born rich, and I wasn't making that much yet. I didn't want to start my career in debt.

"Then you should be thanking me for dodging in time. That's why your punch only grazed me." Third spoke in a level tone, but his eyes twinkled with amusement.

I scrunched my nose slightly in irritation. But even though his words sounded cocky, I had to admit he was right. Otherwise, I'd be drowning in debt by now.

"If you still feel guilty, just make it up to me by treating me better."

"What? When did I ever treat you badly?" I blurted out before thinking, then immediately realized that, yeah, I had snapped at this guy quite a bit before.

Third raised an eyebrow, giving me a look that said, *You seriously have the nerve to say that?*

"Maybe I did, but you were annoying too, right? Let's just call it even." I quickly cut the conversation short. Life is short, you know? There's no point dwelling on the past, focusing on the present is way more important.

"Mm," he hummed in agreement.

At first, I thought Third would throw back some snarky remark, but to my surprise, he accepted it easily. Seeing this as an opportunity to reset our relationship, I immediately extended my hand.

"We may have... uh, not gotten along before, but that's in the past. Let's start fresh from now on. If you ever need help or advice, just let me know."

Silence filled the room. My conversation partner stared at my outstretched hand for so long that I started feeling awkward. Just when I thought about pulling it back, his slightly rough hand reached out to shake mine.

"Mm."

The warmth of his hand, slightly larger than mine, sent a strange flutter through my chest, like something was tickling it. But just as quickly, he pulled his hand away naturally, leaving only me feeling a bit flustered.

"Thanks for the thought, but you should be worrying about yourself instead."

"Huh?" I blinked. Just now, he seemed relaxed, but why did his face suddenly look serious?

"I can take care of myself. You should be the one watching out," Third emphasized, making me even more confused. He sounded like I was about to run into something bad.

"You mean—"

However, before I could ask for clarification, I heard P'Jern calling from outside the room. Then, other staff members started coming in, talking about how Third had to get his makeup redone and reshoot the scene from earlier.

In the end, I never got to talk to Third, and what he had said was buried under so many other things that I completely forgot about it.

"Did you bring an extra pencil?"

"I did."

"What about a sharpener?"

"Got it."

A conversation took place on an early Saturday morning, a day off for most people. Although the clock on the living room wall had just struck six in the morning, both View and I were already dressed and ready to leave.

"Your ID card? You won't be able to enter the exam room without it."

"Right here, I won't forget it." My younger sister, neatly dressed in her high school uniform, rolled her eyes and laughed lightly, causing her ponytail and ribbon to sway with her movement.

If you ask why we were up so early, it was because today was View's TGAT exam day. As for me, I also had something important waiting, which is the opening ceremony for the series production. In about ten minutes, the company's van would come to pick me up.

"Sorry I can't take you there." I let out a long sigh.

I used to always take View wherever she needed to go, tutoring or hanging out with friends, so she wouldn't have to spend money on transportation. But since starting this job, I barely had time to talk to her. By the time I got back to the condo each day, it was already late, and View had gone to bed. Even though we lived in the same place, it felt like we hadn't seen each other in ages. It was a change that left me feeling a little lost.

"It's okay, P'Wan. You have work to do." My sister, who always acted more mature than her age, smiled softly. She cupped my cheeks with both hands and spoke in a cheerful voice. "Do your best today. Hope you gain a lot more fans! Once I finish my exam, I'll join the fun and fangirl over today's event in the tag."

"Fangirl over who?"

"P'Third.. just kidding! Of course, I'll fangirl over my big brother." She giggled when she saw me pout. Even though I always

complained about Third, View still liked him a lot. I guess my little sister just had a thing for cold bad-boy types.

I placed my hand on her head and gave it a playful ruffle. "Do your best on the exam today. After it's done, I'll take you out for a treat."

"Ugh, P'Wan, you messed up my hair!" She scrunched her face in protest, fixing her hair quickly before grabbing her bag.

"I'm heading out now!"

"Okay, travel safely. I hope you ace every question." I wished her luck and pulled her into a loose hug, watching her leave.

I had seen her since she was just a baby, and in the blink of an eye, she was already a young woman, about to enter university.

Growth is something to be celebrated. I, too, needed to grow. And today was an important step forward, because for the first time, I would be meeting my fans in person, after only interacting with them on social media.

I was beyond excited!

Lately, I had been gaining a lot of fans. Here's the thing, last week, my university held a large fair, where different faculties set up booths to raise funds for their student clubs. My faculty had a drinks booth, and my friends pulled me in to help, saying I could attract customers since I was *kind of* well-known (which part of me was famous, I had no idea). My job was to take orders, mix drinks, and handle payments.

While working, a few customers who followed the BL industry came by to chat and take photos with me because they knew I was going to star in a series. I played along as expected, unaware that

someone had taken a video of me working at the booth and posted it on social media. That video went completely viral!

It got millions of views as 'the handsome vendor you must check out!'

When I found out, I was shocked. I mean, millions of people watched me give change to customers? But at the same time, I was happy that people thought I looked good. Thanks to the person who posted that video, my Instagram followers skyrocketed. Within a day, I gained over ten thousand new followers!

When my company saw this, they immediately told me to do an Instagram live to keep the momentum going.

Before, my lives barely reached a few hundred viewers. But after that video went viral, my live viewers jumped to thousands! Even my official fanbase account gained over four thousand new followers.

Journalists even started writing about me, mentioning that I was about to make my acting debut soon.

This is the power of social media. Going viral can literally change your life overnight.

My manager, P'Jarin, said I was on the rise and reminded me to be extra charming at today's event. The goal was to gain as many new fans as possible. That pressure made me a little nervous, but P'Cher reassured me, saying that I just needed to be myself, interact with fans, and show them attention. Then, people would naturally start supporting me.

That's why today was such a big deal for me. In many ways, it felt like my official debut into the industry.

"Morning, P'Cher."

I greeted the AR as I opened the van door. She gave me a nod and, as usual, handed me an iced latte, which is my favorite, before I sat down next to Renji.

"Where's everyone else?"

"They took another van. We'll pick up Porsche on the way and then head straight to the mall. Get dressed there, and at 8:30, you'll meet the fans," P'Cher explained the schedule.

"P'Wan, are you excited?" Renji asked, his face full of excitement.

"What do you think?" I exhaled, rubbing my palms together. With so many reporters and fans expected today, I just hoped I wouldn't trip over something or embarrass myself.

"I'm excited too! Let's do our best, P'!" He grabbed my hand with bright, determined eyes. I couldn't help but ruffle his hair in response.

"Yeah, let's do this!"

Our van arrived at the venue a little after 7 AM. Once inside the dressing room, we were given T-shirts with the series logo, just like the other actors and staff. After a quick breakfast and getting our hair and makeup done, we took some photos to boost the event's trending hashtag.

At 8:30 AM, the staff herded us out to meet the fans gathered in front of the mall for the blessing ceremony.

"Kyaaa!!!"

"P'Third! Over here!!!"

"Nong Nine, so cute!!!"

As soon as we stepped out, deafening screams filled the air. Hundreds—no, probably two or three hundred—fans were crowded behind the event barriers, holding banners and phones pointed at us.

It was such a strange feeling. Normally, I was one of those people cheering for artists. I never imagined I'd be the one standing here, receiving that attention.

Looking around, it was as expected, most of the fans were here for Third and Nine, the lead actors.

"What time did you all get here?" Third called out to the fans. Meanwhile, Nine was already chatting with his fans, and the other actors were finding their own fan sections.

I hesitated for a moment, glancing around nervously. Then, my eyes landed on a small group of girls holding up a sign with my name.

"Oh!" My eyes widened in surprise, and my heart raced with excitement. When I looked their way, they screamed even louder.

"Kyaa! P'Wan is so cute!!!"

"Nong Wan, fighting!!!"

"Look over here, please!"

And various other words that I couldn't catch blended with the sound of rapid camera shutters.

Hearing cheers for myself made me feel shy, my face heating up. Last night, before going to bed, I had secretly thought, just for fun, that it would be nice if three or four people came to cheer me on. But seeing dozens of fans standing there holding name signs or fans

with my face on them, waving at me, left me speechless. The overwhelming gratitude overflowed in my heart.

"Wan, go to your fans," P'Cher came over and whispered, giving me a gentle push on the back.

I stepped stiffly toward them, too shy to know what to say, so I blurted out, "Who are you cheering for?"

"For Wan, of course!" someone answered.

Laughter erupted. I knew immediately that what I had said was embarrassing, so I raised my hand to cover my mouth. They were holding signs with my name, who else would they be cheering for?

"Thank you so much," I smiled widely. Meanwhile, my mind was in chaos, trying to figure out what to say next. I regretted that I wasn't good at talking with people I wasn't close to, only realizing it today.

But I didn't have to think too much because the fans took the initiative to start conversations. For nearly ten minutes, I answered countless questions and even started chatting back a little. I just found out that they had sent me a congratulatory flower bouquet too!

P'Cher kept an eye on me from a distance while I talked to the fans. Not long after, the staff came to nudge me to gather at the ceremony area to prepare.

"I'll come back later," I waved goodbye to them, not forgetting to turn and greet the other actors' fans nearby as well. P'Cher had taught me that whether they were my fans or not, I should always be nice to everyone so that people would warm up to me.

"P'Wan, your fans came in big numbers!" As soon as I rejoined the group, Renji greeted me, looking more excited than I was.

"Yeah, I'm happy. My heart is still pounding," I raised my hand to touch my chest, where my heart was beating rapidly. Being loved, knowing that there were people supporting me, it was such a reassuring feeling. It reminded me of when I used to follow Nine to events. When Nine saw his fans, did he feel like this too?

"You started off well," a deep voice sounded behind me. When I turned around, I saw Third standing there beside me, the corner of his mouth slightly lifted. "Congratulations."

"Yeah, back when we had the blessing ceremony for our first series, I think not even ten fans showed up," Nine, who was nearby and overheard the conversation, joined in. "But Wan has a viral moment right now, so he's lucky."

"That's true..." I smiled awkwardly, secretly swallowing.

In truth, I was one of the people who had gone to support Nine at the blessing ceremony for his second series. If I told him, would he still remember the guy who covered his face, didn't speak because he was too shy, and just stood there taking pictures of him?

"I hope your luck stays like this forever," the sweet-faced man said with a wide smile, his crescent-shaped eyes reminding me of the first day we met.

For some reason, my feelings right now were different from back then. Maybe it was something in his gentle tone that added a strange sense of pressure to the atmosphere. Or maybe I was just overthinking it.

"Everyone, the live stream is about to start. Please take your seats," a staff member announced.

The actors all moved toward the designated seats. I sat down next to Nine, my heart suddenly feeling heavy for no reason.

At exactly 9:09 AM, the blessing ceremony for the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' began right on schedule.

Having already been in several acting projects, Third wasn't particularly excited about the rituals. However, beneath his composed expression, there was a hint of joy in his eyes. After all, this was his first role as a lead actor.

It had taken him over three years to reach this point. The journey had been tough. He had gone through dozens of castings before finally getting this opportunity. Even though he had to work with someone he didn't get along with, for the sake of his dream of becoming a professional actor recognized for his skills, Third had to endure and push through, carrying out his responsibilities to the best of his ability.

He followed the director to place incense sticks in the ceremonial offerings. His large hand grasped the flower petals the staff had arranged on a tray and scattered them over the altar, completing the Brahmin ritual. Afterward, it was time to eat the offerings for good luck.

"Can we just take them?"

"Yes, you can eat them now."

A quiet conversation came from behind him. Third glanced over and saw two new actors whispering to each other.

When Renji said that, Wan turned to look at the sweets and fruits on the table with a confused expression. That sight made the corner of Third's mouth lift slightly. Before he even realized it, he reached out, picked up a piece of *Thong Yip*, and handed it to the hesitant Wan.

"Eat this."

"Huh?"

"Eat *Thong Yip* first, so you can 'pick up gold and silver' and have prosperity." He said before putting a piece into his own mouth, surprised at himself.

Normally, he wasn't the type to engage with people or start conversations. He didn't even know why he was talking to this guy, especially considering they hadn't gotten along before.

"You're into superstitions too?" The other guy's mouth opened slightly in surprise. The usual frown he had whenever they locked eyes was gone. "Wow, I didn't expect that."

"I just heard people say it." Third exhaled sharply. He wasn't into this stuff. He just believed in not disrespecting it.

"Alright, I'll believe it then," the shorter guy—by nearly ten centimeters—chuckled before munching on the *Thong Yip* he had been handed.

At this point, their relationship could probably be described as something close to friendship.

Previously, Third had to admit that he didn't like Wan. He didn't like anyone who wasn't professional, who arrived late or didn't take work seriously. Because for Third, getting to a point where he was trusted by industry seniors, building a stable fan base, and proving he was more than just a pretty face had taken years of relentless effort. He had endured criticism, constantly being told he only had his looks, before he could prove he was more than that.

So whenever he had to work with people who didn't appreciate the opportunities given to them, which were plenty in this industry, it always frustrated him.

But after thinking it over, Third admitted that he might have judged too quickly. Wan had told him to wait and see, so he had observed Wan's growth. Since their argument that day, Wan had never been late again. He had taken acting lessons seriously and worked hard to catch up with the more experienced actors. Third had gone through that same pressure himself.

To him, a person's worth lay in their effort. Seeing Wan's dedication, he gradually changed his perception of him, and they reached a better understanding. These days, they had a decent relationship. The more they talked, the more Third realized that Wan was easy to be around. Wan was straightforward, not someone with hidden agendas. Unlike many people in this industry, whether actors or staff, who always had ulterior motives.

"Hey," Wan nudged his elbow, leaning in to whisper. "What are we doing next?"

"Interviews," Third replied, slightly surprised that Wan was asking him. But when he looked past Wan, he saw that Renji had been pulled away by an AR staff member for a photo session. That explained why Wan had come to him instead.

"After that, we'll meet with the fans again, right?"

"Yeah, there's a fan meeting session later."

"Great! I want to talk to the fans more," the bright-eyed guy beamed with excitement.

That enthusiasm cracked the stoic mask on Third's face. The corner of his lips lifted slightly as he recalled his early days in the industry. Back then, he had been just as excited, even if he hadn't shown it like Wan did.

"Actors, please go to the backdrop."

When the staff came to call them, the actors went to stand in front of the backdrop along with the producer and director to give interviews to the reporters. Third stood next to Nine, his co-lead, just like always. Even though every second standing beside him felt suffocating, the young actor reminded himself that this was work. He wouldn't let personal matters interfere with his job.

"Third, there are so many fans here to support you today, and the X-trend is also ranking number one. How do you feel?"

"I'm happy to receive such a great response, both for the pilot and for today's blessing ceremony. We're all doing our best to create the best work possible."

"Then, did you receive any special encouragement from someone? Did the person beside you cheer you on?" one reporter asked, a question that almost made Third furrow his brows.

Pushing the ship again, he thought to himself. But since he was in front of the camera, he could only smile faintly and answer in a calm tone.

"Nine and I always cheer each other on. We work together."

"That's right. Getting encouragement from someone close really gives you a big boost," a soft voice continued. The owner of the sweet face turned to him with a smile, and Third had to put in quite an effort to maintain the polite, small smile on his lips.

In truth, he wanted to turn away, to stand as far away as possible. He didn't even want this person in his sight for a single second.

"Now, let's move on to Nong Wan, our rising newcomer! Do you know that the clip of 'the handsome vendor' has already hit three million views?"

"Really?" The named person, standing next to Nine, widened his eyes. "Whoa! Thank you so much! Honestly, I never thought so many people would watch me giving customers their change."

That statement drew laughter from the reporters and fellow actors. Even Third smiled, wondering if Wan himself realized just how naturally funny he was.

"The netizens are eagerly waiting for your work, too. Do you feel pressured?"

"Of course, I do feel some pressure since this is my first project, and I'm working with such talented actors, directors, and crew members. But I'll try my best! Please feel free to give me feedback. I'll use it to improve myself," Wan answered with a bright smile, one that made people feel at ease just by looking at him.

Even from the perspective of someone who didn't know him personally, Third thought Wan seemed like a very approachable person. The reporters also seemed to like this newcomer quite a lot.

The interview continued for nearly twenty more minutes. Most of the questions were directed at him and Nine, which was expected since they were the leads. But Wan, who was quickly gaining popularity, was also asked a lot. Even after the group interview ended, he was pulled aside for multiple solo interviews, almost as much as Third himself.

"Tired, huh?"

While Third stood in the tent beside the stage, letting the staff dab his face before another round of interviews, Nine walked up and stood next to him, holding a portable fan up to his neck with an annoyingly fake smile.

"Hot, isn't it?"

"..."

Third ignored him, thanked the staff, and gave them a look signaling them to step away before picking up his phone and scrolling, just so he wouldn't have to engage in conversation.

To be honest, he was tired of talking to Nine. Just having to work together every day was already unbearable to the point of driving him crazy. So when they weren't in front of the camera or in sight of the fans, Third never bothered to hide his dislike.

"Third, look over there."

But his co-star was undeterred and kept talking. Annoyed, Third glanced in the indicated direction, hoping Nine would just say what he wanted and leave already.

His gaze landed on Wan, who was standing in front of reporters, being interviewed. He looked a little shy but was engaging with the cameras enthusiastically, making Third forget his irritation for a moment.

Getting used to the press already, huh? That's good...

"Still such a rookie, going all out like that. Doesn't even know how to carry himself properly," Nine drawled. He cast a sidelong glance at the person speaking to the reporters before turning to Third with a smirk. "Don't you think so? He's answering longer than us, the leads."

"So what?" Third shot back icily. He didn't need to be told. He already knew what kind of person was standing before him. That incident where Wan was pushed into the water? Yeah, probably not an accident.

Nine leaned in closer and lowered his voice to a near whisper. "Don't you think about how hard we worked to get this chance? And now,

some random nobody is trying to steal the spotlight at our event. If you really don't feel anything, you must be pretty generous."

"That's right. I'm not as petty as you," Third snapped. Others might see Nine as sweet and innocent, but that carefully crafted image didn't fool him.

No matter how much time passed, this person was still the same. Jealous and unwilling to see anyone do better than him.

Nine flinched slightly. For a brief moment, Third caught a flicker of pure hatred in his eyes, but it was gone in a second, replaced by a bright smile as if they were just joking around.

"Forget it. Maybe I'm overthinking. But we should stick close together. The fans are probably waiting to take pictures of us."

"..."

"Don't forget. We're a pair now. You can't just ignore me like before. In front of the cameras, the reporters, the fans... you better play along. Don't you want to be a professional actor?" Nine's voice was sweet as honey, but the coldness in his eyes betrayed him.

Third clenched his jaw, glancing at the watch on his wrist. He silently wondered when this event would finally be over.

After the interviews ended, it was time for the final part of the event, which is the fan meet. This was a chance for the fans who had woken up early to support them to interact with the cast.

The first part was a group session, where all the actors took turns speaking into the mic, introducing themselves, and sharing some lighthearted stories about the filming process. After that, everyone split up to meet their own fans, including Wan.

"Nong Wan, are you tired?"

"I'm not tired! I'm having so much fun," he answered honestly. The heat was a little much, but his energy was through the roof today. Maybe it was because so many fans had come to cheer them on.

"How's the filming going? Anyone bullying you?"

"Nope! Everyone's super nice."

"Really? Who are you close with?"

"Honestly, I get along with everyone," he laughed. In truth, he was closest to Renji since they were in the same agency and clicked well. They often hung out together.

Besides Renji, though...

His eyes unintentionally flickered to the left, where Third stood talking to his fans. His smile looked genuine, not like the businesslike one he sometimes wore on set.

It was the same as that day, the day they sat down to practice their lines together.

So he can smile like this. Why doesn't he do it more often? Wan wondered.

At that exact moment, as if sensing someone watching, Third turned his head toward him. Their eyes met.

Thump. Thump.

Wan's heart seemed to beat a little faster when Third gave him a small smile before turning back to his fans. He quickly turned back to focus on his own fans as well, trying to pay attention to their questions. But his concentration shattered, his mind kept drifting back to his co-star's smile just now.

Third really did look good when he smiled, but... why did I even care about his smile?

Take 10, Action!

"Wan, Third, hold on a sec. I need to talk to you about something."

Director P'Phai walked up to us while the other actors were raising their hands in a wai to bid farewell to the crew, getting ready to go their separate ways.

Third and I exchanged a brief glance as we followed P'Phai to a quieter spot to talk privately. I couldn't help but wonder what he wanted to discuss. Seeing his serious expression made me a little uneasy.

"What's the matter?" The usually quiet leading actor was the one to ask after we stopped at a corner of the parking lot.

"It's about you two." P'Phai sighed, looking between me and Third with an exasperated expression. "Honestly, I don't want to force you into anything, and I don't even know if there's anything going on between you two or not."

"Huh?!" I jolted, eyes widening in shock. My face heated up instantly, and my heartbeat quickened.

What does he mean by 'anything going on'? Don't tell me P'Phai is thinking that Third and I have *something* between us. No way! How could that even be possible? Why would he suddenly think that? And why am I feeling flustered?! I don't have *anything* going on with that guy!

I didn't dare look at Third's expression, but deep down, I was curious about how he was reacting to this.

"I've never said this directly to you two, but I think now's the time." P'Phai pulled a cigarette from the pack but, upon noticing a no-smoking sign nearby, let out a deep breath and stuffed the cigarette back into the pack.

"I know you two don't get along very well. I have no idea why, but since you'll be working together for a while, I don't want things on set to feel awkward. Also, I want you two to clear things up between you."

"..." I blinked several times, processing his words for a solid three seconds before my face burned again, not from embarrassment, but from sheer secondhand embarrassment.

Oh. So I was just imagining things earlier? I mean, seriously, who would even think that Third and I have *that kind* of relationship? The odds are like one in a million. Haha.

"So, find a day to hang out together, just the two of you. Even half a day is fine. No bringing anyone else. Go anywhere you want. And send me a picture as proof."

"..."

Both Third and I were momentarily speechless at the unexpected order.

"P'Phai, Third and I don't have any issues." Third stated seriously.

"Yeah, exactly! Maybe in the past, we, uh... had some minor disagreements, but we've already cleared things up. There's really no problem at all!" I quickly backed him up.

P'Phai raised an eyebrow, glancing between us like he still wasn't convinced.

"Good. Then go on that outing and get even closer."

"..."

So no matter how we explain it, he's not going to listen?

I let out an awkward smile and turned to look at Third. His sharp, handsome face was still as expressionless as ever, but there was a hint of unease in his dark eyes.

"Just do it for my peace of mind, okay?" P'Phai patted our shoulders firmly before walking away, leaving Third and me standing there in silence, staring at each other.

"Guess we have no choice. We'll have to go." The taller guy was the first to break the silence, his brows still slightly furrowed.

"I don't mind." I sighed. I was fine with it. Other than filming, I didn't have much on my schedule, so I could easily find a free day. But the real issue was the busy leading man next to me.

"Will you even have time?"

"I'll ask my manager to clear a day." He exhaled slowly. When his sharp eyes met mine again, I felt an odd twist in my chest.

"Just let me know when you're free, and I'll talk to my manager."

"No, it's fine. You pick the day. Just tell me when." I replied quickly, not even sure why I was feeling so nervous around him.

"Alright. I'll text you. Accept my friend request." His voice was as calm as ever before he turned and walked off, leaving me standing there in a daze. Once I snapped out of it, I hurried after him out of the parking lot, heading back to find my AR.

Ding!

As I was walking, a pop-up appeared on my phone screen, someone had added me on LINE. He must have added me from the series

group chat we were both in.

I accepted the request and sent a sticker as a greeting. He responded with a funny-looking pit bull sticker, making me chuckle as I watched his broad back walking ahead of me.

Oh well. Let's just take it as a chance to strengthen our connection. Maybe, as someone with few friends, I'll gain a good one.

As expected, P'Phai's order caused quite a bit of trouble for one of us, it means Third. It took some effort to free up his schedule since he had work almost every day. Meanwhile, I only had occasional jobs, so it wasn't a big deal for me. Eventually, we settled on Friday as our free day. I told him that even half a day would be enough, but Third insisted that since he was taking a break, he might as well take the whole day off and treat it as a break.

[Where are we going?]

He texted.

His typing was as short and blunt as his speech, but I knew he wasn't actually annoyed. He was just a straight-to-the-point type of person, unlike the cool, flirty bad-boy image the company tried to paint him as.

[Can I pick?]

I quickly typed back. I already had a place in mind, not too far from Bangkok.

[Up to you.]

[I'll message you later in the evening. I'm in class right now.]

I typed fast and put my phone away, feeling the sharp gaze of my professor from the front of the room.

"Wan, who are you texting? Your girlfriend?"

Jay, my dear friend who had zero discretion, leaned over to whisper.

"Your ass. I'm working my ass off like a buffalo. Where would I even find time for a girlfriend?" I whispered back, hunching slightly as the professor glanced our way again.

"I don't know. You were smiling while typing. Thought you were chatting with some girl."

I froze for a split second before replying, "...Just work."

"Alright, alright." Jay mumbled. Meanwhile, I frowned slightly as I highlighted a section in my notes.

Wait... Was I really smiling just now? I didn't even realize.

That evening, after wrapping up everything, I texted Third about the planned destination. It's Ayutthaya, my hometown. I hadn't been back in almost four months, and my mom had been nagging about missing me. Since I had a day off, I wanted to visit my parents and maybe show Third around a bit before heading back to Bangkok.

It was nearly midnight when Third finally replied. He had probably just finished work. I was still awake because I was fixing my research paper, so we got to chat for a bit. Luckily, he had no objections, so we agreed to meet at 8 AM on Friday. He would pick me up at my condo since I couldn't drive, I only knew how to ride a motorbike. So, the role of driver for this trip naturally fell to the superstar himself.

If I remember correctly, he drives a BMW. My friend Renji, the son of a famous department store owner, drives a Porsche too. Everyone around me is loaded. Guess I get to ride in a luxury car again. This is what they call *having rich friends*.

"P'Wan, don't forget my sai mai!"

View, my little sister, reminded me for the tenth time before heading to school. The moment I mentioned my trip to Ayutthaya, she made me promise to bring back our favorite roti sai mai. She kept saying that the ones in Bangkok didn't taste as good as the ones from home.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Noodles from home too."

"I know." I responded, watching my younger sibling leave the room. Once View was gone, I went to take a shower and get dressed. Around eight o'clock, I headed down to wait in the condo's shared lounge area.

The clock on my phone showed exactly eight o'clock when I saw a black BMW turn in and park in front of the building. I grabbed my backpack, slung it over my shoulder, and walked straight toward the car, taking the liberty to open the passenger-side door.

"Thanks for picking me up."

"Mmm." The other person hummed in response.

Today, Third showed up with a bare face, his hair completely unstyled. Even though he had a few acne marks, because, well, he's human, he still looked really good. Now that he had his hair down and was dressed casually in a loose t-shirt and jeans like any other teenager, he looked younger than usual. The atmosphere around him also felt more approachable.

"Have you eaten? I have a sandwich." I lifted the bag of snacks I had bought from the convenience store under my condo.

"It's okay. You eat. I'll stop by the gas station for coffee later."

He spoke while keeping his gaze fixed on me. I was just about to unwrap my sandwich when I hesitated. Was my bare face that bad? No way. Or was he afraid I'd spill food and mess up his luxury car?

"Never mind, I won't eat yet. I'll just grab something at the gas station." I settled into my seat.

"It's fine. If you're hungry, go ahead and eat." He turned his eyes back to the road and pressed the accelerator.

The atmosphere in the car was quite silent. I quietly ate my sandwich, occasionally glancing out the window awkwardly. First, because we weren't that close, and we had even disliked each other before. Second, because it was someone else's car, which made me feel even more tense. Third, neither of us was very talkative. If this were a variety show, there would definitely be a sound effect of crows flying by right now.

"Why do you want to go to Ayutthaya?" The usually quiet one suddenly spoke up.

I swallowed the last bite of my sandwich and answered in a slow voice. "I just want to go home. I'm from Ayutthaya. By the time we arrive, it should be around lunchtime, so I thought I'd take you to eat boat noodles from my family's shop first, then we can go sightseeing afterward."

"So basically, you're taking me to meet your parents?" He glanced at me with a look that carried a mix of emotions, but the amusement was the most obvious.

My face heated up instantly. I hated the way he summarized things so misleadingly.

"I'm just taking a customer to my family's shop! You're famous, you know? If I get a picture of you there, I can put it up on the wall, 'Third Tharit once ate here', and attract more customers." I quickly corrected him before he got the wrong idea.

"Oh... I see."

What was with that 'Oh'? I wasn't making excuses! This was the truth!

"But it's delicious, I guarantee it. My family's been selling noodles for fifty years, since my grandma's time." I puffed my chest out with pride. Everyone who tried our noodles loved them. It was an authentic, traditional recipe, not one of those 'let's just call it an old recipe to boost sales' things. We used only high-quality ingredients, definitely Michelin-worthy. But even if we didn't get a star, it didn't matter. We already had plenty of customers.

Third gave a slight smile but said nothing, and the atmosphere returned to silence. A soft foreign song played in the background as the car sped toward the outskirts of Bangkok.

We stopped at a gas station to use the restroom, grab coffee, and send a picture to report to P'Phai. Then, we got back on the highway. Two hours later, we arrived at our destination a little past eleven, just in time for lunch.

"We're almost there." I straightened my back, suddenly feeling more energetic. As the car turned into a small alley, I saw the familiar old three-story shophouse. A relaxed smile spread across my face. I was finally home.

"Dad, Mom!" The moment I got out of the car, I rushed over to my parents, who were busy blanching noodles and preparing bowls for

customers.

"Oh, you're here!" Mom looked up and beamed, while Dad chuckled.

"Finally! Your mom's been complaining about missing you every day."

"Sorry, I've been busy with work." I grinned playfully, hugging my parents loosely from behind, just like when I was a kid. Then, I suddenly remembered there was someone else with me. Clearing my throat, I straightened up, adjusting my demeanor to be more composed as I introduced Third, who was waiting near the storefront.

"This is Third. He's... uh, a fellow actor. He's the lead in the series I'm in."

"Hello." The tall figure gave a small smile and respectfully pressed his hands together in a wai.

"Hello! Wow, you really are handsome." Mom, who had always been a fan of good-looking people, smiled in delight. I was sure she'd be looking up Third's past works to watch tonight. And Dad would definitely text me about it later.

"Go ahead and find a seat. Write down what you want to eat." Dad called out, motioning for us to sit while he continued preparing noodles for customers.

It was almost noon, and the shop was getting crowded. Third seemed to want to avoid attention, so he picked the innermost table, facing away from the storefront. Meanwhile, I went to grab ice for our drinks. Our shop was semi-self-service. Otherwise, during rush hour, the servers wouldn't be able to keep up.

After staring at the menu on the wall for a moment, Third grabbed a pen and order slip to write his order before handing it to me. I

added my own order next.

"You don't eat spicy food?" I asked, noticing that he had written 'no chili' in parentheses.

"Mmm."

"Is it because you can't eat it, or you just don't like it?" I pried. Not that I was trying to be nosy. I just wanted him to experience the full, authentic taste. Because if it is seasoned properly, the noodles were absolutely delicious.

"If I eat spicy food, my nose runs. So I avoid it."

Probably a concern for his image as an actor. Sitting there with a runny nose while eating in public wouldn't look good.

"Then try my broth first. If you like it, I'll ask Mom to pack some for you to take home. Deal?" I said while jotting down my order.

"...Alright." Third paused for a second before agreeing.

I secretly smiled. He wasn't as hard to approach as I thought.

I took our order to my parents, but seeing how busy they were, I decided to make it myself. Before long, I returned with a tray of noodles.

"I missed this taste so much." I murmured after taking a sip of the broth. The familiar flavor filled not only my stomach but also my heart with warmth.

Back then, I hardly ever ate noodles. When you see them every day, you kind of lose your appetite for them. But after moving to Bangkok, I started missing my parents' cooking. No other noodles ever tasted as good as the ones from home. So whenever I came back, I always craved them.

"Here, try it." I pushed my bowl toward Third.

He frowned. "Why are there no vegetables?"

"Oh, I don't eat veggies." I gave a sheepish smile. Vegetables just didn't taste good. My parents had nagged me about this my whole life, but I always ignored them. At this point, they had given up. Since I made my own bowl today, of course, I left them out.

"Like a kid." Third commented.

"I'm twenty-one. That's still young, right?" I retorted playfully.

"Next time, if you don't eat your veggies, give them to me."

My heart skipped a beat. Did that mean he planned to have meals with me again in the future...?

"Ah, hurry up and taste it." I quickly diverted the topic to cover up my own flustered reaction by urging him. I watched anxiously as he took the shared spoon and scooped up some soup from my bowl to taste.

"Is it good?"

"Mm, it's good." The other person replied, his sharp eyes showing a hint of surprise mixed with approval.

"I told you." When I saw the other person's expression, I puffed out my chest with pride. This is the best of Ayutthaya. As the host, I had to take good care of my guest, so I secretly got up and whispered to my mom to pack two bags of noodles for Third to take home, one as thanks for driving me, and the other for View, since she had been complaining about missing Mom's cooking.

When I returned to the table, Third had already finished his bowl very quickly. Was he eating or inhaling it? That was way too fast.

"If you're still hungry, you can have another bowl."

"No, it's fine." He drank the rest of his water in one go and grabbed a tissue to wipe his mouth.

I started eating my own noodles, taking my time because I wanted to stay here a little longer. The restaurant was still a bit noisy as usual. It might be annoying to some people, but I grew up with this. I missed it, a lot.

Bangkok is nice, but if I had a choice, I'd rather stay home. Though right now, that wasn't an option. Maybe in another twenty years, I'd come back and settle down here.

"Shall we go?" I asked after finishing my food, just as the server placed the takeaway noodles on our table.

"Aren't you going to stay and chat with your parents?"

"No time for that. It'll get even busier soon. I'll find time to come home with my sister next month." I smiled. Today was just about seeing my parents' faces to ease my homesickness. If I stayed too long, I'd get back to Bangkok too late, and I had a shoot tomorrow.

We went to say goodbye to my parents. Third tried to pay for the meal, but my parents refused outright.

"No need, no need. Of course, we have to feed our son's friend." Dad said.

"Hey, can you take a photo with my parents? It'll help attract customers." I hadn't forgotten my main goal. Third didn't protest (well, of course, he got a free meal, so he had to help out a little). He took a smiling photo with my parents, and as their son, I was more than satisfied.

"Don't forget to pay my fee," He said as we left my parents and got back in the car.

"Huh?"

"You're paying for the next meal," the leading man said in a calm voice as he started the car. I pouted, thinking to myself that rich people are really stingy.

"Where to next?"

"Temple visit. If you're in Ayutthaya, you have to visit a temple." I took the liberty of grabbing Third's phone and setting the GPS to Wat Phanan Choeng. The owner of the phone didn't object, driving straight toward our destination.

Wat Phanan Choeng is one of Ayutthaya's most famous ancient temples, a must-visit spot for both Thai and foreign tourists. It's especially popular among Chinese visitors due to the renowned sacred Luang Pho To or Luang Pho Cham Po Kong, which has been worshipped since the Ayutthaya period. The temple is also located by the river, giving it a great atmosphere, so visitors never stop coming.

Even though it wasn't a holiday, the temple's parking lot was still packed with cars. I led Third to pay respects at the temple and bought some snacks at the market in front of it. We took turns snapping photos and sending them to P'Phai, like we were on a school field trip handing in our assignment.

Should I post this on my story? I wondered as we walked back to the car.

"Third, have you posted on your story yet?"

"Why?"

"If you post, then I won't." I said. I didn't really want people to know we were here together. He's in a ship with Nine, after all. If people found out we were traveling alone together, it might stir up drama.

"Not yet. You post and tag me."

"Nah, forget it. I won't post at all then." I cut it short for safety's sake.

Third frowned. "You don't want people to know you're traveling with me?"

"Something like that. It's not that I have a problem with you, but I don't want your ship fans to hate me." I let out a dry laugh. Some BL fans (though only a small portion) were really possessive over their ships and didn't like seeing actors getting close to anyone other than their ship partner.

I personally found it a bit silly, but since I was just starting out in this industry, I had to be cautious. Even in the filming set, if Third posted a story featuring other actors but not Nine, it already caused drama (View told me about it). I didn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

Third didn't say anything, but his well-shaped eyebrows remained furrowed. He seemed a bit annoyed. But about what...?

"Do you want to go anywhere?" I asked, letting him pick the next spot.

I had planned to take him to the night market for dinner before heading back to Bangkok. There were still about two hours before it opened, enough time for another stop. The leading man ended up choosing a café with an English garden theme.

Seeing the nice scenery, my photographer instincts kicked in. I looked around for my honorary model, who else but the guy I came with? That's when I spotted Third crouched in the garden, playing with the café's puppies.

His small smile was warm and gentle, something I rarely saw. He was clearly an animal lover (even if his face didn't exactly look the part). Without thinking, I pulled out my phone and snapped a picture. Satisfied, I smiled at how well the pose, lighting, and overall mood of the photo turned out.

"Third." I nudged him while he was still playing with the puppies and showed him the picture. "Want it? I'll send it to you."

"Mm." He looked quite surprised. He glanced at the photo, then up at me, before saying in a neutral tone, "You're good at taking pictures."

"Of course. I used to be a photographer." I raised my eyebrows. I actually preferred taking pictures of other people, but after becoming an actor, I became the one being photographed instead.

It wasn't natural for me. Even now, I still wasn't used to it.

I ordered an iced latte with less sugar, and he got a blended iced green tea. Even though Third had just told me I'd be covering the next meal, when it came time to pay, he ended up covering the bill again.

"Didn't you say I was supposed to pay?"

"Next meal." He said casually. He was probably saving it for when we hit the night market and he could really drain my wallet.

We sipped our drinks, chatting lightly and enjoying the peaceful atmosphere. Third started talking about himself a little, so I learned that he came from a wealthy family (which was obvious from the car

he drove). His dad was a medical professor, and his mom worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had once considered studying abroad but ended up entering the entertainment industry instead.

Such a classic celebrity background, like he was destined to be famous.

"Let's go to the market and grab dinner before heading back to Bangkok." Once we finished our drinks, I suggested our last stop is the night market near Wat Chaiwatthanaram, which only opened from Friday to Sunday starting at 4 PM.

This market stands out for its traditional Thai atmosphere, from the shop decorations and background music to the food containers used. Many vendors wear traditional Thai clothing, and even some visitors dress the same.

Since the market is crowded, Third and I choose to wear masks to conceal our faces while browsing the endless selection of food. Being well-known in society doesn't mean we always want to be in the spotlight. In our private time, we just want to live like normal people too.

"Can I scan to pay?"

"Yes, of course," the elderly vendor selling khanom tan replies. I open my mobile banking app to scan the QR code for payment, but Third is quicker by handing her cash first.

"I'll pay for it."

"Again? When will I ever get to pay?" I frown up at him. He's been paying for everything since we started walking around the market. Didn't he say he'd let me treat him? What's going on here?

"Next time."

His face is hidden behind a mask, so I can't see his expression, yet my heart suddenly starts racing. And for some reason, I can't explain why that makes me so happy...

After finishing buying food, we chose to find a place to sit a bit away from people, eating while listening to music, breathing in the fresh evening air in a relaxed manner as the sun was about to set beyond the horizon.

"Eat this." Third pushed a small banana-leaf tray filled with khanom thuai that he had bought, sharing it with me. I didn't refuse his kindness, using a toothpick to pick up a piece and pop it into my mouth, chewing slowly while observing his sullen face.

Coming on this trip together today made me feel like I was getting to know Third a little more. For example, he really, really liked sweets, he had bought tons of desserts to eat along the way. He also loved dogs, the moment he saw one wagging its tail at the temple, he immediately ran over to play with it. It was the same at the café, and the dogs seemed to like him too.

And then... what else? Oh! He wasn't as arrogant or cold as I had thought. He just had a naturally serious face and wasn't great at talking to others. He was straightforward and direct, whatever he thought, he said, sometimes a bit too bluntly, saying things that weren't exactly pleasant to hear. But in truth, he wasn't a harmful person. You could even say he was a good friend.

There was just one thing I couldn't understand no matter how much I thought about it, why was he so cold toward Nine? I noticed that, on set, unless absolutely necessary, he wouldn't talk to Nine at all. He wouldn't go near him, wouldn't even look at him. But maybe because they were in the same company and were a shipped pair, aside from filming the series, they had other jobs they had to do together often. That was why they had to talk to each other. The other staff members, including P'Phai, probably hadn't noticed that

he didn't really want to talk to Nine. But I was a Nine's fan, I could see those things clearly.

"Hey, let me ask you something." My curiosity reached a point where I could no longer hold it in, so I cautiously tested the waters with the person sitting across from me.

"What?"

"With Nine... you're not close?"

"No." The tall figure answered curtly. His sharp eyes, which had been relaxed, instantly turned icy, and it made my heart sink in a strange way.

"Do you guys have a problem?" I asked softly, but I knew that what I was asking was intrusive since it was a personal matter, so I quickly added, "I mean, I don't mean to... how should I put it... If it's uncomfortable, you don't have to answer. I was just curious."

Shit. No matter how I phrased it, it still sounded nosy.

My conversation partner fell silent, making me want to slap myself. The whole day had been good. It felt like Third and I were opening up to each other more. But then I let my nosiness ruin the atmosphere.

"I don't want to get involved with him because of old matters. But even if they're old, I will never forgive him."

That sentence made me freeze mid-bite. I could sense a faint pain in his deep, low voice. Ever since I had known him, I had never heard this kind of voice from him before.

What exactly happened...?

I swallowed hard, deciding that I shouldn't pry any further. Not just because I didn't want to bring up the past and make Third think about it again, but maybe because, deep down, I didn't want to hear about it. Nine was someone I admired, someone I had supported for a long time. I didn't want to see him in a different light...

"Oh, I meant to ask but forgot, why did you become an actor?" I asked in a casual tone, quickly changing the subject in hopes of lightening the mood.

"Have you ever watched Forrest Gump?"

"Once, I think, but I don't remember it well." I tried to recall. If I wasn't mistaken, that movie had won an Oscar.

"When I was in eleventh grade, I watched that movie and was deeply impressed by everything in it, especially the lead actor." He set his spoon down, and the hardness in his eyes faded. Looked like my subject change was successful.

"Tom Hanks. I thought he was amazing. He made someone like me, who wasn't a native speaker, fully feel the emotions of the character. And suddenly, I thought that I wanted to be an actor. I wanted people to be moved by my acting too."

"..."

"Before that, I never had the slightest interest in acting. But after watching that movie, it was like someone set off fireworks in my heart or something. So, I asked my parents to let me take acting classes, went around auditioning everywhere, and it took over a year before I got my first role in a series as a minor character. After that, more opportunities started coming in."

"Whoa..." Listening to him, I started to understand why he had been so angry on the first day of the workshop when I arrived late. He was probably like hundreds or thousands of other actors who had

struggled so hard just to get an opportunity. Meanwhile, I had been handed one without knowing a thing, completely clueless. To him, I must have looked like someone who wanted to enter the industry just for fame.

"Honestly, I don't want to be a celebrity. I just want to be an actor. You get that, right? But it's not something I can choose." He concluded with a low chuckle and took a sip of his watermelon smoothie.

"But you have a dream. I envy that," I murmured, as if talking to myself.

I had always envied people with dreams, people who were determined to chase after them, because I had never had one. I just lived day by day, not knowing what I wanted to be, never having a clue about what I wanted to do after graduation. All I thought about was finding some kind of job to survive, and that made me feel incredibly lost.

"What I'm about to say might annoy you, but to be honest... I only auditioned for this role because my friend pushed me to, and I just wanted to try it out." I stabbed at the remaining khanom tan in the tray with a toothpick, sighing.

"I like Nine's acting, so I thought it'd be nice to work with an artist I admire. That's all. I never dreamed of becoming an actor. And now, I feel empty. Sometimes, I wonder what I'm doing. I thought that if I tried acting, I might like it, that I might find my dream. It's been nice, but it's still not it."

"..."

"I... don't know what's ahead. It's like I can't see anything at all..." I poured everything out. It was something I had never told anyone, but for some reason, I found myself saying it in front of Third, the

person who had a strong dream of becoming an actor, the person who was the complete opposite of me.

Would he be mad after hearing that? He might think I was pathetic...

"It's not a big deal."

His words surprised me. I looked up and saw him giving me a small smile.

"People can search for their dreams their whole lives. Maybe you'll find yours someday."

"..."

"And even if you don't, even if you never have a dream, it's okay. As long as you live happily, isn't that enough to make life worth it?"

"That's right." I smiled as a certain warmth washed over me upon hearing those words.

All this time, I had only been looking at others, clinging to the idea that I should be like everyone else. But when someone told me that it was okay to be different, it felt like I could finally see the road ahead more clearly. Even though it still lacked a destination, I had plenty of time to keep walking along it.

And one day, if I were lucky... I might just find something I truly love.

"For now, just focus on acting. Like you said, you'd prove it to me." The person in front of me spoke in an even tone while stirring his watermelon smoothie. His gaze made it clear, if I didn't take my work seriously, we'd be having another problem for sure.

"I got it, I got it," I rolled my eyes. But the moment we locked eyes, we both burst into laughter.

And in that instant, when Third flashed me a wide smile, my heart started pounding erratically. I had to lower my gaze to escape his eyes.

"Are you done eating? Let's head back." I quickly got up, taking my empty food container to throw away. He stood and followed me, and soon, we were leaving the market, heading back to the car for our return to Bangkok.

The two-hours drive back felt as long as two years. We sat in silence, only the soft hum of music filling the space. I couldn't explain it, but being alone with Third made me restless. This wasn't the first time, but it was the first time it felt so intense, so unusually obvious.

"Drop me off at the next BTS station."

"It's fine, I'll take you—"

"No, no, no. I just... I have somewhere else to go. Just drop me off up ahead." I quickly interrupted as we entered Bangkok. Third pulled over as I had asked, and after thanking him, I quickly got on the BTS station.

I lied. I didn't actually have any errands to run. I was just too confused and flustered to stay alone with him any longer. I needed some time to clear my head and go home on my own. Besides... Third's place was nearby, but my house was still far away. If he took me all the way, it would just waste more of his time to rest.

I stood in a corner, adjusting my mask higher to avoid attention as I scrolled through my phone. But then, my eyes widened in shock.

Third's Instagram, which I had just followed this morning, popped up on my feed.

He had just posted a picture I took of him playing with a puppy at the café, with the caption,

'Take a break, in this moment.'

Beneath my mask, my cheekbones lifted involuntarily in a smile. And I had no idea why...

Take 11, Action!

Creeeeak

The mobile phone placed on the bedside table vibrates. A melody plays from the speaker as the screen lights up, showing the time as 4 AM.

I spring up from the bed, grab the mobile phone, and turn off the alarm energetically, as if I had a full night's sleep. Even though in reality, I only slept for four hours. On shooting days, I always have to wake up before the rooster crows. If you ask if I'm tired or sleepy, well, a little, but my energy is surging at full force. My eyes are wide awake without needing coffee. I shower, get dressed, and hum a song cheerfully at the thought of going to the set.

It's not that I suddenly became hardworking or developed a passion for acting. The reason I'm in a good mood is that if I go to the set, I'll get to see...

Creak!

At this thought, my hand, which was reaching for my backpack, freezes. I was about to go down and wait for the company van at the lounge downstairs when an image of that handsome smile of the lead actor flashes into my mind. That makes me panic, I collapse onto the sofa, gripping my head with both hands.

Lately, whenever I'm alone, I tend to lose my mind frequently. Ever since coming back from Ayutthaya, I keep thinking about Third on and off, like every five minutes... or is it every three minutes? Not sure. Suppose I'm eating Pad Krapow, I'd accidentally think,

'Something this spicy, Third wouldn't eat.' Or if I see someone holding a green tea cup, I'd think, 'That's his favorite drink.'

On set, my eyes keep drifting toward him. When we have scenes together, I secretly get nervous and avoid direct eye contact. When he messages me on LINE (mostly about work-related matters), my heart races, and I reread the message over and over. Before bed, I catch myself wondering whether Third is asleep yet.

Out of nowhere, that man has taken over more than seventy percent of my brain. As a guy with exactly one experience in love, this feeling reminds me of when I had a crush on my ex during high school.

The symptoms are identical.

So, does that mean I have a crush on Third?!

Realizing this fact, something I've been aware of for a while now, makes my throat dry. I've reflected on it already. What I feel for Third doesn't seem to be mere admiration, like seeing him as an idol the way I do with Nine. If it were just admiration, I wouldn't long for Third to smile warmly at me and only me. I wouldn't feel a strange tightness in my chest when rewatching his past projects where he has love scenes with other actors.

Damn it, is my heart playing tricks on me? I used to find this arrogant, pretentious lead actor annoying, someone who acts like a bad boy on camera but is a walking freezer behind the scenes. And now, I'm the one who's frozen solid. This is a total 180-degree turnaround.

I feel conflicted, torn between wanting Third to know I like him and not wanting him to know at all.

But if I keep thinking about this, I won't be able to focus on work. So, I decide to act normal for now and observe his reaction.

I have no idea if he likes men. Just because he acts in BL series doesn't mean he's LGBTQ+. Even I, who always thought I was a straight guy, was shocked to realize I like Third.

But sexuality is fluid throughout life. Maybe I'm bisexual. As for Third... if it turns out he doesn't see me as more than a coworker or already has someone he's talking to, I'll quietly give up.

"Good morning, P'."

"Morning."

As soon as I step into the van, P'Cher hands me a cup of lightly sweetened latte, as always.

"Thank you," I say, nodding in greeting to Renji, who is sitting behind P'Cher, looking exhausted, like he was forced out of bed for work.

I quickly head to the back seat, take out my phone, connect it to my AirPods, and put them on.

"P'Wan, why do you always sit in the back these days? Do I smell bad?" The kid whines sleepily. Before, whenever I got in the van, I would always sit next to him.

"No, no, I just want to focus." I flash him a smile.

But the real reason I sit in the back is so no one can see my phone screen.

I open my secret X account, scrolling through my timeline and various hashtags. I tap on Third's name tag, browsing through all the updates about him that his fans have posted, Instagram pictures, stories, event photos, and interview clips.

I check out a thread where fans compiled instances of Third calling out societal issues, like advocating for marriage equality and other legal reforms. I've seen glimpses of these before, but since I was biased against him, I never really paid attention. Now that I actually listen to his views, I find myself even more impressed.

"Since heterosexual couples receive legal rights when they marry, all couples, regardless of gender, should have the same rights. The law shouldn't divide human rights based on gender. Marriage equality should have happened a long time ago. But since it still hasn't, I'd like to encourage everyone to join in advocating for fairness for all people."

Wow, an actor who makes full use of his voice. His fans must be proud. I also intend to use my own voice to contribute to society as much as possible.

"Wan."

"..."

"Wan!"

"Yes?!"

P'Cher's loud call startles me. I was so focused on staring at Third's face that I almost dropped my AirPods. "What's up?"

"I said, next week there's a launch event for a high-end cosmetic brand. They just contacted us to have you, Third, and Nine attend."

"Oh, okay."

Since my viral vendor clip, I've been getting quite a few solo gigs, event appearances, photoshoots, and magazine interviews. But this will be my first time attending a big brand event, and with Third, no less.

I bite my lip to stop myself from grinning while sneaking a glance at my phone. But at the same time, I'm surprised that I thought of Third before Nine, even though I should be more excited about Nine.

Time changes everything. Even my feelings for Nine.

They say a fan's love for an artist has a promotional period and an expiration date. Maybe my promotional period has ended. Nowadays, when I see a notification that Nine has posted a new picture, I don't rush to check it like before.

Maybe it's because we work together often, so he doesn't feel as distant anymore, making it less special. Or maybe it's because I've seen other sides of him...

I know I shouldn't expect anything from others. But I can't help feeling a little disappointed. Just a little. I still admire Nine the same way, it's just that... the excitement and enthusiasm are gone.

"And what were you smiling so sweetly at just now?"

P'Cher turns around, eyes sharp behind her golden-framed glasses, staring me down. "Were you talking to your lover?"

"Hey, P'! I don't have a lover." I shake my head.

A lover? Pfft. I'm crushing on someone one-sidedly here!

"Alright then. If you ever get a lover, tell me, so I can help keep it under wraps. You have to tell me, Renji too. Got it?"

"Yesss," we both reply in unison.

Becoming a celebrity requires sacrificing many things in exchange for immense wealth, especially privacy. For young stars like us, whose careers rely heavily on our image, it's inevitable that we have to keep our relationships a secret. Fans tend to prefer celebrities

who appear single rather than those who openly have partners. At least, that's what the company says.

Most agencies don't forbid their artists from having relationships, but they often require them to keep it a secret so it doesn't affect the image the company has built. So, if you have a partner, you have to be extremely careful. Everything must be kept under wraps. No matter how much you want to show off your love to the world, you can only express it through private or locked accounts. You can't go public until the time is right, which for most people, is long past their golden era in the industry.

Honestly, it's pretty tough. But for now, I guess I still have it easy. I don't think I'll be getting a lover anytime soon, unless Third happens to like me too, which... seems pretty unlikely. Haha...

"P'Cher, so if someone has a partner but acts like they're just friends or siblings, that's okay, right?" Renji suddenly started acting like a curious little kid.

"That's fine, but you should let me check whatever you post first. And you also need to talk to your partner about what is and isn't okay to share on social media. Actually, it's best not to post anything at all, just to be safe."

"So that means dating someone outside the industry would be really difficult. Wouldn't it be safer to date someone from the same company?"

"Not necessarily, but if you're in the same company, it's easier to manage things." P'Cher narrowed his eyes and furrowed his brows. "Why are you suddenly asking? Are you dating someone?"

"No, no! I was just asking." Renji laughed softly, his face pure and innocent.

I was sitting there listening, not quite wanting to believe it. Asking in such detail like this must mean he has a lover or someone he likes for sure. But who does Renji like? Every day, I only see him hanging out with P'Cher and me. Especially me, he follows me around like a little puppy.

Or does he like Porsche, another junior in the same company? But he doesn't seem that close or involved with Porsche to that extent. Maybe it's someone outside the industry. Anyway, if he doesn't say anything, out of good manners, I shouldn't go prying.

Why bother with other people's business? Handle your own matters first, Wan.

Sigh.

The world continues to spin at a steady pace, just like the hands of a clock that never stop moving, unless the clock dies. In the blink of an eye, the filming of the series has already reached the halfway point. As for today, it's the day I have to attend an event with Third and Nine at a famous shopping mall in the heart of the city.

"Behave well during the interview with the reporters. Don't forget to subtly promote the product for the clients too. That way, in the future, you might get to be a brand friend or work with them again. Got it?" P'Jarin, the manager who personally came to supervise me today, said. P'Cher helped to remind me again while I was getting my makeup and hair done.

"Okay, got it." I obediently responded.

Come to think of it, life is so unpredictable. Before, when there were events like this, I had to stand on my toes, stretching my neck, lifting my camera to take pictures of celebrities. But today, people will be standing on their toes to take pictures of me instead.

But today is a workday. I wonder how many fans will be free to come see me. If at least four or five show up, that'd be great. Just that much would give me motivation.

"Since you're attending an event with Third and Nine today, more people will see you, and your engagement might increase. Within the next two or three days, do an IG live, okay?" P'Jarin said while dusting off her bright red gel-polished fingernails.

"I don't even know what to live about anymore."

"Then just live when you go grocery shopping, when you go to 7-Eleven, when you go jogging in the park, anything at all, sweetie. I know you're an introvert, but we're celebrities. Our lives need some content, okay?"

"Yes..." I responded in a weary voice.

It's not that I don't want to do a live for my fans. I just don't know what to talk about. Talking to the camera isn't the same as talking to a real person, you get me? When I talk to myself, I feel like I'm going crazy. It'll take me a while before I get used to it.

"Alright, get ready to get in the car." P'Jarin grabbed her ridiculously expensive luxury-brand bag, slung it over her arm, and patted my shoulder after I was fully done with hair and makeup, ready for the event. "Let's hurry a bit so we have time to greet the clients, take pictures, and all that."

"Then we'll get to see Third..." I blurted out before realizing. Once I caught on, *crap, that sounded so suspicious!*, I quickly added, "And Nine, right? I mean, did they arrive before us?"

"Not sure. Don't know if they got here first or if they'll go straight into the event. If they had another schedule before this, we'll probably see them at the venue." P'Cher answered while grabbing

her bag and striding off to the car. Meanwhile, P'Jarin burst into laughter.

"What's this, sweetie? Missing your friend? Seeing each other at the filming set isn't enough?"

"No, I was just curious."

I *wasn't* excited about seeing Third! I was just wondering what he'd be wearing. From what I've noticed, every time he attends an event, he usually gets outfits on the sexy side, those deep-cut suits and all. But he pulls them off. I used to not like it much, but after seeing it a lot, it actually suits him...

When you like someone, even if Third wore rags, I'd still think he looks good.

My team and I arrived at the event venue nearly an hour early. P'Jarin took me to greet and introduce myself to the clients. I put on my sweetest smile and talked as much as I could. Making conversation is still a bit difficult for me, but P'Cher said I've improved.

"Yes, just like that, Wan. Wherever you go, try to chat with people like this. It makes them feel that we're approachable and friendly. Celebrities who act friendly get more love than those who carry themselves like untouchable stars," P'Jarin explained at length as we walked back to the waiting room.

I glanced at my phone. Ten minutes left until it was time to go on stage.

"Wan, your phone."

"Yes." I handed my phone to P'Cher for safekeeping, thinking to myself that I'd probably see those two at the event itself. That's how it is for top-tier celebrities. Some days, they run from one event to another, three or four in a single day. They must pass out from exhaustion once they get home.

After a while, a staff member came to escort us to get ready and receive the briefing. I waited near the exit door, greeting and getting to know other artists who were attending. While I was chatting with an actress, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"Hello, Wan?"

"Hello." I smiled at Nine, who was wearing a white suit today, with soft, peach-pink toned makeup that matched the brand's colors. My eyes naturally drifted to the tall figure of Third, who was following behind. He wore a navy blue deep-cut suit, accessorized with luxury silver jewelry including earrings, necklaces, rings on every finger. His hair was styled up, revealing his forehead, and his sharp eyeliner emphasized his intense and captivating eyes.

Just seeing Third's face made my breathing quicken. And when he met my eyes and raised an eyebrow in greeting, I had to force myself not to look away.

"Did you two... have another event before this?" I quickly asked to cover up before my reaction gave me away.

"Yeah. It was tiring. Wan, you're lucky you don't have to rush around like us." Nine replied, his tone gentle, but the words made me pause for a moment.

Was he implying that I don't have many jobs? No, probably not. I'm overthinking it.

I kept quiet and stopped trying to make conversation, since it was almost time to go on stage. Third moved closer, his body warmth

reaching me, followed by his low voice speaking softly,

"You look good in that suit today."

Wait, wait, why is my heart racing? He was talking about the suit, Wan! Not about me!

"Uh-huh. Gotta thank the suit. It makes me look a little better." I suppressed my nervousness as I responded, glancing down at the fitted gray suit I was wearing. It was a sponsored piece, and I liked it so much that I was thinking about buying it to keep.

"You'd look good even without it."

"..."

Okay. That was definitely directed at me. Damn it. Is he trying to mess with my heart right before the event starts? Is he trying to kill me?!

"Yeah, true. Otherwise, how would I be a celebrity? Haha." I joked to cover up my inner turmoil. I heard Third chuckle softly and felt his gaze on me, but I didn't dare look at him. I was afraid I'd lose my composure and he'd notice.

Luckily, the event had already begun. The staff invited the artists to make their appearances one by one. I went out first since I was still new, while the top artists would come out later. The highlight of the event was, of course, the hottest on-screen couple at the moment, Third and Nine.

There wasn't much to an event like this. Just standing around, smiling, taking photos with the product displays in different spots inside the shop, answering the host's pre-briefed questions, and waving to the fans gathered outside. I felt relieved when I saw quite a number of people holding signs with my name on them, cheering for me from time to time. After the event ended, there would be a

small gathering, so I'd get the chance to chat with my fans and catch up with them.

"Let's have all the artists take a group photo."

Before wrapping up, the staff took a final group picture. The whole event took about an hour, after which we went to give interviews to the waiting reporters. They wanted to interview me, Third, and Nine together since we were currently filming the same series.

"Can you give us an update on the series you're filming? How far along is it?"

"We've finished about fifty percent of the filming now. It'll definitely be out within this year," Third answered. I just nodded along in agreement. As long as the reporters didn't ask me anything directly, I had no intention of stealing the spotlight from the two leads.

"Can you share a bit about what it's like on set?"

"Our set? It's really fun, really great, right?" Nine replied, turning to me and Third for support. I just nodded along, going with the flow.

"Everyone is working really hard, especially Wan, our new member."

While I was zoning out, Nine suddenly directed the conversation toward me. I had to snap back to my senses and smile at the reporters. But my expression quickly stiffened when I heard the next sentence.

"Since he's new, right? When we're in scenes together, there might be more cuts than usual. There might be some hiccups that slow things down a bit, but Wan is really dedicated and works very hard."

"..."

Wait a minute. P'Jarin once taught me that during interviews, if I have to talk about someone else, I must never say anything negative to avoid any possible misunderstandings. And that sentence just now... It sounded a little off. Would people think that I was the one slowing down the filming?

If we don't count that accident where I missed my cue and accidentally punched Third, all my other scenes were shot according to schedule, with no delays at all. So why did Nine say that? Or maybe he just said it carelessly without meaning anything by it...

"Has the filming been delayed more than expected because of that?"

My heart sank when I heard a reporter ask exactly what I was worried about.

"Well..."

"Not at all."

A deep voice from the tall figure standing on the other side cut Nine off.

My heart pounded in my chest, a loud ringing in my ears. Just when it felt like I was about to sink into a freezing abyss, a hand grasped mine, pulling me back to solid ground.

"The filming is going according to plan. And Wan has improved his acting skills really quickly. Even P'Phai, the director, personally praised him. Honestly, I think he's even better than I was when I first started filming a series. Please look forward to Wan's performance, along with the rest of our cast."

I glanced at the sharp-featured man who was smiling at the reporters. My heart pounded so hard it felt like it would jump out of my chest.

The interview continued for a while, but soon, I was pulled away to film solo content while Third and Nine continued their joint interview. I finished my work earlier and returned to the artists' waiting room, taking a break to drink some water and pack up before heading to meet the fans. I still hadn't had the chance to thank Third in person.

I quickly nudged A.R. before we left the waiting room to see the fans.

"P'Cher, can I have my phone for a sec?"

P'Cher handed me my phone, and I quickly opened LINE, clicked into Third's chat, and typed out a message before handing the phone back to P'Cher.

[Thank you so much for today.]

Before this, I didn't quite understand myself. I didn't know why I started to like him.

But today, I think I found my answer.

It's because of his honesty, his sincerity. Because he always stands up to protect others.

As the sound of camera shutters faded and the reporters and fans dispersed, the atmosphere between the hottest on-screen couple right now flipped completely.

"What was that just now?"

"What do you mean?" Nine raised an eyebrow, turning to look at his fellow labelmate and onscreen partner with a clueless expression.

"You said Wan caused a lot of cuts. Why did you say that?"

"It's the truth. They asked about the atmosphere on set, so I just answered honestly." Nine flopped onto the sofa, unscrewed a bottle of water, and took a sip as the makeup artist stepped in to touch up his face.

"There were plenty of other things you could have talked about, weren't there?" Third spoke in a low, displeased tone. During the interview, he had clearly noticed the anxious look in Wan's eyes. He knew exactly why this bastard had said that.

"Come on, it's not that serious," P'Sunny, their A.R., tried to mediate.

"Yeah, you're making a big deal out of nothing."

Seeing that the person sitting there didn't show the slightest remorse for his actions, Third clenched his jaw, barely restraining his frustration. His voice was ice-cold as he spoke.

"Give us a moment. I need to talk to him alone."

It wasn't a request, it was an order. And since the staff at the label knew well enough about the rocky relationship between these two, they all quietly left the room without hesitation.

Click!

As soon as the door shut, Third immediately smirked mockingly.

"Still haven't changed your nasty habits, have you?"

"Hmm?"

"That habit of not wanting to see anyone else do well. Still haven't kicked it?"

"What are you talking about? I don't understand at all." Nine dropped his usual sweet and polite facade. His large eyes gleamed with satisfaction, contradicting his words. "But speaking of which..."

You seem oddly protective of that Wan guy. You go on one trip together, and suddenly you're best buddies?"

"I care about him because I don't want him to go through what you did to me."

Third strode toward Nine with slow, deliberate steps, his gaze now ice-cold.

"You already ruined my chances once. That should be enough, shouldn't it? You got what you wanted, so stop dragging others into your mess. If you keep harassing people like this, one day, someone's going to dig up all your filth and expose you for what you are."

"..."

"Fix yourself up and hurry up. We still have to meet the fans and go home."

With that, Third turned on his heel and marched out of the room, leaving Nine watching his back with a smug smile.

"It won't turn out that way, my friend."

He murmured as he gracefully stood from the chair, stepping toward the large mirror and raising a hand to fix his hair.

"If you destroy others before they can destroy you, then you win."

Today's schedule was finally over. After meeting the fans, I went out for dinner with the team. The company's van dropped me off in front of my condo at 9:30 PM.

"P'Wan, you should clean your makeup off as soon as you get back, or you'll break out," View popped his head out of his room,

grumbling at me while I sat slumped on the sofa, completely drained.

"Yeah, yeah..." I drawled lazily. But I knew she was right, so I forced myself to drag my feet to my bedroom and grab my cleansing balm.

As I rubbed it onto my face, my eyes kept darting toward the phone lying lifelessly on my bed. Third still hadn't replied to my message. Maybe he was busy, still working, or had left his phone with A.R.

Even though I knew all that, I was still irritated with myself for sitting here waiting for a reply instead of doing something else.

Ding!

I flinched as my phone screen lit up, signaling a new message. A smile spread across my face when I saw Third's name.

I quickly grabbed my phone, completely forgetting that my hands were still covered in cleansing balm.

[It's fine.]

Just three short syllables, yet they made me grin wide.

I suddenly wanted to keep talking to him. But I had no idea what to say.

Riiiiing!

As if reading my mind, he called me first.

I swallowed hard, nervous as I pressed the answer button.

This was the first time Third had ever called me.

"Uh... Hello."

[...Hey.]

It seems like the person who isn't good at talking also doesn't know how to start the conversation. But still, he went out of his way to call.

"What is it?" I asked, secretly anticipating what he would talk about. But I knew it wouldn't be anything other than today's interview.

[Don't think too much about it. About today, I mean.]

A deep voice spoke, exactly as I had expected. On the outside, Third seems like a cold person, but he actually cares a lot about the feelings of those around him. I really wish people, whether his fans or those who are prejudiced against him, could see this good side of him.

"Mm, I'm not thinking too much about it. I know that Nine probably didn't mean it." I said. As someone who has been a fan of Nine for a long time, I knew well enough that he tends to speak without thinking. This time was just a small mistake. He probably didn't have any bad intentions.

The other side went silent for a moment before saying, [It's good that you're not thinking too much about it.]

Then, dead air. Neither of us knew what to say. I didn't want to hang up yet, but I also knew we were done talking, and I should probably end the call now so Third could rest...

[Wan.]

"Hm?"

[From now on, if there's anything bothering you, you can talk to me. No need to hesitate.]

His short words, spoken in a monotone voice, made me smile wider. My heart ticked a little faster as I teased, "You said it now. If I end up calling you every day and you get annoyed later, it'll be too late."

The person on the other end let out a soft laugh. And then he said something that made my eyes widen and my heart race even more.

[Then call me. I'll be waiting.]

"I-I'm removing my makeup! That's all for now!" I blurted out quickly and hung up before burying my face against my knees, letting out a groan.

I was the one who flirted first, but when he flirted back (?), I completely lost my composure and couldn't continue the conversation. Damn, I'm so pathetic.

Amidst my embarrassment, I felt like I could see a glimmer of hope. I seriously wondered, was Third just joking around earlier? Or did he actually mean it when he said I could call him every day?

Because if it was the latter... it meant that maybe, just maybe, this love of mine wasn't entirely impossible.

Was that right...?

I don't know if this is normal for everyone, or if I'm just the unluckiest person alive, but every time I think my life is going well, something always happens to wipe the smile off my face.

Creeeeek.

The phone on the bedside table vibrated noisily, refusing to stop. I woke up in a daze and reached for it to see that it was a call from my own AR.

It was only 5:30 in the morning. I didn't have any filming schedules today. Why was P'Cher calling me this early? Waking someone up while they're sleeping peacefully is a serious crime, you know!

Even though I thought that, my instincts were screaming that something wasn't right. If it weren't something urgent, P'Cher would never call me at dawn. So I quickly answered the call.

"Hello...?"

[Wan, sorry for waking you up. But there's a bit of a situation right now.]

P'Cher's voice carried an unusual hint of worry, something I rarely ever heard from her.

My heart immediately dropped to my stomach when I heard her next sentence.

[Late last night, someone spread a rumor on social media saying that you and Third had a fight on set. So bad that you even physically attacked each other first. The trend on X has almost hit 500K already. For now, don't go on social media. And other than your parents, don't pick up any calls from anyone. P'Jarin and I will try to clear things up first, then we'll call you again.]

"...Okay." I responded with a dry mouth.

The moment I hung up, I raised my hand to press against my temples.

What the hell is this nonsense?

Take 12, Action!

Even though P'Cher kept warning me that I shouldn't go on social media yet, but curiosity is something difficult to control. It's too troublesome.

'An insider says there's conflict on set. T. and W. don't get along. Everyone on set knows these two don't talk to each other.'

'They say W. started the trouble, even punched T., but T. didn't retaliate. So it's exactly like the script, right? The protagonist and the villain.'

'Isn't he a newbie? He seemed cute when he appeared in public, so why is he acting all macho like this? Or is he jealous and wants attention like our favorite?'

'Remember last month when T. kept wearing a mask for a while? And when he attended events, his makeup looked oddly thick. Fans were cursing out the makeup artist like crazy, but in the end, they were just covering up a wound.'

Those messages were what was spreading under the hashtag #SetSecretsDeepDive. The source was a burner account that had just been freshly created, claiming to be an insider on the series' set. It described a fight between actors that escalated to physical violence and said real life was just like the roles they played in the series.

Of course, no names were mentioned directly, but fans and Thai netizens were digging around, trying to piece things together. The conclusion was that the ones involved were Third, the series' lead, and a new actor who got a major role as the villain on his first project, which is me. Every burner account was trying to dig up clips and scrutinize event photos. Normally, when attending events, Third and I didn't talk much anyway, so that ended up becoming (some sort of) evidence proving our supposedly strained relationship. And since that burner account was stirring things up by claiming there was even a clip of our fight, the hashtag's engagement shot up, nearly hitting 600,000 tweets.

I pressed my lips together as I skimmed through everyone's speculations. It was unbelievable how easily netizens were swayed by a faceless burner account that had just been created yesterday. Luckily, there were still a few who defended me. Mostly my fans and old school friends from high school and university, saying that, based on their experience, I wasn't that kind of person at all. But most people tend to believe rumors more. Maybe it's because waiting for the truth to come out isn't as flavorful or exciting as following a scandal. So now I was being torn apart, criticized to the point where people were even demanding that I be removed from the series entirely.

The biggest question was who started this rumor in the first place. It was true that Third and I didn't hit it off at first and didn't talk during pre-production, but the whole fight thing was complete nonsense. That day was an accident. If there was a clip, it was probably from that moment. And besides, Third and I had already cleared things up. These days, we joke around as usual on set. If this so-called insider was really part of the production team, they would have seen that. So why suddenly spread rumors to ruin our reputations? Even though I was taking the heavier hit, Third had his antis piling on him too. In the end, both sides were getting dragged down.

I locked my phone screen, set my phone down on the bed, and rubbed my temples, which were throbbing. I should've listened to P'Cher. I really shouldn't have checked social media.

It was now 5:30 AM. It was a day off with no work schedule, but I couldn't sleep anymore. I figured I might as well open my laptop and work on my research report. However, when I sat down at my desk, my mind went completely blank. I couldn't type a single word. When I opened my photo-editing program to edit a picture of Nine, I found that his bright smile no longer had the power to comfort me.

I snapped my laptop shut with a deep sigh, then returned to hugging my knees on the bed for a long while. I ignored calls from everyone, including Jay and Renji, because I wasn't in the right headspace to deal with anyone just yet.

Knock, knock, knock!

"P'Wan, are you awake? P'Wan!"

At 8 AM, my little sister's anxious voice rang out, accompanied by rapid knocking on my bedroom door. When I dragged myself to open the door, I saw View in her long nightgown, her hair a messy tangle as she held her phone with a panicked expression.

"P'Wan, have you seen the news? On X, there's—"

"SetSecretsDeepDive or whatever? Yeah, I know." I cut in with a slow, steady voice, trying to keep my expression neutral as I walked back to sit on my bed. My sister trailing closely behind.

"But it's not true, right? I don't believe for a second that you'd get into a fight with anyone." View plopped down beside me, grilling me for answers, though her big eyes were filled with nothing but pure concern.

"And especially not P'Third. No way. Compared to him, you're like a tiny puppy. Even if you threw a punch, you'd lose."

"..."

"Don't make that face! I mean, you're smart enough not to use violence, right? Even if there was a problem between you two." My cheeky little sister hurried to clarify when she saw me furrow my brows.

"Yeah." I nodded. I wasn't sure if she had just insulted or complimented me, but at least she trusted me. "It's all fake news. Third and I never had any issues. I mean, sure, we didn't click at first, but we never got physical. We already worked things out. These days, we talk just fine."

"What about the clip people are talking about?"

"It was a missed cue during a fight scene. I accidentally hit Third for real."

"Huh?! So you really punched—"

"But it was an accident. Third understood, and there was never a problem. If there was, would I have gone on a trip to Ayutthaya with him?" I explained.

Hearing that, View looked relieved for a moment before her expression darkened with anger.

"So that so-called clip is just from that scene? Ugh, those jerks. This is straight-up slander. I'm gonna curse them out." She aggressively opened X, ready to type away.

"Stop, stop, stop!" I snatched the phone from her and immediately stopped her. "No, the company will handle it. You just stay put."

"How can I stay put when they're trashing my brother?!"

"It's okay. Let the higher-ups sort it out. Thanks for worrying about me." I reassured my sister, who still looked frustrated, but she was mature enough to know when to back off. Since I asked her directly, she let it go.

"Come on, let's eat. I'm starving. Sausages and eggs sound good, right?"

I got up to make breakfast, hoping to distract myself, but my sister pushed me back down.

"You sit tight. I'll make it." View huffed and stomped off to the kitchen.

Not wanting to sit idly, I followed her. Even when she shooed me away, I insisted. In the end, I was frying sausages and bacon at the stove while View cooked the eggs.

Creeeeak.

My phone, which is resting on the counter behind us, vibrated with an incoming Line call. When I glanced at the screen, I froze. It was Third calling.

I had been told not to answer calls from anyone except my parents, but Third was involved in the same scandal. We were in this mess together. Surely answering wouldn't be a problem.

"View, watch the pan for me. I'm gonna take this call." I grabbed my phone and hurried out to the balcony. After sliding the door shut, I picked up.

"Hello?"

[I just saw the news.] No small talk. He got straight to the point, his voice still slightly groggy. He must have woken up to this disaster and called me right away.

"Yeah. Ridiculous, right?" I forced a laugh, though I knew my voice sounded dry. Even if it was fake news, seeing so many people cursing me out felt awful. Social media was terrifying.

[Are you okay?]

Third's question made something hard lodge in my throat. It took me several seconds to find my voice.

"Well... it's not true. But seeing so many people cursing me makes me feel uneasy. I just realized how many people are ready to hate me, even though there's no evidence at all."

Ever since I found out about this, I haven't been able to focus. I try not to overthink, try to stay strong, reminding myself that being in the public eye means facing things like this, it's normal. A hundred people may love me, but ten thousand may hate me. If I chose this career, I have to toughen up. But at the same time, I can't deny that I'm really worried because this is the first time I've experienced something like this.

[I'll handle it. You don't have to worry,] Third said, his deep voice steady and firm, bringing me a sense of reassurance.

[Your manager has already contacted mine. I think we'll have to post a story to explain that it was a misunderstanding and let the company take legal action against the one who spread the rumor. If reporters ask me about it at my event tonight, I'll explain it again so people can stop doubting.]

"..."

[Don't worry, okay?] He repeated.

"Mm. Thanks a lot." The corners of my lips curled up as I spoke. Third seemed so calm and composed, like he was used to this sort of thing. Will I ever be as strong as him?

"Who do you think started the rumor? That account claims it was someone from our production team."

[Probably someone who just loves trouble and wants to end up in court.] His usually calm voice turned noticeably harsher. He must be pretty angry. After all, he's affected by this too.

"I'm sorry that you got dragged into this because of me."

[You don't need to apologize. You're not the one at fault.] He replied immediately. I heard him let out a long sigh. [What time did you wake up?]

"Five in the morning. AR called to tell me the news."

[You don't have any work today, right? Go back to sleep. Days off are hard to come by.]

"I can't sleep until this is resolved." I hunched my shoulders, feeling dejected. My rare day off had been completely ruined. I'd probably be a walking zombie all day.

[You're so stubborn. How old are you, seriously?]

"Huh?" I blinked, confused. Did he just call me stubborn? What the hell? Or am I so stressed that I'm hallucinating?

[Go to sleep.]

"I'm not sleeping."

[Are you always this argumentative?] His smooth, deep voice carried a mix of sternness and amusement, making my heart race. If he

were here, would he be looking at me with that fond and exasperated gaze?

Crap. I was stressed just a moment ago, and now my heart is acting up. My emotions are changing way too fast!

"Alright, alright, I'm going now. If there's any update, let's talk again later." I spoke so fast my tongue almost tripped over itself before quickly ending the call. The next thing I knew, there was a smile on my face. A stark contrast to how down I had felt just moments ago, like a puppy abandoned by its owner for a three-day vacation.

Did he do that on purpose just to cheer me up? If so... he's playing with my heart way too much!

For Third, it should've been just another normal workday. But that changed when he woke up, checked social media, and found a ridiculous hashtag filled with fake news about him and Wan spreading all over the internet.

The first thing he did was call to check on Wan. Just hearing his dejected voice was enough to know that he was stressed over the situation. It is understandable for a rookie in the entertainment industry who had never faced something this frustrating before. It only made Third angrier at whoever started this rumor.

After hanging up, Third called his manager, wondering why he hadn't been informed about this sooner.

[Oh, it's just nonsense. I didn't want to waste your brain cells on it. The higher-ups are handling it. You just need to wait for instructions on what to do. Also, since you're up, get ready. The car will pick you up at noon.]

That was from P'Pitch, the company owner and his manager.

Third felt a little uneasy about the lack of communication, but it made sense. He had an event today, and his manager probably didn't want him to be distracted by drama. Usually, the company would handle these things first before telling the artists how to respond publicly. So for now, all he could do was wait.

By the afternoon, both he and Wan posted Instagram stories explaining the situation. Wan clarified that there was no conflict between them and that the alleged physical altercation was a misunderstanding. It had been a mistimed action scene during filming. Wan's agency released a statement saying they would take legal action against whoever spread the damaging rumors. Third then quote-shared the statement.

The situation died down quickly. Once people realized it was a misunderstanding, they lost interest. By the time Third was getting his makeup done before his event at 7 PM, the hashtag had already fallen from the trending list.

What annoyed him, though, was seeing how many people had trashed Wan when the rumors were spreading, only to quietly delete their posts after the truth came out. Very few actually apologized.

People type out cruel words so easily, based on nothing but hearsay. They justify it by saying public figures should be prepared for criticism, but when the truth comes out, they refuse to apologize. That's how social media has always been. The ones who spread the rumors move on like nothing happened, while the ones they hurt are left with lasting scars. Some people won't understand until they experience it themselves.

"Third, you're not taking this to heart, are you?"

A smooth but insincere voice broke through his thoughts. It was Nine, his co-star for today's event, speaking as he stepped out of the restroom in their artist dressing room.

"Are you ready to answer the reporters' questions?"

Ignoring Nine, Third turned to P'Sunny, his AR staff, who was chatting with another team member.

"P'Sunny, what time is our company releasing the statement about suing the person who spread the fake news? I want to repost it."

"Hmm... Oh, uh... not sure. Maybe there won't be one."

The AR woman's response made the listener furrow his brows tightly. "Why isn't there one?"

"Because in this news, our side is the one being wronged. When we talked, the other party already said they were planning to sue. So P'Pitch might have decided to let it go this time and wait for a bigger anti case, something strong enough to make an example out of."

The woman replied in a calm tone before turning to giggle with the team, leaving Third to sigh in resignation. His sharp eyes were clouded with frustration and doubt.

Neither P'Pitch nor P'Sunny seemed the least bit concerned about this news. No, to be exact, they seemed completely indifferent. Even if he was less affected than Wan, he was still impacted by the fake news. Did they not care about the feelings of their own artist at all? Not even a statement threatening legal action?

Since he couldn't rely on the company, he might have to handle this himself.

"Alright, get up, kids. Third, when the reporters ask about this, just say it's not true and you don't know anything about it." The AR woman instructed once more before they had to go on stage, unaware that the artist under her care had a more indifferent expression than usual.

The event proceeded as expected and wrapped up in just over an hour. After stepping off the stage, Third and Nine were immediately surrounded by reporters, and as anticipated, the first topic they were asked about was the drama surrounding the #SetSecretsDeepDive.

"As I clarified in my story, it was all a misunderstanding. Wan and I never had a fight. It was just a minor accident due to a mistimed cue."

"But some netizens suspect that the other party deliberately mistimed the cue. What do you think about that, Third?"

"Action scenes naturally come with the risk of accidents. And we're friends. If there was a real problem, we'd talk it out behind the scenes rather than start a fight on set in front of hundreds of people." The young man laughed lightly, though irritation burned inside him.

Who the hell came up with this nonsense? Have they been watching too many dramas?

"So, to confirm, you're saying there was never any conflict between you two?"

"That's right. Wan is my friend, and he's a really good person. I'm also upset that this happened," he said, then added in a serious tone, "It would be great if those who misunderstood and spread false rumors about Wan came forward and apologized. I don't like seeing my friend being accused of something he didn't do. As for whoever started the rumor, I believe the necessary evidence has already been gathered. The higher-ups will handle it from here."

This was all he could do to protect both Wan and himself at this moment. Unfortunately, taking legal action had to go through his agency. If he were managing himself, he would have already had a lawyer investigate, issue notices, and prepare lawsuits. He wouldn't let them just delete their posts and get away with it so easily.

Once the drama was addressed, the reporters moved on to other general questions, alternating between him and Nine. Nine kept trying to sell their on-screen chemistry, but Third was so frustrated that he could barely maintain his usual composure. He forced a smile and avoided answering directly. When the interview ended, he strode back to the artist's waiting room without waiting for Nine, breaking his usual habit of maintaining politeness.

A deep furrow appeared between his brows as he walked. No matter how he looked at it, it was strange that the company wasn't concerned at all. Thinking about it carefully, this fake news directly tarnished Wan's reputation just as he was gaining popularity online. And who would benefit from taking Wan down from his rising status as the public's favorite?

"Don't you think it was really difficult for us to get this opportunity? And suddenly, some random person comes in and steals the spotlight at our event. If you don't feel anything about that, you must be incredibly generous."

A sentence Nine had once said at a blessing ceremony flashed through Third's mind. He paused slightly, considering a new possibility. Could it be that the company was ignoring this drama because there was something going on behind the scenes? Were they afraid that Wan, who was from another agency, would outshine the leads, him and Nine? Did they hire someone to spread the rumor to block Wan's rise?

The entertainment industry wasn't pure or straightforward. He didn't want to think badly of his own company, but when he considered Nine's jealousy toward Wan and the fact that Nine was close to P'Pitch, their manager, the possibility seemed quite high...

"Sigh, good thing we don't have any group activities today. Let's just go home after this. I'm too lazy," Nine whined as soon as they

entered the waiting room. The gentle, well-mannered persona he showed earlier had completely vanished, replaced by arrogance.

"P'Sunny, I want some orange juice. Can you go buy it for me?"

"Okay, okay." The AR woman rolled her eyes. To be honest, she wasn't particularly enthusiastic about her job of taking care of artists, especially the demanding ones like this. But as a salaried employee, she had no choice but to put up with it.

Once she left the room, only a few staff members remained, people who already knew that Third and Nine didn't get along. With no need to keep up appearances, Third strode over to his co-star, who was casually sitting with one leg crossed, fixing his hair in the mirror.

"Suddenly, I realized that today's drama has a very familiar plot. I'm not just imagining things, am I?"

"Hm? What are you talking about?" Nine glanced at him, smirking in an annoyingly smug way.

"You knew about the fake news, didn't you?"

The atmosphere in the room instantly grew tense. The remaining staff exchanged glances before quietly leaving, giving the two rising stars space to confront each other.

One clenched his jaw, suppressing his anger, while the other feigned innocence.

"Wow, Third, aren't you being too paranoid? Are you really blaming every shitty thing in your life on me? Hilarious." Nine raised an eyebrow, laughing in a way that was clearly fake. "You ever think that maybe someone else also has a grudge against you or that Wan guy? You're not exactly the most likable person, you know."

"But no one holds a grudge against me as much as you do." Third's fists tightened, his dark eyes flashing with resentment. Even after all these years, he could never forget the things Nine had done to him.

Nearly seven years ago, when they were both fifteen, they were in their fourth year of secondary school at a prestigious academic-focused public school.

Third had been there since middle school, while Nine had transferred in through an entrance exam, earning a scholarship. They were in the same class, though not particularly close. Third only knew that Nine came from a struggling family but was hardworking enough to earn his place at the school. He had even admired Nine's determination.

"The other day, I saw a Benz picking you up after school."

"Oh, that was my dad."

"Wow, nice. Must be nice to be Third, huh?"

It seemed like casual conversation, but at the time, Third had no idea what kind of gaze Nine was giving him. Because they didn't talk much, he never realized that beneath Nine's polite and gentle façade, one that even teachers adored, lay deep-seated jealousy. Nine envied classmates who came from wealth, particularly Third, who was popular at school, always ranked in the top three academically, and excelled at everything.

Ambition wasn't a bad thing if used properly, but Nine had chosen to channel his drive in the wrong direction. Their relationship reached a breaking point when the school held a selection exam for a study abroad exchange program in the U.S., offering just one scholarship.

Third, with his family's wealth, didn't need the scholarship. His parents could send him abroad anytime. But he wanted to compete for it on his own merit. As for Nine, he needed this scholarship as an opportunity to pull himself forward and break free from the poverty he was stuck in.

Third still vividly remembered that one week before the exam, he had encouraged Nine to do his best. In return, he was met with a sweet smile laced with something darker.

"I'm already giving it my all. But it would be nice if no one took what should be mine."

"...What do you mean?"

"I mean... shouldn't this opportunity go to someone whose family can't afford to support them? I don't know, maybe I'm just overthinking," Nine chuckled softly.

Looking at the situation objectively, without being self-centered, the only real competition for the top spot was between him and Nine. That was when Third started realizing that his friend resented him for applying. Nine saw him as someone who could study abroad without relying on a scholarship, so his presence in the competition felt unfair.

But Third believed he had every right to compete. He wanted to go there through his own merit rather than his parents' money.

In the exam, whoever scored the highest would win. It was a fair competition. He wasn't stealing anyone's opportunity. Besides, there would be another chance next year for others to try again. So he thought he'd just do his best—if he didn't make it, that was fine.

But then, just one day before the scholarship exam, something unexpected happened.

"Grade 10/2, Tharit Charaslecha, please come to the English department's faculty office immediately."

The announcement echoed through the school during lunchtime, making Third, who was in the middle of playing soccer with his friends, frown. He had never been summoned like this before. A strange sense of foreboding crept over him.

And then, as if the world had collapsed before his eyes, the teacher instructed him to fetch his school bag. Inside, they discovered a copy of the exam for tomorrow's scholarship selection.

"Teacher, I didn't do it!" The boy was in shock, denying the accusation with all his might.

That morning, he had arrived at school before dawn simply because he had caught a ride with his mother on her way to work. He had stopped by the English department to turn in his homework before anyone else had arrived. There had been a janitor cleaning the faculty office, and if they checked the CCTV, they would see that he had only dropped off his worksheet and left immediately.

"Teacher, check the CCTV—"

"The camera in the faculty office is broken, but there is one outside. You were the only person seen entering and leaving that early in the morning. The janitor also said she saw you lurking around the teacher's desk."

"That's not true! I didn't do it!"

No matter how hard he tried to argue, the teacher didn't seem to believe him. And even though there was no concrete proof that he was guilty, the fact remained, the exam paper was in his bag. They checked other security footage, but no one had tampered with his belongings, except for himself.

"I'm sorry, Tharit, but to be fair to the other students, we have to disqualify you from this year's exam."

That was the final verdict. No matter how much Third tried to appeal, even with his parents' involvement, the decision was irreversible. His parents didn't see it as a big deal since it was just a scholarship for this year, and they could afford his education abroad without it. Stirring up trouble would only tarnish his mother's reputation as a high-ranking government official, so they advised him to drop the matter.

Financially, it didn't matter. But emotionally? It was a different story.

His parents were always busy working, never paying much attention to how he felt. Even though the school tried to keep it quiet, rumors still spread. His friends looked at him with suspicion, his teachers no longer treated him the same, and the atmosphere had changed permanently.

There was no evidence that he was the culprit.

But at the same time, there was no way to prove his innocence.

In the end, the overseas scholarship went to Nine. Unable to endure the suffocating environment any longer, Third begged his parents to let him transfer to a private school after the semester ended.

"Too bad we won't be seeing each other anymore," Nine had said on the last day of exams.

Third had his suspicions about him. But without proof, he told himself not to be biased.

"Good luck, Third."

Nine smiled, patted his shoulder, and leaned in to whisper, "What's mine will always be mine. So, what belongs to me... is mine."

"You—!"

In that moment, his anger exploded, and he raised his fist. He was now a hundred percent certain that Nine had framed him. But it was too late. Even if he spoke up, no one would believe him anymore.

With clenched teeth, he swung his backpack over his shoulder and strode out of the classroom, never once looking back at the school that had become his personal hell.

Years passed, but the wound in his heart never healed.

And it was torn open all over again when Third found his new dream, becoming an actor.

Just as things seemed to be going well, Nine reappeared in his life.

He had signed with the same agency.

They were cast in the same series.

And worst of all, they were paired as an onscreen couple.

"Guess we meet again. Let's get along, friend."

That was the first thing Nine said to him when they met again.

It took every ounce of restraint for Third not to punch him in the face in front of their manager. He tried to keep his distance, and the agency was aware that they didn't get along. But fate was cruel. They gained popularity from the same series, were shipped as a couple, and were cast as co-leads again.

The mere sight of Nine's fake smile made Third sick to his stomach. He had to use all his willpower to separate personal matters from work, knowing that speaking up wouldn't change anything.

Nine was a master manipulator, charming and persuasive. Compared to him, Third was cold and distant. Who would people believe?

His career and his future, came with the baggage of a painful past.

But when he was forced to choose between his past and his future, Third gritted his teeth and endured. He was determined to rise as high as possible, to escape from Nine's shadow once and for all.

But Nine wasn't satisfied.

Destroying Third once wasn't enough. Now, he was trying to sabotage Wan.

But Third refused to let history repeat itself.

That day, he couldn't protect himself.

But this time, he would protect Wan.

"Revenge? That's a harsh word."

Nine smirked, eyes narrowing.

"Tell you what, if you really think I did it, then prove it. Don't just run your mouth, just like last time. Oh, wait! You couldn't prove it back then either, could you?"

"You—!"

Fury surged through Third as he grabbed Nine by the collar, lifting him slightly off the ground.

But Nine simply pried his fingers off with a calm expression.

"Tsk. Talking like this with your onscreen partner... What would P'Pitch and P'Sunny say if they found out?"

He smoothed his shirt and shrugged nonchalantly.

"Isn't it over? Why do you still care? And tell me, are you mad for yourself, or because Wan is the one being targeted now? I'm starting to wonder if you two are—"

"Shut up and stay away from me and Wan."

Third's voice was low, laced with a deadly warning.

"This is the last time I'm warning you. I don't care how much this agency favors you, but if you pull this again, I won't hold back."

With that, he grabbed his outfit and stormed into the dressing room.

BANG!

The sound of the door slamming shut echoed through the room.

Nine smirked, pulling out his phone and opening social media to update his IG story.

The next day, I was still jobless.

P'Jarin postponed a magazine interview to give me time to recover mentally, so I got the rare chance to sleep in until ten.

The first thing I did when I woke up was check my phone.

Everyone told me to stop looking at the trending hashtag, but I couldn't help myself. Even though the agency had released a statement yesterday, I braced myself for more hate.

Instead, I found a clip from an event where Third was interviewed.

"It would be nice if those who misunderstood and spread false rumors about Wan apologized. I don't like seeing my friend being accused of something he didn't do."

My still half-asleep self suddenly sobered up. I sat there, stunned, holding my phone frozen in place. My heart pounded rapidly.

Third had stepped up to defend me. Even though the word friend made my heart sink a little, the gratitude and warmth I felt far outweighed that. He didn't have to say anything to make them apologize to me. He could've just let it go. Speaking up like that might make people think he was too harsh, but he still...

This is crazy. If I ever want to move on from him, it's going to be so damn hard.

After watching the clip about ten times, I opened LINE and sent him a message. I didn't know when he'd read it, but after standing up for me like that, if I didn't at least thank him, I'd be the worst.

[I saw your interview yesterday. Thanks a lot.]

Ding!

Just as I was setting my phone down on the table, a notification popped up. The screen lit up, revealing Third's quick reply.

[Are you okay now?]

He was asking if I was okay again. If he kept acting like he cared this much, I was just going to... like him even more.

[I'm okay now. The company is handling it. They're going to sue.]

[Good.]

His reply was short, followed by a pit bull sticker giving a thumbs-up.

That sticker usually meant the conversation was over, so I figured that was that. But then, '*ding!*' a new message popped up, making me jump.

[Did you sleep last night?]

[Not really.]

[If you couldn't sleep, why didn't you call? Didn't you say you'd call me every day?]

What the—? Was he flirting with me or what? My hands trembled slightly as I typed my response.

[I didn't want to bother you.]

And then... silence.

He just disappeared, leaving me staring at my phone, waiting for his reply for a full five minutes. I pouted. Whatever. Maybe he's busy. Fine, whatever...

Ding!

[If you don't call, I'll call you instead.]

[Pick up tonight.]

"Hey! AHHH!!"

"P'Wan! Why the hell are you screaming?!"

View's sharp voice rang out from the bathroom. I clamped a hand over my mouth and buried my burning face into my pillow, making sure not even a ghost in the room could see it.

Well, I guess amidst all the bad things, there were still some good things. My love life might actually be looking up!

Take 13, Action!

When one storm passes, the sky becomes clear again.

#SetSecretsDeepDive turned out to be nothing more than a fleeting dream of mine. After Third's interview with the press, everything ended as if nothing had ever happened. To ensure there would be no more rumors about a rift between us, my agency and the series production team agreed that from now on, any behind-the-scenes photos or clips released to promote the series would include both Third and me in the same frame.

But as we kept taking pictures together and appearing in more clips side by side, the 'rift' rumors began to shift into something else, at least in the eyes of the BL fans on the internet.

"Renji, what are you looking at?" I asked while placing my plate of food on the table. It was lunchtime on set, and most people were glued to their phones, lost in their own worlds, Renji and P'Cher included.

"Uh..."

At first, he hesitated, but when I shot him a pointed look, he turned his phone screen toward me. Turns out, he was scrolling through X, paused on a rather familiar hashtag.

#ThirdWan

Huh?

"People are shipping you and P'Third now."

My eyes widened, and heat rushed to my face as I snatched the phone from his hand. I had been on a social media detox for the past few days, so I had missed a lot. Who would've thought that by the time I checked back in, there'd already be a ship hashtag for us?

The tag was filled with all sorts of wild theories. Pictures of Third and me together, short fanfics, interview clips where Third had defended me, and even slow-motion edits of us locking eyes, set to ridiculously romantic background music.

Oh. My. God. BL fans really do have insane imaginations. Or maybe their instincts are just that sharp. Because at least one person here was actually thinking something about Third. That person being me.

"You really do look at P'Third a lot, though," Renji said, leaning in with a teasing smirk. His thick brows furrowed slightly as he watched a clip of an event interview we did together. I hadn't noticed before, but throughout the entire segment where Third was speaking, my eyes were practically glued to him.

"I-It's just timing! Of course, when someone's talking, you look at them! And when they slow it down, it just seems like I'm staring!" I blurted defensively. I mean, come on, it's basic courtesy to look at the person speaking! It's not because Third's side profile is stupidly handsome or anything!

"True. Honestly, I look at you more often than that, but no one notices."

The kid let out a quiet laugh, but for some reason, he seemed a little more subdued than usual. So, to lift his mood, I decided to tease him.

"What, are you jealous? Do you want a ship tag with me too?"

"I wouldn't mind."

"Huh?" I raised a brow. There was some background chatter from the crew, so I didn't quite catch what he mumbled. "What was that? I didn't hear you."

"I said I want some Earl Grey," he replied with a closed-eyed smile before focusing on his food again.

"I can order some—" I started, just as a tall figure dressed in a university uniform appeared.

The moment I saw Third's face, my heart started doing a breakdance routine. And when he actually walked up to our table, I got so flustered that I nearly forgot about the tea entirely.

"Can I sit here?" His deep voice sent another tremor through my chest.

In film sets, actors from different agencies who weren't close usually ate with their respective teams. Sometimes we'd mix, but more often than not, people stuck with their managers or close friends.

I almost asked him where his AR was, but then I remembered, P'Sunny was probably off with Nine. Those two had never once joined us for a meal in the past ten shooting days.

"Sure," I said, and Third slid into the seat beside me. I focused on eating my fried rice, but my heart was still racing uncontrollably.

Ever since that incident, we had been talking on the phone almost every night. Third always called first, probably because I was too hesitant to do it myself. I didn't know why he kept calling, and our conversations weren't even about work. Only about ten percent of it was work-related. The rest was just random small talk, playful banter, and ending with a simple goodnight.

Like last night, he even told me to have sweet dreams.

And now my bisexual ass was panicking. Is this normal friend behavior? I don't have that many friends, and even the ones I do have don't talk to me every day. Jay's been MIA, buried in research. And Renji, despite being close, spends most of his time buried in architecture coursework. Honestly, it's a miracle he still has the energy to film the series.

Do friends even say goodnight to each other? I didn't want to overthink it, but Third was a lot nicer than people gave him credit for. Maybe he was just worried I was still upset about the drama, so he wanted to distract me.

I snuck a glance at the guy I secretly liked who was sitting to my right, and then at my junior who was sipping his iced black tea on my left. None of us were speaking.

"Afternoon scene is a swimming one," Third suddenly broke the silence, looking at me with a small smirk. "Eat too much, and you'll get a belly."

"Says the guy who's been shoveling food down," I shot back, eyeing his half-finished plate. "I only had one plate. Renji had two."

"He's already in shape," Third replied, glancing at the younger guy.

For some reason, the atmosphere turned oddly tense. Even P'Cher, who was busy texting her boyfriend, glanced up. The awkwardness only lifted when Renji smiled, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly.

"Thanks, but I think P'Third's in better shape than me."

"Hey, what about me?" I asked, my tone slow and threatening as if he didn't say something nice, I wasn't getting him that Earl Grey.

"P'Wan is in great shape! Cute, just right. I mean, if you toned up a bit more, you'd be perfect!" Renji hurriedly babbled, his ears turning

pink.

"Yeah, you've got a good physique," Third added.

"..."

I blinked at him. There was something about the subtle smirk at the corner of his lips that made my face heat up. My face flushed red, so I quickly put my head down and continued eating to cover up my embarrassment.

Renji smoothly changed the topic, and once we were done eating, everyone dispersed. I went to the restroom before sitting down to play a mobile game to pass the time before my next scene, which wasn't until nearly 4 PM.

"Wan."

Just as I was topping up in the game, Third nudged me and held up his phone. "Got a minute? Let's film a TikTok."

"Huh?" I blinked. He didn't seem like the type to follow trends.

"Why that face?"

"Nothing, I'm just surprised. You don't seem like someone into social media."

"I'm not, but online marketing is important these days. Gotta do it," he said simply.

Fair point. The entertainment industry is fiercely competitive. If you want to stay relevant, you need to keep people talking. It's not easy for introverts like us.

"Why me, though? You could film it alone."

"So people stop thinking we don't get along."

Oh, so in the end, he meant well for me. But since Third isn't really active on social media, he might not know that the situation has already changed, to the point that there's even a #ThirdWan hashtag now...

"Alright, let's do it." In the end, I agreed. It's completely normal for friends to film TikToks together. If the BL fans want to fangirl over it, then at least I'm making them happy. And I'm happy too, because I get to film a clip with someone I like...

We filmed the trending song challenge about four or five times before we got a take we were satisfied with. Then, Third uploaded the clip to his channel and tagged me right away. The last time I checked, before P'Cher took my phone, there were already hundreds of comments. On X, the ThirdWan hashtag was trending at the end, even though it had only been posted for a little over ten minutes

"Alright, alright! Next up, Third, Nine, Renji, Porsche!"

P'Jern, the assistant director, called for the group to gather as they were about to film the first scene after the break. Meanwhile, I just sat idly, watching everyone else work.

"Nine, fighting!" I beamed, cheering on my bias as he walked past me.

But Nine didn't respond. Not only that, the way he looked at me wasn't friendly at all, making my heart sink.

Actually, he'd been ignoring me since this morning, no talking, no eye contact. But since everyone was busy then, I thought I was just overthinking it. Now, it was obvious that something was wrong. He seemed to be upset with me about something.

I sat still, trying to figure out what I had done to make Nine unhappy. But no matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't find

an answer. So, I decided to push my worries aside for now and focus on work. I planned to talk to him after we wrapped up for the day.

"That's a wrap! Great job today, everyone!"

Around 10 PM, P'Phai, the director, announced the end of the shoot.

I let out a relieved sigh and glanced at Nine as he walked off the set. I waited for him to change before approaching him. But before I could make a move, he walked straight toward me instead, with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Wan, can we talk for a sec?"

"...Uh, yeah." I was taken aback but nodded.

It seemed like we were on the same page, which was a good thing. If I had done something to upset him, I wanted to clear the air and apologize as soon as possible. Even though I wasn't as obsessed with Nine as I used to be, I was still his fan. Being on bad terms with someone you admire was the last thing I wanted.

Nine led me to the athletes' changing room by the swimming pool. While the crew was still packing up outside, he pushed the door open and stepped inside. Once we were alone, his voice lost its usual warmth.

"We've never had a direct conversation about this before, but I feel like it's getting out of hand. It's time we talk."

His gaze was cold and sharp, making me freeze. In the two years I had followed him, even after working together, I had only seen that look from him once, when he glanced at Third during our first script reading. But back then, I thought I was imagining it.

Now, I had undeniable proof that I wasn't.

"This series was created for me and Third. We're the official pairing. Fans might ship us with other people, but in the end, ThirdNine is the real deal. So, other people should at least show some respect."

He emphasized 'other people' while looking straight at me. It was clear he must have seen the #ThirdWan hashtag or the TikTok video Third and I filmed today.

"No matter how hard anyone tries, the leads of this series will always be me and Third. If you're a professional, you should know better than to steal the spotlight from the main actors. Just focus on your work, and one day, your chance will come. I'm sure you understand what I'm saying, Wan."

He flashed a sweet smile, the same bright and heartwarming smile I had admired for so long.

But now, it was laced with poison. My heart pounded painfully in my chest, crushed under the weight of disappointment and hurt.

"...Got it."

"I don't hate you, Wan. But this industry has a hierarchy. There's a process to everything. As a newcomer, you might not understand it yet, so take your time and learn."

He patted my shoulder lightly, like a kind senior giving advice, before walking away. Leaving me standing there, frozen like a statue.

The distant chatter of the crew cleaning up echoed from outside, but my ears were ringing too much to hear anything clearly. My face felt numb, as if I had just been slapped. It took me several minutes to snap out of it and remember that I shouldn't just stand here. P'Cher would worry.

Forcing my stiff legs to move, I finally walked out.

"Wan, I saw Nine leave a while ago. Why are you just coming out now?"

"I... was in the bathroom," I forced an answer, even though my mind was completely out of it.

P'Cher, the sharp-eyed AR staff, studied me carefully. I wasn't sure what my face looked like, but she seemed to think I wasn't feeling well. She quickly led me back to the van, instructing Renji and Porsche not to bother me so I could rest.

As I lay down and closed my eyes, pretending to sleep, my heart ached unbearably.

I had always known that the real Nine wasn't as pure and innocent as his public image, that was just part of the job, a necessary act. And I understood that people had different sides to them.

But I never expected him to be this different from what I had believed.

His eyes held no warmth. His words cut deep. He didn't see me as a friend. He saw me as a threat, someone trying to steal the spotlight.

Even though #ThirdWan wasn't something I intentionally created, fans started it on their own, but I did film that TikTok with Third. Nine must have seen it as disrespectful to his official pairing. Maybe I was careless, but did I really deserve to be treated like this?

Nine was someone I had admired for so long. He was my joy, my motivation, my inspiration, my comfort. I even had his picture on my desk, and his photo, one that I had taken myself, was my laptop's wallpaper.

No matter where he had an event, whether in Bangkok or another province, I would go if I was free, just to show my support. To let him know that he had a fan who would always be there for him.

But now, everything had shattered. Nothing was left except disappointment and pain.

I kept replaying everything in my mind, barely aware when the van finally reached my condo.

To make things worse, View wasn't home tonight. She had gone back to Ayutthaya. As I left alone, I went to my bedroom and sat on the bed, staring blankly into space. Everything felt so empty.

Bzzz...

My phone vibrated beside me. I glanced at it.

It was a Line call from Third.

It was already 11:30 PM.

But I didn't answer. I just stared at the screen until the call ended.

Bzzz...

Bzzz...

Bzzz...

But the guy on the other end wasn't the type to give up easily. And I... I was too lost in my thoughts. So, I reached for my phone, hoping that talking to someone might help clear my mind.

"Hello?"

[You're still awake, aren't you?]

"Yeah."

[Are you okay? You looked pale when we were leaving.]

Third's voice was as calm as ever, but I could hear the concern beneath it.

It felt like there was sand caught in my throat. I wanted to tell someone, to vent. But if I did, it would feel like I was just dumping my problems onto him. Besides... who would even believe me?

"I... no, it's nothing."

[If something's bothering you, you can tell me.]

My cold heart warmed up a little when I heard Third say that.

From what I had seen of Third so far, he was someone I could trust. He had protected me before. He wouldn't see me as an enemy like—

"Yeah, something's on my mind. But it's nothing serious. I'll be fine soon."

Even though I trusted Third, I didn't want to burden him with this. He was already working so hard every day. And if I told him, it might make things even worse between him and Nine, whose relationship already seemed strained.

[Are you sure?]

"Yeah. I just need a little time to rest." I sighed.

It might take a while, but I'd get over it eventually.

It wasn't like I had been dumped. I had just lost faith in an idol.

That shouldn't take as long to get over as heartbreak...

The other end of the line went silent for a moment before speaking.

[Are you sleepy?]

"Umm, not really."

[Then, do you want to go for a drive? Right now?]

"Huh?" My eyes widened. Going for a drive at 11:30 PM?

[Just around Bangkok. Want to go? I'll pick you up at your condo.]

"Uh... um... okay," I stammered, wondering what Third was thinking to invite me out so suddenly. But right now, I really did want to be with someone. If the person I liked was by my side, maybe I'd feel a little better.

Half an hour later, a sleek black BMW pulled up in front of my condo. I was still in the same outfit I had worn when I came back from the set. I looked at Third, who showed no signs of drowsiness despite working all day.

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"I slept in the morning," he replied, and I suddenly remembered that he had only filmed two scenes earlier in the day, so he had napped in the van. Then, at lunchtime, he had come to eat with us.

"If you're tired, you can sleep. I'll wake you up when we get there."

"No way. What if you sell me off while I'm asleep?" I joked, trying to lighten the mood for both of us. Third gave me a look of exasperation as he drove away from my condo.

"Where are we going?"

"To see the view," he answered shortly before reaching out to turn on the music. A soft acoustic song played, creating a cozy atmosphere, as if we were sitting by a fireplace in winter.

Neither of us spoke. I simply gazed at the nighttime scenery of this chaotic city, feeling my heart calm just a little. I had never been out

this late before. Only now did I realize that Bangkok, when it's asleep, is much more peaceful and pleasant. No traffic jams, no blaring noise, just twinkling lights from the buildings, shining so brightly they outshone the stars.

Third kept driving until we reached the outskirts of the city. I noticed a sign pointing toward Suvarnabhumi Airport and wondered where he was taking me. Eventually, he parked near a bridge.

"You can see planes taking off clearly from here," he said, pointing at a plane soaring into the vast sky.

I looked up, watching the giant bird glide overhead, when Third spoke again in his deep, steady voice.

"Before I joined the industry, I used to come here at night to watch planes take off. It might sound weird, but I found it calming."

"It's not weird. It's actually really relaxing," I leaned back against the seat, watching the plane disappear into the distance. Soon, another plane would take off. Airports are always bustling, but from a distance, they have an unexpectedly tranquil charm.

We sat there in silence, watching planes ascend into the sky while soft music played in the background. The weight in my chest felt a little lighter, just having someone beside me. I found myself wishing this moment could stretch on forever.

"Do you want to talk about it?" After a long pause, Third's voice broke the silence. His gaze was still fixed on a new plane climbing higher and higher.

"...Yeah, I do," I admitted.

Damn it. I had planned to keep this to myself, but in the end, I lost to my own weakness.

"The thing is... I really admire someone," I began, carefully choosing words that wouldn't make things worse. "Not in that way. I admire his skills. But I just found out recently that he doesn't see me as a friend. He see me as... almost an enemy, I guess. It really hurt. I didn't know how to handle it."

Third didn't say anything. He just sat there and listened. I used to think he was bossy and overbearing, but in reality, he was a good listener.

"I guess it feels like a heartbreak," I sighed. "I admired him for years, but when I realized he wasn't the person I thought he was, and that he didn't like me either... It hurt. I know I might've done things to upset him, but to find out he outright dislike me, it just knocked me off balance."

"If that's the case, then he doesn't deserve your admiration," Third finally said, his sharp eyes meeting mine. "There are plenty of talented people in this world to look up to. But it's okay to be sad. Just don't hold onto it for too long. Not every day has to be a bad day."

"...Yeah, you're right," I smiled faintly.

Today might have been a bad day, but there would be better days ahead.

No. actually, there was already something good about today. The person sitting beside me.

After a long stretch of quiet, just watching the planes, Third asked, "Feeling better?"

"Yeah. I've never watched planes take off before, but the atmosphere here is really nice."

"That's why I like this place. It feels open, like I have the whole world to myself. No chaos."

"But today, I'm here to disturb your peace," I chuckled. I was happy to spend time with Third, but I also felt guilty for intruding on his rare free time.

"It's fine. Having you here is nice."

"..."

The peaceful atmosphere suddenly felt strangely awkward. Maybe it was just me, but the gentle look in Third's eyes and his faint smile made my hands feel oddly clumsy.

"Uh... just curious. If you weren't an actor, what would you want to be?" I quickly changed the subject before I lost my composure completely.

"Umm..." He went quiet for a moment before answering, "A scientist, maybe."

"For real?" My eyes widened. Actually... now that I thought about it, he did give off a bit of a nerdy vibe when he wasn't putting on his entertainment industry persona.

"Yeah. I liked science, especially chemistry. I took the science track in high school. At first, I planned to major in science, but then I got interested in acting, so I switched to studying film and performing arts instead."

"Oh..." I nodded as Third leaned back against his seat.

"But being an actor is good too. Even though there are a lot of annoying things, I love being in front of the camera. I love it enough to put up with all the hassle."

I looked at Third, seeing the glint of happiness in his eyes. I admired his determination to chase his dream. Despite being an introvert, he had pushed past his limits, done everything he could to become a skilled actor recognized for his talent. He must have had an incredible amount of passion to endure all the hardships of this industry.

"I'm jealous of people with passion like you," I murmured.

Third had always been captivating, but when he talked about his dreams and happiness, he shone even brighter, so much that he felt even farther away from me...

"Wan."

"Hmm?"

"I'm glad to meet you."

"..."

His dark eyes carried a whirlwind of emotions as we locked gazes. In that moment, it felt as if the entire world had come to a standstill. I couldn't hear the music playing, nor did I notice the planes soaring into the sky. My eyes were completely fixated on his handsome face, which was drawing closer and closer... so close that I could almost count his eyelashes.

Bzzttt!

Before anything could actually happen, my phone vibrated, immediately followed by the sound of a message notification. I flinched away from Third, quickly grabbing my phone from my lap, only to find a notification from my university group chat.

"I... I... I need to reply to my group chat first," I stammered.

"Mm."

My face and neck burned with heat, my heart pounding so hard it felt like it might explode. I fixated on my phone as if my life depended on it, pretending to be seriously engaged in work. When in reality, my mind was in complete chaos.

Just now, he was going to kiss me. A hundred percent. A million percent.

What does that even mean? Was it just the mood, or...

Does he actually like me too?

Aaaahhh! I'm sure he does!!!

Take 14, Action!

Silence comes in many forms. There is the peaceful silence that brings relaxation, the awkward silence that makes you want to escape the situation as soon as possible, or the kind of silence that brings about embarrassment, just like what is happening in the car right now.

The owner of the luxurious car cast a sidelong glance at the person sitting in the passenger seat beside him. Wan's usually large and lively eyes were tightly shut, his head resting against the car window without the slightest movement. The sight made the driver, who was pressing down on the accelerator to head back into the city, smile a little in amusement.

Someone who's truly asleep wouldn't have such red ears.

Judging by the way things looked, he was more likely faking sleep to escape his embarrassment.

Thinking back to the electrifying moment just now, Third couldn't help but feel a tinge of regret at being interrupted by that incoming message. It was already so late at night, why weren't Wan's friends asleep yet? And why did they have to send a message right at that moment? Couldn't they have waited just five more minutes so he could fully savor the softness of those lips?

But in truth, the kiss had only been an incidental result of the atmosphere. It wasn't like he had taken Wan out for a drive with the intention of doing something like that. Third had simply noticed that the other seemed stressed and wanted to help him relax. Lately, his emotions seemed to be dictated by Wan's reactions. If Wan was

happy, then he was happy too. And on days like today, when Wan was feeling troubled, he found himself growing anxious, wanting to do something, anything to make the person he liked feel better.

Yes, he liked Wan. That was something Third had thought over many times until he was certain that this feeling wasn't something fleeting.

The beginning of their relationship hadn't exactly been smooth, but in the end, they had managed to clear up their misunderstandings and grow closer. At first, Third had simply felt comfortable around Wan. He didn't have to be cautious, and he could be himself completely. But at some point, that comfort had gradually deepened into something more. Maybe it was because he got to know Wan's true nature through their conversations. Maybe it was when he saw Wan reciting his lines with unwavering focus. Third liked people who were hardworking. Maybe it was when he saw Wan smiling and laughing while joking around with fellow actors, the production crew, or even his fans. Or maybe it was when they traveled to Ayutthaya together, just the two of them...

Third became fully aware of his feelings when he found himself instinctively scanning the set for Wan's familiar figure first thing every day. Whenever he let his guard down, his gaze would always drift toward Wan. He felt a strange sense of joy whenever he teased Wan into pouting. And hearing that soft voice bicker back at him every night before bed, it made him fall asleep with a smile.

Back in high school, he had been in a relationship before, so he knew exactly what this feeling was. And he also knew that Wan was still single, which meant he had a chance.

Once Third realized his feelings, he started making subtle moves. He called Wan almost every day after work, threw in teasing remarks just to gauge his reactions. Fortunately, Wan wasn't the type to hide

his emotions well, so Third could more or less tell that Wan always seemed flustered and shy whenever he flirted.

And just now, that moment had been proof.

If Wan hadn't felt anything or if he had been disgusted, he would've pushed Third away or even thrown a punch. But instead, he had gone red in the face and ears, avoided eye contact, and faked sleep. This was clearly an attempt to hide his embarrassment.

Look at him, his eyes are closed, but his brows are furrowed.

What kind of actor fakes sleep so unconvincingly?

Third chuckled, turning his gaze back to the road, letting Wan continue his (pretend) sleep. It was already past 2 AM, and Wan had been filming all day. He might actually be tired for real.

When Third glanced over again, he saw that Wan's brows had relaxed. He had truly fallen asleep.

Third liked silence.

And even more so, he liked the kind of peaceful silence that came with having the person he liked by his side.

He didn't want this moment to end.

But all good things must come to an end.

When he pulled up in front of Wan's condo building, he had no choice but to wake the other up by leaning in to whisper,

"Wan."

"..."

"Wan, we're at your condo."

"...Hmm?"

"You're not waking up? If you don't wake up, I'll take you back to my condo instead."

"Huh... Hey!"

The drowsy person jolted awake, eyes widening in confusion as he looked at Third, before his face turned a soft shade of pink.

"Uh... um. Thanks for... today." He stammered, seemingly just realizing what had happened.

His adorable expression made the corners of the leading man's lips curve into a high arc as he gazed at that attractive face with sparkling eyes.

"Wan, I—"

"And thanks for dropping me off. See you later! Bye!" But Wan didn't give him a chance to finish his sentence. He flustered and hastily said his goodbye, opened the car door, and dashed back into the building. The tall figure was left sitting there in stunned silence for about three seconds before letting out a soft chuckle.

Well, no rush. No, by tomorrow, they'd meet on set again anyway. He still had plenty of time to get closer to Wan, to slowly get to know each other throughout the filming of this series.

After all, he was pretty sure he had a good chance. Judging by that red face, those flushed ears, and the frequent attempts to avoid his gaze, Wan must like him too.

A lot has happened to me these past few days. Each day has been filled with a whirlwind of events and emotions, almost too much to

process.

First, there's the matter with Nine. After he so clearly showed his hostility that day, I learned to slowly come to terms with it, trying to keep my distance and only interact with him when necessary. It still hurts, of course it does. I used to be his fan, after all. It'll take some time for the wound to heal before I can become numb to it.

As for Third, I talk to him as usual. Off-camera is personal, but when it comes to posting pictures or Instagram stories on my public account, I avoid taking any with him to keep Nine from getting upset. Honestly, I think it's kind of ridiculous, but I don't want to create unnecessary problems with my coworkers. Besides... in this project, the leads are Third and Nine. From a marketing perspective, it wouldn't be ideal if the ThirdWan pairing overshadowed them.

I haven't told anyone about Nine coming to talk to me, not Third, not P'Cher. I planned to handle this quietly. But some people don't seem too keen on cooperating.

"Wan."

"Hm?"

"Look at the camera."

"...Are you posting this on your story? No way." I shook my head firmly, my heart pounding at the sharp gaze of the tall figure sitting next to me during our break. "Go take a picture of someone else."

"But I want to take a picture of you." He shot back. Even without seeing his face, I could hear the teasing smile in his deep voice, making me both flustered and conflicted.

"It's not for a story. I just want to keep it for myself."

This leading man... He was coaxing me, trying to get me to look at the camera. When I finally caved and turned his way, my face instantly heated up. That ridiculously handsome face was smiling mischievously.

"Alright, that's enough! No pictures!" I quickly threw my hands up to cover the camera, feeling so embarrassed that I could die. Anyone watching us would probably be confused as hell. Just a while ago, we were barely speaking, but now we were joking around like old friends. A complete 180-degree shift.

It's all Third's fault. Ever since that day he took me on a drive, he's been going all in, and my heart can't keep up.

"We won't see each other for a few days, so I just wanted a picture to keep." Third's voice softened. I couldn't help but wonder, when he has a boyfriend, is he the clingy type? Because what he's doing to me now is pretty close...

At that thought, my heart pounded even harder. Truthfully, neither of us has said the words out loud yet, but even without saying it, I think we both already know.

"You talk like we don't have phones to call each other."

"It's not the same as seeing you in person." Third sighed. No more cold eyes when looking at me. Now, this top-tier leading man was looking at me with puppy-dog eyes.

"Wan."

"What?"

"Let's go on another trip together when we're free. I want to go with you."

"..."

Wow. At this point, he might as well just say he likes me. I'm waiting, you know? I want him to say it first because I don't want to lose face.

"I'll check my schedule first. My schedule is pretty packed, Nong." I smirked teasingly, earning a laugh from him.

In reality, it was Third's schedule that was packed to the brim. As much as I wanted to go on a trip with him, if he ever got any free time, I'd rather he use it to rest.

"Alright, everyone! Get ready, we're starting soon! Third, Nine, to the set!"

P'Jern, the assistant director, called through the megaphone, her voice echoing across the pool. Third got up with a sigh, and I gave him a thumbs-up for encouragement, watching his tall figure walk to the set with a heart full of warmth.

Being with someone you like really is happiness.

"Wan."

As I sat there watching Third prepare for the scene, a familiar voice sounded above me. P'Cher, my AR, handed me my second cup of coffee for the day and sat down beside me.

I took a sip, my eyes still fixed on Third. But after a while, a strange chill ran down my spine. When I turned, I found P'Cher staring at me with an unreadable expression. She didn't say anything, though, just picked up her phone and started scrolling.

It seemed like nothing... but a tiny part of me felt uneasy.

That feeling faded when it was time for my scene, and I focused on work until we wrapped up at 10 PM.

"I'm heading out first." I went over to whisper goodbye to Third, gave a respectful wai to the nearby staff, and nearly jumped when Third grabbed my shoulder and leaned in to whisper in my ear.

"I'll call you tonight."

"...Okay." I nodded quickly and hurried back to P'Cher, trying my best not to let a stupid grin slip onto my face.

"Get in the car." P'Cher urged, her voice sterner than usual. Once we were in the car, there were just the two of us and the driver, she turned to look at me immediately.

"Wan, this might be personal, but answer me honestly."

I froze, halfway through pulling out my phone. A bad feeling crept up my spine. "...What is it?"

"Are you and Third dating?"

The direct question made me jolt. I knew people had probably noticed how close we'd become lately, but I thought we still looked like just friends. I didn't expect P'Cher to see right through us.

"No. We're just friends..."

I wasn't lying. Our status right now... I guess we're just talking. But since neither of us has brought it up, we're still just friends.

"Then do you feel something for him? More than just a friend?"

P'Cher pressed on. I figured she had handled many artists before, so there was no escaping this.

"...Yeah... I like him."

As soon as I admitted it, her expression grew even more serious. I didn't understand why.

Before I could ask, she hit me with a sentence that made my heart drop.

"Wan, to be honest, I don't approve of you two liking each other."

"...Why?" My stomach sank. "Didn't you say having a relationship is fine? As long as we inform the company and be careful?"

"Yes, but it also depends on who it is." P'Cher sighed before explaining, an explanation that left me speechless.

"That's Third. He already has a ship partner, and you two are in the same series. Right now, ThirdNine is on fire, and the series is about to air soon. If people find out you and Third are involved, it'll be a huge problem."

"..."

"Wan, if your boyfriend was someone outside the industry or even someone else in the industry, I wouldn't care. I'd support you and help you keep it quiet. But if it's Third, that's not a good idea. There are too many risks. If people find out, Third will lose his ship fanbase, and you... you'll have it even worse. A rookie actor doesn't have enough fans to protect them. You'd get destroyed by Third and Nine's fans."

"..."

"I know I can't stop you, but as your manager, I have to warn you. Think carefully before you act," P'Cher squeezed my shoulder lightly.

Amid the tension, her eyes behind her glasses were filled with sympathy. I knew she had to do this as part of her duty, so I murmured softly, "Yes..."

We didn't speak again until we arrived at the condo. P'Cher told me to get plenty of rest, but at this point, how could I possibly fall

asleep?

"P'Wan. How was it? Tired? How was filming today?" As soon as I opened the door, View peeked in to greet me.

"It was fine..." I replied wearily and dragged myself into the bedroom like a soulless body.

I sank onto the bed and spaced out, replaying P'Cher's words in my mind.

Even though fans these days are better at separating an artist's work from their personal life compared to the past, I used to be a fan myself, I know that many still can't accept it if their favorite on-screen couple isn't actually dating.

No matter how clearly Third sets boundaries with Nine, some fans still believe there's a chance for their relationship to develop because Nine always leaves room for interpretation when he speaks.

All types of fans are important because they form the foundation that supports an artist. Even though Third is gaining fame, it's too soon to say he has a secure position. That's why his fan base is crucial, his dream is to grow as an actor.

The cast and crew have all put in immense effort. This series is my agency's hope for making a name in the industry. Many new actors are waiting for a chance to shine through this project. If any scandal affects the series, it won't be good.

Opportunities in life can come multiple times, but for some people, there's only one. No matter what kind of opportunity it is, it matters. I know Third has poured his heart into this series. It's a critical step in his career, and nothing should stand in his way.

And that 'something'... is me.

Riiing—

The phone in my hand vibrated with an incoming Line call. There was a time when seeing Third's name on my screen filled me with warmth and happiness every night before bed. But now, it only made my chest feel heavy and my mind spiral in confusion.

The ringing continued.

In the end, I muted my phone, closed my eyes, and let the call go unanswered.

Something was clearly off at the set today, and the rising star was getting increasingly irritated.

"Third, come film a promo clip with Nine."

"Third, record a Story. Fans are waiting."

"Third, come talk to me about tomorrow's photoshoot."

And a whole lot more from P'Sunny, his AR. Today, she was unusually persistent, constantly interrupting every time he tried to walk over to Wan, who was sitting with the other actors.

"Cut!"

"Wan," Third called out as they wrapped the last scene before the lunch break. He leaned toward the monitor where the smaller actor was watching playback. "I wanted to—"

"Third, where are you going? Come here! We need photos with the food truck."

P'Sunny swooped in and grabbed his arm, dragging him away before he could say another word. He missed his chance again.

He saw Wan offer a small smile and wave, but his eyes looked dull, nothing like before.

Third exhaled heavily, tempted to shake off the AR's grip, but that would be rude. So, he had no choice but to comply while cursing internally.

Aside from the pre-shoot briefing, he hadn't spoken to Wan at all today.

And Wan seemed quieter than usual.

"Porsche, have you seen Wan?" Third asked after finishing his obligations.

He rushed back to the area where the staff was eating, but Wan was nowhere in sight.

"He already left, P'. P'Wan only had morning scenes today," the younger actor replied.

Third clenched his jaw, his thick brows furrowing. Something was definitely wrong.

First, P'Sunny was actively keeping him away from Wan. Then, Wan himself was acting strange, giving short replies to texts, declining calls at night, saying he was busy with class and research reports. It was a reasonable excuse, sure, but Third's gut told him there was more to it.

Just yesterday, everything between them seemed fine. What the hell happened?

He forced himself to suppress his doubts and focus on work.

The last scene wrapped at 6:30 PM, but he still had to meet a client to discuss a brand ambassador deal. P'Sunny stayed behind to supervise Nine's remaining scenes, so his personal manager, P'Pitch, who also owned the agency, came to pick him up.

"Actually, this client really likes ThirdNine. Try selling the ship a little during the conversation. Who knows, they might hire both of you."

P'Pitch casually suggested while driving.

But Third had no intention of doing that. He didn't want to deceive anyone. That duty fell to P'Pitch, who kept talking nonsense, hinting that some couples in the agency were really dating but didn't want to reveal it. Third sat there, waiting impatiently for time to pass, asking himself what the hell he was doing.

Was acting alone not enough to survive in this cutthroat industry?
Was that why he felt so trapped?

Nearly two hours later, the client finally left.

In the now-empty private dining room, only Third and his agency's owner remained. P'Pitch casually sipped his cocktail.

"So, Third, are you seeing anyone these days?"

The out-of-nowhere question made Third narrow his eyes.

"I am."

"Who?"

The older man's tone was relaxed, as if discussing the weather. But Third had been in the industry long enough to sense the underlying tension.

"If you're asking like this, I assume you already know."

"I heard from Sunny, but I wanted to confirm."

The agency head set down his glass and locked eyes with Third, pressuring him for an answer.

"It's exactly as she said. I'm seeing Wan. I like him."

Third didn't intend to hide it. Per his contract, he was allowed to date, he just had to inform the agency. In some cases, the relationship might need to be kept secret for business reasons, but the agency had no right to interfere with his personal life.

"Really? I don't think he's a good match for you."

Those words seemed to have crossed the line a little. The sharp-eyed young leading actor's gaze instantly gleamed with clear displeasure.

"What exactly is inappropriate?"

"The timing, of course." P'Pitch replied. He knew full well that this kid was stubborn. Even if he let Sunny handle it, it wouldn't be enough, so he had to step in and deal with it himself.

"You're on the rise, Third. And right now, ThirdNine is booming. Everyone is eagerly waiting for your series, rooting for you two to be together. With the hype this strong, if you get caught dating someone else, especially a co-star from the same series who isn't Nine, you could go down overnight."

"I've made it clear from the beginning that I sell my acting skills, not fan service or my soul." The deep voice replied, suppressing the emotion boiling in his chest.

So he wasn't allowed to date Wan because of this? That was beyond ridiculous.

"I always say in interviews that work is work. Are you underestimating the audience's judgment?"

"But the ones who bring in the crowds are your fans, right? You're in a BL series, Third. These things can't be separated. There are plenty

of delusional fans, and those delusional ones? They're your supporters. Just look at how some of them are already grumbling every day over that 'ThirdWan' tag. Have you ever checked? If they stop supporting you, you're done. After all this effort, do you really want to throw it away? The series, which is supposed to be a hit, could flop, and everything will collapse!"

The atmosphere in the restaurant grew visibly tense. Third clenched his jaw to stop himself from swearing, while the company owner clicked his tongue in frustration.

"I'm telling you straight up, the timing is off. Just keep your distance for now. Wait until the series has aired and settled, then figure it out."

"You may be my manager, but you have no right to interfere in my personal life." Third cut him off, grabbing his bag and phone from the table and standing up abruptly.

"I'm leaving."

The tall figure stormed out, leaving only the agency owner cursing under his breath. He had expected this outcome from today's conversation, but he still held onto the hope that Third, after working in the industry for some time, would have started to understand its nature.

He admired Third's determination, his nearly all-rounded skills, and especially his acting talent. Third was the agency's star product, a promising investment with vast potential. But his biggest flaw was his unyielding bluntness. Third had made it clear that he wanted to be recognized solely for his acting skills.

But that was just an ideal.

In reality, no one could survive and stay famous in this industry on talent alone.

Blunt honesty and the entertainment industry were like parallel lines. Never meant to intersect. And he had invested too much in Third. If the actor himself wouldn't play the game, then it was up to the manager and the agency to eliminate obstacles that stood in the way of profit.

"I really don't want to do this, Third... but I have no choice." Pitch exhaled sharply, grabbing his phone to make some calls.

After today, that kid might resent him.

But so what?

They were still bound by contract for years to come. And Pitch was confident one or two years from now, Third would understand.

He'd be grateful for everything Pitch had done for him.

Take 15, Action!

My life lately feels like I'm facing a year of bad luck, with Saturn and Venus both afflicting me, and Rahu joining in. I wake up every day lifeless, and everywhere I look, everything around me is dull. Though I'm not sure whether it's because of sadness or PM 2.5 dust.

Since talking to P'Cher on the van that day, I have thought it over and decided that I should keep my distance from Third and go back to just being friends for the sake of his career. Even though I know that doing this will make both of us sad, I don't want to be the cause of ruining the bright future of the person I like in his acting career.

I once thought about talking to Third about the situation to find a solution, but I know that someone as stubborn as him would only resist and refuse. So I had to be cruel. It might not be the right thing to do, but it's the best thing I can do for the person I like. I never cared about my own reputation. Let them attack me if they want. I never wanted to be an actor in the first place. But Third loves this profession so much. I will protect his dreams and future, even if it means both of us will have to suffer.

Maybe our timing isn't right at this moment. If, in the future, we still have feelings for each other, we might reconnect. But I don't dare to hope for that. Since I'm the one hurting him, how could I expect him to still hold on to anything?

Ting!

[Isn't your presentation today? Fighting!]

I'm in my student uniform, standing in front of the mirror combing my hair. I glance at my phone screen, which is brightly displaying a message. Third still remembered that I had to present my research today, even though we hadn't talked in days. That fact made a lump rise in my throat. As I pressed to send a thank-you sticker out of politeness, I switched on Do Not Disturb mode and took a deep breath.

Don't get distracted, Wan. Just focus on studying. I hypnotized myself while quickly getting dressed, grabbing my backpack, and riding my motorcycle from my condo to the university.

But unfortunately, no matter how much I tried to convince myself, when I accidentally thought about the left-heavy chat from him over the past few days, my chest still tightened with guilt.

Today was my research presentation day. Since it was an important day that would determine my academic future, I didn't want anything to distract me, so I stayed off social media since morning. I also told P'Cher that if anything came up, just leave a message, and I would get back to them after class.

When I arrived at the university, I could feel the eyes of the students on me all the way. Ever since I acted in a series, I was used to people looking at me when I walked around campus. So I just smiled politely as usual and hurried to my classroom. However, since I was too preoccupied with my presentation, I failed to notice that today, the gazes were filled with suspicion.

"Hey, you ready?"

"Ready my ass. I still can't remember the script."

Jay, who arrived earlier and was memorizing the script, raised his hand and scratched his head as I slumped into the seat next to him.

My best friend shifted his eyes from the iPad screen to look at me, hesitating slightly before calling my name.

"Wan, m..."

"Hm?" I blinked, listening attentively.

But Jay hesitated again. In the end, he let out a heavy sigh and said, "Never mind. We'll talk later. You better review your script first. You're presenting before me."

"Okay, okay." I nodded, slightly puzzled by his reaction.

I also noticed that other classmates were looking at me too. This was starting to feel abnormal. My classmates have seen me for almost a year now, why would they stare at me like the rest of the university?

But since my biggest concern at that moment was my presentation, I ignored their stares and focused on memorizing my script until the professor walked in. When my turn came, I suppressed my nerves and delivered my speech according to the script I had prepared. In the end, my research presentation, *'The Image of BL Series Actors and Its Impact on Social Media Publicity,'* went smoothly. All that was left were a few minor details in the written report that needed revision.

I returned to my seat, exhaling deeply as if a mountain had been lifted off my chest, and quickly grabbed my phone to check social media under the desk while Jay was preparing his presentation slides at the front.

As soon as I opened X, I was surprised to see my name among the top trends on X Thailand.

Even though I should be happy, I had a bad feeling about this. And when I clicked on it, well, I got the answer.

I was hit with fake news again.

Among the tens of thousands of reposts, almost reaching a hundred thousand, the summary was that two anonymous accounts came out this morning to expose me, accusing me of acting like a 'real man' by being arrogant and a homewrecker since high school. The way this news was released was exactly like last time. It hasn't even been a month, and I've already been hit by fake news twice.

But this time, I was luckier than before, 80% of netizens in the tag found it ridiculous. My fans were defending me to the fullest, and even my friends and acquaintances were refuting the news all over social media.

'I went to the same school as him, a first-year junior. Never saw him act like that at all. His friends and teachers love him. If this were true, rumors would've spread ages ago. You can't hide things when you're a celebrity.'

'When someone's about to get famous, haters multiply like this. Hope the company sues them all.'

'I was Wan's high school friend. I guarantee he's not like that and has never done anything like what's being accused. He's actually really polite. All the teachers and friends adore him. The people spreading rumors must be jobless. Did they leave their common sense in their mother's womb?'

'I'm Wan's mentor in the faculty. I can confirm that in all the time I've known him, he has never behaved the way they claim. How would he act all tough or steal someone's lover? He can barely even talk to strangers. Anyone who defames my junior, I hope you get sued.'

But even though so many people were defending me, that didn't mean I didn't lose my reputation.

Whether the news was true or not didn't matter. People always remember the first thing they hear. Few people follow up on news continuously. Many assume that rumors always have some basis in truth. Even if I prove my innocence, those who dislike or envy me will shut their eyes and refuse to listen.

'But isn't it weird that there's been two scandals in less than a month?'

'Honestly, isn't this bad for the series? People are more focused on his scandals than the show.'

'Even last time, this guy seemed problematic. His fans are so rude, always trying to one-up other couples. And he always tries to create moments with other people's faves. Maybe there's some truth to it. Learn to respect the lead actors.'

'Who even cast this guy? Should we just remove him from the series? If he stays, I won't watch, even if my fave is in it. There's still time to recast and reshoot, right?'

I saw plenty of comments like that, and the last one had over a thousand reposts.

So, no matter whether the response to this news was positive or negative, I was affected anyway.

I really wanted to know what grudge this person had against me. Or did I unknowingly step on someone's toes...?

A vein pulsed at my temple as I exited X and opened Line.

There were hundreds of unread messages, from my younger sister, Third, Renji, my fellow actors, my high school friends, and even my classmates, asking if I was okay. But I didn't respond to anyone yet.

The first thing I searched for was a message from my company.

There was only one. From P'Jarin.

[Call me immediately after class.]

I sat and waited until class ended, feeling guilty that my brain hadn't registered a single thing my classmates were presenting. As soon as the professor left the room, my classmates immediately came up to me. Everyone had already seen the news. That explained why they all stared at me when I walked in.

"Wan, how are you? Are you okay?"

"I don't believe for a second that you're like that. How could you possibly steal someone's partner? It took you almost a year just to talk to the girls in our department without looking away."

"These assholes must have too much free time. Want us to tweet back at them? We're ready."

"It's fine. Thanks. I'll let the company handle it," I said with a small smile, touched by their support. There wasn't a single trace of doubt in their eyes. Even in the middle of all this mess, I still had something good.

After leaving the classroom, I walked around looking for a quiet, empty place to make a call. I finally stopped at a balcony outside an unused classroom. Jay followed me.

[Wan, class is over, right? Where are you?]

"I'm at the university,"

[Have you heard about that news yet?]

"I have."

[I believe in you, but I need to hear it from your mouth once again to be sure. You have never done anything like what that person

accused you of, right? Stealing someone else's lover, behaving like a 'real man'?]

"I never have." I answered firmly. The company has already investigated my background. If they had found that I had such behavior, I wouldn't have been here until now.

[Okay, then I'll let the lawyer handle it. Don't stress over it, Wan. The public opinion is more on your side. Everyone is coming out to defend you.]

"I'm not stressed at all, P'." I replied. Because it's not true, and because I could already guess the reason why I kept getting these fabricated rumors.

It's sabotage, because I made someone lose their benefits. And the main reason likely stems from my relationship with Third.

The last rumor was an attempt to suppress a rising star. Nine came forward to talk about me stealing the spotlight. Others on set must have noticed the changes between me and Third. Plus, with the growing hashtag #ThirdWan, when everything is pieced together, it all makes sense. Even P'Cher could guess that Third and I were talking. Others must have sensed it too, and they didn't want it to happen because it might affect the series as well as the ship fandom #ThirdNine.

It's cutting the problem at its root. Since I was the obstacle, someone tried to remove me.

[You don't have any work today, so just get some rest. No need to respond to anything. I will handle it. I'll update you again later.]
P'Jarin left these words before hanging up.

I lifted my gaze to the overcast sky, my eyes dim, and let out a deep sigh.

"Sometimes, I think maybe I shouldn't have encouraged you to go to that casting." Jay, who stood beside me, said softly, his voice filled with guilt.

"No, you meant well for me. These things are just... normal in this industry." I gave him a weak smile.

The entertainment industry, which looks bright and beautiful from the outside, full of colors and glamour, is only so to distract people from the sharp thorns hidden beneath, like a beautiful rose concealing its dangers.

"Sigh... Don't stress yourself out. Everyone knows you're not like that. Let's go get something to eat. How about mala? My treat."

"Sorry, Jay. I want to go back to my room. I want to sleep." I refused. Whenever something bad happens, I never have the appetite to eat anything. I just want to be alone.

"Alright, no problem. Another day then."

"Sorry."

"Why are you apologizing? You should rest." Jay patted my shoulder in understanding. We said our goodbyes, and then I rode my motorcycle back to my condo.

I stopped by a convenience store to buy a packed meal, but once I got to my room, I left it untouched on the table. Instead, I sat curled up on the sofa, responding to messages from everyone who checked in on me.

I had always been someone with few friends, but now that this happened, many friends, even those I wasn't close to, reached out, not out of curiosity, but because they cared and trusted me. I was truly touched.

[Wan, call me back when you're free.]

There was only one message I hadn't opened yet. Third had been messaging me repeatedly.

While I was confused and overwhelmed with guilt, he kept sending messages.

I wanted to call. I wanted to hear his voice so badly.

But I couldn't.

The thing standing in the way of Third's growth as an actor, the dream he had always pursued, was me.

In this industry, if you have skills but no popularity, it means nothing.

Right now, Third cannot afford to lose any group of fans, especially the ship fans, who would help him rise to the top quickly.

Pathetic.

I used to think this kind of thing was absolutely ridiculous.

But in the end, I had to surrender to capitalism.

For the person I like to reach the peak of his dream, I am willing to do anything.

Maybe... I was never suited for this industry from the beginning.

I sat there contemplating for hours, weighing the pros and cons, until I made up my mind.

I took a deep breath, gathering my courage, as I picked up my phone.

My hands felt stiff as I scrolled through my contacts to find P'Jarin's number.

[What's up, Wan? We're about to release a statement to sue them for defamation. Don't worry about anything—]

"P'Jarin, I have something I want to discuss. I want to talk to P'Wut."

[P'Wut?!] There was clear surprise in the voice on the other end when I mentioned the name of the company's owner, who was also the investor in this series. [What is it about?]

"I've been thinking about it... All of this chaos happened because of me. I think you and P'Cher already know about me and Third. And you probably understand why I keep getting hit with fake news."

[Yeah... that's true. But let me handle this first. We can talk about everything else later.]

P'Jarin tried to sound relaxed, but I could tell his tone was off. He was probably more stressed than he let on.

Because the series didn't just have me in it.

If the drama got bad enough that people boycotted the show, everyone would be affected.

"P', I've thought about it. I don't want this series that everyone has worked so hard on to run into problems because of me.

Maybe... I'm just not suited for this path."

[Wan...]

"Maybe it would be better if I... withdrew from the series."

My throat tightened. I knew exactly how serious the words I had just spoken were.

The series was already halfway through filming.

Even though I didn't have a huge role, I was still one of the key characters.

But this might be the best solution I could come up with.

The best option for everyone.

"I know this sounds irresponsible. I have no excuse. If I need to pay a penalty fee, I'll accept it. Please consider it."

[Wan... Let's do this. Come in and talk first. I'll inform P'Wut and schedule a meeting for us. Okay?]

"Alright." I agreed.

Once I hung up, I buried my face into my knees and closed my eyes.

—

Vrrrrrr—

I sat there without knowing how much time had passed, but the ringing sound that suddenly echoed made me lift my head to look at the phone lying beside me. My eyes trembled when I saw that it was Third calling.

I hesitated for a moment, but my hand reached out before my brain could even issue the command. In the end, I pressed to accept the call, after he had already called me dozens of times since this morning.

"Hello."

[How are you?]

The deep voice that was usually indifferent and cold now sounded urgent and unsettled, causing my heart to feel both warm and painfully stung with guilt at the same time.

"I'm fine. You called because of the news, right? It's nothing. I've already cleared things up with the company."

[Is there anything I can help with? Is your company really going to sue, or are they just saying that? You've already gone through this twice. Just suing them won't be enough. Let me help. I know a lawyer—]

"No, no, it's really okay," I quickly refused.

At the same time, I felt like crying because he was this worried about me. Even when I was trying to distance myself from him. And he probably already realized that.

[Then... are you okay right now?]

His voice softened, carrying various emotions even though I couldn't see his expression.

I swallowed, my throat dry. I had already made up my mind. I had to say it and bring this to an end.

"Third, I talked to my manager."

[...]

"I think I'm going to withdraw from the series."

The other end of the line fell completely silent. He was probably in shock.

But I knew that if I didn't step back, there would always be people fabricating rumors to attack me.

Even though the choice I made would have many consequences, the damage could be even greater if I kept stubbornly pushing forward as if nothing had happened.

Sacrificing the lesser for the greater benefit.

In the business world, it has to be that way.

"Thinking about it, I don't really like acting that much, and I don't fit into this industry either. So, I'm going to talk to the company this evening. Maybe if they change to another actor, things might turn out better."

I forced my voice to sound casual, even though, in truth, it hurt quite a lot. The truth was, I enjoyed playing a character. Even though I wasn't in love with the acting profession, it was something I genuinely wanted to do well.

I don't like lying. I don't want to be irresponsible. But I'm completely lost. I can't see a way forward anymore.

[Where are you right now?] Third asked in a calm voice.

"At... my room."

I hesitated a little before answering, but I figured that someone with such a packed schedule like him wouldn't be able to come all the way to my condo anyway.

[Stay there. I'll call you when I arrive.]

"What? Third!"

Beep!

The call was cut off.

I tried calling him back, but he wouldn't pick up. Don't tell me... he's actually coming here?!

I sat there restlessly, anxiously waiting. In the meantime, I kept trying to call Third and checked the updates on the situation. My company had already issued a statement threatening to sue whoever spread the rumors, but the fan war between the two fandoms was far from over. ThirdNine's fans had even started trending a hashtag demanding that the production team remove me from the series.

It wasn't surprising.

It really would be better for everyone if I stepped down.

Vrrrrrr

After half an hour, Third called again. I immediately answered.

"Hello."

[I'm downstairs at your condo, in the lounge.]

I quickly grabbed my keycard and rushed out of my room to the elevator. My mind was in complete chaos. I didn't even know what I should say to him when I saw him.

When the elevator reached the ground floor, I walked briskly to the lounge. My heart pounded intensely when I saw the familiar tall figure in a student uniform, sitting with his back to me. Even with a mask and a cap covering his face, his aura as a celebrity couldn't be hidden.

"Wan."

The moment he saw me, he stood up and walked toward me. I grabbed his arm and pulled him to the condo's garden to talk.

"You don't have work?"

"I had classes today," he replied.

I see. If he had work, he wouldn't have been able to come.

"Then why did you come?"

"To talk face to face," Third said, pulling off his mask, revealing the tense expression on his sharp face as he reached out and squeezed my shoulder. "Why did you say you're withdrawing?"

"It's the best choice I can think of and make," I gave him a bitter smile.

It might seem irresponsible to leave a project halfway, but I believed that if the company weighed the pros and cons, they would likely lean toward agreeing with me.

"It's actually the worst choice. You didn't do anything wrong, so why should you withdraw?" Third said firmly, just as I expected.

"Third, you might not know this, but most of the audience is demanding that I be removed from the series," I tried to explain.

Knowing his personality, I guessed he understood perfectly well why all of this was happening, but he simply wouldn't care. He would do whatever he wanted.

That's why it was my responsibility to step away... for his future.

"I know. But so what? Do I have to care?"

"You should care. They're the audience, the ones who will be watching. They're the ones who will support you. If I stay, everyone

will—"

"And so what? Work is work, personal matters are personal. I like you, and who the hell has a problem with that?"

His deep voice rang loudly through the garden.

I froze for a moment, emotions surging until my eyes burned.

Hearing the person you like say that they like you back should be the happiest thing.

But at the same time, I couldn't smile and tell him I liked him too.

I took a step back and gave him a sad smile.

"Thank you for your feelings, Third."

"..."

"But I can't accept them."

The silence that followed was suffocating. His dark eyes stared straight at me, as if trying to see through my heart and thoughts.

"Why? I thought you liked me too... isn't that right?"

Hearing those words, my eyes burned again.

Yes, I liked him. A lot.

But because I liked him, I couldn't allow myself to be an obstacle in his life.

"I do have feelings for you, but with everything that's happening, I don't think it's a good idea for us to move forward," I said as indifferently as I could, hoping that he wouldn't catch the slight tremble in my voice at the end.

"..."

"Go back, Third. I want to rest."

I turned around and took long strides back into the building immediately, not daring to look back at the expression of the person who still stood frozen like a statue. I didn't want to see the pain and disappointment in his eyes, and even more so, I didn't want him to see my face right now.

As soon as the elevator doors closed, the tears I had been holding back finally spilled over. I took a deep breath, trying to suppress my sobs, lifting a hand to wipe my tears, but they wouldn't stop falling.

It wasn't that I wanted to give up. It wasn't that I didn't want to hold Third's hand and fight through this together. But no matter where I looked, I couldn't see a way forward. All I could do was drag him down with me. If that was the case, it was better for me to walk away from his life.

The good feelings between us in this short time... I would let them remain as just memories.

The phone in my pocket vibrated with an incoming message. I wiped my tears as I stepped out of the elevator and headed back to my room, my eyes focusing on the message from P'Jarin.

[I've informed P'Wut. See you at the office at six in the evening. For now, I just want you to calm down, think carefully, and we'll talk this evening.]

How unfortunate. No matter how many times I tried to think it over, an idiot like me could only find this as the best way out...

Take 16, Action!

Three days later, the official page of the series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart* released an announcement that shocked many awaiting viewers regarding Wan Achawin's withdrawal, one of the actors playing a key role in the series.

The details in the statement stated that Wan had health issues and was withdrawing, unrelated to the circulating rumors. After careful discussions, the series' production team, which was also Wan's agency, prioritized the actor's health and agreed on this decision. A new actor would be cast as Sky, and further announcements would follow.

As for Wan, he uploaded a photo of a handwritten letter on X, apologizing to the staff, his fellow actors, fans, and those waiting for the series for his decision. After that, there was no further activity on his social media, exactly as the company's statement had said, Wan was currently taking time off to recover both physically and mentally.

Of course, public opinion was divided into two sides. One side sympathized, assuming that the withdrawal was due to fake news and calls from some fans to remove him from the series, which had negatively impacted his physical and mental health. The other side speculated that he might have been truly at fault, hence the withdrawal.

However, two days later, when pictures surfaced of Wan's lawyer submitting documents to sue those spreading false rumors, all doubts faded. No one dared to post anything risky on social media anymore after seeing how seriously the agency was handling the matter.

That was what outsiders knew. But insiders, like Third, knew that there was more to it. Wan had withdrawn to prevent further negative attention from affecting the series and everyone involved. What hurt the most was that Third couldn't do anything to protect Wan.

His relationship with Wan seemed to have ended since the day he went to see him at the condo. After that, Third couldn't reach him. Wan wouldn't answer calls or read messages, making the lead actor worry to the point of madness. He even went to the condo but didn't find him. He checked the faculty, but there was no trace of him, as if Wan had never existed in the first place.

Third only now realized that he didn't know Wan as well as he thought. They had too little time to get to know each other. He only knew Wan as an artist but not enough about his personal life. He knew Wan had a younger sister named View but had never seen her and had no way of contacting her. Apart from fellow actors in the same agency, he didn't know any of Wan's other friends, making it even harder to reach him.

"P'Cher, can you get in touch with Wan?" The same question escaped the lead actor's lips every time he met P'Cher, the AR who managed Wan. Even though Wan had withdrawn from the series, there were still other actors in the agency, so she had to visit the set regularly.

"Wan is resting, don't worry." Her answer was always the same, though her eyes carried sympathy. Even so, she had to respect Wan's wishes, not as an AR, but as a sister.

Since Wan had said he wanted to be alone for a while and didn't want to contact anyone, especially the person in front of her, she would do that until Wan's mind was strong enough.

Even so, Third was restless. As long as he didn't see Wan in person or talk to him, he couldn't feel at ease. Even though his love had

been rejected coldly, Third was sure Wan didn't mean what he said. Wan had stepped back for his sake. But Third refused to accept that. He would never let Wan go because of such nonsense.

First, he had to find Wan. He had to talk to him again. But as time passed without any contact, the lead actor started to feel completely lost.

"P'Third, can I take a story with you?"

A voice interrupted his thoughts as he sat quietly outside the university building during the final filming day. Renji walked over with a faint smile on his face.

"As a keepsake. Today's the last filming day."

"Sure," Third replied, forcing a smile as they took a story for Renji's Instagram.

He couldn't believe how fast time had flown. Nearly two months had passed since the incident. Filming, including reshoots for the recast scenes, had wrapped up. The atmosphere on set was one of farewells.

"Have you been able to contact Wan?" the lead actor asked his junior, only to be disappointed when the other shook his head.

"Not at all. P'Cher said P'Wan isn't at the condo either. I don't know where he went. He won't pick up my calls either." Renji sighed, looking dejected as he grumbled, "I'm upset, you know? I thought he might make an exception for me since we're close. But he really hasn't contacted anyone except P'Cher and P'Jarin. If P'Wan ever comes back, I'm not talking to him. I'll sulk at him instead."

After he finished speaking, silence fell between the two men. Third glanced at his tall junior standing beside him before casually asking, "Do you like Wan?"

He expected the other to be surprised, but Renji only went quiet for a moment before letting out a bitter smile.

"Ghosts recognize ghosts, huh?" The younger man sighed. "Yeah... I've liked him since the first day I met him. But he only sees me as a younger brother. I tried flirting, but he never reacted, so I knew I had no chance. I... I think I've gotten over it now... I guess."

It wasn't surprising. Wan seemed quite dense. Even when Third first approached him, he hadn't noticed the interest. With someone like Renji, whom he spent time with often and who was younger, it was no wonder Wan never saw his true intentions.

"And what about you two?" Renji asked.

Third was silent for a moment before choosing the most accurate words.

"...Unresolved feelings."

He wouldn't accept that their story had ended until he heard it clearly from Wan himself, without any external pressure forcing Wan to cut ties with him.

"Then keep fighting," Renji said with a small smile before walking back to the others, leaving Third alone with his thoughts.

There was still one place he was sure Wan would be. But until now, his schedule had been packed, almost as if the agency feared he would go searching for Wan, so they had flooded him with work.

But today, filming was done. He finally had time.

He would never give up, so he decided that tomorrow, he would go to Ayutthaya.

People tend to return home when they are troubled. He was sure Wan would be there.

The next morning, the young man left Bangkok at seven and drove to Ayutthaya with hope in his heart. Nearly three hours later, he parked in front of a shophouse, the famous boat noodle restaurant he had visited before. It was already open, with customers coming in since early morning.

"Hello," Third greeted as he walked inside, bowing to Wan's parents, who were busy making noodles. He pulled down his mask to show his face. "I'm... Wan's friend. Do you remember me?"

"Of course! You're the lead actor, right?" The middle-aged woman stopped working and approached him, while her husband smiled warmly.

"Yes. I was wondering... is Wan here?" Third asked casually, pretending he already knew, using his acting skills outside of work.

The couple exchanged glances, hesitating slightly before Wan's father spoke. "Why did you come here? Wan's not here. He's in Bangkok."

"...Oh." Third paused briefly. He had been so sure Wan had come home. He hadn't expected to arrive and not find him.

"He dropped by last week but left again. Try calling him, he's probably at his condo."

"Alright," Third forced a smile. His chest felt heavy with disappointment. Maybe this was Wan's clear answer. Maybe he was the only one trying to hold on...

"Since you're here, have something to eat," Wan's mother insisted, so Third had no choice but to stay and accept their hospitality.

A steaming bowl of boat noodles was served. It smelled delicious, but to Third, it tasted bitter.

"Goodbye, then."

"Drive safely," Wan's mother said warmly.

Third smiled, bowed in farewell, and walked back to his car, leaving behind all his hopes. He pressed the accelerator, heading back to Bangkok, with his hope fading more and more.

Time never stands still. No matter what joys or sorrows life brings, time continues moving forward, leaving all happiness and pain behind as mere memories.

I, in my student uniform, took a deep breath while walking along the road leading to the university's registration office. After four years of hard study, I had finally become a full-fledged graduate and was on my way to pick up the transcript I had requested.

Four years ago, I walked down this road with enthusiasm, eager to start my life within the university walls. Four years later, I had achieved success as I had hoped. At the very least, there was something in my life that made my parents and myself proud, even though I had not succeeded in my path as an actor...

I entered the registration office, which was surprisingly empty. It was because I had failed to read the huge sign in front of the building that said the registration counter opened at nine in the morning, so I had to wait for the staff to arrive. I pulled up my mask to cover my nose as I sat waiting, staring absentmindedly at the small garden in front of me, thinking about everything that had happened over the past three months.

That evening, I went to talk to P'Wut. In the end, he agreed to my request after weighing the pros and cons and considering that my mental state was probably not ready to move forward yet. At first, I had even thought about leaving the entertainment industry altogether, but P'Wut told me to take a break and think it over carefully. I could take as much time as I needed, and if I really wanted to cancel my artist contract, we could talk again.

I thought I would have to pay a fine for causing delays to the production, but P'Wut was very kind and told me I didn't have to take responsibility. Perhaps part of it was because he wanted to compensate me, since I had been removed from the series without doing anything wrong. As for the defamation lawsuits over the fake news, if my guess was correct that the person who spread the rumors was connected to Third's agency, then the matter would likely end in negotiation and settlement. After all, P'Wut and Khun Pitch had been friends for a long time and had business interests together. Even if there were conflicts or rivalries at times, they still had to protect their main interests.

Most of the time, lawsuits involving artists were like this. The agency would just issue a statement as a warning to prevent others from following suit, but rarely would they actually take serious legal action.

For all those reasons, P'Wut didn't blame me at all. Instead, he gave me as much time as I needed to rest and carefully reconsider before terminating my artist contract. It was probably a way for him, as a businessman, to win me over. And besides, I had made a fair amount of money for the agency in the short time I had been there. If you balanced the numbers, it was a fair trade-off. As for my role, a well-known actor had taken over. The fans who were waiting to see the series were happy, and I felt relieved as well. I had been deeply attached to the character of Sky, so knowing that a skilled actor was continuing the role made me genuinely happy.

Over the past three months, I had stayed off social media and barely contacted anyone besides my family, P'Cher, P'Jarin, and Jay. I really wanted to take a serious break. Even though I felt quite guilty towards Renji because I kept seeing him sending messages, I still felt that I wasn't ready to face it. It made me uncomfortable. At first, I thought I was fine, but in reality, what had happened had affected me more than I expected. I had never been mobbed by strangers to that extent before. So, I chose to remain silent and let time heal me.

As for Third, I blocked out everything related to him. I tried not to know anything at all, because thinking about him only made me hurt more. But what I hadn't expected was that, while I was trying so hard to move on from him, Third refused to give up. He actually followed me to Ayutthaya, was he crazy?

Well, actually, I was still at my condo. But when I was feeling really down, I would go back to stay with my parents. It just so happened that during one of those times, Third went looking for me. That day, I had gone to see a high school friend, so we missed each other.

Luckily, I had already told my parents that if Third came looking for me, they should say I wasn't there. But I hadn't expected that he would actually come. I was angry at myself because, deep down, a tiny part of me was happy, so obviously happy, when I heard he had come looking for me. Even though I had disappointed him, even though I was trying to move on, I still had the audacity to feel secretly happy when he came to find me.

But after that day, Third's attempts to contact me gradually lessened. He barely called or sent messages anymore. It seemed like he had given up. That fact made me feel miserable, but I comforted myself by saying it was for the best. He and I were never meant to cross paths in the first place. I should be happy to see Third moving forward. Right now, he was skyrocketing in popularity. Even though I wasn't on social media, I still saw his advertisements on the BTS.

And this month, the series was about to air. With his growing fanbase and acting ability, it was easy to predict that Third would become a superstar in no time.

I was truly happy for him.

After receiving my transcript, I quickly returned to my condo because I didn't want to attract attention. Since it was semester break, View had gone back to stay with our parents, so the room was mine alone. I still had to stay in Bangkok to take care of various matters. That evening, I had a meeting at the agency because P'Jarin had told me the other day that if I really didn't want to be an artist anymore, P'Wut would still welcome me to work in marketing. I didn't even know how to thank them.

"Oh, right. The premiere screening of Episode 1 is this Saturday."

That evening, after our discussion over dinner, I officially transitioned from an artist contract to a staff position at the agency. P'Jarin spoke to me in a half-teasing tone. "Are you going? You can get in for free as staff."

"Uh... better not," I replied with a dry laugh. After making the production team and the cast go through two full days of reshoots, I had no face to show up at the event.

But I still felt a connection to this series. So, on the day of the Episode 1 premiere, I logged into social media for the first time in three months to check on the updates. BL series often held special screenings for the first and last episodes in theaters, allowing fans to meet the cast and watch the show on the big screen together. It was both a way to fulfill fan demands and a business strategy for investors, a win-win situation. It also helped with media promotion.

On Saturday afternoon, I lounged on the sofa, scrolling through the live broadcast of the actors' interviews on the official page of the

series. It felt strange to see familiar faces standing there, but I was no longer among them...

"Today is the day we've all been waiting for, right, Third? It's finally airing. So exciting!"

My heart clenched automatically when I saw Third and Nine standing in the center. Nine still had that heart-melting sweet smile, even though I already knew that smile was just an act.

"Yes, I just hope the audience will enjoy our work," Third replied.

Even though he smiled and answered the reporters' questions fluently, I could sense the heavy atmosphere. I knew him well enough to see that his smile didn't come from genuine happiness.

"A lot of fans have come to support you both today. How did Third and Nine encourage each other before the event?"

"We just talked about how we've already done our best. Now, all that's left is to receive feedback. No matter what, we'll keep supporting each other. We cheer each other on every day. Even if we don't see each other, we call each other. He's probably sick of hearing my voice by now," Nine said with a shy smile, in contrast to the person beside him, who, despite maintaining a faint smile, had an indifferent look in his eyes.

"Oh! You call each other often?"

"Almost every day—"

"We just talk about work," Third interjected. His smile had vanished, replaced by a serious expression as he spoke a sentence that silenced the entire interview.

"I want to make it clear right here that I don't want people to see me and Nine as a shipped couple. We are actors, just coworkers,

and nothing more. Since we've given our all in our roles as actors, I'd prefer for everyone to focus on our work rather than our personal relationships."

The reporters were stunned. The fans were stunned. Even I, watching the livestream from home, was so stunned that I almost dropped my phone.

Having been involved in the BL industry both as a fan and as an actor, I knew the norm was to keep things ambiguous to maintain the ship's fanbase. I had never heard an actor speak this bluntly before. Even though he had often said that it was just work, this time, he outright declared that there was no possibility of developing a relationship with Nine.

Did Third realize that saying this could cause some shippers to leave? Then why did he say it...?

As soon as Third finished speaking, Nine's smile froze. He looked completely shocked. The other actors also fell silent, some shifting awkwardly, until one of the reporters quickly changed the topic to keep the interview going. But the awkwardness in the atmosphere was obvious. Even watching through a screen, I felt suffocated. The people at the event must have felt it ten times worse.

I exited the livestream and sat there blankly for a moment, trying to process what had just happened. I could already predict that the trending tag on X would be moving faster than a flash flood. The shipper fans were bound to be heartbroken.

And sure enough, just as I expected, the shipper fans flooded X with complaints.

'It was obvious from the start that he didn't like our boy. If he hates it so much, why even act together?'

'Yeah, just end this thing already. Our pretty boy deserves someone better, not someone who's forcing himself to work with him.'

'Saying that while he's standing right next to you? That's humiliating. Where's the basic decency?'

As expected, the topic shot up to X's number one trending spot, though not because of the series itself. Meanwhile, Third's fans fiercely defended him.

'He's always been clear that it's just work. If he didn't say anything, you'd accuse him of selling the ship like some people we won't name.'

'When he says it's just work, you bash him. BL fans are never satisfied with anything.'

'So our guy is at fault for shattering your delusions? I guess he should have kept queerbaiting and pretending to be someone he's not, huh?'

The drama dragged on longer than I expected. After the first episode's premiere, rumors surfaced from fans who had followed them to the parking lot after the event, claiming that they overheard Third and Nine arguing about the interview. The person who spread the rumor got bashed for invading their privacy, but people still kept debating whether the argument had really happened.

Of course, Nine must have been furious. And I don't think Third's manager was pleased with what he said either.

I was just as confused. I had stepped back and cut ties with him so that his future could go smoothly. But look at what he did.

It was like he was throwing it back in my face, showing me that no matter what, he would never follow the path that everyone tried to set for him.

He is truly both admirable and frustrating at the same time.

I reached for my phone, opened LINE, and scrolled to find Third's chat. I hadn't opened his messages in a long time, but I was about to lose my patience. I was worried. I wanted to know how he was doing. This drama was so big that even news agencies were covering it. Some of ThirdNine's shippers had started supporting them separately and were fighting every day on X. I figured Third must be under a lot of pressure from the company.

No.

A voice in my head warned me just as I was about to tap into his chatroom. If I messaged him, everything I had been trying to do for the past three months would be for nothing. Third shouldn't be wavering because of me again. Drama is just like a gust of wind. If nothing fans the flames, people forget about it before long.

And yet, I was still worried about him.

In the end, I registered a new X account, acted as an anonymous fan, and posted words of encouragement for Third.

'We know how much effort and dedication Third has put into this. Stay strong. No matter what happens, this fan will always be cheering for you from afar. #ThirdTharit'

This is all I could do, be a fan who supports him from a distance. He doesn't use social media much, so he probably wouldn't see my message. But if he ever does, I want him to know that there are still many of us who understand.

I kept scrolling through the tag related to Third on X and saw that he had an event this evening. Fans were encouraging each other to go and support him before his series aired tomorrow. They wanted him to know that there were still people rooting for him despite all the turmoil.

Go support him...

I locked my phone screen.

Part of me wanted to go and watch over him from afar, but another part thought, better not.

I couldn't go. I shouldn't go. Just supporting him on social media was enough.

My younger sister once told me that I'm the most contradictory person in the world. I say no, no, but in the end, I always do whatever I truly want. And the fact that I'm standing here at the event plaza of a famous shopping mall, a professional camera in hand, is proof of that statement.

I wore a mask, a cap, and glasses, covering my face so completely I almost looked like a thief in the middle of a crowd of excited female fans. It had been a long time since I felt this atmosphere, the only difference being that I had changed fandoms. The reason I was here today wasn't much different from when I used to stan Nine. I came for Third, to let him know that someone was still cheering him on. Even if he couldn't see me.

"Thank you to everyone who came to support me today," his voice rang out.

Through the lenses of my glasses, I fixed my gaze on the man standing on stage, speaking to the MC amidst the deafening cheers of his fans. Today, Third wore a white suit, looking like a groom straight out of a drama. He didn't need a spotlight, his aura was already bright enough to outshine everything around him. I couldn't help myself. I raised my camera and snapped a picture, unable to look away.

That man was dazzling, almost untouchable. Hard to believe that for a brief moment in time, I had been close to him. So close that we had almost been something more. Almost lovers.

Back then, it felt like a dream.

I kept my eyes on Third the entire time he was on stage, watching him even as he stepped down to be interviewed by the press. Fans swarmed him instantly, forming a tight crowd around him. I, however, remained in my spot, taking a deep breath and watching from afar.

This... This was the distance that suited us.

Just as I was about to turn away and leave quietly, Third's sharp eyes suddenly landed on me, just for a fleeting second. I startled, my body jerking in response, and then I spun around and walked away briskly, my heart pounding in my chest.

Shit, shit, shit! Did he see me? Or was it just a coincidence? With all those people and all that blinding light, it was hard to see anything clearly... Third probably didn't see me. Calm down, Wan.

With that thought, my racing heart gradually settled. I wandered around the mall, browsed through random stores, stopped by the supermarket to pick up a few things, and finally headed back to my condo. On the way, I got hungry and dropped by a nearby shop for a bowl of congee.

Ring!

I nearly choked on my food when my phone screen lit up with an incoming Line call, Third's name flashing on the screen. He hadn't called me in a long time. So why now?

I muted my phone but didn't answer, focusing on eating instead. Let him call as many times as he wanted. To others, I might seem

heartless, but in reality, it hurt just as much for me to ignore him.

But Third was far more persistent than I expected. Even as I finished my meal and walked back to my condo, he kept calling, making me wonder if he had nothing better to do.

"Wan."

"Holy shit!"

I nearly jumped out of my skin when I stepped into the condo lobby, only to see Third rising from the sofa and striding toward me. Before I could react, his hand grabbed my wrist.

"Finally, I found you," he said, his deep voice laced with relief.

"H-H-How did you get here?" I stammered, my eyes sweeping over his tall figure. He was still wearing a mask, his makeup not yet removed, clear evidence that he had come straight from an event. That meant he really did see me there.

Crap. Wan, you idiot. You shouldn't have gone to that event!

"Let's talk. Can we?" His deep voice carried a pleading tone. Just seeing his face made my already fragile heart melt like wax under a flame. The day I rejected him, I had to muster every ounce of my acting skills to maintain my distant demeanor. But now, looking into those weary eyes, I couldn't bring myself to be cruel to him any longer.

"Then... let's talk in the garden," I murmured. Taking him up to my room? No way. I was afraid... afraid my resolve wouldn't be strong enough to stop things from escalating. So talking outside was the safest option. It was already 9 PM, no one would be wandering around the garden except for the security guards.

It felt like time had rewound, bringing us back to the same spot where I had once cut him off. We stood in silence, the atmosphere awkward and heavy. And through it all, Third still held onto my wrist tightly, as if terrified I would run away.

"You came to see me today, didn't you?" The famous leading actor was the first to break the silence.

"...Yeah." I could only nod, there was no use denying it. I was still wearing the same outfit, with my camera bag slung over my shoulder. He must have put two and two together and come looking for me here.

"Then why didn't you answer my messages? Why didn't you pick up my calls?" His voice carried a note of hurt, his eyes reflecting pain so clearly that it made my chest tighten.

"I don't want us to stay in contact." I sighed. He already knew why I was doing this, but he was too stubborn to accept it.

"I told you, I don't care about other people," Third said firmly, his grip on my wrist tightening. "I've always kept my work and personal life separate. It was already painful enough having to let you step away from the series. You're the only one who had to make sacrifices. I—"

"Third, withdrawing was my idea," I interrupted before he could drown himself in guilt. "I've been dragged into scandals twice now. Even if none of it was true, it still had an impact. And if I kept pushing forward, more bad rumors would just keep coming. So I made this decision. It might seem irresponsible, but honestly, I feel so much more at ease now."

"..."

"You don't have to feel guilty. I've never regretted that decision. Someone like me isn't cut out to be in the entertainment industry

anyway. And besides, I already have a new job now. I'm really happy." I reached out to pat the back of his hand, and his tense posture gradually relaxed.

"I saw the news. The interview you gave to the press." I brought it up, tilting my head to look at him with questioning eyes. "Why did you say that? You knew what kind of consequences it could bring."

"Yes, I knew." His sharp eyes locked onto mine. "But I don't regret it. If fans or audiences like me, they should like me for my acting or for who I really am."

"But you'll lose opportunities—"

"Opportunities to sell fake ships? To let people misunderstand? To disappoint fans in the future? If that's the case, then losing those opportunities is a good thing." He didn't even hesitate with his response.

"..."

"Honestly, my agency wasn't too happy about it. But P'Wut, the owner of your agency and the investor, didn't mind about this. I talked to him from the start and made it clear I wouldn't do fake shipping. So don't worry, there won't be any issues." Third reassured me.

It was ironic that the one facing the backlash was the one comforting me. Yet, I still couldn't help but worry, feeling both regret and admiration at the same time. But it was exactly because Third was this straightforward and unwavering... that I had fallen for him.

"So stop running away from me." He stepped closer and pulled me into an embrace.

I was caught off guard and stumbled against his broad chest, my eyes widening as Third lowered his face onto my shoulder.

"I know you did all of that with good intentions... but don't do it again. Don't run away from me. I like you. I really, really do."

I stood frozen, my eyes stinging with heat. I had thought I had come to terms with everything, but when he stood in front of me and confessed again, I realized my feelings had never changed. No, if anything, I missed him. I longed for him even more than before.

"Are you... sure?" I asked, my voice unsteady. Working in the entertainment industry meant he would meet many people, people who might be better than me in every way. Was he really certain about me?

"As sure as I was when I realized I wanted to be an actor."

His voice was firm, warm, just like the heat radiating from his body against mine. Third pulled back to look at me. Though he was still wearing a mask, his eyes revealed everything he felt.

"Be with me. Let's be together. I really don't want to lose you."

In my whole life, aside from my family, I had never thought I mattered this much to anyone. But when Third said those words, I finally understood how important I was to him.

But...

"I... like you..." I admitted, lowering my gaze. "But being together... I don't know. Should we? The two of us..."

Even if we felt the same way, I couldn't ignore my worries. If anyone found out Third was dating me, it would be a huge deal. What if I ended up ruining his future?

"We can keep it a secret if you don't want to go public," he said, as if reading my mind. He pulled me into a gentle embrace, stroking my hair.

"It'll just be between us. I'll only tell the people I truly trust that I have a boyfriend, but I won't say who. You can decide whether to tell anyone or not. If one day we're both ready, we can make it public together. Okay?"

That offer made it easier to breathe. It didn't sound too bad. Even if we were seen together, as long as we didn't act too close, people would just assume we were good friends...

"Okay..." I nodded. If this was what he wanted, then I shouldn't go against both his feelings and mine.

We smiled at each other, letting out small laughs. It had been months since I had felt this lighthearted. I hadn't even realized that during all the time I spent away from Third, I hadn't been happy at all.

"Can I sleep over tonight?"

"Huh?!" My smile disappeared as my eyes widened. Wait a minute, we just got together five seconds ago, and now he wants to sleep over?!

"What are you thinking?" Third narrowed his eyes when he saw my shocked expression. "I just want to sleep. It's late, driving back would be dangerous, and I've been working all day. I'm exhausted."

I glanced at my watch. Late, huh? It was, well... around 9:30 PM. But since my boyfriend said he was tired, I wasn't heartless enough to kick him out.

"...Fine. But you're sleeping on the couch, okay?" I quickly set the rule.

I mean, we're a couple now. Being alone together means... things could happen, right? And I'm not ready for that yet. I mean, tonight is too soon. As for the future... well...

But if he wanted to kiss me tonight, I might just...

"Sure, anything's fine," Third agreed easily. I couldn't see his full face, but the way his sharp eyes curved told me he was smiling widely beneath the mask.

His large hand slid down to intertwine our fingers, holding mine as we walked back inside the building. My heart felt so light it might as well float away.

I have a boyfriend now.

And my boyfriend is a famous, ridiculously handsome leading man!

Take 17, Action!

"Hey."

"What?"

"Don't you ever think about going back to sleep at your own place?"

A conversation arose early one morning while I was washing a glass in the kitchen. Meanwhile, my frequent guest had just walked out of my bedroom, dressed in a casual t-shirt and sweatpants, his bare face giving the impression that this was his own room.

"Nope." Third, my boyfriend, answered with a straight face while walking to the fridge, grabbing a bottle of water to drink.

"My sister is coming back next week. You can't stay here all the time anymore." I said softly.

Since the day we agreed to be a couple, Third had been coming over almost every day, eating, sleeping, practically living in my room. At first, I told him to sleep on the couch. But in the end, I felt bad for him. I didn't want him to be uncomfortable, so we ended up sharing the bed.

Now, this leading man of mine wouldn't leave at all. He even brought his clothes over and left them here, basically moving in. Before this, I thought I knew Third quite well, but after we started dating, I realized there were still so many things I didn't know about him.

"Then, can you stay at my place instead? I'll make a keycard for you."

The tall figure walked over and hugged me from behind, resting his chin on my shoulder in an affectionate manner. This was one of the things I had just learned, Third was quite attached to physical affection. And extremely attached to me.

"I can't stay there all the time. I still have to take care of my sister." I glanced at the tall guy clinging to me like glue. His sharp eyes, gazing at me, carried a hint of loneliness, making the corners of my mouth curve up.

"But I can stay over sometimes."

"Mmm, in that case, I'll make you a keycard. You can come whenever you want." Third's face brightened instantly.

Before this, I used to think he was just a reserved and cold guy. But after dating, I realized he was just like anyone else. When we were together, he completely switched off his serious mode and transformed into a giant kitten instead.

Speaking of which, it's already been two months since we started dating. A short time, but I've been so happy. Although we had to adjust to each other quite a bit, believe it or not, we've never had a single argument. Maybe because it was so hard to get together in the first place that we tried our best to be considerate of each other.

"I have to go to work now." Third sighed heavily as he spoke, as if what he was saying went completely against what he wanted. That was confirmed by his warm arms tightening around me. "I'll be back late tonight. You can sleep first."

"Mmm." I nodded, but when I saw my boyfriend looking so down, I lightly patted his cheek and said, "At least put on a cheerful face when you go to work."

"I don't want to go at all." He hugged me even tighter, making me laugh.

Lately, Third had work every single day. He must be exhausted. The series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart* was currently airing and receiving an overwhelming response. It was a massive hit. Both lead actors, Third and Nine, were in high demand. There were countless event appearances, endorsements, and other offers pouring in. The pre-airing drama surrounding the series had barely affected its success at all.

"How can you not want to go? You're at your peak right now. Just hang in there for a bit. Isn't my boyfriend amazing? Fighting!" I squeezed his hand, which was wrapped around my waist.

"Then..."

Third loosened his embrace, placing his hands on my shoulders to turn me around and face him. His lips curled into a sly smile.

"Give me some motivation."

"A kiss on the cheek?"

"Not enough. A kiss on the lips... okay?" He asked expectantly.

"Mmm."

I knew he needed encouragement, so I didn't tease him. I held back a smile and nodded. The moment I gave permission, his handsome face swiftly leaned in, capturing my lips in an instant.

His soft lips moved expertly, his warm tongue entwining with mine, stealing my breath with intense passion. The room echoed with embarrassing sounds. Though I was secretly shy, I lifted my arms to wrap around his thick neck, parting my lips to return the deep kiss willingly.

It might sound unbelievable, but even after two months of dating, we still hadn't gone all the way... you know, to the final stage. One reason was that Third was constantly busy. By the time he got home, he was so exhausted that he could barely stay awake. The other reason was that I was still hesitant and a little scared. So, our physical relationship usually stopped at kissing. The most we had done was... helping each other out. And even then, Third always asked for my permission first.

My boyfriend is seriously the cutest, huh?

"If this keeps up, I won't be going to work for sure."

After a long while, the tall figure was the one to pull away. His breathing was ragged, just like mine. I was panting, my face and ears burning, my entire body heated from head to toe. I don't think I need to elaborate on which part was particularly awake...

"Mmm, go already. You're gonna be late." I tiptoed and gave him a quick peck on the cheek before stepping back, letting Third grab his bag and car keys.

"Drive safely. Hope everything goes smoothly at work. I'll be watching your series tonight."

"...If it's too much, you don't have to force yourself to watch."

"I'm not forcing myself. I want to see your performance." I said. Third didn't really want me to watch because he thought I had bad memories associated with this series. Which, honestly, I did. But it's his work. I want to see my boyfriend act.

"Up to you. I'll text you later."

The lead actor of my life walked over and planted a quick kiss on my cheek before leaving the room.

"Byeeeeee!" I poked my head out to wave at him, watching until he turned the corner before smiling to myself.

Life had been pretty smooth for me lately. My health was fine. I had a premium-grade handsome boyfriend. Work was chill since I already knew the people in the company well. My parents were healthy. My sister had just gotten accepted into a prestigious state university. Guess that meant I had finally passed my tough times. The sky after the storm really is clear and bright!

Now that I'd sent Third off to work, it was my turn. I quickly showered, got dressed, grabbed my motorbike keys and bag, and left the apartment. I rode to the office of the agency where I worked.

My job was as a creative in the marketing department, handling artist promotions, content planning, and social media management. Anything related to promotion was my responsibility. I enjoyed my job. It aligned with my degree. It might not be my dream career, but it was something I could do without feeling drained.

In life, just having a job that doesn't make you miserable is enough to be happy. As for dreams... I still have my whole life to chase after them.

When I arrived on the second floor of the office, which housed a small studio, I found the staff and artists already gathered. Today, the company had scheduled the annual profile photoshoot for all the artists under its agency. That meant I got to see many familiar faces. My role today was to take photos, record videos, and conduct brief interviews with the artists for social media engagement, which would later be used as material for client proposals.

"Hey, P'Wan!"

"Hey, kiddo," I said, patting Renji's shoulder as he flashed me a puppy-like smile.

When I disappeared and lost contact with everyone for two months, he persistently called and texted me. But I never picked up. When I finally sorted everything out and reached out to him again, it turned out Renji was sulking. He ignored my messages and refused to call me back. I had to go through quite the effort to appease him. I couldn't even blame him for it. After all, I was the one who vanished and made him worry.

"Aren't you going to join the photoshoot?" The young man teased, nodding toward the set. If I were still an artist, I'd have to participate today too.

I immediately shook my head. "No way, not anymore."

I terminated my artist contract with the company last month. An official announcement was made, stating that I'd be transitioning to a behind-the-scenes role instead. The news shocked quite a few fans. Honestly, it wasn't an easy decision, knowing it would affect my supporters emotionally. But I didn't want to keep forcing myself to do something that no longer felt right. I decided to make a clear statement so they wouldn't keep waiting in vain.

I'm incredibly grateful and sorry to those who supported someone as hopeless as me. Even though my time as an artist was short, the few months I had fans cheering me on were moments I would never forget.

"Come on, since you're free, let me take some pictures. Make it a good one. I'll post it under the tag," I said, pulling the tall kid to an empty spot before lifting my camera. Renji knew exactly what to do, instantly shifting from an excitable puppy to a charming young man, flashing a subtle yet captivating smile at the camera.

Click!

My work continued until the end of the day. I went to a shabu restaurant near the office for a wrap-up dinner with the actors and crew before we all went our separate ways. I rode my motorcycle back to my room and arrived around 9:30 PM. The series would air at 10 PM, so I quickly took a shower, changed into comfortable clothes, and settled onto the sofa. I hugged a pillow as I waited to watch it live on TV.

As soon as the series started, I stared intently at the screen. I already knew the storyline from beginning to end, so there was nothing particularly exciting about it for me. Mainly, I was waiting to see Third's performance. I already felt immersed when watching through the monitor on set, but with the final cut, complete with editing and background music, it hit even harder. He was such an incredible actor. When he put on that smug smile, I found him annoying. When he got angry, I felt intimidated. And when he was sad, I wanted to cry with him. Tears welled up in my eyes. God, I was so into this!

"Ah..."

I let out a soft murmur as I reached the romantic scene where Third stole a kiss on Nine's cheek. They looked so happy on screen, while I, as a viewer at home, forced a dry smile and hypnotized myself.

It's just work. Just work. It's just a kiss on the cheek. If I want to date an actor, I need to prepare myself for things like this. That's not Third in the show. It's just his character, Copter. I'm not going to be a jealous idiot.

But if it were a deep kiss or an intense love scene, I'd probably have to skip over it. I admit, my heart isn't strong enough for that yet.
Hnghhh...

Once the series ended, I turned off the TV and went to bed like a responsible adult. Having experienced the demanding life of an artist, I've come to truly value a full night's sleep. So whenever I have time, I make sure to rest as much as possible. Sleep like there's no tomorrow!

At first, I thought about staying up to wait for Third, but he said he wouldn't be back until around 1 AM. No way I'd last that long. Guess I'll see him in the morning.

That night, I vaguely felt someone wrap his arms around me in the middle of my sleep. The warmth and familiar scent told me that Third had returned. Instinctively, I turned over, hugged him back, and nestled into his broad chest before drifting into a deep and peaceful slumber once again.

"Wan."

A deep voice rang beside my ear, replacing my morning alarm and pulling me back to reality.

"Hnnngh..." I groaned, barely managing to prop myself up despite still being half-asleep. Through my blurry vision, I saw my boyfriend sitting beside me, looking unusually serious.

I woke up a bit more and asked in a hoarse voice, "Third, what's wrong...?"

"There's news." He said briefly and handed me his phone. The moment I scrolled through the timeline, my eyes widened, and my heart started pounding.

'Anyone still deluding themselves about Third and Nine should stop now. Third already has someone in real life. He goes to see his boyfriend at his condo almost every day.'

[Cocochip : The news, the reporters, and the fans didn't know that Third's lover is a guy because the word used here is *faen* (แฟน), which is gender-neutral in Thai. Third also didn't mention the gender at all during the interview. However, I decided to use 'he' in my translation.]

The post included a photo of Third stepping out of his car in my condo's parking lot. My name wasn't mentioned, but I still felt a chill down my spine.

"A sasaeng?" I sighed.

A sasaeng refers to an overly obsessed fan who crosses the line, stalking, following artists everywhere, or lurking in places just to catch a glimpse of them. Even though I'm not that famous, I've still had my share of experiences. Some have trailed me all around campus, and others have somehow known exactly where I was going and showed up uninvited. I've even heard that top-tier artists have had GPS trackers secretly installed on their cars.

Let me tell you, this kind of behavior doesn't make artists feel good. It makes us uncomfortable, irritated, and even scared. Of course, I appreciate the support, but please, have some limits and respect personal space.

"Yeah, they must've followed me," Third frowned, clearly displeased. He valued his privacy a lot, so it was no surprise that he was annoyed.

I continued scrolling through the timeline. It was turning into a big deal. Third's name had already reached over a hundred thousand tweets. People were trying to dig up information about his supposed boyfriend, and some fans who still shipped his on-screen pairing with Nine were spiraling into drama.

I clicked my tongue in frustration. I had worked so hard to keep this a secret, only for someone else to expose it like this. Annoying,

wasn't it?

"You have an event today, right?" I furrowed my brows. There was no way reporters wouldn't bring this up. I quickly started thinking of a solution.

"You should just deny it. Or say you were visiting a friend. No one knows who your actual boyfriend is anyway," I suggested. Since he was on the rise, it would be better for his image if people thought he was still single. It was just smart psychology.

Third reached out and gently ruffled my messy hair as he said, "I'll answer in a way that's best for everyone."

"Hmm." I nodded. Third never acted without careful thought. I trusted that he'd handle this well.

That afternoon, Third went to work while I, having a day off, decided to clean my room. By the time I looked at the clock again, it was already evening, almost time for his event. I grabbed the food I ordered via delivery, sat at my desk, and opened my laptop to watch the event's live stream while scrolling through the tag to check out pictures of Third.

Honestly, I kind of missed those days when I used to follow idols with my camera. I wanted to take photos of Third myself. He's my boyfriend, after all, and he's *so* handsome. Too bad all I could do now was wait for pictures from others...

After the event, it was time for the press conference. I tuned in through a live broadcast from an entertainment news page. And, as expected, the very first question was about Third's rumored boyfriend, the hottest topic on social media.

"Is it true that Third already has a boyfriend? And is that why you've been so firm about not wanting to be shipped with other actors?"

The bizarre question made me freeze mid-bite into my yakisoba, my chopsticks halting in the air.

The BL industry is so weird. Since when does an actor need to have a real-life partner just to focus on their own craft? Isn't it just common sense that actors would prioritize their acting over shipping?

Third maintained a faint smile as he answered, "I'll answer the second question first. What I've said about wanting people to focus on my acting has nothing to do with whether I have a partner or not. Whether in the past, present, or future, I want fans and viewers to watch my growth as an actor. I'll keep working hard to improve my skills."

"..."

"As for the first question. It's true. I'm in a relationship."

Clatter!

My chopsticks dropped onto the table. My mouth fell open, and my heart pounded wildly. I never expected him to just admit it like that.

"I won't reveal who he is, but we've been seeing each other for a while. I like him, so I asked him out." Third spoke with a smile, causing a wave of murmurs among the reporters.

I covered my face with my hands. It was embarrassing. He was *so* in love and wasn't hiding it at all. But beyond that, I couldn't help but worry about his future...

"It would've been nice to share this when the time was right, when we were both ready, not because we were forced by circumstances.

But since the news is already out, I want to respect him. So I decided to be upfront about it. I hope everyone will give us our privacy." Third ended with a soft smile, but his words had a sharp edge, subtly calling out those who had crossed the line.

"And are you worried about backlash? That it might affect the BL series you're currently in?"

"I don't think acting in a BL series has any negative impact. In fact, BL series aren't any different from other genres. I've always been clear about separating work from my personal life. Fans and viewers who follow me should already understand this. So, I don't think it would cause any issues."

My boyfriend answered confidently, while I, on the other hand, was completely flustered. I quickly opened X to check the reaction.

The fandom was in an uproar. Some were disappointed, especially the shipper fans, while antis joined in, adding fuel to the fire, which made me nervous. However, once the news spread beyond the fandom, the situation took a turn. Most of social media praised Third for being so upfront, and his solo fans stepped up to defend him.

'Love this! A BL actor who's insanely honest. He has a partner and openly says so, respecting his partner too. His partner is so lucky. Honestly, finding a guy like this in real life is a blessing.'

'BL fans are upset because they don't like honest people. They prefer those who sell ships.'

'He's selling his acting skills, not his relationship status. Having a partner doesn't affect his performance. Weren't y'all crying over that scene last week when Copter got ambushed? And now you're complaining?'

Fans cheered for Third so much that his name trended with hundreds of thousands of tweets. I finally felt relieved, smiling as I

saw just how much his fans adored him. Many said that whoever Third loved, they would love too. But I couldn't help but wonder, if they found out it was me, how would they react? Heh...

I threw away the empty food container, smiling to myself in satisfaction. Well, keeping it a secret like this was probably for the best. We'll wait until we're both ready to go public. When that day comes, I hope everyone will bless us.

Every time I think my life is going smoothly without obstacles, something always comes along to trip me up. But this time, it wasn't me. It was my boyfriend who got caught in the crossfire of someone else's actions.

"Drama again?"

"Yeah." Third rolled his eyes and tossed his phone onto the couch. Then he pulled me, who had been sweeping the floor, onto his lap and hugged me tight. (I stay over at Third's place three times a week.) Lately, he seemed fed up because every time he logged into social media, there were people tagging him in drama or hate posts. Most of them came from shipper fans and Nine's fans.

Why was he getting hate? Because Third had openly admitted to having a boyfriend. On top of that, after the interview, Nine posted a series of sad song lyrics in his stories for several days. Every single one about heartbreak. And when he attended an event recently, he looked visibly down, which only fueled fans' imaginations. They started believing Nine was heartbroken over Third, and just like that, my boyfriend became the villain in everyone's eyes.

"He's still at it, posting some cryptic nonsense on X again today. When is he gonna stop fishing for sympathy?" Third gritted his teeth next to my ear. I grabbed my own phone to check, sighing when I

saw that Nine had posted something about waiting for the storm to pass, along with yet another heartbreak song.

If I didn't know the full story, I might've believed Nine really liked Third and was genuinely heartbroken. But Third had told me everything, including their history from high school. When I found out, I felt numb with disappointment. I had supported Nine for over two years, only to learn this? I immediately threw out all the merch and photos I had of him, even deleted all the digital files.

And yet, even now, he wouldn't stop trying to bring my boyfriend down. It was as if he wanted to crush Third completely, to ruin him while boosting his own popularity. It was working too, he was trending on X every single day. It was a calculated and cold-blooded move.

"What should we do?" I asked.

"Nothing. Just let it go. The news will die down eventually. My fans understand me, and that's enough." Third buried his face in my shoulder, pressing kisses along my collarbone.

Even with my shirt in the way, I still felt a tingling sensation in my stomach. I wanted to just let myself get flustered, but I was too worried. So, I turned to face him, cupping his sharp jaw with both hands.

"Are you sure this won't hurt your image? I'm worried—"

"There's nothing to worry about. Don't stress." He smiled and kissed my palm gently. His dark eyes had a thoughtful glint. "Honestly, I don't think he can keep this up for much longer."

"Why not?"

"I just happened to find something out." He gave a small, unreadable smile, making me tilt my head in confusion.

"Let's just say... this will all be over soon. His series is ending, too. Whatever he's done, he'll have to face the consequences."

"What? What do you mean? Tell me!"

I perked up, trying to get him to spill, but Third silenced me with a kiss. By the time he finally let me go, I was lying breathless on the couch and my mind completely blank.

Third's 'soon' came even faster than I expected. The very next morning, social media exploded with a huge scandal.

'Exposing the dark side of a sweet-faced BL actor: He may look innocent on screen, but who knew he was a two-faced bully?'

That was the headline from a major entertainment news outlet. When I clicked in, I found that it all started from an anonymous account spilling dirt on a famous BL actor, codenamed 'N'. The accusations? He took advantage of his university classmates, never showed up for group work, refused to respond to work-related messages, and even mocked LGBTQ+ classmates in a derogatory way. Worst of all, leaked chat logs showed him threatening his groupmates, saying that if they didn't include his name in their projects, they would all face trouble with their professor.

Even though the post used an alias, Thai netizens were basically better detectives than Conan himself. They quickly pieced together which university, faculty, and batch the accuser was from, and it matched exactly with Nine. Soon, more anonymous accounts came forward, revealing that Nine had a history of bad behavior since middle school. He was known for sweet-talking teachers while being envious and two-faced towards his peers.

The drama caught fire because bullying and discrimination were despised topics. Especially since he was a BL actor profiting from the

LGBTQ+ community. People were furious. His name trended on X with nearly a million tweets.

I spent the whole day staring at my screen in shock. If all of this was true...

"Third! Is this what you meant yesterday?" That evening, when Third came home from a commercial shoot, I ran to greet him at the door, showing him my phone.

"Oh, yeah."

"You knew this was coming?"

"More or less. The person who exposed him is a friend of someone I know. They found out I went to the same school as Nine and that we had issues, so they came to me for advice," Third explained, pulling me to sit beside him on the couch, wrapping an arm around me.

"I told them I wouldn't expose anything myself since I have a contract with my agency. But if they wanted to do it, that was up to them. I wouldn't interfere."

I was speechless. So Third had known all along that this would happen. But I couldn't blame him, why should he stop it? Nine had hurt him in so many ways. If it were me, I probably would've let it play out too. Karma was real.

"Why did they wait until now to expose him?" I asked.

"Because revenge is most satisfying when you see the person who hurt you fall from their highest point. The higher they climb, the harder they crash."

He was right. Nine had been at the peak of his career, and now this scandal was ruining his reputation completely. His series had already

ended, so at least that was a relief. But this would definitely affect his ability to get more duo projects. Third didn't want to do pair work anyway, so this was actually the perfect chance for him to focus on solo jobs.

I watched as the situation unfolded. Since there were solid chat logs as evidence, Nine couldn't deny it. He had no choice but to hold a press conference, apologize, and admit his wrongdoings, while the internet tore him apart. Most of his fans abandoned him for good. He still had some left, but his opportunities in the industry would surely shrink. Meanwhile, Third's career was skyrocketing.

"Wan!"

The moment I opened my condo door, I was met with my boyfriend's radiant smile.

"I got offered a movie role! The lead role!"

"What?! No way!" My eyes widened in excitement, my smile as big as his. Third stepped in and pulled me into a tight hug. I could feel his heart pounding like crazy.

"I'm so happy."

"Yeah! Me too. You're amazing! Who's my boyfriend again? Freaking awesome!" I hugged him back, laughing. We were still wrapped up in our embrace when View stepped out of her room to check what all the commotion was about. But even then, we didn't let go.

I could just tell, things were only going to get better for us from here. No kidding this time!

Epilogue The Last Take, Action!

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Are you a fanboy of Third?" A young woman, one of the many fans gathered to support Third, struck up a conversation with me while we waited for the brand event of a certain home appliance company to begin at 6 PM. The event had drawn such a large crowd that it overflowed the open area of a well-known shopping mall.

"Oh... yes." I nodded, wearing a mask, thick black-framed glasses, and a cap to conceal my face, making sure no one would recognize me.

"Where did you get to know Third? I started liking him after watching *Deep Dive*. He's such a great actor, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. But actually, at first, I didn't like him much. I thought he was arrogant. But after getting to know him... I mean, after following him, I realized he's really dedicated to his work and very sweet to his fans."

I chuckled softly, thinking back to when we first met. It had already been nearly a year since then. Time really flew by.

"Which X account do you use? Can I have your @? Come to think of it, you seem kind of familiar... like I've seen you somewhere before..."

"I just have a common face! A lot of people say that, haha." I quickly interrupted before she could figure it out, clearing my throat nervously. It was normal in fan circles to exchange social media accounts after clicking with someone at an event so they could cheer for their fave together.

"Oh, you mean X? I don't really use social media much."

"Oh, I see. No problem. If we meet at another event, we can chat again." The girl gave me a kind smile, while I felt a little guilty for lying. But I couldn't risk giving my contact info to anyone. I didn't want to blow my cover.

The crowd suddenly roared in excitement, signaling that the event was about to begin. Fans started screaming in anticipation as their favorite artist took his place beside the stage. I looked toward the stairway leading up and hid a smile behind my mask when I saw the tall figure in a familiar brand-name suit waving to the fans.

Of course, from up there, he couldn't see me. But I would always see him.

"Please welcome Third Tharit!"

"KYAAAA!!!"

As soon as the MC finished speaking, an explosion of cheers filled the venue, accompanied by the rapid clicking of camera shutters. Fans waved their banners and snapped photos and videos of Third with enthusiasm. I, too, lifted my trusty camera, peering through the lens, capturing shot after shot of Third while smiling in satisfaction.

Seeing with my own eyes how many fans loved and supported the person I loved made my eyes sting with emotion. Third shone so brightly among the crowd, and I believed he would soar even higher, becoming an actor whose talent was universally recognized, just as he had always dreamed.

"Hello, I'm Third Tharit," the tall figure on stage introduced himself, scanning the sea of fans surrounding the stage.

For a split second, his sharp eyes met mine. Then, his smile widened. Just like me, smiling so hard until my eyes curved into crescents as I lifted my camera to take his picture.

Click!

Third's journey in the entertainment industry was far from over. And I, Wan Achawin, as both his fan and his boyfriend, would always be here to support him.

The End.

Hi! So, this marks the end of *Mr. Fanboy*! But don't worry, there are 3 special chapters coming your way soon! Stay tuned! 😊 🎉

Special 1 - A Distant Family

This story takes place about a week after Third publicly announced that he was seeing someone (me).

That day was a Sunday. Third had an event in the evening, so he was still at his condo in the Lang Suan area with me in the morning. I usually stayed over about three or four times a week. As I pushed open the bathroom door after showering, I saw my boyfriend sitting on the sofa, talking on the phone with someone.

"Yes," was all I managed to hear Third say before he hung up with a serious expression.

"Who was that?" I asked, dressed in my usual at-home outfit, an oversized t-shirt and knee-length shorts. I walked over and plopped down beside my boyfriend, using a towel to dry my damp hair.

"My mom," he sighed.

As I've mentioned before, Third's mother is a high-ranking government official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while his father is a doctor who owns a clinic. But I've never met them. In fact, even Third himself doesn't go home often. He's not close to his parents.

"And?" I tilted my head, not understanding why just a call from his mom made him look so stressed.

"She's here. She's coming up in the elevator."

"Oh... Huh?!"

My eyes widened as if a jolt of electricity had run through me from head to toe. It's not weird for a mother to visit her son, but the problem was, I was here too! This was huge! And why didn't he tell me sooner?!

To give a little background, when Third and I started dating, I told my own family right away. They weren't surprised. They probably figured it out when Third went all the way to Ayutthaya to find me. My parents had no issue with me not dating women. They just told me to do whatever made me happy.

As for Third, I wasn't sure if he had talked to his family yet. He didn't seem very close to them and rarely mentioned them to me.

Back to the present, where I was absolutely panicking. This condo was bought by Third's parents when he started university, which meant his mom likely had a keycard. There was no time for me to escape. Hiding like in a drama was also risky. If I got caught, things would be even more awkward.

"This is bad. What do I do?!" In my panic, I started biting my nails and pacing back and forth. I didn't know much about Third's relationship with his family, only that he once told me his parents were quite traditional. He rarely went home and didn't stay in touch with them much. By now, they had probably seen the news about him announcing his relationship. Maybe that's why she came, to talk about it.

And if Third's mom found out her son's partner was me, a guy, and what if she couldn't accept it? That would be a disaster!

Breathe, Wan. Stay calm. I took a deep breath, my mind racing for a solution.

"Third, you haven't told your parents about me, have you?"

"..."

"Then just say I'm a friend who came to visit. That works, right?" I quickly concluded, relieved that I found a way out. Yes, that was it. Friends could visit each other's condos. Even if I stayed over, it wouldn't be weird at all.

Beep!

Three seconds after I finished speaking, the door unlock sound rang out. Third got up from the sofa and walked to greet his mother at the door, while I followed behind him, peeking over his shoulder.

"Hi, Mom."

"Mm."

The middle-aged woman in an elegant dress responded in a neutral tone. She gave off the exact same vibe as her son, formal, composed, and slightly intimidating. Their faces were nearly identical, except Third's eyes were a bit sharper than his mom's.

"And who's that behind you?" She raised a brow, staring at me as I stood stiffly behind her son.

"Hello." I quickly stepped forward, pressed my palms together in a respectful wai, and put on my best smile. "My name is Wan. I'm Third's friend. I just came over to visit him."

"Oh, I see." The older woman gave a slight smile.

Goosebumps shot up my arms. To put it simply, Third's mom had the same aura as a strict school disciplinary teacher, stern, formal, and authoritative. She completely fit the image of a government official. Now I understood where Third got his cold and emotionless demeanor from. Did he even realize how much he resembled his mother?

"You never come home, do you? If I didn't visit, I wouldn't get to see you at all." Third's mom turned back to her son, ignoring me.

"I've been busy with work. Sorry."

"It's fine. This is your peak period, after all," she sighed, walking over to sit on the single-seat sofa while Third and I sat together on the long one.

"So, how have you been? Are you doing well?"

"Yes."

"Are you getting enough sleep?"

"Three to four hours a night."

"That's too little."

"Some days, if I have an evening job, I get to sleep in."

Their conversation was just a basic check-in between mother and son, but the atmosphere in the room was suffocating. It felt like a corporate job interview. His mom asked questions like an HR officer, while Third answered like a robot.

Seriously, what kind of family talks like this?!

"Third, I forgot my lozenges." After a brief silence, his mom spoke again. "Go buy some for me. Same brand as always."

She was talking to her son, but her emotionless eyes glanced at me. I had been sitting silently for a while, so I quickly stood up and volunteered.

"I'll go buy them instead. That way, you can stay and talk with Third."

"It's okay. Let Third go. I'd rather talk with you."

"..."

Crap. Why does she want to talk to *me*?! She came here to see her son, didn't she?! What does his friend (boyfriend) have to do with this?!

"Go on, Third."

Third hesitated for a moment, glanced at me, then grabbed his phone and mask before silently leaving the room. I watched my boyfriend's broad back disappear as the door closed behind him. Even though I managed to keep my face calm, but my heart was crying.

Not only did he not help me out, but he left me alone?! Just wait, he's not getting any cuddles tonight!!

"Wan, right?" As soon as her son left, Third's mom wasted no time. Her sharp and intelligent eyes locked onto me like a detective about to interrogate a suspect.

"Yes."

"Have you been with Third for a long time?"

"Uh... since we met, it's been about almost a year now." I answered while raising my hand to count my fingers. I first met him at the beginning of the year, and now it's the end of the year. About nine or ten months, huh? Time really flies.

"No, that's not it." But his mother shook her head before saying something that almost made me choke on my own saliva. "I mean, when did you start dating?"

"..." My brain went blank. I couldn't think of anything to say for a moment. How did she know that I was Third's boyfriend? I swear we weren't acting suspicious just now.

"You already know, Auntie?" I asked in a soft voice.

I already felt small to begin with, but now it was as if I'd shrunk down to just three centimeters. I was scared of every word I was about to hear next. I was afraid that Third's family wouldn't be okay with their son dating me. If that was the case, then I...

"Even if I didn't know, I could guess." His mother chuckled softly, the corners of her lips lifting slightly in a smile that was hard to read.

"He already told me he has a boyfriend, a guy. He told me even before the news came out. And here you are, in the morning, in the house, wearing home clothes, with wet hair. That means you might have stayed over. Third is a very solitary person. If he weren't really close to someone, he wouldn't let them stay over. With just this, it's not hard to figure out, right?"

"Yes... I surrender to the evidence without any arguments. Auntie's eyesight is incredibly sharp. Is this a skill that comes with being a mother?"

As for my boyfriend, the one responsible for all this, just thinking about it makes me annoyed. If he already told his family, he could have at least told me! He scared me half to death. Why didn't we coordinate in advance? Hmph!

"To be honest, I was surprised too." The middle-aged woman said, a faint crease forming between her brows as she kept her eyes on me. "Until now, Third has only ever dated women. I never knew he liked men too."

That statement created a small moment of awkwardness in the room. Maybe because I grew up in a time where gender and

sexuality were widely accepted, and my family was quite open-minded, giving their children complete freedom, I never really understood why dating someone of a different gender or the same gender would make a difference.

"Is there... a difference?"

"?"

"I mean... if Third likes men, does that make him a different person?" I asked softly.

Just to clarify, I wasn't trying to be sarcastic or rude to an elder. I genuinely didn't understand. No matter who Third dated, he was still the same person, outwardly cold and indifferent, but deep down warm and caring. I didn't think that liking men or women would change his personality.

But as soon as I spoke, I had to swallow hard. Did I just make his mother dislike me? Oh no, if I made a bad first impression, I'd be screwed!

"That's true." The elder chuckled lightly after a brief pause.

The frown from earlier had relaxed, and her gaze softened as she looked at me. There was no sign of displeasure on her face, which made me let out a quiet sigh of relief.

"I never thought of it that way. To be honest, I grew up in a time when these things weren't widely accepted. So, deep down, his father and I still feel a little... strange about it." She admitted.

That didn't make me feel bad at all. On the contrary, I felt relieved that she was honest about her feelings. I'm not good at handling hidden meanings or complicated words. I prefer straightforward conversations because it means that if there's a problem, we can address it directly.

"But he's our son, after all. It's his life. No matter what path he chooses, as parents, our job is to support him."

A faint smile appeared on her face, one that looked so much like her son's. For the first time today, she seemed truly at ease, and the awkward atmosphere gradually dissipated.

"So, why do you like Third?"

"Uh... because he's straightforward and caring." I answered cautiously, though the word 'straightforward' probably wasn't enough to describe how blunt my boyfriend actually was.

"Straightforward... Hmm, that's true. He really is very direct, sometimes too much. When he first entered the entertainment industry, I even wondered if people would dislike him for that." She laughed before exhaling another long sigh.

"..."

"As you can see, Third isn't very close with me or his father. But I can't blame him. When he was a child, his father and I were always busy with work, never having time for him. Back then, we thought that if we made enough money, our child would have a comfortable life. But we forgot that what children need from their parents isn't just money."

"..."

"It's our fault. Before we knew it, things had already turned out this way. Third doesn't feel comfortable talking about a lot of things with us. So if there's someone he trusts, someone he can tell everything to and have by his side, then I can be at ease. At least he won't be alone anymore."

She smiled at me, a warm smile that reminded me so much of her son.

Maybe... this conversation was meant for this purpose all along.

"Take care of my son. No, I mean, take care of him for me, Wan. Next time we meet, I hope we can have a meal together." She said as she grabbed her bag and stood up.

"You're... leaving already?"

"Yes, I just came to check in. He never has time to come home. Luckily, I ran into you." She reached out and gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze, as if there was more she wanted to say, but since we weren't that close yet, in the end, we just exchanged smiles without words.

"I'm heading off now. Take care of yourself."

"I'll walk you out." I hurriedly stood up, intending to escort her to her car.

The older woman waved her hand dismissively. "No need."

So I could only walk her to the door, bowing respectfully as I bid her farewell.

As soon as Third's mother left, my shoulders slumped instantly. I sank to the floor, letting out a long sigh of relief.

Oh god, this felt exactly like presenting my thesis and getting a pass from the professor. So, Third's family doesn't seem to have a problem with us being together, right? They just need some time to adjust. It's not that they don't accept it. They just need time to get used to it. Overall, it's a good sign. His mother doesn't dislike me, and she even entrusted Third to me.

I went back to sit on the couch and play with my phone. About five minutes later, I heard the sound of the automatic lock unlocking,

followed by the tall figure of the apartment's owner walking in and removing the mask from his face.

"Auntie has already left."

"Yeah, I ran into her in the hallway." Third said as he sat down beside me. His sharp eyes carrying a hint of concern.

"Did she say anything to you?"

"No." I shook my head. She didn't say anything bad to me, but I'm about to say something to him!

"Why didn't you tell me that you already told your family about dating a guy? Why didn't you give me a heads-up before your mom came? I almost had a heart attack, you know!"

"It was sudden. I didn't have time to tell you. And besides, you already outed yourself." My boyfriend replied with his usual deadpan expression, but his dark eyes held a hint of amusement.

I scrunched my nose at him, thinking he probably didn't tell me on purpose just to mess with me!

"Third."

"Hmm?"

"A moment ago, your mom said she hopes we can have a meal together sometime," I said with a smile. After all, making a good impression on your partner's parents is always a good thing, right? If I behave well, then maybe, just maybe, when Third and I have a fight, they'll take my side!

Third seemed a little taken aback before his lips slowly curled into a smile.

"Yeah, I'll ask the agency to clear my schedule, and then we'll set a date to have a meal with my parents."

"Okay. And you should go home sometimes too. I bet your mom really misses you. Otherwise, she wouldn't have come all the way to your condo," I said. Parents always worry about their kids. It's just that this family has a bit of a tough way of showing their feelings.

"My mom wanted to see you more than me."

"I'm just a bonus. You'll always be the most important person to her," I said, crossing my arms and lifting my chin, acting like a relationship expert.

Third chuckled softly. His eyes hesitated for a moment before he wrapped his arms around my waist and buried his face in my shoulder.

"I don't know... I'm not sure. Ever since I was a kid, I didn't spend much time with my parents. It always felt like their work was more important. A lot of times, I wondered if they had to choose between me and their jobs... they might choose work over me."

"That's not true," I said, gently stroking his head.

Every child craves love and attention from their parents. Even if they work hard to give their kids a comfortable life, a child doesn't understand that at the time. They only see that their parents aren't around, choosing work instead. Even when they grow up and come to understand the reasons, deep down, the insecurity and distance don't completely go away.

"Your parents love you. It's just that time doesn't move backward," I reassured him, cupping his cheeks in my hands and offering him a smile.

"..."

"But that's okay. We can always start over. They miss you, and you miss them too, don't you? So, let's visit them more often when we have time. And if we get a couple of free days, we can visit my parents too."

"Alright," Third chuckled lightly, his sharp eyes twinkling as he said, "I don't know whose boyfriend this is, but he's just too cute. There's no way my mom wouldn't like you, not when I like you this much."

I blushed at his sudden sweetness. Even though we've been together for a while, I still wasn't used to it whenever Third said things like that.

"Go, go! Go take a shower already. Don't you have to leave by noon?" I pushed him lightly, trying to cover up my embarrassment.

"There's still two whole hours," Third glanced at the digital clock on the nearby table before locking eyes with me, a sly smile forming on his lips.

"How about a little workout? In the bedroom."

"No way!"

"Oh, so you want to do it here instead? I'm fine with that."

"Hey, wait! Third! Hahaha!" I burst into laughter as he tackled me onto the couch, playfully tickling my waist. The whole living room filled with our laughter, only to gradually fall silent as our lips met in a soft, lingering kiss.

It was yet another peaceful and wonderful morning.

Special 2 - Time to Rehearse the Script!

The acting profession requires a reasonably good memory. For example, if an actor can remember the names and faces of fans who come to see them, it creates a strong impression and makes the fans even more infatuated because it shows attentiveness. In terms of work, an actor should remember details about the character they are portraying so they can fully embody the role. This includes memorizing lines from various scenes. The more accurately they remember their lines, the more they can focus on facial expressions and emotions, which also saves filming time.

For a rising star like Third Tharit, who is extremely professional, he doesn't let his free time go to waste. Dressed in a casual t-shirt and sweatpants, he is half-sitting, half-lying on a leather sofa in his luxurious condo in the Lang Suan area. His eyes are fixed on his iPad as he memorizes the script for the next day's shoot.

"Wan."

"Hmm?" I, who am sitting slumped on the floor with my back against the sofa, tear my eyes away from my phone game and turn towards the voice of my boyfriend. "What's up?"

"Are you free? Help me run lines."

"Okay, okay." I grab my iPad from the coffee table and get up from the floor, settling cross-legged on the sofa next to Third as he sends me the script via LINE.

Besides being his boyfriend, I also serve as his practice partner since I have acting experience myself (even though I never got to finish

an entire project). Third always prepares by memorizing his lines before the filming day, as expected from a perfectionist who wants everything ready in advance. As for me, I don't have anything else to do, so helping him rehearse is actually fun.

This time, Third's project is a romantic-comedy film about a male lead who has been friends with the female lead since childhood. They grew up together from elementary school, through middle school, high school, university, and into working life. The male lead has always loved the female lead but never had the courage to confess. Eventually, the female lead gets a boyfriend and is about to get married, with the male lead ironically being the wedding organizer for her big day. Tragic, right?

But then, one day before the wedding, the male lead travels back in time to when he was eighteen, before the female lead met her current fiancé. Now, the question is whether he will take this opportunity to confess and make the female lead fall in love with him, or if history will repeat itself and she will still end up marrying someone else. I don't know the ending either because Third refuses to send me the final script, telling me to wait and find out in the cinema.

In this movie, Third stars alongside Pink, a famous singer from a popular girl group. Sounds familiar? That's right, it's the same Pink that my friend Jay is absolutely obsessed with. When I heard the news, I was excited and even asked Third to get her autograph for me. Pink is gorgeous, cute, has an amazing voice, and is incredibly famous. If this film becomes a success, my boyfriend will surely get even more opportunities.

Romantic comedies are generally lighthearted, but the challenge is making the characters charming and lovable to the audience. But since Third is a professional, I have no doubt he can pull it off. So when he asks for help, I'm always ready to be his practice partner.

"Alright, which scene this time?"

"Starting from 22/2," his deep voice replies.

I skim through the script briefly before raising an eyebrow. "This is the confession scene."

"Yeah." He nods while I keep reading. Damn, there's a kiss scene! Tomorrow, my boyfriend has to kiss Pink?!

"You start first," Third says, snapping me out of my thoughts.

Well, love scenes are a normal part of acting. It's their job. Honestly, it's admirable that actors have to hug, kiss, or even film bedroom scenes in front of dozens of crew members, even though they must feel embarrassed. Besides... it's just a character, not actually my boyfriend. I'll just think of Third as a vessel for the character to borrow a body, that's all.

"Alright, I'm starting now." I clear my throat and begin reading the female lead's lines.

"Do you have something you want to talk to me about, Ton?"

"It's not that."

"Huh?"

"Make your voice higher, like a girl."

"Does it have to be that much?"

"Otherwise, it won't feel real," the leading actor said.

So, I had to clear my throat again before adjusting my voice to sound smaller. "Do you have something to talk to me about, Ton?"

Third didn't say his next line. When I looked up, I saw a hint of amusement in his dark eyes.

"So you were planning to tease me, huh? I'm not reading anymore." I narrowed my eyes, pretending to close the iPad. This guy, ever since we started dating, he loved to tease me with small things, like he enjoyed seeing me pout. Weird person.

"Sorry, sorry! I'll be serious now." Third burst out laughing, so I sighed and unlocked the iPad screen again, then started reading the script.

"Do you have something to talk to me about, Ton?"

"I have... something to confess to you, Mook."

Third's deep voice carried a nervous tone I wasn't used to. The character 'Ton' was a timid, somewhat weak guy, so Third designed his voice to tremble slightly, and his body language resembled a startled rabbit.

"Confess? What? Why do you look so serious?" I chuckled, trying to get into the mood with my boyfriend.

"Mook, actually, I..."

"..."

"I like you, Mook."

"Yeah, I know. I like—"

"No! Not like that!" His voice was firm, and those sharp eyes stared at me with such intensity that my heart wavered, making it easy to get immersed in the scene.

"I never liked you as just a friend. I like you the way a man likes a woman. You should have understood that, right? In truth, you've

just been pretending not to understand all along."

"..."

"Every time I try to talk about this, you always change the subject. Why? Is it because you don't like me? Or because you can't like me?"

Third's slightly trembling voice sounded pained. From what I knew of the script, the female lead did like the male lead, but since her friend also liked him, she had always tried to suppress her feelings.

But love isn't something you can easily suppress. I knew that well. I had experienced it myself.

"Ton, I... I don't know," I said, following the dialogue, as Third leaned in closer and lifted my chin.

"Then if I kiss you... would you hate it?"

His voice made my heart tremble. Even if he was playing someone else right now, I still completely lost to the man in front of me.

According to the script, the female lead wouldn't respond, and the male lead would keep leaning in until they finally kissed. This was where the practice should have ended. But Third didn't back away. Instead, he leaned in even closer until our noses touched.

"Wait." Before his lips could press against mine, I raised my hand to stop him and asked, feeling slightly flustered, "Do we have to practice this part too?"

"Yeah. Shouldn't we rehearse everything?" His sharp eyes gleamed mischievously as he pulled my hand away. With nothing left to block him, his lips captured mine in a deep kiss.

"Mm..." I let out a soft sound in my throat as his warm tongue slipped into my mouth, sweeping along my teeth and the inside of my cheeks, entwining with mine. He alternated between nibbling and sucking on my lips, both upper and lower, with a passionate intensity.

Third pressed down until I was lying flat on the sofa, our bodies completely pressed together with no space in between. I could feel his quickened breath against my face as his large hand slid under my shirt, roaming over my waist and hips with leisurely strokes.

"Hah..." After what felt like a long while, the taller man finally released my lips.

I lay on the sofa, panting, while Third hovered above me. His eyes gleamed, filled with unmistakable love and desire.

"Third..."

"Hmm?"

"Tomorrow... you're going to deep kiss Nong Pink like this too?" I asked hesitantly. Was he really rehearsing, or did he just want to kiss me? I was completely confused.

"Of course not." My question drew a deep and pleasant laugh from him. Then Third leaned down and kissed me passionately again, his hands roaming over my waist and stomach, sending shivers through my entire body.

"Honestly, it's just lips touching. You're not jealous, right?"

"Jealous of what? I was just curious, that's all," I huffed, rolling my eyes and quickly defending myself before he got the wrong idea.

But wait... if there's no deep kiss in the script, then what was that just now?

"If the script doesn't have a deep kiss, then what was that you just did? That's called going off-script." I pouted, pressing my swollen lips together to hide my embarrassment.

"Just lips touching isn't enough with you," he said with a sly smile, his sharp nose nudging against my cheek before nuzzling down to my neck. Third always said I smelled good, even though I only used baby powder.

"Can I?" he whispered, his warm lips and tongue sucking on my earlobe, sending tremors through my entire body.

"W-what?"

"Can I have more?" he murmured huskily.

After dating for months, our relationship had finally deepened, on a soul-deep level. I won't go into details because I'm way too embarrassed to say it out loud, but our first time was warm and gentle. Third was incredibly patient, worried that I'd be scared of sex if it hurt too much.

At first, I was nervous. Even though I had prepared well and read plenty of theory, I was still apprehensive because I'd heard it could be really painful. But when it actually happened, it felt so good that I ended up loving it. Not that I'd ever admit that to Third! And I definitely wasn't going to take the lead. I liked it when he was the one to initiate, when he was the one to plead for it. It made me feel wanted, like he really craved me.

"Please..." he coaxed, his deep voice full of longing as his nose brushed against my cheek.

We all know how it is, once the fire is lit, it's hard to put out. I could already feel that part of him, hard and burning hot, pressing against my inner thigh through his sweatpants.

"Aren't we... supposed to keep rehearsing?" I asked, my face and neck burning. My heart pounded wildly, but I couldn't deny that, beneath all the embarrassment, there was a part of me that was anticipating what would come next.

"We are rehearsing," Third grinned, lifting me off the sofa in a bridal carry and heading straight to the bedroom. It wasn't like I was small or anything, but he carried me so effortlessly. Guess all that working out every day paid off.

"Wait, wait! This series doesn't even have a bed scene!"

"But my story with you does," he replied, giving me no time to protest.

He laid me down on the bed and pressed his body against mine, silencing me with a deep kiss while his hands quickly removed our clothes.

Oh, I forgot to mention, Third's favorite scenes to rehearse are the love scenes. Sometimes, he even writes his own script, like right now.

Not that I'm complaining. I'm always happy to help him practice. Hehe.

Take 1, Action!

"Aaaaaah!!! Eeeeeek!!!"

The shrill screams piercing my ears didn't startle me in the slightest. I was used to this kind of environment. Oh, and that numbness creeping up my legs after standing for a full three hours, too.

"Nong Nine!!!"

"Aaaaah, you're so beautiful!!!"

"Nong Nine! Fighting, son!!!"

And all kinds of high-pitched noises around me blending into a chaotic mess. Luckily, my height of 178 centimeters became an advantage amidst the dozens, if not hundreds, of young women packed into the narrow space that the event organizers had designated for fans of the artists attending the launch of a supplement brand at a famous shopping mall in the heart of the city.

Even though I was considerably taller than the girls around me, I still tried to stand on my tiptoes, raising my DSLR camera equipped with a 70-200 mm zoom lens to capture the best angles. The rapid clicks of the shutter competed with the fans' screams. As I fired off shot after shot, I couldn't help but quietly admire the model in front of me.

That's awesome. Today, Nine stood out under the spotlight as usual. It's no surprise that someone with an aura like his is at the top of the industry. No wonder he won the Best New Actor award this year.

I hid my smile behind the black mask covering my face, my eyes and hands still busy with the camera, firing the shutter continuously. From where I stood, I could only see the side of him from a distance with my naked eye, but thanks to the power of the zoom lens, I could clearly see even the tiny mole next to his ear.

Even his mole is adorable. He's my bias, my bias!!

"Nine!!!"

"Aaaaaah!!!"

The screams from Nine's self-proclaimed mommies grew louder when he turned to wave at his fans after finishing the press photo session. Event staff came to guide him to the special seating area prepared for the artists and VIPs attending the event. Fans quickly shifted their cameras to capture photos and clips as the event officially began.

Damn, it's hot. It's freaking hot! No matter how strong the mall's air conditioning is, it's useless when you're crammed in with a crowd for hours. Still, it's better than an outdoor event. That's why I hang in there, using my camera lens as my second pair of eyes. My finger continuously pressing the shutter when Nine playfully waves at the fans. My heart and hands trembled when I realized Nine was looking straight at my camera.

Aaaagh!!!

Of course, that was just me screaming internally. If I screamed out loud, I'd probably startle everyone around me. I couldn't scare the girls nearby, so I did my best to keep my cool. No one knew I was grinning like a fool under my mask. My legs were still numb, but I wouldn't complain anymore! I could stand here for another half-day if it meant seeing him.

When the artist I love is right in front of me, all the exhaustion and discomfort from the past few hours become meaningless.

Nearly an hour later, the event came to an end. I rapidly clicked my shutter as Nine and the other artists took a group photo with many important people whose names I couldn't remember. As soon as they left the stage, reporters swarmed Nine, as expected of a rising star. After finishing the interviews, he waved to the fans for a few more minutes before heading back to the artists' lounge.

The crowd around me immediately scattered like ants. Some fans chased after Nine, who left with his AR team and security guards, while others, including myself, stayed back and watched from afar. I was a bit disappointed that there wasn't a fan interaction session today. But, it didn't matter, just seeing Nine for thirty minutes was enough to give me energy for the entire week!

"Hey, are you a fanboy of Nine?"

While I was craning my neck to catch a last glimpse of my bias, a girl approached me with another friend by her side. The phone case she held had a polaroid of Nine, which meant she was part of the same fandom.

"Uh... yeah."

"Aww, cute! See you at the next event," they said sweetly with a smile.

"Yeah." I pulled my mask up a bit higher, nodding shyly and waving back awkwardly.

"Wan! Hey! Over here!"

Barely three seconds after the girls left, I heard a familiar loud voice calling my name. I turned to see Jay, my classmate, waving enthusiastically and signaling me to come over.

"Did your Pink leave already?"

"Gone already. Probably left a bit before your Nine," Jay, who is also a stan (he's a stan for girl groups), said while craning his neck to look in the direction I just came from out of curiosity. We came to the event together today because his bias was attending the same event as mine. "So, when did it happen? Did a girl hit on you or something?"

"They just said hi. We're in the same fandom."

"Oh, really? Damn, I thought you were finally getting a girlfriend," Jay laughed, throwing an arm around my shoulders. "Come on, Wan! Let's grab some food. I need to sit down and upload photos. Pink looked amazing today. She even did a cat-paw pose at my camera!"

"Nine looked at my camera, too."

"Dude! We're both lucky today, huh? Our bias both gave us moments!" Jay clicked his tongue in excitement. I smiled so wide under my mask that my jaw hurt as we walked side by side toward the food court.

Naturally, our conversation over ramen was all about our beloved artists. Jay and I took turns bragging about the moments we captured. Even the tiniest glance at our cameras became a point of playful debate. After about ten minutes of arguing, I emerged victorious by pulling out the timestamp data. Nine had looked at my camera three seconds longer than Pink had looked at Jay's.

Sounds silly, right? But everyone needs a little silliness to spice up life, don't you think?

"Hey, have you decided on your research topic yet?" I asked as we walked through the mall's parking lot toward our motorbikes.

"Not yet. You?"

"I have. We have to submit it tomorrow, you know."

By the way, despite how I seem, I always manage my studies without falling behind. I owe it to my parents for supporting my education. As for Jay, he always sneaks out after attendance to see Pink. He once stayed out so late after a concert that he almost missed an exam the next day. From sophomore year to senior year, nothing's changed.

"Crap, I'm not sleeping tonight," Jay groaned, ruffling his already messy hair.

"Alright, I'm heading back to work on my paper. See you tomorrow."

"Yeah, later. Drive safe."

"You too." He straddled his motorbike and rode off.

I turned to my beloved black scooter, grabbed my helmet from under the seat, and rode back to my condo near the university which is about five hundred meters from the train station. Even though I had my motorbike, I always had to think about the other person living with me, who couldn't ride one.

"P'Wan! You're late!"

As soon as I pushed open the door to my room at 9:30 PM, a shrill voice called out my name. Three seconds later, a cute girl who bore a strong resemblance to me walked out of the bedroom, arms crossed, frowning at me with a disapproving look, just like a nagging auntie.

"Wow, look at you. Did you go fanboying or go to war? Why do you look so drained?"

"Why don't you try standing on tiptoes for four or five hours and see how it feels? Even a guy would be exhausted," I replied to View, my biological younger sister who always acts like she's my mom, as I trudged toward the sofa.

Honestly, as much as I'm fully dedicated to supporting my bias, I'm not exactly thrilled about standing around on tiptoes for hours. Back when I first started taking freelance photos of celebrities, I didn't really understand fan culture. I once arrived an hour before an event started, only to find that all the good spots were already taken. Sure, my lens can capture even the tiniest pores, but if I don't have a good angle, the photos won't turn out great.

Geez. Isn't it time to change already? When will everyone stop reserving spots half a day before the event starts, huh...

"Ouch!"

"Oh, oh! Clumsy again," my dear little sister teased when I stubbed my toe against the sofa leg, making my face twist in pain. "And have you eaten yet?"

"I've eatennn."

"Good, because even if you hadn't, I wouldn't get you anything anyway," she curled up the corner of her mouth, letting out a haughty 'hmph' like a snobby princess in a cartoon.

I rolled my eyes upward, already used to our sibling conversations where three sentences in, we've already exchanged ten snarky remarks.

"And don't sprawl around like a snake like that. P'Wan, after you come back from outside, hurry up and shower. You stink."

"Are you my sister or my mom, View? Go do your homework."

"I already finished it! You're the one who shouldn't be slacking and forgetting your work. Be careful, so you don't fail to graduate!"

"Yeah, yeah, I won't forget. Go, go read your books, or you'll fail the university entrance exam," I said lazily, waving my hand to shoo away the annoying little brat.

She flipped her hair and marched back to her room. I sat and rested until the fatigue wore off before getting up, going to my bedroom to grab a towel, and heading to the shower. Once my body was fresh and clean, I returned to my desk in my bedroom, opened my laptop, launched the photo editing software, uploaded the pictures I took today, and happily started editing the best shots.

Oh! I've been rambling for a while, but it seems like I forgot to introduce myself. Alright then. Hello, my name is Achawin Sukkoson. My nickname is just what Jay and my sister call me. I'm currently twenty-one years old, a fourth-year student majoring in Public Relations under the Faculty of Communication Arts. But I'm not some important figure contributing to the nation, so my biography is probably not as interesting as the story I'm about to share.

I'm a fangirl—well, fanboy, to be precise. Yes, I'm a fanboy of a rising male actor, Nine Nopphanat!

My journey as a fan began about two years ago. Back then, I was a second-year student doing freelance photography for fan events. I already loved taking photos and, being the good child I am, wanted to help lessen my parents' financial burden. So, I saved up and invested in an expensive zoom lens to take celebrity photos and sell them to fans who couldn't attend events themselves.

You might wonder, does such a job really exist? Well, let me tell you, it pays quite well. That day, I was at Siam Square to photograph a famous BL series actor. Since the series was airing at the time, he was incredibly popular, and the place was packed with fans, making

every alley and corner crowded with excited girls stepping on each other's toes.

I stood on the outer edge, almost at the very back, zooming in as much as I could to capture photos. Even so, people kept squeezing in to find a better angle, pushing and shoving constantly. At one point, someone bumped into me so hard that I lost my balance.

"Careful!" Before I could fall flat on my face, a hand grabbed my arm just in time.

"Like –" I looked up to thank the person, but the words caught in my throat because the one who helped me was the most attractive guy I'd ever seen.

His skin was smooth and fair, with large, bright eyes partially hidden under a black cap. He wore an oversized white T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. His features were a perfect blend of handsome and beautiful. He gave me a small smile, and when he smiled, his eyes curved like a crescent moon.

He was, without a doubt, ridiculously cute. My friends had told me I had a sweet face, but this guy outshone me by a mile. No, a hundred miles.

"Th-thank you," I stammered, still feeling embarrassed and a bit dazed. When I sneaked another glance at him, I couldn't help but wonder if someone this good-looking was even real. Even the celebrity I was there to photograph didn't hold a candle to him.

"Are you an Ozone fan?" he asked casually.

"Ah... uh... yeah," I replied absentmindedly. It would be too weird to explain to a stranger that I was just there for a photography gig.

He turned to look at the stage again. From where we stood without a camera, the performer on stage looked like an ant. Yet, he gazed

at the celebrity intently for a while before turning back to speak to me, who was still absentmindedly staring at him, forgetting my job for a moment.

"He's really outstanding, isn't he? You know, I want to be like that too."

"..."

"I'm working hard for it. One day, I'll be like him," he laughed softly, flashing a smile that made his eyes crinkle with warmth.

"...Good luck," I said after being stunned for three whole seconds by that dazzling smile. Seriously, even as a guy, I felt flustered. I could already picture him charming audiences on stage.

"Thanks. I'll be going now," he said with a smile before walking away.

Amid the deafening cheers, the loud music from the speakers, and the bustling crowd at Bangkok's most famous shopping district, his retreating figure was the clearest thing in my vision.

For a moment, he shone brighter than the actual celebrity on stage.

That impression took root in my heart and grew instantly. After returning from Siam that day, I tried to find out who he was. Unfortunately, I wasn't familiar with the entertainment scene and barely knew any celebrities. Even when I asked my female friends, they could only guess he might be a net idol, a trainee, or an extra in some series.

In the end, I couldn't figure out who he was. I regretted not taking a photo of him that day. Without any clue to follow, my search was fruitless. But I promised myself that if I ever saw him again, I would support and cheer for him with all my heart. Part of it was gratitude for his help, but more than that, I admired his determination.

Besides, he had an adorable smile. I guess you could call this... liking someone.

And then, one day, fate brought us together again. When he debuted in his first acting role as the protagonist's friend (basically, an extra), I finally learned his name—Nine, a rookie actor. It felt like unlocking an SSS-level mission. I followed his Instagram immediately and, of course, watched the series he was in.

Even as a newcomer, Nine's acting was so natural and smooth, even better than the main lead. I'm not exaggerating, he truly had star quality. Before I knew it, I was attending his events, taking photos, and supporting him without anyone needing to hire me.

Nine isn't just a pretty face, he's talented and hardworking. He didn't become famous overnight but climbed his way up from minor roles through sheer effort. I admired his dedication deeply.

Now I've become a full-fledged fanboy. Normally, I'm just a casual music fan or someone who watches performances in passing. I even tend to like girls more. I never thought I'd become so seriously obsessed with anyone like this. At first, I wondered if it was weird for me to like a male celebrity to the point of following him to events.

But then I thought, I'm not bothering anyone, right? Life is short, so why not do what makes me happy. If I want to obsess over a celebrity 24/7, that's my business. Even my parents don't mind, so why should I care what other people think.

But, well... it's easy to talk big when I'm alone, haha. In reality, when I go outside, I still get self-conscious about how others might see me. Most of the fans in my fandom are girls, so whenever I attend events, I always wear a cap and a mask to cover my face, playing the role of a lone wolf, without a single friend in the same fandom.

Because of Nine, I saved up for almost half a year to buy a new camera lens worth fifty thousand baht just to photograph him. But I also take photography gigs for other artists, so I consider it an investment in my career. Oh, I even created a secret account just to help trend hashtags and vote for him. I also buy official merchandise from his company and have been following him since he only had a few dozen fans. Now, whenever he shows up at events, there are hundreds of people supporting him.

Nine seems to be doing really well on his path as an actor. Over the past two years, he's gone from playing minor roles to supporting roles, and his latest project has been a huge hit. People on Twitter are raving about his acting skills. It even went viral! Just last month, there was news that he's about to land a lead role in a BL series!

You know what, I'm so freaking proud of my bias! Nine has everything it takes to be number one—good looks, a sweet personality, and a polite demeanor that makes everyone adore him. His acting skills are top-notch, and if you've ever heard him sing during live streams or events, his voice is amazing. With the upcoming BL series, he'll probably release music too, and then the 'muggles' will finally see another side of his talent. With all these qualities in one person, the number one spot isn't too far off. My bias is seriously awesome!

As for me, my job as a fan is to push him toward his dreams, to help him go as far and as high as he can. Bring on the hashtag trends, I've got a dozen secret accounts for that. I go to almost every event to cheer him on. I do wish I could participate in top spender events, but I'm just a student with lots of expenses and a younger sister to take care of. I'd feel guilty using my allowance to drop tens or hundreds of thousands on fan projects. Still, I help promote him by taking high-quality photos and videos, editing clips, and sharing them on Twitter, Facebook groups, and TikTok to reach a wider audience.

Is it tiring? Of course, it is. A camera body plus a lens as big as a dog's leg isn't exactly light, you know. Even as a guy, waiting at events for four to five hours—sometimes since morning for an event that starts at 7 p.m.—takes a toll. Cramps, back pain, and then coming home to edit photos and videos. It all takes time.

But all my exhaustion is so worth it, just to see Nine's smile. Just to see his face, to hear his soft voice speaking while smiling. Those feelings of exhaustion just disappear as if they were never there.

This is the love of a fan. Underline the word 'fan.' Let me tell you first, I have never thought of him in a romantic way. People who have never been a fan wouldn't understand that all of this is genuinely goodwill without any hidden motives. I just want to see him succeed, that's all. And I don't know how long this love will last, but in the meantime, I will give him my all. So that one day, when he grows up and succeeds, with so many people who love him, I can let go and watch him from afar, just like I intended.

I click the mouse to edit the photos while admiring my own photography skills. The lighting in the mall is hard to capture, you know. But I still manage to take beautiful pictures. By the way, Nine really has amazing skin. I barely need to retouch anything. Sometimes I wonder how someone with such good looks and perfect skin can actually exist. I'd better upload this set of photos quickly. Everyone in the world should know just how good my bias looks.

"Shit, is it already 1 AM..." I mutter when I glance at the time on the bottom of the screen. If it weren't for the fact that I have an 8 AM class tomorrow, I would have stayed up editing videos for TikTok a bit longer.

I close my laptop, drag my feet to switch off the lights, and collapse onto my bed, falling asleep almost instantly.

"Damn, you must be feeling good now that your research topic got approved!" Jay's rough, half-sarcastic voice rings out the moment the professor leaves the room.

"Good my ass. What part of doing research is easy?" I let out a sigh, resting my face on the desk because I'm still feeling a bit sleepy.

Every senior student in every faculty cannot escape the hell known as research. The research topic I chose is 'The Image of BL Series Actors and Its Effect on Social Media Publicity.' Let me clarify, I chose this topic because it's interesting, not because I'm a fan!

Just thinking about how I'll have to stay up late fixing drafts like 'Final.docx,' 'RealFinal.docx,' and 'I-Swear-This-Is-Final.docx' makes me want the world to end. But at least I can rest easy on one thing, I don't have to come up with a new research topic. Too bad Jay isn't as lucky as me.

"My topic didn't even get approved. Help me think of something, Wan. Please~"

"Yeah, yeah, I got it," I sigh deeply, feeling helplessness.

Fine, I'll help this poor puppy out. Maybe it'll even help me get an A in this class.

"That's what I'm talking about! That's true friendship right there." Jay's eyes sparkle as he grins enthusiastically. Feeling annoyed at his overly cheerful face, I shove my notebook into my bag, sling my backpack over my shoulder, and walk out of the classroom, intending to grab lunch at the cafeteria.

"Oh, hey, Wan. Look at this," Jay suddenly smacks my arm a couple of times, making me turn to look at his phone.

"What is it?"

"Check this out. They're holding BL series auditions." He shows me the screen, which displays a Facebook page from a production company announcing auditions for a new BL series.

"Deep Dive: Into Your Heart. Doesn't the name sound familiar? Isn't this the series where your bias got the lead role? The one you've been blabbing about all week?"

"Yeah, yeah," I nod enthusiastically.

This series is about swimmers, friendship, competition, and some love triangle stuff, which Nine, my bias, will play a leading role as another male lead. Or, as BL fans call it, the bottom, but really, it should be called male lead and another male lead. Makes sense, right?

"Here's your chance, Wan. You should try auditioning."

"Huh!?" Jay's words make me stop in my tracks, my eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

"What? Why would I audition?"

"Why not? I even tried once, but I didn't make it," he pouts, recalling his less-than-glorious past.

See, Jay once wanted to break into the entertainment industry. He said it seemed like an easy way to get rich (he probably forgot that only ten percent of people succeed in this field). But no matter how many auditions he went to, he never passed. It's not like he looks bad. He doesn't, but either his character didn't fit the role, or his acting just wasn't good enough.

I shake my head. "Not happening."

"Come on, trust me. They care about looks first, and you've got the look—big eyes, sweet face, the whole 'popular uke' type. Use your

face to make a living, man."

"Even if I look the part, if my acting sucks, it's pointless. I can't act," I roll my eyes. Just because I'm a communications major doesn't mean I know how to act. My program is more focused on marketing, not performing arts.

"Nobody's born knowing how to act. If you pass the audition, they'll send you to acting workshops," Jay keeps pushing.

"No—"

"Look, your research is about BL actors, right? If you get the part, you'll have firsthand experience for your thesis. Plus, you'll get closer to Nine. Who knows, you might even get famous, and then you won't have to worry about job hunting after graduation. It's a win-win!" My best friend is practically a paid advertiser for this audition.

"Come on, Wan. I wanna have a celebrity friend."

"...Nope," I insist, though my eyes start to dart around uncertainly.

His argument is kind of tempting, but I have no acting experience, no connections in the industry, and no one to guide me. I'm just a regular fanboy. Even if I audition, there's no way I'll make it.

"Wan, opportunities like this don't come around often."

"...No."

"Wan—"

"No, no, no. Drop it. Let's go eat," I hook my arm around Jay's neck, cover his mouth with my hand to shut him up, and drag him toward the cafeteria.

Stop overthinking. Stop fantasizing. The entertainment industry is way too competitive, and I was never interested in this path anyway.

Me, auditioning for a BL series?

Not a chance in hell...

Take 2, Action!

No way, where would that be...

"Numbers 070 to 075, please get ready." The female staff member walked around calling the audition participants to prepare to enter the room for their test in front of the judges.

I, wearing a name tag with the number 073 written in the center of my chest, took a deep breath to calm my nerves while standing up to join the line, preparing myself to enter the slaughter room.

That's right. In front of Jay, I acted tough, but when I got back to my condo, I lay down with my hand on my forehead (actually, I wanted to use my foot, but it couldn't reach) and thought about it for three whole days. In the end, I decided to attach my photo and an introduction clip with the application form and sent an email to the organizers.

I weighed the pros and cons and found that there were indeed more advantages. If I passed the audition, I would gain career opportunities, research material, and the chance to work with actors I admire. I might even discover my true dream. If I didn't pass, it would still be a life experience. There's nothing to lose.

When I sent the email for the preliminary audition, I didn't think I would pass. I sent it with a bare face, unstyled hair, and recorded the introduction clip in my bedroom. When I received the email calling me to audition today, I was shocked. Since they went through the trouble of calling me, I decided to give it my all. I even asked a friend majoring in performing arts to tutor me in a crash course, just enough to understand the basics of acting.

The friend who helped me said I had potential. Acting requires a certain sense, and I learn quickly. When Jay heard that, he pumped me up, saying I would definitely pass. I really want to drag him here to the hall right now. What am I going to pass with, huh? All the guys around me are handsome and striking. I look like a chick among champion fighting cocks worth hundreds of thousands or even millions. You get the picture, right?

But whatever, I didn't expect anything anyway. Oh, I forgot to mention, the role I'm auditioning for is 'Sky,' a supporting character who is basically the villain. I chose to audition for this role because the physical description of the character matched me the most. Besides, if I'm going to try, I might as well aim for a prominent role! If I'm going to be bold, I should go all out!

"Oh!"

While I was clenching and unclenching my fists, taking deep breaths to focus, I suddenly heard a commotion around me. When I turned to look, my heart pounded so hard that it echoed in my ears, because the two male leads of this series had just walked through the door.

Of course, my eyes automatically focused on my bias. Today, Nine was wearing an oversized hooded shirt, jeans, and glasses (probably fashion glasses), and he entered the room with his familiar polite smile before stopping at the front.

"Hello, I'm Nine. Today, Third and I are here to cheer everyone on." He spoke with a smile and his signature crescent-shaped eyes.

I pressed my lips together to hold back a smile, my heart racing with excitement and joy. I kind of guessed he might come to surprise us, but seeing him in person made me so happy. It's a shame I didn't bring my big camera today. The moment I saw his face, my fan spirit kicked in. I wanted to take his picture so badly!

Honestly, even though Nine didn't have his hair styled or wear a full face of makeup like at events, just a little lip balm, his aura still shone brightly like golden light radiating from him. It made everyone else in the room look dim in comparison.

"I hope to work with you all. Good luck, we're rooting for you," he said with a slight whine at the end of his sentence, which made even the guys feel fond of him.

Just seeing Nine's face and receiving his well-wishes pumped me up. I completely forgot that I only intended to try it out. Now, all I can think about is giving it my all. I have to land this role!

"Do your best. I believe everyone here has prepared thoroughly for the audition and is very dedicated. I wish you all..."

The other actor who came with Nine, a handsome and serious-looking guy named Third, was also encouraging the participants. But I couldn't hear him because my entire focus was on Nine. I was so dazed that I didn't snap out of it until the female staff member pushed me forward to enter the audition room.

Crap. What were my lines again? I forgot! Shit, shit, shit! God, spirits, anyone, please help me!!!

Some supernatural being must have heard my prayers because the audition went smoothly (I think).

Okay, to be honest, it wasn't perfect but not terrible either. When I walked in, I slipped up a bit, and I stuttered slightly during my introduction. I mean, come on. Standing in front of experienced producers, directors, and staff would make any newbie like me nervous.

But I did well (I think) during the script test. The scene was an argument with 'Copter,' the main character. I poured all my emotions into it. At least someone in there praised me, saying I had good potential and my gaze conveyed emotions effectively. The whole thing probably took less than ten minutes. Before I knew it, I was bowing in thanks and walking out.

I felt kind of dazed, wondering, 'That's it? I waited nearly six hours for this?'

Once it was over, I felt both relieved and anxious. If I passed, I would sign a contract with the production company. It would be great if I got it, but if not, that's fine. I wasn't expecting much...

"Wan, you're really talented."

At that moment, something unexpected happened. As I walked past the two main actors sitting near the exit observing the auditions, Nine suddenly looked at my name tag and said that. He even gave me a thumbs-up and smiled at me.

"T-tha... thank... thank you!" I froze for a second in shock before stammering my thanks.

Am I dreaming? Or did he recognize me as his fan? No way. I always wear a hat and mask when following him to events, and I've barely spoken to him.

But Nine complimented me! My bias watched my audition and said I was talented! Aaaaahhh!!!

At that moment, my brain almost short-circuited from happiness. I wanted to talk to him a bit more, but I didn't want to hold up the line, so I quickly walked out of the room. Before leaving, I glanced at the other lead actor sitting next to Nine. That guy just kept his eyes on the next contestant and didn't even glance at me.

My heart was still fluttering with excitement as I left the room. But at the same time, I furrowed my brows in thought.

Other than Nine, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' also got 'Third Tharit Charaslecha,' another rising star actor, to take the lead role as well. He had acted in the same series as Nine before, but they were not paired together. He was just the main character's friend, that's all. His acting was also outstanding and talked about, no less. And there were quite a few fans who shipped him with Nine when the series aired. Plus, they are under the same agency. The agency probably saw the opportunity to make money, so they got to play the lead roles together in this one.

When it was announced, I remember that the fangirls squealed and cheered so much that the hashtags 'ThirdNine' and 'ThreeNine' trended on Twitter. From a rowing boat, it became an official ship, a cruise ship, or something like that. But personally, I'm not a BL fans. I don't ship Nine with anyone. I keep it solo, keep it main. Whoever he works with, I'm ready to support them all.

But I'll make an exception for this one person. I really don't get along with this Third guy at all.

Ah, ah, before you say I'm biased—yeah, maybe I am. But I feel weird about this guy. Like, I follow Nine to events often, right? And this other guy also appears with Nine a lot. I don't know if it's just me, but I feel like he keeps a distance from my bias. Nine seems to approach him, starting conversations and all, but he gives short answers. Not just at events either. Even when I watch interview clips or behind-the-scenes footage, I still feel the same way.

Let me say, it's not just me who thinks this way. Some fans from our side think the same. It even reached the point where a fan from our side commented on Twitter that Third seems cold towards Nine. But fans from the other side defended him, saying Third is an introvert, speaks little, and may not be good at building relationships with

others. So, there was some back-and-forth, but I didn't join in. My main account is just for posting pictures like a fansite. My alt account is only for trending and voting. I don't use it to follow these dramas.

But I agree with what people are saying. I think this guy acts cold toward Nine. Even though they're under the same agency. Seeing it with my own eyes like this makes it even clearer. Does he not want to work with my bias or what? Hmph, but who cares? I believe there are plenty of people who would love to work with someone as talented as Nine!

This guy is probably just arrogant, thinking he's so handsome (even if I don't like his face, I have to admit he's ridiculously good-looking), his acting is passable (like, it's fine), and he has quite a lot of fans, so now he wants to act superior or something! In this industry, just having a pretty face won't get you far if you have an unpleasant personality like that! And I haven't even mentioned his overall image, which leans a bit towards the bad-boy vibe. In front of the camera, he likes to do that smirking thing like some edgy anime character, you know what I mean? Which is not my style at all.

Anyway, I don't like this Third guy, and I don't want Nine to be shipped with him. Especially now that people are paying extra attention because using ships as a marketing tactic is disrespectful to the LGBTQ+ community. Profiting off other people's identities like that, trying to make fans fantasize unnecessarily, doesn't feel right. Plus, there could be problems if it's revealed that either of them has a partner.

For me, Nine is too talented to waste time playing along with these ships. It's 2024. The era of fooling BL fans is over! But I guess the agency thinks having a ship will bring in more couple fans to support them in addition to the solo fans. From a business perspective, sometimes the drive for social issues weighs less than the profit. So,

if it's absolutely necessary to sell a pair, I wish it were someone else. Not that walking block of granite.

I turned around, then leaned my face toward the window to look inside the room and see the situation. I saw Nine tilt his face to whisper something to Third, but that guy kept a completely blank expression, not speaking, not responding. He only kept his eyes on the person casting and didn't even glance at Nine.

See! Isn't that annoying?!

I exhaled sharply in irritation, but there was nothing I could do. The production already decided to make the series for these two. Besides, I had watched Third's acting before and had to admit that he's a skilled newcomer. In terms of performing as an actor, I admire him. But other than that, he seems like a lost cause.

"If you finish casting, you can leave right away. We will announce the casting results on our page next week," the female staff member said to me while I was retrieving the bag I had left, smiling sweetly.

I figured she probably wanted to clear people out of the area as quickly as possible. Come to think of it, I only just realized how many people want to become actors. For this project alone, there were seven roles to cast, but no less than four hundred people came to audition. Well, if you become famous from acting in a BL series, you'll have enough to live off for a lifetime. Just landing one product endorsement can earn you millions, and if you get several, multiply that. Plus, fans from our side and abroad spend a lot. Like for Nine's birthday event, there were extravagant money bouquets and branded gifts from head to toe. Whatever he wants, fans buy it. He hardly has to spend his own money, and he gets this kind of treatment at every event he attends.

Money, and only money, rules everything. But that's normal. Everyone wants money because poverty is terrifying. However, one truth about this industry is that not everyone succeeds. Only ten to

twenty percent can reach that level, and even at their peak, their career usually lasts just four to five years before it stabilizes and their popularity gradually fades over time. It's a highly competitive industry, especially in the BL sector, where new faces pop up every day. Consumers these days have countless choices.

High risk comes with high reward, which is why everyone wants to try their luck. But I don't think I'll be one of those lucky ones. Just seeing Nine today, getting encouragement from him, hearing him say my name, and even complimenting me, my life is already complete!

Bzzzz

My phone vibrated in my bag, alerting me to a new message. When I took it out, I saw it was from Jay, asking for an update.

[Have you finished the casting yet?]

[Tell me quickly, I want the scoop.]

[I finished. I got to see Nine, too.]

[Damn, lucky bastard. So, how did you do? What did the judges say?]

[Some people complimented me, but I probably won't make it. There are too many talented and handsome people.]

[Hey! If they complimented you, it means they've got their eye on you. Trust me, you have a shot!]

I smiled at my friend's message. Jay sure knows how to hype things up. I bet he really wants a friend who's a celebrity.

[Results come out next week. Let's wait and see.]

[But there are hundreds of people auditioned for my role. I probably don't stand a chance. If I make it, I'll eat dog food.]

I typed confidently.

One percent chance of passing. Ninety-nine percent chance of failing. If this were the lottery, I'd definitely hit the jackpot this round!

[Got it!]

[I'm taking a screenshot, Wan. Even if you delete it later, it's too late. 55555.]

Jay's teasing didn't faze me in the slightest. Let him tease all he wants. I'll never have to eat dog food anyway!

I had heard people say the famous life principle, 'The only certainty is uncertainty,' countless times, but I never thought it would apply to me today...

"Woof woof! Wan, what would you like to eat? Beef flavor? Liver flavor? Or how about wet food? There's chicken in gravy too. What do you like? Hahaha."

Jay laughed heartily, thoroughly enjoying himself while we stood in a pet supply store near our university after class.

"Hey, hey, how about this one? Salmon flavor with a fur-enhancing formula!"

"I'll choose it myself," I snapped through gritted teeth while scanning the shelves.

Yep. I had said I'd eat dog food if I passed the audition, and now it's happening. Yesterday evening, the production company posted the

casting results on their Facebook page. Turns out, the role of 'Sky,' a supporting character in the series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart*, went to me—Achawin Sukkoson.

Damn it, I actually passed! How the hell did that happen? When I saw my name, I screamed so loud until my little sister rushed in with a baseball bat, thinking a burglar had broken in. But when she found out I passed the audition, she screamed louder than me.

"P'Wan!!! What! How! When! When did you audition, and how did you pass? Tell me, tell me!"

"I don't know!!!"

I didn't know how to answer her because I genuinely had no idea how I passed. At first, I thought there had been a technical error, maybe they listed the wrong name. But about an hour after the announcement, I received a call from the production team inviting me to discuss signing the contract tomorrow.

So, no mix-up. I passed the audition and am officially going to be in a series.

"So, what do you want to eat?" Back to the present, Jay stood with his arms crossed, smirking and pressuring me to pick out the dog food I promised to eat.

Mistakes are part of being human. I messed up once but won't mess up again. So, I did some research on dog food that humans can safely eat without torturing their taste buds.

And I found it!

"I'll take this one," I said, smirking as I grabbed a pack of goat's milk tablets from the shelf. Humans can drink goat's milk too, right? And I checked, this brand only uses human-safe ingredients.

"Hey, hey, what's that?" Jay's face changed as he glared at me.
"You're cheating, Wan"

"How is this cheating? This is dog food. Phi, this goat's milk tablets for dogs, right?"

"Yes," the store owner confirmed from behind the counter.

I smirked triumphantly as I walked to pay. See? I kept my promise.

"You bastard," Jay cursed as we left the store.

"What? I didn't break my promise. I said I'd eat dog food but never specified what kind." I tore open the packet and popped a goat's milk tablet into my mouth, casually flashing a victory sign.

I bet Jay wanted to record a video to embarrass me online, but sorry, I'm too clever for that. Hahaha.

"Tastes good, actually. Want one?"

"...Can humans really eat that?"

"Of course. It's sweet." I munched on another tablet, enjoying the taste. Honestly, it was just like any regular milk tablet. But don't try this yourselves, guys. Normal milk tablets are cheaper than the dog version.

Jay, curious as always, grabbed one and tried it. So now, we had two fourth-year university guys standing in front of a pet store eating dog food. What a sight.

"Still, who would've thought you'd actually pass the audition?"

"Wait, didn't you say I'd definitely get the part?"

"I was just encouraging my friend. I saw how hard you worked," he said, patting my shoulder, his eyes shining with genuine happiness.

"But when I found out you passed, I was so relieved! This is your chance, Wan. If you're lucky and the series gets popular, you'll be set. This is the first step that could open up so many more opportunities for you."

"...Honestly, Jay, I'm still not sure," I sighed.

I mean, I'm happy—of course, I am. But to be honest, I've never really wanted to be an actor. Now that the opportunity is here, I feel unsure. I don't know if this is the right path or what I should do next.

"It's okay. Life is all about trial and error," Jay said, as if he could read my mind, offering a comforting smile.

"...Yeah, you're right." I finally managed to smile back.

After all, I got this role fair and square. No connections, no shortcuts. Since I've been given this opportunity, I should give it my all. Who knows? Maybe I'll discover a new dream along the way.

Besides, this is a golden chance for me to get to know Nine beyond the artist-fan dynamic. We'll get to talk, work together. It's more than a dream come true, isn't it?

I'm starting to get excited. I can't wait to start filming the series!!!

Take 3, Action!

Sometimes life takes an unbelievable turn in the blink of an eye. Take me, for example. Two weeks ago, I was just a fourth-year university student buried in stress over my research topic, worrying about whether I'd be able to find a job after graduation. But at this very moment, I am standing and stretching my neck in front of a grand house in the Bangkok Greta area to sign a contract as an actor for a series production company.

Sometimes, the word 'house' might not be sufficient to describe the grandeur of the building in front of me. It might need to be called a building, a mansion, or a villa—something like that. But let's just say it's huge, way too big to be just a residence in my perspective, having grown up in a three-story shophouse. Maybe it also serves as an office for the company.

I send a Line message to P'Cher, the AR who called me the other day, to let her know I've arrived. After standing awkwardly in front of the house for about two or three minutes, someone comes to open the gate for me.

"Hello," I quickly raise my hands in a respectful wai to the woman in front of me. P'Cher is a beautiful woman with sharp eyes and a model-like figure. She wears gold-rimmed rectangular glasses, giving off the image of a strict female character from a drama.

"Hello there. You can park your vehicle in the lot over there. That parking area belongs to our office," she points to the left, where a small parking lot is. So, I lead my beloved Scoopy to a shaded spot before quickly following P'Cher into the house, trailing her like a chick following a mother hen.

"Let me formally introduce myself. I'm Cher, an assistant to P'Jarin, the manager. I'll also be the AR taking care of everything for you from now on. P'Jarin will be here at four in the evening. I'll take you to introduce yourself to him then."

"Okay..." I respond briefly. I'm not someone with excellent social skills or great at chatting with new people. It takes me a while to warm up to someone I've just met.

P'Cher leads me into a reception room so grand that it could rival a hotel lobby. I see a young man sitting on the sofa, looking strikingly handsome. He turns to look at us and gives a slight smile.

"Wan, this is a junior actor under the same agency. Get to know each other. You're the senior, right? I think you're two years apart."

"Hello, P'Wan. I'm Ren," the young man stands up and gives me a respectful wai, which I quickly return.

As soon as he introduces himself, I recall seeing his name in the casting announcement. Someone named Ren was also cast in a role, playing the protagonist Copter's friend. Being two years younger than me means he's only nineteen, but he's so tall that I have to tilt my head up to look at him. He must be at least 190 cm tall.

"Renji," P'Cher suddenly says.

The young man gives a sheepish smile and quickly responds, "Yeah, yeah, I'm Renji. Sorry, I'm still not used to it."

"Uh... What do you mean?" I don't quite understand.

"They added to his original name to make it more unique and avoid duplicates. His full name is Jirapat, so they decided to use Renji. From now on, whenever someone asks, introduce yourself with that name, okay? That way, you'll get used to it quickly," the AR emphasizes the point to the new actor in the agency.

Renji nods obediently, while I just stand there blinking.

"Then... do I have to change my name too?"

"We'll discuss it later. Why? You don't want to change it?"

"Well... yeah." I nod.

I've been using the name Wan, given by my parents, for twenty-one years. I've never thought about changing or adding anything to it. Besides, I'm already slow to respond. If my name changes, I probably won't even react when people call me because I won't recognize it as mine.

"It's fine. Let's talk about something else first," P'Cher changes the subject before turning to the young man. "Renji, wait here to meet P'Jarin. I'll take Wan to discuss the contract in the office."

"Okay," the young man nods obediently and gives me a smile.

I pat my junior's shoulder lightly and tell him we'll see each other later before following P'Cher into a room that's been set up like a conference room.

After we sit down and the housekeeper serves water, P'Cher who's sitting across from me, immediately gets to the point.

"Alright, first, tell me about yourself in detail."

"Sure. Uh... my name is Achawin Sukkoson. My nickname is Wan. I'm twenty-one years old and currently a fourth-year student in the Faculty of Communication Arts, majoring in Public Relations. I have one younger sister," I start recounting my rather unremarkable life history.

"And... I'm from Ayutthaya. My parents are merchants, they run a boat noodle shop. I studied in Ayutthaya from kindergarten to grade

nine. When I was about to enter high school, my parents sent me to study in Bangkok, where I took the entrance exam for a public high school. Back then, I lived with my uncle, who was my guardian. But when I entered university, I moved out and rented a condo near Phaya Thai. Then, when my younger sister started high school, she moved in with me."

"..."

"That's all." I scratch my cheek awkwardly.

"Do you have any special skills? Singing, dancing, rapping, playing sports, playing instruments? Or any hobbies?"

"Uh... I can play the guitar. I can sing decently, but I'm not good at dancing. I don't play sports often, but I'm okay at badminton and table tennis. As for hobbies, uh..." At this point, I pause. Saying that my hobby is being a fan who follows artists around would probably sound weird. So I decide to give a safer answer.

"I take photos. I've done some freelance work as an outdoor photographer."

"That's great! Then you probably already have a foundation in this field," P'Cher smiles slightly. The moment she smiles, she transforms from a strict disciplinary teacher-like figure into a kind older sister.

"Do you have an Instagram? You didn't include it in your application."

"Oh, I have an IG, but it's just for general photos," I show her my Instagram, which mainly features landscapes and sceneries with no photos of myself, hence why I didn't put it on the application.

"Do you have an Instagram where you post pictures of yourself?"

"No."

"That's fine. After signing the contract, set up an Instagram account. It'll be your portfolio for clients." She quickly concludes before getting up to grab a file from the shelf, pulling out two copies of a contract, and placing them in front of me.

"This is the artist contract, one original and one copy. Both have the same details. It includes terms, profit shares, restrictions, and other conditions. Let's go through it together, and I'll explain the details page by page. If you have any questions, feel free to ask."

The next twenty minutes are spent reading and explaining the contract details. P'Cher is very kind and doesn't rush me or show any signs of annoyance, even though I ask about almost every clause. Since I know nothing about the entertainment industry, I have to ask a lot to ensure I don't put myself at a disadvantage.

While we are discussing the contract, P'Jarin, my manager, arrives at the office. He is openly gay and introduces himself briefly before we return to discussing the contract. Both of them also take the time to explain various aspects of the entertainment industry to me.

"P's, I have a question," I decide to ask before signing the contract.

"What is it? Go ahead," P'Jarin prompts.

"I want to know why I passed the audition." I look at both of them, waiting for an answer. Hundreds of people auditioned for this role, yet somehow, I—a complete beginner in acting—managed to beat ninety-nine others. I want to know what the judges saw in me.

"Hmm... That, you'd have to ask P'Wut, the agency owner, and P'Phai, the director."

"Oh... I see." I give a dry smile. That makes sense. I'd have to ask the ones who made the decision.

"But if you ask me, your looks played a big role. You stand out a lot. And I watched your audition clip, you have potential. You might not be perfect yet, but there's something charming about you that makes people stop and look."

"Yeah, I felt the same way," P'Cher nods in agreement.

"Exactly! Good-looking people are everywhere, but those with a strong character and natural charm are rare. Even more so when they can bring that charm into acting. That's a talent, and not every actor has it. P'Wut and P'Phai must have seen that you were right for the role, which is why they chose you."

"Y-yes... thank you," I smile in relief.

The words of both of them made the heavy stone that had been weighing on my heart for days dissolve. I had always wondered if I was truly good enough to be chosen. Had I taken away the opportunity from someone else who was more suitable, who deserved the chance more than I did? However, upon receiving confirmation that I truly had potential, I felt much more at ease.

"How does my character look?"

"Hmm... looks a bit clumsy, but still cool. Approachable, but also seems like a receiving type. Like, naturally so... I can't really explain it. Let's just say it's rare to find someone with this kind of character so clearly in one person."

"..." I was at a loss for words upon hearing P'Cher's explanation. I could understand the other things, but what did they mean by 'receiving type'? These things have types too? Like, does this appearance look like a 'top,' and this one like a 'bottom'? Isn't it that anyone can be anything?

"Let's put that aside for now. Let's get to the important matters before signing the contract." P'Jarin switched from a sweet smile to

a serious expression, making me tense up.

"Uh... Yes."

"Wan, have you ever done anything bad?"

"Huh?" I blinked. Suddenly, I felt like I was being interrogated. And what does 'something bad' mean?

"Have you ever bullied a friend?"

"Huh? N-no, I haven't." I quickly shook my head. Do I look like someone who would bully others? I think I look more like someone who would be bullied instead.

"Have you ever used drugs? What about marijuana? Pot?"

"Never!"

"Have you ever gotten into a fight, used violence against someone? Have you ever physically harmed a partner? Have you done anything bad that could potentially be exposed later?"

"Never." I answered. I mean, I've slapped mosquitoes and flies before, but all those things they mentioned shouldn't be things to do to other people, right?

"If there's anything, tell me honestly right now." P'Jarin urged.

My brain finally caught up, and I understood their purpose. They were checking my background to see if I had any past actions that could be exposed on social media and tarnish my reputation, affecting the agency. Nowadays, celebrities get exposed all the time. The agency has to take precautions.

"I have never done any of those things. Really." I insisted. Though, sometimes I might not follow the Five Precepts completely, like lying

to take my mom's milk money to buy toys, drinking alcohol, slapping mosquitoes, but that's all I've ever done.

"That's good. But the agency will still run a background check. Also, we'll need all your social media accounts so we can help scan for any past posts that might be risky. If there's anything that should be deleted, better do it now to avoid problems later." P'Jarin switched back to a sweet smile, making it easier for me to breathe.

P'Cher asked in a neutral tone, "Have you ever had a partner?"

"Yes." I answered truthfully.

I mean, at this age, it's not surprising that I've had a partner before. But it was just one person, a female classmate in high school who transitioned from a friend to a girlfriend. But in the end, we broke up in our senior year because I realized I didn't feel any different between being friends and being in a relationship.

"Did it end well? Any chance of them exposing anything?"

"...I don't think so. My ex and I are still friends." I assured them.

I did like her, genuinely. I was even the one who pursued her first. But after we got together, I didn't feel any difference from just being friends. I later realized that maybe I never saw her in a romantic way, it was just admiration. She felt the same. In the end, we broke up on good terms. She even has a new partner now. We still occasionally check in on each other.

"What about now? Do you have a partner?"

"No."

"If you do, you can tell us."

"I really don't." I emphasized firmly. My studies were already exhausting, and combined with my fanboying, I barely had time for anything else. Twenty-four hours in a day weren't even enough for everything I wanted to do. Where would I find time for a partner? Even if I had one, we'd probably break up anyway because I wouldn't have time for them.

"Okay." P'Cher and P'Jarin seemed relieved and smiled.

"Alright, do you want to read through the contract again, or are you ready to sign?"

"I can sign now." I picked up the pen.

I had just checked that both copies had the same details. There were no issues, so I pressed the pen to the last page and signed my name with a heavy, pounding heart.

I've really become an artist now, haven't I? Who would've thought my life would reach this point?

"Alright, let's go sit and chat in the lounge. I still have a lot to discuss with you and Renji." P'Jarin got up with a sweet smile, linking arms with me as we walked to the lounge together.

The close interaction made me a little tense, but they weren't strangers anymore. Besides, it wasn't excessive skinship to the point of feeling uncomfortable. So, I let P'Jarin link arms with me, telling myself that I would try to get used to it quickly.

"You're not in a rush to leave today, right? Both of you?"

As soon as we sat on the sofa, P'Cher switched back to the strict older sister mode. Even though she said it like a question, her eyes clearly said, *Don't even think about leaving early.*

"No."

"Okay. We'll order some food, and in the meantime, P'Jarin and I will explain the basics of how to conduct yourselves in this industry, like how to interact with seniors, fellow artists, journalists, and fans. Whether you remember it all or not doesn't matter yet, but just listen. We'll guide you when the time comes."

"Exactly. And you'll also be sent to personality development and speech courses. I noticed that both of you speak too fast and not very clearly. You both had braces before, right?"

"Yes." Renji nodded, and so did I. I had never noticed that I spoke unclearly, but I guess it was a habit from wearing braces.

"You'll also need to visit the clinic. For Renji, I've looked into it, and you might need a slight nose enhancement to perfect your look. But it won't be in time for the series shoot since they're on a tight schedule. So, for now, makeup will have to do."

When P'Jarin said that, I, who had been listening idly, suddenly froze. I had never planned to enter the entertainment industry, so I never thought about cosmetic surgery before.

Am I really going to have to get something done?

"As for Wan..."

"..."

"Your facial features are already perfect, but you need to take extra care of your skin. First, you'll need laser treatments. Maybe a little filler here and there. I'll take you to consult a doctor. This clinic is top-tier, celebrities use it all the time, so don't worry about quality." P'Jarin smiled sweetly. Meanwhile, I started sweating because all of this sounded expensive.

"Who... will pay for this?"

"The agency, of course. But sometimes clinics sponsor it, so we just post reviews for them on Instagram..."

Hearing that, I secretly let out a sigh of relief. My family isn't wealthy, so if I had to pay for it myself, I wouldn't be able to afford it.

Now that I think about it, an agency probably spends a lot to develop an artist. Sending them to various classes, training them... But if they become famous, the revenue must be much greater than the investment, right? Otherwise, why would production companies keep scouting and signing new actors all the time?

"Ah, let's start with the first thing, which is how to carry yourself in public. Keep this in mind, as long as you're not in your own condo, no matter the situation, you must smile. No making faces. No sulking or frowning. Absolutely not. And then..."

And for the next two hours, a flood of information poured out from P'Jarin and P'Cher. Renji seemed to handle it easily since he had some experience in the industry, whether in modeling or as an extra on set. But for me, I was a complete newbie. I hardly knew anything at all, just sitting there with a blank expression, listening to the massive amount of information. My brain could barely process it, and for a moment, I even thought 'can I still cancel the contract now?'

Being an artist doesn't seem easy at all. Can I really do this?

"Alright, let's call it a day for now. See you on the profile shoot day." P'Jarin said while popping a piece of pickled mango into his mouth as the digital clock next to the TV showed 7:30 PM.

I placed my empty milk tea cup, which had been ordered via delivery, on the table. The empty cup reflected my current state of mind, completely blank.

"Oh, if there's any scheduling matter, like when you need to attend classes or go somewhere, P'Cher will be the one to notify you. You'll get a daily work schedule summary every night at 11 PM, and there will also be a weekly schedule. Okay?"

"Yes."

"Oh, almost forgot. Both of you, I'll send the pilot script in Line. Try reading it and getting familiar with it." P'Cher spoke while quickly tapping on their phone, sending us the file.

"This script was written specifically by the production team. There's no original novel. P'Phai, the director, just approved the first draft. Read and get familiar with it first, and on the 16th, there will be the first workshop class with other actors."

"Okay." I nodded, starting to feel excited because that meant in just two weeks, I would get to meet Nine up close, as a coworker!

"If you have any questions or anything you're unsure about in the meantime, feel free to message me or P'Jarin. See you on profile shoot day, Saturday at 8 AM. Don't be late." The female AR wrapped up before finally letting the two of us go home.

I pressed my palms together in a respectful wai to the older seniors before walking out of the office with Renji. I still felt like I was floating. I couldn't believe I was about to enter the entertainment industry...

"P'Wan, how are you getting home?"

"I rode my motorbike here," I told the junior as we walked towards the parking lot together. I was thinking that if Renji needed to book a ride, I could drop him off at a train station or even at his house if it wasn't too far.

Since we're in the same company and acting in the same series, we'd be working together for a long time. I needed to build some connections, so I'd have someone to share my struggles with.

"Okay, I thought P'Wan came alone. I was going to offer you a ride." The other person smiled gently, looking at me like a puppy that hadn't been weaned yet, while pulling his car keys out of his jeans pocket.

The sound of a car unlocking echoed in the parking lot. I gave a weak smile when I realized that the car responding to the sound was a white metallic Porsche Taycan. If I remembered correctly, that car was worth over seven million baht.

Kid, whose son are you?! And here I was thinking about giving him a ride on my motorbike. Have some self-awareness, Wan!

"See you on Saturday, P'Wan." The junior waved at me warmly.

"Ah-haha, see you." I waved back rapidly, forcing a smile to hide my embarrassment as I watched the luxury sports car drive off. Then I let out a deep sigh.

And this was just the first day... How am I going to survive this? Sigh.

Two weeks passed by in the blink of an eye.

Maybe because ever since I signed the contract, I had so many things to do. Aside from starting to write the first chapter of my research paper for my professor, I had to take personality development classes, speech training, visit beauty clinics, shoot profile pictures, and so much more. Normally, I wasn't the hyper-alert, high-energy type to begin with, so nowadays, the moment I

got back to my room, I would drag my exhausted body to the shower and almost pass out instantly.

"P'Wan, you come home drained every day. Are you going to die before you get famous?" View teased me.

I was wondering the same thing myself, was I going to die before making it as an artist? It seemed like it would take some time before my body and mind could fully adjust to this new routine. Lately, every time I heard my alarm, I'd whine a little before dragging myself out of bed. But not today.

Today, I shot up the moment my alarm rang, rushed to the shower, and got ready without hesitation, because today was the first acting class for the cast of *Deep Dive, Into Your Heart*. Today, I would finally meet Nine!

Ever since I passed the audition, I hadn't had time to go take pictures of Nine at his events. I was totally bummed out about not seeing my favorite actor. But as the old saying goes, good things come to those who wait. Today, I'd get to be closer to Nine than even his top-tier fans had ever been!

I had been psyching myself up for days, telling myself to stay calm, not to act weird or make Nine uncomfortable. I barely slept last night from the excitement. I kept staring at our group chat, reading and rereading Nine's message '*See you all tomorrow.*' probably over twenty times!

"Wow, you're glowing today. If I didn't know you were going to an acting class, I'd think you were going on a date." View commented as I grabbed my backpack. My little sister had just woken up, her hair messy, but she still dragged herself to the door to see me off.

"Of course. If you were meeting your favorite person, wouldn't you be happy?"

"Sure, sure. Hope you get lots of moments with him." She rolled her eyes but smiled slightly.

I clicked my tongue at her before stepping out of my room with my heart soaring. I prayed that today would go smoothly and be a happy day for me.

Have you ever had expectations, only for things to not turn out the way you hoped?

Because I have. All the time!

"P-Please... huff... Studio ATZ is in this building, right?" I panted, completely out of breath after sprinting four hundred meters from the parking lot, and stammered out my question to the security guard at the entrance.

"Yes, son. It's on the third floor."

"Tha—huff—thank you!" I quickly pressed my palms together in gratitude before dashing towards the emergency staircase. I wasn't going to waste time on escalators, because I was already twenty minutes late!

I could blame it on bad luck, but honestly, it was mostly my own stupidity.

See, I'm originally from the countryside. Even though I've lived in Bangkok for over six years, I rarely travel around. I only know places near my home, school, university, or event halls.

Last night, when P'Boe sent the acting class location, I skimmed through it and thought, 'Oh, I know this place. It's in Lat Phrao.' But I was dead wrong, it wasn't Lat Phrao. It was Lat Pla Khao. And on

top of that, I overestimated my own sense of direction and didn't use a map.

So yeah. Jackpot.

By the time I realized I was in the wrong place, I had only twenty minutes left before class started. I had to channel my inner street racer, weaving through traffic like a menace. **B**ut still, I ended up being twenty minutes late.

"I'm... here... huff!" I gasped as I pushed open the door, giving a sheepish smile as all seven actors and staff turned to look at me at once.

Just then, my heart-fluttering moment was shattered by a deep, steady voice from someone. I could feel a piercing gaze from the side and found that the owner of that gaze was Third Tharit, the other lead actor of this project.

"Okay, okay. Now that everyone's here, let's get to it. Each of you introduce yourselves again, and then we'll warm up. Alright, starting with Renji." P'Luang, the acting coach, spoke up, beginning the ice-breaking session before getting into character.

Third's sharp eyes were still on me. That gaze, filled with obvious disapproval, made my face heat up with embarrassment. I quickly looked away and took a deep breath, focusing on the lesson in front of me before I got scolded by the director or acting coach.

The acting lesson went on for about an hour and a half. Then, P'Luang announced a ten-minute break, letting everyone go to the restroom or relax their posture.

"P'Wan."

The moment the break started, Renji quickly walked over to greet me and plopped down beside me, tilting his head and looking up

with wide, innocent eyes like a puppy looking for a playmate. That alone made me, someone who still barely knew the other actors, feel relieved. It made me want to raise my hands and wai him right away.

"How's the lesson going? Can you keep up?"

"Well... maybe." I gave a weak smile. This was my first time seriously studying acting, so I had to try much harder than the others, who already had a foundation or prior acting experience.

"Wan."

Then, a familiar, gentle voice called my name. My heart pounded as if someone was beating a drum in my chest when I saw Nine walking toward me. His incredibly perfect face held a friendly smile.

"Can I just call you Wan? When we introduced ourselves earlier, I saw that we're the same age."

"Y-yes..." I stammered, my ears burning hot. The shining star on stage, the person I used to only admire from afar, was now the one approaching me first. And now, he was sitting right next to me. Not even half a meter apart. Aaaahh!!

"I heard you got lost before coming here. Where did you end up?"

"Uh... I took the wrong route from Lat Pla Khao and ended up in Lat Phrao." I answered awkwardly, rubbing my neck in embarrassment. From now on, I won't rely on Luang Pu Mun anymore. Bangkok is cruel. Huuu...

"Sorry for making you guys wait."

"It's alright. Everyone makes mistakes." Nine smiled with squinted eyes.

Just that gentle smile made me feel light, as if I was floating. Like I was lying on a soft, fluffy cotton candy cloud. Encouragement from my bias is the best thing ever!

"Mistakes happen because of carelessness, don't they?"

But then, suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck the cloud I was lying on. The once bright blue sky turned into a stormy gray, as if a tornado was about to destroy the city.

I turned to meet the owner of that voice. Of course, it was none other than the ice-cold lead actor standing nearby with his arms crossed.

"If you paid more attention to today's lesson, you wouldn't have made such a simple mistake like getting the location wrong."

"Third," Nine warned.

The man in question let out a soft scoff before striding out of the room. His off-camera personality was as cold as ice, completely different from the friendly bad-boy image he showed in front of the media.

Nine let out a long sigh. Renji turned pale, while I sat frozen, my whole body going numb with embarrassment.

"Don't take it to heart. Third is just really serious about things. He doesn't like it when people are late," Nine told me.

"...Okay," I replied softly, my brain still unable to fully process everything. But there was one feeling that stood out clearly.

I don't like that guy!!!

Call it childish if you want, say I'm holding a grudge over nothing, but come on! I know I was wrong for being late, but people make

mistakes sometimes, don't they? It's not the end of the world! Even P'Phai and P'Luang didn't scold me, so why was he making such a big deal out of it? Has he never made a mistake in his life? Did he really have to rub it in that hard?

"I'll step outside for a bit," Nine patted my shoulder lightly before getting up and walking out of the room.

Meanwhile, I leaned back against the wall and closed my eyes in frustration.

"P'Wan... P'Third is scary," Renji whispered, his imaginary ears and tail drooping even though he wasn't even the one being scolded.

"Like a Rottweiler." I gritted my teeth and muttered. I know talking behind someone's back isn't good, but for that guy, I'll let it slide this once!

See? My instincts weren't wrong. I already knew it, there's no way that guy and I could ever get along!

Take 4, Action!

Click!

"You're back, famous star! How was it? How was today's acting class?"

As soon as I arrived back at the condo in the evening, my mischievous little sister, who had been at tutoring all day but was still diligently sitting on the floor in front of the sofa, practicing TGAT English exam questions, lifted her face and asked me with a look of eager curiosity.

"How was it? It sucked, obviously." I let out a sharp sigh, threw my bag onto the sofa, and plopped down. The delicious shabu I just had for dinner didn't help ease my lingering irritation at all. The more I thought about that guy's tone and expression, the more pissed off I got again!

"Huh? What happened? What's wrong?" View was confused because it was rare for me to show this level of frustration so clearly.

"...Nothing. Just a little annoying thing."

"What thing?"

"Nothing much. Forget it." I replied evasively, not wanting to dig up the irritating topic. If I started talking about it, it would go on forever.

Actually, after that, the cold-hearted leading actor didn't say anything to me again. To be precise, he didn't even glance at me.

So, the acting class went by smoothly. As soon as the class ended, the great one immediately excused himself and left, saying he had an evening event to attend, so he needed to go prepare. Nine also left with him. The other actors all went their separate ways. Since Renji and I were both free, we decided to go to the mall, eat shabu, and then head home.

My day was almost a happy one, if not for that damn Third saying something so irritating. I made a firm resolution that from now on, I will never be late again. I will focus on acting, diligently memorize my lines, and even as a newbie, I will give it my all. I won't be a burden to the production or a target for snide remarks.

And that guy, just wait. If he ever makes a mistake, I will roast him mercilessly!

"Okay." View seemed to sense that I didn't want to talk about it, so she didn't push further. That's one good thing about her. Even though she can be spoiled, as the youngest daughter who's always pampered by our parents, she knows how to read the room and rarely makes things difficult for me.

"So, how was it? Did you get a lot of moments with Nine?"

"He actually talked to me. We just call each other by name now since we're the same age. He even encouraged me."

The moment I mentioned my bias, my sulky face immediately transformed into a bright, beaming smile. Nine is genuinely adorable both on and off camera. He's a celebrity who isn't arrogant or stuck-up in the slightest. So calm and always cheering others on. A true human vitamin.

I'm so proud. I really picked the right person as my bias!

"That must've been such a thrill!"

"Yeah! I was so nervous. I kept debating whether I should tell him I'm his fan. But I was afraid it'd make him uncomfortable." I rambled on.

I mean, I already told him that I've been following his work, but I didn't dare admit that I like him so much that I go to take photos of him, collect his merch, and help trend hashtags for him. Because now, we're colleagues. I don't know if he'd feel awkward knowing that I'm actually a hardcore fan.

"Maybe you can tell him after filming wraps. Like, surprise! From a fan to a co-star! I think he'd be happy that his fan has succeeded." View suggested.

I agreed. I'd tell him at the wrap party. I'd even mention that I had met him before when he wasn't famous yet. I bet Nine would be so surprised.

"Hey, hey, I wanna know something." My little sister suddenly sprang up from the floor and plopped onto the sofa next to me, leaning in close with sparkling eyes. She asked excitedly, "How about Third? Is he super handsome in real life? Is he nice?"

Click!

The veins on my temple immediately bulged at the mention of that guy's name. That icy expression of his, as if he was above everyone else, and those judgmental eyes were still engraved in my brain.

"He's only got his looks going for him. His personality is absolute trash."

"Huh?! Are you serious?"

"Dead serious. Listen to me, just stop liking that guy. I'm telling you, he's not as great as he looks on screen!"

Being triggered, I lost control. Even though I originally planned not to talk about it, I ended up venting everything to my sister. I told her how I went to the wrong place and ended up being late for class, how Third scolded me, and how he kept giving me those sharp looks even during break!

"Ohh, so that's what happened." View, who had been listening attentively, nodded in understanding. Meanwhile, my throat felt dry, so I got up to grab a bottle of water from the fridge and chugged it down.

"I mean, yeah, he was a bit too serious, but it's understandable. Some people are super strict. If someone's late and causes delays, it can be frustrating."

"What!?" My sister's words made me freeze. I turned to glare at her. "Are you siding with him, View?"

"Maybe? I don't know. I like him, okay? Among the fans, it's well known that he's like this. Honestly, it's no big deal. And you were actually late, weren't you?" She tried to reason with me, defending her favorite actor.

My face darkened. I didn't want to hear a word of it.

"But it's not like I committed a crime, right? Did he really have to make such a big deal out of it? You didn't see the way he looked at me, View. I felt like a tiny ant under his gaze. Do you get that?" I grumbled, feeling frustrated. In all my life, no one had ever made me feel this humiliated. He was the first!

"Maybe you're overthinking. Maybe he was just looking normally. He has a naturally stern face."

"No! He straight-up scolded me. How is that me overthinking? Don't be biased, View!"

"Really? Hmm... Maybe he's not as nice as I thought." My sister's large eyes reflected hesitation.

I immediately felt victorious, puffing out my chest. "Exactly! Not nice at all. But Nine, on the other hand, is just as sweet as he looks on camera."

"Oh..." View replied briefly.

I narrowed my eyes at her suspiciously. "What? Why that tone?"

"What? This is just how I talk! Stop being so suspicious." View furrowed her brows at me.

I raised an eyebrow, unconvinced.

"What, are you still mad that I said I didn't like your bias? That was ages ago!" View sighed dramatically before explaining in an exasperated tone, "I already told you, I don't hate him. I just don't feel drawn to him. But it's not like I despise him or anything. When I said I don't like him, I meant I'm just indifferent. He's not my type, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it." I replied half-heartedly.

To be honest, View and I had already fought about this before. I love Nine so much, right? But when I told her, she just went, 'I don't really like him.' That led to a long argument, and I even ignored her for a whole day until we sat down to talk it out. That's when I finally understood what she meant.

Sounds dumb, huh? But siblings fight over dumb things all the time. Once I understood her reasoning, I let it go. Still, I couldn't help feeling a little annoyed whenever it was brought up. You know how when you really like someone, you want the people close to you to like them too? It's kinda like that.

But my sister, man... She doesn't like an adorable, kind person like Nine, and instead, she goes for some guy who's only good-looking but talks like he owns an entire farm of attack dogs. It pisses me off so much!

She probably only likes him because he's (very) handsome. Sure, he acts well, but there are plenty of other good-looking, talented actors out there.

Why the hell did my sister have to like that guy!?

"Anyway, just go like another actor. Don't like this Third guy." I concluded. View nodded absentmindedly, but I had a feeling she was just humoring me. She'd have to experience it herself to understand.

"Did you eat yet?"

"I did. What about you?"

"Alright, my friend treated for her birthday," my sister said while glancing at my state, both my hair and clothes reeked of shabu.

"You should go take a shower and get some rest."

"I'm not sleeping yet," I returned the water bottle to the fridge and stretched lazily to the right and left, my eyes filled with determination. "I'm going to read the script for a bit."

"Whoa, so hardworking!"

"Of course, I can't let anyone call me a burden," I scoffed under my breath. Let me tell you, my grudge has ignited the flames of my learning spirit to the max!

"Don't overwork yourself, take some rest. I want my brother to be a star, not a zombie."

"Yeah, yeah, I got it. Just watch, View. Your brother is going to be more famous than that Third guy," I declared so loudly that my voice echoed through the small living room.

Normally, I'm a slow-life kind of person, not someone who enjoys competition. But with that Third Tharit, one day, I'll shine brighter than him!

After taking a shower and changing clothes, I sat in front of the vanity mirror and holding an iPad. I read my script, and trying to practice my facial expressions, gaze, and voice according to what I had learned. For someone like me, with zero acting background, it was quite difficult, but I put my all into it, relying on sheer determination. I was set on perfecting the role of Sky!

I glanced at the printed photo of Nine that I had taken myself and pinned onto my desk grid. Whenever I felt exhausted, like right now, I would always look at my idol's picture for motivation. Nine's smile still had the power to make me smile.

Aside from working hard so I wouldn't look down on myself, I also wanted the first project where Nine got a lead role to be as perfect as possible. No matter how much I disliked the other lead actor, Nine was more important. As a devoted fan, I had to give my all for my idol.

I would never give up!

The past two or three weeks could probably be called the most exhausting period of my life. It didn't even compare to the stress of preparing for university entrance exams.

Besides attending workshops with the other cast members, the agency also arranged for me, Renji, and four other newly signed actors to take additional acting workshops twice a week. There were

also personality development and speech training classes, plus trips to beauty clinics for various procedures. Now, small modeling gigs and product promotions were starting to come in. Sometimes, P'Jarin would take us to meet clients and pay respects to senior figures in the industry to build connections.

On top of all that, I was still a fourth-year university student who had to dedicate time to my research report. Even though I was advised to take a break if things got overwhelming, but it was my final semester. I was so close to graduation, why would I drop out now and waste time? I wanted to graduate with my friends. So, after finishing my packed daily schedule, I had to stay up late working on my research.

These days, I got a maximum of four hours of sleep per night. The dark circles under my eyes were practically screaming, 'I can't take it anymore, please sleep!' But I had to submit progress reports to my professor every class. Even if I wanted to sleep, I couldn't.

The lack of sleep made me feel groggy and sluggish at times, to the point where Jay said I looked like a sloth.

Ugh, I missed my slow-life days. Did I make the right or wrong decision by auditioning for this series? It was all because of Jay's persuasion.

"Hello, Wan."

Nine's gentle voice greeted me when I stepped into the small studio.

Today was a fitting session for the actors to try on their costumes before the official fitting two days later. So, everyone had gathered at my agency's office. But since I had a class in the afternoon, I informed them I'd be an hour late.

By the time I arrived, everyone was already in their costumes and making final adjustments.

"Hello," I immediately smiled upon seeing my favorite artist. Any lingering hesitation disappeared from my mind.

I had made the right choice by auditioning for this. Otherwise, would I ever get to chat with Nine this casually? Normally, I'd be lost in a sea of fans at an event, barely distinguishable, and Nine wouldn't even notice me.

"You look tired. Didn't get any sleep?"

"...Oh...yeah, I was working on my research last night," I admitted. I had probably only gotten two hours of sleep. My sluggish brain took two whole seconds to process Nine's question.

"No wonder, your dark circles are so bad," he chuckled softly.

I instinctively touched my under-eye area, which must have been in terrible shape. The makeup artist was definitely going to scold me for using too much concealer. But I couldn't help it, I had allergies, and when I lacked sleep, my dark circles got even worse.

"Wan, don't get carried away chatting! Come take this outfit and change, then come see me," P'Waen, the famous stylist in charge of the costumes for this series, called out in her sharp voice, beckoning me over. She shoved a shirt and pants into my hands and pointed toward the restroom outside.

Dragging my feet, I headed in that direction, eyes half-closed from exhaustion. As I was walking with my head down and eyes shut, about to turn a corner.

BAM!

"Ah..." I shook my head in a daze. Lack of sleep plus back-to-back morning classes had slowed my brain function significantly.

When I looked up and saw who I had bumped into, my sleepiness vanished instantly. It was like an electric shock ran through my body as I locked eyes with those sharp, cold, piercing eyes glaring at me.

With over twenty cast and crew members present today, my bad luck had to make me bump into Third of all people!

And there it was again! That same icy stare, brimming with disdain. If this was just his natural expression, I genuinely wondered how this guy managed to survive 21 years of life when he looked like he was picking a fight with everyone.

"Sorry," I forced myself to say gruffly. After all, it was my fault for not paying attention while walking. I had enough manners to apologize.

Third furrowed his brows, staring at me in silence. His gaze was filled with disapproval, just like that day in acting class. It instantly reignited my frustration.

"Can you move? I need to change," I said curtly. If there was enough space, I would've walked around him, but it was a narrow hallway, and he was absurdly tall and broad.

"You," he said in a cold voice. I heard him let out a sharp sigh, sounding irritated. Then, his strong hand grabbed my wrist and pulled me aside.

"Do you have a problem with me?" he asked the moment he dragged me into the kitchen area, looking around to make sure no one else was there.

I yanked my arm free and snapped back just as firmly, "Shouldn't I be asking you that? Do you have a problem with me? Because it seems like you don't like me."

"Oh? Maybe," he replied nonchalantly.

His bluntness caught me off guard. I didn't expect him to admit it so easily.

"Wait, hold on. We've never met before. What did I do to make you dislike me?"

"I don't like weaklings like you," Third said flatly, his sharp eyes scanning me from head to toe, making my face burn with anger.

"You showed up late on the first day. You seem distracted in class, always fidgeting. Today, you bumped into me and gave a half-hearted apology. Is that enough reason for me to dislike you?"

"I—"

"Are you really serious about becoming an actor?" Third didn't give me a chance to defend myself. He shot out a question that hit me right where it hurt. "Or do you just want fame and recognition, so you're using BL series as a stepping stone? Doesn't matter if you act stiff or terrible, right? Because you know you're good-looking, and sooner or later, you'll have fans supporting you anyway."

"You—!!!" My eyes widened in fury. His condescending words made my blood boil.

Okay, fine. Maybe I didn't come to this audition because I dreamed of being an actor. But that didn't mean I wasn't taking my role seriously. I never intended to disrespect the audience. Yet here he was, judging me before I even had the chance to prove myself.

"What is it? Are you angry because you're not like that? Or are you angry because I saw right through you?" He smirked. It was a cold, lifeless smile that somehow made his already handsome face seem even more devoid of warmth.

"There are so many people who enter this industry just for fame, without caring to improve their skills. Meanwhile, there are just as

many who genuinely dream of becoming actors, yet they lose opportunities because the first type of people takes up all the space. To be honest, I don't care what your reason for joining this industry is. But what I do despise is the unprofessionalism you're displaying right now."

His long-winded criticism made my ears ring with anger. So this was what it felt like to be prejudged by someone who didn't know a damn thing about me. But I guess it was fair, because I was prejudiced against him too.

"Fine, maybe I've made some mistakes. But don't you think it's a bit much to judge me without even giving me a chance to prove myself, Mr. Famous Actor?" I deliberately stressed the last part mockingly, meeting his gaze without backing down.

"I had no prior acting experience before this. This is my first time learning how to act. You might think I'm not serious, but I'm giving my all to this opportunity. I might not be naturally talented like you. I might take longer to improve. But I won't stop trying. I never intended to drag anyone down. So if that's what you're worried about, you can rest assured."

"Good. I hope you keep your word through actions, not just empty promises." He lifted the corner of his mouth, but his eyes remained cold.

"Hurry up and change your clothes." Third strode away immediately, leaving me clenching my jaw in frustration, watching his broad back as I cursed him in my head.

That bastard!!!

This was straight-up an insult. There was no way I'd ever get along with that guy. I absolutely hated people who judged others before even getting to know them.

But I refuse to be the failure he expects me to be. I'll prove to him that I can be just as professional as anyone else. I'll become an actor that people recognize and respect!

Take 5, Action!

Two days after Third and I had a big argument, the day of the fitting and press conference for the series 'Deep Dive : Into Your Heart' arrived.

I forced myself to wake up at five in the morning, booked a Grab, and arrived at the photo studio in Lat Phrao at six-thirty, a full thirty minutes before the appointment time, so no one could say I was late. I even arrived before P'Cher, my own AR. When I got there, I saw the most excellent and outstanding person in all three worlds, our series' male lead, already sitting and waiting. He was the first actor to arrive at the studio.

"Hello, P'Chuchan, P'Waen. Hello, everyone," I greeted with a smile, raising my hands in a respectful wai to the makeup artist, stylist, and other crew members. But I didn't greet Third.

He glanced at me briefly before closing his eyes, allowing P'Susan, the makeup artist, to continue enhancing his already handsome face. I didn't pay him any mind either. I hurried to change clothes and then sat in the dressing room to get my hair styled. Other actors gradually arrived, and soon, the dressing room was packed. The room was filled with chatter while everyone ate breakfast and prepared themselves so they wouldn't be late.

"Are you excited, P'?" Renji, who had just finished getting his hair and makeup done, came to sit beside me. I was the first to finish dressing and was now scrolling through my phone on the sofa outside the dressing room.

"Very excited," I replied.

Honestly, my heart was pounding, and my hands were ice-cold. I was scrolling through my phone to calm myself down. Even though I had done some modeling before, today was different because reporters would be there to observe, take photos, and shoot videos for news features. I couldn't help but be nervous since this would be my first media interview.

I'm still quite awkward and clumsy. I just hope I don't embarrass myself in front of everyone.

"I'm nervous too. I usually just play extras," Renji said, shaking his hands restlessly. If someone with experience on set was this nervous, what chance did I have?

Renji slipped his hand into mine, interlocking our fingers. His hand was just as cold as mine, making me laugh.

"It's okay. Just do your best. P'Phai and the photographers will help set the mood," P'Cher, who was sitting nearby, said in a calm voice.

I was usually a bit scared of her because she was strict, but today, I felt relieved to have her around. It was like having a mom with me.

"Okay! Let's do this!" I told Renji.

"Yeah! P' too!" He grinned widely. Even though he looked like he had just recovered from an illness, once you got to know him, he was like a fluffy Samoyed puppy. And not just any puppy, he was the pampered kind because he was the son of a famous department store owner. His family was ridiculously rich.

Renji squeezed my hand tightly as if seeking encouragement. I squeezed his hand back twice. If his hair hadn't been meticulously styled, I would have ruffled his head. He was just too adorable, this little kid. Aww.

By eight o'clock, the fitting photoshoot began. Naturally, the first pair to go was the two leads, Third and Nine, for their first set of photos. Since the reporters hadn't arrived yet, the atmosphere was more relaxed.

They started with individual shots before moving on to couple shots. Technically, Renji and I, along with the other actors who weren't scheduled yet, could wait in the lounge, but I dragged Renji to watch from the studio instead. I wanted to observe and prepare myself. But mainly, I wanted to see Nine at work.

"Move a little closer. Third, put your arm around Nine's waist. Pull him in closer. A little more. Yeah, just like that."

P'Phai, the director, shouted instructions that echoed throughout the studio, accompanied by international music playing softly in the background to set the mood for the actors. My eyes focused on Nine. He looked so focused and natural. No matter how the director and photographers guided him, he executed everything perfectly. Plus, he always had a bright smile, showing no signs of exhaustion.

My bias is such a professional. I'm really proud of him. As for the other one, well, whatever. He has to act professional because he's already made a big deal out of me (indirectly). If he didn't behave well now, he'd embarrass himself.

"Lean in a little more. Almost touching lips. Yes, just like that!" P'Phai shouted, while the photographer rapidly clicked the shutter.

I frowned and whispered to Renji, "Does it really have to be that close? Their lips are almost touching."

"I guess they're using it for promotion," Renji guessed, while I grimaced in confusion. 'Deep Dive : Into Your Heart' is supposed to be about competition, chasing dreams, and friendship. The romantic subplot isn't even that prominent. If they were using this for marketing, it seemed a little off from the series' actual plot.

Weird.

"They usually take a lot of photos first and then select later. These pictures can be used for merchandise, like photo books. It's all about marketing. They say BL fans love this stuff," Renji explained when he saw my furrowed brows.

Oh, so it's all about money. That makes sense.

Once the main leads finished their shoot, it was time for a break and a wardrobe change. Then, it was time for the supporting roles, including me. I started with solo shots. At first, I was a bit stiff, so the director and P'Cher had to step in to guide and encourage me closely. But after about five minutes, I started to settle in, embodying my character Sky, a deceptive noble brat, with ease.

"Good, now look more arrogant. Yes, just like that. Give me a condescending gaze."

A condescending gaze? Got it. My mental reference? None other than the look that our so-called righteous male lead gave me the other day!

"Okay, that's a wrap. Wan, take a break. You'll be called back for a shoot with Third and Nine when the reporters arrive."

After about twenty minutes, my session was done. I sighed in relief, bowed to thank the crew, and went to rest. I didn't forget to fist-bump Renji for encouragement before his turn.

"Wan, how was it? Everything okay?" Nine, now dressed in a new outfit, greeted me as soon as I walked into the lounge.

"Yeah," I automatically smiled at him, completely ignoring the other lead actor sitting alone on the couch. He didn't acknowledge me either, just sat there with his AirPods in, lost in his own world.

"Around eleven, the reporters will arrive. It'll be a bit crowded, but don't be nervous. Just stay calm," Nine reassured me in his usual kind and charming manner. I nodded eagerly, my eyes sparkling. I liked him even more now.

After that, we didn't talk much since Nine had to focus. I also went to change outfits and sat quietly, preparing myself as he did. After a while, a crew member came to call us for the shoot.

"The reporters are here. Watch your expressions and body language," P'Cher whispered as I was about to step out of the room.

I nodded and followed Third and Nine outside. As soon as I stepped into the studio, I was shocked to see a crowd of thirty to forty journalists surrounding the set.

"Hello, everyone. Welcome!" Nine, who was leading, flashed a sweet smile at the reporters. I followed his lead, bowing slightly and smiling at them. Meanwhile, Third, walking at the front, gave a small smile, turning on his full professional charm, completely different from his usual cold demeanor.

Professional actors, huh?

"Let's start with a trio shot, then we'll do a couple shoot with Third and Nine," P'Phai instructed. I stepped onto the set with the other two, my heart pounding. This was my first time being surrounded by so many cameras, all focused on me.

Normally, I'm always the one taking pictures of other people. I've never been the one getting photographed, so I felt a bit stiff. But I tried to act natural, pretending not to care about my surroundings, only listening to P'Phai shouting directions. I held my breath a little when I had to stand next to Third.

I'm 178 centimeters tall, which is considered quite tall by Thai male standards. But our leading man is nearly ten centimeters taller than

me, so I felt like a Smurf standing next to him. And when we were directed to look at each other with Nine standing in the middle, I got even more annoyed. Being shorter made me feel like I was being looked down on.

"Hey. Third, Wan, great inner emotion! Keep going, don't drop it!" P'Phai shouted encouragingly. I immediately glared at that guy, while he looked back at me with a teasing expression, just as the script required.

Of course, my emotions had to be intense, it's not like we liked each other to begin with.

After that, my turn was over, and they moved on to another photoshoot set with the lead actors, finishing off with a group shot of the entire cast. That nearly hour-long session drained me more than I expected. Having to stay in character and project emotions was way more exhausting than just being myself. But even though we were done shooting, there was still no break. We had to head straight to the press conference.

"Yes, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' is about chasing dreams, competition, friendship, and love within the swimming club."

Nine's smooth, pleasant voice rang out as he answered the reporters' questions in front of the crowd and numerous cameras. The interview was flowing effortlessly. Standing on Nine's left side, I glanced at him, smiling slightly in admiration. Who would've thought that from just watching his interviews on YouTube, I'd end up standing next to him in an actual press interview today?

"There has been a buzz about you two as a popular on-screen pair since your last series. Now that you're officially acting together in this one, how do you both feel about it?" a female reporter asked.

"Ah... Nine answer first, okay?" Nine turned to smile at the camera when he glanced over and saw that the other person being asked

had no reaction.

I glanced at Third. His facial expression and eyes looked emotionless.

"I've seen that there has been a hashtag created by fans since the previous project. I really want to thank everyone for adoring the two of us. Also, I'm grateful and happy that the seniors gave us this opportunity. Third and I are both very happy to be able to act in this series together. Right? Like, we were already very close, so there wasn't much adjustment needed. Just looking into each other's eyes, we already understand each other. Acting together probably made us even closer."

Nine laughed shyly while glancing at the person on his left.

I thought to myself that this kind of answer would make BL fans go crazy. When I go back and check Twitter, this clip will definitely be cut and spread everywhere.

"And how about Third? How do you feel?" The reporter shifted the focus to the lead actor of the series.

"I want to thank the fans for their support, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to work with the director, the crew, and talented actors. As for the script, from what I've read, it's very interesting and has every emotion. It should allow the audience to see the acting skills of all the actors."

He explained with a small smile before his eyes became more serious as he spoke the next sentence.

"As for the ship, I don't want people to focus on whether Nine and I are a real pair or a fan-created ship. We are actors, so I want people to focus on the acting more. We are determined to showcase the chemistry between the characters we portray for everyone to see in the series."

Those words made me, who was listening, feel slightly uneasy, but I managed to keep my expression perfectly composed, offering a small smile while listening to the reporters continue with other questions.

I didn't turn to look at the reactions of others, but inside, I felt conflicted.

On one hand, I felt that Third's answer was too harsh. Maybe because Nine had just talked about their closeness earlier. And I knew Nine said that because the company had briefed him to do so. After all, BL series inevitably have to sell the chemistry a bit to attract the BL fans fanbase. But Third chose to answer differently, focusing only on work, which made me feel like Nine got embarrassed a little. I could already predict that some fans would think the same way since there had been previous drama about this.

But on the other hand, I also thought what Third said was true. Even though I don't particularly like him, I'm not a child who can't separate logic from feelings. An actor's career should focus on acting skills, not on ships.

From a business perspective, it does help with marketing, increasing fan support. But it also has drawbacks, making people expect that you should always be paired with the same person.

Some fans can differentiate, but some can't. If things are done in a way that makes people think there's something more than just coworkers, it'll become troublesome later.

I think someone as serious as Third chose to answer this way to avoid future problems. Even though his personality isn't the best, it's clear that he really wants to be an actor. He wants to showcase his skills and be recognized.

It's hard to say which side is right. But as Nine's fan, I do feel sorry for my bias for setting things up just to be brushed aside. Couldn't

Third have found a better way to avoid the question? I don't know...

"I heard this is Wan's first series too. A complete newbie! How excited are you?"

While I was still torn over someone else's business, the reporter suddenly targeted me.

I quickly put on a big smile, just as P'Boe and P'Jarin once advised, to always smile a lot. Then, I answered as briefed.

"I'm very excited, but I'll do my best. I'll focus on learning acting properly. I'll be the character Sky in a way that won't disappoint the audience!"

"And how was it working with the other actors?"

"Everyone is very kind. Whenever I don't understand something, they always help. Nine especially helps explain things and gives me acting tips. The others too."

I turned to smile at Nine, who smiled back with eyes nearly closed. In moments like this, of course, I had to praise my bias' kindness in front of reporters. I want everyone to know that behind the scenes, he's truly a good person.

The interview continued for about twenty more minutes. Then, it was time for solo interviews. I was pulled aside for interviews with two or three other media outlets, while the two lead actors had a queue of reporters waiting to interview them one by one.

Supporting actors like me finished work first, so we could go eat before taking a few more photos, then change and go home.

"P'Wan, those two are still being interviewed."

Renji, who had already changed, gestured toward one corner of the studio. Third and Nine were still giving interviews, smiling, though they were probably tired since they hadn't had lunch yet.

"That's what happens when you're famous. You have to accept the exhaustion. Who knows? Maybe one day, we'll be like them too."

I teased Renji. No one knows what will happen. If we perform well and get lucky, we might rise to fame too.

"I'll go change real quick," I said.

After the fitting, Renji and I planned to go to the clinic. He was getting lip fillers, and I was getting laser treatment. So yesterday, he told me not to bring my motorbike, saying we'd go together and he'd drop me off at my condo afterward.

As I went to change and return the outfit to the stylist, I overheard voices coming from a rarely used dressing room.

Curiosity made me stop in my tracks and listen instinctively.

"We've already talked about this. I've told you so many times, Third, not to answer so bluntly like that," a woman's voice said.

If I'm not mistaken, it's P'Sunny, the AR for Third and Nine. They're from the same company. The company owner, P'Pitch, is also an artist manager and a friend of my company's owner, P'Wut. That's why they co-produced this series, in order to let their trainees act while my company got to debut new talents. A mutually beneficial deal.

"Answering like that will cause more problems. Your fans are already fighting all the time. Right now, we need the shipping fanbase to make the series popular. Can't you just force yourself to say something that suggests some chemistry?"

"I don't like giving people false hope about something that will never happen. If the script is good and the acting is good, the series will become successful on its own," Third's deep, indifferent voice responded.

No need to say, he was talking about shipping. It seemed like the AR was upset that Third didn't answer as briefed.

"And if I'm going to have fans, I want them to like me for who I really am."

"This industry isn't that easy. And being realistic doesn't guarantee fame, Third. Being yourself all the time isn't always a good thing. Right now, we have to do whatever it takes. If you're really that uncomfortable, just fake it a little at the beginning, and later—"

I walked away before hearing the rest.

Once again, my mind was split.

If it were me, what would I choose?

Would I sell the ship to make the series popular?

Or would I be myself and let the quality of the series and my acting speak for themselves?

But wouldn't the latter take longer to pay off in the long run...?

I took the outfit to the stylist and then went to grab my own bag in the resting room. The other actors were gradually coming in to pick up their own belongings, preparing to go home as well, including Nine and Third, who walked in afterward.

Nine was still smiling, while Third had a neutral expression, as usual, impossible to read.

"I'm leaving first. See you all at the workshop class the day after tomorrow," Nine cheerfully bid farewell to everyone. I saw him walk over to nudge Third and say goodbye.

Third's reaction was to grab his own brand-name bag, sling it over his shoulder, and walk out of the room amidst the gazes of the other actors and staff, who all fell into an awkward silence, exchanging uneasy glances.

"What was that?" I unconsciously mumbled my thoughts out loud, watching the back of the person who walked away without even glancing back, feeling displeased. This guy has such bad manners. And today was already the second time he acted unkindly toward my bias.

Such a bad attitude!

"Don't be mad. He's probably irritated about something. When he's angry, he's always like that, silent. He probably doesn't want to take it out on anyone," Nine leaned in and whispered to me, who was fuming on his behalf.

See? Even now, Nine was still making excuses for him. Isn't he being too nice?

"Or maybe he just doesn't want to talk to me," he continued with a sad smile. From my observation over multiple instances, Third really did seem to avoid conversations with my bias. It wasn't just my imagination. Only Nine was the one constantly trying to approach him.

That only made me even more annoyed at Third!

"Don't pay attention to it. There are plenty of people who like you, Nine," I comforted.

The other nodded, giving me a gentle smile before saying goodbye and leaving with his AR.

"P'Wan, are we going now?"

"Let's go, let's go," I told Renji, the puppy-like guy who was obediently waiting. His eyes were still watching Nine until the other got into the car and left. I let out a deep sigh.

During the series shoot, I probably need to act as my bias' guardian knight for a bit. If that Third guy wants to pick a fight with Nine, he'll have to step over my dead body first!!!

"I'm backkk!"

"P'Wan! I watched today's interview too!" View rushed to the door just as I was taking off my shoes, shoving her phone at me, which was playing a clip of the press conference. "You answered so casually, just like a real actor. You've really become one now."

"Really? How was it? Was I cool?"

"Eh, so-so. There are lots of other handsome guys," my cheeky little sister tilted her chin up, the corner of her lips curling into a mischievous smile. "Like this one. The tall one, with narrow eyes, the one named Renji."

"Oh, this guy is really nice. He even drove me home today."

"Really?! Ahhh! Why didn't you tell me?! I want to take a picture with him!" View shrieked, but I think it's a good thing they didn't meet. Not because I'm an overprotective big brother, but I'm worried about Renji instead.

My sister is crazy and chaotic. Let Renji go find a good person instead.

"So, how's the feedback? I haven't checked Twitter yet."

"It's great. It even trended. Most of the hype is from Third-Nine fans, but a lot of people are saying you're cute too. Looks like someone even made a base fan account for you."

"Really?"

"Yeah, look." View held out her phone, showing an account page of my base fan club.

Even though the followers weren't even a hundred yet, I couldn't help but feel warm inside, knowing that there were people cheering for me.

"Alright, I'm gonna go shower first. Feeling sticky."

"Okay. I'll go read my book. Oh, and don't forget to call Mom. She's been complaining that you haven't called her much lately."

"Okay, okay."

That little rascal ran off into her room. I quickly took off my clothes and went to shower since I had been out all day. After freshening up, I called Mom first to keep her from worrying and told her about the fitting today. After hanging up, I sat at my desk, opened my laptop, and checked the feedback on today's series fitting press conference.

There were quite a few people complimenting me, saying I looked good, and they were looking forward to my performance. So far, I hadn't seen any negative comments yet. As for Third and Nine, just as expected, some fans thought that Third had humiliated Nine,

causing a minor drama. If those fans had seen how Third ignored Nine when going home, like I did, they'd probably be even angrier.

My eyes locked onto the handsome face of the male lead in the clip, who was answering questions. I scoffed, closed Twitter, and opened my photo editing program instead.

Just looking at that guy's face annoyed me. I'd rather edit pictures of Nine to calm myself down!

Take 6, Action!

Even though time has passed so quickly that it's hard to believe, from the day I signed the contract to become an actor under the company until today, it has already been two months.

It has been two months where my life has been filled with new things, trying out many things that I had never done in the past twenty-one years of my life. Now, the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' has already finished filming the pilot, and it is currently in the editing process, waiting to be released next week.

That's right. I had the opportunity to act in front of the camera for the first time, but it was only two scenes. They were short scenes, with each scene having only one line of dialogue. I did my homework diligently before the shooting day and received compliments from P'Phai, the director, saying that I did well for a newcomer. I'm quite satisfied with my performance. The rest is just waiting to see the feedback from the audience.

P'Cher told me to prepare myself to receive criticism. I'm not too serious about that. As a public figure, it's unavoidable anyway. Criticism is useful as it helps me improve my acting.

But if you ask if there's anything I regret about filming the pilot, I do regret a little that I didn't get to absorb the atmosphere of life on set. Because the day of the pilot shoot coincided with my midterm exam, as if fate (or my professor) intentionally made things difficult. P'Phai decided to shoot my scenes first so that I could go take my exam. So that day, I had to film the pilot in the morning, and as soon as my scenes were done, I had to rush back to university to take my afternoon exam. The life of an actor is not easy at all. But

P'Cher told me not to feel bad about it because once the actual filming starts, I'll be on set so much that I'll get sick of it.

For the past month or so, I've felt that twenty-four hours in a day pass by so fast. Or maybe it's because I have too much to do. I study and work at the same time without knowing what day it is. I rely on Jay to remind me what day it is, what classes I have, and what assignments I need to submit. It's funny because I used to be the one reminding him for over three years, and now our roles have suddenly switched. But Jay helps me a lot. He says he'll take care of me fully so that when I become famous, I won't forget him. And when I go for interviews, I shouldn't forget to mention him.

That reason.. uh... he's probably joking.

The period before the pilot shoot was the busiest time for me. Of course, I had to work on my research paper while also reading scripts, attending filming, taking acting classes, doing modeling gigs, and more. I was so exhausted that I almost threw up. I came home every day looking like a wilted vegetable to the point that my younger sister kept asking if I was okay. Luckily, after the pilot filming was done, I had some time to breathe before the real filming begins in two weeks.

"Let's go, Renji," I grabbed my backpack, speaking to my junior, who was kind enough to drive over to pick me up early in the morning. Then I pushed the car door open and stepped out of the luxury sports car. "Let's go get slaughtered."

"It's just a read-through, P', not a slaughterhouse," Renji laughed as he locked the car and walked alongside me toward P'Phai's studio. P'Phai, the director, had scheduled a read-through for the first half of the script with the eight main actors at 8 AM today.

It was only 7:30 AM. When I entered the studio and headed to the meeting room, I found that P'Phai had already arrived, along with

the assistant director and two scriptwriters, who were busy ordering food from a delivery app.

At first, I thought Renji and I were the first two actors to arrive, but just as we were about to sit down, I saw Third's tall figure entering the room in an oversized t-shirt and sweatpants. His sharp eyes met mine for a split second before he looked away and sat down in the opposite seat, which already had a bag placed on it.

In the end, I still couldn't arrive before this guy. I felt a bit annoyed for some reason.

"Good morning, P'Third," my well-mannered junior, Renji, greeted the senior actor with a polite wai.

Third gave a small nod and exchanged a couple of polite words. As for me, I pretended to scroll through my phone, ignoring their conversation. Just hearing Third's deep, arrogant voice made me irritated.

Speaking of my relationship with Third over the past month, we still don't get along. We just ignore each other to avoid conflicts on set. But I have to admit, this guy is really disciplined. Until now, he has never once been late, no matter how early the call time was, 5 AM, 6 AM, or how far the filming location was. Most of the time, he arrives about thirty minutes early. It seems like he drives himself instead of coming with the company's vehicle.

When he's on set, he's focused on his work. Even though I was only on the pilot set for a short time, I saw him reading the script and meditating before filming. He often nailed scenes in one take. He's truly a professional. It's normal for people to have both strengths and weaknesses, but for me, his discipline and work ethic don't make up for his flaws.

Third still speaks in an unpleasant way, his expression always indifferent. His social skills are so bad that the makeup artists and

stylists gossip about him, calling him 'the cold prince.' He doesn't joke around with the crew and is straightforward when giving feedback about makeup, hair, or outfits if they don't match his character. The staff, like most senior figures in Thai society, prefer easy-going people, so they don't really favor him. They smile at him in front but gossip behind his back.

Honestly, I don't think his personality suits the entertainment industry. Even though I've only been in this industry for two months, I feel like connections are crucial. If he makes the behind-the-scenes crew dislike him, his future might be tough. But on the other hand, he's just trying to make sure the production is at its best. In the end, it's all about perspective. I try not to get involved in others' issues, handling my own problems is already exhausting enough!

After Renji greeted Third, the room fell into silence. P'Phai and the staff were outside discussing work, leaving just the three actors sitting in awkward silence. But fortunately, a few minutes later, the other actors started arriving, so we didn't have to endure the awkwardness for too long.

The clock on the conference room wall struck 8 AM. P'Phai and the scriptwriters took their seats, but one lead actor was still missing.

"Is Nine here yet? Where is he?" P'Phai frowned as he sat at the head of the table.

"Not sure, he hasn't replied to messages yet," P'Jern, the assistant director, answered.

"Try calling him. If he doesn't pick up, call the AR or his manager," P'Phai ordered. While his staff made the call, he spoke up, "In the meantime, let's read the other parts first to save time. Today, we'll cover episodes one to four so that next time, we can finish episode eight all at once."

"Okay, P'," everyone responded.

I glanced toward the door, feeling worried about whether something had happened to Nine or if it was just traffic.

The script reading began, but with the absence of the lead actor, who played a crucial role in driving the story, the flow was disrupted. At first, I thought maybe the morning traffic was bad, and he'd arrive in ten or twenty minutes. But an hour had passed, and Nine was still nowhere to be seen.

When we contacted the AR, they said they'd check, then disappeared again. By then, P'Phai's irritation was becoming obvious.

"Enough, enough! Stop! Let's eat first. We'll restart the reading from the beginning once Nine arrives," the middle-aged director announced after over an hour of unproductivity. P'Phai shot up from his chair, pulled a cigarette from his pocket, and stormed out of the room with a visibly displeased expression.

I swallowed hard, making a mental note never to provoke P'Phai's anger.

"Alright, kids, eat up! Who wants what? We have basil chicken and garlic pork," P'Jern called out, gradually easing the tense atmosphere.

"I'm here!"

Just as we were halfway through our meal, the door swung open at Nine's hand, drawing everyone's attention toward the lead actor. He flashed an apologetic smile as he made his way to the empty seat beside Third.

"Sorry, everyone. I set my alarm, but it didn't go off. When I woke up, it was almost eight, and I couldn't get a ride, as no one accepted my booking," Nine said softly to P'Jern, looking genuinely remorseful.

"It's alright, just eat first. Only the garlic pork is left," the assistant director said as she reached for a meal box to hand him.

But Nine shook his head with a small smile. "I'll order something myself instead."

"You sure?" P'Jern hesitated slightly.

I stayed quiet, eating while observing. I figured she wanted everyone to eat quickly so we could get on with the script reading without further breaks. But as a fan, I knew Nine didn't like food with garlic, which was why he chose to order his own.

As he scrolled through the delivery app, Nine asked, "So, how far have you gotten in the script reading?"

"Not far, because we couldn't read," Third's deep voice answered on behalf of the team. His sharp, onyx-colored eyes held an icy glint as he cast a glance at his fellow cast member.

"It's because of me?" Nine's face fell. "I'm really sorry, my alarm didn't go off."

"Let's hope that's really the case," the other replied with disbelief, making my ears perk up as I immediately looked up from my meal. A surge of irritation welled up inside me at the way my favorite was being doubted.

"Why would you say that?" Nine hesitated for a moment before asking back.

The tension between the two lead actors became so thick that the entire room could feel it. But before things could escalate further, P'Jern quickly stepped in to mediate.

"Alright, alright. Whoever's done eating, help clean up the table. Go to the restroom, finish up everything properly. P'Phai said that in five

minutes, we will start reading the script."

Inside the meeting room, things returned to normal. Those who had finished eating helped clean up the trash. Some went to the restroom. Meanwhile, I scooped the last bite of basil rice into my mouth just as Third abruptly stood up and walked out to the restroom.

This guy's foul mouth really can't be fixed. I get that he's upset that Nine was late, but shouldn't he have talked to him privately? Not scold him in front of so many people.

Even so, I have to admit that this time I can't completely blame Third. Because Nine wasn't just late, he was late by twenty minutes. A dozen actors and crew members had to sit and wait for just one person. Well...

I let out a long sigh and got up from my chair, intending to throw away my lunch box and go comfort Nine a bit. However, I froze when I saw the way he was looking at the door that Third had just walked out of.

Everyone else in the room was busy and didn't notice, but from where I stood, I could clearly see Nine's expression. His eyes were filled with simmering anger and dissatisfaction, enough to call it hatred.

I was stunned and froze in place, but in just a fraction of a second, Nine's expression returned to normal as he turned to the sound of P'Jern calling him.

"P'Wan, are you throwing away your trash? I'll do it for you." Renji snatched the lunch box from my hand and went to throw it away before turning to help the staff wipe the table.

I walked back to my seat, still confused about what I had just seen. The more I saw Nine's small face when he quickly walked over to

P'Phai, who had just come back, to apologize, the more I hesitated. Did I imagine that? Normally, Nine is extremely calm. He never gets angry, whether on camera or off. How could he make such a hateful expression toward someone? Even if it was foul-mouthed Third, that was still...

Maybe I was just sleep-deprived and hallucinating. Yeah, that must be it.

"Alright, let's start reading again from the first scene," P'Phai ordered loudly once everyone had returned to their seats.

I took a deep breath, focused, and waited for my scene. In the meantime, I listened carefully to Nine's smooth voice as he read his lines.

"Nine, read it again. Put more inner emotion into the character. The voice I briefed you on before isn't like this," P'Phai's stern voice rang out immediately after Nine finished reading the first scene.

"Okay," Nine smiled sweetly before starting again.

"Put more emotion into it."

"Okay."

Since it wasn't my turn yet, I watched my bias read his script quietly. I couldn't help but think that today, he seemed tired. And... it felt like he was just reading for the sake of it. I don't know, it seemed like he wasn't very focused. Normally, Nine delivers much better emotion than this.

But he's human, after all. Everyone has days when they feel tired or unmotivated. Or maybe he wasn't feeling well.

"Third, go ahead. No need to wait for me to tell you," P'Phai said.

A deep, dreamy voice that could make girls swoon filled the room. I glanced at Third, who was sitting across from me. He still looked as focused as ever, his tone, expression, and eyes were serious. He perfectly embodied the character Copter, even though this was just a script read-through.

"Episode One, Scene Five-Point-Two, Sky." P'Jern, who was helping with the script reading, called out my character's name.

I took a deep breath, embodying the deeply scheming nobleman character, using the tone of voice briefed to me by the acting coach and director. But I still stumbled a little while reading, so P'Phai had the script team note it down to see if they could adjust some words to fit me better. He told me to keep reading.

After two chapters, I felt increasingly pressured. Even when I practiced reading at home, there were some parts where the character's emotions were quite complex, and I still didn't fully understand them. I felt like I wasn't conveying them well enough. If this continued into filming, there might be issues. So I marked the difficult parts, planning to discuss them with the script team later.

Reading through all four episodes took four and a half hours. When Nine read the last line of the final scene of Episode Four, everyone let out long sighs. Some slumped onto the table, visibly exhausted.

"That's it. Thank you, everyone. See you next week," P'Phai said.

I locked my iPad screen and leaned back in my chair, feeling so tired that it felt like my soul was leaving my body. Even so, my business wasn't finished yet. I watched as two scriptwriters walked over to talk with P'Phai, planning that I would go to the restroom quickly before coming back to ask them my questions.

"Everyone, I'll take my leave first. I need to go greet a client," Nine said as he swiftly shouldered his luxury-brand bag.

I saw Third glance at him and ask in a neutral tone, "You have work today?"

"Yes." Nine was still smiling before he went to politely say goodbye to the director and crew, then left the studio.

I watched him leave, thinking that we barely talked today. And today... Nine seemed a little strange.

While I was spacing out, Renji came over and nudged me. "P'Wan, are you going home?"

"Not yet. I need to talk to the scriptwriters."

"Then I'll wait for you."

I shook my head. "No need. Don't you have a work meeting with your friends this evening? Go ahead."

"How are you getting home?"

"I'll hail a taxi," I shrugged. If no taxi was available, I could take a motorbike taxi to the train station. No big deal.

"You sure?" Renji hesitated, but after I reassured him, he left. Other actors also said their goodbyes and headed home.

I went to the restroom and finished my business. When I returned to the meeting room, I rolled my eyes upon seeing that the scriptwriters had been snatched up, by none other than the lead actor, who was seriously discussing his script.

Okay, my bad for being slow. I had to wait for my turn. But how long was Third going to talk with them?

I went back to my seat, rested my chin on my arm, and observed the room. The lead actor was still his usual workaholic self,

meticulously discussing script details, even asking if changing certain words would affect the intended meaning in specific scenes.

The more I listened, the more I felt that Third was incredibly detail-oriented. It seemed like he was trying to fully embody Copter's character. His passion for acting was intense. Maybe that's why he was so charming in fans' eyes and why P'Phai often praised him. People with passion for something always have a certain charm.

Wait, what? Did I just think this guy was charming? That's ridiculous. My brain must be fried!

"Alright, I'll note this down and consult P'Phai again. Anything else, Third?"

"No, but if I have questions later, I'll message the group chat," he said, closing his iPad.

I glanced at the clock, he took thirty whole minutes. But he noted everything down in detail. If I were P'Phai or the script team, I'd probably appreciate his dedication.

"Wan, you're still here?" one of the scriptwriters asked.

"I need to ask you something about the script. There are parts I don't understand."

"Just a sec, let us go to the bathroom real quick," she replied, and then the two of them walked out of the room together.

Now, it's just me alone with the famous leading man, who, as always, keeps a blank expression.

I have to say, the atmosphere is incredibly awkward!

"Still here?" Third remarked casually while stuffing his iPad into his backpack.

"Why? Am I not allowed to be here? Or did you buy this place?" I raised an eyebrow, answering in a deliberately teasing tone. Call it looking for trouble if you want, but I just don't like him. Whenever we talk, the words just naturally come out snarky.

Third didn't seem the least bit angry. He simply lifted his head and looked at me with that same emotionless face.

"I was just asking normally."

"And I wasn't answering badly, was I? Also, Mr. Leading Man, you're not the only one here who takes their work seriously," I shot back. Since he wasn't snapping at me, I took the chance to act cocky. I'm a man of my word. I've already said I wouldn't be a burden to the production, and I will prove him wrong for ever calling me lazy and unprofessional.

Third's response was a subtle curve of his lips, a faint smile that gave away nothing of his true thoughts. He slung his backpack over his shoulder and spoke one last line before leaving the room.

"Well, that's good to hear."

The door clicked shut, but my eyes lingered on it as if I could somehow see through to the person who had just walked out. I scoffed. Why does everything about him, his words, his face, his whole demeanor, have to be so damn smug?

But... was this the first time we talked without him throwing jabs at me?

Or maybe he did throw a jab? I don't know. He's impossible to read. But whatever, I couldn't care less about him anyway.

"Alright, alright. What do you want to ask?"

As soon as the two scriptwriters returned to the room, I pushed all thoughts of Third aside, quickly opened my iPad, and refocused on work.

This is my debut as an actor. My first series.

I'm going to give it everything I've got!

Take 7, Action!

"Oh, Wan, you're here early."

"Hello, P'Jern."

"Hello. Go get your makeup done while you wait. P'Susan! Wan is here!" Phi Ngern, the assistant director, shouted to the makeup artist, who was walking out of the actors' resting room, about to head to the bathroom. Meanwhile, I took long strides in that direction, taking deep breaths to calm my excitement.

Today was the first filming day of the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart', the first scene of the shoot. P'Phai, the director, had scheduled me, who had one of the earliest scenes, to arrive at the filming location, which was a college in the suburban area of Bangkok, at 5 AM. The shoot was taking place near the bleachers. P'Cher, the AR, had the company's van pick me up from my condo at 4:30 AM.

Waking up early wasn't a problem for a merchant's son like me. Back when I was in Ayutthaya, I would wake up at 3 or 4 AM to help carry goods at the market and assist my parents in selling noodles. But the real challenge now was my own state of mind. I was extremely nervous! Even though I had already filmed the pilot, but this was the official shoot. The feeling was like taking a midterm before, but now it's the final exam that determines my grade. The real deal had arrived.

"Hello, Phi Boe."

"Hello, Third." My AR nodded in response to the greeting from the lead actor, who was currently getting his hair done. In his hand was a cup of green tea (I heard he doesn't drink coffee).

I glanced at the tall figure who, after greeting the seniors, went back to closing his eyes and meditating. Third and I still weren't on good terms, but lately, he had stopped glaring at me with disdain. I couldn't be bothered to care either, I didn't want to make the atmosphere on set awkward for others, so I tried to stay away from him as much as possible.

That being said... he was here early again today. Even though it was the first shooting day, he still arrived before the 5 AM call time.

"Hey," he suddenly spoke.

I looked left and right. In the dressing room, there were only me, P'Rin, the hairstylist, and P'Cher. The last two were seniors, so he wouldn't have spoken to them like that... which meant he was greeting me?!

Damn, did it snow in Thailand today?!

"...Hey." I mimicked his words, still stunned and too shocked to respond properly. But was this a good sign for bonding? Because normally, Third barely spoke to me unless necessary.

"What scene do you have today?" he asked in a flat tone, eyes still closed.

P'Boe had gone to get coffee, so I had no escape. I had to answer.

"Around six. I think I have three scenes in the morning." I replied as I sat down on the chair, feeling a little wary. Why was he acting weird today? Starting conversations and all. Did he take the wrong meds or something?

"Do your best," Third said, still in the same emotionless voice before returning to his silent state.

I blinked rapidly, staring at the sharp side profile of his face, wondering if our lead actor had hit his head or something. He seemed... friendly. Well, as friendly as he could get.

After waiting for a bit, P'Susan, the makeup artist who had gone to the restroom, returned to the dressing room. She started applying skincare to prep my face while chatting in a high-pitched voice with P'Rin and P'Waen, the stylist.

"The other day, King was gossiping about that guy again. That kid from the big agency. Heard he took another boy to his condo."

"Which guy, damn it? There are too many of them in this industry. I can't keep up anymore."

"That one! The one from yesterday's scene!"

"Ohhh, the main lead, right? I heard about it too. The gossip was wild. Apparently, their top found out and went after the side piece at the hotel, causing a whole scene. And as for the 'husband,' who knows what kind of bullshit he's spinning this time? Just yesterday, he posted all lovey-dovey on his private IG, taking his 'wife' to buy Chanel in Singapore to shut them up nicely."

"Too much drama! But you'd never guess from how innocent he looks in front of the camera. He acts like the sweetest bottom ever, but damn, he's got the skills. Even smoother than real trans women like me! If the fans found out, it'd be trending for three days straight."

The lively gossip continued above my head as I sat with my eyes closed, letting P'Susan apply makeup to my face. Even though I had AirPods in, playing music, their sharp voices still pierced through, forcing me to unwillingly absorb all the industry gossip.

Most of the hairstylists, makeup artists, stylists, and crew members were freelancers, not tied to any single company. Since they took jobs everywhere, they got to meet many actors and hear countless stories. This was what they called 'insider gossip.' Most of their conversations revolved around relationships, who was backstabbing whom, who was straight, who was secretly gay. Just within thirty minutes of makeup time, I felt like I had already learned half the entertainment industry's secrets.

Wait, does that mean they gossip about us when they work on other sets too? But as long as I behave well, they'll probably talk about me in a good way, right?

Forget it for now. I had bigger things to focus on. Soon, I would be shooting my first scene, which was the third scene of the day. It was a conversation between Sky and Noel, played by Nine, in front of the swimming club. And it was an emotional scene. What a tough start for my first day.

Even though I had taken plenty of acting lessons which are almost every other day before the shoot, but I was still a rookie compared to others. I wasn't confident in my skills yet, so I had to concentrate and memorize my lines perfectly. I didn't want to slow down the set. If I got it right quickly, I could go home earlier. But if I kept messing up, making the hundred-person crew and my co-stars wait for me, that wouldn't be okay.

"Wan, eat first."

"...P'Cher, I'm not hungry." I glanced at the bowl of porridge and the neatly cut watermelon slices that the AR had brought from the catering outside. When I was nervous or stressed, I couldn't eat, and I always ended up with a stomachache.

I knew breakfast was important, but I really couldn't eat right now. Ughhh.

"Force yourself. Otherwise, you won't get to eat until the afternoon."
P'Cher scolded.

I reluctantly took a spoonful of porridge, while she sat beside me, sipping her coffee.

"Don't stress. It's the first day. Even if you mess up, P'Phai won't get mad. Every newbie goes through this. After a few shoots, you'll get the hang of it."

"Thank you."

"But don't mess up too much."

"Oh." I was stunned. I was almost relieved just now, but in the end, I'm back to being stressed again. Ugh.

While my mind was still spiraling out of control, other actors scheduled for the morning shoot started arriving. Since I had already finished my hair, makeup, and costume change, I went to sit outside, waiting for my turn to shoot. Feeling restless, I sat quietly with P'Cher, since the waiting room was too cramped. I kept reciting my lines to stay focused.

"Wan!" Suddenly, at eight in the morning, P'Jern walked in and called me. "Scene order change. Wan, you'll be filming with Third for the first scene. It's Scene 3, 9/2."

"Huh!?" My eyes widened. Wasn't the first scene supposed to be the lead actors' duo scene? Why the sudden change!?

"Nine was late by half an hour, so he's still getting his makeup done. P'Phai doesn't want to waste time. Wan, go get ready for your scene now," P'Jern explained quickly before hurrying off.

P'Cher patted my shoulder to snap me out of it. "Go, quickly."

"...O-Okay." I rushed after the assistant director, sighing heavily as my nerves kicked in.

When filming a drama, movie, or series, scenes aren't shot in chronological order as written in the script. Instead, they're scheduled based on location and actors' availability. For example, if today's shoot is set at a swimming pool from 8 AM to 10 PM, then all scenes featuring the pool as a backdrop will be filmed that day, no matter where they appear in the storyline. This means the scene order jumps around, one moment you could be shooting Scene 19 from Episode 1, and the next, Scene 3 from Episode 8. On top of that, the emotional tone of each scene could be vastly different.

Originally, according to the schedule, my first scene of the day was supposed to be a conversation with Noel (Nine) back when we were still best friends before our rivalry started. But since Nine wasn't ready, and P'Phai didn't want to waste time, they swapped in an afternoon scene instead, where I argue with Copter (Third).

Crap, this is bad.

P'Cher had told me before that anything can happen on set, and you always have to be ready to adapt. But I've always been someone who likes to plan everything in advance. So when something changes at the last minute, I start to panic.

No choice. Now that I'm here, I have to face it head-on!!!

"Episode Three, Scene 9/2, Take One. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

".. You still... still don't realize, do you? That you and I are on completely different levels!"

"Cut!! Wan, do it again! Don't stutter!" P'Phai's voice shouted from the monitor.

I swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and locked eyes with Third, who stood before me, listening to the countdown from the assistant director to prepare for the second take.

"Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"You still don't realize, do you? That you and I..."

The moment I met Third's eyes, the next line vanished from my mind, like someone had hit the delete button. In my head, I thought, Shit, Wan! Then followed immediately by P'Phai's voice shouting 'Cut!' again. My face heated up, and I started getting frustrated with myself.

What the hell? I was doing way better in acting class.

"Again," the person standing before me spoke softly, but his expression and gaze didn't show any annoyance. It seemed like Third understood my nerves.

"Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

In the end, a short five- or six-line dialogue ended up needing six takes. It was a complete mess. Some takes had unclear pronunciation, some lacked the right emotion, and P'Phai wouldn't let any mistakes slide. He was doing his job as a director properly.

But I... I wasn't doing my job as an actor properly...

"P'Cher, I'm going to the bathroom," I whispered to my AR before getting up from the bench and heading toward the restroom behind the bleachers. The set was currently filming Third's solo scene, and even though my scene had just wrapped, I still felt unsettled.

I didn't know what was wrong with me today. The more I focused, the worse it got. I wanted to do well, but instead, I ended up causing endless retakes, wasting both the crew's and my co-stars' time...

I could feel someone's gaze following me. Probably P'Cher. I walked over to the sink and washed my hands, taking a deep breath to regain my composure. I wanted to splash water on my face to clear my head, but if I did, P'Susan, the makeup artist, would definitely chew me out.

Calm down, Wan. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. P'Phai hasn't even scolded you. Don't stress too much!

I returned to the set when I was called for my next scene. This time, it was a solo scene, and yet I still messed up with countless retakes, just like before.

The director still didn't say anything to me, but I felt even worse.

"Hey."

As I sat anxiously at the front of the set, trying to focus since my next scene was coming up soon, the emotionless leading actor, who had just finished his scene, suddenly strode over and sat down beside me. Something he had never done before.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

And he had never asked me something like that before either.

"I... I'm fine. It's nothing."

I lowered my gaze to the floor, avoiding Third's eyes. I felt both embarrassed and guilty at the same time. I had confidently promised that I wouldn't be a burden to the crew, but I failed to keep that

promise. At worse, I made Third waste so many takes because of me.

I heard a sharp sigh from beside me.

"Relax," Third leaned in closer, and I caught a faint whiff of his cologne. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "It's your first day. You're not doing as badly as you think."

"..."

I glanced at him, surprised. His face remained serious, but there was no trace of mockery or condescension.

Was he... comforting me?

"P'Phai is a meticulous director. Sometimes, he makes us do multiple takes just to pick the best shot. If he isn't scolding you or getting frustrated, it means you're not doing badly. You can relax."

"..."

"Go get a drink. Calm yourself down," he said before standing up and heading toward the makeup artist who had called him for a touch-up.

I blinked, feeling an indescribable emotion stir inside me.

Unbelievable. I thought he'd be irritated that I made him redo so many takes, but instead, he came over to encourage me. So this guy can be nice to people after all...

"Wan! Get ready for your scene!" P'Jern called out. I quickly pushed thoughts of Third aside and focused on my script.

The burning frustration in my chest slowly faded, replaced by a surprising warmth that I hadn't even noticed creeping in.

In what felt like no time at all, the sun had climbed high in the sky. At the set, the crew was adjusting the lighting for the final outdoor scene before the lunch break. In the afternoon, we would move to film at the indoor swimming pool.

"Third, Nine, Wan. Get ready for your scene," P'Jern said.

As the makeup artist touched up my lips, I started feeling nervous again. This was my first scene of the day with Nine. And the very first scene we'd have together... was a fight scene. Classic love-triangle vibes.

My character, Sky, secretly liked Noel, who used to be his best friend, but a twist of fate turned them into rivals. When Noel got close to Copter, Sky felt both jealous and angry, like his beloved possession was being taken away. So every time he saw the two main leads together, he would always lash out with sarcastic and harsh words.

In short, my character was the ultimate asshole.

"Let's get through this quickly so we can eat," Nine said with a smile, his gaze directed at me.

"Mm," I hummed, my voice low, feeling nervous about messing up again. I could handle solo scenes to some extent, but the moment other actors were involved, the pressure on me as a rookie felt unbearable. The more people in the scene, the more anxious I got, afraid of wasting everyone's time.

"Relax," Third chimed in.

For some reason, hearing his deep, emotionless voice made me feel a bit more at ease.

Weird. What's up with me today...?

"Take one. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"Sky, if something's wrong, just talk to me. Copter has nothing to do with this," Nine, as Noel, said with a shaky voice. His gaze, fixed on me, no, on Sky, was full of disappointment and heartbreak. Just seconds ago, he had been cheerful, but now he had completely become the character.

"Talking is a waste of time. People like him don't understand words," Third, as Copter, scoffed and grabbed Noel's wrist, ready to pull him away.

I stepped forward to block them.

But unfortunately, I tripped slightly and lost my timing.

"Cut! Do it again," P'Phai immediately ordered.

"Sorry, sorry," I apologized with an awkward smile to my co-actors.

"It's fine," Nine replied with a smile.

But because I was too focused on preparing for the next take, I didn't notice that his eyes didn't smile along with his lips like they usually did.

"Take two. Five, four, three, two, one... Action!"

"Sky, if you have something to talk about, just talk to me. Copter is not involved."

"Talking is a waste of time. People like this can't be reasoned with." Third grabbed Nine's wrist, while I stepped forward, forcing my voice through clenched teeth.

"Friends are talking, what is an outsider interfering for!?"

"Cut! Wan, it can be more than this. I want more aggression, stare at Third like you want to punch him."

"Okay!" I shouted back and took a deep breath.

"Take three. Five, four, three, two, one, action!"

"Friends are talking, what is an outsider interfering for!?"

"Cut!! One more time. Wan, pronounce 'R' clearly."

"Yes!"

"Take four. Five, four, three, two, one, action!"

"Cut!! One more time!" Even though the performance was flowing smoothly, the director wouldn't let it pass easily if it wasn't at least ninety percent to his liking.

At this point, I started sweating. I could tell my face probably didn't look so good anymore.

"It's okay. He's not complaining, which means the next take will probably pass." Third, standing beside me, whispered. His sharp eyes weren't as cold and emotionless as usual. Maybe because Copter, his character, was more open than his real self. When Third acted as Copter, his personality changed slightly.

Maybe I like him better as Copter...

I glanced at Nine, hoping for encouragement from my own bias. But instead, I was stunned to see him clicking his tongue, rolling his eyes, and looking annoyed. When he noticed I was watching, he quickly changed his expression into a sweet smile.

"Do your best, Wan! Hopefully, this will be the last take so we and the crew can finally eat."

Even though he said 'do your best,' I felt embarrassed, uncomfortable, and pressured enough to avoid his gaze. I even heard Nine sigh heavily. I wasn't naïve. I understood his expression.

Was he annoyed that I was taking too long and not getting the scene right?

"Don't stress. Just do it like before." Third whispered one last time before stepping back to his designated spot, while the crew's countdown before action echoed.

I locked eyes with Third and saw him nod slightly, the corner of his mouth twitching as if sending me encouragement. That image strangely reassured me. Maybe because right now, I wasn't Wan, and he wasn't Third. We were Sky and Copter.

We became someone else, so it was easier to get along than being ourselves...

I took a deep breath to regain my confidence. When the action cue was given, I let the atmosphere consume me and released my emotions completely.

"Cut!!! Great job! Take a break and eat now!" P'Phai removed his headphones and set down his walkie-talkie.

The crew cheered, quickly packing up and heading towards the catering area where food was ready. I smiled in relief, knowing I had finished half of my scenes for the day.

I hope I do even better in the afternoon. Keep fighting, Wan!

"Third, the couple's fans sent a food truck for us. Let's go take pictures." Nine nudged the person he called.

"Then go take them." Third replied coldly.

As I accepted a cold towel from P'Cher, I secretly listened in, unable to resist my nosiness.

"We have to take them together. It's for our couple."

"I'll go take them myself."

"We have to take them together, Third."

He stood with his back turned, so I couldn't see Nine's face, but I could sense the tense atmosphere. In the end, Third let out a deep sigh and followed Nine.

I blinked in confusion. I couldn't understand their relationship. They were from the same company, so they should be close, right? But Third seemed distant from Nine, like he didn't want to talk unless necessary.

As for Nine...

I don't know, but he seemed strange today. Everything felt off.

"Wan, the fans sent food support. Want to check it out?" P'Boe asked, snapping me back to the present.

"Me? Someone sent it for me too!?"

"Of course! You have a fanbase too, so why wouldn't you get a food truck?" P'Cher laughed, playfully tapping my head, making me feel both embarrassed and flustered.

I really didn't expect this. I don't even have any significant work yet, but there are people willing to support me enough to send food to the set. Knowing this, my heart swelled with happiness. I was fully motivated for the afternoon shoots!

I took pictures with the food support my fans sent and helped distribute the food, snacks, and drinks to the crew to avoid food

waste. I carried a boxed meal from the fans and sat with the crew and other actors. I noticed Third sitting with the crew at another table, while Nine and P'Sunny, his AR, were nowhere to be seen.

"Where did Nine and P'Sunny go?"

"They probably went to eat somewhere else." P'Cher replied, sipping coffee before leaning in to whisper. "He never eats with the crew. I heard he's like this on other sets too."

"Why?"

"Not sure." The AR shrugged.

From my observations, it seemed like P'Cher and P'Sunny weren't on the best terms. They talked and smiled at each other, but there was always an awkward tension. Renji once told me that the entertainment industry had a lot of drama. People could chat and smile in front of each other but gossip and backstab behind the scenes. They could be both colleagues and rivals. Maybe this was one of those cases.

But I just found out that Nine never eats with the crew. Why?

"P'Boe, why is there a separate drink section over there?" I nodded toward the catering area.

On the table, three large beverage dispensers were set up. One was labeled 'Soft drinks for actors, directors, staff.' Another was labeled 'Sweet drinks for actors, directors, staff' as well. The last one wasn't labeled but was meant for the general crew.

"Maybe that's just how this production organizes things. Some sets separate meals, making it clear that actors, directors, and senior staff shouldn't eat with the general crew."

Hearing that, I instinctively furrowed my brows. I had heard Renji talk about class divisions on set before and read about it on Twitter. But I never thought I'd witness it myself.

I mean, come on. Everyone is human, right? We all do our jobs. No one is more important than anyone else. How can something like social class still exist in this industry? Imagine if there were no small crew members, would the production run smoothly? Without extras, would the final product look complete? Every role is equally important.

"But as far as I know, P'Phai isn't that kind of person. Maybe it was the crew's decision." P'Cher whispered. From what I'd seen, P'Phai was friendly with his team and never gave such orders.

And I was right.

Ten minutes later, P'Phai came for lunch. When he saw the separated food and drinks, he loudly scolded the crew. It turned out that one of his assistants had arranged it. P'Phai immediately ordered that from now on, everything should be shared equally. My respect for him grew even more.

It was still break time.

P'Cher stepped away to take a work call, and I felt like getting some fresh air. I found a quiet spot under a tree and chatted with Jay on Line.

[Almost died, but I'm still alive.]

That's what I texted back. At the same time, I felt a bit lonely. Renji had no shoot today, or else I'd have someone to chat with during break.

Thud. Thud...

The sound of approaching footsteps made me look up from my phone, and my eyes widened in surprise.

Third, in his school uniform, walked toward me holding a bottle of orange juice. His sharp gaze locked onto me.

"Is something wrong?" I asked when the other person walked up and stopped in front of me.

To be honest, even though we'd known each other as colleagues for over two months, I still couldn't read this guy's emotions at all. His expression was so blank that no one could tell what he was thinking.

"What are you doing sitting here?"

Instead of answering, he asked me a question in return.

"Just... hanging out."

"You're not overthinking things, are you?"

That question surprised me even more. Who would've thought this guy actually cared about his colleagues? Turns out, he has a surprisingly good side to him.

"No, I'm fine now. I think I'm starting to get a grasp on P'Phai," I said, accidentally letting a smile slip. Maybe Third thought that if I was stressed, I'd keep messing up my takes and waste his time, so he was trying to help me relax.

But whatever the reason, it still felt nice to have someone comfort me.

Alright, I'll try to forget about our past issues and start seeing him in a better light.

"Good," the taller guy muttered. I had a feeling he wanted to say something else, but in the end, he didn't.

"Huh?"

While I was scrolling through social media with my head down, I suddenly heard Third's voice. When I looked up, I saw him holding out a bottle of orange juice toward me.

"Drink it," he said, shoving the bottle into my hand before walking away, leaving me sitting there, completely bewildered.

Wait... what? He just gave me this out of nowhere? Was this his way of showing friendliness? Seriously? He's so stiff, no softness at all.
Hahaha.

I smiled to myself.

When I looked down at the bottle in my hand, I noticed a sticker on it. Third's face with a small smile, along with the name of his fan club.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I opened the cap and took a sip. For the first time today, I truly felt relaxed.

The orange juice was pretty good.

I guess I should thank the person who gave it to me.

Take 8, Action!

"Wan, hey Wan."

"...Huh?"

"Are you going back to the condo? You look like you're about to die." Jay, my best friend, frowned while looking at me who is lying face down in a near-death state on the lecture table while waiting for the professor.

"How would I go back? I've already used up my full quota of absences for this class." I spoke while yawning, my eyes half-closed, about to shut completely. It was truly karma that back in my first year, I decided to postpone taking my elective courses. At that time, I was chill about it, thinking I'd just take them in my fourth year when I had more free time. (Free time, where?) So now, I had to pay for that decision in my final semester like this.

"Then just check your name and sneak out. Wanna go? I'm too lazy to sit through this class." Jay didn't give up. In the end, he didn't actually care about me. He just wanted to go back to sleep.

"You already came all the way here, so sit through the class, will you? Have some sympathy for your parents." I smacked his head just as the professor walked into the room, ending our conversation.

Even though I told Jay to pay attention in class, I couldn't do it myself because my body simply wasn't cooperating. As soon as I checked my name, I dozed off for almost an hour. These past few days, I had been on set almost every day. Yesterday, we wrapped up at 10:30 PM, and by the time I got back to my room, it was already

late. This morning, I had class at 8 AM. The fact that I hadn't collapsed yet was already a miracle.

But at least I only had one class today. That's good. After this, I could go back and sleep. Basically, retreat from the world for a while.

"Are you P'Wan, the one acting in *Deep Dive*?" After class, before I even had time to pack my stuff, a group of first-year girls approached me.

"Yes, I am."

"Eeeek! I'm looking forward to seeing your work! Can I take a picture with you?" The girl who spoke looked at me with hopeful eyes.

"Sure."

I didn't want to crush her expectations. Plus, the production company didn't have any rules against it. So, I took a selfie with her and then took pictures with four or five other people before leaving the classroom with Jay to find something to eat.

"You're getting famous, my friend. Soon, you won't even turn around when I call you, right?" The taller guy nudged me with his elbow. He was more excited than I was when people came up to take pictures.

"You're exaggerating. I don't even know if I'll become famous or not." I laughed lightly, still feeling drowsy. Honestly, I wasn't even sure what I was doing with my life. I didn't have a clear dream. Acting, I could do it, but I wouldn't say I liked it that much.

And I was about to graduate soon, yet sometimes, I felt like I couldn't see the path ahead. I didn't know which direction my life should go.

"Famous or not, you're still getting benefits. At the very least, people know you. You can use those connections to build your career. Plus, you get to be close to the person you idolize. That alone is already worth it." Jay started listing the benefits of being an actor.

I unconsciously pressed my lips together under my mask. Before, I thought the same way as Jay, that at the very least, I'd get to be close to Nine, the artist I had admired for years. But after actually working together, seeing different sides of him that I had never seen before, I started to feel... strange. I couldn't explain it.

I had heard people say that when you're a fan of someone, it's best to only know as much as they want you to know. So now, I was wondering, should I not have auditioned for the series in the first place?

I knew Nine was just a normal human being, not always cheerful and adorable. But seeing things I never expected, like how he never ate with the crew, never touched the on-set meals, or how he sometimes sighed when other actors took too many retakes. Those things surprised me.

"Wan, what do you want to eat?"

"Pork blood soup, I guess. I feel like eating something hot." I replied, not even realizing we had already reached the food court.

While waiting for our food, I let out a deep sigh. I wouldn't say I was disappointed in Nine. But if I had a choice... I wouldn't want to know that side of him.

Today was another day where I had an afternoon shoot. So, I arrived on set at 11:30 AM with Renji and P'Cher. The filming location was the college swimming pool, as usual.

As soon as I arrived, I went to get my makeup and hair done, then waited to change into my costume closer to my cue, since the crew was about to take a lunch break.

While getting my hair done, I opened my iPad to go over the script for today. It was another set of emotional scenes, three or four in a row. My character was jealous, frustrated, and annoyed in almost every scene. Honestly, he wasn't someone you'd want to be friends with, he was the villain after all. But I had to portray him properly because I was an actor.

I glanced at the lead actor of the series, who was sitting with his eyes closed, meditating before his scene. The more we filmed, the more I wondered, what kind of person was Third, really?

At first, he seemed to dislike me. He was cold, sharp-tongued, and indifferent. But over time, I started to see his good sides. How he always encouraged new actors, not just me, but everyone.

Also, he never got annoyed when his scene partners messed up. He would often buy drinks or snacks for the crew. He wasn't overly friendly or chatty, but he never acted superior either. He always ate at the same table as the crew and regularly checked in on others. The on-set caterer absolutely adored him because he often ate the food she made instead of only eating the fan-sent meals.

He seemed hard to approach, but not unreachable. Seemed heartless, yet still warm.

Why was this guy so contradictory?

During the lunch break, everyone scattered to eat. Nine disappeared with P'Sunny, his AR manager, as usual. Other actors and crew members gathered to eat together. As for me, Renji, and P'Cher, we had already eaten before coming, so we sat and snacked on the treats Renji's fans had sent.

"P'Wan, do you want more?"

"That's enough." I shook my head when Renji offered me another cupcake, then pulled out my iPad. The afternoon scene was with Third, so I planned to review my lines.

I had once declared to his face that I wouldn't be a burden to him. So this time, I aimed to finish the scene in no more than three takes. Hopefully...

"I'm going to sit inside for a bit to read the script." I told P'Cher and Renji, who were busy enjoying their cupcakes.

"I'll go with you—"

"You stay here. Don't bother Wan." P'Cher grabbed the tall kid's arm, stopping him from following me, even though he still had food in his hand.

Renji pouted but nodded reluctantly, afraid of getting scolded by his AR.

"I'll be back soon." I smiled reassuringly, patting the kid's shoulder before heading to the empty dressing room to focus on my script.

Sky and Copter, my character and Third's, couldn't stand each other, so almost every scene we had together involved sarcastic remarks, arguments, or even fights. The fight scene was scheduled for the evening, so I needed to memorize my lines well while also focusing on safety.

As I was reading, I heard the door open. Looking up, I saw my co-star walking in.

"Reviewing your lines?" Third asked in his usual monotone voice.

"Mm, well, the first scene in the afternoon, the one I have to shoot with you (*nai*)... khun." I quickly corrected my pronoun. We were the same age, but we weren't close, so I didn't want to seem overly familiar. Even though he always called me 'nai' instead of my name.

"Just talk casually." He said, sitting down in the chair beside me and opening his own iPad.

"Okay." Since he said so, I wouldn't argue.

"Wan."

"Hm?" I raised an eyebrow. Was this the first time he called me by name instead of "you (*nai*)"?

"Let's rehearse together."

"Huh?" I turned sharply, staring at him in surprise "With me... Me? What made you think of that?"

"Well, I have a scene with you. Who else am I supposed to rehearse with?" Third raised an eyebrow, looking at me like I was crazy. He propped one elbow on the table, resting his head on his hand while opening the script file on his iPad.

This guy really has to act cool in every situation. Seriously.

"Oh... uh, sure." I scratched my cheek, feeling oddly awkward. I had rehearsed lines with Third before, but there was always a director or an acting coach present. This was the first time we were practicing alone, without anyone forcing us to do it.

I scrolled back on my iPad to the scene we had to shoot after the break. It was a scene where Sky went to pick a fight with Copter (again). The conversation wasn't very long, but it required full emotional intensity.

"Let's start. Put some emotion into it too, so we know what to adjust." Third said.

I cleared my throat and began speaking my lines. "Hah. So this is the so-called promising young shark that Coach keeps hyping up? But from what I see, you're just a loser who couldn't even pass the club's qualifying round."

"Shut up." A deep, restrained voice responded. Even though it was just a script, I couldn't help but think that if this guy were actually angry, he'd be pretty scary. Just hearing his voice sent a shiver down my spine.

"Why? Can't handle the truth that you're a loser?" I snapped, curling my lips into a mocking smile. "You're all talk. That win of yours was just a fluke. Too bad it'll be your last."

"..."

"What? Why are you staring at me? Angry? Or just can't handle the truth?"

"..."

"Try harder, struggle more. I love seeing your face when you're disappointed. It makes you look like such a loser. Haha" I let out a satisfied laugh, completely in the zone. Practicing like this felt less pressured than when we had the director or acting coach watching. It made acting feel easier somehow.

The next line was Third's, so I stopped and waited for him to speak. But when no sound came, I looked up from my iPad, only to find him staring at me.

More importantly, the corners of his lips were slightly curved up.

"Hey... why are you smiling?" I suddenly felt uneasy. We weren't exactly on friendly terms before, and even now, we weren't that close. Sitting here and smiling at me like this. Even if Third looked great when he smiled, it was still...

Wait, this is weird... Why does my chest feel all fluttery?

"...Nothing." He quickly straightened his face, let out a small cough, and shifted his gaze back to the iPad, starting to read his lines.

I also looked down at my script, reading along with him, but that strange feeling in my chest didn't go away. It wasn't exactly a bad feeling... I just suddenly found myself unable to meet Third's eyes.

What the hell is wrong with me...?

"Oh? You guys are here by yourselves?" P'Phai, the director, opened the door to the break room. Seeing the two of us reading the script together, he raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Rehearsing lines together? Whoa, you two are close now, huh?"

"It's just work." Third answered nonchalantly, his sharp eyes briefly flicking toward me before continuing in an even tone. "So we don't have to do too many retakes when filming. That way, no one will make you frustrated."

"That's right." I flashed a wide, innocent smile, completely contradicting my next words. "For example, the person who just spoke."

"You two, seriously..." P'Phai let out an exasperated sigh and rolled his eyes.

Everyone on set knew that Third and I had some minor issues over something before. But what they didn't know was that we were...

probably fine now. At least, I didn't dislike him anymore. As for what Third thought, I had no idea.

I glanced at him, only to find him looking at me too. Even though we were just teasing each other a moment ago, I didn't feel like Third was being antagonistic this time. It was more like playful banter.

That thought was confirmed when I noticed the slight upward curve of his lips. His dark eyes no longer held that usual cold or sharp look.

"Alright, go wait on set now." P'Phai shook his head and walked out.

We got up to follow, with Third walking ahead. My gaze absentmindedly fell on his broad back, my mind still replaying the smile he had just given me.

That smile, both on his lips and in his eyes... If we're not counting when he's acting, this might have been the first time I've seen him smile like that from the heart.

And I couldn't deny that it was a damn good-looking smile.

"Cut!!! Great job, Wan! You're getting better and better!"

P'Phai praised me after my solo scene in the afternoon wrapped up.

"Thank you!" I pressed my palms together in a respectful wai, grinning so wide my face almost split in half.

Getting a compliment from the director in front of the entire crew and cast was like a divine blessing for a rookie actor like me. Finally, all my hard work, practicing intensely every day, rehearsing in front of the mirror (so much that my little sister, View, kept knocking on

my door because she thought my murmuring was a ghost), had paid off. I didn't have to do multiple retakes anymore!

"Alright, go get changed. Third, Nine, Renji, get ready for the next scene!"

While the director called the next set of actors, I headed off to change into swimming trunks and a warm-up jacket for another scene.

"Congrats, P!" Renji, who was waiting with Third and Nine, gave me a thumbs-up, grinning like he had been the one getting praised.

Nine also gave me a small smile before turning away, probably focusing before his scene. As for Third, he nodded at me. His expression was neutral, but there was a faint trace of a smile in his eyes that made me feel unexpectedly happy.

"Alright, time to show off your body!" P'Waen, the stylist, shoved my next costume into my hands and pushed me toward the dressing room.

Since this show was about a swim club, there were naturally shirtless scenes. I had spent the past two months controlling my diet and hitting the gym as hard as I could to get in shape for this. Fortunately, I already exercised regularly, so it wasn't too difficult.

I might not have a six-pack as defined as Third's or Renji's, the kind that makes girls scream, but at least I had some visible muscle definition. My little sister confirmed it! (Or maybe she was just trying to cheer me up, who knows...)

"Wan! Get ready!"

"Got it!" I replied to P'Jern, the assistant director, while P'Susan, the makeup artist, did a quick touch-up. Then I rushed to the set.

This scene was where Sky accidentally ran into Noel's group by the pool. Seeing Noel and Copter together, he got possessive and started stirring up trouble.

As soon as the action cue was given, I waited for my timing. When I heard P'Phai's command over the radio, I strode straight into the scene, ready to cause trouble.

"I'm hungry. Let's go get something to eat—" Noel, played by Nine, spoke his line while stepping back.

According to the brief, Nine was supposed to bump into me lightly before turning around to exchange words. But the impact was stronger than I expected, and since I was mid-step, I lost my balance...

Splash!!!

"Cut!!!"

The loud sound of water splashing filled the set, overlapping with the director's call to cut. I heard panicked voices from the crew as I surfaced from the pool, followed by Nine's alarmed voice rushing over.

"Wan! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to!"

"It's fine, it's fine!" I waved my hand while wiping water off my face. Other than being a bit dazed from the surprise, I was perfectly okay.

Nine reached out to help pull me up, apologizing repeatedly while the staff hurriedly wrapped a towel around me. I reassured him that I wasn't mad at all, accidents happened all the time.

"Are you okay?" A deep voice sounded above my head. Third scanned me as I sat on the floor with a serious expression.

"I'm okay," I answered briefly while Nine kept mumbling apologies.

"I'm sorry."

"It's really fine," I chuckled softly. Even if I wanted to be mad, seeing that downcast face and hearing that soft voice, plus the fact that he's my bias, how could I possibly stay angry?

However, Third, who was standing over me, suddenly shot a sharp glare at his fellow labelmate, making me furrow my brows. Was he annoyed because the accident delayed the filming? But things like this happen all the time. There was no need to be so upset with Nine.

"P'Wan, are you okay?" My beloved little brother, Renji, hurriedly walked up as the staff led me to change my clothes. He looked like a sad puppy as he took in my completely soaked state.

"Yeah, I'm totally fine. Go wait for your scene," I patted his shoulder and hurried inside to change my clothes, unaware that another pair of eyes, filled with a faint trace of concern, had been watching me the whole time.

An hour later, we were finally able to reshoot the same scene, which went smoothly. After several takes, the actors had settled into their roles, getting into character without needing long adjustment periods like in the beginning. This helped keep the shoot running on schedule. It was only 8 PM now, and there were just a few scenes left. I secretly hoped I could go home before 10 PM today...

"Third, Wan, get ready for your scene!"

Finally, it was time for the last scene (for me) that I had been waiting for, the argument scene that Third and I had rehearsed during lunch break. Before the actual shoot, we had to go through a briefing in front of the set to determine which angles to throw the punch from and how to execute it safely. In this scene, only Third would get hit because when the protagonist raises his fist to punch me back, the other club members step in just in time to stop him.

"Just graze him slightly like this, and Third, dodge this way. Okay, let's try it, punch, dodge... yeah, just like that," P'Phai briefed us for a while before heading back to sit in front of the monitor, ready to call for action. I took a deep breath. Hang in there, Wan. After this scene, you can finally go home!!!

"Five, four, three, two, one... action!"

"Heh, so this is the so-called rising star that the coach keeps hyping up? All I see is a loser who couldn't even pass the club's qualifying rounds," I, now fully embodying Sky, strode over to mock the protagonist, who sat dejectedly by the pool.

Third—no, Copter—lifted his head and glared at me, gritting his teeth. "Shut up."

"What? Can't handle the truth that you're just a loser?"

"..."

"All you're good at is running your mouth. That one win you had was just a fluke. Too bad it was probably your last," I smirked wickedly, my eyes gleaming with pure satisfaction. At this moment, the person in front of me was no longer a co-star but a sworn enemy I utterly despised. I had to dig deep into my darkest side to bring Sky's character to life perfectly.

"What? Why are you staring at me? Mad? Or can't accept the fact that I'm just speaking the truth?"

"..."

"Keep trying, struggle all you want. I love seeing your face when you're disappointed, it makes you look even more pathetic. Hahaha!" I laughed maniacally like a deranged person.

The entire set fell silent, engrossed in the intense scene unfolding before them. Meanwhile, Third followed the briefing, rising to his feet and slowly approaching me with deliberate steps, his gaze filled with scorn.

"I might lose in swimming this time, but in everything else, I won't lose," he said in a low voice, smirking.

His incredible performance sent a ripple of energy through me, fueling Sky's anger and pulling me even deeper into the role.

"Are you sure it's just about swimming? Or is it because Noel chose me and not you?"

"You—!!" I growled, snapping as he hit a nerve.

I clenched my fist and swung it as the director had instructed. But completely immersed in the role, my emotions ran high, and the force behind my punch grew stronger than intended. By the time I realized my fist was moving too fast and too hard, I could no longer stop my arm.

"Hey!"

Thud!

Take 9, Action!

"Hey!"

"Cut!! Third! How are you?"

The commotion among the crew rose immediately. Many people rushed over to check on the person who got punched and fell to the ground. Meanwhile, I, the one who threw the punch, stood frozen like a rock. My body trembling, hands shaking, my face paler than A4 paper. My heart dropped to my stomach when I realized that this was the first time in my life I had physically hurt someone, even if it was unintentional.

"S-Sorry! I'm really sorry! I didn't mean to!" Once I came to my senses, I rushed to Third, raising my hands in a wai frantically over my head. My eyes widened when I saw blood seeping from the corner of his mouth.

Shit, shit, shit! I punched him! I made someone bleed! What do I do, what do I do?! Someone, please help me—ugh!

"It's fine," the other person said in a calm voice as he lifted his hand to touch his mouth where my punch had accidentally landed.

Luckily, Third was quick to react, so my fist only grazed his face. But even so, it still left a cut that was bleeding. No doubt by tomorrow morning, it would be bruised. And for a rising actor who regularly attends events, this was definitely not a good thing.

"Let's take a break. Third, go get your wound treated," P'Phai let out a deep sigh before turning to call for a break loud enough for the

entire crew to hear.

"Come on." P'Sunny, Third's AR, quickly rushed over to support his actor while shooting me a sharp glare as they helped him to the dressing room. I shrank back, feeling like my face had shriveled to two inches. I suddenly wanted to cry.

"P'Phai, I—"

"It's okay, it's okay. Sometimes, there are mistakes in timing like this," the middle-aged director patted my shoulder a few times. He didn't seem angry about what had happened. Then P'Phai walked off to the dressing room to check on Third, while I stood there with my head hanging low, letting P'Cher and Renji come to comfort me.

"What happened? You didn't do it on purpose, right?" P'Cher whispered with a serious face, knowing full well that Third and I didn't get along.

"No! I really didn't mean to! At that moment, I couldn't hold back in time, I..." I raised my hands to clutch my temples in distress.

I swear, a million percent, that this was truly an accident. Even though we had problems before, I'm not someone who mixes work with personal issues. And I would never use acting as an excuse to do something just for satisfaction.

"Okay, okay, it's fine. Just wait until Third finishes getting treated, then go apologize to him again," P'Cher cut in, squeezing my shoulder.

Renji hovered around, checking on my mental state with concern. Honestly, I was fine. The one who got hurt was Third. But if his face got so bruised that he couldn't attend events, my company might be in trouble for having to compensate for damages...

Shit, shit, shit! Why didn't you be more careful, Wan?!

"Sunny, can Wan go in and talk to Third?" P'Cher took on the role of negotiator and went to speak with the AR of the other party. After asking around the crew, they confirmed that Third had already finished treating his wound.

"Go ahead," P'Sunny stiffly replied, looking at me with clear displeasure. Uh, actually, very displeased. But they still allowed me to enter the dressing room, while P'Cher nodded at me encouragingly.

I took a deep breath as I stepped inside. Third was sitting in the same spot where we had rehearsed our lines together during the lunch break. The corner of his mouth was slightly swollen, his face expressionless.

"...Does it hurt a lot?" I asked, my voice small as I walked hesitantly to sit beside him. In my entire life, aside from squashing ants and slapping mosquitoes, I had never used violence on anyone. Seeing him injured made me feel so guilty.

"You sure pack a punch," the person being asked let out a dry chuckle but winced slightly as it aggravated his wound.

"I'm really sorry! I swear I didn't mean to!" I raised my hands in a wai over my head again. Even if we were the same age, I didn't care. I wanted him to know that I truly felt guilty.

"Mm, I understand."

"Sorry."

"It's fine."

"I'm really, really sorry, from the bottom of my heart."

"I already said it's fine. Accidents happen," this time, his slow, calm tone carried a slight hint of annoyance. His sharp eyes narrowed as

he looked at me. "Or did you punch me on purpose?"

"Are you crazy?!" My eyes widened. Why was everyone asking me that?! What kind of person did they think I was?! "It was really a mistake! I would never mix personal matters with work!"

"If that's the case, then I have no complaints." Third let out a small huff, his dark eyes gleaming with amusement. "I accept your apology. Now stop apologizing already. You keep repeating yourself, I'm getting a headache."

"Mm..." As the wronged party confirmed his acceptance, the heavy weight in my chest gradually eased. Even so, I still felt uneasy seeing his handsome face marred with bruises.

"Do you have any events coming up soon?"

"Not in the next couple of days. My university has exams, so I asked my agency to avoid booking any jobs this week."

"..."

"But even if I had to attend an event, I could just cover it up with makeup. The makeup artist said a bruise like this can be concealed." He spoke in such a casual tone, as if he already knew what I was worrying about.

I let out a deep sigh, mentally thanking my lucky stars. At least I wouldn't have to pay millions in compensation.

"You look relieved."

"Well, yeah! I don't have money, you know?" I pouted. I wasn't born rich, and I wasn't making that much yet. I didn't want to start my career in debt.

"Then you should be thanking me for dodging in time. That's why your punch only grazed me." Third spoke in a level tone, but his eyes twinkled with amusement.

I scrunched my nose slightly in irritation. But even though his words sounded cocky, I had to admit he was right. Otherwise, I'd be drowning in debt by now.

"If you still feel guilty, just make it up to me by treating me better."

"What? When did I ever treat you badly?" I blurted out before thinking, then immediately realized that, yeah, I had snapped at this guy quite a bit before.

Third raised an eyebrow, giving me a look that said, *You seriously have the nerve to say that?*

"Maybe I did, but you were annoying too, right? Let's just call it even." I quickly cut the conversation short. Life is short, you know? There's no point dwelling on the past, focusing on the present is way more important.

"Mm," he hummed in agreement.

At first, I thought Third would throw back some snarky remark, but to my surprise, he accepted it easily. Seeing this as an opportunity to reset our relationship, I immediately extended my hand.

"We may have... uh, not gotten along before, but that's in the past. Let's start fresh from now on. If you ever need help or advice, just let me know."

Silence filled the room. My conversation partner stared at my outstretched hand for so long that I started feeling awkward. Just when I thought about pulling it back, his slightly rough hand reached out to shake mine.

"Mm."

The warmth of his hand, slightly larger than mine, sent a strange flutter through my chest, like something was tickling it. But just as quickly, he pulled his hand away naturally, leaving only me feeling a bit flustered.

"Thanks for the thought, but you should be worrying about yourself instead."

"Huh?" I blinked. Just now, he seemed relaxed, but why did his face suddenly look serious?

"I can take care of myself. You should be the one watching out," Third emphasized, making me even more confused. He sounded like I was about to run into something bad.

"You mean—"

However, before I could ask for clarification, I heard P'Jern calling from outside the room. Then, other staff members started coming in, talking about how Third had to get his makeup redone and reshoot the scene from earlier.

In the end, I never got to talk to Third, and what he had said was buried under so many other things that I completely forgot about it.

"Did you bring an extra pencil?"

"I did."

"What about a sharpener?"

"Got it."

A conversation took place on an early Saturday morning, a day off for most people. Although the clock on the living room wall had just struck six in the morning, both View and I were already dressed and ready to leave.

"Your ID card? You won't be able to enter the exam room without it."

"Right here, I won't forget it." My younger sister, neatly dressed in her high school uniform, rolled her eyes and laughed lightly, causing her ponytail and ribbon to sway with her movement.

If you ask why we were up so early, it was because today was View's TGAT exam day. As for me, I also had something important waiting, which is the opening ceremony for the series production. In about ten minutes, the company's van would come to pick me up.

"Sorry I can't take you there." I let out a long sigh.

I used to always take View wherever she needed to go, tutoring or hanging out with friends, so she wouldn't have to spend money on transportation. But since starting this job, I barely had time to talk to her. By the time I got back to the condo each day, it was already late, and View had gone to bed. Even though we lived in the same place, it felt like we hadn't seen each other in ages. It was a change that left me feeling a little lost.

"It's okay, P'Wan. You have work to do." My sister, who always acted more mature than her age, smiled softly. She cupped my cheeks with both hands and spoke in a cheerful voice. "Do your best today. Hope you gain a lot more fans! Once I finish my exam, I'll join the fun and fangirl over today's event in the tag."

"Fangirl over who?"

"P'Third.. just kidding! Of course, I'll fangirl over my big brother." She giggled when she saw me pout. Even though I always

complained about Third, View still liked him a lot. I guess my little sister just had a thing for cold bad-boy types.

I placed my hand on her head and gave it a playful ruffle. "Do your best on the exam today. After it's done, I'll take you out for a treat."

"Ugh, P'Wan, you messed up my hair!" She scrunched her face in protest, fixing her hair quickly before grabbing her bag.

"I'm heading out now!"

"Okay, travel safely. I hope you ace every question." I wished her luck and pulled her into a loose hug, watching her leave.

I had seen her since she was just a baby, and in the blink of an eye, she was already a young woman, about to enter university.

Growth is something to be celebrated. I, too, needed to grow. And today was an important step forward, because for the first time, I would be meeting my fans in person, after only interacting with them on social media.

I was beyond excited!

Lately, I had been gaining a lot of fans. Here's the thing, last week, my university held a large fair, where different faculties set up booths to raise funds for their student clubs. My faculty had a drinks booth, and my friends pulled me in to help, saying I could attract customers since I was *kind of* well-known (which part of me was famous, I had no idea). My job was to take orders, mix drinks, and handle payments.

While working, a few customers who followed the BL industry came by to chat and take photos with me because they knew I was going to star in a series. I played along as expected, unaware that

someone had taken a video of me working at the booth and posted it on social media. That video went completely viral!

It got millions of views as 'the handsome vendor you must check out!'

When I found out, I was shocked. I mean, millions of people watched me give change to customers? But at the same time, I was happy that people thought I looked good. Thanks to the person who posted that video, my Instagram followers skyrocketed. Within a day, I gained over ten thousand new followers!

When my company saw this, they immediately told me to do an Instagram live to keep the momentum going.

Before, my lives barely reached a few hundred viewers. But after that video went viral, my live viewers jumped to thousands! Even my official fanbase account gained over four thousand new followers.

Journalists even started writing about me, mentioning that I was about to make my acting debut soon.

This is the power of social media. Going viral can literally change your life overnight.

My manager, P'Jarin, said I was on the rise and reminded me to be extra charming at today's event. The goal was to gain as many new fans as possible. That pressure made me a little nervous, but P'Cher reassured me, saying that I just needed to be myself, interact with fans, and show them attention. Then, people would naturally start supporting me.

That's why today was such a big deal for me. In many ways, it felt like my official debut into the industry.

"Morning, P'Cher."

I greeted the AR as I opened the van door. She gave me a nod and, as usual, handed me an iced latte, which is my favorite, before I sat down next to Renji.

"Where's everyone else?"

"They took another van. We'll pick up Porsche on the way and then head straight to the mall. Get dressed there, and at 8:30, you'll meet the fans," P'Cher explained the schedule.

"P'Wan, are you excited?" Renji asked, his face full of excitement.

"What do you think?" I exhaled, rubbing my palms together. With so many reporters and fans expected today, I just hoped I wouldn't trip over something or embarrass myself.

"I'm excited too! Let's do our best, P'!" He grabbed my hand with bright, determined eyes. I couldn't help but ruffle his hair in response.

"Yeah, let's do this!"

Our van arrived at the venue a little after 7 AM. Once inside the dressing room, we were given T-shirts with the series logo, just like the other actors and staff. After a quick breakfast and getting our hair and makeup done, we took some photos to boost the event's trending hashtag.

At 8:30 AM, the staff herded us out to meet the fans gathered in front of the mall for the blessing ceremony.

"Kyaaa!!!"

"P'Third! Over here!!"

"Nong Nine, so cute!!!"

As soon as we stepped out, deafening screams filled the air. Hundreds—no, probably two or three hundred—fans were crowded behind the event barriers, holding banners and phones pointed at us.

It was such a strange feeling. Normally, I was one of those people cheering for artists. I never imagined I'd be the one standing here, receiving that attention.

Looking around, it was as expected, most of the fans were here for Third and Nine, the lead actors.

"What time did you all get here?" Third called out to the fans. Meanwhile, Nine was already chatting with his fans, and the other actors were finding their own fan sections.

I hesitated for a moment, glancing around nervously. Then, my eyes landed on a small group of girls holding up a sign with my name.

"Oh!" My eyes widened in surprise, and my heart raced with excitement. When I looked their way, they screamed even louder.

"Kyaa! P'Wan is so cute!!!"

"Nong Wan, fighting!!!"

"Look over here, please!"

And various other words that I couldn't catch blended with the sound of rapid camera shutters.

Hearing cheers for myself made me feel shy, my face heating up. Last night, before going to bed, I had secretly thought, just for fun, that it would be nice if three or four people came to cheer me on. But seeing dozens of fans standing there holding name signs or fans

with my face on them, waving at me, left me speechless. The overwhelming gratitude overflowed in my heart.

"Wan, go to your fans," P'Cher came over and whispered, giving me a gentle push on the back.

I stepped stiffly toward them, too shy to know what to say, so I blurted out, "Who are you cheering for?"

"For Wan, of course!" someone answered.

Laughter erupted. I knew immediately that what I had said was embarrassing, so I raised my hand to cover my mouth. They were holding signs with my name, who else would they be cheering for?

"Thank you so much," I smiled widely. Meanwhile, my mind was in chaos, trying to figure out what to say next. I regretted that I wasn't good at talking with people I wasn't close to, only realizing it today.

But I didn't have to think too much because the fans took the initiative to start conversations. For nearly ten minutes, I answered countless questions and even started chatting back a little. I just found out that they had sent me a congratulatory flower bouquet too!

P'Cher kept an eye on me from a distance while I talked to the fans. Not long after, the staff came to nudge me to gather at the ceremony area to prepare.

"I'll come back later," I waved goodbye to them, not forgetting to turn and greet the other actors' fans nearby as well. P'Cher had taught me that whether they were my fans or not, I should always be nice to everyone so that people would warm up to me.

"P'Wan, your fans came in big numbers!" As soon as I rejoined the group, Renji greeted me, looking more excited than I was.

"Yeah, I'm happy. My heart is still pounding," I raised my hand to touch my chest, where my heart was beating rapidly. Being loved, knowing that there were people supporting me, it was such a reassuring feeling. It reminded me of when I used to follow Nine to events. When Nine saw his fans, did he feel like this too?

"You started off well," a deep voice sounded behind me. When I turned around, I saw Third standing there beside me, the corner of his mouth slightly lifted. "Congratulations."

"Yeah, back when we had the blessing ceremony for our first series, I think not even ten fans showed up," Nine, who was nearby and overheard the conversation, joined in. "But Wan has a viral moment right now, so he's lucky."

"That's true..." I smiled awkwardly, secretly swallowing.

In truth, I was one of the people who had gone to support Nine at the blessing ceremony for his second series. If I told him, would he still remember the guy who covered his face, didn't speak because he was too shy, and just stood there taking pictures of him?

"I hope your luck stays like this forever," the sweet-faced man said with a wide smile, his crescent-shaped eyes reminding me of the first day we met.

For some reason, my feelings right now were different from back then. Maybe it was something in his gentle tone that added a strange sense of pressure to the atmosphere. Or maybe I was just overthinking it.

"Everyone, the live stream is about to start. Please take your seats," a staff member announced.

The actors all moved toward the designated seats. I sat down next to Nine, my heart suddenly feeling heavy for no reason.

At exactly 9:09 AM, the blessing ceremony for the series 'Deep Dive: Into Your Heart' began right on schedule.

Having already been in several acting projects, Third wasn't particularly excited about the rituals. However, beneath his composed expression, there was a hint of joy in his eyes. After all, this was his first role as a lead actor.

It had taken him over three years to reach this point. The journey had been tough. He had gone through dozens of castings before finally getting this opportunity. Even though he had to work with someone he didn't get along with, for the sake of his dream of becoming a professional actor recognized for his skills, Third had to endure and push through, carrying out his responsibilities to the best of his ability.

He followed the director to place incense sticks in the ceremonial offerings. His large hand grasped the flower petals the staff had arranged on a tray and scattered them over the altar, completing the Brahmin ritual. Afterward, it was time to eat the offerings for good luck.

"Can we just take them?"

"Yes, you can eat them now."

A quiet conversation came from behind him. Third glanced over and saw two new actors whispering to each other.

When Renji said that, Wan turned to look at the sweets and fruits on the table with a confused expression. That sight made the corner of Third's mouth lift slightly. Before he even realized it, he reached out, picked up a piece of *Thong Yip*, and handed it to the hesitant Wan.

"Eat this."

"Huh?"

"Eat *Thong Yip* first, so you can 'pick up gold and silver' and have prosperity." He said before putting a piece into his own mouth, surprised at himself.

Normally, he wasn't the type to engage with people or start conversations. He didn't even know why he was talking to this guy, especially considering they hadn't gotten along before.

"You're into superstitions too?" The other guy's mouth opened slightly in surprise. The usual frown he had whenever they locked eyes was gone. "Wow, I didn't expect that."

"I just heard people say it." Third exhaled sharply. He wasn't into this stuff. He just believed in not disrespecting it.

"Alright, I'll believe it then," the shorter guy—by nearly ten centimeters—chuckled before munching on the *Thong Yip* he had been handed.

At this point, their relationship could probably be described as something close to friendship.

Previously, Third had to admit that he didn't like Wan. He didn't like anyone who wasn't professional, who arrived late or didn't take work seriously. Because for Third, getting to a point where he was trusted by industry seniors, building a stable fan base, and proving he was more than just a pretty face had taken years of relentless effort. He had endured criticism, constantly being told he only had his looks, before he could prove he was more than that.

So whenever he had to work with people who didn't appreciate the opportunities given to them, which were plenty in this industry, it always frustrated him.

But after thinking it over, Third admitted that he might have judged too quickly. Wan had told him to wait and see, so he had observed Wan's growth. Since their argument that day, Wan had never been late again. He had taken acting lessons seriously and worked hard to catch up with the more experienced actors. Third had gone through that same pressure himself.

To him, a person's worth lay in their effort. Seeing Wan's dedication, he gradually changed his perception of him, and they reached a better understanding. These days, they had a decent relationship. The more they talked, the more Third realized that Wan was easy to be around. Wan was straightforward, not someone with hidden agendas. Unlike many people in this industry, whether actors or staff, who always had ulterior motives.

"Hey," Wan nudged his elbow, leaning in to whisper. "What are we doing next?"

"Interviews," Third replied, slightly surprised that Wan was asking him. But when he looked past Wan, he saw that Renji had been pulled away by an AR staff member for a photo session. That explained why Wan had come to him instead.

"After that, we'll meet with the fans again, right?"

"Yeah, there's a fan meeting session later."

"Great! I want to talk to the fans more," the bright-eyed guy beamed with excitement.

That enthusiasm cracked the stoic mask on Third's face. The corner of his lips lifted slightly as he recalled his early days in the industry. Back then, he had been just as excited, even if he hadn't shown it like Wan did.

"Actors, please go to the backdrop."

When the staff came to call them, the actors went to stand in front of the backdrop along with the producer and director to give interviews to the reporters. Third stood next to Nine, his co-lead, just like always. Even though every second standing beside him felt suffocating, the young actor reminded himself that this was work. He wouldn't let personal matters interfere with his job.

"Third, there are so many fans here to support you today, and the X-trend is also ranking number one. How do you feel?"

"I'm happy to receive such a great response, both for the pilot and for today's blessing ceremony. We're all doing our best to create the best work possible."

"Then, did you receive any special encouragement from someone? Did the person beside you cheer you on?" one reporter asked, a question that almost made Third furrow his brows.

Pushing the ship again, he thought to himself. But since he was in front of the camera, he could only smile faintly and answer in a calm tone.

"Nine and I always cheer each other on. We work together."

"That's right. Getting encouragement from someone close really gives you a big boost," a soft voice continued. The owner of the sweet face turned to him with a smile, and Third had to put in quite an effort to maintain the polite, small smile on his lips.

In truth, he wanted to turn away, to stand as far away as possible. He didn't even want this person in his sight for a single second.

"Now, let's move on to Nong Wan, our rising newcomer! Do you know that the clip of 'the handsome vendor' has already hit three million views?"

"Really?" The named person, standing next to Nine, widened his eyes. "Whoa! Thank you so much! Honestly, I never thought so many people would watch me giving customers their change."

That statement drew laughter from the reporters and fellow actors. Even Third smiled, wondering if Wan himself realized just how naturally funny he was.

"The netizens are eagerly waiting for your work, too. Do you feel pressured?"

"Of course, I do feel some pressure since this is my first project, and I'm working with such talented actors, directors, and crew members. But I'll try my best! Please feel free to give me feedback. I'll use it to improve myself," Wan answered with a bright smile, one that made people feel at ease just by looking at him.

Even from the perspective of someone who didn't know him personally, Third thought Wan seemed like a very approachable person. The reporters also seemed to like this newcomer quite a lot.

The interview continued for nearly twenty more minutes. Most of the questions were directed at him and Nine, which was expected since they were the leads. But Wan, who was quickly gaining popularity, was also asked a lot. Even after the group interview ended, he was pulled aside for multiple solo interviews, almost as much as Third himself.

"Tired, huh?"

While Third stood in the tent beside the stage, letting the staff dab his face before another round of interviews, Nine walked up and stood next to him, holding a portable fan up to his neck with an annoyingly fake smile.

"Hot, isn't it?"

"..."

Third ignored him, thanked the staff, and gave them a look signaling them to step away before picking up his phone and scrolling, just so he wouldn't have to engage in conversation.

To be honest, he was tired of talking to Nine. Just having to work together every day was already unbearable to the point of driving him crazy. So when they weren't in front of the camera or in sight of the fans, Third never bothered to hide his dislike.

"Third, look over there."

But his co-star was undeterred and kept talking. Annoyed, Third glanced in the indicated direction, hoping Nine would just say what he wanted and leave already.

His gaze landed on Wan, who was standing in front of reporters, being interviewed. He looked a little shy but was engaging with the cameras enthusiastically, making Third forget his irritation for a moment.

Getting used to the press already, huh? That's good...

"Still such a rookie, going all out like that. Doesn't even know how to carry himself properly," Nine drawled. He cast a sidelong glance at the person speaking to the reporters before turning to Third with a smirk. "Don't you think so? He's answering longer than us, the leads."

"So what?" Third shot back icily. He didn't need to be told. He already knew what kind of person was standing before him. That incident where Wan was pushed into the water? Yeah, probably not an accident.

Nine leaned in closer and lowered his voice to a near whisper. "Don't you think about how hard we worked to get this chance? And now,

some random nobody is trying to steal the spotlight at our event. If you really don't feel anything, you must be pretty generous."

"That's right. I'm not as petty as you," Third snapped. Others might see Nine as sweet and innocent, but that carefully crafted image didn't fool him.

No matter how much time passed, this person was still the same. Jealous and unwilling to see anyone do better than him.

Nine flinched slightly. For a brief moment, Third caught a flicker of pure hatred in his eyes, but it was gone in a second, replaced by a bright smile as if they were just joking around.

"Forget it. Maybe I'm overthinking. But we should stick close together. The fans are probably waiting to take pictures of us."

"..."

"Don't forget. We're a pair now. You can't just ignore me like before. In front of the cameras, the reporters, the fans... you better play along. Don't you want to be a professional actor?" Nine's voice was sweet as honey, but the coldness in his eyes betrayed him.

Third clenched his jaw, glancing at the watch on his wrist. He silently wondered when this event would finally be over.

After the interviews ended, it was time for the final part of the event, which is the fan meet. This was a chance for the fans who had woken up early to support them to interact with the cast.

The first part was a group session, where all the actors took turns speaking into the mic, introducing themselves, and sharing some lighthearted stories about the filming process. After that, everyone split up to meet their own fans, including Wan.

"Nong Wan, are you tired?"

"I'm not tired! I'm having so much fun," he answered honestly. The heat was a little much, but his energy was through the roof today. Maybe it was because so many fans had come to cheer them on.

"How's the filming going? Anyone bullying you?"

"Nope! Everyone's super nice."

"Really? Who are you close with?"

"Honestly, I get along with everyone," he laughed. In truth, he was closest to Renji since they were in the same agency and clicked well. They often hung out together.

Besides Renji, though...

His eyes unintentionally flickered to the left, where Third stood talking to his fans. His smile looked genuine, not like the businesslike one he sometimes wore on set.

It was the same as that day, the day they sat down to practice their lines together.

So he can smile like this. Why doesn't he do it more often? Wan wondered.

At that exact moment, as if sensing someone watching, Third turned his head toward him. Their eyes met.

Thump. Thump.

Wan's heart seemed to beat a little faster when Third gave him a small smile before turning back to his fans. He quickly turned back to focus on his own fans as well, trying to pay attention to their questions. But his concentration shattered, his mind kept drifting back to his co-star's smile just now.

Third really did look good when he smiled, but... why did I even care about his smile?

Take 10, Action!

"Wan, Third, hold on a sec. I need to talk to you about something."

Director P'Phai walked up to us while the other actors were raising their hands in a wai to bid farewell to the crew, getting ready to go their separate ways.

Third and I exchanged a brief glance as we followed P'Phai to a quieter spot to talk privately. I couldn't help but wonder what he wanted to discuss. Seeing his serious expression made me a little uneasy.

"What's the matter?" The usually quiet leading actor was the one to ask after we stopped at a corner of the parking lot.

"It's about you two." P'Phai sighed, looking between me and Third with an exasperated expression. "Honestly, I don't want to force you into anything, and I don't even know if there's anything going on between you two or not."

"Huh?!" I jolted, eyes widening in shock. My face heated up instantly, and my heartbeat quickened.

What does he mean by 'anything going on'? Don't tell me P'Phai is thinking that Third and I have *something* between us. No way! How could that even be possible? Why would he suddenly think that? And why am I feeling flustered?! I don't have *anything* going on with that guy!

I didn't dare look at Third's expression, but deep down, I was curious about how he was reacting to this.

"I've never said this directly to you two, but I think now's the time." P'Phai pulled a cigarette from the pack but, upon noticing a no-smoking sign nearby, let out a deep breath and stuffed the cigarette back into the pack.

"I know you two don't get along very well. I have no idea why, but since you'll be working together for a while, I don't want things on set to feel awkward. Also, I want you two to clear things up between you."

"..." I blinked several times, processing his words for a solid three seconds before my face burned again, not from embarrassment, but from sheer secondhand embarrassment.

Oh. So I was just imagining things earlier? I mean, seriously, who would even think that Third and I have *that kind* of relationship? The odds are like one in a million. Haha.

"So, find a day to hang out together, just the two of you. Even half a day is fine. No bringing anyone else. Go anywhere you want. And send me a picture as proof."

"..."

Both Third and I were momentarily speechless at the unexpected order.

"P'Phai, Third and I don't have any issues." Third stated seriously.

"Yeah, exactly! Maybe in the past, we, uh... had some minor disagreements, but we've already cleared things up. There's really no problem at all!" I quickly backed him up.

P'Phai raised an eyebrow, glancing between us like he still wasn't convinced.

"Good. Then go on that outing and get even closer."

"..."

So no matter how we explain it, he's not going to listen?

I let out an awkward smile and turned to look at Third. His sharp, handsome face was still as expressionless as ever, but there was a hint of unease in his dark eyes.

"Just do it for my peace of mind, okay?" P'Phai patted our shoulders firmly before walking away, leaving Third and me standing there in silence, staring at each other.

"Guess we have no choice. We'll have to go." The taller guy was the first to break the silence, his brows still slightly furrowed.

"I don't mind." I sighed. I was fine with it. Other than filming, I didn't have much on my schedule, so I could easily find a free day. But the real issue was the busy leading man next to me.

"Will you even have time?"

"I'll ask my manager to clear a day." He exhaled slowly. When his sharp eyes met mine again, I felt an odd twist in my chest.

"Just let me know when you're free, and I'll talk to my manager."

"No, it's fine. You pick the day. Just tell me when." I replied quickly, not even sure why I was feeling so nervous around him.

"Alright. I'll text you. Accept my friend request." His voice was as calm as ever before he turned and walked off, leaving me standing there in a daze. Once I snapped out of it, I hurried after him out of the parking lot, heading back to find my AR.

Ding!

As I was walking, a pop-up appeared on my phone screen, someone had added me on LINE. He must have added me from the series

group chat we were both in.

I accepted the request and sent a sticker as a greeting. He responded with a funny-looking pit bull sticker, making me chuckle as I watched his broad back walking ahead of me.

Oh well. Let's just take it as a chance to strengthen our connection. Maybe, as someone with few friends, I'll gain a good one.

As expected, P'Phai's order caused quite a bit of trouble for one of us, it means Third. It took some effort to free up his schedule since he had work almost every day. Meanwhile, I only had occasional jobs, so it wasn't a big deal for me. Eventually, we settled on Friday as our free day. I told him that even half a day would be enough, but Third insisted that since he was taking a break, he might as well take the whole day off and treat it as a break.

[Where are we going?]

He texted.

His typing was as short and blunt as his speech, but I knew he wasn't actually annoyed. He was just a straight-to-the-point type of person, unlike the cool, flirty bad-boy image the company tried to paint him as.

[Can I pick?]

I quickly typed back. I already had a place in mind, not too far from Bangkok.

[Up to you.]

[I'll message you later in the evening. I'm in class right now.]

I typed fast and put my phone away, feeling the sharp gaze of my professor from the front of the room.

"Wan, who are you texting? Your girlfriend?"

Jay, my dear friend who had zero discretion, leaned over to whisper.

"Your ass. I'm working my ass off like a buffalo. Where would I even find time for a girlfriend?" I whispered back, hunching slightly as the professor glanced our way again.

"I don't know. You were smiling while typing. Thought you were chatting with some girl."

I froze for a split second before replying, "...Just work."

"Alright, alright." Jay mumbled. Meanwhile, I frowned slightly as I highlighted a section in my notes.

Wait... Was I really smiling just now? I didn't even realize.

That evening, after wrapping up everything, I texted Third about the planned destination. It's Ayutthaya, my hometown. I hadn't been back in almost four months, and my mom had been nagging about missing me. Since I had a day off, I wanted to visit my parents and maybe show Third around a bit before heading back to Bangkok.

It was nearly midnight when Third finally replied. He had probably just finished work. I was still awake because I was fixing my research paper, so we got to chat for a bit. Luckily, he had no objections, so we agreed to meet at 8 AM on Friday. He would pick me up at my condo since I couldn't drive, I only knew how to ride a motorbike. So, the role of driver for this trip naturally fell to the superstar himself.

If I remember correctly, he drives a BMW. My friend Renji, the son of a famous department store owner, drives a Porsche too. Everyone around me is loaded. Guess I get to ride in a luxury car again. This is what they call *having rich friends*.

"P'Wan, don't forget my sai mai!"

View, my little sister, reminded me for the tenth time before heading to school. The moment I mentioned my trip to Ayutthaya, she made me promise to bring back our favorite roti sai mai. She kept saying that the ones in Bangkok didn't taste as good as the ones from home.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Noodles from home too."

"I know." I responded, watching my younger sibling leave the room. Once View was gone, I went to take a shower and get dressed. Around eight o'clock, I headed down to wait in the condo's shared lounge area.

The clock on my phone showed exactly eight o'clock when I saw a black BMW turn in and park in front of the building. I grabbed my backpack, slung it over my shoulder, and walked straight toward the car, taking the liberty to open the passenger-side door.

"Thanks for picking me up."

"Mmm." The other person hummed in response.

Today, Third showed up with a bare face, his hair completely unstyled. Even though he had a few acne marks, because, well, he's human, he still looked really good. Now that he had his hair down and was dressed casually in a loose t-shirt and jeans like any other teenager, he looked younger than usual. The atmosphere around him also felt more approachable.

"Have you eaten? I have a sandwich." I lifted the bag of snacks I had bought from the convenience store under my condo.

"It's okay. You eat. I'll stop by the gas station for coffee later."

He spoke while keeping his gaze fixed on me. I was just about to unwrap my sandwich when I hesitated. Was my bare face that bad? No way. Or was he afraid I'd spill food and mess up his luxury car?

"Never mind, I won't eat yet. I'll just grab something at the gas station." I settled into my seat.

"It's fine. If you're hungry, go ahead and eat." He turned his eyes back to the road and pressed the accelerator.

The atmosphere in the car was quite silent. I quietly ate my sandwich, occasionally glancing out the window awkwardly. First, because we weren't that close, and we had even disliked each other before. Second, because it was someone else's car, which made me feel even more tense. Third, neither of us was very talkative. If this were a variety show, there would definitely be a sound effect of crows flying by right now.

"Why do you want to go to Ayutthaya?" The usually quiet one suddenly spoke up.

I swallowed the last bite of my sandwich and answered in a slow voice. "I just want to go home. I'm from Ayutthaya. By the time we arrive, it should be around lunchtime, so I thought I'd take you to eat boat noodles from my family's shop first, then we can go sightseeing afterward."

"So basically, you're taking me to meet your parents?" He glanced at me with a look that carried a mix of emotions, but the amusement was the most obvious.

My face heated up instantly. I hated the way he summarized things so misleadingly.

"I'm just taking a customer to my family's shop! You're famous, you know? If I get a picture of you there, I can put it up on the wall, 'Third Tharit once ate here', and attract more customers." I quickly corrected him before he got the wrong idea.

"Oh... I see."

What was with that 'Oh'? I wasn't making excuses! This was the truth!

"But it's delicious, I guarantee it. My family's been selling noodles for fifty years, since my grandma's time." I puffed my chest out with pride. Everyone who tried our noodles loved them. It was an authentic, traditional recipe, not one of those 'let's just call it an old recipe to boost sales' things. We used only high-quality ingredients, definitely Michelin-worthy. But even if we didn't get a star, it didn't matter. We already had plenty of customers.

Third gave a slight smile but said nothing, and the atmosphere returned to silence. A soft foreign song played in the background as the car sped toward the outskirts of Bangkok.

We stopped at a gas station to use the restroom, grab coffee, and send a picture to report to P'Phai. Then, we got back on the highway. Two hours later, we arrived at our destination a little past eleven, just in time for lunch.

"We're almost there." I straightened my back, suddenly feeling more energetic. As the car turned into a small alley, I saw the familiar old three-story shophouse. A relaxed smile spread across my face. I was finally home.

"Dad, Mom!" The moment I got out of the car, I rushed over to my parents, who were busy blanching noodles and preparing bowls for

customers.

"Oh, you're here!" Mom looked up and beamed, while Dad chuckled.

"Finally! Your mom's been complaining about missing you every day."

"Sorry, I've been busy with work." I grinned playfully, hugging my parents loosely from behind, just like when I was a kid. Then, I suddenly remembered there was someone else with me. Clearing my throat, I straightened up, adjusting my demeanor to be more composed as I introduced Third, who was waiting near the storefront.

"This is Third. He's... uh, a fellow actor. He's the lead in the series I'm in."

"Hello." The tall figure gave a small smile and respectfully pressed his hands together in a wai.

"Hello! Wow, you really are handsome." Mom, who had always been a fan of good-looking people, smiled in delight. I was sure she'd be looking up Third's past works to watch tonight. And Dad would definitely text me about it later.

"Go ahead and find a seat. Write down what you want to eat." Dad called out, motioning for us to sit while he continued preparing noodles for customers.

It was almost noon, and the shop was getting crowded. Third seemed to want to avoid attention, so he picked the innermost table, facing away from the storefront. Meanwhile, I went to grab ice for our drinks. Our shop was semi-self-service. Otherwise, during rush hour, the servers wouldn't be able to keep up.

After staring at the menu on the wall for a moment, Third grabbed a pen and order slip to write his order before handing it to me. I

added my own order next.

"You don't eat spicy food?" I asked, noticing that he had written 'no chili' in parentheses.

"Mmm."

"Is it because you can't eat it, or you just don't like it?" I pried. Not that I was trying to be nosy. I just wanted him to experience the full, authentic taste. Because if it is seasoned properly, the noodles were absolutely delicious.

"If I eat spicy food, my nose runs. So I avoid it."

Probably a concern for his image as an actor. Sitting there with a runny nose while eating in public wouldn't look good.

"Then try my broth first. If you like it, I'll ask Mom to pack some for you to take home. Deal?" I said while jotting down my order.

"...Alright." Third paused for a second before agreeing.

I secretly smiled. He wasn't as hard to approach as I thought.

I took our order to my parents, but seeing how busy they were, I decided to make it myself. Before long, I returned with a tray of noodles.

"I missed this taste so much." I murmured after taking a sip of the broth. The familiar flavor filled not only my stomach but also my heart with warmth.

Back then, I hardly ever ate noodles. When you see them every day, you kind of lose your appetite for them. But after moving to Bangkok, I started missing my parents' cooking. No other noodles ever tasted as good as the ones from home. So whenever I came back, I always craved them.

"Here, try it." I pushed my bowl toward Third.

He frowned. "Why are there no vegetables?"

"Oh, I don't eat veggies." I gave a sheepish smile. Vegetables just didn't taste good. My parents had nagged me about this my whole life, but I always ignored them. At this point, they had given up. Since I made my own bowl today, of course, I left them out.

"Like a kid." Third commented.

"I'm twenty-one. That's still young, right?" I retorted playfully.

"Next time, if you don't eat your veggies, give them to me."

My heart skipped a beat. Did that mean he planned to have meals with me again in the future...?

"Ah, hurry up and taste it." I quickly diverted the topic to cover up my own flustered reaction by urging him. I watched anxiously as he took the shared spoon and scooped up some soup from my bowl to taste.

"Is it good?"

"Mm, it's good." The other person replied, his sharp eyes showing a hint of surprise mixed with approval.

"I told you." When I saw the other person's expression, I puffed out my chest with pride. This is the best of Ayutthaya. As the host, I had to take good care of my guest, so I secretly got up and whispered to my mom to pack two bags of noodles for Third to take home, one as thanks for driving me, and the other for View, since she had been complaining about missing Mom's cooking.

When I returned to the table, Third had already finished his bowl very quickly. Was he eating or inhaling it? That was way too fast.

"If you're still hungry, you can have another bowl."

"No, it's fine." He drank the rest of his water in one go and grabbed a tissue to wipe his mouth.

I started eating my own noodles, taking my time because I wanted to stay here a little longer. The restaurant was still a bit noisy as usual. It might be annoying to some people, but I grew up with this. I missed it, a lot.

Bangkok is nice, but if I had a choice, I'd rather stay home. Though right now, that wasn't an option. Maybe in another twenty years, I'd come back and settle down here.

"Shall we go?" I asked after finishing my food, just as the server placed the takeaway noodles on our table.

"Aren't you going to stay and chat with your parents?"

"No time for that. It'll get even busier soon. I'll find time to come home with my sister next month." I smiled. Today was just about seeing my parents' faces to ease my homesickness. If I stayed too long, I'd get back to Bangkok too late, and I had a shoot tomorrow.

We went to say goodbye to my parents. Third tried to pay for the meal, but my parents refused outright.

"No need, no need. Of course, we have to feed our son's friend." Dad said.

"Hey, can you take a photo with my parents? It'll help attract customers." I hadn't forgotten my main goal. Third didn't protest (well, of course, he got a free meal, so he had to help out a little). He took a smiling photo with my parents, and as their son, I was more than satisfied.

"Don't forget to pay my fee," He said as we left my parents and got back in the car.

"Huh?"

"You're paying for the next meal," the leading man said in a calm voice as he started the car. I pouted, thinking to myself that rich people are really stingy.

"Where to next?"

"Temple visit. If you're in Ayutthaya, you have to visit a temple." I took the liberty of grabbing Third's phone and setting the GPS to Wat Phanan Choeng. The owner of the phone didn't object, driving straight toward our destination.

Wat Phanan Choeng is one of Ayutthaya's most famous ancient temples, a must-visit spot for both Thai and foreign tourists. It's especially popular among Chinese visitors due to the renowned sacred Luang Pho To or Luang Pho Cham Po Kong, which has been worshipped since the Ayutthaya period. The temple is also located by the river, giving it a great atmosphere, so visitors never stop coming.

Even though it wasn't a holiday, the temple's parking lot was still packed with cars. I led Third to pay respects at the temple and bought some snacks at the market in front of it. We took turns snapping photos and sending them to P'Phai, like we were on a school field trip handing in our assignment.

Should I post this on my story? I wondered as we walked back to the car.

"Third, have you posted on your story yet?"

"Why?"

"If you post, then I won't." I said. I didn't really want people to know we were here together. He's in a ship with Nine, after all. If people found out we were traveling alone together, it might stir up drama.

"Not yet. You post and tag me."

"Nah, forget it. I won't post at all then." I cut it short for safety's sake.

Third frowned. "You don't want people to know you're traveling with me?"

"Something like that. It's not that I have a problem with you, but I don't want your ship fans to hate me." I let out a dry laugh. Some BL fans (though only a small portion) were really possessive over their ships and didn't like seeing actors getting close to anyone other than their ship partner.

I personally found it a bit silly, but since I was just starting out in this industry, I had to be cautious. Even in the filming set, if Third posted a story featuring other actors but not Nine, it already caused drama (View told me about it). I didn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

Third didn't say anything, but his well-shaped eyebrows remained furrowed. He seemed a bit annoyed. But about what...?

"Do you want to go anywhere?" I asked, letting him pick the next spot.

I had planned to take him to the night market for dinner before heading back to Bangkok. There were still about two hours before it opened, enough time for another stop. The leading man ended up choosing a café with an English garden theme.

Seeing the nice scenery, my photographer instincts kicked in. I looked around for my honorary model, who else but the guy I came with? That's when I spotted Third crouched in the garden, playing with the café's puppies.

His small smile was warm and gentle, something I rarely saw. He was clearly an animal lover (even if his face didn't exactly look the part). Without thinking, I pulled out my phone and snapped a picture. Satisfied, I smiled at how well the pose, lighting, and overall mood of the photo turned out.

"Third." I nudged him while he was still playing with the puppies and showed him the picture. "Want it? I'll send it to you."

"Mm." He looked quite surprised. He glanced at the photo, then up at me, before saying in a neutral tone, "You're good at taking pictures."

"Of course. I used to be a photographer." I raised my eyebrows. I actually preferred taking pictures of other people, but after becoming an actor, I became the one being photographed instead.

It wasn't natural for me. Even now, I still wasn't used to it.

I ordered an iced latte with less sugar, and he got a blended iced green tea. Even though Third had just told me I'd be covering the next meal, when it came time to pay, he ended up covering the bill again.

"Didn't you say I was supposed to pay?"

"Next meal." He said casually. He was probably saving it for when we hit the night market and he could really drain my wallet.

We sipped our drinks, chatting lightly and enjoying the peaceful atmosphere. Third started talking about himself a little, so I learned that he came from a wealthy family (which was obvious from the car

he drove). His dad was a medical professor, and his mom worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had once considered studying abroad but ended up entering the entertainment industry instead.

Such a classic celebrity background, like he was destined to be famous.

"Let's go to the market and grab dinner before heading back to Bangkok." Once we finished our drinks, I suggested our last stop is the night market near Wat Chaiwatthanaram, which only opened from Friday to Sunday starting at 4 PM.

This market stands out for its traditional Thai atmosphere, from the shop decorations and background music to the food containers used. Many vendors wear traditional Thai clothing, and even some visitors dress the same.

Since the market is crowded, Third and I choose to wear masks to conceal our faces while browsing the endless selection of food. Being well-known in society doesn't mean we always want to be in the spotlight. In our private time, we just want to live like normal people too.

"Can I scan to pay?"

"Yes, of course," the elderly vendor selling khanom tan replies. I open my mobile banking app to scan the QR code for payment, but Third is quicker by handing her cash first.

"I'll pay for it."

"Again? When will I ever get to pay?" I frown up at him. He's been paying for everything since we started walking around the market. Didn't he say he'd let me treat him? What's going on here?

"Next time."

His face is hidden behind a mask, so I can't see his expression, yet my heart suddenly starts racing. And for some reason, I can't explain why that makes me so happy...

After finishing buying food, we chose to find a place to sit a bit away from people, eating while listening to music, breathing in the fresh evening air in a relaxed manner as the sun was about to set beyond the horizon.

"Eat this." Third pushed a small banana-leaf tray filled with khanom thuai that he had bought, sharing it with me. I didn't refuse his kindness, using a toothpick to pick up a piece and pop it into my mouth, chewing slowly while observing his sullen face.

Coming on this trip together today made me feel like I was getting to know Third a little more. For example, he really, really liked sweets, he had bought tons of desserts to eat along the way. He also loved dogs, the moment he saw one wagging its tail at the temple, he immediately ran over to play with it. It was the same at the café, and the dogs seemed to like him too.

And then... what else? Oh! He wasn't as arrogant or cold as I had thought. He just had a naturally serious face and wasn't great at talking to others. He was straightforward and direct, whatever he thought, he said, sometimes a bit too bluntly, saying things that weren't exactly pleasant to hear. But in truth, he wasn't a harmful person. You could even say he was a good friend.

There was just one thing I couldn't understand no matter how much I thought about it, why was he so cold toward Nine? I noticed that, on set, unless absolutely necessary, he wouldn't talk to Nine at all. He wouldn't go near him, wouldn't even look at him. But maybe because they were in the same company and were a shipped pair, aside from filming the series, they had other jobs they had to do together often. That was why they had to talk to each other. The other staff members, including P'Phai, probably hadn't noticed that

he didn't really want to talk to Nine. But I was a Nine's fan, I could see those things clearly.

"Hey, let me ask you something." My curiosity reached a point where I could no longer hold it in, so I cautiously tested the waters with the person sitting across from me.

"What?"

"With Nine... you're not close?"

"No." The tall figure answered curtly. His sharp eyes, which had been relaxed, instantly turned icy, and it made my heart sink in a strange way.

"Do you guys have a problem?" I asked softly, but I knew that what I was asking was intrusive since it was a personal matter, so I quickly added, "I mean, I don't mean to... how should I put it... If it's uncomfortable, you don't have to answer. I was just curious."

Shit. No matter how I phrased it, it still sounded nosy.

My conversation partner fell silent, making me want to slap myself. The whole day had been good. It felt like Third and I were opening up to each other more. But then I let my nosiness ruin the atmosphere.

"I don't want to get involved with him because of old matters. But even if they're old, I will never forgive him."

That sentence made me freeze mid-bite. I could sense a faint pain in his deep, low voice. Ever since I had known him, I had never heard this kind of voice from him before.

What exactly happened...?

I swallowed hard, deciding that I shouldn't pry any further. Not just because I didn't want to bring up the past and make Third think about it again, but maybe because, deep down, I didn't want to hear about it. Nine was someone I admired, someone I had supported for a long time. I didn't want to see him in a different light...

"Oh, I meant to ask but forgot, why did you become an actor?" I asked in a casual tone, quickly changing the subject in hopes of lightening the mood.

"Have you ever watched Forrest Gump?"

"Once, I think, but I don't remember it well." I tried to recall. If I wasn't mistaken, that movie had won an Oscar.

"When I was in eleventh grade, I watched that movie and was deeply impressed by everything in it, especially the lead actor." He set his spoon down, and the hardness in his eyes faded. Looked like my subject change was successful.

"Tom Hanks. I thought he was amazing. He made someone like me, who wasn't a native speaker, fully feel the emotions of the character. And suddenly, I thought that I wanted to be an actor. I wanted people to be moved by my acting too."

"..."

"Before that, I never had the slightest interest in acting. But after watching that movie, it was like someone set off fireworks in my heart or something. So, I asked my parents to let me take acting classes, went around auditioning everywhere, and it took over a year before I got my first role in a series as a minor character. After that, more opportunities started coming in."

"Whoa..." Listening to him, I started to understand why he had been so angry on the first day of the workshop when I arrived late. He was probably like hundreds or thousands of other actors who had

struggled so hard just to get an opportunity. Meanwhile, I had been handed one without knowing a thing, completely clueless. To him, I must have looked like someone who wanted to enter the industry just for fame.

"Honestly, I don't want to be a celebrity. I just want to be an actor. You get that, right? But it's not something I can choose." He concluded with a low chuckle and took a sip of his watermelon smoothie.

"But you have a dream. I envy that," I murmured, as if talking to myself.

I had always envied people with dreams, people who were determined to chase after them, because I had never had one. I just lived day by day, not knowing what I wanted to be, never having a clue about what I wanted to do after graduation. All I thought about was finding some kind of job to survive, and that made me feel incredibly lost.

"What I'm about to say might annoy you, but to be honest... I only auditioned for this role because my friend pushed me to, and I just wanted to try it out." I stabbed at the remaining khanom tan in the tray with a toothpick, sighing.

"I like Nine's acting, so I thought it'd be nice to work with an artist I admire. That's all. I never dreamed of becoming an actor. And now, I feel empty. Sometimes, I wonder what I'm doing. I thought that if I tried acting, I might like it, that I might find my dream. It's been nice, but it's still not it."

"..."

"I... don't know what's ahead. It's like I can't see anything at all..." I poured everything out. It was something I had never told anyone, but for some reason, I found myself saying it in front of Third, the

person who had a strong dream of becoming an actor, the person who was the complete opposite of me.

Would he be mad after hearing that? He might think I was pathetic...

"It's not a big deal."

His words surprised me. I looked up and saw him giving me a small smile.

"People can search for their dreams their whole lives. Maybe you'll find yours someday."

"..."

"And even if you don't, even if you never have a dream, it's okay. As long as you live happily, isn't that enough to make life worth it?"

"That's right." I smiled as a certain warmth washed over me upon hearing those words.

All this time, I had only been looking at others, clinging to the idea that I should be like everyone else. But when someone told me that it was okay to be different, it felt like I could finally see the road ahead more clearly. Even though it still lacked a destination, I had plenty of time to keep walking along it.

And one day, if I were lucky... I might just find something I truly love.

"For now, just focus on acting. Like you said, you'd prove it to me." The person in front of me spoke in an even tone while stirring his watermelon smoothie. His gaze made it clear, if I didn't take my work seriously, we'd be having another problem for sure.

"I got it, I got it," I rolled my eyes. But the moment we locked eyes, we both burst into laughter.

And in that instant, when Third flashed me a wide smile, my heart started pounding erratically. I had to lower my gaze to escape his eyes.

"Are you done eating? Let's head back." I quickly got up, taking my empty food container to throw away. He stood and followed me, and soon, we were leaving the market, heading back to the car for our return to Bangkok.

The two-hours drive back felt as long as two years. We sat in silence, only the soft hum of music filling the space. I couldn't explain it, but being alone with Third made me restless. This wasn't the first time, but it was the first time it felt so intense, so unusually obvious.

"Drop me off at the next BTS station."

"It's fine, I'll take you—"

"No, no, no. I just... I have somewhere else to go. Just drop me off up ahead." I quickly interrupted as we entered Bangkok. Third pulled over as I had asked, and after thanking him, I quickly got on the BTS station.

I lied. I didn't actually have any errands to run. I was just too confused and flustered to stay alone with him any longer. I needed some time to clear my head and go home on my own. Besides... Third's place was nearby, but my house was still far away. If he took me all the way, it would just waste more of his time to rest.

I stood in a corner, adjusting my mask higher to avoid attention as I scrolled through my phone. But then, my eyes widened in shock.

Third's Instagram, which I had just followed this morning, popped up on my feed.

He had just posted a picture I took of him playing with a puppy at the café, with the caption,

'Take a break, in this moment.'

Beneath my mask, my cheekbones lifted involuntarily in a smile. And I had no idea why...

Take 11, Action!

Creeeeak

The mobile phone placed on the bedside table vibrates. A melody plays from the speaker as the screen lights up, showing the time as 4 AM.

I spring up from the bed, grab the mobile phone, and turn off the alarm energetically, as if I had a full night's sleep. Even though in reality, I only slept for four hours. On shooting days, I always have to wake up before the rooster crows. If you ask if I'm tired or sleepy, well, a little, but my energy is surging at full force. My eyes are wide awake without needing coffee. I shower, get dressed, and hum a song cheerfully at the thought of going to the set.

It's not that I suddenly became hardworking or developed a passion for acting. The reason I'm in a good mood is that if I go to the set, I'll get to see...

Creak!

At this thought, my hand, which was reaching for my backpack, freezes. I was about to go down and wait for the company van at the lounge downstairs when an image of that handsome smile of the lead actor flashes into my mind. That makes me panic, I collapse onto the sofa, gripping my head with both hands.

Lately, whenever I'm alone, I tend to lose my mind frequently. Ever since coming back from Ayutthaya, I keep thinking about Third on and off, like every five minutes... or is it every three minutes? Not sure. Suppose I'm eating Pad Krapow, I'd accidentally think,

'Something this spicy, Third wouldn't eat.' Or if I see someone holding a green tea cup, I'd think, 'That's his favorite drink.'

On set, my eyes keep drifting toward him. When we have scenes together, I secretly get nervous and avoid direct eye contact. When he messages me on LINE (mostly about work-related matters), my heart races, and I reread the message over and over. Before bed, I catch myself wondering whether Third is asleep yet.

Out of nowhere, that man has taken over more than seventy percent of my brain. As a guy with exactly one experience in love, this feeling reminds me of when I had a crush on my ex during high school.

The symptoms are identical.

So, does that mean I have a crush on Third?!

Realizing this fact, something I've been aware of for a while now, makes my throat dry. I've reflected on it already. What I feel for Third doesn't seem to be mere admiration, like seeing him as an idol the way I do with Nine. If it were just admiration, I wouldn't long for Third to smile warmly at me and only me. I wouldn't feel a strange tightness in my chest when rewatching his past projects where he has love scenes with other actors.

Damn it, is my heart playing tricks on me? I used to find this arrogant, pretentious lead actor annoying, someone who acts like a bad boy on camera but is a walking freezer behind the scenes. And now, I'm the one who's frozen solid. This is a total 180-degree turnaround.

I feel conflicted, torn between wanting Third to know I like him and not wanting him to know at all.

But if I keep thinking about this, I won't be able to focus on work. So, I decide to act normal for now and observe his reaction.

I have no idea if he likes men. Just because he acts in BL series doesn't mean he's LGBTQ+. Even I, who always thought I was a straight guy, was shocked to realize I like Third.

But sexuality is fluid throughout life. Maybe I'm bisexual. As for Third... if it turns out he doesn't see me as more than a coworker or already has someone he's talking to, I'll quietly give up.

"Good morning, P'."

"Morning."

As soon as I step into the van, P'Cher hands me a cup of lightly sweetened latte, as always.

"Thank you," I say, nodding in greeting to Renji, who is sitting behind P'Cher, looking exhausted, like he was forced out of bed for work.

I quickly head to the back seat, take out my phone, connect it to my AirPods, and put them on.

"P'Wan, why do you always sit in the back these days? Do I smell bad?" The kid whines sleepily. Before, whenever I got in the van, I would always sit next to him.

"No, no, I just want to focus." I flash him a smile.

But the real reason I sit in the back is so no one can see my phone screen.

I open my secret X account, scrolling through my timeline and various hashtags. I tap on Third's name tag, browsing through all the updates about him that his fans have posted, Instagram pictures, stories, event photos, and interview clips.

I check out a thread where fans compiled instances of Third calling out societal issues, like advocating for marriage equality and other legal reforms. I've seen glimpses of these before, but since I was biased against him, I never really paid attention. Now that I actually listen to his views, I find myself even more impressed.

"Since heterosexual couples receive legal rights when they marry, all couples, regardless of gender, should have the same rights. The law shouldn't divide human rights based on gender. Marriage equality should have happened a long time ago. But since it still hasn't, I'd like to encourage everyone to join in advocating for fairness for all people."

Wow, an actor who makes full use of his voice. His fans must be proud. I also intend to use my own voice to contribute to society as much as possible.

"Wan."

"..."

"Wan!"

"Yes?!"

P'Cher's loud call startles me. I was so focused on staring at Third's face that I almost dropped my AirPods. "What's up?"

"I said, next week there's a launch event for a high-end cosmetic brand. They just contacted us to have you, Third, and Nine attend."

"Oh, okay."

Since my viral vendor clip, I've been getting quite a few solo gigs, event appearances, photoshoots, and magazine interviews. But this will be my first time attending a big brand event, and with Third, no less.

I bite my lip to stop myself from grinning while sneaking a glance at my phone. But at the same time, I'm surprised that I thought of Third before Nine, even though I should be more excited about Nine.

Time changes everything. Even my feelings for Nine.

They say a fan's love for an artist has a promotional period and an expiration date. Maybe my promotional period has ended. Nowadays, when I see a notification that Nine has posted a new picture, I don't rush to check it like before.

Maybe it's because we work together often, so he doesn't feel as distant anymore, making it less special. Or maybe it's because I've seen other sides of him...

I know I shouldn't expect anything from others. But I can't help feeling a little disappointed. Just a little. I still admire Nine the same way, it's just that... the excitement and enthusiasm are gone.

"And what were you smiling so sweetly at just now?"

P'Cher turns around, eyes sharp behind her golden-framed glasses, staring me down. "Were you talking to your lover?"

"Hey, P'! I don't have a lover." I shake my head.

A lover? Pfft. I'm crushing on someone one-sidedly here!

"Alright then. If you ever get a lover, tell me, so I can help keep it under wraps. You have to tell me, Renji too. Got it?"

"Yesss," we both reply in unison.

Becoming a celebrity requires sacrificing many things in exchange for immense wealth, especially privacy. For young stars like us, whose careers rely heavily on our image, it's inevitable that we have to keep our relationships a secret. Fans tend to prefer celebrities

who appear single rather than those who openly have partners. At least, that's what the company says.

Most agencies don't forbid their artists from having relationships, but they often require them to keep it a secret so it doesn't affect the image the company has built. So, if you have a partner, you have to be extremely careful. Everything must be kept under wraps. No matter how much you want to show off your love to the world, you can only express it through private or locked accounts. You can't go public until the time is right, which for most people, is long past their golden era in the industry.

Honestly, it's pretty tough. But for now, I guess I still have it easy. I don't think I'll be getting a lover anytime soon, unless Third happens to like me too, which... seems pretty unlikely. Haha...

"P'Cher, so if someone has a partner but acts like they're just friends or siblings, that's okay, right?" Renji suddenly started acting like a curious little kid.

"That's fine, but you should let me check whatever you post first. And you also need to talk to your partner about what is and isn't okay to share on social media. Actually, it's best not to post anything at all, just to be safe."

"So that means dating someone outside the industry would be really difficult. Wouldn't it be safer to date someone from the same company?"

"Not necessarily, but if you're in the same company, it's easier to manage things." P'Cher narrowed his eyes and furrowed his brows. "Why are you suddenly asking? Are you dating someone?"

"No, no! I was just asking." Renji laughed softly, his face pure and innocent.

I was sitting there listening, not quite wanting to believe it. Asking in such detail like this must mean he has a lover or someone he likes for sure. But who does Renji like? Every day, I only see him hanging out with P'Cher and me. Especially me, he follows me around like a little puppy.

Or does he like Porsche, another junior in the same company? But he doesn't seem that close or involved with Porsche to that extent. Maybe it's someone outside the industry. Anyway, if he doesn't say anything, out of good manners, I shouldn't go prying.

Why bother with other people's business? Handle your own matters first, Wan.

Sigh.

The world continues to spin at a steady pace, just like the hands of a clock that never stop moving, unless the clock dies. In the blink of an eye, the filming of the series has already reached the halfway point. As for today, it's the day I have to attend an event with Third and Nine at a famous shopping mall in the heart of the city.

"Behave well during the interview with the reporters. Don't forget to subtly promote the product for the clients too. That way, in the future, you might get to be a brand friend or work with them again. Got it?" P'Jarin, the manager who personally came to supervise me today, said. P'Cher helped to remind me again while I was getting my makeup and hair done.

"Okay, got it." I obediently responded.

Come to think of it, life is so unpredictable. Before, when there were events like this, I had to stand on my toes, stretching my neck, lifting my camera to take pictures of celebrities. But today, people will be standing on their toes to take pictures of me instead.

But today is a workday. I wonder how many fans will be free to come see me. If at least four or five show up, that'd be great. Just that much would give me motivation.

"Since you're attending an event with Third and Nine today, more people will see you, and your engagement might increase. Within the next two or three days, do an IG live, okay?" P'Jarin said while dusting off her bright red gel-polished fingernails.

"I don't even know what to live about anymore."

"Then just live when you go grocery shopping, when you go to 7-Eleven, when you go jogging in the park, anything at all, sweetie. I know you're an introvert, but we're celebrities. Our lives need some content, okay?"

"Yes..." I responded in a weary voice.

It's not that I don't want to do a live for my fans. I just don't know what to talk about. Talking to the camera isn't the same as talking to a real person, you get me? When I talk to myself, I feel like I'm going crazy. It'll take me a while before I get used to it.

"Alright, get ready to get in the car." P'Jarin grabbed her ridiculously expensive luxury-brand bag, slung it over her arm, and patted my shoulder after I was fully done with hair and makeup, ready for the event. "Let's hurry a bit so we have time to greet the clients, take pictures, and all that."

"Then we'll get to see Third..." I blurted out before realizing. Once I caught on, *crap, that sounded so suspicious!*, I quickly added, "And Nine, right? I mean, did they arrive before us?"

"Not sure. Don't know if they got here first or if they'll go straight into the event. If they had another schedule before this, we'll probably see them at the venue." P'Cher answered while grabbing

her bag and striding off to the car. Meanwhile, P'Jarin burst into laughter.

"What's this, sweetie? Missing your friend? Seeing each other at the filming set isn't enough?"

"No, I was just curious."

I *wasn't* excited about seeing Third! I was just wondering what he'd be wearing. From what I've noticed, every time he attends an event, he usually gets outfits on the sexy side, those deep-cut suits and all. But he pulls them off. I used to not like it much, but after seeing it a lot, it actually suits him...

When you like someone, even if Third wore rags, I'd still think he looks good.

My team and I arrived at the event venue nearly an hour early. P'Jarin took me to greet and introduce myself to the clients. I put on my sweetest smile and talked as much as I could. Making conversation is still a bit difficult for me, but P'Cher said I've improved.

"Yes, just like that, Wan. Wherever you go, try to chat with people like this. It makes them feel that we're approachable and friendly. Celebrities who act friendly get more love than those who carry themselves like untouchable stars," P'Jarin explained at length as we walked back to the waiting room.

I glanced at my phone. Ten minutes left until it was time to go on stage.

"Wan, your phone."

"Yes." I handed my phone to P'Cher for safekeeping, thinking to myself that I'd probably see those two at the event itself. That's how it is for top-tier celebrities. Some days, they run from one event to another, three or four in a single day. They must pass out from exhaustion once they get home.

After a while, a staff member came to escort us to get ready and receive the briefing. I waited near the exit door, greeting and getting to know other artists who were attending. While I was chatting with an actress, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"Hello, Wan?"

"Hello." I smiled at Nine, who was wearing a white suit today, with soft, peach-pink toned makeup that matched the brand's colors. My eyes naturally drifted to the tall figure of Third, who was following behind. He wore a navy blue deep-cut suit, accessorized with luxury silver jewelry including earrings, necklaces, rings on every finger. His hair was styled up, revealing his forehead, and his sharp eyeliner emphasized his intense and captivating eyes.

Just seeing Third's face made my breathing quicken. And when he met my eyes and raised an eyebrow in greeting, I had to force myself not to look away.

"Did you two... have another event before this?" I quickly asked to cover up before my reaction gave me away.

"Yeah. It was tiring. Wan, you're lucky you don't have to rush around like us." Nine replied, his tone gentle, but the words made me pause for a moment.

Was he implying that I don't have many jobs? No, probably not. I'm overthinking it.

I kept quiet and stopped trying to make conversation, since it was almost time to go on stage. Third moved closer, his body warmth

reaching me, followed by his low voice speaking softly,

"You look good in that suit today."

Wait, wait, why is my heart racing? He was talking about the suit, Wan! Not about me!

"Uh-huh. Gotta thank the suit. It makes me look a little better." I suppressed my nervousness as I responded, glancing down at the fitted gray suit I was wearing. It was a sponsored piece, and I liked it so much that I was thinking about buying it to keep.

"You'd look good even without it."

"..."

Okay. That was definitely directed at me. Damn it. Is he trying to mess with my heart right before the event starts? Is he trying to kill me?!

"Yeah, true. Otherwise, how would I be a celebrity? Haha." I joked to cover up my inner turmoil. I heard Third chuckle softly and felt his gaze on me, but I didn't dare look at him. I was afraid I'd lose my composure and he'd notice.

Luckily, the event had already begun. The staff invited the artists to make their appearances one by one. I went out first since I was still new, while the top artists would come out later. The highlight of the event was, of course, the hottest on-screen couple at the moment, Third and Nine.

There wasn't much to an event like this. Just standing around, smiling, taking photos with the product displays in different spots inside the shop, answering the host's pre-briefed questions, and waving to the fans gathered outside. I felt relieved when I saw quite a number of people holding signs with my name on them, cheering for me from time to time. After the event ended, there would be a

small gathering, so I'd get the chance to chat with my fans and catch up with them.

"Let's have all the artists take a group photo."

Before wrapping up, the staff took a final group picture. The whole event took about an hour, after which we went to give interviews to the waiting reporters. They wanted to interview me, Third, and Nine together since we were currently filming the same series.

"Can you give us an update on the series you're filming? How far along is it?"

"We've finished about fifty percent of the filming now. It'll definitely be out within this year," Third answered. I just nodded along in agreement. As long as the reporters didn't ask me anything directly, I had no intention of stealing the spotlight from the two leads.

"Can you share a bit about what it's like on set?"

"Our set? It's really fun, really great, right?" Nine replied, turning to me and Third for support. I just nodded along, going with the flow.

"Everyone is working really hard, especially Wan, our new member."

While I was zoning out, Nine suddenly directed the conversation toward me. I had to snap back to my senses and smile at the reporters. But my expression quickly stiffened when I heard the next sentence.

"Since he's new, right? When we're in scenes together, there might be more cuts than usual. There might be some hiccups that slow things down a bit, but Wan is really dedicated and works very hard."

"..."

Wait a minute. P'Jarin once taught me that during interviews, if I have to talk about someone else, I must never say anything negative to avoid any possible misunderstandings. And that sentence just now... It sounded a little off. Would people think that I was the one slowing down the filming?

If we don't count that accident where I missed my cue and accidentally punched Third, all my other scenes were shot according to schedule, with no delays at all. So why did Nine say that? Or maybe he just said it carelessly without meaning anything by it...

"Has the filming been delayed more than expected because of that?"

My heart sank when I heard a reporter ask exactly what I was worried about.

"Well..."

"Not at all."

A deep voice from the tall figure standing on the other side cut Nine off.

My heart pounded in my chest, a loud ringing in my ears. Just when it felt like I was about to sink into a freezing abyss, a hand grasped mine, pulling me back to solid ground.

"The filming is going according to plan. And Wan has improved his acting skills really quickly. Even P'Phai, the director, personally praised him. Honestly, I think he's even better than I was when I first started filming a series. Please look forward to Wan's performance, along with the rest of our cast."

I glanced at the sharp-featured man who was smiling at the reporters. My heart pounded so hard it felt like it would jump out of my chest.

The interview continued for a while, but soon, I was pulled away to film solo content while Third and Nine continued their joint interview. I finished my work earlier and returned to the artists' waiting room, taking a break to drink some water and pack up before heading to meet the fans. I still hadn't had the chance to thank Third in person.

I quickly nudged A.R. before we left the waiting room to see the fans.

"P'Cher, can I have my phone for a sec?"

P'Cher handed me my phone, and I quickly opened LINE, clicked into Third's chat, and typed out a message before handing the phone back to P'Cher.

[Thank you so much for today.]

Before this, I didn't quite understand myself. I didn't know why I started to like him.

But today, I think I found my answer.

It's because of his honesty, his sincerity. Because he always stands up to protect others.

As the sound of camera shutters faded and the reporters and fans dispersed, the atmosphere between the hottest on-screen couple right now flipped completely.

"What was that just now?"

"What do you mean?" Nine raised an eyebrow, turning to look at his fellow labelmate and onscreen partner with a clueless expression.

"You said Wan caused a lot of cuts. Why did you say that?"

"It's the truth. They asked about the atmosphere on set, so I just answered honestly." Nine flopped onto the sofa, unscrewed a bottle of water, and took a sip as the makeup artist stepped in to touch up his face.

"There were plenty of other things you could have talked about, weren't there?" Third spoke in a low, displeased tone. During the interview, he had clearly noticed the anxious look in Wan's eyes. He knew exactly why this bastard had said that.

"Come on, it's not that serious," P'Sunny, their A.R., tried to mediate.

"Yeah, you're making a big deal out of nothing."

Seeing that the person sitting there didn't show the slightest remorse for his actions, Third clenched his jaw, barely restraining his frustration. His voice was ice-cold as he spoke.

"Give us a moment. I need to talk to him alone."

It wasn't a request, it was an order. And since the staff at the label knew well enough about the rocky relationship between these two, they all quietly left the room without hesitation.

Click!

As soon as the door shut, Third immediately smirked mockingly.

"Still haven't changed your nasty habits, have you?"

"Hmm?"

"That habit of not wanting to see anyone else do well. Still haven't kicked it?"

"What are you talking about? I don't understand at all." Nine dropped his usual sweet and polite facade. His large eyes gleamed with satisfaction, contradicting his words. "But speaking of which..."

You seem oddly protective of that Wan guy. You go on one trip together, and suddenly you're best buddies?"

"I care about him because I don't want him to go through what you did to me."

Third strode toward Nine with slow, deliberate steps, his gaze now ice-cold.

"You already ruined my chances once. That should be enough, shouldn't it? You got what you wanted, so stop dragging others into your mess. If you keep harassing people like this, one day, someone's going to dig up all your filth and expose you for what you are."

"..."

"Fix yourself up and hurry up. We still have to meet the fans and go home."

With that, Third turned on his heel and marched out of the room, leaving Nine watching his back with a smug smile.

"It won't turn out that way, my friend."

He murmured as he gracefully stood from the chair, stepping toward the large mirror and raising a hand to fix his hair.

"If you destroy others before they can destroy you, then you win."

Today's schedule was finally over. After meeting the fans, I went out for dinner with the team. The company's van dropped me off in front of my condo at 9:30 PM.

"P'Wan, you should clean your makeup off as soon as you get back, or you'll break out," View popped his head out of his room,

grumbling at me while I sat slumped on the sofa, completely drained.

"Yeah, yeah..." I drawled lazily. But I knew she was right, so I forced myself to drag my feet to my bedroom and grab my cleansing balm.

As I rubbed it onto my face, my eyes kept darting toward the phone lying lifelessly on my bed. Third still hadn't replied to my message. Maybe he was busy, still working, or had left his phone with A.R.

Even though I knew all that, I was still irritated with myself for sitting here waiting for a reply instead of doing something else.

Ding!

I flinched as my phone screen lit up, signaling a new message. A smile spread across my face when I saw Third's name.

I quickly grabbed my phone, completely forgetting that my hands were still covered in cleansing balm.

[It's fine.]

Just three short syllables, yet they made me grin wide.

I suddenly wanted to keep talking to him. But I had no idea what to say.

Riiiiing!

As if reading my mind, he called me first.

I swallowed hard, nervous as I pressed the answer button.

This was the first time Third had ever called me.

"Uh... Hello."

[...Hey.]

It seems like the person who isn't good at talking also doesn't know how to start the conversation. But still, he went out of his way to call.

"What is it?" I asked, secretly anticipating what he would talk about. But I knew it wouldn't be anything other than today's interview.

[Don't think too much about it. About today, I mean.]

A deep voice spoke, exactly as I had expected. On the outside, Third seems like a cold person, but he actually cares a lot about the feelings of those around him. I really wish people, whether his fans or those who are prejudiced against him, could see this good side of him.

"Mm, I'm not thinking too much about it. I know that Nine probably didn't mean it." I said. As someone who has been a fan of Nine for a long time, I knew well enough that he tends to speak without thinking. This time was just a small mistake. He probably didn't have any bad intentions.

The other side went silent for a moment before saying, [It's good that you're not thinking too much about it.]

Then, dead air. Neither of us knew what to say. I didn't want to hang up yet, but I also knew we were done talking, and I should probably end the call now so Third could rest...

[Wan.]

"Hm?"

[From now on, if there's anything bothering you, you can talk to me. No need to hesitate.]

His short words, spoken in a monotone voice, made me smile wider. My heart ticked a little faster as I teased, "You said it now. If I end up calling you every day and you get annoyed later, it'll be too late."

The person on the other end let out a soft laugh. And then he said something that made my eyes widen and my heart race even more.

[Then call me. I'll be waiting.]

"I-I'm removing my makeup! That's all for now!" I blurted out quickly and hung up before burying my face against my knees, letting out a groan.

I was the one who flirted first, but when he flirted back (?), I completely lost my composure and couldn't continue the conversation. Damn, I'm so pathetic.

Amidst my embarrassment, I felt like I could see a glimmer of hope. I seriously wondered, was Third just joking around earlier? Or did he actually mean it when he said I could call him every day?

Because if it was the latter... it meant that maybe, just maybe, this love of mine wasn't entirely impossible.

Was that right...?

I don't know if this is normal for everyone, or if I'm just the unluckiest person alive, but every time I think my life is going well, something always happens to wipe the smile off my face.

Creeeeek.

The phone on the bedside table vibrated noisily, refusing to stop. I woke up in a daze and reached for it to see that it was a call from my own AR.

It was only 5:30 in the morning. I didn't have any filming schedules today. Why was P'Cher calling me this early? Waking someone up while they're sleeping peacefully is a serious crime, you know!

Even though I thought that, my instincts were screaming that something wasn't right. If it weren't something urgent, P'Cher would never call me at dawn. So I quickly answered the call.

"Hello...?"

[Wan, sorry for waking you up. But there's a bit of a situation right now.]

P'Cher's voice carried an unusual hint of worry, something I rarely ever heard from her.

My heart immediately dropped to my stomach when I heard her next sentence.

[Late last night, someone spread a rumor on social media saying that you and Third had a fight on set. So bad that you even physically attacked each other first. The trend on X has almost hit 500K already. For now, don't go on social media. And other than your parents, don't pick up any calls from anyone. P'Jarin and I will try to clear things up first, then we'll call you again.]

"...Okay." I responded with a dry mouth.

The moment I hung up, I raised my hand to press against my temples.

What the hell is this nonsense?

Take 12, Action!

Even though P'Cher kept warning me that I shouldn't go on social media yet, but curiosity is something difficult to control. It's too troublesome.

'An insider says there's conflict on set. T. and W. don't get along. Everyone on set knows these two don't talk to each other.'

'They say W. started the trouble, even punched T., but T. didn't retaliate. So it's exactly like the script, right? The protagonist and the villain.'

'Isn't he a newbie? He seemed cute when he appeared in public, so why is he acting all macho like this? Or is he jealous and wants attention like our favorite?'

'Remember last month when T. kept wearing a mask for a while? And when he attended events, his makeup looked oddly thick. Fans were cursing out the makeup artist like crazy, but in the end, they were just covering up a wound.'

Those messages were what was spreading under the hashtag #SetSecretsDeepDive. The source was a burner account that had just been freshly created, claiming to be an insider on the series' set. It described a fight between actors that escalated to physical violence and said real life was just like the roles they played in the series.

Of course, no names were mentioned directly, but fans and Thai netizens were digging around, trying to piece things together. The conclusion was that the ones involved were Third, the series' lead, and a new actor who got a major role as the villain on his first project, which is me. Every burner account was trying to dig up clips and scrutinize event photos. Normally, when attending events, Third and I didn't talk much anyway, so that ended up becoming (some sort of) evidence proving our supposedly strained relationship. And since that burner account was stirring things up by claiming there was even a clip of our fight, the hashtag's engagement shot up, nearly hitting 600,000 tweets.

I pressed my lips together as I skimmed through everyone's speculations. It was unbelievable how easily netizens were swayed by a faceless burner account that had just been created yesterday. Luckily, there were still a few who defended me. Mostly my fans and old school friends from high school and university, saying that, based on their experience, I wasn't that kind of person at all. But most people tend to believe rumors more. Maybe it's because waiting for the truth to come out isn't as flavorful or exciting as following a scandal. So now I was being torn apart, criticized to the point where people were even demanding that I be removed from the series entirely.

The biggest question was who started this rumor in the first place. It was true that Third and I didn't hit it off at first and didn't talk during pre-production, but the whole fight thing was complete nonsense. That day was an accident. If there was a clip, it was probably from that moment. And besides, Third and I had already cleared things up. These days, we joke around as usual on set. If this so-called insider was really part of the production team, they would have seen that. So why suddenly spread rumors to ruin our reputations? Even though I was taking the heavier hit, Third had his antis piling on him too. In the end, both sides were getting dragged down.

I locked my phone screen, set my phone down on the bed, and rubbed my temples, which were throbbing. I should've listened to P'Cher. I really shouldn't have checked social media.

It was now 5:30 AM. It was a day off with no work schedule, but I couldn't sleep anymore. I figured I might as well open my laptop and work on my research report. However, when I sat down at my desk, my mind went completely blank. I couldn't type a single word. When I opened my photo-editing program to edit a picture of Nine, I found that his bright smile no longer had the power to comfort me.

I snapped my laptop shut with a deep sigh, then returned to hugging my knees on the bed for a long while. I ignored calls from everyone, including Jay and Renji, because I wasn't in the right headspace to deal with anyone just yet.

Knock, knock, knock!

"P'Wan, are you awake? P'Wan!"

At 8 AM, my little sister's anxious voice rang out, accompanied by rapid knocking on my bedroom door. When I dragged myself to open the door, I saw View in her long nightgown, her hair a messy tangle as she held her phone with a panicked expression.

"P'Wan, have you seen the news? On X, there's—"

"SetSecretsDeepDive or whatever? Yeah, I know." I cut in with a slow, steady voice, trying to keep my expression neutral as I walked back to sit on my bed. My sister trailing closely behind.

"But it's not true, right? I don't believe for a second that you'd get into a fight with anyone." View plopped down beside me, grilling me for answers, though her big eyes were filled with nothing but pure concern.

"And especially not P'Third. No way. Compared to him, you're like a tiny puppy. Even if you threw a punch, you'd lose."

"..."

"Don't make that face! I mean, you're smart enough not to use violence, right? Even if there was a problem between you two." My cheeky little sister hurried to clarify when she saw me furrow my brows.

"Yeah." I nodded. I wasn't sure if she had just insulted or complimented me, but at least she trusted me. "It's all fake news. Third and I never had any issues. I mean, sure, we didn't click at first, but we never got physical. We already worked things out. These days, we talk just fine."

"What about the clip people are talking about?"

"It was a missed cue during a fight scene. I accidentally hit Third for real."

"Huh?! So you really punched—"

"But it was an accident. Third understood, and there was never a problem. If there was, would I have gone on a trip to Ayutthaya with him?" I explained.

Hearing that, View looked relieved for a moment before her expression darkened with anger.

"So that so-called clip is just from that scene? Ugh, those jerks. This is straight-up slander. I'm gonna curse them out." She aggressively opened X, ready to type away.

"Stop, stop, stop!" I snatched the phone from her and immediately stopped her. "No, the company will handle it. You just stay put."

"How can I stay put when they're trashing my brother?!"

"It's okay. Let the higher-ups sort it out. Thanks for worrying about me." I reassured my sister, who still looked frustrated, but she was mature enough to know when to back off. Since I asked her directly, she let it go.

"Come on, let's eat. I'm starving. Sausages and eggs sound good, right?"

I got up to make breakfast, hoping to distract myself, but my sister pushed me back down.

"You sit tight. I'll make it." View huffed and stomped off to the kitchen.

Not wanting to sit idly, I followed her. Even when she shooed me away, I insisted. In the end, I was frying sausages and bacon at the stove while View cooked the eggs.

Creeeeak.

My phone, which is resting on the counter behind us, vibrated with an incoming Line call. When I glanced at the screen, I froze. It was Third calling.

I had been told not to answer calls from anyone except my parents, but Third was involved in the same scandal. We were in this mess together. Surely answering wouldn't be a problem.

"View, watch the pan for me. I'm gonna take this call." I grabbed my phone and hurried out to the balcony. After sliding the door shut, I picked up.

"Hello?"

[I just saw the news.] No small talk. He got straight to the point, his voice still slightly groggy. He must have woken up to this disaster and called me right away.

"Yeah. Ridiculous, right?" I forced a laugh, though I knew my voice sounded dry. Even if it was fake news, seeing so many people cursing me out felt awful. Social media was terrifying.

[Are you okay?]

Third's question made something hard lodge in my throat. It took me several seconds to find my voice.

"Well... it's not true. But seeing so many people cursing me makes me feel uneasy. I just realized how many people are ready to hate me, even though there's no evidence at all."

Ever since I found out about this, I haven't been able to focus. I try not to overthink, try to stay strong, reminding myself that being in the public eye means facing things like this, it's normal. A hundred people may love me, but ten thousand may hate me. If I chose this career, I have to toughen up. But at the same time, I can't deny that I'm really worried because this is the first time I've experienced something like this.

[I'll handle it. You don't have to worry,] Third said, his deep voice steady and firm, bringing me a sense of reassurance.

[Your manager has already contacted mine. I think we'll have to post a story to explain that it was a misunderstanding and let the company take legal action against the one who spread the rumor. If reporters ask me about it at my event tonight, I'll explain it again so people can stop doubting.]

"..."

[Don't worry, okay?] He repeated.

"Mm. Thanks a lot." The corners of my lips curled up as I spoke. Third seemed so calm and composed, like he was used to this sort of thing. Will I ever be as strong as him?

"Who do you think started the rumor? That account claims it was someone from our production team."

[Probably someone who just loves trouble and wants to end up in court.] His usually calm voice turned noticeably harsher. He must be pretty angry. After all, he's affected by this too.

"I'm sorry that you got dragged into this because of me."

[You don't need to apologize. You're not the one at fault.] He replied immediately. I heard him let out a long sigh. [What time did you wake up?]

"Five in the morning. AR called to tell me the news."

[You don't have any work today, right? Go back to sleep. Days off are hard to come by.]

"I can't sleep until this is resolved." I hunched my shoulders, feeling dejected. My rare day off had been completely ruined. I'd probably be a walking zombie all day.

[You're so stubborn. How old are you, seriously?]

"Huh?" I blinked, confused. Did he just call me stubborn? What the hell? Or am I so stressed that I'm hallucinating?

[Go to sleep.]

"I'm not sleeping."

[Are you always this argumentative?] His smooth, deep voice carried a mix of sternness and amusement, making my heart race. If he

were here, would he be looking at me with that fond and exasperated gaze?

Crap. I was stressed just a moment ago, and now my heart is acting up. My emotions are changing way too fast!

"Alright, alright, I'm going now. If there's any update, let's talk again later." I spoke so fast my tongue almost tripped over itself before quickly ending the call. The next thing I knew, there was a smile on my face. A stark contrast to how down I had felt just moments ago, like a puppy abandoned by its owner for a three-day vacation.

Did he do that on purpose just to cheer me up? If so... he's playing with my heart way too much!

For Third, it should've been just another normal workday. But that changed when he woke up, checked social media, and found a ridiculous hashtag filled with fake news about him and Wan spreading all over the internet.

The first thing he did was call to check on Wan. Just hearing his dejected voice was enough to know that he was stressed over the situation. It is understandable for a rookie in the entertainment industry who had never faced something this frustrating before. It only made Third angrier at whoever started this rumor.

After hanging up, Third called his manager, wondering why he hadn't been informed about this sooner.

[Oh, it's just nonsense. I didn't want to waste your brain cells on it. The higher-ups are handling it. You just need to wait for instructions on what to do. Also, since you're up, get ready. The car will pick you up at noon.]

That was from P'Pitch, the company owner and his manager.

Third felt a little uneasy about the lack of communication, but it made sense. He had an event today, and his manager probably didn't want him to be distracted by drama. Usually, the company would handle these things first before telling the artists how to respond publicly. So for now, all he could do was wait.

By the afternoon, both he and Wan posted Instagram stories explaining the situation. Wan clarified that there was no conflict between them and that the alleged physical altercation was a misunderstanding. It had been a mistimed action scene during filming. Wan's agency released a statement saying they would take legal action against whoever spread the damaging rumors. Third then quote-shared the statement.

The situation died down quickly. Once people realized it was a misunderstanding, they lost interest. By the time Third was getting his makeup done before his event at 7 PM, the hashtag had already fallen from the trending list.

What annoyed him, though, was seeing how many people had trashed Wan when the rumors were spreading, only to quietly delete their posts after the truth came out. Very few actually apologized.

People type out cruel words so easily, based on nothing but hearsay. They justify it by saying public figures should be prepared for criticism, but when the truth comes out, they refuse to apologize. That's how social media has always been. The ones who spread the rumors move on like nothing happened, while the ones they hurt are left with lasting scars. Some people won't understand until they experience it themselves.

"Third, you're not taking this to heart, are you?"

A smooth but insincere voice broke through his thoughts. It was Nine, his co-star for today's event, speaking as he stepped out of the restroom in their artist dressing room.

"Are you ready to answer the reporters' questions?"

Ignoring Nine, Third turned to P'Sunny, his AR staff, who was chatting with another team member.

"P'Sunny, what time is our company releasing the statement about suing the person who spread the fake news? I want to repost it."

"Hmm... Oh, uh... not sure. Maybe there won't be one."

The AR woman's response made the listener furrow his brows tightly. "Why isn't there one?"

"Because in this news, our side is the one being wronged. When we talked, the other party already said they were planning to sue. So P'Pitch might have decided to let it go this time and wait for a bigger anti case, something strong enough to make an example out of."

The woman replied in a calm tone before turning to giggle with the team, leaving Third to sigh in resignation. His sharp eyes were clouded with frustration and doubt.

Neither P'Pitch nor P'Sunny seemed the least bit concerned about this news. No, to be exact, they seemed completely indifferent. Even if he was less affected than Wan, he was still impacted by the fake news. Did they not care about the feelings of their own artist at all? Not even a statement threatening legal action?

Since he couldn't rely on the company, he might have to handle this himself.

"Alright, get up, kids. Third, when the reporters ask about this, just say it's not true and you don't know anything about it." The AR woman instructed once more before they had to go on stage, unaware that the artist under her care had a more indifferent expression than usual.

The event proceeded as expected and wrapped up in just over an hour. After stepping off the stage, Third and Nine were immediately surrounded by reporters, and as anticipated, the first topic they were asked about was the drama surrounding the #SetSecretsDeepDive.

"As I clarified in my story, it was all a misunderstanding. Wan and I never had a fight. It was just a minor accident due to a mistimed cue."

"But some netizens suspect that the other party deliberately mistimed the cue. What do you think about that, Third?"

"Action scenes naturally come with the risk of accidents. And we're friends. If there was a real problem, we'd talk it out behind the scenes rather than start a fight on set in front of hundreds of people." The young man laughed lightly, though irritation burned inside him.

Who the hell came up with this nonsense? Have they been watching too many dramas?

"So, to confirm, you're saying there was never any conflict between you two?"

"That's right. Wan is my friend, and he's a really good person. I'm also upset that this happened," he said, then added in a serious tone, "It would be great if those who misunderstood and spread false rumors about Wan came forward and apologized. I don't like seeing my friend being accused of something he didn't do. As for whoever started the rumor, I believe the necessary evidence has already been gathered. The higher-ups will handle it from here."

This was all he could do to protect both Wan and himself at this moment. Unfortunately, taking legal action had to go through his agency. If he were managing himself, he would have already had a lawyer investigate, issue notices, and prepare lawsuits. He wouldn't let them just delete their posts and get away with it so easily.

Once the drama was addressed, the reporters moved on to other general questions, alternating between him and Nine. Nine kept trying to sell their on-screen chemistry, but Third was so frustrated that he could barely maintain his usual composure. He forced a smile and avoided answering directly. When the interview ended, he strode back to the artist's waiting room without waiting for Nine, breaking his usual habit of maintaining politeness.

A deep furrow appeared between his brows as he walked. No matter how he looked at it, it was strange that the company wasn't concerned at all. Thinking about it carefully, this fake news directly tarnished Wan's reputation just as he was gaining popularity online. And who would benefit from taking Wan down from his rising status as the public's favorite?

"Don't you think it was really difficult for us to get this opportunity? And suddenly, some random person comes in and steals the spotlight at our event. If you don't feel anything about that, you must be incredibly generous."

A sentence Nine had once said at a blessing ceremony flashed through Third's mind. He paused slightly, considering a new possibility. Could it be that the company was ignoring this drama because there was something going on behind the scenes? Were they afraid that Wan, who was from another agency, would outshine the leads, him and Nine? Did they hire someone to spread the rumor to block Wan's rise?

The entertainment industry wasn't pure or straightforward. He didn't want to think badly of his own company, but when he considered Nine's jealousy toward Wan and the fact that Nine was close to P'Pitch, their manager, the possibility seemed quite high...

"Sigh, good thing we don't have any group activities today. Let's just go home after this. I'm too lazy," Nine whined as soon as they

entered the waiting room. The gentle, well-mannered persona he showed earlier had completely vanished, replaced by arrogance.

"P'Sunny, I want some orange juice. Can you go buy it for me?"

"Okay, okay." The AR woman rolled her eyes. To be honest, she wasn't particularly enthusiastic about her job of taking care of artists, especially the demanding ones like this. But as a salaried employee, she had no choice but to put up with it.

Once she left the room, only a few staff members remained, people who already knew that Third and Nine didn't get along. With no need to keep up appearances, Third strode over to his co-star, who was casually sitting with one leg crossed, fixing his hair in the mirror.

"Suddenly, I realized that today's drama has a very familiar plot. I'm not just imagining things, am I?"

"Hm? What are you talking about?" Nine glanced at him, smirking in an annoyingly smug way.

"You knew about the fake news, didn't you?"

The atmosphere in the room instantly grew tense. The remaining staff exchanged glances before quietly leaving, giving the two rising stars space to confront each other.

One clenched his jaw, suppressing his anger, while the other feigned innocence.

"Wow, Third, aren't you being too paranoid? Are you really blaming every shitty thing in your life on me? Hilarious." Nine raised an eyebrow, laughing in a way that was clearly fake. "You ever think that maybe someone else also has a grudge against you or that Wan guy? You're not exactly the most likable person, you know."

"But no one holds a grudge against me as much as you do." Third's fists tightened, his dark eyes flashing with resentment. Even after all these years, he could never forget the things Nine had done to him.

Nearly seven years ago, when they were both fifteen, they were in their fourth year of secondary school at a prestigious academic-focused public school.

Third had been there since middle school, while Nine had transferred in through an entrance exam, earning a scholarship. They were in the same class, though not particularly close. Third only knew that Nine came from a struggling family but was hardworking enough to earn his place at the school. He had even admired Nine's determination.

"The other day, I saw a Benz picking you up after school."

"Oh, that was my dad."

"Wow, nice. Must be nice to be Third, huh?"

It seemed like casual conversation, but at the time, Third had no idea what kind of gaze Nine was giving him. Because they didn't talk much, he never realized that beneath Nine's polite and gentle façade, one that even teachers adored, lay deep-seated jealousy. Nine envied classmates who came from wealth, particularly Third, who was popular at school, always ranked in the top three academically, and excelled at everything.

Ambition wasn't a bad thing if used properly, but Nine had chosen to channel his drive in the wrong direction. Their relationship reached a breaking point when the school held a selection exam for a study abroad exchange program in the U.S., offering just one scholarship.

Third, with his family's wealth, didn't need the scholarship. His parents could send him abroad anytime. But he wanted to compete for it on his own merit. As for Nine, he needed this scholarship as an opportunity to pull himself forward and break free from the poverty he was stuck in.

Third still vividly remembered that one week before the exam, he had encouraged Nine to do his best. In return, he was met with a sweet smile laced with something darker.

"I'm already giving it my all. But it would be nice if no one took what should be mine."

"...What do you mean?"

"I mean... shouldn't this opportunity go to someone whose family can't afford to support them? I don't know, maybe I'm just overthinking," Nine chuckled softly.

Looking at the situation objectively, without being self-centered, the only real competition for the top spot was between him and Nine. That was when Third started realizing that his friend resented him for applying. Nine saw him as someone who could study abroad without relying on a scholarship, so his presence in the competition felt unfair.

But Third believed he had every right to compete. He wanted to go there through his own merit rather than his parents' money.

In the exam, whoever scored the highest would win. It was a fair competition. He wasn't stealing anyone's opportunity. Besides, there would be another chance next year for others to try again. So he thought he'd just do his best—if he didn't make it, that was fine.

But then, just one day before the scholarship exam, something unexpected happened.

"Grade 10/2, Tharit Charaslecha, please come to the English department's faculty office immediately."

The announcement echoed through the school during lunchtime, making Third, who was in the middle of playing soccer with his friends, frown. He had never been summoned like this before. A strange sense of foreboding crept over him.

And then, as if the world had collapsed before his eyes, the teacher instructed him to fetch his school bag. Inside, they discovered a copy of the exam for tomorrow's scholarship selection.

"Teacher, I didn't do it!" The boy was in shock, denying the accusation with all his might.

That morning, he had arrived at school before dawn simply because he had caught a ride with his mother on her way to work. He had stopped by the English department to turn in his homework before anyone else had arrived. There had been a janitor cleaning the faculty office, and if they checked the CCTV, they would see that he had only dropped off his worksheet and left immediately.

"Teacher, check the CCTV—"

"The camera in the faculty office is broken, but there is one outside. You were the only person seen entering and leaving that early in the morning. The janitor also said she saw you lurking around the teacher's desk."

"That's not true! I didn't do it!"

No matter how hard he tried to argue, the teacher didn't seem to believe him. And even though there was no concrete proof that he was guilty, the fact remained, the exam paper was in his bag. They checked other security footage, but no one had tampered with his belongings, except for himself.

"I'm sorry, Tharit, but to be fair to the other students, we have to disqualify you from this year's exam."

That was the final verdict. No matter how much Third tried to appeal, even with his parents' involvement, the decision was irreversible. His parents didn't see it as a big deal since it was just a scholarship for this year, and they could afford his education abroad without it. Stirring up trouble would only tarnish his mother's reputation as a high-ranking government official, so they advised him to drop the matter.

Financially, it didn't matter. But emotionally? It was a different story.

His parents were always busy working, never paying much attention to how he felt. Even though the school tried to keep it quiet, rumors still spread. His friends looked at him with suspicion, his teachers no longer treated him the same, and the atmosphere had changed permanently.

There was no evidence that he was the culprit.

But at the same time, there was no way to prove his innocence.

In the end, the overseas scholarship went to Nine. Unable to endure the suffocating environment any longer, Third begged his parents to let him transfer to a private school after the semester ended.

"Too bad we won't be seeing each other anymore," Nine had said on the last day of exams.

Third had his suspicions about him. But without proof, he told himself not to be biased.

"Good luck, Third."

Nine smiled, patted his shoulder, and leaned in to whisper, "What's mine will always be mine. So, what belongs to me... is mine."

"You—!"

In that moment, his anger exploded, and he raised his fist. He was now a hundred percent certain that Nine had framed him. But it was too late. Even if he spoke up, no one would believe him anymore.

With clenched teeth, he swung his backpack over his shoulder and strode out of the classroom, never once looking back at the school that had become his personal hell.

Years passed, but the wound in his heart never healed.

And it was torn open all over again when Third found his new dream, becoming an actor.

Just as things seemed to be going well, Nine reappeared in his life.

He had signed with the same agency.

They were cast in the same series.

And worst of all, they were paired as an onscreen couple.

"Guess we meet again. Let's get along, friend."

That was the first thing Nine said to him when they met again.

It took every ounce of restraint for Third not to punch him in the face in front of their manager. He tried to keep his distance, and the agency was aware that they didn't get along. But fate was cruel. They gained popularity from the same series, were shipped as a couple, and were cast as co-leads again.

The mere sight of Nine's fake smile made Third sick to his stomach. He had to use all his willpower to separate personal matters from work, knowing that speaking up wouldn't change anything.

Nine was a master manipulator, charming and persuasive. Compared to him, Third was cold and distant. Who would people believe?

His career and his future, came with the baggage of a painful past.

But when he was forced to choose between his past and his future, Third gritted his teeth and endured. He was determined to rise as high as possible, to escape from Nine's shadow once and for all.

But Nine wasn't satisfied.

Destroying Third once wasn't enough. Now, he was trying to sabotage Wan.

But Third refused to let history repeat itself.

That day, he couldn't protect himself.

But this time, he would protect Wan.

"Revenge? That's a harsh word."

Nine smirked, eyes narrowing.

"Tell you what, if you really think I did it, then prove it. Don't just run your mouth, just like last time. Oh, wait! You couldn't prove it back then either, could you?"

"You—!"

Fury surged through Third as he grabbed Nine by the collar, lifting him slightly off the ground.

But Nine simply pried his fingers off with a calm expression.

"Tsk. Talking like this with your onscreen partner... What would P'Pitch and P'Sunny say if they found out?"

He smoothed his shirt and shrugged nonchalantly.

"Isn't it over? Why do you still care? And tell me, are you mad for yourself, or because Wan is the one being targeted now? I'm starting to wonder if you two are—"

"Shut up and stay away from me and Wan."

Third's voice was low, laced with a deadly warning.

"This is the last time I'm warning you. I don't care how much this agency favors you, but if you pull this again, I won't hold back."

With that, he grabbed his outfit and stormed into the dressing room.

BANG!

The sound of the door slamming shut echoed through the room.

Nine smirked, pulling out his phone and opening social media to update his IG story.

The next day, I was still jobless.

P'Jarin postponed a magazine interview to give me time to recover mentally, so I got the rare chance to sleep in until ten.

The first thing I did when I woke up was check my phone.

Everyone told me to stop looking at the trending hashtag, but I couldn't help myself. Even though the agency had released a statement yesterday, I braced myself for more hate.

Instead, I found a clip from an event where Third was interviewed.

"It would be nice if those who misunderstood and spread false rumors about Wan apologized. I don't like seeing my friend being accused of something he didn't do."

My still half-asleep self suddenly sobered up. I sat there, stunned, holding my phone frozen in place. My heart pounded rapidly.

Third had stepped up to defend me. Even though the word friend made my heart sink a little, the gratitude and warmth I felt far outweighed that. He didn't have to say anything to make them apologize to me. He could've just let it go. Speaking up like that might make people think he was too harsh, but he still...

This is crazy. If I ever want to move on from him, it's going to be so damn hard.

After watching the clip about ten times, I opened LINE and sent him a message. I didn't know when he'd read it, but after standing up for me like that, if I didn't at least thank him, I'd be the worst.

[I saw your interview yesterday. Thanks a lot.]

Ding!

Just as I was setting my phone down on the table, a notification popped up. The screen lit up, revealing Third's quick reply.

[Are you okay now?]

He was asking if I was okay again. If he kept acting like he cared this much, I was just going to... like him even more.

[I'm okay now. The company is handling it. They're going to sue.]

[Good.]

His reply was short, followed by a pit bull sticker giving a thumbs-up.

That sticker usually meant the conversation was over, so I figured that was that. But then, '*ding!*' a new message popped up, making me jump.

[Did you sleep last night?]

[Not really.]

[If you couldn't sleep, why didn't you call? Didn't you say you'd call me every day?]

What the—? Was he flirting with me or what? My hands trembled slightly as I typed my response.

[I didn't want to bother you.]

And then... silence.

He just disappeared, leaving me staring at my phone, waiting for his reply for a full five minutes. I pouted. Whatever. Maybe he's busy. Fine, whatever...

Ding!

[If you don't call, I'll call you instead.]

[Pick up tonight.]

"Hey! AHHH!!"

"P'Wan! Why the hell are you screaming?!"

View's sharp voice rang out from the bathroom. I clamped a hand over my mouth and buried my burning face into my pillow, making sure not even a ghost in the room could see it.

Well, I guess amidst all the bad things, there were still some good things. My love life might actually be looking up!

Take 13, Action!

When one storm passes, the sky becomes clear again.

#SetSecretsDeepDive turned out to be nothing more than a fleeting dream of mine. After Third's interview with the press, everything ended as if nothing had ever happened. To ensure there would be no more rumors about a rift between us, my agency and the series production team agreed that from now on, any behind-the-scenes photos or clips released to promote the series would include both Third and me in the same frame.

But as we kept taking pictures together and appearing in more clips side by side, the 'rift' rumors began to shift into something else, at least in the eyes of the BL fans on the internet.

"Renji, what are you looking at?" I asked while placing my plate of food on the table. It was lunchtime on set, and most people were glued to their phones, lost in their own worlds, Renji and P'Cher included.

"Uh..."

At first, he hesitated, but when I shot him a pointed look, he turned his phone screen toward me. Turns out, he was scrolling through X, paused on a rather familiar hashtag.

#ThirdWan

Huh?

"People are shipping you and P'Third now."

My eyes widened, and heat rushed to my face as I snatched the phone from his hand. I had been on a social media detox for the past few days, so I had missed a lot. Who would've thought that by the time I checked back in, there'd already be a ship hashtag for us?

The tag was filled with all sorts of wild theories. Pictures of Third and me together, short fanfics, interview clips where Third had defended me, and even slow-motion edits of us locking eyes, set to ridiculously romantic background music.

Oh. My. God. BL fans really do have insane imaginations. Or maybe their instincts are just that sharp. Because at least one person here was actually thinking something about Third. That person being me.

"You really do look at P'Third a lot, though," Renji said, leaning in with a teasing smirk. His thick brows furrowed slightly as he watched a clip of an event interview we did together. I hadn't noticed before, but throughout the entire segment where Third was speaking, my eyes were practically glued to him.

"I-It's just timing! Of course, when someone's talking, you look at them! And when they slow it down, it just seems like I'm staring!" I blurted defensively. I mean, come on, it's basic courtesy to look at the person speaking! It's not because Third's side profile is stupidly handsome or anything!

"True. Honestly, I look at you more often than that, but no one notices."

The kid let out a quiet laugh, but for some reason, he seemed a little more subdued than usual. So, to lift his mood, I decided to tease him.

"What, are you jealous? Do you want a ship tag with me too?"

"I wouldn't mind."

"Huh?" I raised a brow. There was some background chatter from the crew, so I didn't quite catch what he mumbled. "What was that? I didn't hear you."

"I said I want some Earl Grey," he replied with a closed-eyed smile before focusing on his food again.

"I can order some—" I started, just as a tall figure dressed in a university uniform appeared.

The moment I saw Third's face, my heart started doing a breakdance routine. And when he actually walked up to our table, I got so flustered that I nearly forgot about the tea entirely.

"Can I sit here?" His deep voice sent another tremor through my chest.

In film sets, actors from different agencies who weren't close usually ate with their respective teams. Sometimes we'd mix, but more often than not, people stuck with their managers or close friends.

I almost asked him where his AR was, but then I remembered, P'Sunny was probably off with Nine. Those two had never once joined us for a meal in the past ten shooting days.

"Sure," I said, and Third slid into the seat beside me. I focused on eating my fried rice, but my heart was still racing uncontrollably.

Ever since that incident, we had been talking on the phone almost every night. Third always called first, probably because I was too hesitant to do it myself. I didn't know why he kept calling, and our conversations weren't even about work. Only about ten percent of it was work-related. The rest was just random small talk, playful banter, and ending with a simple goodnight.

Like last night, he even told me to have sweet dreams.

And now my bisexual ass was panicking. Is this normal friend behavior? I don't have that many friends, and even the ones I do have don't talk to me every day. Jay's been MIA, buried in research. And Renji, despite being close, spends most of his time buried in architecture coursework. Honestly, it's a miracle he still has the energy to film the series.

Do friends even say goodnight to each other? I didn't want to overthink it, but Third was a lot nicer than people gave him credit for. Maybe he was just worried I was still upset about the drama, so he wanted to distract me.

I snuck a glance at the guy I secretly liked who was sitting to my right, and then at my junior who was sipping his iced black tea on my left. None of us were speaking.

"Afternoon scene is a swimming one," Third suddenly broke the silence, looking at me with a small smirk. "Eat too much, and you'll get a belly."

"Says the guy who's been shoveling food down," I shot back, eyeing his half-finished plate. "I only had one plate. Renji had two."

"He's already in shape," Third replied, glancing at the younger guy.

For some reason, the atmosphere turned oddly tense. Even P'Cher, who was busy texting her boyfriend, glanced up. The awkwardness only lifted when Renji smiled, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly.

"Thanks, but I think P'Third's in better shape than me."

"Hey, what about me?" I asked, my tone slow and threatening as if he didn't say something nice, I wasn't getting him that Earl Grey.

"P'Wan is in great shape! Cute, just right. I mean, if you toned up a bit more, you'd be perfect!" Renji hurriedly babbled, his ears turning

pink.

"Yeah, you've got a good physique," Third added.

"..."

I blinked at him. There was something about the subtle smirk at the corner of his lips that made my face heat up. My face flushed red, so I quickly put my head down and continued eating to cover up my embarrassment.

Renji smoothly changed the topic, and once we were done eating, everyone dispersed. I went to the restroom before sitting down to play a mobile game to pass the time before my next scene, which wasn't until nearly 4 PM.

"Wan."

Just as I was topping up in the game, Third nudged me and held up his phone. "Got a minute? Let's film a TikTok."

"Huh?" I blinked. He didn't seem like the type to follow trends.

"Why that face?"

"Nothing, I'm just surprised. You don't seem like someone into social media."

"I'm not, but online marketing is important these days. Gotta do it," he said simply.

Fair point. The entertainment industry is fiercely competitive. If you want to stay relevant, you need to keep people talking. It's not easy for introverts like us.

"Why me, though? You could film it alone."

"So people stop thinking we don't get along."

Oh, so in the end, he meant well for me. But since Third isn't really active on social media, he might not know that the situation has already changed, to the point that there's even a #ThirdWan hashtag now...

"Alright, let's do it." In the end, I agreed. It's completely normal for friends to film TikToks together. If the BL fans want to fangirl over it, then at least I'm making them happy. And I'm happy too, because I get to film a clip with someone I like...

We filmed the trending song challenge about four or five times before we got a take we were satisfied with. Then, Third uploaded the clip to his channel and tagged me right away. The last time I checked, before P'Cher took my phone, there were already hundreds of comments. On X, the ThirdWan hashtag was trending at the end, even though it had only been posted for a little over ten minutes

"Alright, alright! Next up, Third, Nine, Renji, Porsche!"

P'Jern, the assistant director, called for the group to gather as they were about to film the first scene after the break. Meanwhile, I just sat idly, watching everyone else work.

"Nine, fighting!" I beamed, cheering on my bias as he walked past me.

But Nine didn't respond. Not only that, the way he looked at me wasn't friendly at all, making my heart sink.

Actually, he'd been ignoring me since this morning, no talking, no eye contact. But since everyone was busy then, I thought I was just overthinking it. Now, it was obvious that something was wrong. He seemed to be upset with me about something.

I sat still, trying to figure out what I had done to make Nine unhappy. But no matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't find

an answer. So, I decided to push my worries aside for now and focus on work. I planned to talk to him after we wrapped up for the day.

"That's a wrap! Great job today, everyone!"

Around 10 PM, P'Phai, the director, announced the end of the shoot.

I let out a relieved sigh and glanced at Nine as he walked off the set. I waited for him to change before approaching him. But before I could make a move, he walked straight toward me instead, with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Wan, can we talk for a sec?"

"...Uh, yeah." I was taken aback but nodded.

It seemed like we were on the same page, which was a good thing. If I had done something to upset him, I wanted to clear the air and apologize as soon as possible. Even though I wasn't as obsessed with Nine as I used to be, I was still his fan. Being on bad terms with someone you admire was the last thing I wanted.

Nine led me to the athletes' changing room by the swimming pool. While the crew was still packing up outside, he pushed the door open and stepped inside. Once we were alone, his voice lost its usual warmth.

"We've never had a direct conversation about this before, but I feel like it's getting out of hand. It's time we talk."

His gaze was cold and sharp, making me freeze. In the two years I had followed him, even after working together, I had only seen that look from him once, when he glanced at Third during our first script reading. But back then, I thought I was imagining it.

Now, I had undeniable proof that I wasn't.

"This series was created for me and Third. We're the official pairing. Fans might ship us with other people, but in the end, ThirdNine is the real deal. So, other people should at least show some respect."

He emphasized 'other people' while looking straight at me. It was clear he must have seen the #ThirdWan hashtag or the TikTok video Third and I filmed today.

"No matter how hard anyone tries, the leads of this series will always be me and Third. If you're a professional, you should know better than to steal the spotlight from the main actors. Just focus on your work, and one day, your chance will come. I'm sure you understand what I'm saying, Wan."

He flashed a sweet smile, the same bright and heartwarming smile I had admired for so long.

But now, it was laced with poison. My heart pounded painfully in my chest, crushed under the weight of disappointment and hurt.

"...Got it."

"I don't hate you, Wan. But this industry has a hierarchy. There's a process to everything. As a newcomer, you might not understand it yet, so take your time and learn."

He patted my shoulder lightly, like a kind senior giving advice, before walking away. Leaving me standing there, frozen like a statue.

The distant chatter of the crew cleaning up echoed from outside, but my ears were ringing too much to hear anything clearly. My face felt numb, as if I had just been slapped. It took me several minutes to snap out of it and remember that I shouldn't just stand here. P'Cher would worry.

Forcing my stiff legs to move, I finally walked out.

"Wan, I saw Nine leave a while ago. Why are you just coming out now?"

"I... was in the bathroom," I forced an answer, even though my mind was completely out of it.

P'Cher, the sharp-eyed AR staff, studied me carefully. I wasn't sure what my face looked like, but she seemed to think I wasn't feeling well. She quickly led me back to the van, instructing Renji and Porsche not to bother me so I could rest.

As I lay down and closed my eyes, pretending to sleep, my heart ached unbearably.

I had always known that the real Nine wasn't as pure and innocent as his public image, that was just part of the job, a necessary act. And I understood that people had different sides to them.

But I never expected him to be this different from what I had believed.

His eyes held no warmth. His words cut deep. He didn't see me as a friend. He saw me as a threat, someone trying to steal the spotlight.

Even though #ThirdWan wasn't something I intentionally created, fans started it on their own, but I did film that TikTok with Third. Nine must have seen it as disrespectful to his official pairing. Maybe I was careless, but did I really deserve to be treated like this?

Nine was someone I had admired for so long. He was my joy, my motivation, my inspiration, my comfort. I even had his picture on my desk, and his photo, one that I had taken myself, was my laptop's wallpaper.

No matter where he had an event, whether in Bangkok or another province, I would go if I was free, just to show my support. To let him know that he had a fan who would always be there for him.

But now, everything had shattered. Nothing was left except disappointment and pain.

I kept replaying everything in my mind, barely aware when the van finally reached my condo.

To make things worse, View wasn't home tonight. She had gone back to Ayutthaya. As I left alone, I went to my bedroom and sat on the bed, staring blankly into space. Everything felt so empty.

Bzzz...

My phone vibrated beside me. I glanced at it.

It was a Line call from Third.

It was already 11:30 PM.

But I didn't answer. I just stared at the screen until the call ended.

Bzzz...

Bzzz...

Bzzz...

But the guy on the other end wasn't the type to give up easily. And I... I was too lost in my thoughts. So, I reached for my phone, hoping that talking to someone might help clear my mind.

"Hello?"

[You're still awake, aren't you?]

"Yeah."

[Are you okay? You looked pale when we were leaving.]

Third's voice was as calm as ever, but I could hear the concern beneath it.

It felt like there was sand caught in my throat. I wanted to tell someone, to vent. But if I did, it would feel like I was just dumping my problems onto him. Besides... who would even believe me?

"I... no, it's nothing."

[If something's bothering you, you can tell me.]

My cold heart warmed up a little when I heard Third say that.

From what I had seen of Third so far, he was someone I could trust. He had protected me before. He wouldn't see me as an enemy like—

"Yeah, something's on my mind. But it's nothing serious. I'll be fine soon."

Even though I trusted Third, I didn't want to burden him with this. He was already working so hard every day. And if I told him, it might make things even worse between him and Nine, whose relationship already seemed strained.

[Are you sure?]

"Yeah. I just need a little time to rest." I sighed.

It might take a while, but I'd get over it eventually.

It wasn't like I had been dumped. I had just lost faith in an idol.

That shouldn't take as long to get over as heartbreak...

The other end of the line went silent for a moment before speaking.

[Are you sleepy?]

"Umm, not really."

[Then, do you want to go for a drive? Right now?]

"Huh?" My eyes widened. Going for a drive at 11:30 PM?

[Just around Bangkok. Want to go? I'll pick you up at your condo.]

"Uh... um... okay," I stammered, wondering what Third was thinking to invite me out so suddenly. But right now, I really did want to be with someone. If the person I liked was by my side, maybe I'd feel a little better.

Half an hour later, a sleek black BMW pulled up in front of my condo. I was still in the same outfit I had worn when I came back from the set. I looked at Third, who showed no signs of drowsiness despite working all day.

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"I slept in the morning," he replied, and I suddenly remembered that he had only filmed two scenes earlier in the day, so he had napped in the van. Then, at lunchtime, he had come to eat with us.

"If you're tired, you can sleep. I'll wake you up when we get there."

"No way. What if you sell me off while I'm asleep?" I joked, trying to lighten the mood for both of us. Third gave me a look of exasperation as he drove away from my condo.

"Where are we going?"

"To see the view," he answered shortly before reaching out to turn on the music. A soft acoustic song played, creating a cozy atmosphere, as if we were sitting by a fireplace in winter.

Neither of us spoke. I simply gazed at the nighttime scenery of this chaotic city, feeling my heart calm just a little. I had never been out

this late before. Only now did I realize that Bangkok, when it's asleep, is much more peaceful and pleasant. No traffic jams, no blaring noise, just twinkling lights from the buildings, shining so brightly they outshone the stars.

Third kept driving until we reached the outskirts of the city. I noticed a sign pointing toward Suvarnabhumi Airport and wondered where he was taking me. Eventually, he parked near a bridge.

"You can see planes taking off clearly from here," he said, pointing at a plane soaring into the vast sky.

I looked up, watching the giant bird glide overhead, when Third spoke again in his deep, steady voice.

"Before I joined the industry, I used to come here at night to watch planes take off. It might sound weird, but I found it calming."

"It's not weird. It's actually really relaxing," I leaned back against the seat, watching the plane disappear into the distance. Soon, another plane would take off. Airports are always bustling, but from a distance, they have an unexpectedly tranquil charm.

We sat there in silence, watching planes ascend into the sky while soft music played in the background. The weight in my chest felt a little lighter, just having someone beside me. I found myself wishing this moment could stretch on forever.

"Do you want to talk about it?" After a long pause, Third's voice broke the silence. His gaze was still fixed on a new plane climbing higher and higher.

"...Yeah, I do," I admitted.

Damn it. I had planned to keep this to myself, but in the end, I lost to my own weakness.

"The thing is... I really admire someone," I began, carefully choosing words that wouldn't make things worse. "Not in that way. I admire his skills. But I just found out recently that he doesn't see me as a friend. He see me as... almost an enemy, I guess. It really hurt. I didn't know how to handle it."

Third didn't say anything. He just sat there and listened. I used to think he was bossy and overbearing, but in reality, he was a good listener.

"I guess it feels like a heartbreak," I sighed. "I admired him for years, but when I realized he wasn't the person I thought he was, and that he didn't like me either... It hurt. I know I might've done things to upset him, but to find out he outright dislike me, it just knocked me off balance."

"If that's the case, then he doesn't deserve your admiration," Third finally said, his sharp eyes meeting mine. "There are plenty of talented people in this world to look up to. But it's okay to be sad. Just don't hold onto it for too long. Not every day has to be a bad day."

"...Yeah, you're right," I smiled faintly.

Today might have been a bad day, but there would be better days ahead.

No. actually, there was already something good about today. The person sitting beside me.

After a long stretch of quiet, just watching the planes, Third asked, "Feeling better?"

"Yeah. I've never watched planes take off before, but the atmosphere here is really nice."

"That's why I like this place. It feels open, like I have the whole world to myself. No chaos."

"But today, I'm here to disturb your peace," I chuckled. I was happy to spend time with Third, but I also felt guilty for intruding on his rare free time.

"It's fine. Having you here is nice."

"..."

The peaceful atmosphere suddenly felt strangely awkward. Maybe it was just me, but the gentle look in Third's eyes and his faint smile made my hands feel oddly clumsy.

"Uh... just curious. If you weren't an actor, what would you want to be?" I quickly changed the subject before I lost my composure completely.

"Umm..." He went quiet for a moment before answering, "A scientist, maybe."

"For real?" My eyes widened. Actually... now that I thought about it, he did give off a bit of a nerdy vibe when he wasn't putting on his entertainment industry persona.

"Yeah. I liked science, especially chemistry. I took the science track in high school. At first, I planned to major in science, but then I got interested in acting, so I switched to studying film and performing arts instead."

"Oh..." I nodded as Third leaned back against his seat.

"But being an actor is good too. Even though there are a lot of annoying things, I love being in front of the camera. I love it enough to put up with all the hassle."

I looked at Third, seeing the glint of happiness in his eyes. I admired his determination to chase his dream. Despite being an introvert, he had pushed past his limits, done everything he could to become a skilled actor recognized for his talent. He must have had an incredible amount of passion to endure all the hardships of this industry.

"I'm jealous of people with passion like you," I murmured.

Third had always been captivating, but when he talked about his dreams and happiness, he shone even brighter, so much that he felt even farther away from me...

"Wan."

"Hmm?"

"I'm glad to meet you."

"..."

His dark eyes carried a whirlwind of emotions as we locked gazes. In that moment, it felt as if the entire world had come to a standstill. I couldn't hear the music playing, nor did I notice the planes soaring into the sky. My eyes were completely fixated on his handsome face, which was drawing closer and closer... so close that I could almost count his eyelashes.

Bzzttt!

Before anything could actually happen, my phone vibrated, immediately followed by the sound of a message notification. I flinched away from Third, quickly grabbing my phone from my lap, only to find a notification from my university group chat.

"I... I... I need to reply to my group chat first," I stammered.

"Mm."

My face and neck burned with heat, my heart pounding so hard it felt like it might explode. I fixated on my phone as if my life depended on it, pretending to be seriously engaged in work. When in reality, my mind was in complete chaos.

Just now, he was going to kiss me. A hundred percent. A million percent.

What does that even mean? Was it just the mood, or...

Does he actually like me too?

Aaaahhh! I'm sure he does!!!

Take 14, Action!

Silence comes in many forms. There is the peaceful silence that brings relaxation, the awkward silence that makes you want to escape the situation as soon as possible, or the kind of silence that brings about embarrassment, just like what is happening in the car right now.

The owner of the luxurious car cast a sidelong glance at the person sitting in the passenger seat beside him. Wan's usually large and lively eyes were tightly shut, his head resting against the car window without the slightest movement. The sight made the driver, who was pressing down on the accelerator to head back into the city, smile a little in amusement.

Someone who's truly asleep wouldn't have such red ears.

Judging by the way things looked, he was more likely faking sleep to escape his embarrassment.

Thinking back to the electrifying moment just now, Third couldn't help but feel a tinge of regret at being interrupted by that incoming message. It was already so late at night, why weren't Wan's friends asleep yet? And why did they have to send a message right at that moment? Couldn't they have waited just five more minutes so he could fully savor the softness of those lips?

But in truth, the kiss had only been an incidental result of the atmosphere. It wasn't like he had taken Wan out for a drive with the intention of doing something like that. Third had simply noticed that the other seemed stressed and wanted to help him relax. Lately, his emotions seemed to be dictated by Wan's reactions. If Wan was

happy, then he was happy too. And on days like today, when Wan was feeling troubled, he found himself growing anxious, wanting to do something, anything to make the person he liked feel better.

Yes, he liked Wan. That was something Third had thought over many times until he was certain that this feeling wasn't something fleeting.

The beginning of their relationship hadn't exactly been smooth, but in the end, they had managed to clear up their misunderstandings and grow closer. At first, Third had simply felt comfortable around Wan. He didn't have to be cautious, and he could be himself completely. But at some point, that comfort had gradually deepened into something more. Maybe it was because he got to know Wan's true nature through their conversations. Maybe it was when he saw Wan reciting his lines with unwavering focus. Third liked people who were hardworking. Maybe it was when he saw Wan smiling and laughing while joking around with fellow actors, the production crew, or even his fans. Or maybe it was when they traveled to Ayutthaya together, just the two of them...

Third became fully aware of his feelings when he found himself instinctively scanning the set for Wan's familiar figure first thing every day. Whenever he let his guard down, his gaze would always drift toward Wan. He felt a strange sense of joy whenever he teased Wan into pouting. And hearing that soft voice bicker back at him every night before bed, it made him fall asleep with a smile.

Back in high school, he had been in a relationship before, so he knew exactly what this feeling was. And he also knew that Wan was still single, which meant he had a chance.

Once Third realized his feelings, he started making subtle moves. He called Wan almost every day after work, threw in teasing remarks just to gauge his reactions. Fortunately, Wan wasn't the type to hide

his emotions well, so Third could more or less tell that Wan always seemed flustered and shy whenever he flirted.

And just now, that moment had been proof.

If Wan hadn't felt anything or if he had been disgusted, he would've pushed Third away or even thrown a punch. But instead, he had gone red in the face and ears, avoided eye contact, and faked sleep. This was clearly an attempt to hide his embarrassment.

Look at him, his eyes are closed, but his brows are furrowed.

What kind of actor fakes sleep so unconvincingly?

Third chuckled, turning his gaze back to the road, letting Wan continue his (pretend) sleep. It was already past 2 AM, and Wan had been filming all day. He might actually be tired for real.

When Third glanced over again, he saw that Wan's brows had relaxed. He had truly fallen asleep.

Third liked silence.

And even more so, he liked the kind of peaceful silence that came with having the person he liked by his side.

He didn't want this moment to end.

But all good things must come to an end.

When he pulled up in front of Wan's condo building, he had no choice but to wake the other up by leaning in to whisper,

"Wan."

"..."

"Wan, we're at your condo."

"...Hmm?"

"You're not waking up? If you don't wake up, I'll take you back to my condo instead."

"Huh... Hey!"

The drowsy person jolted awake, eyes widening in confusion as he looked at Third, before his face turned a soft shade of pink.

"Uh... um. Thanks for... today." He stammered, seemingly just realizing what had happened.

His adorable expression made the corners of the leading man's lips curve into a high arc as he gazed at that attractive face with sparkling eyes.

"Wan, I—"

"And thanks for dropping me off. See you later! Bye!" But Wan didn't give him a chance to finish his sentence. He flustered and hastily said his goodbye, opened the car door, and dashed back into the building. The tall figure was left sitting there in stunned silence for about three seconds before letting out a soft chuckle.

Well, no rush. No, by tomorrow, they'd meet on set again anyway. He still had plenty of time to get closer to Wan, to slowly get to know each other throughout the filming of this series.

After all, he was pretty sure he had a good chance. Judging by that red face, those flushed ears, and the frequent attempts to avoid his gaze, Wan must like him too.

A lot has happened to me these past few days. Each day has been filled with a whirlwind of events and emotions, almost too much to

process.

First, there's the matter with Nine. After he so clearly showed his hostility that day, I learned to slowly come to terms with it, trying to keep my distance and only interact with him when necessary. It still hurts, of course it does. I used to be his fan, after all. It'll take some time for the wound to heal before I can become numb to it.

As for Third, I talk to him as usual. Off-camera is personal, but when it comes to posting pictures or Instagram stories on my public account, I avoid taking any with him to keep Nine from getting upset. Honestly, I think it's kind of ridiculous, but I don't want to create unnecessary problems with my coworkers. Besides... in this project, the leads are Third and Nine. From a marketing perspective, it wouldn't be ideal if the ThirdWan pairing overshadowed them.

I haven't told anyone about Nine coming to talk to me, not Third, not P'Cher. I planned to handle this quietly. But some people don't seem too keen on cooperating.

"Wan."

"Hm?"

"Look at the camera."

"...Are you posting this on your story? No way." I shook my head firmly, my heart pounding at the sharp gaze of the tall figure sitting next to me during our break. "Go take a picture of someone else."

"But I want to take a picture of you." He shot back. Even without seeing his face, I could hear the teasing smile in his deep voice, making me both flustered and conflicted.

"It's not for a story. I just want to keep it for myself."

This leading man... He was coaxing me, trying to get me to look at the camera. When I finally caved and turned his way, my face instantly heated up. That ridiculously handsome face was smiling mischievously.

"Alright, that's enough! No pictures!" I quickly threw my hands up to cover the camera, feeling so embarrassed that I could die. Anyone watching us would probably be confused as hell. Just a while ago, we were barely speaking, but now we were joking around like old friends. A complete 180-degree shift.

It's all Third's fault. Ever since that day he took me on a drive, he's been going all in, and my heart can't keep up.

"We won't see each other for a few days, so I just wanted a picture to keep." Third's voice softened. I couldn't help but wonder, when he has a boyfriend, is he the clingy type? Because what he's doing to me now is pretty close...

At that thought, my heart pounded even harder. Truthfully, neither of us has said the words out loud yet, but even without saying it, I think we both already know.

"You talk like we don't have phones to call each other."

"It's not the same as seeing you in person." Third sighed. No more cold eyes when looking at me. Now, this top-tier leading man was looking at me with puppy-dog eyes.

"Wan."

"What?"

"Let's go on another trip together when we're free. I want to go with you."

"..."

Wow. At this point, he might as well just say he likes me. I'm waiting, you know? I want him to say it first because I don't want to lose face.

"I'll check my schedule first. My schedule is pretty packed, Nong." I smirked teasingly, earning a laugh from him.

In reality, it was Third's schedule that was packed to the brim. As much as I wanted to go on a trip with him, if he ever got any free time, I'd rather he use it to rest.

"Alright, everyone! Get ready, we're starting soon! Third, Nine, to the set!"

P'Jern, the assistant director, called through the megaphone, her voice echoing across the pool. Third got up with a sigh, and I gave him a thumbs-up for encouragement, watching his tall figure walk to the set with a heart full of warmth.

Being with someone you like really is happiness.

"Wan."

As I sat there watching Third prepare for the scene, a familiar voice sounded above me. P'Cher, my AR, handed me my second cup of coffee for the day and sat down beside me.

I took a sip, my eyes still fixed on Third. But after a while, a strange chill ran down my spine. When I turned, I found P'Cher staring at me with an unreadable expression. She didn't say anything, though, just picked up her phone and started scrolling.

It seemed like nothing... but a tiny part of me felt uneasy.

That feeling faded when it was time for my scene, and I focused on work until we wrapped up at 10 PM.

"I'm heading out first." I went over to whisper goodbye to Third, gave a respectful wai to the nearby staff, and nearly jumped when Third grabbed my shoulder and leaned in to whisper in my ear.

"I'll call you tonight."

"...Okay." I nodded quickly and hurried back to P'Cher, trying my best not to let a stupid grin slip onto my face.

"Get in the car." P'Cher urged, her voice sterner than usual. Once we were in the car, there were just the two of us and the driver, she turned to look at me immediately.

"Wan, this might be personal, but answer me honestly."

I froze, halfway through pulling out my phone. A bad feeling crept up my spine. "...What is it?"

"Are you and Third dating?"

The direct question made me jolt. I knew people had probably noticed how close we'd become lately, but I thought we still looked like just friends. I didn't expect P'Cher to see right through us.

"No. We're just friends..."

I wasn't lying. Our status right now... I guess we're just talking. But since neither of us has brought it up, we're still just friends.

"Then do you feel something for him? More than just a friend?" P'Cher pressed on. I figured she had handled many artists before, so there was no escaping this.

"...Yeah... I like him."

As soon as I admitted it, her expression grew even more serious. I didn't understand why.

Before I could ask, she hit me with a sentence that made my heart drop.

"Wan, to be honest, I don't approve of you two liking each other."

"...Why?" My stomach sank. "Didn't you say having a relationship is fine? As long as we inform the company and be careful?"

"Yes, but it also depends on who it is." P'Cher sighed before explaining, an explanation that left me speechless.

"That's Third. He already has a ship partner, and you two are in the same series. Right now, ThirdNine is on fire, and the series is about to air soon. If people find out you and Third are involved, it'll be a huge problem."

"..."

"Wan, if your boyfriend was someone outside the industry or even someone else in the industry, I wouldn't care. I'd support you and help you keep it quiet. But if it's Third, that's not a good idea. There are too many risks. If people find out, Third will lose his ship fanbase, and you... you'll have it even worse. A rookie actor doesn't have enough fans to protect them. You'd get destroyed by Third and Nine's fans."

"..."

"I know I can't stop you, but as your manager, I have to warn you. Think carefully before you act," P'Cher squeezed my shoulder lightly.

Amid the tension, her eyes behind her glasses were filled with sympathy. I knew she had to do this as part of her duty, so I murmured softly, "Yes..."

We didn't speak again until we arrived at the condo. P'Cher told me to get plenty of rest, but at this point, how could I possibly fall

asleep?

"P'Wan. How was it? Tired? How was filming today?" As soon as I opened the door, View peeked in to greet me.

"It was fine..." I replied wearily and dragged myself into the bedroom like a soulless body.

I sank onto the bed and spaced out, replaying P'Cher's words in my mind.

Even though fans these days are better at separating an artist's work from their personal life compared to the past, I used to be a fan myself, I know that many still can't accept it if their favorite on-screen couple isn't actually dating.

No matter how clearly Third sets boundaries with Nine, some fans still believe there's a chance for their relationship to develop because Nine always leaves room for interpretation when he speaks.

All types of fans are important because they form the foundation that supports an artist. Even though Third is gaining fame, it's too soon to say he has a secure position. That's why his fan base is crucial, his dream is to grow as an actor.

The cast and crew have all put in immense effort. This series is my agency's hope for making a name in the industry. Many new actors are waiting for a chance to shine through this project. If any scandal affects the series, it won't be good.

Opportunities in life can come multiple times, but for some people, there's only one. No matter what kind of opportunity it is, it matters. I know Third has poured his heart into this series. It's a critical step in his career, and nothing should stand in his way.

And that 'something'... is me.

Riiing—

The phone in my hand vibrated with an incoming Line call. There was a time when seeing Third's name on my screen filled me with warmth and happiness every night before bed. But now, it only made my chest feel heavy and my mind spiral in confusion.

The ringing continued.

In the end, I muted my phone, closed my eyes, and let the call go unanswered.

Something was clearly off at the set today, and the rising star was getting increasingly irritated.

"Third, come film a promo clip with Nine."

"Third, record a Story. Fans are waiting."

"Third, come talk to me about tomorrow's photoshoot."

And a whole lot more from P'Sunny, his AR. Today, she was unusually persistent, constantly interrupting every time he tried to walk over to Wan, who was sitting with the other actors.

"Cut!"

"Wan," Third called out as they wrapped the last scene before the lunch break. He leaned toward the monitor where the smaller actor was watching playback. "I wanted to—"

"Third, where are you going? Come here! We need photos with the food truck."

P'Sunny swooped in and grabbed his arm, dragging him away before he could say another word. He missed his chance again.

He saw Wan offer a small smile and wave, but his eyes looked dull, nothing like before.

Third exhaled heavily, tempted to shake off the AR's grip, but that would be rude. So, he had no choice but to comply while cursing internally.

Aside from the pre-shoot briefing, he hadn't spoken to Wan at all today.

And Wan seemed quieter than usual.

"Porsche, have you seen Wan?" Third asked after finishing his obligations.

He rushed back to the area where the staff was eating, but Wan was nowhere in sight.

"He already left, P'. P'Wan only had morning scenes today," the younger actor replied.

Third clenched his jaw, his thick brows furrowing. Something was definitely wrong.

First, P'Sunny was actively keeping him away from Wan. Then, Wan himself was acting strange, giving short replies to texts, declining calls at night, saying he was busy with class and research reports. It was a reasonable excuse, sure, but Third's gut told him there was more to it.

Just yesterday, everything between them seemed fine. What the hell happened?

He forced himself to suppress his doubts and focus on work.

The last scene wrapped at 6:30 PM, but he still had to meet a client to discuss a brand ambassador deal. P'Sunny stayed behind to supervise Nine's remaining scenes, so his personal manager, P'Pitch, who also owned the agency, came to pick him up.

"Actually, this client really likes ThirdNine. Try selling the ship a little during the conversation. Who knows, they might hire both of you."

P'Pitch casually suggested while driving.

But Third had no intention of doing that. He didn't want to deceive anyone. That duty fell to P'Pitch, who kept talking nonsense, hinting that some couples in the agency were really dating but didn't want to reveal it. Third sat there, waiting impatiently for time to pass, asking himself what the hell he was doing.

Was acting alone not enough to survive in this cutthroat industry?
Was that why he felt so trapped?

Nearly two hours later, the client finally left.

In the now-empty private dining room, only Third and his agency's owner remained. P'Pitch casually sipped his cocktail.

"So, Third, are you seeing anyone these days?"

The out-of-nowhere question made Third narrow his eyes.

"I am."

"Who?"

The older man's tone was relaxed, as if discussing the weather. But Third had been in the industry long enough to sense the underlying tension.

"If you're asking like this, I assume you already know."

"I heard from Sunny, but I wanted to confirm."

The agency head set down his glass and locked eyes with Third, pressuring him for an answer.

"It's exactly as she said. I'm seeing Wan. I like him."

Third didn't intend to hide it. Per his contract, he was allowed to date, he just had to inform the agency. In some cases, the relationship might need to be kept secret for business reasons, but the agency had no right to interfere with his personal life.

"Really? I don't think he's a good match for you."

Those words seemed to have crossed the line a little. The sharp-eyed young leading actor's gaze instantly gleamed with clear displeasure.

"What exactly is inappropriate?"

"The timing, of course." P'Pitch replied. He knew full well that this kid was stubborn. Even if he let Sunny handle it, it wouldn't be enough, so he had to step in and deal with it himself.

"You're on the rise, Third. And right now, ThirdNine is booming. Everyone is eagerly waiting for your series, rooting for you two to be together. With the hype this strong, if you get caught dating someone else, especially a co-star from the same series who isn't Nine, you could go down overnight."

"I've made it clear from the beginning that I sell my acting skills, not fan service or my soul." The deep voice replied, suppressing the emotion boiling in his chest.

So he wasn't allowed to date Wan because of this? That was beyond ridiculous.

"I always say in interviews that work is work. Are you underestimating the audience's judgment?"

"But the ones who bring in the crowds are your fans, right? You're in a BL series, Third. These things can't be separated. There are plenty

of delusional fans, and those delusional ones? They're your supporters. Just look at how some of them are already grumbling every day over that 'ThirdWan' tag. Have you ever checked? If they stop supporting you, you're done. After all this effort, do you really want to throw it away? The series, which is supposed to be a hit, could flop, and everything will collapse!"

The atmosphere in the restaurant grew visibly tense. Third clenched his jaw to stop himself from swearing, while the company owner clicked his tongue in frustration.

"I'm telling you straight up, the timing is off. Just keep your distance for now. Wait until the series has aired and settled, then figure it out."

"You may be my manager, but you have no right to interfere in my personal life." Third cut him off, grabbing his bag and phone from the table and standing up abruptly.

"I'm leaving."

The tall figure stormed out, leaving only the agency owner cursing under his breath. He had expected this outcome from today's conversation, but he still held onto the hope that Third, after working in the industry for some time, would have started to understand its nature.

He admired Third's determination, his nearly all-rounded skills, and especially his acting talent. Third was the agency's star product, a promising investment with vast potential. But his biggest flaw was his unyielding bluntness. Third had made it clear that he wanted to be recognized solely for his acting skills.

But that was just an ideal.

In reality, no one could survive and stay famous in this industry on talent alone.

Blunt honesty and the entertainment industry were like parallel lines. Never meant to intersect. And he had invested too much in Third. If the actor himself wouldn't play the game, then it was up to the manager and the agency to eliminate obstacles that stood in the way of profit.

"I really don't want to do this, Third... but I have no choice." Pitch exhaled sharply, grabbing his phone to make some calls.

After today, that kid might resent him.

But so what?

They were still bound by contract for years to come. And Pitch was confident one or two years from now, Third would understand.

He'd be grateful for everything Pitch had done for him.

Take 15, Action!

My life lately feels like I'm facing a year of bad luck, with Saturn and Venus both afflicting me, and Rahu joining in. I wake up every day lifeless, and everywhere I look, everything around me is dull. Though I'm not sure whether it's because of sadness or PM 2.5 dust.

Since talking to P'Cher on the van that day, I have thought it over and decided that I should keep my distance from Third and go back to just being friends for the sake of his career. Even though I know that doing this will make both of us sad, I don't want to be the cause of ruining the bright future of the person I like in his acting career.

I once thought about talking to Third about the situation to find a solution, but I know that someone as stubborn as him would only resist and refuse. So I had to be cruel. It might not be the right thing to do, but it's the best thing I can do for the person I like. I never cared about my own reputation. Let them attack me if they want. I never wanted to be an actor in the first place. But Third loves this profession so much. I will protect his dreams and future, even if it means both of us will have to suffer.

Maybe our timing isn't right at this moment. If, in the future, we still have feelings for each other, we might reconnect. But I don't dare to hope for that. Since I'm the one hurting him, how could I expect him to still hold on to anything?

Ting!

[Isn't your presentation today? Fighting!]

I'm in my student uniform, standing in front of the mirror combing my hair. I glance at my phone screen, which is brightly displaying a message. Third still remembered that I had to present my research today, even though we hadn't talked in days. That fact made a lump rise in my throat. As I pressed to send a thank-you sticker out of politeness, I switched on Do Not Disturb mode and took a deep breath.

Don't get distracted, Wan. Just focus on studying. I hypnotized myself while quickly getting dressed, grabbing my backpack, and riding my motorcycle from my condo to the university.

But unfortunately, no matter how much I tried to convince myself, when I accidentally thought about the left-heavy chat from him over the past few days, my chest still tightened with guilt.

Today was my research presentation day. Since it was an important day that would determine my academic future, I didn't want anything to distract me, so I stayed off social media since morning. I also told P'Cher that if anything came up, just leave a message, and I would get back to them after class.

When I arrived at the university, I could feel the eyes of the students on me all the way. Ever since I acted in a series, I was used to people looking at me when I walked around campus. So I just smiled politely as usual and hurried to my classroom. However, since I was too preoccupied with my presentation, I failed to notice that today, the gazes were filled with suspicion.

"Hey, you ready?"

"Ready my ass. I still can't remember the script."

Jay, who arrived earlier and was memorizing the script, raised his hand and scratched his head as I slumped into the seat next to him.

My best friend shifted his eyes from the iPad screen to look at me, hesitating slightly before calling my name.

"Wan, m..."

"Hm?" I blinked, listening attentively.

But Jay hesitated again. In the end, he let out a heavy sigh and said, "Never mind. We'll talk later. You better review your script first. You're presenting before me."

"Okay, okay." I nodded, slightly puzzled by his reaction.

I also noticed that other classmates were looking at me too. This was starting to feel abnormal. My classmates have seen me for almost a year now, why would they stare at me like the rest of the university?

But since my biggest concern at that moment was my presentation, I ignored their stares and focused on memorizing my script until the professor walked in. When my turn came, I suppressed my nerves and delivered my speech according to the script I had prepared. In the end, my research presentation, *'The Image of BL Series Actors and Its Impact on Social Media Publicity,'* went smoothly. All that was left were a few minor details in the written report that needed revision.

I returned to my seat, exhaling deeply as if a mountain had been lifted off my chest, and quickly grabbed my phone to check social media under the desk while Jay was preparing his presentation slides at the front.

As soon as I opened X, I was surprised to see my name among the top trends on X Thailand.

Even though I should be happy, I had a bad feeling about this. And when I clicked on it, well, I got the answer.

I was hit with fake news again.

Among the tens of thousands of reposts, almost reaching a hundred thousand, the summary was that two anonymous accounts came out this morning to expose me, accusing me of acting like a 'real man' by being arrogant and a homewrecker since high school. The way this news was released was exactly like last time. It hasn't even been a month, and I've already been hit by fake news twice.

But this time, I was luckier than before, 80% of netizens in the tag found it ridiculous. My fans were defending me to the fullest, and even my friends and acquaintances were refuting the news all over social media.

'I went to the same school as him, a first-year junior. Never saw him act like that at all. His friends and teachers love him. If this were true, rumors would've spread ages ago. You can't hide things when you're a celebrity.'

'When someone's about to get famous, haters multiply like this. Hope the company sues them all.'

'I was Wan's high school friend. I guarantee he's not like that and has never done anything like what's being accused. He's actually really polite. All the teachers and friends adore him. The people spreading rumors must be jobless. Did they leave their common sense in their mother's womb?'

'I'm Wan's mentor in the faculty. I can confirm that in all the time I've known him, he has never behaved the way they claim. How would he act all tough or steal someone's lover? He can barely even talk to strangers. Anyone who defames my junior, I hope you get sued.'

But even though so many people were defending me, that didn't mean I didn't lose my reputation.

Whether the news was true or not didn't matter. People always remember the first thing they hear. Few people follow up on news continuously. Many assume that rumors always have some basis in truth. Even if I prove my innocence, those who dislike or envy me will shut their eyes and refuse to listen.

'But isn't it weird that there's been two scandals in less than a month?'

'Honestly, isn't this bad for the series? People are more focused on his scandals than the show.'

'Even last time, this guy seemed problematic. His fans are so rude, always trying to one-up other couples. And he always tries to create moments with other people's faves. Maybe there's some truth to it. Learn to respect the lead actors.'

'Who even cast this guy? Should we just remove him from the series? If he stays, I won't watch, even if my fave is in it. There's still time to recast and reshoot, right?'

I saw plenty of comments like that, and the last one had over a thousand reposts.

So, no matter whether the response to this news was positive or negative, I was affected anyway.

I really wanted to know what grudge this person had against me. Or did I unknowingly step on someone's toes...?

A vein pulsed at my temple as I exited X and opened Line.

There were hundreds of unread messages, from my younger sister, Third, Renji, my fellow actors, my high school friends, and even my classmates, asking if I was okay. But I didn't respond to anyone yet.

The first thing I searched for was a message from my company.

There was only one. From P'Jarin.

[Call me immediately after class.]

I sat and waited until class ended, feeling guilty that my brain hadn't registered a single thing my classmates were presenting. As soon as the professor left the room, my classmates immediately came up to me. Everyone had already seen the news. That explained why they all stared at me when I walked in.

"Wan, how are you? Are you okay?"

"I don't believe for a second that you're like that. How could you possibly steal someone's partner? It took you almost a year just to talk to the girls in our department without looking away."

"These assholes must have too much free time. Want us to tweet back at them? We're ready."

"It's fine. Thanks. I'll let the company handle it," I said with a small smile, touched by their support. There wasn't a single trace of doubt in their eyes. Even in the middle of all this mess, I still had something good.

After leaving the classroom, I walked around looking for a quiet, empty place to make a call. I finally stopped at a balcony outside an unused classroom. Jay followed me.

[Wan, class is over, right? Where are you?]

"I'm at the university,"

[Have you heard about that news yet?]

"I have."

[I believe in you, but I need to hear it from your mouth once again to be sure. You have never done anything like what that person

accused you of, right? Stealing someone else's lover, behaving like a 'real man'?]

"I never have." I answered firmly. The company has already investigated my background. If they had found that I had such behavior, I wouldn't have been here until now.

[Okay, then I'll let the lawyer handle it. Don't stress over it, Wan. The public opinion is more on your side. Everyone is coming out to defend you.]

"I'm not stressed at all, P'." I replied. Because it's not true, and because I could already guess the reason why I kept getting these fabricated rumors.

It's sabotage, because I made someone lose their benefits. And the main reason likely stems from my relationship with Third.

The last rumor was an attempt to suppress a rising star. Nine came forward to talk about me stealing the spotlight. Others on set must have noticed the changes between me and Third. Plus, with the growing hashtag #ThirdWan, when everything is pieced together, it all makes sense. Even P'Cher could guess that Third and I were talking. Others must have sensed it too, and they didn't want it to happen because it might affect the series as well as the ship fandom #ThirdNine.

It's cutting the problem at its root. Since I was the obstacle, someone tried to remove me.

[You don't have any work today, so just get some rest. No need to respond to anything. I will handle it. I'll update you again later.]
P'Jarin left these words before hanging up.

I lifted my gaze to the overcast sky, my eyes dim, and let out a deep sigh.

"Sometimes, I think maybe I shouldn't have encouraged you to go to that casting." Jay, who stood beside me, said softly, his voice filled with guilt.

"No, you meant well for me. These things are just... normal in this industry." I gave him a weak smile.

The entertainment industry, which looks bright and beautiful from the outside, full of colors and glamour, is only so to distract people from the sharp thorns hidden beneath, like a beautiful rose concealing its dangers.

"Sigh... Don't stress yourself out. Everyone knows you're not like that. Let's go get something to eat. How about mala? My treat."

"Sorry, Jay. I want to go back to my room. I want to sleep." I refused. Whenever something bad happens, I never have the appetite to eat anything. I just want to be alone.

"Alright, no problem. Another day then."

"Sorry."

"Why are you apologizing? You should rest." Jay patted my shoulder in understanding. We said our goodbyes, and then I rode my motorcycle back to my condo.

I stopped by a convenience store to buy a packed meal, but once I got to my room, I left it untouched on the table. Instead, I sat curled up on the sofa, responding to messages from everyone who checked in on me.

I had always been someone with few friends, but now that this happened, many friends, even those I wasn't close to, reached out, not out of curiosity, but because they cared and trusted me. I was truly touched.

[Wan, call me back when you're free.]

There was only one message I hadn't opened yet. Third had been messaging me repeatedly.

While I was confused and overwhelmed with guilt, he kept sending messages.

I wanted to call. I wanted to hear his voice so badly.

But I couldn't.

The thing standing in the way of Third's growth as an actor, the dream he had always pursued, was me.

In this industry, if you have skills but no popularity, it means nothing.

Right now, Third cannot afford to lose any group of fans, especially the ship fans, who would help him rise to the top quickly.

Pathetic.

I used to think this kind of thing was absolutely ridiculous.

But in the end, I had to surrender to capitalism.

For the person I like to reach the peak of his dream, I am willing to do anything.

Maybe... I was never suited for this industry from the beginning.

I sat there contemplating for hours, weighing the pros and cons, until I made up my mind.

I took a deep breath, gathering my courage, as I picked up my phone.

My hands felt stiff as I scrolled through my contacts to find P'Jarin's number.

[What's up, Wan? We're about to release a statement to sue them for defamation. Don't worry about anything—]

"P'Jarin, I have something I want to discuss. I want to talk to P'Wut."

[P'Wut?!] There was clear surprise in the voice on the other end when I mentioned the name of the company's owner, who was also the investor in this series. [What is it about?]

"I've been thinking about it... All of this chaos happened because of me. I think you and P'Cher already know about me and Third. And you probably understand why I keep getting hit with fake news."

[Yeah... that's true. But let me handle this first. We can talk about everything else later.]

P'Jarin tried to sound relaxed, but I could tell his tone was off. He was probably more stressed than he let on.

Because the series didn't just have me in it.

If the drama got bad enough that people boycotted the show, everyone would be affected.

"P', I've thought about it. I don't want this series that everyone has worked so hard on to run into problems because of me.

Maybe... I'm just not suited for this path."

[Wan...]

"Maybe it would be better if I... withdrew from the series."

My throat tightened. I knew exactly how serious the words I had just spoken were.

The series was already halfway through filming.

Even though I didn't have a huge role, I was still one of the key characters.

But this might be the best solution I could come up with.

The best option for everyone.

"I know this sounds irresponsible. I have no excuse. If I need to pay a penalty fee, I'll accept it. Please consider it."

[Wan... Let's do this. Come in and talk first. I'll inform P'Wut and schedule a meeting for us. Okay?]

"Alright." I agreed.

Once I hung up, I buried my face into my knees and closed my eyes.

—

Vrrrrrr—

I sat there without knowing how much time had passed, but the ringing sound that suddenly echoed made me lift my head to look at the phone lying beside me. My eyes trembled when I saw that it was Third calling.

I hesitated for a moment, but my hand reached out before my brain could even issue the command. In the end, I pressed to accept the call, after he had already called me dozens of times since this morning.

"Hello."

[How are you?]

The deep voice that was usually indifferent and cold now sounded urgent and unsettled, causing my heart to feel both warm and painfully stung with guilt at the same time.

"I'm fine. You called because of the news, right? It's nothing. I've already cleared things up with the company."

[Is there anything I can help with? Is your company really going to sue, or are they just saying that? You've already gone through this twice. Just suing them won't be enough. Let me help. I know a lawyer—]

"No, no, it's really okay," I quickly refused.

At the same time, I felt like crying because he was this worried about me. Even when I was trying to distance myself from him. And he probably already realized that.

[Then... are you okay right now?]

His voice softened, carrying various emotions even though I couldn't see his expression.

I swallowed, my throat dry. I had already made up my mind. I had to say it and bring this to an end.

"Third, I talked to my manager."

[...]

"I think I'm going to withdraw from the series."

The other end of the line fell completely silent. He was probably in shock.

But I knew that if I didn't step back, there would always be people fabricating rumors to attack me.

Even though the choice I made would have many consequences, the damage could be even greater if I kept stubbornly pushing forward as if nothing had happened.

Sacrificing the lesser for the greater benefit.

In the business world, it has to be that way.

"Thinking about it, I don't really like acting that much, and I don't fit into this industry either. So, I'm going to talk to the company this evening. Maybe if they change to another actor, things might turn out better."

I forced my voice to sound casual, even though, in truth, it hurt quite a lot. The truth was, I enjoyed playing a character. Even though I wasn't in love with the acting profession, it was something I genuinely wanted to do well.

I don't like lying. I don't want to be irresponsible. But I'm completely lost. I can't see a way forward anymore.

[Where are you right now?] Third asked in a calm voice.

"At... my room."

I hesitated a little before answering, but I figured that someone with such a packed schedule like him wouldn't be able to come all the way to my condo anyway.

[Stay there. I'll call you when I arrive.]

"What? Third!"

Beep!

The call was cut off.

I tried calling him back, but he wouldn't pick up. Don't tell me... he's actually coming here?!

I sat there restlessly, anxiously waiting. In the meantime, I kept trying to call Third and checked the updates on the situation. My company had already issued a statement threatening to sue whoever spread the rumors, but the fan war between the two fandoms was far from over. ThirdNine's fans had even started trending a hashtag demanding that the production team remove me from the series.

It wasn't surprising.

It really would be better for everyone if I stepped down.

Vrrrrrr

After half an hour, Third called again. I immediately answered.

"Hello."

[I'm downstairs at your condo, in the lounge.]

I quickly grabbed my keycard and rushed out of my room to the elevator. My mind was in complete chaos. I didn't even know what I should say to him when I saw him.

When the elevator reached the ground floor, I walked briskly to the lounge. My heart pounded intensely when I saw the familiar tall figure in a student uniform, sitting with his back to me. Even with a mask and a cap covering his face, his aura as a celebrity couldn't be hidden.

"Wan."

The moment he saw me, he stood up and walked toward me. I grabbed his arm and pulled him to the condo's garden to talk.

"You don't have work?"

"I had classes today," he replied.

I see. If he had work, he wouldn't have been able to come.

"Then why did you come?"

"To talk face to face," Third said, pulling off his mask, revealing the tense expression on his sharp face as he reached out and squeezed my shoulder. "Why did you say you're withdrawing?"

"It's the best choice I can think of and make," I gave him a bitter smile.

It might seem irresponsible to leave a project halfway, but I believed that if the company weighed the pros and cons, they would likely lean toward agreeing with me.

"It's actually the worst choice. You didn't do anything wrong, so why should you withdraw?" Third said firmly, just as I expected.

"Third, you might not know this, but most of the audience is demanding that I be removed from the series," I tried to explain.

Knowing his personality, I guessed he understood perfectly well why all of this was happening, but he simply wouldn't care. He would do whatever he wanted.

That's why it was my responsibility to step away... for his future.

"I know. But so what? Do I have to care?"

"You should care. They're the audience, the ones who will be watching. They're the ones who will support you. If I stay, everyone

will—"

"And so what? Work is work, personal matters are personal. I like you, and who the hell has a problem with that?"

His deep voice rang loudly through the garden.

I froze for a moment, emotions surging until my eyes burned.

Hearing the person you like say that they like you back should be the happiest thing.

But at the same time, I couldn't smile and tell him I liked him too.

I took a step back and gave him a sad smile.

"Thank you for your feelings, Third."

"..."

"But I can't accept them."

The silence that followed was suffocating. His dark eyes stared straight at me, as if trying to see through my heart and thoughts.

"Why? I thought you liked me too... isn't that right?"

Hearing those words, my eyes burned again.

Yes, I liked him. A lot.

But because I liked him, I couldn't allow myself to be an obstacle in his life.

"I do have feelings for you, but with everything that's happening, I don't think it's a good idea for us to move forward," I said as indifferently as I could, hoping that he wouldn't catch the slight tremble in my voice at the end.

"..."

"Go back, Third. I want to rest."

I turned around and took long strides back into the building immediately, not daring to look back at the expression of the person who still stood frozen like a statue. I didn't want to see the pain and disappointment in his eyes, and even more so, I didn't want him to see my face right now.

As soon as the elevator doors closed, the tears I had been holding back finally spilled over. I took a deep breath, trying to suppress my sobs, lifting a hand to wipe my tears, but they wouldn't stop falling.

It wasn't that I wanted to give up. It wasn't that I didn't want to hold Third's hand and fight through this together. But no matter where I looked, I couldn't see a way forward. All I could do was drag him down with me. If that was the case, it was better for me to walk away from his life.

The good feelings between us in this short time... I would let them remain as just memories.

The phone in my pocket vibrated with an incoming message. I wiped my tears as I stepped out of the elevator and headed back to my room, my eyes focusing on the message from P'Jarin.

[I've informed P'Wut. See you at the office at six in the evening. For now, I just want you to calm down, think carefully, and we'll talk this evening.]

How unfortunate. No matter how many times I tried to think it over, an idiot like me could only find this as the best way out...

Take 16, Action!

Three days later, the official page of the series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart* released an announcement that shocked many awaiting viewers regarding Wan Achawin's withdrawal, one of the actors playing a key role in the series.

The details in the statement stated that Wan had health issues and was withdrawing, unrelated to the circulating rumors. After careful discussions, the series' production team, which was also Wan's agency, prioritized the actor's health and agreed on this decision. A new actor would be cast as Sky, and further announcements would follow.

As for Wan, he uploaded a photo of a handwritten letter on X, apologizing to the staff, his fellow actors, fans, and those waiting for the series for his decision. After that, there was no further activity on his social media, exactly as the company's statement had said, Wan was currently taking time off to recover both physically and mentally.

Of course, public opinion was divided into two sides. One side sympathized, assuming that the withdrawal was due to fake news and calls from some fans to remove him from the series, which had negatively impacted his physical and mental health. The other side speculated that he might have been truly at fault, hence the withdrawal.

However, two days later, when pictures surfaced of Wan's lawyer submitting documents to sue those spreading false rumors, all doubts faded. No one dared to post anything risky on social media anymore after seeing how seriously the agency was handling the matter.

That was what outsiders knew. But insiders, like Third, knew that there was more to it. Wan had withdrawn to prevent further negative attention from affecting the series and everyone involved. What hurt the most was that Third couldn't do anything to protect Wan.

His relationship with Wan seemed to have ended since the day he went to see him at the condo. After that, Third couldn't reach him. Wan wouldn't answer calls or read messages, making the lead actor worry to the point of madness. He even went to the condo but didn't find him. He checked the faculty, but there was no trace of him, as if Wan had never existed in the first place.

Third only now realized that he didn't know Wan as well as he thought. They had too little time to get to know each other. He only knew Wan as an artist but not enough about his personal life. He knew Wan had a younger sister named View but had never seen her and had no way of contacting her. Apart from fellow actors in the same agency, he didn't know any of Wan's other friends, making it even harder to reach him.

"P'Cher, can you get in touch with Wan?" The same question escaped the lead actor's lips every time he met P'Cher, the AR who managed Wan. Even though Wan had withdrawn from the series, there were still other actors in the agency, so she had to visit the set regularly.

"Wan is resting, don't worry." Her answer was always the same, though her eyes carried sympathy. Even so, she had to respect Wan's wishes, not as an AR, but as a sister.

Since Wan had said he wanted to be alone for a while and didn't want to contact anyone, especially the person in front of her, she would do that until Wan's mind was strong enough.

Even so, Third was restless. As long as he didn't see Wan in person or talk to him, he couldn't feel at ease. Even though his love had

been rejected coldly, Third was sure Wan didn't mean what he said. Wan had stepped back for his sake. But Third refused to accept that. He would never let Wan go because of such nonsense.

First, he had to find Wan. He had to talk to him again. But as time passed without any contact, the lead actor started to feel completely lost.

"P'Third, can I take a story with you?"

A voice interrupted his thoughts as he sat quietly outside the university building during the final filming day. Renji walked over with a faint smile on his face.

"As a keepsake. Today's the last filming day."

"Sure," Third replied, forcing a smile as they took a story for Renji's Instagram.

He couldn't believe how fast time had flown. Nearly two months had passed since the incident. Filming, including reshoots for the recast scenes, had wrapped up. The atmosphere on set was one of farewells.

"Have you been able to contact Wan?" the lead actor asked his junior, only to be disappointed when the other shook his head.

"Not at all. P'Cher said P'Wan isn't at the condo either. I don't know where he went. He won't pick up my calls either." Renji sighed, looking dejected as he grumbled, "I'm upset, you know? I thought he might make an exception for me since we're close. But he really hasn't contacted anyone except P'Cher and P'Jarin. If P'Wan ever comes back, I'm not talking to him. I'll sulk at him instead."

After he finished speaking, silence fell between the two men. Third glanced at his tall junior standing beside him before casually asking, "Do you like Wan?"

He expected the other to be surprised, but Renji only went quiet for a moment before letting out a bitter smile.

"Ghosts recognize ghosts, huh?" The younger man sighed. "Yeah... I've liked him since the first day I met him. But he only sees me as a younger brother. I tried flirting, but he never reacted, so I knew I had no chance. I... I think I've gotten over it now... I guess."

It wasn't surprising. Wan seemed quite dense. Even when Third first approached him, he hadn't noticed the interest. With someone like Renji, whom he spent time with often and who was younger, it was no wonder Wan never saw his true intentions.

"And what about you two?" Renji asked.

Third was silent for a moment before choosing the most accurate words.

"...Unresolved feelings."

He wouldn't accept that their story had ended until he heard it clearly from Wan himself, without any external pressure forcing Wan to cut ties with him.

"Then keep fighting," Renji said with a small smile before walking back to the others, leaving Third alone with his thoughts.

There was still one place he was sure Wan would be. But until now, his schedule had been packed, almost as if the agency feared he would go searching for Wan, so they had flooded him with work.

But today, filming was done. He finally had time.

He would never give up, so he decided that tomorrow, he would go to Ayutthaya.

People tend to return home when they are troubled. He was sure Wan would be there.

The next morning, the young man left Bangkok at seven and drove to Ayutthaya with hope in his heart. Nearly three hours later, he parked in front of a shophouse, the famous boat noodle restaurant he had visited before. It was already open, with customers coming in since early morning.

"Hello," Third greeted as he walked inside, bowing to Wan's parents, who were busy making noodles. He pulled down his mask to show his face. "I'm... Wan's friend. Do you remember me?"

"Of course! You're the lead actor, right?" The middle-aged woman stopped working and approached him, while her husband smiled warmly.

"Yes. I was wondering... is Wan here?" Third asked casually, pretending he already knew, using his acting skills outside of work.

The couple exchanged glances, hesitating slightly before Wan's father spoke. "Why did you come here? Wan's not here. He's in Bangkok."

"...Oh." Third paused briefly. He had been so sure Wan had come home. He hadn't expected to arrive and not find him.

"He dropped by last week but left again. Try calling him, he's probably at his condo."

"Alright," Third forced a smile. His chest felt heavy with disappointment. Maybe this was Wan's clear answer. Maybe he was the only one trying to hold on...

"Since you're here, have something to eat," Wan's mother insisted, so Third had no choice but to stay and accept their hospitality.

A steaming bowl of boat noodles was served. It smelled delicious, but to Third, it tasted bitter.

"Goodbye, then."

"Drive safely," Wan's mother said warmly.

Third smiled, bowed in farewell, and walked back to his car, leaving behind all his hopes. He pressed the accelerator, heading back to Bangkok, with his hope fading more and more.

Time never stands still. No matter what joys or sorrows life brings, time continues moving forward, leaving all happiness and pain behind as mere memories.

I, in my student uniform, took a deep breath while walking along the road leading to the university's registration office. After four years of hard study, I had finally become a full-fledged graduate and was on my way to pick up the transcript I had requested.

Four years ago, I walked down this road with enthusiasm, eager to start my life within the university walls. Four years later, I had achieved success as I had hoped. At the very least, there was something in my life that made my parents and myself proud, even though I had not succeeded in my path as an actor...

I entered the registration office, which was surprisingly empty. It was because I had failed to read the huge sign in front of the building that said the registration counter opened at nine in the morning, so I had to wait for the staff to arrive. I pulled up my mask to cover my nose as I sat waiting, staring absentmindedly at the small garden in front of me, thinking about everything that had happened over the past three months.

That evening, I went to talk to P'Wut. In the end, he agreed to my request after weighing the pros and cons and considering that my mental state was probably not ready to move forward yet. At first, I had even thought about leaving the entertainment industry altogether, but P'Wut told me to take a break and think it over carefully. I could take as much time as I needed, and if I really wanted to cancel my artist contract, we could talk again.

I thought I would have to pay a fine for causing delays to the production, but P'Wut was very kind and told me I didn't have to take responsibility. Perhaps part of it was because he wanted to compensate me, since I had been removed from the series without doing anything wrong. As for the defamation lawsuits over the fake news, if my guess was correct that the person who spread the rumors was connected to Third's agency, then the matter would likely end in negotiation and settlement. After all, P'Wut and Khun Pitch had been friends for a long time and had business interests together. Even if there were conflicts or rivalries at times, they still had to protect their main interests.

Most of the time, lawsuits involving artists were like this. The agency would just issue a statement as a warning to prevent others from following suit, but rarely would they actually take serious legal action.

For all those reasons, P'Wut didn't blame me at all. Instead, he gave me as much time as I needed to rest and carefully reconsider before terminating my artist contract. It was probably a way for him, as a businessman, to win me over. And besides, I had made a fair amount of money for the agency in the short time I had been there. If you balanced the numbers, it was a fair trade-off. As for my role, a well-known actor had taken over. The fans who were waiting to see the series were happy, and I felt relieved as well. I had been deeply attached to the character of Sky, so knowing that a skilled actor was continuing the role made me genuinely happy.

Over the past three months, I had stayed off social media and barely contacted anyone besides my family, P'Cher, P'Jarin, and Jay. I really wanted to take a serious break. Even though I felt quite guilty towards Renji because I kept seeing him sending messages, I still felt that I wasn't ready to face it. It made me uncomfortable. At first, I thought I was fine, but in reality, what had happened had affected me more than I expected. I had never been mobbed by strangers to that extent before. So, I chose to remain silent and let time heal me.

As for Third, I blocked out everything related to him. I tried not to know anything at all, because thinking about him only made me hurt more. But what I hadn't expected was that, while I was trying so hard to move on from him, Third refused to give up. He actually followed me to Ayutthaya, was he crazy?

Well, actually, I was still at my condo. But when I was feeling really down, I would go back to stay with my parents. It just so happened that during one of those times, Third went looking for me. That day, I had gone to see a high school friend, so we missed each other.

Luckily, I had already told my parents that if Third came looking for me, they should say I wasn't there. But I hadn't expected that he would actually come. I was angry at myself because, deep down, a tiny part of me was happy, so obviously happy, when I heard he had come looking for me. Even though I had disappointed him, even though I was trying to move on, I still had the audacity to feel secretly happy when he came to find me.

But after that day, Third's attempts to contact me gradually lessened. He barely called or sent messages anymore. It seemed like he had given up. That fact made me feel miserable, but I comforted myself by saying it was for the best. He and I were never meant to cross paths in the first place. I should be happy to see Third moving forward. Right now, he was skyrocketing in popularity. Even though I wasn't on social media, I still saw his advertisements on the BTS.

And this month, the series was about to air. With his growing fanbase and acting ability, it was easy to predict that Third would become a superstar in no time.

I was truly happy for him.

After receiving my transcript, I quickly returned to my condo because I didn't want to attract attention. Since it was semester break, View had gone back to stay with our parents, so the room was mine alone. I still had to stay in Bangkok to take care of various matters. That evening, I had a meeting at the agency because P'Jarin had told me the other day that if I really didn't want to be an artist anymore, P'Wut would still welcome me to work in marketing. I didn't even know how to thank them.

"Oh, right. The premiere screening of Episode 1 is this Saturday."

That evening, after our discussion over dinner, I officially transitioned from an artist contract to a staff position at the agency. P'Jarin spoke to me in a half-teasing tone. "Are you going? You can get in for free as staff."

"Uh... better not," I replied with a dry laugh. After making the production team and the cast go through two full days of reshoots, I had no face to show up at the event.

But I still felt a connection to this series. So, on the day of the Episode 1 premiere, I logged into social media for the first time in three months to check on the updates. BL series often held special screenings for the first and last episodes in theaters, allowing fans to meet the cast and watch the show on the big screen together. It was both a way to fulfill fan demands and a business strategy for investors, a win-win situation. It also helped with media promotion.

On Saturday afternoon, I lounged on the sofa, scrolling through the live broadcast of the actors' interviews on the official page of the

series. It felt strange to see familiar faces standing there, but I was no longer among them...

"Today is the day we've all been waiting for, right, Third? It's finally airing. So exciting!"

My heart clenched automatically when I saw Third and Nine standing in the center. Nine still had that heart-melting sweet smile, even though I already knew that smile was just an act.

"Yes, I just hope the audience will enjoy our work," Third replied.

Even though he smiled and answered the reporters' questions fluently, I could sense the heavy atmosphere. I knew him well enough to see that his smile didn't come from genuine happiness.

"A lot of fans have come to support you both today. How did Third and Nine encourage each other before the event?"

"We just talked about how we've already done our best. Now, all that's left is to receive feedback. No matter what, we'll keep supporting each other. We cheer each other on every day. Even if we don't see each other, we call each other. He's probably sick of hearing my voice by now," Nine said with a shy smile, in contrast to the person beside him, who, despite maintaining a faint smile, had an indifferent look in his eyes.

"Oh! You call each other often?"

"Almost every day—"

"We just talk about work," Third interjected. His smile had vanished, replaced by a serious expression as he spoke a sentence that silenced the entire interview.

"I want to make it clear right here that I don't want people to see me and Nine as a shipped couple. We are actors, just coworkers,

and nothing more. Since we've given our all in our roles as actors, I'd prefer for everyone to focus on our work rather than our personal relationships."

The reporters were stunned. The fans were stunned. Even I, watching the livestream from home, was so stunned that I almost dropped my phone.

Having been involved in the BL industry both as a fan and as an actor, I knew the norm was to keep things ambiguous to maintain the ship's fanbase. I had never heard an actor speak this bluntly before. Even though he had often said that it was just work, this time, he outright declared that there was no possibility of developing a relationship with Nine.

Did Third realize that saying this could cause some shippers to leave? Then why did he say it...?

As soon as Third finished speaking, Nine's smile froze. He looked completely shocked. The other actors also fell silent, some shifting awkwardly, until one of the reporters quickly changed the topic to keep the interview going. But the awkwardness in the atmosphere was obvious. Even watching through a screen, I felt suffocated. The people at the event must have felt it ten times worse.

I exited the livestream and sat there blankly for a moment, trying to process what had just happened. I could already predict that the trending tag on X would be moving faster than a flash flood. The shipper fans were bound to be heartbroken.

And sure enough, just as I expected, the shipper fans flooded X with complaints.

'It was obvious from the start that he didn't like our boy. If he hates it so much, why even act together?'

'Yeah, just end this thing already. Our pretty boy deserves someone better, not someone who's forcing himself to work with him.'

'Saying that while he's standing right next to you? That's humiliating. Where's the basic decency?'

As expected, the topic shot up to X's number one trending spot, though not because of the series itself. Meanwhile, Third's fans fiercely defended him.

'He's always been clear that it's just work. If he didn't say anything, you'd accuse him of selling the ship like some people we won't name.'

'When he says it's just work, you bash him. BL fans are never satisfied with anything.'

'So our guy is at fault for shattering your delusions? I guess he should have kept queerbaiting and pretending to be someone he's not, huh?'

The drama dragged on longer than I expected. After the first episode's premiere, rumors surfaced from fans who had followed them to the parking lot after the event, claiming that they overheard Third and Nine arguing about the interview. The person who spread the rumor got bashed for invading their privacy, but people still kept debating whether the argument had really happened.

Of course, Nine must have been furious. And I don't think Third's manager was pleased with what he said either.

I was just as confused. I had stepped back and cut ties with him so that his future could go smoothly. But look at what he did.

It was like he was throwing it back in my face, showing me that no matter what, he would never follow the path that everyone tried to set for him.

He is truly both admirable and frustrating at the same time.

I reached for my phone, opened LINE, and scrolled to find Third's chat. I hadn't opened his messages in a long time, but I was about to lose my patience. I was worried. I wanted to know how he was doing. This drama was so big that even news agencies were covering it. Some of ThirdNine's shippers had started supporting them separately and were fighting every day on X. I figured Third must be under a lot of pressure from the company.

No.

A voice in my head warned me just as I was about to tap into his chatroom. If I messaged him, everything I had been trying to do for the past three months would be for nothing. Third shouldn't be wavering because of me again. Drama is just like a gust of wind. If nothing fans the flames, people forget about it before long.

And yet, I was still worried about him.

In the end, I registered a new X account, acted as an anonymous fan, and posted words of encouragement for Third.

'We know how much effort and dedication Third has put into this. Stay strong. No matter what happens, this fan will always be cheering for you from afar. #ThirdTharit'

This is all I could do, be a fan who supports him from a distance. He doesn't use social media much, so he probably wouldn't see my message. But if he ever does, I want him to know that there are still many of us who understand.

I kept scrolling through the tag related to Third on X and saw that he had an event this evening. Fans were encouraging each other to go and support him before his series aired tomorrow. They wanted him to know that there were still people rooting for him despite all the turmoil.

Go support him...

I locked my phone screen.

Part of me wanted to go and watch over him from afar, but another part thought, better not.

I couldn't go. I shouldn't go. Just supporting him on social media was enough.

My younger sister once told me that I'm the most contradictory person in the world. I say no, no, but in the end, I always do whatever I truly want. And the fact that I'm standing here at the event plaza of a famous shopping mall, a professional camera in hand, is proof of that statement.

I wore a mask, a cap, and glasses, covering my face so completely I almost looked like a thief in the middle of a crowd of excited female fans. It had been a long time since I felt this atmosphere, the only difference being that I had changed fandoms. The reason I was here today wasn't much different from when I used to stan Nine. I came for Third, to let him know that someone was still cheering him on. Even if he couldn't see me.

"Thank you to everyone who came to support me today," his voice rang out.

Through the lenses of my glasses, I fixed my gaze on the man standing on stage, speaking to the MC amidst the deafening cheers of his fans. Today, Third wore a white suit, looking like a groom straight out of a drama. He didn't need a spotlight, his aura was already bright enough to outshine everything around him. I couldn't help myself. I raised my camera and snapped a picture, unable to look away.

That man was dazzling, almost untouchable. Hard to believe that for a brief moment in time, I had been close to him. So close that we had almost been something more. Almost lovers.

Back then, it felt like a dream.

I kept my eyes on Third the entire time he was on stage, watching him even as he stepped down to be interviewed by the press. Fans swarmed him instantly, forming a tight crowd around him. I, however, remained in my spot, taking a deep breath and watching from afar.

This... This was the distance that suited us.

Just as I was about to turn away and leave quietly, Third's sharp eyes suddenly landed on me, just for a fleeting second. I startled, my body jerking in response, and then I spun around and walked away briskly, my heart pounding in my chest.

Shit, shit, shit! Did he see me? Or was it just a coincidence? With all those people and all that blinding light, it was hard to see anything clearly... Third probably didn't see me. Calm down, Wan.

With that thought, my racing heart gradually settled. I wandered around the mall, browsed through random stores, stopped by the supermarket to pick up a few things, and finally headed back to my condo. On the way, I got hungry and dropped by a nearby shop for a bowl of congee.

Ring!

I nearly choked on my food when my phone screen lit up with an incoming Line call, Third's name flashing on the screen. He hadn't called me in a long time. So why now?

I muted my phone but didn't answer, focusing on eating instead. Let him call as many times as he wanted. To others, I might seem

heartless, but in reality, it hurt just as much for me to ignore him.

But Third was far more persistent than I expected. Even as I finished my meal and walked back to my condo, he kept calling, making me wonder if he had nothing better to do.

"Wan."

"Holy shit!"

I nearly jumped out of my skin when I stepped into the condo lobby, only to see Third rising from the sofa and striding toward me. Before I could react, his hand grabbed my wrist.

"Finally, I found you," he said, his deep voice laced with relief.

"H-H-How did you get here?" I stammered, my eyes sweeping over his tall figure. He was still wearing a mask, his makeup not yet removed, clear evidence that he had come straight from an event. That meant he really did see me there.

Crap. Wan, you idiot. You shouldn't have gone to that event!

"Let's talk. Can we?" His deep voice carried a pleading tone. Just seeing his face made my already fragile heart melt like wax under a flame. The day I rejected him, I had to muster every ounce of my acting skills to maintain my distant demeanor. But now, looking into those weary eyes, I couldn't bring myself to be cruel to him any longer.

"Then... let's talk in the garden," I murmured. Taking him up to my room? No way. I was afraid... afraid my resolve wouldn't be strong enough to stop things from escalating. So talking outside was the safest option. It was already 9 PM, no one would be wandering around the garden except for the security guards.

It felt like time had rewound, bringing us back to the same spot where I had once cut him off. We stood in silence, the atmosphere awkward and heavy. And through it all, Third still held onto my wrist tightly, as if terrified I would run away.

"You came to see me today, didn't you?" The famous leading actor was the first to break the silence.

"...Yeah." I could only nod, there was no use denying it. I was still wearing the same outfit, with my camera bag slung over my shoulder. He must have put two and two together and come looking for me here.

"Then why didn't you answer my messages? Why didn't you pick up my calls?" His voice carried a note of hurt, his eyes reflecting pain so clearly that it made my chest tighten.

"I don't want us to stay in contact." I sighed. He already knew why I was doing this, but he was too stubborn to accept it.

"I told you, I don't care about other people," Third said firmly, his grip on my wrist tightening. "I've always kept my work and personal life separate. It was already painful enough having to let you step away from the series. You're the only one who had to make sacrifices. I—"

"Third, withdrawing was my idea," I interrupted before he could drown himself in guilt. "I've been dragged into scandals twice now. Even if none of it was true, it still had an impact. And if I kept pushing forward, more bad rumors would just keep coming. So I made this decision. It might seem irresponsible, but honestly, I feel so much more at ease now."

"..."

"You don't have to feel guilty. I've never regretted that decision. Someone like me isn't cut out to be in the entertainment industry

anyway. And besides, I already have a new job now. I'm really happy." I reached out to pat the back of his hand, and his tense posture gradually relaxed.

"I saw the news. The interview you gave to the press." I brought it up, tilting my head to look at him with questioning eyes. "Why did you say that? You knew what kind of consequences it could bring."

"Yes, I knew." His sharp eyes locked onto mine. "But I don't regret it. If fans or audiences like me, they should like me for my acting or for who I really am."

"But you'll lose opportunities—"

"Opportunities to sell fake ships? To let people misunderstand? To disappoint fans in the future? If that's the case, then losing those opportunities is a good thing." He didn't even hesitate with his response.

"..."

"Honestly, my agency wasn't too happy about it. But P'Wut, the owner of your agency and the investor, didn't mind about this. I talked to him from the start and made it clear I wouldn't do fake shipping. So don't worry, there won't be any issues." Third reassured me.

It was ironic that the one facing the backlash was the one comforting me. Yet, I still couldn't help but worry, feeling both regret and admiration at the same time. But it was exactly because Third was this straightforward and unwavering... that I had fallen for him.

"So stop running away from me." He stepped closer and pulled me into an embrace.

I was caught off guard and stumbled against his broad chest, my eyes widening as Third lowered his face onto my shoulder.

"I know you did all of that with good intentions... but don't do it again. Don't run away from me. I like you. I really, really do."

I stood frozen, my eyes stinging with heat. I had thought I had come to terms with everything, but when he stood in front of me and confessed again, I realized my feelings had never changed. No, if anything, I missed him. I longed for him even more than before.

"Are you... sure?" I asked, my voice unsteady. Working in the entertainment industry meant he would meet many people, people who might be better than me in every way. Was he really certain about me?

"As sure as I was when I realized I wanted to be an actor."

His voice was firm, warm, just like the heat radiating from his body against mine. Third pulled back to look at me. Though he was still wearing a mask, his eyes revealed everything he felt.

"Be with me. Let's be together. I really don't want to lose you."

In my whole life, aside from my family, I had never thought I mattered this much to anyone. But when Third said those words, I finally understood how important I was to him.

But...

"I... like you..." I admitted, lowering my gaze. "But being together... I don't know. Should we? The two of us..."

Even if we felt the same way, I couldn't ignore my worries. If anyone found out Third was dating me, it would be a huge deal. What if I ended up ruining his future?

"We can keep it a secret if you don't want to go public," he said, as if reading my mind. He pulled me into a gentle embrace, stroking my hair.

"It'll just be between us. I'll only tell the people I truly trust that I have a boyfriend, but I won't say who. You can decide whether to tell anyone or not. If one day we're both ready, we can make it public together. Okay?"

That offer made it easier to breathe. It didn't sound too bad. Even if we were seen together, as long as we didn't act too close, people would just assume we were good friends...

"Okay..." I nodded. If this was what he wanted, then I shouldn't go against both his feelings and mine.

We smiled at each other, letting out small laughs. It had been months since I had felt this lighthearted. I hadn't even realized that during all the time I spent away from Third, I hadn't been happy at all.

"Can I sleep over tonight?"

"Huh?!" My smile disappeared as my eyes widened. Wait a minute, we just got together five seconds ago, and now he wants to sleep over?!

"What are you thinking?" Third narrowed his eyes when he saw my shocked expression. "I just want to sleep. It's late, driving back would be dangerous, and I've been working all day. I'm exhausted."

I glanced at my watch. Late, huh? It was, well... around 9:30 PM. But since my boyfriend said he was tired, I wasn't heartless enough to kick him out.

"...Fine. But you're sleeping on the couch, okay?" I quickly set the rule.

I mean, we're a couple now. Being alone together means... things could happen, right? And I'm not ready for that yet. I mean, tonight is too soon. As for the future... well...

But if he wanted to kiss me tonight, I might just...

"Sure, anything's fine," Third agreed easily. I couldn't see his full face, but the way his sharp eyes curved told me he was smiling widely beneath the mask.

His large hand slid down to intertwine our fingers, holding mine as we walked back inside the building. My heart felt so light it might as well float away.

I have a boyfriend now.

And my boyfriend is a famous, ridiculously handsome leading man!

Take 17, Action!

"Hey."

"What?"

"Don't you ever think about going back to sleep at your own place?"

A conversation arose early one morning while I was washing a glass in the kitchen. Meanwhile, my frequent guest had just walked out of my bedroom, dressed in a casual t-shirt and sweatpants, his bare face giving the impression that this was his own room.

"Nope." Third, my boyfriend, answered with a straight face while walking to the fridge, grabbing a bottle of water to drink.

"My sister is coming back next week. You can't stay here all the time anymore." I said softly.

Since the day we agreed to be a couple, Third had been coming over almost every day, eating, sleeping, practically living in my room. At first, I told him to sleep on the couch. But in the end, I felt bad for him. I didn't want him to be uncomfortable, so we ended up sharing the bed.

Now, this leading man of mine wouldn't leave at all. He even brought his clothes over and left them here, basically moving in. Before this, I thought I knew Third quite well, but after we started dating, I realized there were still so many things I didn't know about him.

"Then, can you stay at my place instead? I'll make a keycard for you."

The tall figure walked over and hugged me from behind, resting his chin on my shoulder in an affectionate manner. This was one of the things I had just learned, Third was quite attached to physical affection. And extremely attached to me.

"I can't stay there all the time. I still have to take care of my sister." I glanced at the tall guy clinging to me like glue. His sharp eyes, gazing at me, carried a hint of loneliness, making the corners of my mouth curve up.

"But I can stay over sometimes."

"Mmm, in that case, I'll make you a keycard. You can come whenever you want." Third's face brightened instantly.

Before this, I used to think he was just a reserved and cold guy. But after dating, I realized he was just like anyone else. When we were together, he completely switched off his serious mode and transformed into a giant kitten instead.

Speaking of which, it's already been two months since we started dating. A short time, but I've been so happy. Although we had to adjust to each other quite a bit, believe it or not, we've never had a single argument. Maybe because it was so hard to get together in the first place that we tried our best to be considerate of each other.

"I have to go to work now." Third sighed heavily as he spoke, as if what he was saying went completely against what he wanted. That was confirmed by his warm arms tightening around me. "I'll be back late tonight. You can sleep first."

"Mmm." I nodded, but when I saw my boyfriend looking so down, I lightly patted his cheek and said, "At least put on a cheerful face when you go to work."

"I don't want to go at all." He hugged me even tighter, making me laugh.

Lately, Third had work every single day. He must be exhausted. The series *Deep Dive: Into Your Heart* was currently airing and receiving an overwhelming response. It was a massive hit. Both lead actors, Third and Nine, were in high demand. There were countless event appearances, endorsements, and other offers pouring in. The pre-airing drama surrounding the series had barely affected its success at all.

"How can you not want to go? You're at your peak right now. Just hang in there for a bit. Isn't my boyfriend amazing? Fighting!" I squeezed his hand, which was wrapped around my waist.

"Then..."

Third loosened his embrace, placing his hands on my shoulders to turn me around and face him. His lips curled into a sly smile.

"Give me some motivation."

"A kiss on the cheek?"

"Not enough. A kiss on the lips... okay?" He asked expectantly.

"Mmm."

I knew he needed encouragement, so I didn't tease him. I held back a smile and nodded. The moment I gave permission, his handsome face swiftly leaned in, capturing my lips in an instant.

His soft lips moved expertly, his warm tongue entwining with mine, stealing my breath with intense passion. The room echoed with embarrassing sounds. Though I was secretly shy, I lifted my arms to wrap around his thick neck, parting my lips to return the deep kiss willingly.

It might sound unbelievable, but even after two months of dating, we still hadn't gone all the way... you know, to the final stage. One reason was that Third was constantly busy. By the time he got home, he was so exhausted that he could barely stay awake. The other reason was that I was still hesitant and a little scared. So, our physical relationship usually stopped at kissing. The most we had done was... helping each other out. And even then, Third always asked for my permission first.

My boyfriend is seriously the cutest, huh?

"If this keeps up, I won't be going to work for sure."

After a long while, the tall figure was the one to pull away. His breathing was ragged, just like mine. I was panting, my face and ears burning, my entire body heated from head to toe. I don't think I need to elaborate on which part was particularly awake...

"Mmm, go already. You're gonna be late." I tiptoed and gave him a quick peck on the cheek before stepping back, letting Third grab his bag and car keys.

"Drive safely. Hope everything goes smoothly at work. I'll be watching your series tonight."

"...If it's too much, you don't have to force yourself to watch."

"I'm not forcing myself. I want to see your performance." I said. Third didn't really want me to watch because he thought I had bad memories associated with this series. Which, honestly, I did. But it's his work. I want to see my boyfriend act.

"Up to you. I'll text you later."

The lead actor of my life walked over and planted a quick kiss on my cheek before leaving the room.

"Byeeeeee!" I poked my head out to wave at him, watching until he turned the corner before smiling to myself.

Life had been pretty smooth for me lately. My health was fine. I had a premium-grade handsome boyfriend. Work was chill since I already knew the people in the company well. My parents were healthy. My sister had just gotten accepted into a prestigious state university. Guess that meant I had finally passed my tough times. The sky after the storm really is clear and bright!

Now that I'd sent Third off to work, it was my turn. I quickly showered, got dressed, grabbed my motorbike keys and bag, and left the apartment. I rode to the office of the agency where I worked.

My job was as a creative in the marketing department, handling artist promotions, content planning, and social media management. Anything related to promotion was my responsibility. I enjoyed my job. It aligned with my degree. It might not be my dream career, but it was something I could do without feeling drained.

In life, just having a job that doesn't make you miserable is enough to be happy. As for dreams... I still have my whole life to chase after them.

When I arrived on the second floor of the office, which housed a small studio, I found the staff and artists already gathered. Today, the company had scheduled the annual profile photoshoot for all the artists under its agency. That meant I got to see many familiar faces. My role today was to take photos, record videos, and conduct brief interviews with the artists for social media engagement, which would later be used as material for client proposals.

"Hey, P'Wan!"

"Hey, kiddo," I said, patting Renji's shoulder as he flashed me a puppy-like smile.

When I disappeared and lost contact with everyone for two months, he persistently called and texted me. But I never picked up. When I finally sorted everything out and reached out to him again, it turned out Renji was sulking. He ignored my messages and refused to call me back. I had to go through quite the effort to appease him. I couldn't even blame him for it. After all, I was the one who vanished and made him worry.

"Aren't you going to join the photoshoot?" The young man teased, nodding toward the set. If I were still an artist, I'd have to participate today too.

I immediately shook my head. "No way, not anymore."

I terminated my artist contract with the company last month. An official announcement was made, stating that I'd be transitioning to a behind-the-scenes role instead. The news shocked quite a few fans. Honestly, it wasn't an easy decision, knowing it would affect my supporters emotionally. But I didn't want to keep forcing myself to do something that no longer felt right. I decided to make a clear statement so they wouldn't keep waiting in vain.

I'm incredibly grateful and sorry to those who supported someone as hopeless as me. Even though my time as an artist was short, the few months I had fans cheering me on were moments I would never forget.

"Come on, since you're free, let me take some pictures. Make it a good one. I'll post it under the tag," I said, pulling the tall kid to an empty spot before lifting my camera. Renji knew exactly what to do, instantly shifting from an excitable puppy to a charming young man, flashing a subtle yet captivating smile at the camera.

Click!

My work continued until the end of the day. I went to a shabu restaurant near the office for a wrap-up dinner with the actors and crew before we all went our separate ways. I rode my motorcycle back to my room and arrived around 9:30 PM. The series would air at 10 PM, so I quickly took a shower, changed into comfortable clothes, and settled onto the sofa. I hugged a pillow as I waited to watch it live on TV.

As soon as the series started, I stared intently at the screen. I already knew the storyline from beginning to end, so there was nothing particularly exciting about it for me. Mainly, I was waiting to see Third's performance. I already felt immersed when watching through the monitor on set, but with the final cut, complete with editing and background music, it hit even harder. He was such an incredible actor. When he put on that smug smile, I found him annoying. When he got angry, I felt intimidated. And when he was sad, I wanted to cry with him. Tears welled up in my eyes. God, I was so into this!

"Ah..."

I let out a soft murmur as I reached the romantic scene where Third stole a kiss on Nine's cheek. They looked so happy on screen, while I, as a viewer at home, forced a dry smile and hypnotized myself.

It's just work. Just work. It's just a kiss on the cheek. If I want to date an actor, I need to prepare myself for things like this. That's not Third in the show. It's just his character, Copter. I'm not going to be a jealous idiot.

But if it were a deep kiss or an intense love scene, I'd probably have to skip over it. I admit, my heart isn't strong enough for that yet.
Hnghhh...

Once the series ended, I turned off the TV and went to bed like a responsible adult. Having experienced the demanding life of an artist, I've come to truly value a full night's sleep. So whenever I have time, I make sure to rest as much as possible. Sleep like there's no tomorrow!

At first, I thought about staying up to wait for Third, but he said he wouldn't be back until around 1 AM. No way I'd last that long. Guess I'll see him in the morning.

That night, I vaguely felt someone wrap his arms around me in the middle of my sleep. The warmth and familiar scent told me that Third had returned. Instinctively, I turned over, hugged him back, and nestled into his broad chest before drifting into a deep and peaceful slumber once again.

"Wan."

A deep voice rang beside my ear, replacing my morning alarm and pulling me back to reality.

"Hnnngh..." I groaned, barely managing to prop myself up despite still being half-asleep. Through my blurry vision, I saw my boyfriend sitting beside me, looking unusually serious.

I woke up a bit more and asked in a hoarse voice, "Third, what's wrong...?"

"There's news." He said briefly and handed me his phone. The moment I scrolled through the timeline, my eyes widened, and my heart started pounding.

'Anyone still deluding themselves about Third and Nine should stop now. Third already has someone in real life. He goes to see his boyfriend at his condo almost every day.'

[Cocochip : The news, the reporters, and the fans didn't know that Third's lover is a guy because the word used here is *faen* (แฟน), which is gender-neutral in Thai. Third also didn't mention the gender at all during the interview. However, I decided to use 'he' in my translation.]

The post included a photo of Third stepping out of his car in my condo's parking lot. My name wasn't mentioned, but I still felt a chill down my spine.

"A sasaeng?" I sighed.

A sasaeng refers to an overly obsessed fan who crosses the line, stalking, following artists everywhere, or lurking in places just to catch a glimpse of them. Even though I'm not that famous, I've still had my share of experiences. Some have trailed me all around campus, and others have somehow known exactly where I was going and showed up uninvited. I've even heard that top-tier artists have had GPS trackers secretly installed on their cars.

Let me tell you, this kind of behavior doesn't make artists feel good. It makes us uncomfortable, irritated, and even scared. Of course, I appreciate the support, but please, have some limits and respect personal space.

"Yeah, they must've followed me," Third frowned, clearly displeased. He valued his privacy a lot, so it was no surprise that he was annoyed.

I continued scrolling through the timeline. It was turning into a big deal. Third's name had already reached over a hundred thousand tweets. People were trying to dig up information about his supposed boyfriend, and some fans who still shipped his on-screen pairing with Nine were spiraling into drama.

I clicked my tongue in frustration. I had worked so hard to keep this a secret, only for someone else to expose it like this. Annoying,

wasn't it?

"You have an event today, right?" I furrowed my brows. There was no way reporters wouldn't bring this up. I quickly started thinking of a solution.

"You should just deny it. Or say you were visiting a friend. No one knows who your actual boyfriend is anyway," I suggested. Since he was on the rise, it would be better for his image if people thought he was still single. It was just smart psychology.

Third reached out and gently ruffled my messy hair as he said, "I'll answer in a way that's best for everyone."

"Hmm." I nodded. Third never acted without careful thought. I trusted that he'd handle this well.

That afternoon, Third went to work while I, having a day off, decided to clean my room. By the time I looked at the clock again, it was already evening, almost time for his event. I grabbed the food I ordered via delivery, sat at my desk, and opened my laptop to watch the event's live stream while scrolling through the tag to check out pictures of Third.

Honestly, I kind of missed those days when I used to follow idols with my camera. I wanted to take photos of Third myself. He's my boyfriend, after all, and he's *so* handsome. Too bad all I could do now was wait for pictures from others...

After the event, it was time for the press conference. I tuned in through a live broadcast from an entertainment news page. And, as expected, the very first question was about Third's rumored boyfriend, the hottest topic on social media.

"Is it true that Third already has a boyfriend? And is that why you've been so firm about not wanting to be shipped with other actors?"

The bizarre question made me freeze mid-bite into my yakisoba, my chopsticks halting in the air.

The BL industry is so weird. Since when does an actor need to have a real-life partner just to focus on their own craft? Isn't it just common sense that actors would prioritize their acting over shipping?

Third maintained a faint smile as he answered, "I'll answer the second question first. What I've said about wanting people to focus on my acting has nothing to do with whether I have a partner or not. Whether in the past, present, or future, I want fans and viewers to watch my growth as an actor. I'll keep working hard to improve my skills."

"..."

"As for the first question. It's true. I'm in a relationship."

Clatter!

My chopsticks dropped onto the table. My mouth fell open, and my heart pounded wildly. I never expected him to just admit it like that.

"I won't reveal who he is, but we've been seeing each other for a while. I like him, so I asked him out." Third spoke with a smile, causing a wave of murmurs among the reporters.

I covered my face with my hands. It was embarrassing. He was *so* in love and wasn't hiding it at all. But beyond that, I couldn't help but worry about his future...

"It would've been nice to share this when the time was right, when we were both ready, not because we were forced by circumstances.

But since the news is already out, I want to respect him. So I decided to be upfront about it. I hope everyone will give us our privacy." Third ended with a soft smile, but his words had a sharp edge, subtly calling out those who had crossed the line.

"And are you worried about backlash? That it might affect the BL series you're currently in?"

"I don't think acting in a BL series has any negative impact. In fact, BL series aren't any different from other genres. I've always been clear about separating work from my personal life. Fans and viewers who follow me should already understand this. So, I don't think it would cause any issues."

My boyfriend answered confidently, while I, on the other hand, was completely flustered. I quickly opened X to check the reaction.

The fandom was in an uproar. Some were disappointed, especially the shipper fans, while antis joined in, adding fuel to the fire, which made me nervous. However, once the news spread beyond the fandom, the situation took a turn. Most of social media praised Third for being so upfront, and his solo fans stepped up to defend him.

'Love this! A BL actor who's insanely honest. He has a partner and openly says so, respecting his partner too. His partner is so lucky. Honestly, finding a guy like this in real life is a blessing.'

'BL fans are upset because they don't like honest people. They prefer those who sell ships.'

'He's selling his acting skills, not his relationship status. Having a partner doesn't affect his performance. Weren't y'all crying over that scene last week when Copter got ambushed? And now you're complaining?'

Fans cheered for Third so much that his name trended with hundreds of thousands of tweets. I finally felt relieved, smiling as I

saw just how much his fans adored him. Many said that whoever Third loved, they would love too. But I couldn't help but wonder, if they found out it was me, how would they react? Heh...

I threw away the empty food container, smiling to myself in satisfaction. Well, keeping it a secret like this was probably for the best. We'll wait until we're both ready to go public. When that day comes, I hope everyone will bless us.

Every time I think my life is going smoothly without obstacles, something always comes along to trip me up. But this time, it wasn't me. It was my boyfriend who got caught in the crossfire of someone else's actions.

"Drama again?"

"Yeah." Third rolled his eyes and tossed his phone onto the couch. Then he pulled me, who had been sweeping the floor, onto his lap and hugged me tight. (I stay over at Third's place three times a week.) Lately, he seemed fed up because every time he logged into social media, there were people tagging him in drama or hate posts. Most of them came from shipper fans and Nine's fans.

Why was he getting hate? Because Third had openly admitted to having a boyfriend. On top of that, after the interview, Nine posted a series of sad song lyrics in his stories for several days. Every single one about heartbreak. And when he attended an event recently, he looked visibly down, which only fueled fans' imaginations. They started believing Nine was heartbroken over Third, and just like that, my boyfriend became the villain in everyone's eyes.

"He's still at it, posting some cryptic nonsense on X again today. When is he gonna stop fishing for sympathy?" Third gritted his teeth next to my ear. I grabbed my own phone to check, sighing when I

saw that Nine had posted something about waiting for the storm to pass, along with yet another heartbreak song.

If I didn't know the full story, I might've believed Nine really liked Third and was genuinely heartbroken. But Third had told me everything, including their history from high school. When I found out, I felt numb with disappointment. I had supported Nine for over two years, only to learn this? I immediately threw out all the merch and photos I had of him, even deleted all the digital files.

And yet, even now, he wouldn't stop trying to bring my boyfriend down. It was as if he wanted to crush Third completely, to ruin him while boosting his own popularity. It was working too, he was trending on X every single day. It was a calculated and cold-blooded move.

"What should we do?" I asked.

"Nothing. Just let it go. The news will die down eventually. My fans understand me, and that's enough." Third buried his face in my shoulder, pressing kisses along my collarbone.

Even with my shirt in the way, I still felt a tingling sensation in my stomach. I wanted to just let myself get flustered, but I was too worried. So, I turned to face him, cupping his sharp jaw with both hands.

"Are you sure this won't hurt your image? I'm worried—"

"There's nothing to worry about. Don't stress." He smiled and kissed my palm gently. His dark eyes had a thoughtful glint. "Honestly, I don't think he can keep this up for much longer."

"Why not?"

"I just happened to find something out." He gave a small, unreadable smile, making me tilt my head in confusion.

"Let's just say... this will all be over soon. His series is ending, too. Whatever he's done, he'll have to face the consequences."

"What? What do you mean? Tell me!"

I perked up, trying to get him to spill, but Third silenced me with a kiss. By the time he finally let me go, I was lying breathless on the couch and my mind completely blank.

Third's 'soon' came even faster than I expected. The very next morning, social media exploded with a huge scandal.

'Exposing the dark side of a sweet-faced BL actor: He may look innocent on screen, but who knew he was a two-faced bully?'

That was the headline from a major entertainment news outlet. When I clicked in, I found that it all started from an anonymous account spilling dirt on a famous BL actor, codenamed 'N'. The accusations? He took advantage of his university classmates, never showed up for group work, refused to respond to work-related messages, and even mocked LGBTQ+ classmates in a derogatory way. Worst of all, leaked chat logs showed him threatening his groupmates, saying that if they didn't include his name in their projects, they would all face trouble with their professor.

Even though the post used an alias, Thai netizens were basically better detectives than Conan himself. They quickly pieced together which university, faculty, and batch the accuser was from, and it matched exactly with Nine. Soon, more anonymous accounts came forward, revealing that Nine had a history of bad behavior since middle school. He was known for sweet-talking teachers while being envious and two-faced towards his peers.

The drama caught fire because bullying and discrimination were despised topics. Especially since he was a BL actor profiting from the

LGBTQ+ community. People were furious. His name trended on X with nearly a million tweets.

I spent the whole day staring at my screen in shock. If all of this was true...

"Third! Is this what you meant yesterday?" That evening, when Third came home from a commercial shoot, I ran to greet him at the door, showing him my phone.

"Oh, yeah."

"You knew this was coming?"

"More or less. The person who exposed him is a friend of someone I know. They found out I went to the same school as Nine and that we had issues, so they came to me for advice," Third explained, pulling me to sit beside him on the couch, wrapping an arm around me.

"I told them I wouldn't expose anything myself since I have a contract with my agency. But if they wanted to do it, that was up to them. I wouldn't interfere."

I was speechless. So Third had known all along that this would happen. But I couldn't blame him, why should he stop it? Nine had hurt him in so many ways. If it were me, I probably would've let it play out too. Karma was real.

"Why did they wait until now to expose him?" I asked.

"Because revenge is most satisfying when you see the person who hurt you fall from their highest point. The higher they climb, the harder they crash."

He was right. Nine had been at the peak of his career, and now this scandal was ruining his reputation completely. His series had already

ended, so at least that was a relief. But this would definitely affect his ability to get more duo projects. Third didn't want to do pair work anyway, so this was actually the perfect chance for him to focus on solo jobs.

I watched as the situation unfolded. Since there were solid chat logs as evidence, Nine couldn't deny it. He had no choice but to hold a press conference, apologize, and admit his wrongdoings, while the internet tore him apart. Most of his fans abandoned him for good. He still had some left, but his opportunities in the industry would surely shrink. Meanwhile, Third's career was skyrocketing.

"Wan!"

The moment I opened my condo door, I was met with my boyfriend's radiant smile.

"I got offered a movie role! The lead role!"

"What?! No way!" My eyes widened in excitement, my smile as big as his. Third stepped in and pulled me into a tight hug. I could feel his heart pounding like crazy.

"I'm so happy."

"Yeah! Me too. You're amazing! Who's my boyfriend again? Freaking awesome!" I hugged him back, laughing. We were still wrapped up in our embrace when View stepped out of her room to check what all the commotion was about. But even then, we didn't let go.

I could just tell, things were only going to get better for us from here. No kidding this time!

Epilogue The Last Take, Action!

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Are you a fanboy of Third?" A young woman, one of the many fans gathered to support Third, struck up a conversation with me while we waited for the brand event of a certain home appliance company to begin at 6 PM. The event had drawn such a large crowd that it overflowed the open area of a well-known shopping mall.

"Oh... yes." I nodded, wearing a mask, thick black-framed glasses, and a cap to conceal my face, making sure no one would recognize me.

"Where did you get to know Third? I started liking him after watching *Deep Dive*. He's such a great actor, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. But actually, at first, I didn't like him much. I thought he was arrogant. But after getting to know him... I mean, after following him, I realized he's really dedicated to his work and very sweet to his fans."

I chuckled softly, thinking back to when we first met. It had already been nearly a year since then. Time really flew by.

"Which X account do you use? Can I have your @? Come to think of it, you seem kind of familiar... like I've seen you somewhere before..."

"I just have a common face! A lot of people say that, haha." I quickly interrupted before she could figure it out, clearing my throat nervously. It was normal in fan circles to exchange social media accounts after clicking with someone at an event so they could cheer for their fave together.

"Oh, you mean X? I don't really use social media much."

"Oh, I see. No problem. If we meet at another event, we can chat again." The girl gave me a kind smile, while I felt a little guilty for lying. But I couldn't risk giving my contact info to anyone. I didn't want to blow my cover.

The crowd suddenly roared in excitement, signaling that the event was about to begin. Fans started screaming in anticipation as their favorite artist took his place beside the stage. I looked toward the stairway leading up and hid a smile behind my mask when I saw the tall figure in a familiar brand-name suit waving to the fans.

Of course, from up there, he couldn't see me. But I would always see him.

"Please welcome Third Tharit!"

"KYAAAA!!!"

As soon as the MC finished speaking, an explosion of cheers filled the venue, accompanied by the rapid clicking of camera shutters. Fans waved their banners and snapped photos and videos of Third with enthusiasm. I, too, lifted my trusty camera, peering through the lens, capturing shot after shot of Third while smiling in satisfaction.

Seeing with my own eyes how many fans loved and supported the person I loved made my eyes sting with emotion. Third shone so brightly among the crowd, and I believed he would soar even higher, becoming an actor whose talent was universally recognized, just as he had always dreamed.

"Hello, I'm Third Tharit," the tall figure on stage introduced himself, scanning the sea of fans surrounding the stage.

For a split second, his sharp eyes met mine. Then, his smile widened. Just like me, smiling so hard until my eyes curved into crescents as I lifted my camera to take his picture.

Click!

Third's journey in the entertainment industry was far from over. And I, Wan Achawin, as both his fan and his boyfriend, would always be here to support him.

The End.

Hi! So, this marks the end of *Mr. Fanboy*! But don't worry, there are 3 special chapters coming your way soon! Stay tuned! 😊 🎉

Special 1 - A Distant Family

This story takes place about a week after Third publicly announced that he was seeing someone (me).

That day was a Sunday. Third had an event in the evening, so he was still at his condo in the Lang Suan area with me in the morning. I usually stayed over about three or four times a week. As I pushed open the bathroom door after showering, I saw my boyfriend sitting on the sofa, talking on the phone with someone.

"Yes," was all I managed to hear Third say before he hung up with a serious expression.

"Who was that?" I asked, dressed in my usual at-home outfit, an oversized t-shirt and knee-length shorts. I walked over and plopped down beside my boyfriend, using a towel to dry my damp hair.

"My mom," he sighed.

As I've mentioned before, Third's mother is a high-ranking government official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while his father is a doctor who owns a clinic. But I've never met them. In fact, even Third himself doesn't go home often. He's not close to his parents.

"And?" I tilted my head, not understanding why just a call from his mom made him look so stressed.

"She's here. She's coming up in the elevator."

"Oh... Huh?!"

My eyes widened as if a jolt of electricity had run through me from head to toe. It's not weird for a mother to visit her son, but the problem was, I was here too! This was huge! And why didn't he tell me sooner?!

To give a little background, when Third and I started dating, I told my own family right away. They weren't surprised. They probably figured it out when Third went all the way to Ayutthaya to find me. My parents had no issue with me not dating women. They just told me to do whatever made me happy.

As for Third, I wasn't sure if he had talked to his family yet. He didn't seem very close to them and rarely mentioned them to me.

Back to the present, where I was absolutely panicking. This condo was bought by Third's parents when he started university, which meant his mom likely had a keycard. There was no time for me to escape. Hiding like in a drama was also risky. If I got caught, things would be even more awkward.

"This is bad. What do I do?!" In my panic, I started biting my nails and pacing back and forth. I didn't know much about Third's relationship with his family, only that he once told me his parents were quite traditional. He rarely went home and didn't stay in touch with them much. By now, they had probably seen the news about him announcing his relationship. Maybe that's why she came, to talk about it.

And if Third's mom found out her son's partner was me, a guy, and what if she couldn't accept it? That would be a disaster!

Breathe, Wan. Stay calm. I took a deep breath, my mind racing for a solution.

"Third, you haven't told your parents about me, have you?"

"..."

"Then just say I'm a friend who came to visit. That works, right?" I quickly concluded, relieved that I found a way out. Yes, that was it. Friends could visit each other's condos. Even if I stayed over, it wouldn't be weird at all.

Beep!

Three seconds after I finished speaking, the door unlock sound rang out. Third got up from the sofa and walked to greet his mother at the door, while I followed behind him, peeking over his shoulder.

"Hi, Mom."

"Mm."

The middle-aged woman in an elegant dress responded in a neutral tone. She gave off the exact same vibe as her son, formal, composed, and slightly intimidating. Their faces were nearly identical, except Third's eyes were a bit sharper than his mom's.

"And who's that behind you?" She raised a brow, staring at me as I stood stiffly behind her son.

"Hello." I quickly stepped forward, pressed my palms together in a respectful wai, and put on my best smile. "My name is Wan. I'm Third's friend. I just came over to visit him."

"Oh, I see." The older woman gave a slight smile.

Goosebumps shot up my arms. To put it simply, Third's mom had the same aura as a strict school disciplinary teacher, stern, formal, and authoritative. She completely fit the image of a government official. Now I understood where Third got his cold and emotionless demeanor from. Did he even realize how much he resembled his mother?

"You never come home, do you? If I didn't visit, I wouldn't get to see you at all." Third's mom turned back to her son, ignoring me.

"I've been busy with work. Sorry."

"It's fine. This is your peak period, after all," she sighed, walking over to sit on the single-seat sofa while Third and I sat together on the long one.

"So, how have you been? Are you doing well?"

"Yes."

"Are you getting enough sleep?"

"Three to four hours a night."

"That's too little."

"Some days, if I have an evening job, I get to sleep in."

Their conversation was just a basic check-in between mother and son, but the atmosphere in the room was suffocating. It felt like a corporate job interview. His mom asked questions like an HR officer, while Third answered like a robot.

Seriously, what kind of family talks like this?!

"Third, I forgot my lozenges." After a brief silence, his mom spoke again. "Go buy some for me. Same brand as always."

She was talking to her son, but her emotionless eyes glanced at me. I had been sitting silently for a while, so I quickly stood up and volunteered.

"I'll go buy them instead. That way, you can stay and talk with Third."

"It's okay. Let Third go. I'd rather talk with you."

"..."

Crap. Why does she want to talk to *me*?! She came here to see her son, didn't she?! What does his friend (boyfriend) have to do with this?!

"Go on, Third."

Third hesitated for a moment, glanced at me, then grabbed his phone and mask before silently leaving the room. I watched my boyfriend's broad back disappear as the door closed behind him. Even though I managed to keep my face calm, but my heart was crying.

Not only did he not help me out, but he left me alone?! Just wait, he's not getting any cuddles tonight!!

"Wan, right?" As soon as her son left, Third's mom wasted no time. Her sharp and intelligent eyes locked onto me like a detective about to interrogate a suspect.

"Yes."

"Have you been with Third for a long time?"

"Uh... since we met, it's been about almost a year now." I answered while raising my hand to count my fingers. I first met him at the beginning of the year, and now it's the end of the year. About nine or ten months, huh? Time really flies.

"No, that's not it." But his mother shook her head before saying something that almost made me choke on my own saliva. "I mean, when did you start dating?"

"..." My brain went blank. I couldn't think of anything to say for a moment. How did she know that I was Third's boyfriend? I swear we weren't acting suspicious just now.

"You already know, Auntie?" I asked in a soft voice.

I already felt small to begin with, but now it was as if I'd shrunk down to just three centimeters. I was scared of every word I was about to hear next. I was afraid that Third's family wouldn't be okay with their son dating me. If that was the case, then I...

"Even if I didn't know, I could guess." His mother chuckled softly, the corners of her lips lifting slightly in a smile that was hard to read.

"He already told me he has a boyfriend, a guy. He told me even before the news came out. And here you are, in the morning, in the house, wearing home clothes, with wet hair. That means you might have stayed over. Third is a very solitary person. If he weren't really close to someone, he wouldn't let them stay over. With just this, it's not hard to figure out, right?"

"Yes... I surrender to the evidence without any arguments. Auntie's eyesight is incredibly sharp. Is this a skill that comes with being a mother?"

As for my boyfriend, the one responsible for all this, just thinking about it makes me annoyed. If he already told his family, he could have at least told me! He scared me half to death. Why didn't we coordinate in advance? Hmph!

"To be honest, I was surprised too." The middle-aged woman said, a faint crease forming between her brows as she kept her eyes on me. "Until now, Third has only ever dated women. I never knew he liked men too."

That statement created a small moment of awkwardness in the room. Maybe because I grew up in a time where gender and

sexuality were widely accepted, and my family was quite open-minded, giving their children complete freedom, I never really understood why dating someone of a different gender or the same gender would make a difference.

"Is there... a difference?"

"?"

"I mean... if Third likes men, does that make him a different person?" I asked softly.

Just to clarify, I wasn't trying to be sarcastic or rude to an elder. I genuinely didn't understand. No matter who Third dated, he was still the same person, outwardly cold and indifferent, but deep down warm and caring. I didn't think that liking men or women would change his personality.

But as soon as I spoke, I had to swallow hard. Did I just make his mother dislike me? Oh no, if I made a bad first impression, I'd be screwed!

"That's true." The elder chuckled lightly after a brief pause.

The frown from earlier had relaxed, and her gaze softened as she looked at me. There was no sign of displeasure on her face, which made me let out a quiet sigh of relief.

"I never thought of it that way. To be honest, I grew up in a time when these things weren't widely accepted. So, deep down, his father and I still feel a little... strange about it." She admitted.

That didn't make me feel bad at all. On the contrary, I felt relieved that she was honest about her feelings. I'm not good at handling hidden meanings or complicated words. I prefer straightforward conversations because it means that if there's a problem, we can address it directly.

"But he's our son, after all. It's his life. No matter what path he chooses, as parents, our job is to support him."

A faint smile appeared on her face, one that looked so much like her son's. For the first time today, she seemed truly at ease, and the awkward atmosphere gradually dissipated.

"So, why do you like Third?"

"Uh... because he's straightforward and caring." I answered cautiously, though the word 'straightforward' probably wasn't enough to describe how blunt my boyfriend actually was.

"Straightforward... Hmm, that's true. He really is very direct, sometimes too much. When he first entered the entertainment industry, I even wondered if people would dislike him for that." She laughed before exhaling another long sigh.

"..."

"As you can see, Third isn't very close with me or his father. But I can't blame him. When he was a child, his father and I were always busy with work, never having time for him. Back then, we thought that if we made enough money, our child would have a comfortable life. But we forgot that what children need from their parents isn't just money."

"..."

"It's our fault. Before we knew it, things had already turned out this way. Third doesn't feel comfortable talking about a lot of things with us. So if there's someone he trusts, someone he can tell everything to and have by his side, then I can be at ease. At least he won't be alone anymore."

She smiled at me, a warm smile that reminded me so much of her son.

Maybe... this conversation was meant for this purpose all along.

"Take care of my son. No, I mean, take care of him for me, Wan. Next time we meet, I hope we can have a meal together." She said as she grabbed her bag and stood up.

"You're... leaving already?"

"Yes, I just came to check in. He never has time to come home. Luckily, I ran into you." She reached out and gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze, as if there was more she wanted to say, but since we weren't that close yet, in the end, we just exchanged smiles without words.

"I'm heading off now. Take care of yourself."

"I'll walk you out." I hurriedly stood up, intending to escort her to her car.

The older woman waved her hand dismissively. "No need."

So I could only walk her to the door, bowing respectfully as I bid her farewell.

As soon as Third's mother left, my shoulders slumped instantly. I sank to the floor, letting out a long sigh of relief.

Oh god, this felt exactly like presenting my thesis and getting a pass from the professor. So, Third's family doesn't seem to have a problem with us being together, right? They just need some time to adjust. It's not that they don't accept it. They just need time to get used to it. Overall, it's a good sign. His mother doesn't dislike me, and she even entrusted Third to me.

I went back to sit on the couch and play with my phone. About five minutes later, I heard the sound of the automatic lock unlocking,

followed by the tall figure of the apartment's owner walking in and removing the mask from his face.

"Auntie has already left."

"Yeah, I ran into her in the hallway." Third said as he sat down beside me. His sharp eyes carrying a hint of concern.

"Did she say anything to you?"

"No." I shook my head. She didn't say anything bad to me, but I'm about to say something to him!

"Why didn't you tell me that you already told your family about dating a guy? Why didn't you give me a heads-up before your mom came? I almost had a heart attack, you know!"

"It was sudden. I didn't have time to tell you. And besides, you already outed yourself." My boyfriend replied with his usual deadpan expression, but his dark eyes held a hint of amusement.

I scrunched my nose at him, thinking he probably didn't tell me on purpose just to mess with me!

"Third."

"Hmm?"

"A moment ago, your mom said she hopes we can have a meal together sometime," I said with a smile. After all, making a good impression on your partner's parents is always a good thing, right? If I behave well, then maybe, just maybe, when Third and I have a fight, they'll take my side!

Third seemed a little taken aback before his lips slowly curled into a smile.

"Yeah, I'll ask the agency to clear my schedule, and then we'll set a date to have a meal with my parents."

"Okay. And you should go home sometimes too. I bet your mom really misses you. Otherwise, she wouldn't have come all the way to your condo," I said. Parents always worry about their kids. It's just that this family has a bit of a tough way of showing their feelings.

"My mom wanted to see you more than me."

"I'm just a bonus. You'll always be the most important person to her," I said, crossing my arms and lifting my chin, acting like a relationship expert.

Third chuckled softly. His eyes hesitated for a moment before he wrapped his arms around my waist and buried his face in my shoulder.

"I don't know... I'm not sure. Ever since I was a kid, I didn't spend much time with my parents. It always felt like their work was more important. A lot of times, I wondered if they had to choose between me and their jobs... they might choose work over me."

"That's not true," I said, gently stroking his head.

Every child craves love and attention from their parents. Even if they work hard to give their kids a comfortable life, a child doesn't understand that at the time. They only see that their parents aren't around, choosing work instead. Even when they grow up and come to understand the reasons, deep down, the insecurity and distance don't completely go away.

"Your parents love you. It's just that time doesn't move backward," I reassured him, cupping his cheeks in my hands and offering him a smile.

"..."

"But that's okay. We can always start over. They miss you, and you miss them too, don't you? So, let's visit them more often when we have time. And if we get a couple of free days, we can visit my parents too."

"Alright," Third chuckled lightly, his sharp eyes twinkling as he said, "I don't know whose boyfriend this is, but he's just too cute. There's no way my mom wouldn't like you, not when I like you this much."

I blushed at his sudden sweetness. Even though we've been together for a while, I still wasn't used to it whenever Third said things like that.

"Go, go! Go take a shower already. Don't you have to leave by noon?" I pushed him lightly, trying to cover up my embarrassment.

"There's still two whole hours," Third glanced at the digital clock on the nearby table before locking eyes with me, a sly smile forming on his lips.

"How about a little workout? In the bedroom."

"No way!"

"Oh, so you want to do it here instead? I'm fine with that."

"Hey, wait! Third! Hahaha!" I burst into laughter as he tackled me onto the couch, playfully tickling my waist. The whole living room filled with our laughter, only to gradually fall silent as our lips met in a soft, lingering kiss.

It was yet another peaceful and wonderful morning.

Special 2 - Time to Rehearse the Script!

The acting profession requires a reasonably good memory. For example, if an actor can remember the names and faces of fans who come to see them, it creates a strong impression and makes the fans even more infatuated because it shows attentiveness. In terms of work, an actor should remember details about the character they are portraying so they can fully embody the role. This includes memorizing lines from various scenes. The more accurately they remember their lines, the more they can focus on facial expressions and emotions, which also saves filming time.

For a rising star like Third Tharit, who is extremely professional, he doesn't let his free time go to waste. Dressed in a casual t-shirt and sweatpants, he is half-sitting, half-lying on a leather sofa in his luxurious condo in the Lang Suan area. His eyes are fixed on his iPad as he memorizes the script for the next day's shoot.

"Wan."

"Hmm?" I, who am sitting slumped on the floor with my back against the sofa, tear my eyes away from my phone game and turn towards the voice of my boyfriend. "What's up?"

"Are you free? Help me run lines."

"Okay, okay." I grab my iPad from the coffee table and get up from the floor, settling cross-legged on the sofa next to Third as he sends me the script via LINE.

Besides being his boyfriend, I also serve as his practice partner since I have acting experience myself (even though I never got to finish

an entire project). Third always prepares by memorizing his lines before the filming day, as expected from a perfectionist who wants everything ready in advance. As for me, I don't have anything else to do, so helping him rehearse is actually fun.

This time, Third's project is a romantic-comedy film about a male lead who has been friends with the female lead since childhood. They grew up together from elementary school, through middle school, high school, university, and into working life. The male lead has always loved the female lead but never had the courage to confess. Eventually, the female lead gets a boyfriend and is about to get married, with the male lead ironically being the wedding organizer for her big day. Tragic, right?

But then, one day before the wedding, the male lead travels back in time to when he was eighteen, before the female lead met her current fiancé. Now, the question is whether he will take this opportunity to confess and make the female lead fall in love with him, or if history will repeat itself and she will still end up marrying someone else. I don't know the ending either because Third refuses to send me the final script, telling me to wait and find out in the cinema.

In this movie, Third stars alongside Pink, a famous singer from a popular girl group. Sounds familiar? That's right, it's the same Pink that my friend Jay is absolutely obsessed with. When I heard the news, I was excited and even asked Third to get her autograph for me. Pink is gorgeous, cute, has an amazing voice, and is incredibly famous. If this film becomes a success, my boyfriend will surely get even more opportunities.

Romantic comedies are generally lighthearted, but the challenge is making the characters charming and lovable to the audience. But since Third is a professional, I have no doubt he can pull it off. So when he asks for help, I'm always ready to be his practice partner.

"Alright, which scene this time?"

"Starting from 22/2," his deep voice replies.

I skim through the script briefly before raising an eyebrow. "This is the confession scene."

"Yeah." He nods while I keep reading. Damn, there's a kiss scene! Tomorrow, my boyfriend has to kiss Pink?!

"You start first," Third says, snapping me out of my thoughts.

Well, love scenes are a normal part of acting. It's their job. Honestly, it's admirable that actors have to hug, kiss, or even film bedroom scenes in front of dozens of crew members, even though they must feel embarrassed. Besides... it's just a character, not actually my boyfriend. I'll just think of Third as a vessel for the character to borrow a body, that's all.

"Alright, I'm starting now." I clear my throat and begin reading the female lead's lines.

"Do you have something you want to talk to me about, Ton?"

"It's not that."

"Huh?"

"Make your voice higher, like a girl."

"Does it have to be that much?"

"Otherwise, it won't feel real," the leading actor said.

So, I had to clear my throat again before adjusting my voice to sound smaller. "Do you have something to talk to me about, Ton?"

Third didn't say his next line. When I looked up, I saw a hint of amusement in his dark eyes.

"So you were planning to tease me, huh? I'm not reading anymore." I narrowed my eyes, pretending to close the iPad. This guy, ever since we started dating, he loved to tease me with small things, like he enjoyed seeing me pout. Weird person.

"Sorry, sorry! I'll be serious now." Third burst out laughing, so I sighed and unlocked the iPad screen again, then started reading the script.

"Do you have something to talk to me about, Ton?"

"I have... something to confess to you, Mook."

Third's deep voice carried a nervous tone I wasn't used to. The character 'Ton' was a timid, somewhat weak guy, so Third designed his voice to tremble slightly, and his body language resembled a startled rabbit.

"Confess? What? Why do you look so serious?" I chuckled, trying to get into the mood with my boyfriend.

"Mook, actually, I..."

"..."

"I like you, Mook."

"Yeah, I know. I like—"

"No! Not like that!" His voice was firm, and those sharp eyes stared at me with such intensity that my heart wavered, making it easy to get immersed in the scene.

"I never liked you as just a friend. I like you the way a man likes a woman. You should have understood that, right? In truth, you've

just been pretending not to understand all along."

"..."

"Every time I try to talk about this, you always change the subject. Why? Is it because you don't like me? Or because you can't like me?"

Third's slightly trembling voice sounded pained. From what I knew of the script, the female lead did like the male lead, but since her friend also liked him, she had always tried to suppress her feelings.

But love isn't something you can easily suppress. I knew that well. I had experienced it myself.

"Ton, I... I don't know," I said, following the dialogue, as Third leaned in closer and lifted my chin.

"Then if I kiss you... would you hate it?"

His voice made my heart tremble. Even if he was playing someone else right now, I still completely lost to the man in front of me.

According to the script, the female lead wouldn't respond, and the male lead would keep leaning in until they finally kissed. This was where the practice should have ended. But Third didn't back away. Instead, he leaned in even closer until our noses touched.

"Wait." Before his lips could press against mine, I raised my hand to stop him and asked, feeling slightly flustered, "Do we have to practice this part too?"

"Yeah. Shouldn't we rehearse everything?" His sharp eyes gleamed mischievously as he pulled my hand away. With nothing left to block him, his lips captured mine in a deep kiss.

"Mm..." I let out a soft sound in my throat as his warm tongue slipped into my mouth, sweeping along my teeth and the inside of my cheeks, entwining with mine. He alternated between nibbling and sucking on my lips, both upper and lower, with a passionate intensity.

Third pressed down until I was lying flat on the sofa, our bodies completely pressed together with no space in between. I could feel his quickened breath against my face as his large hand slid under my shirt, roaming over my waist and hips with leisurely strokes.

"Hah..." After what felt like a long while, the taller man finally released my lips.

I lay on the sofa, panting, while Third hovered above me. His eyes gleamed, filled with unmistakable love and desire.

"Third..."

"Hmm?"

"Tomorrow... you're going to deep kiss Nong Pink like this too?" I asked hesitantly. Was he really rehearsing, or did he just want to kiss me? I was completely confused.

"Of course not." My question drew a deep and pleasant laugh from him. Then Third leaned down and kissed me passionately again, his hands roaming over my waist and stomach, sending shivers through my entire body.

"Honestly, it's just lips touching. You're not jealous, right?"

"Jealous of what? I was just curious, that's all," I huffed, rolling my eyes and quickly defending myself before he got the wrong idea.

But wait... if there's no deep kiss in the script, then what was that just now?

"If the script doesn't have a deep kiss, then what was that you just did? That's called going off-script." I pouted, pressing my swollen lips together to hide my embarrassment.

"Just lips touching isn't enough with you," he said with a sly smile, his sharp nose nudging against my cheek before nuzzling down to my neck. Third always said I smelled good, even though I only used baby powder.

"Can I?" he whispered, his warm lips and tongue sucking on my earlobe, sending tremors through my entire body.

"W-what?"

"Can I have more?" he murmured huskily.

After dating for months, our relationship had finally deepened, on a soul-deep level. I won't go into details because I'm way too embarrassed to say it out loud, but our first time was warm and gentle. Third was incredibly patient, worried that I'd be scared of sex if it hurt too much.

At first, I was nervous. Even though I had prepared well and read plenty of theory, I was still apprehensive because I'd heard it could be really painful. But when it actually happened, it felt so good that I ended up loving it. Not that I'd ever admit that to Third! And I definitely wasn't going to take the lead. I liked it when he was the one to initiate, when he was the one to plead for it. It made me feel wanted, like he really craved me.

"Please..." he coaxed, his deep voice full of longing as his nose brushed against my cheek.

We all know how it is, once the fire is lit, it's hard to put out. I could already feel that part of him, hard and burning hot, pressing against my inner thigh through his sweatpants.

"Aren't we... supposed to keep rehearsing?" I asked, my face and neck burning. My heart pounded wildly, but I couldn't deny that, beneath all the embarrassment, there was a part of me that was anticipating what would come next.

"We are rehearsing," Third grinned, lifting me off the sofa in a bridal carry and heading straight to the bedroom. It wasn't like I was small or anything, but he carried me so effortlessly. Guess all that working out every day paid off.

"Wait, wait! This series doesn't even have a bed scene!"

"But my story with you does," he replied, giving me no time to protest.

He laid me down on the bed and pressed his body against mine, silencing me with a deep kiss while his hands quickly removed our clothes.

Oh, I forgot to mention, Third's favorite scenes to rehearse are the love scenes. Sometimes, he even writes his own script, like right now.

Not that I'm complaining. I'm always happy to help him practice. Hehe.