

**gotta watch you walk in the room baby, gotta watch you walk out**

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# **gotta watch you walk in the room baby, gotta watch you walk out**

by [winterstorm](#)

## Summary

"I'm perfectly capable of finding someone who is not a dirty, unremarkable, mud-covered Thai Program urchin."

Tin and Can do modern day Pride and Prejudice (kind of)

## Notes

I never thought I'd see the day I'd name a fic with Whitney Houston lyrics. I'm getting soft in my old age.

Please note that this starts when they're just about to graduate. Thus Can is a little more mature than he would have been three or so years previously. Can is also better dressed - no more unflattering baggy clothes.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# One

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,” Tin huffed, tentatively lowering himself down onto an uncomfortable looking concrete bleacher overlooking the university football pitch. “You’re about to graduate in business management, not anthropology. Why must we mix with these...natives?” Below him on the field, like a swarm of insects, footballers everywhere... Worse, they were *Thai Program* footballers. They were just so noisy and the crowd that he now found himself part of were jeering and waving plastic implements of torture that overloaded his senses.

He shuddered, feeling suddenly out of his depth.

“Well, I think this is a perfectly pleasant way to spend an afternoon. Anyway, we graduate next week, and this our last chance to see a university game,” Pete said happily, looking around with wide eyes, his handsome face alight. Tin had no idea how he always managed to look so sodding amiable. People always loved Pete. The opposite could be said of himself. He was permanently disagreeable and, even though he was usually good at hiding it, uncomfortable in social situations. He had no wish to be liked or admired. He’d long since learned that people only wanted him for what they could get from him, and he’d long since stopped caring. That was all people ever wanted – family, ‘friends’ and peers – it was all he was worth.

Pete was the only person alive that Tin gave a shit about, his best friend, who had been there for him when nobody else had. Pete had suffered a similar fate to Tin, being from a rich family as well, except he had a mother who loved him, something that Tin struggled to comprehend. Where Tin had built walls around himself, Pete was soft and that made it easier for people to take advantage of him. He was so *nice* and trusting.

‘Pleasant’ would be the last word Tin would use to describe what had to be at least the third depth of hell he currently found himself in. “If you say so,” he said, loosening his tie as though that might make heat evaporate. “Why the sudden interest in football anyway? You hate sports.”

“No, I don’t. I like sport. I like football.”

Tin raised an eyebrow. “Explain the offside rule.” Tin had spent many years boarding at a school in England where many of his fellow pupils had been football crazy. Tin did not share their enthusiasm, but he had picked up many uninteresting facts about the game.

“The off— The *what* rule?” Pete’s cheeks were turning an unflattering shade of red.

“What is your favourite team?” Tin allowed himself a little enjoyment at Pete’s expense.

Pete frowned. “Um. Manchester?” He folded his arms across his chest and glared at Tin. “Fine. I kind of met a guy last week. In a university football uniform. In the elevator of our building.”

“Alright, so which one is he?” Tin scanned the field, briefly assessing all of the players. It was fair to say that none of the Thai Programs had been at the front of the queue when good looks were being handed out, and there was certainly no one in Pete’s league. He could concede that a couple of them were passable. Number 13 had a pleasant face, and number 10 might be alright if Tin squinted. He saw nothing worth giving up an afternoon for that was for sure.

“The one who has the ball, number 7.”

The guy with the ball was short, average looking and one-hundred and ten percent Thai Program. Tin wouldn’t go as far as to say he was ugly, but ‘plain’ definitely covered it. He watched as Seven passed the ball to a mud splattered and equally bland looking number 3. “Did you talk to him? In the elevator.”

Pete refocused in Tin’s direction, cheeks still flushed. Lucky for Pete he was the most handsome guy in the IC and there wasn’t a lot that could take that prize away. “It was when the elevator broke down last week. He managed to get the doors open and helped me out. I think I said, ‘is there anything I can do?’ and ‘thank you’.”

Of course, Pete would like the hero type. “If you want to date a guy you should date me.” Tin full body turned to Pete. “We’d make a good-looking couple.”

“Tin, you don’t see me like that and it’s mutual.”

Tin shrugged, unfazed. It wasn’t that he wanted to date Pete, that really would be too weird, he didn’t want to date *anyone*, but if they were a couple Pete would be protected from all the vultures that circled him, and they were friends who cared about one another. That was a lot more than most of the couples in Tin’s circle. “At least we can be assured that neither of us is after the other’s money.”

“I plan to be with someone because I love them. No offence, Tin,” Pete stared dreamily at Seven, or as the back of his shirt also divulged, ‘Ae’. “Although you’re my best friend, you know love you, obviously, just not like that.”

Tin rolled his eyes and turned his attention back to the action on the field. Pete was right to dismiss the suggestion. Tin almost envied his friend for his crush on the footballer even if it was ill advised and doomed to eventual failure. He himself had never had romantic feelings for anyone. He was far from being a virgin, but no one had ever held his interest long enough for more than one date, or to call it what it really was, a hook-up. He hadn’t been joking when he’d said to Pete about the money either. People were so shallow and grabby.

The noise from the crowd suddenly increased and Tin saw that number 3 was dribbling the ball towards the goal. He successfully fired the ball into the back of the net and promptly lost his footing and skidded a metre or so across the damp grass. Everyone leapt to their feet waving their plastic tat in the air and screaming. Three was pulled to his feet by Seven, patted on the back and pulled into a one-armed hug before several other team members piled onto him and he vanished into the scrum.

Tin was thankful when the whistle went for time and the torture was over. He started to edge in the direction of the car park and freedom. As he moved sideways out of the bleachers the football players began to vanish underneath the bleachers where Tin assumed the changing rooms were located.

He spotted that Seven and Three had remained on the field to talk to a tall guy in jeans and a blue hoody. Three was talking animatedly, gesturing wildly with his arms, Seven was listening with a half-smile and the third person listened with a fond expression. It was then that Seven turned his attention from his friend and locked his eyes on Pete who was following along behind Tin. Tin watched as he said something to Three who nodded and with a wave to the other guy they both set off across the tarmac towards them.

“Hello again,” Seven said as he approached Pete. He glanced quickly at Tin who instinctively took a protective step closer to Pete.

Pete nearly swooned. “Hi,” he managed, suddenly all shy and bashful. “Congratulations on the win.”

“Thank you.” An open smile spread across the face of Pete’s elevator-rescue hero. “We didn’t get chance for introductions the other day. I’m Ae. This is my friend Can.”

Can, or Three, had mud smeared all down the left side of his body and it extended to his face and hair which was matted with gunk. Tin couldn’t help wrinkling his nose and that did not go unnoticed, and the guy narrowed his black eyes at him.

Pete, stars in his eyes, said, “I’m Pete. This is my friend Tin.”

“We are going to ‘The Green Room’ for celebration drinks, will you join us?” Ae asked without taking his eyes from Pete’s to acknowledge Tin. “We just need to go and get changed first.”

“I don’t think—” Tin began, having no intention of going to some dive of a bar to hang out with the football team and their entourage. This was the first free time he’d had in ages, and he wanted to go home to relax.

Pete had other ideas. “Tin, come on, let’s go. It might be fun.”

Tin highly doubted it, but as he technically had nowhere else to be and he disliked the idea of leaving Pete alone with these strangers he nodded. “Yes, *fun*,” he sniffed, pointedly looking whatever his name was, Three, up and down — taking in the sweat, mud and grass stains — twisting his features in distaste before raising an eyebrow. “I highly doubt there will be anything there to interest me.”

Three’s eyes widened, and to Tin’s annoyance he returned the motion, slowly looking him up and down, taking him in from head to toe before meeting his gaze head-on, his dark eyes seeming to throw Tin a challenge that just for a second Tin wanted to meet and something twisted his insides before he boxed it swiftly away. From the corner of his eye, he saw Three’s fist clench then he snorted to himself and turned his attention to his friend. “Come on, Ae, let’s get going,” he encouraged.

Ae nodded and said, eyes still on Pete, “So I’ll see you there in about half an hour?” and at Pete’s return nod he beamed and followed his teammate in the direction of the changing rooms beneath the bleachers.

Tin could feel the annoyance emanating from his friend as they walked in the direction of the bar. Eventually Pete broke the silence by saying, “Must you always be so rude?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Tin said, narrowing his eyes as the bar came into view, garish neon lettering declaring its name above the door. He heaved a laden sigh. “This place is a dive. Must we really go in?”

Pete levelled Tin with his best withering glare. “You can go home if you want. I’m staying.” He paused with his hand on the door and looked at Tin with a raised eyebrow. “Well?”

“Fine.” Tin gritted his teeth. Pete was so naïve, and Tin couldn’t trust him to go into a place like this alone. He approached the bar and, sliding into an empty spot he ordered two soft drinks and looked around. The place was popular with university students and probably only half-full due to the early hour. The music was loud and in English, which Tin preferred and as yet, there was no sign of any of the football team. However, holding a large table in the corner was the blue hoody guy from the pitch and three others, quite likely he was waiting for the players to arrive. Tin turned away and accepted the drinks from the barman.

“You’re such a snob,” Pete continued to voice his displeasure at Tin as he accepted the drink. “I don’t understand what you have against the Thai Programs. They’re nice.”

“You think everyone is nice.” Tin tactfully didn’t mention the Trump incident. Pete was a good guy, too trusting and had fallen victim to a con man. Tin had had to call in some favours to ensure the asshole kept clear of Pete in the future.

They carried their drinks to a high table nearby, Tin deliberately not mentioning that he’d spotted where the football team would likely be gathering. He glanced in that direction again and noted that a couple of pretty girls had joined the party, but as yet no team members.

After a several minutes chatting about taking a vacation they were planning together after graduation Tin asked, “What’s so special about *Ae*?”

“Everything about him. He’s handsome, polite...really fit,” Pete said with a dreamy sigh. He elbowed Tin gently. “What about you? I know you have a heart somewhere underneath all that stone. *Ae*’s friend Can is cute—”

“Stop right there,” Tin said shortly, his focus on the bubbles rising in his glass. “If I wanted someone then I’m perfectly capable of finding someone who is not a dirty, unremarkable, mud-covered Thai Program urchin.” He shuddered dramatically.

“Tin—!”

“What? You know—” Tin stalled as eyes landed on Seven, or rather, *Ae* who had appeared beside the table, nervously looking behind him for a moment before his focus shifted entirely onto Pete like Tin was a pillar of salt.

“You came.”

Pete nodded, “I said I would.”

“Can I get you a drink?”

“I’ve got one thanks.”

Ae seemed unable to tear his eyes off Pete. “Will you join us? My friends have the big table in the corner.”

Pete nodded his agreement and slid down from the stool. He motioned with his eyes for Tin to follow.

Tin was reluctantly about to follow when his attention was drawn beyond Pete and his suitor to the rear of a lithe guy who was now holding court with the group of obvious Thai Programs who had converged near the bar. He wore tight arse hugging faded jeans with white Converse and a snug black t-shirt. Tin wasn’t blind, he could acknowledge the guy had a very nice bottom indeed and rather good thighs. They were all laughing at what he was saying, but then, to Tin’s horror, everyone turned to look at him as did the owner of the tight backside. Fuck, all washed up, mud stain free and really fucking *pretty*, it was number 3, Can.

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The snobby asshole didn’t like being laughed at. That only made Can want to annoy him more. He couldn’t know that what Can had said about him had been both a compliment and an insult. “I just met the man of my dreams,” he’d told his friends, drawing them in for the punchline. “And there I am, about to make my move when I hear him call me a ‘mud covered urchin’. Oh, my heart.” He’d slammed a hand over his heart and staggered a little and turned them all in the direction of the disdainful IC student...Tin? They’d laughed on cue and Can had enjoyed the angry expression that had produced just a little too much.

Man of his dreams? Not so much. Yes he was tall and handsome, but Can wasn’t easily swayed by a handsome face and sad eyes. The guy was damned lucky Can was had matured some in the last couple of years, and despite the strong urge was no longer as quick to throw a punch as his younger self had been. Still, the just the thought of seeing that smug face with a bloody nose was pleasantly satisfying. Let’s see how good-looking the asshole was then.

It was a shame Ae was so smitten with Pete. He hadn’t stopped talking about the guy since the incident with the elevator a few days ago — well, he’d mentioned him a few times which for Ae was a *lot*. Seeing him here today had seen Ae’s face light up and a spring appear in his step. So no, perhaps it wasn’t a shame at all, and Pete seemed to be a nice guy, unlike his sour faced friend.

Can accepted his beer from Pond and followed his friends over to the table Type and Techno had reserved for them. Techno made room for him between himself and Type. Despite graduating and finding their first jobs, he and his old seniors had maintained close friendships and Can was glad for it, he both enjoyed and felt safe in their company.

He spent the next half-an-hour or so enjoying good natured banter with everyone, the only interruption being Ae's swift arrival and introduction of Pete and Tin. Pete had beamed at everyone with a polite wai. Tin had glowered beside him and offered no greeting. He'd taken the seat adjacent to Pete where he still remained as he attempted to drain all the joy from the room with his negative energy.

"What's your deal?" Pond challenged, pointing at Tin, when there was a lull in the conversation. "You haven't spoken a word to anyone since you sat down."

"I have nothing to say."

"Nothing at all? How dull your life must be," Bow said causing Tin's intense brown eyes to land on her briefly before glancing in Can's direction for a moment.

"I'm sure it would seem that way to Thai Programs such as yourselves." He was still looking at Can. Can openly stared back at him. Let him stare. Probably checking his unremarkable face for remnants of urchin mud or whatever. What a *douche*. "Excuse me," Tin said, still looking at Can as he stood, only breaking eye contact when he turned and headed in the direction of the bathrooms.

Bow snorted. "How can he be so handsome and so empty at the same time?"

Someone else said, "You know who that is right? Tin *Medthanan*. His family owns half of Bangkok."

Can stared at Tin's retreating figure, registering Pete muttering something to Ae and following his friend. Bow was wrong, the guy wasn't *empty*. He was probably full of things, a rich snob being one of them, but he seemed really unhappy...and Can was massively overthinking the situation, the guy was an asshole first and foremost. He shook his head and returned himself to the conversation that had easily moved onto teasing Pond about when he was going to propose to ChaAim with ChaAim denying that she'd ever want to marry Pond despite them having been together for about three years.

Before he knew it, they had turned on him. "Can what about your grandfather's will? You're running out of time!"

Can laughed and rolled his eyes. His grandfather had died almost two years ago, skipped his own sons and entailed his recent lottery win upon this two grandchildren with the arbitrary proviso they got married within five years. The old man had always been, as his Ma often said, 'someone who dances to the beat of his own drum'.

"I wish I'd never told you guys about that," Can complained, but he was grinning. "I'm considering options. Anyone up for it?" Can wasn't even allowed to know the sum in question, and it possibly wasn't worth the hassle of fake marrying someone, the cost of the wedding would probably be more than the inheritance! Bow's friend from the Faculty of Law was helping him find a way around the marriage clause, he just had to hope she came through soon.



“Marry Techno. He’s pretty enough to make anyone a beautiful bride,” Type teased, and everyone howled with laughter.

“Oii!” protested Techno, but he was smiling, cheeks flushed pink.

Can joined in, laughing at the idea of he and Techno getting married. He knew for a fact that if anyone was going to marry Techno it would be Good. He’d had a massive crush on him since they were freshmen, not that he’d ever said as much to Can, but Can knew his best friend.

“Here comes the bride!” Pond sang in English and almost fell off his chair laughing at his own joke.

When everyone calmed down Can said, almost wistfully, “Seriously though, I’m only ever getting married to someone I really love.” He meant it too.

“How are you going to find ‘real love’ when you never date anyone? You rarely even hook up,” Mai said, and the rest of the table joined in the banter.

“I hook up. I just don’t feel the need to kiss and tell,” Can protested weakly. Despite his chatterbox personality some things just stayed private. He hooked up plenty...okay, there was just that one time and it didn’t really count anyway but that was his business. Lately he was just too busy to bother trying again. “And I don’t have the time to date.”

Mai raised an eyebrow and Can narrowed his eyes at him and stuck out his tongue. He couldn’t be mad at Mai. He was one of the nicest guys he knew.

“Can,” Good began, “That girl from work...kissed you. She’s...pretty.”

A chorus of whoops and people asking, “What girl?” followed and Can felt his cheeks flame. The problem living in a shared apartment with six other people was that it was difficult to keep secrets. His co-worker, Zo, had given him a lift back from work the other day when it had been raining so hard the world outside the café window had become a blur of bright streaked lights. He’d been grateful for the offer, but less appreciative of the nervous confession and the unwanted kiss when she’d pulled up outside his building. Of course, it was inevitable one of his flatmates had seen this happen. He just didn’t think Good would betray him by telling everyone!

Can received his fair share of attention from both sexes, especially from customers when he worked the front of house at the café and now, apparently, from fellow staff members. He was a friendly guy, good at putting people at ease, and despite what a certain person had said about him, he knew he was no supermodel, but he didn’t think he was totally ugly. That was probably a combination that drew people in. He shrugged and said, “It’s nice to be appreciated by someone who doesn’t think I’m a ‘dirty urchin’!” Those who had heard his tale regarding Tin earlier all laughed but Good’s eyes widened in horror and Can turned to find Tin had returned from the bathroom and had reached the table. Their eyes met and Can felt an intense surge of satisfaction and smirked at him. He gave no shits what Tin Met... Men...whatever his name was thought of him and if he’d looked like an urchin after ninety

minutes of a heavy-going football game then so what? He'd like to see what Mr Snobby would look like after the same level of exertion. Asshole.

Can gulped down his beer and said, "Anyone for another?"

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Tin found out at the end of the night that Ae not only lived in their building but that there was seven of them, *seven*! They lived on the fourth floor in one of the standard apartments if one could call a six-bedroom apartment 'standard'. Pete had offered Ae and two of the others a lift home and Tin had been horrified when he'd learned their destination. It hadn't even occurred to him before then that the reason Ae had been in the building's elevator the other day when it had broken down would be because he lived there!

Apparently one of them had a relative who owned the place or something and the students lived there free. They'd lived there for two years! Tin and Pete had only moved into the penthouse a few weeks ago when renovations had disrupted the quiet at their old place. It was one of the many properties owned by his family business and would do for the few short months they needed it.

Tin had left Pete to his goodbyes with Ae and continued in the elevator up to the penthouse on the fifty-third floor, like a peace seeking missile. He shut the door of his bedroom and leant back against it with closed eyes. First the football match, then the endless thump of music at the bar topped off by a carload of noisy Thai Programs, and that was just the extra two. Ae, in his favour, didn't appear to be the boisterous sort. A tall boy and a girl with a very high-pitched voice made enough noise for twenty people.

He took a shower and sat down on his bed to towel his wet hair, relishing the quiet of the apartment. One side of the bedroom was a wall of glass that offered a panoramic view of the city, a city that was full of life and colour. The total opposite to how he felt.

Pete was his only anchor, and Tin could see that Pete was forging a strong connection with someone else. Already he could see that Pete's feelings for the Thai Program kid were stronger than the how he'd felt with that bastard Trump. Trump had found his way in with flattery and Pete's loneliness had done the rest.

Tin's connection with Pete was strong, born of years of friendship, one that had lasted throughout Tin's years in England. Pete had been the only one to immediately believe him when he'd been accused things he hadn't done. Pete had always had his back. Tin intended the same in return, and his protectiveness of him came as natural as breathing, and that meant making sure Pete didn't throw his heart at another gold digger.

People were selfish, clever and manipulative. Tin had learnt first-hand just how far people would go to get their own way, especially when money was involved. The smell of money made them weak and greedy. Pete had fallen into that trap once before and Tin would make sure he never did again.

Pete's family was rich, but even with all their millions they were paupers compared to the Medthanan family, and that wasn't a boast, it was fact. Not that there was any 'family' left to

enjoy the wealth. His father was dead and no other family member aside from himself had any claim on it.

Tin could not hide from his family name. All of his hook-ups only wanted him for that name, they didn't want to get to know the real him. He wasn't proud of it and sometimes he wondered why he even bothered, the sex did nothing for him, not really, just a momentary distraction, a brief flare of pleasure, from the monotony that was his day-to-day life.

He often wondered what would it feel like to be like other people, who saw something in another person that made them want give themselves over to them completely, who could trust another person enough to want to?

What would it feel like to love someone and have that someone love you back? It was unlikely he'd ever find out.

## Two

Sharing your living space with six other people was sometimes the best thing ever. There was always someone to talk to if he wanted, and if he didn't Can could hide in his room with his headphones on. It was a different world from living with his parents.

When Good's uncle had offered him the use of the apartment, Can had been the first one he'd asked to share with him. It was a good deal. 'Rent free'. At the time he had just started a part-time job at a local café because his parents couldn't afford to pay him much allowance and support Ley on her upcoming nursing course at the same time. They had relocated to Chiangmai for Pa's work so Can couldn't live at home. At Good's, Can only had to pay his share of the bills and for food.

Most of the time living with that many people was actually fine as they all had different schedules, so it didn't get too crazy. They had agreed on two evenings a week that they would all try to eat together and usually there was at least five or six of them if they all couldn't make it.

They arrived home from the bar in two waves. Ae, Bow and Mai had taken a lift with Pete, an offer Can had pretended not to hear when it had been issued. There was no way he wanted to be trapped in a confined space with that Tin guy. He'd walked home with the rest of his flatmates after they'd stayed for one last drink at a drunken Techno's plaintive whining.

Can went straight to his room, declining Bow's pleas to join them for a few more drinks. He had to work the next day and even though he didn't have to go in until eleven he needed a good few hours before then. He was nearly running on empty.

He cleaned his teeth and sat half-naked and cross legged on the end of his bed distractedly watching out the window at the fourth floor of the adjacent building where he could see a man and a woman engaged in what appeared to be a heated discussion as the woman paced back and forth in front of the floor length window and the man leant back against a table with folded arms. When the man reached out and grabbed hold of the woman's arm and she went into his arms for a kiss Can got up and shut his blinds. He didn't want to be privy to that kind of show, but those guys' lives regularly played out like a romantic K-drama and he couldn't help but be fascinated.

He climbed into bed and turned out his light and stared unseeingly into the dark, and as he recalled the events of the evening his fists clenched and he muttered to himself, "*Urchin*." He kicked his legs in frustration and added, "Asshole."

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"Why do you keep watching the door?" Fong asked, draping herself along Tin's side, clawing his arm with her long fingernails. "Are you waiting for someone?"

Ignoring the question Tin sighed, unpeeled her grip upon him and took a step sideways. "Why are you here exactly?"

“Aw, Tin, don’t be like that. Are we not friends?” Now she was pouting. Tin was completely immune to it and frankly amazed that she was *still* trying to get close to him even after over three years of his disinterest. Sometimes he’d been forced to partner with her for projects — only in classes that he didn’t share with Pete — no one else ever dared approach him and Tin still wasn’t quite sure if it were because they were scared of him or Fong and her poison glare.

“We are classmates, that’s all,” he said, taking a further step away from her. Unfortunately, they had recently been paired again for another project and she’d taken that as a green light to ramp up her pursuit.

The woman was persistent he’d allow her that. He just was not interested, not least because he was gay and even if he wasn’t she was the very epitome of exactly what he didn’t want... someone who only saw his wealth.

What the hell was he even doing here at a birthday party for someone he didn’t even know? It was some friend of Ae’s, and Ae had invited Pete. Tin didn’t even know the name of whoever it was. As the captain of the football team Ae appeared to have many friends. He was one of *those* people, an all-round *nice* guy, someone like Tin would never be. He was the one everyone avoided, and most of the time that was how he liked it.

He looked at Fong with narrowed eyes, “I’ll ask again, why are you here? I’d bet my first born that you don’t know whose party this is?”

Fong shrugged. “I was passing by and I saw you and Pete coming in here so I thought it wouldn’t hurt if I came to say hi.”

Stalking more like, Tin thought, but realised it wasn’t worth the effort to call her on it. Talking of Pete though, where the hell was he? He’d guilted him into attending with his big eyes and ‘protect me’ vibe and then abandoned him into Fong’s clutches while he’d gone looking for Ae.

Pete and Ae had been spending a lot of time together these last couple of weeks since the football match and Tin was not blind. Going by the red marks on Pete’s neck things had clearly progressed considerably. He’d never seen Pete so happy. Sickeningly so.

Tin hated it because he knew it could not end well. Nice guy or not, Ae had to have an eye on Pete’s money. People couldn’t help it. No matter how much a good person someone was, subconsciously they were attracted to wealth. It was in the human DNA.

He’d been here an hour, he had no one to answer to. He could leave right now and surely no one would even notice or care? Well, Fong would definitely notice and would probably follow him again so perhaps he needed to throw her off the scent first.

A disturbance by the entrance gave him the opportunity to merge backwards into the crowd while she was distracted. A sudden chorus of ‘Surprise!’ followed by a round of loud teasing and laughter rushed his ears and he surmised that the birthday boy or girl must have finally arrived. He turned away and immediately collided with another body. He gritted his

teeth together in annoyance and took an instinctive step back, aware that he was the one at fault.

“Tin Medthanana, it’s been a while.”

Tin allowed the owner of the voice a moment of his attention and frowned in reluctant recognition. Money. Someone who Tin had always viewed with disdain and hadn’t been ashamed to show it. She was just so...what word to use? So inappropriate. Yes, that would do. The way she had always been all over Pete had never sat right with him.

“Money,” Tin greeted politely and was surprised when Money didn’t give him the top-to-toe once over he’d come to expect from past encounters. It really had been a while since they had encountered one another as Money had graduated a couple of years ago.

Money was looking at him with puzzlement, but she shook that away and smiled. “You are the last person I expected to see here,” she said, taking her eyes off Tin and looking in the direction of where the party guests were sweeping the guest of honour towards the bar area. “How do you know Can?”

Tin tried not to grimace when the name registered. *Of course*, this would be the party for the bloody urchin. He had kind of hoped he would never encounter that particular football player again. He shook his head. “No, I’m not. I didn’t even know whose party this was,” he admitted, continuing, “I came with Pete. Are *you* a friend of his?”

Tin fully expected Money to swoon dramatically at the mention of Pete, but she just nodded. “Can has a lot of friends.” They were both looking in the direction of the bar now and Tin immediately recognised the back of the birthday boy’s head.

Wait. What? How? He closed his eyes, thoroughly annoyed with himself. It had been more than two weeks since that football game and by now Tin should have shaken that unexpected and definitely unwanted stab of guilt that took up residence somewhere in his chest when he thought of the footballer. *Can*. He’d been rude, and the other man hadn’t let him get away with it. That was not the worst of it though. Tin had not been able to stop thinking about the other man. His mocking eyes. Those pink lips and pretty face. His tight backside.

Fuck.

“There you are, Tin!” Fong appeared at his side, talons wrapping around his upper arm like he hadn’t shaken her off him a hundred times before.

Seeing Money standing in next to Tin, Fong said, “I remember you! Money, right?”

They launched into excited talk about who knew who and what. Tin had tuned out. He turned away from them and it took him a millisecond to realise he was looking for Can again and another moment to admit to himself why he’d been watching the door earlier, even before he’d realised it was actually Can’s party.

Damn, damn, DAMN.

For someone who did not really care for parties, Can found himself attending rather a lot of them. The one thing he was grateful for was that they never had parties at their apartment. They'd tried once when they first moved in, and it had taken all seven of them most of the following day to clear the place up afterwards. They had all agreed that had been an experiment they would never repeat.

He'd had the early shift at work that day, gone home for a quick shower managed a few minutes on the phone to his parents, before going to meet his friends for a birthday drink. He had not expected the 'surprise!' at all. Almost everyone in his friendship group turned twenty-one that year. Some birthdays had passed, others had yet to come, and they'd all celebrated with various parties, meals out or drinks. This was the first surprise party.

"Whose idea was this?" he asked as Ae and Good led him towards the bar where Mai was waiting with a bright pink fruit laden cocktail and a huge grin.

"No...one...and...everyone," Good replied.

"We just think you work really hard," Ae said, beaming. "And you never complain."

Can raised an eyebrow. He was pretty sure he *did* complain but maybe it got lost in the stream of chatter that he still sometimes struggled to control despite being long out of his teenage years.

"Yet you still find time to help everyone." Bow appeared next to him, slinging an arm around his neck and kissing his cheek. Can felt himself blush.

"Happy birthday," Mai said, holding out the cocktail for him to take. "Raspberry Collins for you."

Can happily took the drink and took a long sip through the bright pink straw. He loved anything raspberry. "Mmm, thanks." Glancing around he joked, "I didn't know I had this many friends."

He had a few close friends, his other flatmates and his old seniors, particularly Techno and he was friendly with many others he supposed. People seemed to like him for some reason. All of those people appeared to be in the room. His eyes scanned the room and made an emergency stop when they landed on an unwelcome face, meeting a pair of distinctly unfriendly eyes. Can narrowed his gaze.

"What's *he* doing here?"

"Who?" Ae asked and everyone turned to see who Can referred to. Ae scowled. "Oh, you mean Tin. Pete asked him along. They're best friends."

Over the last couple of weeks Can had got to know Pete a little as he and Ae had been spending a lot of time together, mostly at their shared apartment. Pete seemed like a good guy and he and Ae were imperfectly perfect for one another.

“Best friends with an asshole,” he grumbled and dragged his gaze away from the other man’s, annoyed with himself for getting drawn into whatever mind games he might be playing or whatever it was he was doing. Probably wondering why he’d come to a party held in the honour of someone as lowly as himself. Why did Can even allow the guy headspace? He closed his eyes and hoovered up the remainder of his cocktail.

Turning to Bow, who still had her arm around him, he said, “Dance?”

It didn’t take much to get him tipsy and in the mood for fun. Bow took his hand and pulled him to the dance floor and Can pointedly did not look in the direction of those intense eyes again.

-

Dancing was suuuch fun. Cocktails too. They were amaaazing. His friends were the best ever. He was so tired he thought he might fall asleep standing but at the same time his body hummed with that rare feeling you only got when the stars aligned like they must be today.

He was now in some kind of human sandwich between Pond and ChaAim. ChaAim had her hands resting on Can’s hips from the front and Pond’s arms were wrapped around his chest from behind and he had his head on Can’s shoulder as they danced to an 80s Madonna tune that Can could sing word for word even though he didn’t actually understand what half of the words meant.

When the song finished Can broke away and headed towards the bathroom. Once done and back in the bar again he was waylaid by his sister before he reached the dance floor. “Ley! I didn’t know you were here,” he half-shouted, throwing his arms around her.

Ley pried his arms off and shoved him to arm’s length. “I didn’t know you knew Tin and Pete,” she accused. No ‘happy birthday big bro’ or acknowledgement that she was at *his* party. Typical. Ley’s expression turned dreamy. “They’re so ho— good together...”

Can was not in the mood for Ley’s ‘shipping’. “I’ve met Pete, like, five times, Ley,” Can said, feeling his good mood waver. “And Tin once which was enough. He’s a massive douche. Why do you even care anyway?”

“He’s been staring at you all night. At first I thought he must be looking for Pete, but Pete wasn’t there, it was you,” she poked his chest with her index finger, pouting. Can could tell she was at least tipsy but the manic look in her eyes. “I *knew* you must’ve done something to annoy him already.”

“I haven’t done anything,” Can said quietly, almost to himself, squirming at the idea Tin had been watching him. He rubbed the back of his neck, suddenly self-conscious. He looked back over his shoulder and immediately located that same pair of eyes, fixed upon him. To his horror Tin said something to the girl beside him and began to walk in their direction. Money, who had been standing on Tin’s other side, followed.

Beside him Ley was bouncing excitedly like a toddler anticipating an ice cream.



Tin arrived in front of them, Money on his heels.

Money slid her arm through his. “Can! Happy birthday baby boy!” She kissed his cheek and said, “Have you met Tin? Tin, this is Can. He’s the guest of honour and my star employee.”

“We’ve met,” Can grumbled before Tin could respond, offering him a huge, and very false, smile. He’d already had enough of this guy, and this was only the second time they had met. “This is my sister, Ley.”

Can tuned out Ley’s effusive greeting, preferring to glare at Tin who was watching him right back. When she’d finished swooning Tin said, still looking at Can, “Can I buy you a birthday drink?”

Can knew his alcohol limit and he’d marginally passed it. Even if he hadn’t, he’d rather drink a pint of his own urine than accept a drink from him. “No thanks, I have had enough,” he said shortly. “I...promised someone I’d duet with them.” There was about to be karaoke. Can was *bad* at karaoke, but it was the first thing to enter his head and quite honestly he’d get up on stage and sing a cappella if it meant he could escape the current situation. He patted Money’s arm, still linked through his, and with another insincere smile he motored off towards where Bow and ChaAim were scrolling through the song menu.

“*Cantaloupe!*” Ley called after him, but he ignored her. If she was so interested in Tin, then let now be her chance to grill him for information. It was his birthday and neither his sister nor that massive git was going to ruin it for him.

Ten minutes later as he and the two girls brought an end to an embarrassingly poor rendition of BTS’s ‘Boy with Luv’ whilst trying to copy the dance moves on the video screen, Can spotted his sister still talking to Tin, Money and that girl who’d been clinging onto Tin’s arm and glaring at Can earlier. He clenched his fist and stamped his feet—no one would know that wasn’t supposed to be part of the dance routine—and muttered ‘asshole’ under his breath.

-0-

Tin’s plans to sneak out of the party had taken a U-turn three hours ago and now it was one in the morning and his car had somehow become a Thai Program taxi. Two giggling girls in the back, one slumbering birthday boy in the front. He was going to kill Pete for forcing passengers on him.

What was with the traffic anyway? It was practically the middle of the night! Why wasn’t it moving? The high-pitched chatter coming from the back was setting his teeth on edge. He prayed neither of them vomited.

In the passenger seat Can, or as his sister divulged earlier, *Cantaloupe*, was sound asleep. Pete and Ae had had a half-hearted fight getting him into the car – “I’m fine, I can walk home, I don’t want to get in the car with *him!*” He’d been asleep before Tin had even got behind the wheel, curled against the passenger door leaving Tin to lean over him to reach the seat belt, far too close for his comfort, and discovering that his slumbering charge smelled of raspberries.

Finally, the traffic moved and passed the scene of an accident, opening the road up again and Tin was pulling into the underground car park of their building shortly afterwards. The girls opened a door and stumbled out of the car tittering to one another. Tin didn't trust them not to leave their sleepy friend to ride the elevator all night, snoring in the corner. "I'll bring him up," he told them as he climbed out of the car, and they seemed to remember Can was in the car too and had turned back for him. "What apartment number?"

"Four-zero-two," one of them said, followed by, "Thanks." They stumbled off in the direction of the elevators, whispering and giggling.

Tin turned his attention to the passenger door and took a deep breath before opening it. "Come on," he said, annoyed that he was lumbered when not that long ago he'd given himself a thorough talking to regarding the very person he now had to deal with. He was *not* attracted to the guy. Nope. All he had to do was stay away from his proximity and the urge would fade, because that was all it was, obviously. It had clearly been too long since he'd got laid and the attraction was just his dick reacting to a nice backside and pretty face.

"What...? Is fine here," Can replied to Tin's urging that he get out of the car without opening his eyes. "S' nice."

Was he drunk or tired? Probably both. Tin had seen him with several cocktails over the course of the evening, then watched as he'd suddenly seemed to expire. Now here they were. "I'm just going to help you out of the car," Tin said, leaning in and wrapping both hands around Can's wrists. He pulled firmly and it worked, Can was on his feet, only now he was leaning into Tin's side. "Stay away," he muttered to himself under his breath as he felt the urge to wrap an arm around Can.

With considerable effort he made it to the elevator without Can even opening his eyes to see who it was he was leaning against. Once inside though both eyes pinged open and switched hazily onto Tin. "You..." he slurred, smiling, then shook his head and huffed to himself, eyes drooping again leave Tin to wonder what he had been going to say.

At the fourth floor and Apartment 402, Tin was pleased to find the door ajar, less pleased to find the main living area empty of inhabitants. The girls were home, he knew that, but the others were presumably still at the party.

"Which is your room?" he asked, hoping that this might be the moment he woke up and Tin would be liberated.

"..."

Right, well, Tin had had enough. He'd made it inside the apartment and that was where his duty was discharged. He managed to get Can over to the large corner sofa that dominated half of the room as was about to drop Can down onto it when Can's eyes opened and upon seeing Tin he smiled dopily and slung an arm around his neck. "You... nice lips," he said and giggled. His eyes closed again, and Tin was left with no choice but to gently lower him onto the sofa while trying to remove the arm from around his neck. Once Can felt the surface beneath him he groaned and shuffled backwards, eyes still firmly closed.

Tin took off Can's shoes and threw the blanket from the back of the sofa over him before he'd even realised what he was doing.

*Nice lips.*

Fuck.

# Three

## Chapter Notes

Sorry guys, am renovating my house and only just found the laptop covered in dust on top of a bookcase where the other half shoved it a month ago!

“...so, then he said, ‘only if you were on fire, darling’ and...Can? Are you even listening to me?” Money pouted and put her hands on her hips, glare fierce upon him.

“What? Oh, right, sorry, Mon,” Can said, tying the apron around his waist and smiling up at her, giving her his best puppy eyes usually guaranteed to soften her up. He rubbed the back of his neck. “I’ve got a bit of a headache.”

Money snorted and her frown faded as she ruffled his hair affectionately. “I’m not surprised. Every time I saw you last night you had a different coloured cocktail.” Her eyes landed on his neck and his failed attempt to cover the red mark there. “Get lucky, did you?”

Can felt himself turn red. He’d woken up that morning tucked under a blanket on the sofa with no recollection of how he’d got there. He’d not actually been that drunk, but he had been exhausted from weeks of work and college with barely a break. ChaAim had helpfully informed him that she and Bow had left him under Tin’s charge after the three of them had had a lift back from the party in his BMW. He’d gone to shower and seen the mark on his neck in the mirror and had a full five minutes of panic. What the hell had happened with Tin, and moreover, why couldn’t he remember?

The truth had been far preferable. “No ‘luck’ for me,” he said with a bright smile. “Pond thought it would be *hilarious* to give me a hickey while I was asleep.” When he’d come out of his room, he’d found all his flatmates, except for Good, lined up on the sofa all trying to look innocent and failing the moment they’d seen his face. Can had seen the funny side once the relief had set in that he hadn’t made out with that asshole. That would be something he’d want to remember.

Wait. *What?*

Not that said asshole would lower himself to a such Can’s level anyway. He would never be on the radar of a guy like Tin. Can didn’t know much about the guy but he’d heard his friends say Tin was mega rich, which was obvious from how he acted and, if rumours were to be believed, a cold-hearted playboy. Can could well believe that.

Money sighed, putting her hands on Can’s shoulder to spin him round so she could tie his apron properly. “Can, you’re my favourite nong and seriously cute, you know, that right? You

get at least three phone numbers a week when you're working here but you never call any of them, and Zo, you know she quit?"

Can turned around to look at his boss, shocked. "She— Why?"

Money shrugged, "She confessed, and you said no. I think she's embarrassed."

Can groaned and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms. "Why did she have to do that? I never gave her any reason to think I liked her as more than even a colleague." He hadn't, had he? He didn't think so. She was a pretty girl, funny and sweet, and Can liked her. That was as far as it went. "I like her, but I don't *like* like her."

"Have you ever *liked* anyone?" Money's eyes gleamed as she added, "Can, are you a virgin?"

Can felt himself flush again. "No," he answered, because he far from that. He checked behind him to make sure no other staff members were circling. Everyone else was in the kitchen prepping for the day and the other servers who were on that day all started just before noon. Can was starting an hour earlier to cover the casual coffee and cake drop-ins who liked to sit out in the courtyard. "I had a girlfriend for a year and a half."

Money eyed him suspiciously, chewing her lip. "Girlfriend? I thought—" She shook her head, tutting. "No boys?"

"I like both." He just liked guys, like, seventy percent and girls thirty.

"What happened with the girlfriend?"

"Nothing really, we just sort of fizzled out. We are still pretty good friends." If he was honest his heart had never been at risk there, they'd been more like best friends. "I'm okay as I am and I'm too busy for a relationship."

"Who said anything about a relationship? What you need is a good fucking."

"Mon!" Can coughed in surprise. "I'm too busy for that as well."

Money sighed and tipped Can's chin to look up at her. "Baby boy, you should never be too busy for cock. It would certainly lighten you up a bit." She made a thoughtful face. "You know, Duke has a friend who would love you..."

"Oii! Please, Mon, I'm fine. If I want a, er, *dicking*, I can find my own." He certainly did not want to be introduced to a friend of Dukes! Money's on/off boyfriend was at least ten years older than she was and sort of a gangster. Well, maybe not an actual gangster, more of a wannabe.

"Fine," she huffed, patting his cheeks. "Just don't forget, you're twenty-one, you shouldn't be hiding away. No one is saying you need to fuck everyone you meet, just live a little, yeah? You deserve some fun."

"I'll think about it."

“Maybe give that poor Techno guy a chance. Those pining looks break my heart.”

“Techno does *not* pine after me, we are just friends!”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, baby boy.”

Can shook his head and took the clean menus from the tray by the till and started to distribute them to each table, leaving Money to watch him from her position near the counter. He knew it sometimes looked as though there was something going on with him and Techno – especially when he’d always given into his demands for food - but even if he had liked him as more than a friend, which he didn’t, he’d never be able to do anything about it because of Good. Good had been his best friend since they were both in nappies and you did not throw something like that away easily, especially not over a guy.

Time sped along for the rest of the day and Can had soon finished his shift. After a badly timed, awkwardly silent, trip in the elevator with Tin, was enjoying an hour of lying on his bed staring at the ceiling before dinner – it was Bow’s turn to cook so it should be half-decent – then he had an assignment to finish before class the next day. There was only a couple of weeks left before he was done with university for good, but it was busier than ever as the end approached. When exactly he was supposed to shoehorn in time for a ‘dicking’ he did not know. Money was so crude, yet Can couldn’t help but love her. She was also honest to a fault, incredibly generous and a good boss.

Bow cooked Italian for dinner and Can felt pleasantly replete afterwards, allowing half an hour to sit around and banter with his flatmates before he forced himself to go and study. Ae took the force of the teasing about his burgeoning relationship with Pete who was unanimously liked by the group. The conversation naturally turned to the subject of his objectionable friend and some drug scandal he’d been part of a few years ago. Can found the idea of someone so measured and controlled, like Tin clearly was, being involved in drugs highly unlikely but he didn’t voice it. Instead, he excused himself and went to bury himself in coursework until the early hours.

-o-O-o-

“Is Ae here?”

Tin stared at the unwelcome presence at his front door in surprise and made a mental note never to move somewhere without a private elevator again. It was eight-thirty on a Friday night, and he was working through a presentation for Monday’s class that was worth ten percent of the final grade. Unfortunately, that meant Can was his second unwelcome visitor of the night as his study partner for the task, Fong, was already here and grating on him with her incessant unsubtle come-ons. All Tin wanted was to relax after a busy week of both study and business meetings, in peace.

“Pete has gone with Ae on a trip to the beach.” With the residents of the fourth floor flat if Tin remembered correctly. Tin looked the visitor up and down, making sure to keep his expression blank. Can was dressed in snug black jeans and an emerald-green hoody that suited his pale colouring and his hair was a swept forward over his eyes. He looked ridiculously *good*. “Shouldn’t *you* be with them?”

Can shook his head. "I forgot that was today. Been too busy." He patted his pockets and mumbled, "No phone, no key... Shit."

Tin didn't need to be a genius to work out what was going on. However, it was not his problem.

If only his mouth got the memo. "Come in. You can use my phone."

Can, who had been backing up from the door, looked at him in surprise. "No, thanks, I—"

"Tin, who is it?" Fong appeared behind him like she was an actual resident rather than just an acquaintance and took hold of his arm, as was her custom. Her gaze landed on Can and as she looked him up and down, she said disdainfully, "Oh. It's you."

"Yes," Can said, rolling his eyes. "Me whose birthday party you were perfectly happy to crash the other day."

Tin's lips twitched and he shook Fong off and said to Can, "I insist."

Can glanced between him and Fong and his eyes narrowed but after a moment's contemplation he said, "Um... Yeah, alright, thanks." He stepped through the space Tin made by opening the door further and followed him into the vast open-plan living space.

"My phone is over there," Tin said, nodding at the coffee table and watched as Can approached, picked it up then sighed heavily. "What's wrong? It's not locked."

"I don't know anyone's number."

"Pete's number is in there."

He watched as Can scrolled through the numbers and hovered a thumb over the 'call' button before looking up at him, expression pained. "They'll already be at the resort. I can't expect them to come rushing back because I left my key in my room." He chewed his lip.

"You're locked out? How convenient." Fong caught on with a derisive snort, having missed the start of the conversation. Then, "Wait, *you* live in this building?"

To his credit, Can ignored her. He handed Tin back the phone. Tin held up a hand to signal 'wait' and walked across the living area, coming to a halt when he reached the far window where the rain was sheeting down against the pane. He hit 'call' and dialled Pete.

It took Pete a couple of rings to answer. Tin made sure to keep his back to the room as he talked to his best friend in a low voice. After just a minute he ended the call and turned around. Fong was leaning against the back of the sofa watching him, tapping her foot and Can lingered uncomfortably a few steps inside the door.

"You were right, they arrived at the resort a couple of hours ago." He walked forward, coming to a halt alongside Fong.

Can nodded. "I'll get going. Um, thank you." His smile held no warmth as he stepped backwards towards the door.

"Where will you go?" Tin asked, immediately wanting to kick himself. He'd promised himself to stay away from Can, what was he doing engaging further when Can was already leaving?

Can met his gaze and shrugged. "I'm sure Money will let me sleep on her sofa for a couple of nights until everyone's back."

The words were out of Tin's mouth before he could stop himself. "You can stay here in the spare room."

"Tin—! I thought you and I were going to—" Fong said, pulling his arm again. Without looking at her he knew she was pouting.

Tin shook his arm free for what felt like the hundredth time that evening, his focus still on Can.

"Why?" Can asked, folding his arms in front of his chest.

*I'm asking myself the same question.* "It was Pete's suggestion just now." *Liar.* "I'd never hear the end of it if I let you walk the streets."

"I don't want to be in the way," mumbled Can, casting a look at Fong whose pout had turned into a glower.

"We were about to take a *study* break anyway. I was going to order take-out. I'll order for three. After that you can stay out here or go to bed."

Can's eyes lit up. "What kind of take-out?"

-o-

Unfortunately for Can it became an uncomfortable mealtime. Wherein Can talked incessantly about anything and everything that came into his head because that was what he tended to do, especially when he felt nervous and awkward.

"...and people think that because he talks slow, like a quarter of the speed I do, that he's dumb. He's not though, he's just processing stuff."

"That sounds like *bliss*," Fong said, shooting him what had to be her tenth dirty look of the night.

Can glared right back at her, fed up with her attitude. He reached for his glass of water and took a long gulp. What the hell had he been thinking saying yes to staying here? Sleeping on Money's sofa had to be a better option, his *only* option other than being where he now was. What was actually going on anyway? Had he interrupted a date? Fong was acting as though he had but Tin seemed to be putting as much distance as possible between Fong and himself.



If Can had thought Tin was an unpleasant individual, then Fong was worse, he really did *not* like her. They were well suited.

“Thanks for the pizza,” he said, addressing Tin. Enough was enough. “Where is the spare room?”

“I’ll show you,” Tin said and stood.

Can got up to follow without bothering to say goodnight to Fong. With any luck he’d never see her again. Tin led him through the main living area where there was a long galley huge with a floor to ceiling window on the right around a corner to several doors leading off to the side.

Tin opened the second door inwards and pressed himself back against it to hold it open. “This is it. There’s a bathroom in the corner with plenty of towels and spare toothbrushes are under the sink.”

Can slid past Tin, making himself as small as possible so he didn’t brush against him. “Thank you. I’m really grateful.”

“Thank Pete when you see him.”

Talk about making it clear how unwelcome he was! Can was so close to telling Tin to shove it and to walk to Money’s apartment which was near the café she owned, it would only be a ninety-minute walk, but the huge double bed that dominated his line of vision looked so comfortable and it was only for two nights, it was raining like crazy, and he was *tired*. He didn’t need to have anything much to do with Tin while he was here, and he was fairly sure that would suit Tin too. He’d got the day off work tomorrow to work on the planning for his final practical—

Fuck, all his study stuff was in the apartment, and he was locked out.

“Is everything okay?” Tin asked.

Like Can wanted to admit a new failing to the guy. Tin was watching him expectantly and Can tried hard not to notice (again) just how handsome he was, and how close. He looked away quickly. It didn’t matter how handsome Tin was, the guy was an ass and worse, he was an ass who found Can both beneath him and wholly unattractive...and why did that make him feel so shit?

“It’s fine. Thanks again.”

Tin took the hint and retreated backwards out of the door. Can flopped back on the bed. “What is wrong with me?” he asked himself, squeezing his eyes closed. “Who cares what he thinks?” He shouldn’t care, he *didn’t* care, yet on some level it rankled.

-0-

Tin’s television was the size of a small country. It threw out enough light that Can was able to turn off the lamp before sitting cross legged in the corner of the sofa, cushions plumped up

behind him. He'd slept for maybe an hour and then lain awake for a couple more. When he'd given in trying to get back to sleep the smart device by the bed advised him it was after 2am.

It should be safe to venture out into the living area and put on the TV, Tin and Fong would have gone to bed. He found YouTube and the latest episode of the UK 'Masterchef' and settled back to watch it. There were no subs, but he didn't really need them.

Inevitably he fell asleep and when he woke again it was light outside and Tin was sitting on the armchair next to the sofa with a hot drink and an iPad looking as though he was modelling for a photoshoot for one of those celebrity at home magazine articles Can's ma liked. The TV was switched off and Can's back ached from the awkward angle he'd dozed in.

"What time is it?" he managed, sitting up and rubbing his face with both palms, suddenly aware that he was only wearing boxers and a white t-shirt and Tin was probably fuming that he was contaminating his pristine sofa with his *dirty* bare legs and feet.

Tin lowered the iPad and regarded Can impassively over the rim of the mug. "Good morning, *Cantaloupe*."

Can's reaction was instant. "Oii! Don't call me that!" He rolled his neck and, in the process, removed his eyes from Tin. Under his breath he muttered, "Asshole."

"Are you always this rude?"

*Fuuuck*. He really needed to learn volume control. "Only to you," he grumbled, sliding to the edge of the sofa and dropping his feet to the floor. He heard his ma's voice in his head, also calling him by his full name, telling him to apologise immediately. Obliging her, he raised his eyes and looked right at Tin. "You let me stay and I'm being...difficult. I'm sorry. I just don't like being called by my full name."

"Noted."

Tin's expression remained blank. Can wondered what it would take to get a strong reaction out of him...any reaction.

He hated that he wanted to try.

"Where's Fong?"

"She went home last night once we'd finished the assignment. You know, she and I are not..." He frowned, seemingly trying to find the right word.

Can's lack of filter filled the gap. "Fucking?"

Even that did not get a response. Tin just said, "Not together." Wait, was that a frown?

Can would wager Fong wasn't very pleased about Tin's lack of interest. The woman clearly had hearts in her eyes for him. Or should that be dollar signs? Can nearly always gave people the benefit of the doubt, was probably far too trusting for his own good, but Fong had made it clear she thought he was beneath her, so he owed her no positive thoughts. That really kind of

made her perfect for Tin though, right? He had a very low opinion of Can as well, they were both the same in that regard.

They were awkwardly silent for longer than was comfortable before Tin cleared his throat and said, “There’s coffee in the pot. Help yourself to anything you want from the kitchen if you’re hungry.” His disinterested gaze swept over Can. “I’ll get you some clean sweats and a t-shirt. If you want to wash your own clothes, the laundry room is at through the door other door in the hallway.”

Can had nowhere to go when Tin was being so reasonable towards him. “Thanks.” He scratched the back of his neck. “Um. I had planned to spend the day working, but my stuff is all in the apartment. I don’t suppose you have a computer I can borrow?” There was a lot of research he could do online, and he could log into the university portal save what he’d done. The day was not lost.

“I’ll be out most of the day, so you can use my desktop. It’s in my office. I’ll log you in before I go out.”

The guy was being so generous but at the same time so cold. Can couldn’t figure him out. Can felt like he could see right through him but at the same time he could see nothing at all... and that made zero sense.

“Yeah, okay, thanks.” Can roused himself from the sofa. He was starving but his primary need was to pee and, “I’ll just...take a shower.” He side-stepped away from the sofa, avoiding the coffee table.

He felt Tin watch him leave. When he came out of the en-suite bathroom after he was done, he found a pair of grey sweats on the bed and a red t-shirt with the English words ‘radical’ written on the front. With his limited English Can could say the word but he didn’t know what it meant.

Tin was loading his mug into the dishwasher when Can emerged, t-shirt halfway down his thighs and the sweats rolled over three times at his ankles. “I logged the computer on. The office is the last door down there.” He nodded in the direction of the bedroom Can had stayed in. “I set you up as a user. The password is F-0-o-t-B-a-1-1.” He gave one of those not-smiles he was so good at.

Can wondered what he would look like if he genuinely smiled. He supposed he would never find out, and why did that make him feel suddenly sad?

“I’ll be out most of the day.” He nodded and headed towards the hallway before stopping and turning. “Your flatmates come back tomorrow, yes?”

Well, that was a strong ‘fuck off’ hint if ever there was one. “Tomorrow afternoon. Don’t worry though, I’ve got a shift at Money’s at ten, I’ll be out of your way just after nine.”

Tin nodded. “See you later.” Fifteen seconds later the door was closing behind him and Can exhaled dramatically. He must’ve stood watching the door as though expecting Tin to re-

appear for at least three minutes before he shook his head and went to inspect the fridge. He was *starving*.

# Four

## Chapter Notes

Sorry. Renovations. It's too hot. Work. Child. Argh.

Tin pinched the bridge of his nose and wished for an early death. Three sets of expectant eyes watched him, all older and more experienced than he was, all probably thinking they should be the ones making the decisions and not him. Yes, they all worked for him, but he'd inherited them all from his father's reign and they were loyal to a dead man. A heart attack had struck him at fifty-five.

Tin knew that Trai Medthanan hadn't been a stupid man, and if he trusted these men before him then Tin knew he could rely on them. The problem for him was that they were all at least ten years older than his father had been and their outlook was old-fashioned. He needed people working for him who he had recruited himself, people that would owe their loyalty to him. He just didn't know where to start and until he figured that out, he was stuck right here.

He had just a few weeks before he finished his degree, and he could concentrate full time on the company that bore his name and hopefully things would become clearer when it was his sole focus.

"Alright," he said, rolling his shoulders. "Let's do it. Offer twenty percent less than the asking price and leave the offer on the table. They can take it or leave it. The operation would enhance our portfolio, but we don't *need* it."

The three men nodded in assent and, pleased that the ordeal that had been his Saturday was nearly over, Tin snapped his laptop shut and gathered the supporting documents they'd provided him. Another sign that they were old fashioned. All of the information could have easily been supplied electronically.

Time to go home and face his temporary house guest, a prospect that made his head explode. Business talk he could comfortably do all day, whether or not he enjoyed it. Small talk with an unreasonably attractive Thai Program student, not so much. What the hell had he been thinking by as much as inviting him inside, never mind inviting him to stay? He wouldn't even have Fong to hide behind tonight.

It was getting on for six o'clock when he pulled into the car park beneath the building and headed for the elevator. His stomach was protesting that it needed food *right now* as he had skipped lunch and breakfast had consisted solely of coffee. The chocolate bar from the vending machine didn't count for much.

His stomach nearly jumped out his mouth when he swiped into the apartment to be greeted by the smell of Gaeng Daeng. He found Can inspecting the rice steamer with a look of extreme concentration. His fringe was swept up in a cute pigtail on top of his head and he looked about fifteen years old.

“Whatever you’re cooking, please tell me there’s enough for two.”

Can startled and dropped the spatula he was holding. “Give a guy some warning next time!” he said, picking up what he’d dropped and placing it in the sink. “I— I hope you don’t mind, you had all this stuff in the cupboards. I was going to leave some for you to reheat if you weren’t back in time.”

Can did not look like someone who knew his way around a kitchen, but Tin was too hungry to care, and it did smell *really good*. “How long until it’s ready?”

“Fifteen minutes or so.”

“I’ll just get changed then.” Tin managed a smile at Can and headed in the direction of his room. Fifteen minutes was time for a quick shower before changing. He washed quickly and allowed himself a moment to lean back against the cool tiles and to close his eyes. “Don’t even think about it,” he told the rational part of his brain. The irrational part was busy admiring how adorable Can had looked with his hair up and brow furrowed in concentration. How he’d wanted to sidle up behind him and kiss his neck. Seriously, what on earth was the matter with him?

He recalled Fong’s words from the night before, after Can had gone to bed. “You look at him you want to ruin him,” she’d said slyly, followed up with a malicious laugh. Tin had felled her with a glare and the laughter had died away. “Which is fine, obviously, as you can sleep with whoever you want, and he is very pretty even if he is poor. As a *Medthanan* you will need to settle down with a woman from a good family... I’m not stupid, I know you like both. If I were your wife I’d turn a blind eye to—”

Tin had interrupted then, firmly saying, “There is no circumstance on earth whereby *you* would become my wife.” He could have told her he didn’t like *both*, he just liked men. Better, he could have added in that if he were to follow the path his parents had laid out for him, despite being from a rich family, Fong’s connections were nowhere near where they needed to be to become Mrs Medthanan. It didn’t matter that he gave zero fucks what his parents had expected of him. His father was gone, and he hadn’t seen his mother since the funeral. “It’s none of your business what I do, or who with, just know that it will never be with *you*.”

“You don’t have to be so blunt,” Fong had bristled, tears forming the corners of her eyes. Tin had known they wouldn’t fall, she would never risk her make-up.

“You just as much as said you’d marry me and not care if I slept with other people.” He’d enjoyed the realisation on her face that she had hammered the final nail in her own coffin and added, “If I ever marry it will be for love, to somebody who absolutely *does* care if I sleep with someone else.” Not that he could imagine ever being loved like that, it was a life that other people led, never him.

He did not envisage ever getting married or even being in a long-term relationship. He didn't hold any worth for someone to genuinely love him. Even his parents had never cared for him, had been quick to believe his brother's lies about him. Never mind that all of that drug addict nonsense had later been disproved. No apology had been forthcoming, just anger that Tin hadn't set the record straight at the time, as if he hadn't tried, at least at the start. His English 'friends' had been paid for, or at least most of them had and he had no way of knowing who might have genuinely liked him. Probably no one. Only Pete put up with his emotionally stunted and awkward personality and actually gave a fuck about him.

Tin turned the shower onto the coldest setting and said, "Stop dwelling on it." He knew it was easier said than done, his insecurities were his constant companion, and he had to listen to them in order to survive. *Trust no one.*

He dried off quickly and was about to dress in navy sweats and a white t-shirt before rethinking and pulling on a pair of black trousers and a button down. It wouldn't do to dress so casually in front of his house guest, it would feel too familiar.

Can had set out plates and cutlery alongside a steaming bowl of curry and was just carrying a plate of rice to the table when Tin arrived back in the living area. He glanced at Tin as he set the plate on the table. "I hope it's okay. I don't have any money with me to go out and get more ingredients."

"It smells divine," Tin complimented, and it was the truth.

He took at seat the table and Can sat opposite him. They ate for a couple of minutes in uncomfortable silence. The food tasted as good as it smelled.

"So, Can— What are you studying?"

"Cookery. I'm training to be a chef." He held his spoon aloft, laden with rice. "Is it good enough?"

Surprised, Tin nodded. "It's spot on." Can was staring at him with his soulful eyes wide and for a moment Tin felt like diving right into them. He lowered his gaze and helped himself to more food. "I had assumed you were studying sports science."

Can snorted, "Because I'm a filthy Thai Program? Makes sense."

Tin felt a jolt of shame, because that was exactly why. Still, a lie fell from his lips and he said, "Not at all, it's because you're on the football team."

"Ae is on the football team and he's studying engineering. It's not compulsory to be from the sports science department." He took a long swig of his water. "Actually, you're half right. I started in sports science, did a year there and I developed an interest in sports nutrition so I started experimenting in the kitchen. Before that I couldn't even boil water. My sister used to cook for us and bribe me to do her chores with threats of cockroaches in my rice!"

"How did you pass the entry for cookery?"

“I practiced. *A lot.*” Their eyes met again. Can’s were shining now. “I scraped in. I think I talked them to death at the interview. I can...talk a lot.”

“What happened to the interest in sports nutrition?”

“I’m actually taking units in nutrition as an option with the cookery. I’m planning to open a café, hopefully next to my friends’ gym. You might remember them from thing after the football match? Type and Techno. They’re sports science graduates and they’re going into business together, so...”

“When does it open?”

Can shrugged. “They’re just finalising a location and sorting the finance. The place they’re thinking of is near the university.”

Tin spoke before he stopped to think, “You’re opening a café next to a non-existent gym in an as yet unknown location?”

“Huh.” Can dropped his cutlery onto his plate and folded his arms. “It’s called having aspirations. Just because it’s still up in the air doesn’t mean it won’t happen! A rich asshole like you is never going to understand. All you aspire to is talking down to people like me for working hard and daring to dream.”

Tin felt his heart rate accelerate at the attack, knowing Can was right. He was an asshole. He’d never wanted for anything material. He knew he should apologise but the words refused to form on this tongue.

“Fuck this shit.” Can got to his feet, the chair making a loud screech as he pushed it back. “I’d rather risk being leered at by Duke’s gangster friend than stay here another minute. I’ll get my shit and remove my filthy self from your presence!”

He stormed off in the direction of the spare bedroom. Shellshocked, Tin was temporarily frozen to the spot as Can yanked the door open. The sound of the door crashing back into the frame snapped him back to it and he instinctively followed after him.

Just inside the room Can had just stripped out of the borrowed outfit Tin had left for him that morning and was reaching for his own freshly washed clothes that were draped over a chair.

*Holy shit.* He was naked. Not that Can seemed to care. He shot Tin a disgusted look and carried on with what he was doing. Tin’s mouth went dry, he couldn’t tear his eyes away.

“Like what you see do you?” Can scowled at him. “I guess a guy like you—”

Can’s words were cut off mid-flow as Tin stepped forward, wrapped a hand around the back of his neck and pulled him in to kiss him.

-o-

Can had *not* seen it coming and he reacted instinctively. He shoved Tin away and punched him in the face. Tin staggered backwards but didn’t fall, eyes wide with shock. Long fingers



came up to the corner of his mouth to thumb the blood where Can had split his lip.

Can's head was roaring, his racing heart almost beating out of his chest as he drew in deep breaths. It wasn't anger though. Adrenaline, shock and as he locked eyes with Tin's accusing glare, arousal. Looking at him now, his guard totally down, it was the first time Can had seen him show any kind of emotion. He was a beautiful man on any day, but right in that moment he was heart stopping.

He stepped forward then, closed the newly formed gap between them both and copied Tin's actions from moments earlier, reaching up and wrapping his hand around Tin's neck, standing on his tiptoes and he kissed him. How could he not?

It had been a while since he'd indulged, had the time or wanted to. The way Tin had just looked at him lit him up from within. It didn't matter what Tin thought of him. You didn't have to like a person to fuck them. Can didn't like Tin either, but he couldn't deny the attraction that had been fizzling under his skin since that first night.

Tin slid his big hands around the curve of Can's bare buttocks and on instinct Can stepped in closer, and in an instant his legs were wrapped around Tin's waist. He was acutely aware that Tin was fully dressed while he wore nothing. They kissed like they'd just invented it. Can could taste the blood from where his fist had connected with Tin's lip and he pulled back. "I made you bleed. I'm sorry."

"I'm not," Tin said, voice cracking, taking Can's mouth again. He span him round and lowered him to the bed, crawling down on top of him to continue his exploration, licking into Can as his arms caged him to the bed. Can opened up for Tin, letting the usually cold man ignite him.

Can tugged on Tin's shirt, trying to one handedly undo the buttons and only getting as far as the top two before Tin pulled back and onto his knees, yanking the shirt over his head and throwing it to the floor.

Can's hands shook in anticipation, running them both down Tin's smooth flanks until they reached the waistband of the trousers he was wearing, thumbs hooking underneath. Why did Tin hide behind those austere suits he wore when he had a body like this beneath? Not that it wasn't obvious he was fit, Can just hadn't appreciated how much.

How fast they moved from just a kiss to Can being flat on his back, hard cock flat against his belly, ready for so much more. He should feel shame at his own wantonness but that would just waste time. He wanted to get fucked.

"Get these off," Can instructed, tugging on Tin's trousers, pulling back from the kiss to bury his face in Tin's collarbone while one of his hands moved downwards to palm Tin's cock through the fabric. Unsurprisingly he was erect and— Tin moved again in a gyrating movement as he rid himself of his remaining clothes, then settled back down between Can's thighs, reclaiming the kiss that he had broken.

Kissing Tin was nothing like Can had ever experienced before, so consuming that Can almost thought he'd do just his forever, Tin's body on his, skin on skin.

Can's legs found their way back around Tin's waist and he bucked up into him, breaking the kiss again to ask, "What do you want?" Their eyes locked, Tin's pupils huge, his breathing laboured.

After what felt like forever looking at one another Tin said, "I want you to ride me." Tin a smooth palm around Can's length. "I want to be inside you now. I want-"

"Demanding aren't you?" Can was so turned on he might just come from the Tin's words. "I want, I want, I want." He leant forward and brushed his lips over Tin's, just a touch across that delicious pink pout.

It was Can's point of no return, he'd only ever done this once before and it had been a disaster, but in comparison to how he felt now he had barely even been turned on back then. He could leave the regrets for another day. He sat backwards, searching Tin's determined eyes for a moment and Tin reached up and pulled him back in and when their lips met for more kisses and Can imploded. He allowed Tin to seize control, eyes rolling to the back of his head as he felt a finger breach him, wriggling at the intrusion and allowing the finger to slide deeper. Can had no idea where Tin had found lube from. He just prayed there were condoms too.

"I want you," Tin hissed, kissing his way down Can's chest. "You're just so..." He swallowed his own words along with Can's dick and Can bucked up of the bed.

"Shia!" He writhed under Tin's attentions, but his mouth was soon removed, and Tin orchestrated a manoeuvre that them both rolling and Can found himself straddling muscular thighs.

Tin reached up to twist Can's nipples and earned a slew of curses that Can couldn't hold back. "Want you," Tin said again, returning his fingers to Can's hole.

"Impatient," Can whined, unsure at this point if he meant himself or Tin. He sat back onto Tin's thighs, forcing him to remove his fingers. He glided his hands down Tin's sides and, ignoring the long thick cock that was making his mouth water, he slid a finger beneath Tin's legs and traced along the seam there, watching for a reaction. On Can's own body that is his most sensitive spot and he was curious. Tin writhed. Yes, he liked it too. Can dipped a finger, a whisper of a touch over Tin's hole, and yes, Tin bucked up with a groan. So responsive.

Can grinned. This was a one-time only occurrence, and yes, he was so far over the line now, too late to stop, he was going to make it good.

He leant forward, nibbling a path of tiny kisses up Tin's flat abdomen, biting at rosy nipples, spreading his own legs so fingers can find their way back inside. So good. So fucking good.

"I want inside of you," Tin said breathily, one hand threading into Can's hair as Can sucked and bites on his neck and the other three fingers deep inside him. "I want-"

"A good lover listens to what their partner wants as well," Can complained. "You haven't asked me what I want."

Tin's eyes widened like it's never occurred to him to ask. It's likely that it hadn't. "What do you want?" he eventually asked, and even as he was speaking, his fingers were curling inside Can, brushing over his prostate, making Can hurt so good. For someone who wanted it *now* there was certainly a lot of time that has passed since the declaration.

"As it happens, I want what you want," Can smirks. "I just wanted you to ask."

"Now?"

"Ten minutes ago," Can replied, holding out a hand. "Condom?"

Tin twisted and rummaged around in the nightstand. How well they stocked up for guests! He ripped the packet open and moved to roll it on. Can stilled him and took it for himself, rapidly smoothing it down, anticipation building tightly in his belly. He raised himself up onto his knees, still mourning the loss of those fingers inside him before he slowly lowered himself down onto Tin's cock. It burned so good. He heard Tin's breath hitch, watched the pleasure chase across his face. It was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

When he was completely filled Tin reached up and threaded the fingers of one of his hands through Can's. His other hand settled on Can's hip. "Move," he commanded, licking his lips. "Move!"

Can did. He lifted himself up and started a slow rhythm, his eyes locked with Tin's, his cock a burning presence untouched against his stomach. Tin groaned and bit his lip, his black hair fanning over the pillow like a halo; Can knew he was anything but an angel, more like a demon, tempting him onto his cock when he'd been convinced this would never happen between them.

Slow became furious as Can quickly adjusted and he knew he was not going to be able to hold back from coming for long, even like this, untouched. He didn't want to touch himself, he wanted it all to be Tin. He leant forward, his hand still in Tin's, the angle of his cock inside him is hitting all the right nerves and Tin's ability to hold back his moans of pleasure has long since left him.

It seemed neither the snob nor the urchin knew how to be quiet in a situation like this.

"I want you to come before me," Tin instructed boldly. "I want it all over me; want you to scream my name."

Can grinned and leaning in to kiss him, whispered, "That shouldn't be a problem." He took another taste of Tin, swallowing up the delicious sounds he was making, muting his own, rocking himself down onto his cock. Tin responded with vigour, biting back at Can, bucking his hips to meet Can's downward thrusts.

Can started to feel his orgasm build, curling through his insides and rising up ready to explode out of him. He pulled back, grinding himself down onto Tin as he shot with Tin's name on his tongue, his come coating Tin's chest, some of it splashing his chin. It was fucking amazing. He'd never come like that, not without a hand on his cock or a warm body enveloping it.

He kept rocking, Tin hadn't come yet and Can wanted to see his face when he did. Wanted to see the usually impassive man come undone. He clenched himself around him, said, "Come in me," and waited. And watched.

When it happened it was beautiful. Tin reacted like it was his first time, his face a picture of wonder and amazement, followed by closed eyes and a sharp cry of, "Cantaloupe!"

Can liked the sound of that name on his lips in that moment, liked it too much. He leant in for another kiss, best not to think about the effect Tin was having on him and just savour it.

When Tin's cock stopped twitching, Can kissed his forehead and lifted himself off, lying flat on his back next to him; both of them utterly breathless. He felt good. So good. He found Tin's hand again and entwined their fingers, needing to ground himself before saying anything else. He smiled to himself, *so good*, he needed to tell Tin that he'd been the best fuck of his twenty-one years so far. Okay, only his second time with a guy, but still. So what if it just fed into his arrogance, he'd made the dirty Thai Program come on just his cock. He hadn't even known that was possible...

He fell asleep before he had the chance to say a single word.

# Five

## Chapter Notes

You know you have it bad for this BL thing when you go to see a play starring the legend that is RALPH FIENNES at the local theatre but all you can think about are totally unrelated plot bunnies starring Tin and Can.

Tin slept better than he had in months, probably years. He'd woken up once only and Can had him locked in his embrace, so he'd simply fallen back to sleep feeling content. Good sex must have magic powers. The sound that woke him was that of his front door closing.

Can.

He reached out and found the other side of the bed empty, and his heart lurched. He had never spent the night in the same bed as another person and now it had finally happened that person had upped and left before he woke up.

The clock on the bedside table proclaimed that it was just after nine. Sunlight flooded in through the windows, no one had shut the curtains the night before. It was going to be a glorious day. A day that stretched out before him with nothing but more work to do.

He squeezed his eyes closed and took a deep breath. Can leaving without saying goodbye was fine. Hadn't he said he had work today anyway? Either way, it had just been a one off and unlikely to happen again, of course he wasn't going to hang around for breakfast. They didn't even like each other as people. Tin had had many hook ups in his time, this one had only rattled him because Can had fallen asleep in the bed next to him. That was all it was.

Can had spent the night *wrapped around* him.

Can had made such sweet sounds when Tin had been fucking him. God.

"Don't overthink it, Tin," he told himself and forced himself out of bed and into the bathroom in his own bedroom. When he caught sight of his own reflection he grimaced. A small cut on his lip and three red marks on his clavicle. If he needed proof he hadn't dreamt the whole thing then there it was.

After a quick breakfast he retreated into his office and spent a few hours editing his thesis. He only slipped off into reminiscing about the night before a couple of times, though even that was frustrating as usually once he was working, he was able to focus one hundred percent.

Pete arrived home around 3pm looking all sun-kissed and dreamy-eyed. Tin made them both a hot drink and they sat on the sofa, and after Pete had queried where Tin's injury had come from and apparently taken his lie at face value, he had set off talking about what a great time

he'd had with Ae, the occupants of the fourth floor flat – and wasn't it unfortunate that Can hadn't made it? – and a couple of those seniors that had been out that first night.

"I really like him, Tin," Pete said, both hands cupping his mug as he stared up at the ceiling as though it held the meaning of life.

Tin still didn't trust Ae one iota. The facts were that Pete was rich, Ae was poor. They were just too many worlds apart. "Just take it slow," he warned, biting back what he really wanted to say. "I don't want you to get hurt again."

"I know, and I love you for it, but not everyone is another Trump." Their eyes met and Pete sighed. "I'm serious, Tin. I just wish you could see the good in people, have some faith."

"You're lucky I see the good in *you*," Tin said, palming his face as sudden exhaustion hit him despite his unusually good night's sleep. He did not like that the conversation had turned onto him.

"It's not luck, it's fate," Pete said, reaching out to squeeze Tin's hand. "We've both had times when we've needed each other, and I'll always be here for you, no matter what. Your family did a massive number on you and it's a real cliché to say this, but you can't choose your family, but you can choose your friends and we chose each other."

"When did you get so cheesy?" He made a joke but the voice in his head reminded him, *Pete's not yours to keep, he can't always be there for you.*

"It's not cheesy if it's the truth." Pete tipped Tin's chip with two fingers, eyes boring into, giving him no option to look right back. "What's up with you anyway? Was having Can here that tiring? I know that guy can *talk*."

Tin was not about to admit what had happened, Pete was a romantic and would be organising the wedding within a week. He shook his head. "We barely saw one another. Fong was here on Friday, and I worked all yesterday." Pete pulled a face, he strongly disliked Fong. "I lost count of how many times he called me an asshole."

Pete laughed. "Why am I not surprised?"

-o-O-o-

"Can! You've got a visitor!" Ae's voice cut through the relative quiet of Wednesday evening in their apartment. There was only himself, Good and Ae at home, everyone else had gone to the cinema to see some rom com and to relax now that they had all finished their courses.

Can was half-way through planning a menu for an intern application, unsure whether to be pleased at the interruption because his own indecisiveness was giving him a headache, or annoyed because he really wanted to get it finished today so that he could send email it over before the deadline.

Expecting Ley, Techno or Type, Can was shocked to find it was none of those. "*Job*? What are you doing here?"

Job was standing awkwardly in the middle of the living area. Ae, who had made no secret in the past how he felt about the guy, was nowhere to be seen and Can knew that Good was in his room studying. Job looked well, colour in his cheeks, hair fashionably styled and wearing jeans and a hoody. “Hi, Can,” he said, with an uncertain smile. “Surprise?”

“You could say that.” The last time Can had been in the same room as Job hadn’t ended well and looking closely he could see the slight bump on his nose where the bone had broken. He gestured towards the sofa, indicating that Job should take a seat. “Er... Would you like a drink?”

“Just water, thanks.” Job perched on the edge of the sofa, eyes following Can as he filled two glasses with water.

Can handed Job his glass and sat the armchair opposite. “What can I do for you?”

“You look good, Can. How are you?”

“Well, thanks. You?”

“Yeah, good. I’m good.”

Can hoped that Job would get to the point soon. This was too uncomfortable. It was over two years since their friendship had come to an end and Job had transferred to a different university. Can raised both eyebrows and waited.

“Okay, so, um—” Job began, shifting uncomfortably. “I owe you a huge apology.”

Can’s eyebrows shot further beneath his fringe. He waited.

“I was jealous. You were with Bow and, yeah, so I just —” He shrugged, his cheeks pinking.

“Just treated me like dirt?” Can asked incredulously. He’d been friends with Job since high school, not as long as he’d been friends with Good, but long enough that he’d been hurt and confused when Job had started taking digs at him when they were university freshmen on the same course. He’d been subtle at first, and Can being dense like he was, hadn’t really noticed. Good had though, Can knew now, which explained his increased protectiveness over Can.

Later, Job had become more obvious in his put downs. Mutual friends had started to complain that they didn’t like the way Job talked about Can. Can could be dumb, he knew that, but the digs started to get through eventually. It was hearing Job tell his girlfriend, Bow, that he didn’t know what she saw in someone so stupid and watching her punch him in the nose that had really brought it all home.

“I’m not proud of it,” Job said, mouth turned down unhappily. “We’d been friends since we were kids and I fucked it up. I let my jealousy cloud everything and I’m sorry. I’m really *really* sorry.” Pleading eyes reached out for him.

“Okay,” Can nodded. “Apology accepted.” He might be one to anger quickly but he wasn’t one to hold a grudge.

Job let out a deep breath and Can almost saw the weight lift off his shoulders.

-O-

“What’s *he* doing here?” Bow hissed after loudly announcing she wanted a word with Can and dragging him into her bedroom and rounding on him, so he was trapped against the door.

“He came to apologise for what happened.”

“Huh. Well, I’m not going to apologise for breaking his nose. You didn’t accept his apology did you?” She folded her arms. “You did! I can tell by your expression! Can, why are you such a pushover?”

Can pouted. “He seems genuine.” He took a deep breath and continued, “He said he acted like he did because he was jealous. You know what that means, right? He had a thing for *you*. He might *still* have a thing for you.” He grinned widely, enjoying the appalled expression on his ex-girlfriend’s face. She was a fiery woman - it was why they had always got on so well.

“Yuck,” she scoffed and made a vomiting gesture, glaring at him.

“Is now a bad time to mention that he’s staying for a few days?”

-O-

“Who have we come to see again?” Job asked, tiptoeing up to look at the empty stage over the heads of the audience, holding onto Can’s arm as a tether.

“Type’s-boyfriend’s-band,” Good supplied, showing uncharacteristic annoyance. He looked at Can then at the spot where Job was clutching onto him and frowned.

It was fair to say that allowing Job to stay for a few days had been a bad idea. All the inhabitants of their apartment were universally annoyed about it. Can was even annoyed with himself, and he was the one trying to remain positive about the whole thing. Job had taken over his bedroom because it hadn’t felt fair to everyone else to have him sleep on the sofa in the shared space and Can had moved into Good’s room for a few nights. Bow ignored him, Ae was extremely cool with him and had told Can that he didn’t forgive him for all the shit talking he had done about him and said that he didn’t think Can should forgive him either. Mai was polite to him but didn’t exactly seek out his company. Even Pond, who liked most people, asked Can just how long he would be staying for because he didn’t feel comfortable around him. Only ChaAim made an effort, but Can could see it was hard work for her.

His friends were all at the concert which was being held in the large garden of a popular city bar. The atmosphere was electric, the fairy lights and the buzz of the crowd combined with the smell of hot food, beer and sun-baked earth. Can felt exhilarated despite his general fatigue from all the hours he had been working at Money’s, something a couple of beers had definitely helped with.

“ChaAim, look, there’s that guy you spilled your coffee over last week!” Bow nodded in the direction of the bar where it was immediately obvious who the subject of the conversation



was as a very tall, very handsome guy looked right back at them as ChaAim cringed.

“Oh no, really?” ChaAim turned slowly and seeing the guy watching them offered him a half-hearted wave before ducking behind Can.

“Uh, ChaAim?” Can stage-whispered. “He’s coming over.”

ChaAim popped back out from behind Can, smoothing her hair down and smiling brightly, just in time for the guy to appear in front of them. “Er— Hi!” she said brightly. “Nice to see you without my three-shot latte decorating your shirt.”

Her reward was a good-natured chuckle. “I don’t know, I thought it suited me.” He waied, encompassing their whole group, sweeping his gaze over all of them, not missing Pond stepping up and taking ChaAim’s hand. Lips twitching, he said, “I’m Tul. Will you introduce me to your friends?”

ChaAim listed everyone’s name, ending with Can. Tul’s smile was friendly and Can, being the chatterbox that he could be, started to ask him if he was here to see the band specifically, at the same time telling him that they were here to support their friend’s band. Tul disclosed that he worked for a production company and was here to listen out for new talent.

The others had drifted as they talked, chatting in smaller groups more suited to the volume of the crowd. Can was left talking with Tul, Job hovering nearby, excluded from other conversations. Tul was handsome and he was staring at Can with the kind of interest that he’d have to be a lot denser than he was not to recognise and be flattered by.

A few weeks had passed after what had happened with Tin, and Can had been realised how *good* it could be to hook up, if it was with the right person. Money had been right, it had lightened him up, or liberated him, at least, whatever it had been, he wanted more of it. He’d heard that the more you have the more you want, maybe that was true of sex – good sex anyway – and Can was now far more open to the idea of hooking up than he had been before his encounter with Tin.

Obviously, he had no intention of any further exploits with Tin himself, bloody brilliant though it had been, he just wasn’t a masochist. Fucking Tin again would mean more time spent in his company and that was not something he wanted. This Tul guy on the other hand...

“I have to get back to my colleagues now,” Tul said, indicating the guys he’d been talking with before approaching. “Will you give me your number and maybe we can continue our chat over dinner?”

Food *and* potential hot sex? Where did Can sign up? He took the phone Tul offered him and entered his details. When he went to hand it back he found Tul’s attention was no longer on Can but glaring angrily at someone else. Can redirected his attention and found Tin, seemingly having just arrived with Pete, shooting lasers back at Tul. This was no new animosity that was for sure.

“You two know each other?” Can asked, regretting it immediately when both sets of eyes turned to him, Tul’s expression warming up immediately, Tin’s looking at him as though he’d never met him before.

“We are acquainted,” Tin said stonily. He pulled himself up to his full height which was a few inches shorter than Tul and without looking at the taller again. “I just came to drop Pete off. I’m leaving now.” He took a couple of steps backwards, nodded once at Pete who was watching with wide eyes, and vanished into the crowd.

“Wow, dude, what did you do to piss him off?” Job grinned up at Tul inanely.

Tul was watching the space that Tin had disappeared into and turned back at Job’s words, smiling and said, “We are distant relations. The two sides of the family are estranged.” He frowned. “Not by my choice, but what can you do?”

He held his hand out to Can who handed him back the phone and he gave Can a missed call. “I’ll be in touch,” he promised and with a nod he faded into the crowd.

“Why did you give him your number?” Job asked, apparently just realising what had occurred, expression furious. “What— Are you into men now?”

“I—”

“Everyone, welcome to tonight’s performance. We’ve got a real treat in store for you this evening, not one, not two, but three exceptional acts. First up is a very talented young lady. Put your hands together for Rose Bunma!”

Can’s awkward reply was swallowed by the start of the show which was honestly a relief. Job had been looking at him just as he used to back years before and it wasn’t a nice feeling.

-0-

Tin arrived back at the apartment, sat in the armchair in the corner that looked out over the city and cursed. What the fuck, Tul was back? Since when? Last Tin had heard he’d been living in England with his real mother. That had been two years ago. Fuck. He’d really taken his eye off the ball by not realising he was back in Thailand...back in Bangkok.

To find him talking to Can as well... They’d been exchanging numbers. He hadn’t seen Can since the night they’d spent together and then to finally see him again after what felt like an age and to find him with *Tul* was a real kick in the teeth.

Every night since their time together he had struggled to sleep and then when he finally managed to drop off, he’d dreamt of Can, and every time he’d wake aroused and unsettled, only able to ease the tension that slithered beneath his skin by finishing himself off. It was worse than when he’d been a teenager.

He retrieved his phone from his back pocket and made a call. “Keen? It’s me. My brother is back in town. I want to know everything he’s been doing. If he as much as glanced at someone I want to know.” They briefly discussed Keen’s fee and Tin was about to hang up

when he decided, “One more thing. Flat 402 in my building— I want to know everything about the seven residents there, with particular focus on one with the first name *Cantaloupe*.”

## Six

“You look good tonight,” Tul said, dragging his gaze the length of Can’s slender frame finishing by meeting his eyes.

“Thanks,” Can smiled, pleased that he’d made an effort. Gone were the days when he’d just throw on a baggy t-shirt and shorts or loose jeans. Bow had always complained that he should wear better clothes, she’d said he had a good body, and he should show it off more and had taken him shopping. Heck, she *still* took him shopping even now and they weren’t even together. She enjoyed it and he needed a second opinion. She’d helped him choose what to wear tonight, sending him out of the door with a kiss on the cheek and a whispered ‘be a good boy’. To Tul now he said, “You look great yourself.”

Tul was really handsome, like, *really* fucking handsome and maybe about five years older, maybe more? Can had to wonder what Tul saw in him, but he figured he wasn’t really looking for anything more than a hook-up and if things developed further, with anyone, not specifically Tul then perhaps Can would be able to claim his grandfather’s inheritance without having to marry one of his friends out of convenience. The marriage of convenience was looking like the only way from where things stood at the moment...but there was still plenty of time.

They went for Korean barbeque, Can’s choice, and Tul turned out to be a charming and attentive companion. He asked Can lots of questions about himself, and for once, Can’s nerves behaved, and he didn’t feel the need to drown the man in his verbosity and he managed to ask some sensible questions in return.

Inevitably the conversation took a turn in the direction Can least wanted it to with Tul asking, “How do you know Tin?”

Can could hardly say, ‘I fucked him’ then, ‘it was bloody amazing actually, thanks for asking’ so he went with, “His friend is dating my friend.” He didn’t even want to share that they lived in the same building.

Tul smiled and took Can’s hand. “I wouldn’t normally share this on a date with someone I’m trying to impress, but you saw how Tin reacted to me, you’re bound to wonder why.”

“I can’t deny I’m nosy,” Can admitted, swallowing and feeling a sudden urge to snatch his hand back. “But it’s still your private business.”

“No, it’s fine, I think you need to know if we are going to carry this on.” He turned Can’s hand over and began to stroke his wrist with his thumb. “Tin is my little brother.”

Can, who had already been feeling uncomfortable, slowly removed his hand from Tul’s hold. “Your *brother*?”

Tul nodded, “Mmmhuh. Well, half-brother really. We have the same father.”

*Oiiiiii! Brother?* “Why did you call him a ‘distant relation’?” The question came out remarkably calmly.

“What else would you call the *brother* who cast you out of the family as soon as he inherited my father’s entire estate? Certainly not a ‘close’ relative?”

From there it all came out. How Tin’s mother, the second wife, had been the one approved by the mighty Medthanans, how Tin had been spoiled by his parents and grandmother when Tul had been ignored. Tin had been sent for an expensive education in England while Tul had had no such privileges. Yet Tin had let the family name down by his behaviour when in England, had been found abusing drugs and had even been arrested, but still his parents favoured him over Tul who had never put a foot wrong, easily believing Tin’s lies that Tul had set it all up. His father had disinherited him and when he’d died a few months later, Tin had inherited everything and refused to help Tul when he had needed support.

Honestly, the story reminded Can of the K-dramas he’d watched with his Ma as a kid.

Tul went on to say that in the middle of all of that Tin had lured away Tul’s own fiancé and once he’d inherited he’d cast her aside, the same as he had Tul.

“My real mother is English, and I went to London to stay with her for a while. She’s remarried now and I have two half-sisters.” Tul gave a short laugh. “Listen to me, I’ve gone on far too long. What about you, do you have—”

“Can! Hey!” A familiar voice cut into their conversation, and both Can and Tul turned in the direction of two approaching females. Ley and her best friend, Chompoo, trailing behind her. Ley came to a stop next to their table, eyes ping-ponging between Tul and Can eagerly. “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“No, well, I’d have gone somewhere else if I’d known I’d see you,” Can teased, but it still a half-truth. He smiled at Chompoo. “Hi, Cho.”

Tul was looking on with interest. Lemon preened under his observation, unable to suppress a high pitched giggle.

“Tul, this is my sister, Lemon, and her friend Chompoo.” Both of them now had hearts in their eyes. Great. “Girls, this is Tul.”

“Are you guys on a date?” Chompoo asked, looking from one to the other with wide eyes. She’d been late to the party but was now fully on board with her best friend’s obsession with ‘boy love’.

“No,” said Can.

“Yes.” Tul spoke at the same time, grinning widely. He looked at Can. “At least I thought I was.”

Ley looked like she might pass out from excitement. Chompoo glanced at her and rolled her eyes. “Let’s leave them to it, Ley. We’ll lose our table if we dither.”

Ley pouted. “Fine.” She looked at Tul, giggled again, then at Can where her face sobered. “Don’t mess up,” she warned before Chompoo yanked her away by her arm.

Tul watched them leave with amusement, and asked, “Just the one sibling?”

“Thankfully, yes.”

They talked a little more and Tul excused himself to go to the bathroom. Can sat back in his chair and tried to process all that he had just learnt prior to Ley’s interruption. He was dying to ask more about Tul’s family situation. Can had already thought Tin to be a – hot, great in bed – asshole, but based on Tul’s information, it went a lot deeper than that. Still, he couldn’t help the feeling that something wasn’t clicking with him and Tul. It had to be that he was Tin’s brother. Right? Yet, when Tul had held his hand and he’d immediately felt the urge to pull away, that had been before he’d known they were siblings. He rubbed the back of his neck and held in the urge to reprimand himself out loud, keeping the words inside his head, telling himself to get a grip and enjoy being wooed by a gorgeous guy like Tul.

When Tul returned he insisted on settling the bill and they walked out onto the street where Tul had left his car. When he took Can’s hand again and backed him up against a white Audi, Can raised his other hand flat against Tul’s chest to hold him at bay just as Tul was lowering his head. He turned his head and Tul’s kiss landed on his cheek. This time his whole being was recoiling.

Tul pulled back with a puzzled expression. “What’s wrong? I thought we were on the same page here.”

Can had thought so too, *before* the date. It had seemed a no-brainer then. “What page is that?” He just...wasn’t feeling it. Understatement of the century!

Can saw a flash of annoyance before Tul morphed his expression into something more genial. “I’m in the same place that you are. You want to take it slow then we take it slow.”

Can let out the breath that he was holding. “I do, want to take it slow I mean.” He was pretty sure there would be a next time and talking about ‘next time’ on a first date was probably normal, right? It didn’t mean there actually would be another time. His dating experience was zero, he and Bow had never really done that, they’d just sort of fallen into a thing from being friends first.

Tul nodded. “Let me drive you home then?”

“No, it’s fine. I’ll take a cab.” He’d walk, but Tul didn’t have to know that.

“May I have a kiss for the road?”

Against his better judgement, thinking *better to get it over with*, Can nodded and Tul bent his head, kissing his lips chastely before pulling back and releasing his hand.

He stepped back. “I’ll text you?” Can formed the lie as a question, cursing himself internally. He was usually more straight up than this.

Tul smiled. "Make sure that you do."

Can waved and watched as Tul drove away, and as the car's headlights faded away he felt sense of relief. He couldn't put a finger on exactly what it was that had bothered him, but he knew he didn't want to go back to Tul's place or have him back to his...he hadn't even wanted the guy to touch him. The guy was really easy on the eye, entertaining and charming yet... "Arrggh!" Can shouted and stamped his feet. A couple of passers-by cast him a funny look but Can didn't care. He didn't even know what was causing him to be so antsy in the first place.

-o-O-o-

"I can't believe I let you talk me into this," Tin said with a horrible feeling of déjà vu. "How many of these people do you actually know?"

The penthouse apartment was alive with party goers that had to be at least ninety-percent Thai Program. Of course, being Pete and Tin, it wasn't the type of party where the kitchen worktop doubled as a self-service bar, no, there was a manned bar and waiters circulating with trays.

Tin now recognised all of the residents of the fourth floor flat even if he didn't know their names. He had reports locked inside his desk on every single one of them, but he hadn't opened any single one. One of the seven was noticeably absent and Tin tried not to examine just why he'd been feeling that absence the whole evening...and why he couldn't take his eyes off the door. Probably because aside from Pete, who had only left Ae's side for a trip to the bathroom which was when Tin had waylaid him to bemoan the fact that the party was happening at all, Tin didn't know a soul.

"I don't need to know who they all are," Pete said, patting Tin consolingly on the arm. "It's a birthday party for Ae, so naturally these are all his friends."

Neither mentioned that their own friends wouldn't even fill their sofa.

"You won't mind if I lock myself in my room then?"

"If that's what gets you through the night, go ahead." Pete's voice was genuine.

In his periphery vision Tin saw the door finally open and Can slid inside. He looked freshly showered, his hair was still damp and his cheeks a little pink. Where had he been that he needed to shower at ten-thirty at night? Another date with Tin's own brother? The thought of the two of them together made his blood boil and the nausea rise. Not for the first time he regretted reading the report Keen had sent him about Tul's movements, because the information that Can had been out for a meal with Tul struck him heavily and he had been unprepared for it.

There had been a photograph that looked like a kiss but Can had not gone home with Tul, they had gone their separate ways. It had been little relief.

Pete faded away back in the direction of Ae and Tin watched as Can greeted his friends, was kissed on the cheek by both of the girls he shared a flat with, shared a high five with Ae, then after fetching taking a beer from a passing waiter he entered into conversation with one of his flatmates that Tin recognised as number 10 footballer – wasn't he the slow talking friend Can had described at their awkward pizza dinner with Fong? - and the other guy from the football match night out who Tin now thought was Techno.

"Hello, you're Tin Medthanant, right?"

Tin was pulled away from his observations by an eager looking guy with light brown hair and an smirking expression.

Before he could even respond the guy said, "We met before? At the concert? I'm Job." He held out his hand. Tin ignored it. He had zero recollection of even seeing him at the concert the other week, not when faced with the return of his half-brother.

Not caring that Tin had remained silent Job continued, "I'm a friend of Can and Ae, well mostly Can. We reunited after a couple of years apart. We lost touch after I transferred to a different university in sophomore year. I'm back now though, and I'm staying with the guys downstairs for a while and..."

Tin tuned out. Seriously, what a weirdo. Tin still hadn't said a word and still he was in the process of telling him his life story?

"Excuse me," Tin spoke his first, and hopefully last, words to his verbose companion and stepped away, his focus back on Can. He wanted to know what had happened with him and Tul. He'd thought that nothing his brother did could touch him now, everything had been legally tied up years ago and Tul had no recourse to either the family business or any money aside from an allowance that their father had stipulated in his will, unable to fully cut off his eldest son entirely.

"May I have a word?" he asked when he made his presence known to Can, interrupting something his friend was saying.

Can flicked his attention to Tin, appearing annoyed. "What?"

"Not here. In private."

Can shared a look with one of the friends and said, "Talk to you later." He indicated to Tin that he was ready, and Tin began to head in the direction of his room.

Once inside Tin indicated that Can should sit on the sofa near the window and locked the door. He'd like to think that no one would try to barge into his bedroom to make out, but no matter how sophisticated the set up was, these were people he didn't know. Can ignored his direction and stayed where he was, which was far too close to Tin.

Whatever it was that Tin had planned to say evaporated and what came out of his mouth was, "You went on a date with my brother."



Can gaped. “How did you—” He paused and shook his head. “And this is your business because?”

“Did you sleep with him?” Something was wrong with his brain! What he planned to say and what he actually said bore no correlation.

“Why, are you *jealous*?” Can took a couple of steps towards him and the look in his eyes was feral. “What would you do if I said yes, if I did sleep with him?”

“Did-you-sleep-with-him?” Tin stepped closer as he enunciated each word and was soon close enough to see the flecks of amber around Can’s irises.

Without breaking eye contact Can said, defiant, “No I did not, but there’s always next time.”

Tin snapped. “He can’t fuck you like I can.” He twisted his fingers into the thin material of Can’s t-shirt and pulled him forward, slamming their lips together. Can’s fist came up and Tin braced himself for a blow that never came. Instead, Can rested his fist on Tin’s shoulder and responded to Tin in kind.

# Seven

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Despite his best intentions Can managed to fall asleep in Tin's bed for a second time, the noise from the party beyond the bedroom door acting as white noise rather than a distraction to his tired brain after working a double shift whereby he'd had to stand in for the chef after he'd called in sick. Luckily by nine o'clock the last orders for main meals had been taken and Money and the waiting staff were able to take over any desserts that might be needed afterwards, meaning he was still able to make the party after a quick dash home to change and shower the smell of cooking grease out of his hair. He had not been in the mood for partying, at all, but as it was Ae's birthday he had wanted to show his face.

His face had probably only been present at the party for half-an-hour tops before he'd wound up in Tin's room. Again. Whereby he'd been thoroughly fucked. Again. *Twice*.

When he'd woken the digital clock by the bed advised him that it was 5:34am and Tin was fast asleep beside him. Thankfully Can had managed not to wind his limbs around him this time and it was much easier to extract himself. Using the light from his phone he found his clothes and made himself decent enough to pass through the penthouse and down in the lift without risking arrest for public indecency.

The apartment was silent when he let himself in and he crept into his room and made quick use of his bathroom to pee, shower and clean his teeth before stripping off and climbing into his bed. Only once he had pulled the duvet over himself did he realise that someone else was in there with him and *fuck*, Job! In his half-awake state he'd completely forgotten that he'd given Job his bed and that he was bunking in with Good for a few days.

He was too tired and too fucked out for this shit. All he wanted was to starfish naked in his own bed, was that too much to ask? Apparently, it was because just as he pushed himself up on his elbows with the intention of removing himself from the bed to put some underwear on to then go and grab a couple of hours sleep on the sofa, an arm snaked around his waist. Can froze.

"I've waited four years for this moment." Job's voice was a whisper and every hair on Can's body stood on end. Job planted a kiss on Can's clavicle and, shocked, Can rolled out of Job's grasp and fell onto the floor, knocking whatever was on the bedside table down to crash loudly onto the floor with him.

"What the fuck, Job!" He was shouting now, no longer half-asleep but fully awake. "What do you think you are doing?"

In the half-light of the room – now that his eyes had adjusted – Can saw Job sit up and look over at him where he was sprawled on the floor bare ass naked. "I've been in love with you since the first time we met," Job said, crawling to the edge of the bed and peering down at Can. "I told you when I first arrived why I'd been such a shit to you, because I was jealous. I

met you first, yet you chose her over me. I couldn't bear it, Can. I just wanted you to hurt like I was hurting."

"I thought you meant you were jealous because you liked Bow, not me!" Can's voice raised in alarm and reached behind him and managed to open one of his drawers and found a pair of shorts which he rapidly pulled on.

The door slammed open and two concerned faces appeared. Bow and Mai, both pyjama clad with bed hair.

"What's going on? Can, are you okay?" Mai switched on the light and stepped into the room, casting Job a dirty look and helping Can to his feet.

"I'm fine. Just a misunderstanding that's all. I came in late and forgot I was bunking in with Good and got into bed with Job by mistake."

"Mistake? You were naked and I thought—" Job parroted, crossing his arms over his chest protectively then catching sight of Bow. "You! Do you think you can just stay on the side lines of his life waiting for him to take you back forever? He's single now. It's my turn!"

Bow looked at Can in alarm just as Job caught sight of the fresh bruises decorating Can's abdomen and his eyes filled with tears. Mai and Bow followed his line of vision and Bow giggled as Mai said, "Looks like you've missed your turn, Mate."

Can wanted the ground to open up and swallow him whole.

-o-

"Thank heaven he's gone," Bow said, placing a white box filled with breakfast muffins on the coffee table and settling back in the armchair to regard Can. She pouted, "I knew he wasn't worthy of your forgiveness."

There was a murmur of agreement from everyone, except Mai who said, "Yeah, no offence, Can, but your 'friend' was a total pain."

Can reached for a muffin and ate half of it in one bite as his flatmates, all six of them, looked on in amusement. It was still early, everyone having woken up at the commotion that Job caused by crashing around Can's room and dramatically packing all his things before storming out of the flat shouting, "You don't know what you're missing!" at Can who was standing in the doorway of his bedroom in shock.

"What?" he mumbled around the second mouthful.

"Not that it's unusual for you or anything but you're still half-naked." Mai pointed out, raising an eyebrow. "And now we know what you've been up to, we are all just waiting to hear the details of who you hooked up with last night, as we know it wasn't your jealous little friend. Come on, tell us who almost ate you alive like that."

Fuck. In all the commotion it hadn't occurred Can to get dressed even though there had been enough time for Bow to go out to the bakery and for everyone to assemble.

He looked at Ae then Good. Both had seen him heading off with Tin and would know he hadn't returned to the party after that. Still, trusting their discretion, he said, "Just some guy at the party." He shrugged. "You guys are always telling me I need to hook up more. I hooked up."

"Who with, Edward Cullen?" ChaAim asked, catching Bow's eye and giggling.

"Who's Edward Cullen?" Can and Mai asked in tandem.

"Forget that vampire shit," Pond said, leaning forward to rest both elbows on his knees to peer at Can. "Was it any good?"

"Yeah," Can sighed, wiping the crumbs off his face. "Amazing."

-O-

Can hadn't checked his phone since he'd arrived home from work the previous evening and when he did, he found he'd got nine texts from Ley demanding information about his 'boyfriend' – Can was amazed she'd taken so long to start the inquisition - two missed calls from Tul and two texts from him, the first one saying he had to go abroad with work for a couple of weeks and the second inviting him out for lunch today before he headed to the airport. Can checked the time and debated whether it was wise to meet him, but at that point his stomach rumbled, and he found himself agreeing. So what? He might be twenty-one years old but he was still ruled by his stomach.

They met at a place that specialised in 'all day breakfast' from around the globe and Can spent far too long perusing the menu before settling on American pancakes. Tul ordered the disgustingly healthy sounding 'Swedish Bircher', though Can knew he should probably be laying off the sweet stuff after the muffin he'd had earlier. He had football later in the afternoon, he'd have to run extra laps to make a dent in what he was about to consume.

Once again Tul was charming company, attentive, funny, interested in hearing about Can's family and amused by his relating Ley's interest in 'shipping'. He told Can he was going to Berlin on business but didn't elaborate what that entailed, talking instead about Berlin's abundance of beer gardens.

It was pleasant enough. When they were outside later, a sleek car waiting at the kerb to take him to the airport, Tul surprised him by kissing him full on the lips and said, "Next time lets have dinner at my place."

Can forced a smile and watched as Tul arranged himself in the back of the car and closed the door. The window slid down and Tul waved as the car pulled away. Can waited until it was out of sight before wiping his mouth with his sleeve and wailing, 'Bleeeeeugh!'

He still couldn't put his finger on why, but Tul left him cold. His logical brain was telling him the opposite, that he was handsome, and Can was lucky someone like paying attention to him, but... Anyway, even if he liked the guy, sleeping with his brother between the first and second date probably was not the best foundation for a relationship! There definitely would not be a third date. Hopefully Tul wouldn't be in touch when he got back to Thailand.

He wasn't even looking for a relationship anyway. Okay, so he'd managed to hook up twice with the same guy, but Tin was someone who would never want anything more permanent with someone like him anyway. It probably wouldn't happen again. If what Tul had told him was true, then Tin wasn't someone Can would want more than just sex with anyway. Someone who slept with his own brother's fiancé? No, thank you very much.

It hadn't been the first time that Can had heard Tin's name linked with drugs, and he'd been doubtful there was truth in it even though he'd barely met him at that point. Now though, with the words coming from his own brother, didn't that add authenticity to the claims? It should do, but Can still couldn't imagine it. The fiancé stealing and the scheming, perhaps, the drugs...it just didn't ring true.

He took the bus home and missed his stop as his traitorous mind wanted to relive the previous evening with Tin. He thought he understood better what all the fuss was about now, why people made such fools of themselves over sex. With Bow it had been *nice*, but the other hook up had been mediocre. His two encounters with Tin had blown him away.

Now Can knew how brilliant sex really could be, a world of possibilities opened before him. He knew it would go nowhere with Tul, handsome though he was, Can felt nothing, but that there would be other people out there who would make him buzz beneath his skin like Tin did...right?

-o-

Can paced around the living room, anxiety stirring in his belly. Today was the day he was supposed to hear from the job application he'd submitted a couple of weeks ago – he'd had a Skype interview and now he was just waiting for the outcome. If he got the job, he would be spending four months there and that was a long time to spend at the wrong choice. He couldn't remember a time he'd ever felt this nervous, not even when the football team had been playing for the cup.

He knocked on Bow's door and stuck his head inside when she called, "Come in!"

"Do you have time for a drink?" He just needed something to distract him. Good had gone to visit his parents, Ae was somewhere with Pete and Pond was not the kind of company he needed when he was stressing out.

Bow was at her desk typing on her laptop and Mai was lying on her bed with his eyes closed and hands behind his head. Can raised an eyebrow. "Am I interrupting?" He wasn't as dumb as people thought he was, he knew there was something going on with them and he was pleased for them both.

Bow pinked and gave a slight shake of her head. Looking at her watch she said, "It's ten in the morning." At Can's blank face she said, "Isn't England, like, seven hours behind or something? They'll all still be in bed."

Shit. Can had not thought of that. "Right, I'm going for a run then. A long one. See you later."

He returned to his room and threw on his running gear and headed outside. The rhythmic thunk thunk of his feet on the tarmac helped him relax and it was two hours later that he returned to the building. Almost twelve-thirty now, it would be five-thirty in the morning in London.

Ordinarily he took the stairs to the fourth floor, relishing in the exercise but he didn't think his limbs had much left to give after his run. He entered the elevator and leant back against the cool metal of the wall with his eyes closed. Someone else entered after him and he heard the doors close, and the elevator jerked into action.

"You missed your floor," said a familiar voice and Can opened his eyes to find Tin regarding him impassively. "You need to actually press the button."

Tin was wearing a fitted business suit with a white shirt and red tie, and he looked fucking *hot*. Desire lurched into life at the sight of him, probably his body's natural reaction to the man that had brought him to orgasm so many times in recent memory. All the air seemed to have been sucked out of the elevator as Can felt lightheaded. He could think of no better distraction than the one presented before him. He pushed himself forward from the wall and took a step in Tin's direction, licking his lips before saying, "Are you free now?"

Tin masked his surprise quickly, but it was there for sure. "I have a free schedule for the rest of the day."

Another step forward and his fingers had closed around the red tie. "Schedule me in for the next two hours," and he tiptoed up to kiss him.

-o-

Tin walked out of the bathroom to an empty bedroom and the smell of sex in the air. The gentle feeling of warmth and wellbeing that had encompassed him somewhere around the time of his second orgasm evaporated. Two hours hadn't been enough and now it was five hours and three orgasms for him and four for Can. In between they'd dozed or talked some, nothing deep, but it had been nice.

Can's absence sent him plummeting down to earth with a painful crash. Can was different from the others, they wanted money and *things* but Can lacked interest in either, but had used him just the same. The first couple of times had been spontaneous, but this had no lead time, no argument had thrown them into each other's path.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and dropped his head into his hands. It didn't matter, none of it did. All it did was strengthen his resolve that he had made the right decision. He just had to wait for Pete to get home and the two of them would be on a plane out of Bangkok with no plans to return quite some time. He never needed to see Can again and that suited him just fine. It was for the best, it wouldn't do to get more attached than he already was.

Poor Tin :- (

# Eight

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Never let them know that you care. That had been Tin's motto all these years. Now it was almost one hundred percent true. Let them do what they would, he was indestructible.

Pete, on the other hand, he was made of softer stuff. Two weeks had passed since they had left the Bangkok penthouse behind and retreated as far as away as they could without leaving the country, in this case to a dedicated spa resort in the mountains owned by Tin's company. With hindsight it was probably a bad idea given that all the time they had to dedicate to relaxing was just time for Pete to wallow in his heartbreak.

What might look to outsiders like an intimate embrace in on a garden bench was in fact Pete sobbing into Tin's shoulder. Tin was really starting to wish he had been wrong about Ae, but the evidence had been clear. Keen had supplied pictures of Ae and the bastard who had tried to con Pete before, Trump, enjoying a drink together, both laughing together like old friends.

Pete had wanted to confront Ae, had said there had to be an innocent explanation, that Ae wasn't like that. Tin had talked him out of it. "Don't show him that you care," he'd advised, feeling so guilty when Pete's face had crumpled when he'd been confronted with the photos. "Let him believe you're ending things on your terms, don't mention this, don't lose face."

Pete had done it. While Tin had been fucking away the afternoon in bed with Can, Pete had been ending things with the person he loved. The two of them were the same in this, both leaving behind Thai Program boys who had used them in their own ways. Tin knew it would be easier for him to let go of that, that all it would take would be to fuck someone else, for that was all it had been. He just wasn't used to sleeping with the same person more than once, without seeing anyone else in between as well, hadn't understood before that the familiarity of that could start to feel as though there was more involved than just base attraction.

"You'll be away from Bangkok with no chance of bumping into Ae. Work will keep you busy."

Pete was taking charge of setting up an office in New York for Tin's company. Pete's own father was still very much involved in his family business and Pete was reluctant to follow in his footsteps. As far as Tin was concerned, employing Pete was the first step in the right direction toward turning the company around and into his control, with *his* people working for him.

Two weeks at a spa and Tin felt anything but recharged. He felt utterly drained. When he went to bed at night his mind would not rest, and he thought he might go insane thinking about Can. Wanting him. It was ridiculous really as he hardly knew him. Worse, Can had been on another date with his own brother. Can could be with Tul *right that moment*. Tin didn't even have Can's phone number, at least not officially, Keen would be able to supply it to him but how would he explain to Can how he'd got his hands on it?



What was he going to do with even if he had it? Can had made it perfectly clear he was only interested in his dick. Tin could get on board with that, definitely, but admitting this made his head spin and his palms hurt. Can already had a loose hold of his heart, if he let him in anymore, he might steal it whole.

-o-O-o-

England in Spring was both sunshine and rain, neither of which came with the heat Can associated with that kind of weather. London had been as busy as Bangkok during the three days he'd spent there playing the lone tourist before his official first day at work. He'd been on the London Eye, visited the Tower of London and Buckingham Palace as well as Madame Tussauds and the Planetarium in Greenwich. His Instagram had never been so busy.

The restaurant he'd be working at had provided him with cheap lodgings with a red-haired woman in her thirties called Willow who lived in a two-bedroom flat above just one street back from Covent Garden with a German Shepherd named Ludwig and two black cats. Willow was an actor and a good friend of the couple who owned the restaurant he'd be working in.

It felt strange. He had never been outside of Thailand before and how he was six thousand miles – *six thousand miles* – from home in a country where he'd be lucky to find another person who spoke Thai, in a city that seemed oddly familiar because of all the movies he'd seen. He may have spent far longer than was healthy standing on Westminster Bridge before realising that the traffic was never going to quieten down enough for him to take a realistic '28 Days Later' selfie.

Willow told him she was currently appearing in a play at a theatre called 'The Old Vic' and she gave him a ticket to come and watch. Can was nearly late because one of the tube stations was closed and he had to get off at the next one and walk back on himself. He found the whole transport system baffling, but hopefully he wouldn't need to use it much as his place of work was just a short walk from where he was lodging.

Can didn't understand half of the play. His English was basic, and the plot moved so fast. Still, he'd never seen a live theatre performance before, and the atmosphere was enticing. Willow had the female lead against a handsome blond love interest. Can was surprised and felt guilty that he had assumed she would have smaller part.

Willow had invited him to come backstage afterwards, which meant exiting the theatre and re-entering via the side stage-door. The queue at the stage door wound around the corner and Can thought he might be waiting a while to get inside until he realised that they were waiting for the actors to leave so they could get a picture with them. He sidestepped them and approached the door, pleased when they let him in once he told the guard his name. Once inside and in the belly of the theatre he was surprised how shabby and cramped the place was. He found Willow, now dressed in her own clothes, talking with the blond actor and another woman who had played a grandmother figure.

He started his job the day after his evening at the theatre, in a busy café restaurant in the centre of Covent Garden named 'Edge'. One of his new bosses, Luke, a bespectacled man aged around thirty-five patiently spent several hours with Can going over each item on the

menu, how it should be presented and what was expected of Can. He wasn't going to be thrown straight into things immediately, he'd start with prep work and work his way upwards. In his final month Can would oversee producing a 'specials' menu. Can discovered that the business employed three guest chefs each year from around the world and that he was the first from Thailand since the business opened five years ago.

After a week Can had met all his colleagues aside from a couple who were on holiday. Most of the staff were part time, and most of the waiting staff were students. Can's English was put to the test from day one, but he got by, and soon bonded with the commis chef, Lizzy, who was showing him the ropes.

The café was busier than any of the places he'd worked on his previous placements, and it was bigger than Money's. Due to its location, it was packed out from the moment it opened its doors to the time they took the last orders in the evening.

Can didn't have time in those first few days to stop and think about anything other than getting to work, working, getting home and sleeping. Willow had asked him to walk Ludwig every morning, something Can was happy to do. He loved dogs and still missed Gucci after he'd gone to Chiangmai with his parents.

Despite how busy he was, Can always found time to message friends back home. Good, Bow and Ley... and Ae in particular, even if Ae didn't often reply. Pete had broken up with him a few weeks earlier and Ae was baffled, confused, angry and utterly heartbroken. Both Pete and Tin had moved out of the penthouse and disappeared who knew where. They'd both finished university at the same time as the occupants of the fourth floor flat so they could be anywhere, together or separate. If Can was honest, he was as confused as everyone else at Pete's actions. Anyone could see those two were totally gone on each other.

Ae had picked up his calls a couple of times and Can had done his best to listen and to give him time to talk without going off on a rant about snobby IC guys, because he knew that if he did that it wouldn't even be Pete he was talking about but Tin.

Tin who had vanished along with Pete the same day he had spent the afternoon in bed with Can. Not that Can cared about ever seeing Tin again. Except, well, Can kind of craved his touch. He'd tried to tell himself that he just needed to get laid with someone else but the idea was utterly unappealing.

Tul had messaged him a couple of times and alluded to meeting up with Can when they were both back Thailand, which for Tul would be next week. Can was glad of the miles between them. He'd left the messages unanswered. Best just to let that die a natural death.

He'd been in England for a month when Ae disclosed that he had found out Pete was in New York and that he was going to fly out to confront him. Can wished him luck and wondered if Tin was with him.

Two weeks after that Can finished his shift at six in the evening and stuck his head out into the main seating area to look for one of the waiting staff, Harry. Harry was due to finish at the same time and was going to join him and Lizzy, her fiancé Eoin and a couple of others at a

nearby pub. Harry was nowhere to be seen, but there, seated with his back to the wall opposite a dark-haired man was Tin Medthanan.

Can gaped. What-the-fuck? How was he here? How was he looking at Can without even a blink of surprise?

“Hey, Can. Are you ready to leave?” Harry appeared in front of him and blocked his view of Tin, which quite honestly suited Can just fine.

“What?” Can dragged his eyes away. “Yes. I’d just come to look for you.”

Can retreated into the kitchen without allowing himself to look in Tin’s direction again.

-0-

Can was the last person Tin had expected to see in London. He hadn’t kept tabs on him, preferring to erase him from his mind as best he could. He’d never even opened the file Keen had prepared for him all those weeks ago. It had worked to a degree, in that he had been too busy with taking the helm of the company full-time to allow himself the indulgence of fantasy.

Can looked good. Like, really, good.

After that the business meeting had been a blur.

He had no excuse for why he found himself back at the same restaurant the next day at a table for one. He tried to tell himself that it was the familiarity amidst all the strangers, but that excuse didn’t work for long. When had he ever needed a familiar face? He’d lived most of his life with strangers, even though they’d called themselves family or had been his classmates who he’d become acquainted with but never really friends. Honestly, he should never have let his guard down at all, look what had happened because he had allowed himself the luxury of making an effort with people.

Can made him want to lower that guard right down. That was why he was eating alone in a busy restaurant. Then later, because he hadn’t seen Can during that time because he was either in the kitchen or not even working that day, situated himself outside of the café to wait for Can to finish work. As he waited, he warred with himself, told himself he needed to leave, that Can was dangerous. He’d push himself up from the wall he was leaning against and take a step, maybe two, then relent and return to his sentry position. He scared himself how much he wanted to see that Thai Program urchin.

How he regretted those words. If he hadn’t spoken them, hadn’t been overheard even... He hadn’t even meant it really; it was just what he did – find a reason to hold everyone at a distance before they got the chance to strike first. No discrimination, *everyone*, Thai Program or CEO.

“Why are you here?”

Tin was startled out of his thoughts by the very person he'd been waiting over two hours to see. Can must've emerged from a staff entrance, hair dishevelled and sticking up all over, casual in a black Guns n' Roses hoody with dark fitted jeans.

"Waiting for you, obviously."

Can checked his watch and shifted his backpack from left to right shoulder as he regarded Tin silently, chewing his lip. Tin wanted to lean in and kiss those lips. He was so totally fucked. "Ok, come with me," Can said and closed his hand around Tin's wrist, tugging him away from his waiting place. Tin allowed it, too surprised to object. Can led him outside the covered area the café was located and wound his way through the throng of tourists beyond, past street performers and creepy living statues, finally emerging on a normal London street.

Finally, Tin managed to say, "Where are we going?"

Can halted and nodded across the road. "The river is behind there. I want to go on a boat trip down the Thames." He released his grip on Tin's wrist and Tin almost wanted whine at the loss, but then slim fingers were threading through his and he was stunned into silence again.

They crossed the road at the traffic lights and sure enough, once around the corner there was a traffic laden bridge over the Thames. Can was obviously familiar with the area ahead because they arrived at the dock where a river taxi was waited. Can paid for them both and once on the boat made his way to some plastic seats near the window.

They sat in silence, fingers till entwined, until the boat pulled away from the dock. Tin said, "How long are you in London for?"

"Four months. They like to recruit novices like me from around the world. It's a good opportunity for me to get the right experience and they get cheap labour."

"Are they taking advantage of you because if they are—" Tin was ready to go into battle.

"Relax, Tin. I get the UK minimum wage plus subsidised accommodation. It's fine."

"I never pictured you in a vegetarian restaurant."

Can snorted. "Its 'plant based' and it's exactly right for me, that's what I want to open back in Bangkok. What about you? How long are you here for?"

"About a month," Tin told him, hyper aware of the hand holding his own. "I've business interest here." He did not elaborate, wary of sounding like he bragging, because 'business', while true, didn't really cover the complexities of it. Part of his time here would be spent recruiting people to head up the Medthan European operations.

"But you have time to loiter outside cafés waiting for acquaintances?"

"It's Saturday." Tin said, suddenly finding a passing boat fascinating. "And I'd say we have gone past acquaintances."

"Hmm." Can's voice was low.

They remained silent for several minutes. Can seemed less restless than he had often appeared back in Thailand. It was a sunny evening and the sunlight bounced off the water and cast kaleidoscopic patterns across the deck.

They alighted at the stop next to the Emirates cable car and Can announced his intention to ride it across the river and back again and Tin was swept along in his child like excitement at the prospect being precariously suspended over the Thames. The view from the car was of a more industrial side of London and Tin wondered why they had spent so much money on an attraction that didn't show off any of the sights of the city, but Can didn't seem to care and the smile remained on his face for the entire journey as he peered down at the river below and bounced up and down to make the car rock. They had stopped holding hands when they got off the boat and Tin was unsure whether to reignite the contact, so he played it safe, keeping his hands to himself.

Once the cable car ride was over Can announced he was hungry. The area around the cable car station was all car park and industrial so Tin flagged down a black cab and asked the driver to take them somewhere with a choice of places to eat. He drove them to Greenwich and consequently into a restaurant called 'Bills'.

The whole thing felt like a date.

Tin wanted it to be a date.

They managed to converse for entirety of the meal – where Can ate double the amount Tin did and still wanted a dessert - and they did so without Tin putting his foot in it and causing Can to react. Can talked more about the café he wanted to open, that his friends Techno and Type had secured the funding that they needed for their gym so therefore once Can got back to Bangkok he needed to get to work on his own plans. Tin talked about his time in England when he was younger.

No one mentioned Tul and Tin wasn't about to ruin a good evening by taking that risk even if it was killing him wondering if Can had been on a date with him again. If he had slept with him.

By the time they had finished at the restaurant it was late. Tin had found out that Can was living by Covent Garden which was not that far from the hotel he was staying at near Regents Park so they took another taxi. When the taxi pulled up on Can's street conversation had long since dwindled to awkwardness.

“Um...” Can fidgeted with the strap of his backpack. “Do you want to come up?”

## Chapter End Notes

Is anyone else amazed how well Can speaks English? 🤖

# Nine

## Chapter Notes

Can's talking with his fists again. 😞

Can disentangled himself from Tin and crept out of bed. It was early but Ludwig needed walking and Willow was filming out of town for a few days, so Ludwig's care was shared between him a dog walker. He threw on whatever clothes he had draped over the chair in the corner and left the flat with the excited canine in tow. It was Sunday and the city didn't come alive until around ten o'clock so the streets were quiet as they walked down the gardens on the Embankment.

His backside hurt in a delightful way, each step reminding him how thoroughly plowed he'd been the night before. Tin was just...fuck. He set Can on fire. Can almost wanted to overlook everything Tul had told him about Tin because it didn't reflect the person he had come to know, and forget about the guy's shitty attitude towards him when they met. Could he though? Was that even on the cards? If Tin hadn't eaten at his place of work a couple of days ago and seen him there, would they have even met again? It had been weeks since Tin – and Pete – had vanished into thin air, Can hadn't heard off Tin since – would he ever have done if fate hadn't intervened?

Fate apparently wanted Can to enjoy some really good sex. Thank you fate.

Back at the flat he found Tin fully dressed, sitting at the breakfast bar with a glass of orange juice. Can watched him from the doorway for a moment before stepping into the room. He helped himself to a glass of juice from the fridge and stood at the end of the counter. Their eyes met.

"I have today off," Can said before he could talk himself out of. "Do you want to do something?"

"I need to go back to my hotel to shower and change. After that I'm free for the day."

Can downed the rest of his juice. "Give me a few minutes to get ready and I'll come with you. Then...breakfast?"

When he arrived at Tin's hotel Can decided to wait in the lobby. He had a few messages to return from the previous evening that he'd ignored. The last message was from Pond asking him to call him if he could so Can mentally worked out that it would be around four in the afternoon in Thailand before ringing his friend.

“Ae’s in a bad way,” Pond reported, uncharacteristically sombre. “He went MIA for a few days, none of us could get hold of him, then he just re-appeared, off his face drunk. Transpires he’d flown to *New York* after finding out that’s where Pete is, and Pete refused to even speak to him.”

“Shit. Poor Ae.” Can rubbed his face with his palm. He hadn’t realised Ae hadn’t told the rest of their friends his plans to fly to the States. “I wish I could help. Ae hasn’t replied to any of my messages for a while.”

“It’s alright, I just wanted to talk to someone who isn’t having to deal with him. He’s off the rails.”

They talked for a few minutes until Tin emerged from the lift wearing thigh hugging denims and simple long-sleeved t-shirt and Can nearly swallowed his own tongue. There was something about the casual clothes that just magnified Tin’s appeal.

“I have to go,” he told Pond, watching Tin approach. “Keep me updated, yeah? I’ll be in touch later in the week.” He ended the call, unable to look away from Tin’s gaze.

“...what do you think? Can? Are you okay?”

Can blinked, realising Tin had been talking. He shook his head. “Taxi where, sorry?” He totally zoned out there.

Tin sighed and followed with a smile, “I was suggesting we go to one of the popular markets. Camden or Spitalfields.”

“Camden!” Can said immediately. “I hear it’s amazing.”

As they walked outside, and a sleek Mercedes pulled up and a uniformed man stepped out and opened the passenger door. Tin said, “After you.”

“We’re going to the market in a limo?”

Can noticed Tin’s cheeks pinked slightly even with his show of nonchalance. “It’s quicker... and less sweaty.”

Can laughed. “I’m not complaining.” He moved past Tin and slid onto the back seat. Tin got in beside him, with lot more grace, and the driver closed the door. Can wiggled his bottom on the smooth leather, wincing a bit as he was reminded again what had happened the night before. “I’ve never been in a limo before. It even smells good.”

The driver made quick work of the distance between Richmond Park and Camden, depositing them outside a café just as a member of staff turned over the sign in the door from ‘closed’ to ‘open’. On cue, Can’s stomach grumbled.

Can ordered the ‘boss vegan’ breakfast while Tin settled with avo toast. “Why are you ordering vegan?” Tin asked when the waiter had taken their order and left.

“I think I said I plan to open a plant based café? That’s why I applied to work at Edge. I always have the plant-based things on the menu when I eat out now, for menu ideas for my own place.”

“Why plant based?”

Their drinks arrived and Can fell on his hot chocolate – made with coconut milk - taking a grateful slurp. Tin was watching him expectantly. “I’m following the global trends. Plant based, or vegan, is growing in popularity especially here in Europe. I decided that’s the direction I want to go in, but it will be from a tasty *healthy* food angle.”

“Are you giving up meat?”

Can immediately thought of his beloved pork skewers and the thought of life without tasting them again and hastily shook his head. “I’m reducing.”

Tin continued to question him about his plans for his own café and in turn Can made an effort to ask Tin about his work. He was still not much wiser on the subject by time they’d finished eating, and Can was rubbing his tummy in satisfaction. That had been an amazing breakfast. He’d taken a photo so he could remember what was in it for research purposes.

The day passed in a blur. Can had spent a fortune and they had barely covered half of the market. He felt happy and exhausted, certain that the smile that had been on his face for most of the day was going to become a permanent fixture. When Tin suggested Can came back to the hotel with him so they could have an evening meal there it didn’t occur to him to refuse. He sent a message to the dog walker to check he was going in to walk Ludwig and once he’d received a positive answer he felt the last tendril of tension leave him. Tin must have called his driver because the car rolled up in front of them just as they exited the walls of the market near the locks.

Can fell asleep on Tin’s shoulder.

-o-

“Ae went to New York to find Pete. Pete wouldn’t see him.”

Tin’s heart nearly stopped. How on earth had Ae found out where Pete had gone, and why hadn’t Pete told him? Lying in bed with Can, both of them sated and breathless, was hardly the time for admitting his part in Ae and Pete’s separation. Not that he wouldn’t do the same thing again if it kept Pete safe from predators like Ae and Trump.

“Pete never mentioned it and we talk most days,” Tin said now, hoping Can wouldn’t pursue the subject.

“It’s all just so strange. One minute they seemed so in love, the next Pete broke it off.” Can sounded so sad, almost like it happened to him. “Did he tell you why?”

“...”



“No, actually, forget I asked. It’s between them. I just feel for Ae, he’s in a bad way. He’s one of my best friends, and I’m not there to support him when he needs me.” Can shifted slightly closer to Tin, both of them lying on their backs with just the ceiling to look at. “I invited him to visit but he can’t afford the air fare after spending all his money on a ticket to New York. I’d cover it myself, but he would never accept it even if I threw in a trip to Old Trafford to see Manchester United.”

“Your friends mean a lot to you.” Tin made simple statement, trying to keep his voice neutral. What must it be like to have a friend like Can?

“Mmm,” was all Can said before he turned on his side to face Tin, shuffling in so that his side was pressed against Tin. “Can we go again?”

Tin thought it was the perfect change of subject.

-o-

Over the course of the next two weeks Can spent more than half of the nights in Tin’s bed with just a couple spent at Can’s lodgings while Willow was away. When she came back Can became coy about taking Tin there. Tin found it adorable.

Can worked long hours and didn’t get many full days off and Tin’s schedule was full on with meeting after meeting. As well as everything else he had scheduled in, he had whittled the shortlists for the people he needed to recruit down to seven.

When he told Can had to go to Birmingham for a couple of days his eyes widened with excitement. That was how Tin found himself at a football match, in the corporate box, watching Aston Villa v Manchester United. Seeing Can’s building excitement as he watched the game was far more interesting to Tin than the actual game. Manchester won 2:1, much to Can’s delight and apparently one of the players, someone named Marcus Rashford, was Can’s hero.

They stayed at the Malmaison, and really, Tin needed to have a word with his PA. She’d booked them into the ‘Nirvana Signature Suite’, a room so gaudy it made his eyes hurt. The bed linen was neon pink, the floor black and white chevrons and half of the walls were mirrored tiles.

“Wow,” Can said, blinking rapidly as the door closed behind them. “I didn’t bring my sunglasses.”

“...it does have a jacuzzi,” Tin pointed out, trying to look for the positive.

“It does?” Can bounced past him and immediately located it. “Brilliant, that’s the entertainment sorted!” He began to peel off his clothes while Tin looked on, thoroughly amused. Feeling generous he tested the water temperature and switched on the jets just in time for Can to almost vault into it, butt naked.

Can immediately lay out lengthways on his back and star fished. Watching him Tin felt suddenly light-headed and that was the moment realisation really dawned. He was in love

with Can. One thousand percent gone for him.

“Come and join me!” Can waved excitedly, smiling so brightly he nearly outshone the neon.

“I just need a minute,” Tin said and retreated to the bathroom. Closing the door he fell back against it with closed eyes. “Fuck.”

How had he let it happen? He supposed he should have read the signs better. Dreaming about him. Sleeping with him not just once, not even twice, but multiple times, missing him when he’d left Bangkok, his jealousy over Tul, the sick feeling when he’d seen him again in London... Acting like a couple for the last few weeks.

He hadn’t felt this vulnerable since he’d found out about Tul’s betrayal.

It was several minutes before he re-entered the hotel room having used the bathroom. He stripped off his own clothes and climbed into the pool with far more decorum than Can had shown. Can immediately straddled his lap and drew him into a kiss. Tin allowed it, even as his mind raced. Did Can know? Could he tell? Every touch, every kiss, every breath felt different. How had he gone from dismissing him as a dirty Thai Program to this? From nothing to *everything*.

Can pulled back. “Is something wrong?”

Tin really needed to stop over analysing and head back to the moment. A moment when the person he loved was naked in his lap. The unwelcome anger that was slowly rising in him, anger that in the back of his mind he recognised as his old friend fear, made him ignore the question and take Can’s mouth again, hard, grinding their cocks together beneath the water.

He didn’t need to think for a long while after that.

-0-

Can didn’t think he had ever felt so nervous. He’d been prepping for today for weeks, months if you counted when he first applied for the job at Edge. The first day of his own menu being available as specials. The brief had been simple. The food had to be plant based and Thai influenced. Luke had approved the choices, Can had made sample dishes for the staff to trial and it had all gone down well. Just...what if no one ordered it? What if it was a flop?

The pressure was worse as he would be co-leading the kitchen for the whole month, his last before he returned to Bangkok. How quickly the time had gone, and how unexpected much of it had been, starting with Tin’s arrival a few weeks before.

Tin was flying back to Bangkok in a couple of days. Can was trying not to think about how much he knew he would miss him before he had even left. How quickly a one-night stand between them back home had become something else entirely. At least it had to Can. Tin, well, he’d been acting weird since their stay in the gaudy hotel room in Birmingham – probably already withdrawing because he knew he was going back home to his real life. The life where Can was just an acquaintance he’d fucked a couple of times. That was fine though, Can couldn’t expect anything more. Except, he’d maybe like to keep the acquaintances with

benefits thing going? It was better than nothing, right? He knew it could never be any more than that, Tin was more than just out of his league, he was playing a different game altogether.

Why did the prospect of a life without Tin made him feel hollow inside?

He'd spoken to Ae the day before and his friend had assured him that he was moving on from Pete now, that every day it got easier. Can wasn't sure he believed him. However, he believed that Ae wanted to believe that it was true for his own sake.

Type and Techno's dream of opening their own gym was drawing closer and Techno had sent Can a video tour of the premises and another of the unit next door that Can hoped to set up his own business within. His issue was funding, lack of it. The only ways he knew to get hold of the cash he needed was to get married and receive his grandfather's inheritance or take out a business loan. Still, he was reluctant to marry someone just for the inheritance, even if long term it was a better option than saddling himself with debts. There would be enough money to set up the business and to give some to his parents. It was just a lot to ask a friend. Just... He couldn't do it.

"You don't need to look so worried, Can," Luke told him around half-way through his shift, just before he was due to go on a half-an-hour break. "It's going really well! We're about to sell out of the red fusion as well." Luke patted him on the shoulder.

Can smiled and nodded, the relief that people seemed to be ordering his creations a tangible thing. At break time he went outside for twenty minutes just for a change of scene, the kitchen sometimes felt too intense, and with him being in charge for the next few weeks he couldn't afford to get too tired. Just before he was due to go back to the kitchen he received a message from Tin telling him he would pick him up after his shift that evening.

Life was...good.

-o-

The day before Tin was due to fly home Can woke up later than usual, exhausted both from work and the time he'd spent *not* sleeping in bed with Tin afterwards. He was woken by Tin escaping the bed into the bathroom. He yawned and stretched and twisted his feet to the floor.

He grabbed his phone from the side table and realised it was dead so he couldn't even check the time. Tin's was charging on his side of the bed, so he rolled over to that side and unplugged his cable and slotted it into his own phone. As he unplugged Tin's phone it lit up and Can saw there was a message on the front screen with Pete's name at the top.

There was no excuse for it, but it was like he was on autopilot when he tapped the screen again. The phone was locked but the message was still visible:

*I know you had my best interests at heart but I wish you'd never told me about Ae being in cahoots with Trump. What if there's an innocent...*

Can dropped the phone like it was a hot rock.

What the actual fuck? Tin had said *what* about Ae? Whatever it was had split them apart. Every good thought Can had ever had about Tin, the feelings he'd been developing for him these past few weeks... All lies. He'd thought he'd seen through the arrogance to the man underneath, but it seemed he had been wrong.

He picked up Tin's phone off the floor, plugged it back into the charger and scrabbled around for his clothes. It was just as well Tin was leaving tomorrow. Can never wanted to see him again! He threw his clothes on and was just shoving his feet into his trainers when Tin appeared out of the bathroom looking like a fucking God in just a tiny white towel. Even through the haze of his anger Can's dick jumped at the sight. That just made him madder!

"I'm heading out. I need the fresh air, so I'll walk." It was only a thirty-minute walk back to his lodgings. "Bye."

He backed out the door at record speed. He didn't want Tin to know he'd seen that text and that he was furious but at the same time he didn't think he could be all nice to him either. Tin's expression was one of bafflement as he raised a hand in farewell even as Can closed the door.

He ran all the way back to Covent Garden. He'd neglected his fitness in favour of work and fucking Tin lately and the run took more out of him than he'd like to admit. No matter. He could resume his daily runs again as Tin was going home and even if he wasn't, this thing they had going was over. *Asshole*. What the hell had he told Pete that had resulted in Pete breaking things off? Pete was such a nice guy as well. Can didn't know him all that well but he could tell he didn't have a mean bone in his body. He'd obviously broken things off as self-protection. That poor guy. Poor Ae.

-o-

His time in England had been productive, new ventures were in progress and he was confident he'd found the right team to head up the European division. He'd wanted to recruit staff who knew how things worked in the EU and since the UK had – foolishly in Tin's opinion – left the EU, he needed someone else to head up the UK.

Tonight had been the first time the four candidates he had chosen had met. The meeting in the restaurant at his hotel had gone on longer than he'd planned as the conversation that turned into an ideas session.

When he'd finally made it back to his room he'd found it empty. Can was nowhere to be seen. It hadn't been mentioned that morning, but Tin had understood that Can would be here waiting for him on his last night in the country. It would be about a month before they would see one another again back home.

Rubbing the bridge of his nose he sat on the bed and made a call to Can. The call went straight to voicemail. He followed with a text 'where are you?' and stripping off, went for a shower. When he was done Can still had not replied.

Worried, Tin dressed in jeans and a sweater and called reception to call him a cab as his driver had long since finished for the day. It was a quick journey to Can's lodgings. He used

the keycode Can had given him and took the stairs to the landing two at a time, knocking on the front door when he reached the summit. Immediately the landlady's dog started to bark but after a couple of minutes and more knocking no one came to the door.

Tin knew the landlady was away so he had no qualms about knocking again and calling Can's name.

The door was wrenched open and Can was there. He left the door open and walked in the direction of the living room. Tin closed the door and followed him. Can was dressed in sleep clothes with his hair dishevelled like he'd been running his hands through it. He sat in the armchair in folded his arms in front of his chest. Tin thought he looked tired. Was that why he hadn't come to the hotel? If that was the case why hadn't he let him know?

Tin sat down on the sofa. "You didn't come."

Can shrugged. "You're going tomorrow, so." He met Tin's eyes warily and that was when Tin noticed his eyes were lined with pink. He'd been crying?

Did Can need reassuring that his return to Thailand wasn't the end for them? Tin certainly had not planned to leave him with any uncertainty about where they stood and had Can been waiting for him as he'd expected then the conversation would already be over, and Tin would have the answer to the question he'd been wanting to ask Can for what felt like eons now.

"Can—" Tin had to pause and clear his throat. He'd never done anything like this before. He'd told himself he didn't need anyone or anything. He needed Can and that scared him. He stood up and pulled himself to his full height. "I... Right, I'm just going to come out and say this." Pause, take a deep breath.

Can was watching him with an unusually blank expression, but Tin did not allow himself time to dwell on that.

"I've been fighting this, but I find I can't any longer. I know we have our differences..." *I can hold my own in front of some of the richest and most powerful people in the world, why can't I find the right words when talking to a Thai Program?* "I'm in love with you, Cantaloupe. Will you be my boyfriend?"

Can jumped from the chair and before Tin even realised what had happened he had punched him on the jaw. "Asshole!" Can spat. "You tell me you love me and in the same sentence you're looking down on me!"

Dear God, he'd spoken his thoughts out loud. He rubbed his chin, eyes smarting.

He held up both hands, shaking his head. "No, please... Don't listen to those words, Can, just take note of my actions." He reached out and took the hand Can had just punched him with into his own. Looking down at their joined hands he ran his thumb over Can's wrist. "I love you. So much."

Can wrenched his hand free and stumbled backwards. "Well I don't love *you*." His features twisted into something Tin, frozen on the spot, didn't recognise at all. "You say you love me

but you don't even know me! If you did you'd actually understand how important my friends are to me...and knowing that you would know I could ever love someone was the cause of my good friend Ae's despair! Or are you going to deny that your whispering in Pete's ear was the cause of them splitting up? Do you deny that you stabbed your own brother in the back and stole the company out from under him?"

Tin felt all the blood leave his head. How had Can known about Pete? "I can explain," he managed, barely hearing his own voice over the thundering of his heartbreak.

"Don't waste your words on me, there's no need. All of this," he gestured between the two of them and walked forwards and shoved Tin, hard, with both hands causing him to step back. "It's just sex. That's *all* it's ever been. I could never be with someone like you."

Tin's ears roared and his head swam. *Someone like you.* He had to get out of there. "If this is what you think of me then there's nothing left to say."

How he made it out of the flat and downstairs he'd never know. Somehow, he made it back to the hotel. He didn't sleep when he got back, just sat on the sofa staring into space.

*Someone like you.*

# Ten

## Chapter Notes

Short chapter before we enter the final phase.

Tin had been back in Bangkok for nearly a week when he finally snapped out of the funk he'd been wallowing in. He'd cried off work citing a fever, when, in reality, it was the opposite, he felt cold. Numb. Still, he was the boss and he could do what he liked. Even if he had *stolen the company from his brother's hands*.

He showered, made himself something to eat, and sat down in front of his laptop. Pulling up his email he typed non-stop, not bothering to pause to edit, and hit send before he could talk himself out of it. Let Can digest the *truth* and choke himself on it. He might not love Tin, hell, given what he'd said the last time they met, he didn't even *like* him unless he was fucking him. Still, Tin wasn't going to let that bullshit he believed about him go unchallenged. He spewed it all out in that email and once he'd sent it, he shoved it into a box inside his head and locked it away.

He'd been fool enough already to ever believe anyone would want him for him. Can didn't want his money, nor his 'fame' but he had wanted to fuck him. Tin had just been deluded when he'd started to believe it could be something more. He really was unloveable.

The day after sending the email he went back to the office as though nothing had happened. He was not going to let this fester, he was *not*.

-o-

After Tin's departure Can threw himself into work, restarted his daily runs and spent his spare time exploring more of London. When he was lucky enough to get two days off in a row his colleague, now friend, Lizzy persuaded him to let her and Eoin take him on a mini tour outside of London whereby he visited Stonehenge, Glastonbury Abbey and Tor and Bath. They stayed two nights in an empty cottage on a farm belonging to one of Willow's many actor friends in a small village in Somerset. It was there that he and Lizzy cooked up the plan to go into partnership and open the café in Bangkok together.

Before he knew it, it was almost time to return to Bangkok. Can worked his final shift at Edge and went out with all his colleagues afterwards, ending up in a nightclub that, according to some of his colleagues, was full of celebrities. Can had no idea who any of the people were!

He flew home two days later with plans for when Lizzy and Eoin would fly out and taking with him contact details of several of his work friends and a promise to stay in touch with

Willow.

The first thing he did when he arrived home, was catch up with his housemates. They only had a few months left living at the flat before Good's uncle moved back from Europe and wanted his home back so they would be going their separate ways after that. It would be the end of an era.

It was so good to see everyone that Can was able to put Tin from his mind for a while. A very short while, because as soon as he was alone in his room, he could barely think of anything else. It had been easier back in England as he had been able to keep himself distracted and able to pretend that he hadn't lied to Tin's face when he'd told him he didn't love him. He told himself it wasn't a full-blooded lie, because the person he'd fallen in love with wasn't the man he'd come to believe Tin was.

Can had long since put aside Tul's claims. Easy. He knew families could be complicated, and he'd been getting to know Tin better than he'd ever known Tul, but that version of Tin had not been real, not when he was someone who could break apart a couple who loved one another like Ae and Pete. Unforgivable, and not the actions of someone Can could love.

He just had to keep on reminding himself of that whenever he started to slip and he'd be fine, back to his old self in no time.

He should have known better than to join Good and Bow for a drink a few days after his return to Bangkok. Result, lying with his head in Bow's lap and his feet in Good's, crying about what an asshole the guy he met in England was. Bow carded her fingers through his hair and listened to his complaints with a half-smile. "He's an idiot if he doesn't appreciate you," she said.

"You always appreciated me," Can bemoaned with a pout. "We should get back together."

Bow snorted. "That ship has long since sailed."

"Is it because of Mai?" Can accused, raising his fists. "I'll fight him!"

"You idiot." She bent down and kissed his forehead. "We were friends first and last, I'll always have your back."

"I liked your back too."

Good tickled Can's feet and said, "Hey...what...about...me? I can have backs."

Can shoved his bare foot up onto Good's cheek and Good shoved it away, laughing so much he fell off the sofa.

As he flailed on the floor his phone rang and Bow made a grab for it off the side table. It rang off before she could answer it. Can sat up. "Who was it?"

Bow tapped the screen a couple of times. "Ae. Here call him back—" She went to hand him the phone and stalled, blinking at the screen. "Seriously, Can – how many unread emails? Three thousand, two hundred and forty-eight!"



“Take a look if you want. It’s only sale receipts and promotional shit, I never check it,” Can explained.

Bow raised an eyebrow and clicked on the email app. Both eyebrows shot up into her hairline. “Why is Tin Medthan an emailing you?”

Can grabbed the phone out of her hand. He’d never shared with anyone that he’d been sleeping with Tin even before England had happened, though he knew Ae and Good suspected. It was one thing to skirt around the truth by not mentioning Tin’s name it was another to outright lie. He wasn’t a good liar and he didn’t like being lied to either. “Tin’s the guy.” Glancing down at the phone and the unopened email that taunted him he clarified, “The guy from London.”

Bow gaped but Good expressed no surprise. Can turned his phone off. “I’ll read it when I’m sober.”

Bow’s expression was still slightly dumbfounded but thankfully she didn’t say anything. “Um,” she started instead, “How are the plans for the business going anyway?”

“I’ve got a meeting with Techno and Type tomorrow actually, so I’ll let you know.”

From there the conversation moved onto safer ground. Can could tell Bow wanted to grill him about Tin, but she obviously interpreted the ‘do not go there’ signals and followed them, much to his relief.

-o-

*Dear Can*

*You made it very clear that you wish to have nothing more to do with me, but I am hoping that you will please hear me out before hitting the delete button.*

*What I am about to divulge is for you only. I know you well enough to trust that you will respect this wish.*

*You were right about Pete and Ae. I did advise Pete to break things off with him. I did this with Pete’s best interests at heart. It had been brought to my attention that Ae is the cousin of an individual named Trump. This is the same person who tried to blackmail Pete for a considerable sum of money less than a year ago. Based on this it was logical so assume that Ae’s intentions were also dishonourable. Pete is my priority and I refuse to apologise for putting his best interests first which is why I made sure that their paths did not cross when Ae went to New York.*

*With regards to my half-brother Tul. Tul was the first born, born to the chosen wife, the love of my father’s life. He was to be the heir to the Medthan an empire. When my grandmother meddled, Tul’s mother left, and my father married my own mother out of duty and I am the son of that union. Neither of my parents cared much for me, I was the spare son, Tul was groomed to take over family business. I was left to my own devices, brought up by the nanny*

*and sent away to boarding school. I saw my parents less than a handful of times a year after that. Tul was never sent away. Instead, he remained in Bangkok and my parents doted on him.*

*He became engaged to the daughter of one of my father's business associates. Two days before the wedding my father found him in bed with the housekeeper's son, Hin, a boy who had grown-up in our house, who he claimed to love. Wadee was already pregnant by then, but Hin didn't know that. When he found out he left. Tul refused to go through with the wedding and left in pursuit of Hin. He never found him.*

*My father threatened to disown him in favour of me.*

*After that Tul tried and failed to set me up and discredit me. The brother I had thought loved me actually hated me. My father found out and, ashamed and embarrassed he made further investigations and what he learnt resulted in him cutting Tul off. It was the only way to save face with his associates. I became the favoured son by default.*

*My father died suddenly, and everything was left to me. It was his wish that I give Tul an allowance, but that is all he is entitled to from the estate which alone is not enough to fund his hedonistic lifestyle.*

*If Tul told you I ruined his life, he means by being born, something I refuse to apologise for.*

*Finally, I can address my confession to you. I realise now that I was wrong to believe that what had come to mean a lot to me was anything more than a casual fling to you. I have already moved out of the penthouse and therefore it is unlikely that our paths will cross again and you need not fear I will renew my unwanted confession. I wish you a happy and lucky life.*

*Kind regards*

*Tin*

Can let go of the breath he'd been holding since about halfway through the email. *Neither of my parents cared much for me.* There went Can's theory that Tin was a spoiled brat. *You need not fear I will renew my unwanted confession.* Fuck.

Tin had failed to address the one thing that hurt Can more than anything else. ...*why can't I find the right words when talking to a Thai Program?* Tin still thought of him as beneath him. A filthy *urchin*. He didn't consider Can as his equal, and true, Can was in a different league financially. He wasn't as pretty as Tin, not as intelligent. Tin had just mistaken lust for love, but that would fade – seemed as though it already had - and the chasm between them would gape open.

There was no point in replying with comforting words, *it wasn't just a fling*, no point at all.

He hit reply and wrote:

*Thank you for the clarification.*

*Ae would never deliberately hurt Pete, or anyone. He's not that kind of guy. He LOVES Pete. Talk to Pete about what you know, let him decide for himself. Make things right.*

*Can*

-0-

Tin hadn't expected a reply at all. When he'd seen the response pop into his inbox a week after he'd sent the mail his traitorous heart, the part of him that still had hope, had almost banged out of his chest.

The disappointment was crushing.

What exactly he'd hoped for he couldn't say, but the terse few words that talked of other people, not them, said it all. Can didn't even care for him and he certainly did not *love* him.

There was nothing else for it other than to bury himself in work and try to exorcise the unwanted feelings that refused to let him rest.

# Eleven

## Five months later.

Tin could count on one hand how many times he'd seen his mother since his father had died. She'd 'retired', at the grand age of forty-three, to the coast where she lived in a villa on one of the Medthanan resorts. Tin had no doubt that she swanned around as though she owned the place, when in fact she didn't own a single brick. The money she'd brought into her marriage to Tin's father hadn't been a vast fortune, she'd been selected because her family was on his grandmother's 'approved' list. Her older brother had gone on to run her family's empire, and that had long since been bought out by the Medthanan Group. Rasaa had never had any intention of *working* for a living anyway. She'd once told Tin as much when trying to instruct him that it was time he found a suitable woman, from a good family, to settle down with. When he'd then told her he liked boys she'd just amended that to a suitable man without batting an eyelid and started listing all the gay sons from good families.

Exactly why she cared who Tin married he could not fathom. He didn't need to 'marry well', or even at all. He didn't need to improve his connections in the same way his father had thirty years ago when he'd married his unsuitable first wife – the horror, an *English* girl who'd been on a gap year who was working at the time in the very resort his mother now lived.

Tin had never met Tul's mother. She'd been chased back to England by the Medthanan matriarch leaving her infant son behind and Tin's father with a broken heart from which he'd never recovered. He'd dutifully married Rasaa and Tin had been born but Tin wasn't sure the man had ever smiled again.

Rasaa had married into the Medthanan's with the intention of continuing in the lifestyle she'd been brought up in. A luxury comfortable home, plenty of money for nice things and all without having to lift a finger.

Tin had no affection for his mother. He did, however, feel a duty towards her as his father had not considered her in his will. The same duty was what had him travelling to the coast to attend her annual birthday party whereby it was important to her than her son make an appearance to be shown off to her friends. It was only one weekend and truth be told, he'd enjoy some time by the sea in the hope that it would distract him from thinking about heartbreak, and work. If he was lucky, he would find a willing body among the inevitable 'suitable' sons his mother would have lined up for him. He needed to break out of the celibacy he'd been living since Can had kicked him to the curb.

It was Friday night and he'd arrived at the resort late, working on his tablet on the plane and in the car right until the moment the driver pulled up at the reception area. He'd powered it down before climbing out and vowing he wouldn't look at it again until Monday morning when he arrived back to the city.

It was nearly midnight, too late to do much other than check into his suite. The party was arranged for the following night, to be held in one of the main bar areas at the resort that was

booked out for the event. He dropped his bag by the door and sank down on the expansive sofa that dominated the living area of the suite. He was so tired, but he didn't feel ready for sleep just yet.

He caught sight of the mini bar and made his way over, and after filling the glass with ice from the dispenser, poured himself a large whisky and headed out onto the balcony to look at the view. The moon was nearly full and cast yellow rays onto the dark sea making it call to him. How he'd love to take a dip right now, but he hadn't taken complete leave of his senses. A swim would be good, yes, but in the sea alone at midnight? Perhaps not.

He could, however, take a dip in one of the swimming pools. That would stave off the constant itch beneath his skin for a short while. He downed the contents of his glass, walked back through the suite and rummaged in his bag for his trunks.

Ten minutes later he was swimming laps in the hotel pool, letting the sound of his body cutting through the water soothe his whirring mind into near submission. This was why he loved swimming so much, why he swam most days in the pool now that he'd moved back into the empty family home. He didn't want to think, he didn't want to feel, he wanted all those thoughts gone from his mind. Swimming could do that.

He wasn't sure how long he'd been swimming for when he reached a natural stop. He was just the right level of tired now, he would hopefully sleep without habitually lying awake for hours staring at ceiling and running things over and over in his head, trying to pinpoint where he'd gone wrong with... No, not now. How would not think about that now. He didn't want to think about it ever again. One day he hoped his traitorous brain would concur, it had been months after all.

He pulled himself up over the edge of the pool and to his feet, planning to grab the towel he'd left on nearby chair. He was stopped in his tracks though when he noticed someone was now sitting on one of the loungers, knees to chest with head resting on the knees. The sound of Tin's footsteps must have startled him though because he jerked his head up and Tin's heart stopped beating.

*"Tin?"*

Tin decided that the whisky must've been stronger than he realised if he was hallucinating now. Except, the figure stood and took a step closer, wearing a puzzled expression. Would a hallucination have longer hair than Tin remembered, and would his pretty face have lost some of its softness?

"Can? I— Er— What are you doing here?"

Would a hallucination look him up and down and swallow as he met his eyes?

"I could ask you the same."

"This is a Medthanan resort. I'm here for a family event."

Can formed a silent ‘oh’ and then said, quietly, “I’m sorry, I didn’t realise. Techno booked it. I would never have...if I’d known. I know you don’t want to see me.”

Tin bit back his first responses. The first, a total lie, *you give allocate yourself too much importance – I’ve moved on*. Then, *I don’t want to see you? It’s the other way around. Even after I explained my actions, you rejected me again*.

“You’re here with your friends?” Tin felt conscious of the water dripping off him, the towel just out of reach.

Can nodded and looked around him. Spotting the towel, he reached over and handed it to Tin who took it gratefully, careful not to touch hands as he did so. “A few of us are here. Um... Techno, Type, Tharn, Good, Ae and Pond. The big launch is next weekend – you know, the gym and the café. Everything is ready and we were driving ourselves mad worrying over every little detail so we decided it would be a good idea to get out of Bangkok for a couple of days.” He scratched the back of his neck. “How have you been?”

Tin finished rubbing his hair with the towel then wrapped it around his waist. “Busy,” he replied, offering a tight smile. “Well, it was good to see you. Enjoy the rest of your stay.” With that he backed away and walked calmly into back into the hotel, resisting the urge to run. He was in the lift when he realised he’d left his robe down by the pool. Lucky it was so late and there was no one around to see him making a half-naked dash through the hotel.

Back in his room he took a brief shower, poured himself another whiskey and, sitting on the sofa tipped his head back, eyes closed. “Damn,” he said to the empty room. “Damn damn damn damn DAMN.”

Five minutes was all it took to realise he most certainly wasn’t over Can. He wasn’t sure he ever would be.

-0-

“I’m not going,” Ae said, glaring at the embossed card that had appeared under door of the three-bedroomed suite they were all sharing. “Tin Medthanant’s *mother’s* birthday party?”

“Pete...might...be...there,” Good offered, earning himself a withering glare.

“What if he is? He ditched me. I doubt he wants to see me.”

Can could tell that Ae was rattled though. Exactly as Can had been, seeing Tin last night. To make things worse, a mostly *naked* Tin. Now this invite appeared. What was he supposed to make of that? Everyone else apart from Ae had jumped onto the ‘free drinks, free food’ bus and could not be reasoned out of attending, after all, the invite had been addressed to *Cantaloupe and friends*.

What was Tin thinking?

“Let’s just enjoy our day on the beach today and worry about birthday parties later,” Can suggested, trying to nudge Ae towards the door and thus the beach where they were meeting

the others. The sooner they got there the sooner he could embark on activities that would stop him from overthinking the invite.

Thankfully, Ae was more the quiet moping type than someone who vented his misery to the world like Can used to. Can knew Ae missed Pete and he wished he could help with that, but he couldn't divulge Pete's secret to him without permission, he owed Tin that much. He didn't know if Tin had made any steps towards 'making it right' for Pete and Ae, but as Pete had not been in touch it was possible that he hadn't done or said anything or that Pete hadn't wanted to know.

The day passed too quickly, both a blessing and a curse, and soon he was standing in front of the mirror inspecting his appearance. The invite stated 'smart/casual' which ordinarily wasn't anything that would bother him, but this was a rich folk party. His best jeans and a blazer over a t-shirt probably wouldn't be fancy enough. At least everyone else was similarly attired, they hadn't packed with the intention of going to a party.

"You guys go ahead," he said when everyone was ready to leave. "I just need to...make a quick call." He held up his phone as evidence and everyone rolled their eyes and with a chorus of 'don't be long' and 'hurry up' they all left. Can listened until their voices disappeared down the corridor outside and retreated to the balcony to collapse onto a lounge.

He didn't like this feeling. The uncertainty. He'd come to terms with having lost Tin. It took him a while but he'd long since concluded that Tin's insults were just a defence mechanism, that Tin was not someone who trusted easily, if at all, and he'd put himself out there for Can, albeit a confession peppered with insults, and been rejected. What was it Tin had written in the email, *'neither of my parents cared much for me'*... Had anyone ever cared for Tin?

He thought he'd completely blown it all, but then last night Tin had been there in the flesh right in front of him. He'd looked a little leaner than before, a little raw around the edges, but only someone who knew Tin well would ever notice. Can knew Tin. It had happened without him realising just as he'd realised too late that he had fallen in love.

Should he be viewing the party invite as a lifeline? One more chance?

Did he dare?

-o-

Tin watched as one by one Can's friends arrived, watching the door as he could admit he always had done when there was a chance Can would walk through it. A scowling Ae was propelled into the room by the friend Tin was sure had a name like Bong or Pong. Six of them in the room and as Tin bored a hole in the door with the intensity of his gaze, the next person to enter was *not* Can. Where the hell was he?

Beside him stood the guy his mother had thrown at him thirty seconds after air-kissing his cheeks and declaring to the room, "Ah, here's my darling boy. Tin, come and kiss your mother." That had been the total sum of his interaction with her and that had been nearly an hour ago – add that to the short amount of time he'd spent with her that afternoon before she'd declared she needed to get her hair done for the party.

To give his mother credit, she'd chosen quite well this time. Ace was the twenty-five-year-old actor son of her latest best friend, and he was more than easy on the eye. It was just a shame that Tin only had eyes for one very different man. So much for breaking his dry spell.

Tin nodded and responded appropriately as Ace talked, but all the while his eyes were watching for Can. Twenty minutes passed and Tin's attention was wandering between observing the entrance and eyeing Can's friends who were mingling with some of the other younger guests – well one of them was holding court and the others were interjecting when there was an opportunity.

Ae stood glowering at one side, glaring at Tin. Right, well, he supposed it wouldn't do to just stand here all night waiting. He excused himself walked towards Ae, almost enjoying watching him bristle at his approach. When they were almost toe to toe Tin said, "Will Can be joining you?"

Ae's eyes narrowed. "He said he was just making a call and would be right behind us."

Tin nodded and glanced again at the entrance, expecting Can to materialise. He was out of luck.

"How is Pete?" Tin's head snapped back in Ae's direction at the question. From the haunted look on his face Tin would guess that Can *hadn't* told him what he'd divulged about Pete. That look and the fact that Ae hadn't punched him yet. Why hadn't Can shared what he knew?

"Pete's doing well," Tin replied, knowing that Pete could be so much better. Like Tin, Pete was functioning at best. He sighed and reached into his inside suit pocket to withdraw a card which he handed to Ae. "Call me when you're back in Bangkok, there's something we need to discuss. This isn't the time or place." The last thing he needed was for the guy to throw a punch at his mother's party, the woman would never forgive him.

Ae stared down at the card. Tin returned his own gaze to the door. Still no Can. With polite nods at the members of group that he was acquainted with, Tin retreated to the empty balcony to clear his head. Where *was* he?

Tin returned from the balcony after a couple of minutes, not liking that he couldn't see who arrived and left from there. Another half-an-hour crept by and there was still no sign of Can. Ace reappeared at his side, this time making it clear that if Tin was interested then so was he, his hand on Tin's lower arm the subtle invite. If Tin hadn't encountered Can again yesterday then perhaps the answer would have been different, he had wanted to move past the hollow feeling that haunted him, but as it was... he just felt nothing.

Over Ace's shoulder Tin finally saw who he'd waiting all night to see. Can walking in as though he wasn't incredibly late, his eyes gravitating to Tin's like a homing beacon then down to Ace's hand on his arm briefly. When he met his eyes again Can smiled brightly, the fake smile Tin knew too well, and nodded before being swept up by his friends.

That was it for the next hour. Neither approached the other. Then Tin took his eyes off Can for a moment to look at a photo Ace was showing him on this phone and when he was free to



look over again, Can was gone.

Tin scanned the crowd and came up blank. It was like all the life had been sucked from the room.

He found himself out in the lobby before he knew what he was doing, and saw Can exiting the bathroom. Of course.

“Are you following me?” Can asked as he neared.

Damn, what was he even doing? Why was he even contemplating putting himself in front of Can again? He might as well hand him a gun and ask him to shoot him now and save himself further misery.

When Tin failed to answer Can said softly, “Shall we go for a walk?”

Tin found himself nodding in the direction of the exit. Can smiled and gestured for Tin to lead the way. They walked silently through the landscaped grounds towards the beach and once they had sand beneath their feet they walked in unspoken agreement towards the water’s edge, both uncaring that the wet sand started to cling to their shoes.

It was an age before either of them spoke. Tin broke first. “How’s your sister?”

“She’s well, busy with placements and study.” He glanced sideways at Tin. “How’s Pete?”

“Pining. I expect Ae to be banging our door down after I admitted what I did.”

Can stopped still. “You said the information was for me only! I haven’t told Ae a thing.” He looked up at Tin with worried eyes. “Shit, was I supposed to?”

Tin shrugged, marvelling at how Can had followed his wishes even while hating him, at the cost of his allegiance to Ae. “You told me how much your friends mean to you. I thought your loyalty would lie with Ae over someone you only ever had sex with.”

“I—” Can flushed at the dig, shaking his head. “What’s changed? That Trump guy is still going to be Ae’s cousin.”

“I jumped to conclusions.” Not to mention, he’d had the whole thing investigated further and there was no doubt Ae was whiter than white.

“And Pete? Why hasn’t he come to Ae?”

“I think he’s scared he’s too late.”

Can turned away and started walking again. Tin caught up easily with his own longer strides, acting on impulse as he caught hold of Can’s wrist and spun him around. Can looked up at him with wide eyes and they both remained there, locked together for what felt like eons.

Then Can stepped in closer, put his other palm on Tin’s cheek and spoke in a low voice, “I was too quick to judge you. I’m sorry.” He rose onto his toes and pressed a kiss to Tin’s lips.

Starved of Can's touch for so long, Tin was quick to ignite, pulling Can close to kiss him how someone like Can should be kissed. Long and deep. He didn't know how long they stayed there, on a secluded part of the beach losing themselves in one another.

He reached with one hand to palm Can's cheek, pulling closer as their lips slot together with scary familiarity. There was something just so perfect and natural about how their mouths fitted together, and Tin realised just how much he had missed kissing Can.

When he felt Can's tongue eagerly brush against his bottom lip, Tin parted his lips and allowed Can to deepen the kiss. He'd probably regret letting this happen, but right now, in that moment, he wanted. So much. Can wrapped his arms around Tin's waist and Tin was done. Tin whispered into his mouth, pulling back a little, "Can."

"Yes?"

"Do you want to come upstairs?"

Can nodded and Tin reached for his wrist and pulled him in closer, pressing a kiss to his lips before winding their fingers together and guiding him back in the direction of the hotel.

## Twelve

Several kisses were shared on the way to Tin's suite, which made it take longer than needed to get there. Tin didn't mind, not when he had Can's body pressed right against his, his hot tongue in his mouth. When they exited the lift on Tin's floor Can released his hand and settled them on Tin's waist, leaning up to kiss him impatiently.

Tin didn't want to let go of Can's mouth for the time it took to unlock the door, so they were still kissing as he fumbled with the key card and once the door clicked open Tin backed Can into the room. The suite was large, and the bedroom might as well be on the other side of the planet it felt so far away. Tin ran his hands down Can's sides to his thighs and lifted. Can quickly got the message and wrapped his legs around Tin's waist. He then made short work of the distance to the bedroom from there, considering they were kissing the whole time.

Can slipped his hands under Tin's shirt to tease the exposed skin giving him goosebumps. When he ran tips of his fingernails down his spine, Tin shivered. He never thought he'd have this again. He didn't want to think about anything beyond tonight. He needed to just be in this moment right now.

"You're wearing too many clothes," Tin mumbled right against Can's lips, and Can pulled out of the kiss and dropped his legs down to allow Tin to shove his blazer off his shoulders to the floor. Can then undid his top two shirt buttons before pulling it over his head and sending it to join the jacket. Tin swallowed at the sight of Can's smooth skin, eyes hungrily taking in the jut of his collarbone and the definition of his chest. He was still just perfect. "Fuck, Can —"

"I want you so bad," Can said, reaching for Tin and undoing his tie and top buttons. Tin shrugged off his jacket and allowed Can to help him out of his shirt. "You really are gorgeous, Tin. God."

"Come here," Tin said, backing up to the bed. He wrapped both arms around Can's neck and tugged him closer, pulling them both downward. Their mouths crash together again, Can hovering over Tin, propping himself up on one elbow.

Can wasted no time, hands eager as they refamiliarized with Tin's body, making quick work of removing his suit trousers and underwear. He was hard now, the inevitable consequence of Can pressing soft kisses against his mouth, his neck, his clavicle. He was not alone in this though, Can was just as hard, erection straining against the fabric of his trousers. Tin somehow stripped him out the rest of his clothes, Can letting out a small gasp when the zipper dragged over the bulge at the front. Once they were both naked, Tin couldn't help but stare. He'd seen Can naked many times now, but this was the first time in months and there were small changes. His stomach is a little more concave, his thighs more muscular. Tiny things but Tin noticed every single one.

They kissed and kissed, like they were just discovering one another. More than they did their first time...more than the last. Can was straddling him, their hard cocks brushing together,

both of them leaking precome.

“Hotel supply condoms and lube are in the drawer,” Tin kissed against Can’s lips. “Do we need both? I haven’t—” Back in London, after a couple of weeks they’d stopped using condoms, both of them clean.

Can pulled back almost reluctantly, like he didn’t want to stop kissing. He stretched across the bed, opening the drawer while managing to remain settled on top of Tin. Tin held his breath. He didn’t want to think about the possibility that Can had been with someone else in the time they’d been apart. Retrieving something from the drawer Can dropped it on the bedspread right next to Tin. No condom, just lube.

Can settled back onto Tin’s thighs and surged forward. Tin loosely clasped his fingers behind Can’s neck, locking their eyes together. “We don’t need a condom.” His eyes searched Tin’s for a moment before he asked, “How do you want to do this?” He leant in and peppered more kisses on Tin’s jaw and neck.

“I think,” Tin started, feeling brave, “that I want you to fuck me.”

Can’s eyes widened, gleaming, “Okay, yeah,” he said, sliding his palm up and over Tin’s abdomen. “I can do that.”

Can kissed down his chest, his abdomen, teasing him so perfectly and slowly as he tore open the packet and coated his fingers with lube. He opened Tin up with one, two and up to three fingers. Tin, new to these sensations, writhed on the bedsheets, hearing his own voice begging for more. It was too much. It wasn’t enough. It was brilliant.

“Are you sure?” Can eventually asked, staring down at him, his breath heavy.

“Yes. I’m sure,” Tin said, his body is shaking a little, as a result of Can’s fingers thrusting right into his sweet spot. “Fuck me please, Can.”

That’s all the encouragement that Can needed, because he immediately slicked himself up with the lube. He lined himself up with Tin, locking their eyes together, before he slowly pushed in.

“Tell me if you want me to stop. I— This is my first time doing *this*.”

It hurt but, not in a bad way. It was strange, he felt wild, even though Can fucked into him slowly at first. His hips built a rhythm that had Tin’s back arching off the bed. Can’s hands were on Tin’s thighs, holding them apart as he snapped his hips into him, leaning down to kiss him over and over, and Tin wrapped his legs around Can’s waist, clutched onto his buttocks with both hands and tried to pull him deeper.

“Feels so good,” Tin managed, feeling his orgasm rising within him. He realised the groans he could hear were coming from *him*. His fingernails dug into Can’s skin as he urged him on.

Can’s thrusts turned erratic as the two of them neared the edge, the filthiest sounds filling the room. Tin reached down for his cock, stroking himself with one hand, but Can noticed and

said, "Let me," and his hand worked quickly around Tin. It was enough to bring Tin to the brink.

"I'm close, Tin," Can said, words kissed against the skin of Tin's neck, as Can buried his face in the crook of it. Tin, moved his arms around Can's neck, holding on tight.

"Me too," Tin said, voice strained. He hissed in pleasure, head rolling back. "Just like that, Can. Make me come."

After that, it only took a couple of thrusts, accompanied by the friction of Can's hand, for Tin to explode all over his stomach with a low groan, eyes squeezed shut. Can followed him over a couple of seconds later, Tin's name falling from his lips as he filled him with his come.

-O-

Can woke up to an empty bed, the sheets cold beside him. He took a moment to recap the events of the evening before, more than aware he couldn't blame alcohol, he'd only a few sips of whatever drink Techno had handed him when he'd arrived at the party. He had been the one to initiate the kiss. It had been him who had woken Tin a couple of hours later for another go, itching for Tin to fuck him, like he was making up for lost time. Perhaps he was. Tin had given no indication that he'd missed Can at all, that he wanted this to be more than sex.

Can had spent far too long dwindling in his hotel room before finally coming down to the party. His eventual conclusion after all the fretting was that if Tin gave him a second chance, then he would grab it. He would show him that he loved him too.

If Tin ever really had loved him, or still did. Whichever one.

He rolled out of bed found his phone in the pocket of his blazer on the floor – it was after eleven! - and ambled into the bathroom. He peed and took a quick shower then wearing nothing but his damp towel, and ignoring the rumbling of his stomach, went in search of Tin. He found him out on the balcony off the suite's living area, sitting on a large wicker sofa tapping away on his laptop. Can enjoyed a few moments of just staring at him before Tin noticed his presence and looked up at him.

Tin's expression was closed, but that was nothing new to Can now. "Hi," he said and bent down to kiss him on the lips. *Show him you love him.*

Tin put the laptop on the side table and Can took that as an invite to climb onto Tin's lap and straddle him. Tin's hands folded around his hips, thumbs caressing ridges there before they disappeared under the towel. The closed expression had long faded, replaced by something that could be adoration, could be lust. As Can bent in to press their lips together he found he didn't care, the fact that he'd elicited any reaction at all was a win.

The towel was soon flung to one side and, still stretched from earlier, Can easily slid down on Tin's cock once he'd freed it from the confines of Tin's sweats. It slow and lazy, with lots of kissing long sighs, Tin's long fingers fixated on Can's chocolate brown nipples, Can's cock trapped between their stomachs all the friction he needed. When they both came within

moments of each other they kissed languidly until they were interrupted by the distant ringing of Can's phone drifting through from the bedroom.

"I'd better get that," Can said reluctantly, kissing Tin's cheek before climbing off his lap and reaching for the towel to cover himself. He headed into the bedroom and fished his phone out of his jacket pocket from the floor.

"Hello."

Can heard the panic in the voice on the other end. It was Techno. "Calm down, I can't keep up with what you're saying."

Techno sniffed loudly. "I said it's all gone, the money for the business—he took it. It was all a con. The business adviser. Everything went into his name somehow and he's screwed us over. I thought he was legit, Can, I swear."

Can had taken out a bank loan, finally completely shelving any idea of marrying to get the inheritance now that Lizzy was partnering with him. A fake marriage would be just too messy. Dishonest. Not that he'd ever genuinely considered it, but it had always been an option should all else fail. Techno and Type had loans too, but the costs for the gym had rocketed and Type's Dad had gifted him a substantial amount pay for all the equipment.

"Shit," Can said, his heart sinking into his shoes. The café was separate to the gym, two different investments, but under the same roof, two halves of a whole. If they went down so would he. "Where are you now?"

Can learnt that Techno and Type were in a taxi to the airport to get an earlier flight back to Bangkok. He needed to go with them. He needed to help. They were in this together. "You go ahead, I'll catch the next flight."

He was about to end the call and head to his room to pack when it occurred to him to ask, "The adviser, Techno. What is his name?" Can hadn't had any involvement with it, and they'd been so busy getting everything ready he hadn't thought to ask.

Techno's answer set off a ringing in his ears. The answer was obvious really. Who else would it be? He hung up the call and stood, numb, staring blankly ahead.

Distantly he registered that Tin was also now on a call. He turned slowly, watching as he paced the length of the balcony, fully dressed now with no sign that he'd just had sex less than ten minutes ago. Slowly he walked over and stood in the open doorway, oblivious to the glorious view over the Gulf.

Can could hear a tinny voice but couldn't make out what they were saying.

"I understand," Tin said eventually, his usual expression had returned. "I'll get back to Bangkok as soon as possible." He ended the call and closed his eyes briefly before turning his attention to Can, full of something unfamiliar. He looked down at the phone and cast to one side as though it was to blame for whatever he'd just been told.

“What’s happened?” Can asked, feeling a prickling sensation creeping up his spine that had nothing to do with the orgasm he’d enjoyed minutes before.

“Tul’s been in a car accident. He’d badly hurt. He—” Tin paused and stalled thickly. He raised his eyes. “Your sister was with him... Can, apparently they were supposed to get married this morning.”

Can felt the blood drain from his face. “Is she—”

“My guy says she’s been lucky and has just a few scrapes and a broken wrist.”

Relieved Can scratched the back of his head. “Shit, Tin. My grandfather’s will! Given what you told me, what are the chances he’s marrying her for love? He’s after the money.” Can had told Tin about the will back in London and they’d laughed about it at the time. He took a deep breath and told Tin what he’d just learned from Techno, ending, “...the ‘adviser’ was Tul.”

Tin cursed loudly, resuming his pacing of the balcony. After two turns he stopped and said, “This is my fault. All of it.” Before Can could protest, he added, “Go and pack. We need to get back to Bangkok.”

-o-

The trip back to Bangkok was a in a private plane and passed in near silence. Tin had retreated into himself and barely responded to anything Can said with anything other than the bare minimum.

Can had called his parents, promising he was on his way to Ley and that they didn’t need to rush to her, he would let them know how she was once he got there. He didn’t mention weddings and inheritances, he didn’t want them to worry more than necessary.

At Bangkok Airport a black SUV was waiting. Tin ushered Can inside, holding the door open as he slid across the back seat expecting Tin to follow him inside. Instead, he took a step back.

“You’re not coming with me?” Can asked, surprised. Once again, he was unable to read Tin. He hated it.

“It was good to catch up again, Can,” Tin stated, not looking at him. “Take care of yourself.” He closed the door and Can heard him tap the roof of the car before it pulled away leaving Tin at the kerb.

In shock, Can turned to watch him out of the blacked-out window as the distance opened up between them, knowing Tin wouldn’t be able to see him. “*Good to catch up,*” he whispered as he saw another SUV pull up and Tin climbed inside before the car he was in rounded a corner and the view was gone. “I guess I have the answer. He doesn’t love me.”

# Thirteen

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tin spent just two days in Bangkok before he flew to London. Once there he took a car to Bristol and without even checking into his hotel, went straight to the address Keen had supplied him and rang the doorbell.

The person who answered the door hadn't changed a bit. Still ridiculously handsome with the same sad eyes, now reflecting shock at Tin's unexpected appearance.

"*Tin?*"

"Hello, Hin. How have you been?"

-O-

"Darling, Ola tells me that you broke things off with Ace after just two dates." Rasaa took a dainty sip from the glass of wine in front of her and pinned Tin with her accusing glare.

"Really, Tin. He's perfect for you. Handsome, famous, rich."

"And boring," Tin added, wishing himself anywhere but having lunch with his mother. She was in Bangkok on one of her regular week-long shopping trips and he'd been summoned. He knew he was free to say no, but life was just easier if he allowed her to think she had some importance to him. "Frankly I'm amazed I managed two dates. Nice guy? Yes. Boyfriend? Never. I prefer someone a little more feisty." Why he'd even agreed to one date he didn't know. Ace had taken him by surprise by messaging him just as he'd switched his phone on when he'd landed back from England.

He'd just wanted to forget.

Rasaa's eyes narrowed. "Feisty is a euphemism for 'common', no? You'd prefer one of those *colourful* young men you invited to my birthday party...perhaps the one you left with, hmm?"

Tin grimaced at the observation, too surprised to maintain neutrality.

"Boys like that are the type you can have some discretionary fun with, nothing more." She gave a tinkling laugh as she appeared to reminisce. "We've all been there. They're never keepers."

"I really don't think you get a say in who I 'keep' or not, Mother. If I wanted to...elope with someone 'colourful' then that's my business." If only the woman knew that he'd been turned down by someone she would consider far too common for her only son.

"Elope! That kind of behaviour is something your good for nothing brother partakes in—"



“So, did you go and see Tul in the end?” Tin interrupted, keen not to get into any further discussion about his love life.

She frowned but took the hint, shaking her head, “That boy has brought nothing but shame to the family name. After this I’m washing my hands of him for good.”

“He’s being discharged on Friday. I’ve made arrangements for him to stay at the house.”

The look on his mother’s face was priceless. “Whatever for? I thought you’d long since disassociated yourself from him.”

Tin gave a slight shrug, “He’s still my brother.”

-0-

Someone somewhere liked them, Can decided. Fate hadn’t completely pulled the rug out from beneath Techno and Type after all, and by association, Can’s business was good to go as well. He didn’t fully understand Type’s explanation of how they’d recovered the money considering Tul Medthanant had been in hospital at the time, but he supposed he didn’t need to know the details if everything was mostly back on track. The only fall out from what had happened was that the launch was put back two weeks due to having to re-order the gym equipment.

‘Plant and Page’ was opening its doors today. He’d resisted suggestions that he call the café ‘Cantaloupe’s’ or similar. Too personal. Plant, because all the food was plant based, and Page because he had decided to incorporate second-hand books that customers could read and buy if they wanted.

Ley was recuperating from the accident with Ma and Pa in Chiangmai. The whole sorry story had come out the moment she’d laid eyes on Can when he’d arrived to collect her from hospital. Tul had approached her saying he’d heard about the inheritance from Can – which was total bullshit, Can had never said a word to him during their brief ‘friendship’ – and had offered to marry her for a cut of the money, promising his silence and an annulment once the money had been paid out. Ley had agreed, telling him she and a couple of friends she’d met on her university course had talked of taking a year out and travelling to Europe when Tul had made the offer she’d seen a way to make it happen. “I didn’t plan on anyone ever finding out!” she’d whined, facepalming her uninjured hand. The crash had happened on the way to the ceremony.

Tul, Can knew, was still in the hospital but would make a full recovery, albeit with some physical scars to remind him of his failed ‘wedding’ day. Can had not been to visit him to give him a piece of his mind. The way he felt about the guy now made all his former misgivings make perfect sense, and he was certain that if he did see him, he’d put the guy back into a coma.

How was someone like that even related to someone as amazing as Tin?

*Tin.* Can had heard nothing from him since the moment he’d rounded that corner and Tin’s SUV had vanished from his sight.

“What’s with the gloomy expression?” Bow appeared in his line of sight, pulling him into a full-on hug. “This is your big day! This is finally a reality. I’m so proud of you! I’ve gotta say that the place looks amazing.”

“It really does, Can,” said a familiar voice as a presence appeared at his left shoulder. “Congratulations!”

Can couldn’t help the smile then as he turned and saw the smiling face of his good friend. “Ae!” They greeted one another with a one-armed bro hug. They pulled apart and Can said, “Thanks so much for coming along.”

They made small-talk for a while, easy and familiar as they all still lived in the same apartment, for the next few weeks at least.

Bow tapped Ae’s arm and sweetly said, “Would you get me a drink, I’m so thirsty.”

Ae rolled his eyes, grinned and immediately set off towards the café counter where free launch day drinks were being served by one of Can’s new employees, Prem. Lizzy was busy nearby fussing over some food samples she was piling onto a plate held by a besotted looking Eoin.

Bow closed orange tipped fingers around Can’s arm. “Quick, while he’s gone, Can.” Bow glanced over his shoulder to check no one else was around and said, “I bumped into Tin yesterday.”

Can’s heart started hammering a heavy metal beat. “How— How did he look?”

Bow and Good were still the only people who knew about Tin. He could hardly talk to Ae about it, and Good would listen but he’d needed someone who would give him a cuddle and tell him everything would work out, even if they both knew that was a lie, so he’d confided in his ex-girlfriend what happened on their weekend away.

“He looked bloody gorgeous, as if that guy would ever look otherwise! Anyway, he asked after you, and I said you were doing well, told him about the launch today, said he should come.” She paused and chewed her lip. “He said he couldn’t make it and asked me to wish you well.”

Can swallowed. “That’s good to hear.” Couldn’t come? More like he didn’t *want* to come. Didn’t want to see Can.

“That’s not all. We only chatted for like, two minutes, and as I was leaving, he grabbed my arm and asked me not to tell you I’d seen him after all.” She shook her head, clearly still baffled.

Can forced a smile. He felt sick knowing that Tin was out there somewhere, living his life, not caring about him. Not wanting to see him like Can craved him. Not loving him anymore. He’d been doing okay these last couple of weeks, keeping busy, sometimes managing as long as half-an-hour without thinking about Tin and remembering anew that he’d screwed things up, missed his chance.

He strongly suspected that how he was feeling was written all over his face because Bow made a little squeak and pulled him onto a hug. Can buried his face in her neck and squeezed his eyes closed. He would not cry. He would not. Today was supposed to be a happy day. All his friends were going to attend throughout the day. Techno and Type were giving tours of the gym and sending guests through to the café. The place was buzzing, and here he was fighting off tears in his ex-girlfriend's arms.

He pulled away just as Ae reappeared with a tall glass of mango juice for Bow. He raised an eyebrow at Can and handed Bow the drink. Can beamed back at him and after a couple more minutes of small talk, got waylaid by Money for a short while before he went to mingle with the other guests. He couldn't believe the day was finally here. His own business! It would take a lot of hard work. He'd already become something of an expert on social media promotion, which was a huge job just by itself.

Still, even though things were going well professionally, he felt hollow inside. He *needed* Tin. He'd spent five long empty months without him and the moment he'd seen him again his axis had tilted. He'd thought — *hoped* — when they'd reconnected that night that he'd got his second chance, but Tin had obviously thought otherwise.

Work was the perfect distraction from how his mind would immediately turn to thoughts of Tin when he had nothing else to think about. He thought about reaching out to him, confessing how he really felt, but uncharacteristically for him, he was scared. Nothing or no one had ever mattered as much to him as Tin did. He was in love, and he didn't foresee a time when he wouldn't love that proud, stubborn, man with all his soul. Knowing Tin no longer felt the same made him want to hide away in a dark space and curl into a ball.

Tin had asked Bow not to tell him she'd seen him. Why?

"Can!" Lizzy was calling him from behind the counter. "Have you seen that tray of brownies?"

Can pasted on his signature smile and went to help her out. When the brownies were located and laid out ready to serve, Eoin appeared and said, "Can, there's a guy just arrived asking for you."

Heart in his throat, Can followed the direction Eoin was nodding in, allowing himself a brief flash of hope that was immediately quashed when he saw Job hovering in the doorway clutching a bunch of roses. Great.

Thanking Eoin, he headed over to greet him, his heart sinking into his shoes at the hopeful expression on the guy's face.

-o-

Tin strode hastily towards his car, solely focussed on hiding away with it's safe confines, hoping he'd gotten away without being seen.

What had he been thinking? He'd had no intention whatsoever of going to the launch and breaking his self-imposed deprivation of all things Can. He'd made sure he would be on the

other side of the city so he wouldn't even be tempted. When he'd bumped into, or rather been accosted by one of Can's flatmates yesterday – the one who he now knew was Can's ex-girlfriend and who he intensely disliked as a result – he'd gone as far as asking her not to tell Can they'd conversed. He hadn't wanted to run the risk of Can getting ideas about inviting him to the event out of politeness, thinking he'd been wanting to attend. He didn't want to be a footnote.

It was one thing denying himself Can, but apparently fate had other ideas. Fate or his unruly subconscious. His appointment had cancelled, and he'd received the message just as he'd been driving past the exit that was just a five-minute drive away from the café. He'd been parked outside before he knew it, staring out through the windscreen at the flags and balloons outside the two new businesses and the building that he knew housed Can.

He'd made it inside after a twenty-minute fight with himself, bumped straight into Techno who had hugged him. *Hugged* him, thanking him for getting the stolen money from Tul and for sorting out all the legalities around the whole fraud and ensuring Tul had no claim on the new business. Tin had smiled and reminded Techno that he mustn't tell Can about his involvement. He'd left it unsaid that he'd only done it for Can, paid the money back out of his own pocket. Had it been someone else his conscience wouldn't have let them suffer because of his brother, but he would not have got personally involved.

When Techno had relinquished his hold on him, Tin had wound his way through the milling guests and found himself on the threshold of the café space. There were open bifold doors connecting it to the reception area of the gym that would enable gym users to enter during shared opening hours, with a separate café entrance set between two more large bifold doors that could be opened and closed depending on the season and the weather. There were outside tables separated from the plaza area with large plant pots and string lantern lights wound around a wooden trellis.

Where the gym was sleek and modern, the café had a cosy feel, with booths along the one wall and deliberately mismatched wooden furniture and there were plants everywhere. There was a corner full of bookcases and large floor cushions. It was welcoming. Warm.

His eyes had homed in on Can, wearing what was probably a uniform, fitted olive green trousers with a white t-shirt and a grey apron, just in time to see him fall into the arms of the ex-girlfriend who petted his hair gently and looked at him with such love that Tin wanted to vomit. He'd turned right back round again and left.

He yanked open the car door and fell inside. Crashing his palms down onto the steering wheel, trying not to scream in frustration as he blinked back tears.

Why did he do this to himself? Can had moved on, of course he had. Back into the arms of his ex? Unlike Tin, Can was bisexual, and there was history there. The girl had looked at him as though she wanted to hold him forever. If Tin wasn't so jealous, he would empathise.

Trouble was, he was so jealous he couldn't see straight. He heard Can's voice in his head saying, 'you're not worth it' and he squeezed his eyes closed for a moment to gather himself.

After a few seconds he started the engine and pulled away from the parking space only to slam on the brakes as someone rushed right in front without looking where they were going. Tin recognised him as the annoying guy Can knew from that party months ago, expression furious as he stormed past holding a crushed bunch of roses. "What's his problem?" Tin mumbled under his breath, waiting until the guy was well clear before carrying on to his destination.

-O-

Tin flew to South Korea the next day on business. It was something he could have handed off to someone else, but he felt like he needed to put some distance between himself and Bangkok. He buried himself in legal red tape around an acquisition deal and only emerged to return to the hotel to sleep.

When his flight arrived back in Bangkok four days later and switched on his phone to a torrent of voicemails, one after the other in what felt like a never-ending stream of beeping. All from his mother demanding he call her right away.

Also, one text message from Ace, *mightve put my foot in it with ur mother when she tried to grill me on why we only had 2 dates but saying ur in love with some1 else, sorry :-)*

Great. Tin recalled the final date with Ace, when he'd had asked Tin back to his place and Tin's response had been far less than enthusiastic and Tin had found himself saying, "I can't. It wouldn't be fair to lead you on."

When Ace had asked if there was someone else Tin had barely nodded but apparently that had been enough for Ace to jump to the right conclusion and no doubt his mother would connect the dots after what she'd witnessed at her party.

He could only assume that was why his mother was burning up his voicemail. He wasn't sure what she could have to say on the subject after their last conversation when he'd told her to mind his own business. He deleted all the messages without listening and pocketed the phone as he spotted his driver in the waiting zone.

Stuck in traffic on the way to the office his phone vibrated again and checking it he found a text message from Ae, *bring Pete to the café Saturday at 3pm.*

Tin felt sick. He didn't need to ask for clarification to know that this was Can's café. When Ae had made contact a week earlier Tin had invited him to his office and admitted what he'd done and offered to sort things out. He'd expected Ae to leap across the desk and punch him in the nose. Part of him had wanted that. Instead, Ae had deflated and *thanked* Tin for looking out for Pete, said he needed time to process had left.

He had to go through with it though. He owed it to Pete not to let him suffer any longer. Today was Monday. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before calling Pete and summoning him home from New York.

## Chapter End Notes

The cafe name is a nod to the great Led Zeppelin, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant as well as to my local plant based cafe, Pot and Page.

# Fourteen

## Chapter Notes

This is the end folks, thanks for sticking with me.

Who the hell was banging so loudly at this hour? Can groaned and rolled onto his back, flinging an arm over his eyes. Had one of the guys gone out and forgotten their key? Seriously. It was Friday night and he'd had a long day, long week actually. Getting a new business up and running was bloody hard work. It was going well, which was great, but at the end of every day he felt like he'd run a marathon.

The banging persisted and Can flipped his feet to the floor and rubbed his eyes, realising he wasn't even in his bed, but had nodded off on the sofa. A quick tap on his phone revealed the time to be nearly 11pm.

Mai emerged from his room, wearing pyjama bottoms and nothing else. "What's that noise?" he grumbled, padding over to the front door before Can could even get himself to his feet. A moment later Pond appeared with ChaAim close on his heels.

Mai opened the front door to reveal Tin's mother.

Tin's *mother* was at the door. What the actual hell? Can found the energy from somewhere to stand.

Mai obviously recognised her from the birthday party because he said, "Mrs Medthanan, what a surprise."

She shot Mai a filthy look that would have felled a demon. "Where is the one called 'Can'?" she spat, eyes searching the room and landing on him, her already haughty expression morphing into utter disdain. "*You!*" She raised a jewelled finger and pointed.

Can felt actual fear for a moment. She looked like she was about to smite him! What could the woman want with him? Was she going to rip him a new one for daring to turn Tin down all those months ago? Would she even know about that? Can doubted it.

"Good evening, Mrs Medthanan," Can tried, with a small smile that was an effort. What had Tin written in that email to him? *Neither of my parents cared much for me, I was the spare son.* Can had little care for a woman who could treat her own son, someone Can himself loved with all his heart, like he didn't matter. "What can I do for you?"

Her eyes flashed and her cosmetically enhanced features twisted into something very ugly as she stepped towards him. He vaguely registered the shocked faces of his friends as she jabbed her finger into his chest and said, "You will stay away from my son."

Can, feeling the anger rise, replied as he stepped back, “I will not. If Tin wants me — if he *needs* me — I’m always going to be there.” *Unlike you.* “He matters.”

“You insolent little brat!” she hissed, fist clenching. “You and that scheming sister of yours —”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Mai interrupted. “I think it would be best if you left now.”

“This is none of your business!” Mrs Medthanan didn’t even glance in Mai’s direction. “This is between me and—”

“Mai is right,” Can agreed, thankful for his friend’s interjection. “You need to leave.” He nodded in the direction of the door, thankful to ChaAim for opening it and making a sweeping gesture towards Mrs Medthanan.

She glanced at the open door and drew herself up to her full height, and returned to glaring at Can. “Who did you think you are? Someone like you will never be good enough for my son! You—”

“Leave, or I call the police,” Mai said, folding his arms over his naked chest.

Mrs Medthanan finally turned to look at Mai, looking him up and down in disgust. Mai raised an eyebrow and she said, “Fine, I’m going.” To Can she said, “Stay away from Tin.” With that she straightened her shoulders and marched out the apartment. ChaAim let go of the door and it slammed loudly.

“Wow,” said Pond, finding his voice for the first time since Mrs Medthanan’s arrival. “What the fuck was that? You and Tin Medthanan?” Pond made a ‘you did good’ face and ChaAim elbowed him.

“She’s a bit late to the party. Me and Tin — it’s all over now,” Can said, rubbing the back of his neck in an attempt to stop his head from spinning. The other three were looking at him like he’d grown a new head. Can sighed heavily. “Thanks for having my back.”

Mai patted him consolingly on the back. “Anytime.”

Can managed a smile. “There’s some beer in the fridge. I think we need a drink.” He really wanted time alone to process what had just happened, but he felt he owed his friends an explanation — as best he could anyway when he had no clue himself!

Later, when he finally escaped and into his own bed he lay on his back staring at the shadows cast from the bedside lamp onto the ceiling he wondered, what did it all mean? Why had she visited now when things had ended? Did she know something he didn’t? Could he even hope that perhaps he’d had it all wrong and there was still a chance for him with Tin?

By the time sleep claimed him he’d decided that whatever it had been, it didn’t mean Tin still cared about him at all. His mother was right, someone like him *would* never be good enough for Tin. Tin deserved someone who was his equal. Can would never come close.



“I feel sick,” Pete said as Tin pulled the car into a space near ‘Plant and Page’ on Saturday.  
“What if he hates me now?”

“Would he want to see you if he hated you?” Tin asked, undoing his seatbelt and hoping that Pete wouldn’t notice that he was as nervous, if not worse, than Pete himself. “He knows that all of this is my fault. If he hates anyone it’s going to be me.”

They both stayed staring blankly out of the windscreen in silence until Pete finally undid his own seatbelt and said, “Right, well, time to get it over with.”

The two of them climbed onto the car and walked purposefully in the direction of the café. Once inside Tin noticed Ae immediately, talking with Techno near the counter. When Ae saw Pete he froze and stared at him, the expression on his face so soft as they approached that any fears Tin had that the reconciliation wouldn’t go as planned faded away.

Relieved, Tin scanned the busy premises looking for Can but there was no sign of him.

“Can’s not here,” Techno said, obviously reading Tin correctly.

“That’s a shame,” Tin responded, almost shaking with the disappointment. What he’d been hoping for he didn’t really know, he’d been both dreading and over-thinking it knowing he’d been coming here with Pete. None of the scenarios he’d gone over in his head had been that Can wouldn’t even be there!

Techno gave him a searching look then he closed his eyes and nodded to himself before locking his intense gaze upon him and saying, “Come to the gym office with me, please? I want to tell you something.”

Surprised, Tin didn’t argue when Techno led him out through the bifold doors and across the gym reception area into a small functional room that contained two desks with laptops and had a huge notice board dominating one wall. Techno indicated that Tin should sit down, and he did as asked. Techno reached to the side of the desk and opened a small fridge and took out two bottles of water, handing one to Tin who took it gratefully. It was a hot day.

Expectantly he watched Techno who was taking his time opening his own water bottle. Without looking up from his task he said, “I’ve always been a little bit in love with Can.”

“... ”

Tin felt his hackles immediately rise and Techno looked up at him as if expecting to see anger reflected back at him. He held up his hands placatingly. “Hear me out. Please?”

Tin nodded, waiting.

“A little bit in love...a lot in love. It doesn’t matter. Can never noticed, never saw me that way. I thought maybe one day, you know? He can take a while to catch on sometimes and I hoped... Anyway. I know now he’ll only ever see me as a friend. I’m not the one he’s in love with.”

“Where are you going with this?” Tin snapped then, trying to hold his shattering heart in one piece. Can was in love. Who the fuck with? Can could love someone else but not him?

Techno sighed and shook his head, continuing, “Your *mother* showed up at Can’s last night. She was rude, told him to stay away from you. Said he wasn’t good enough for you.”

Tin opened his mouth and closed it again. He could not have heard that right.

“It’s true, Pond told me, he was there when she turned up. But that’s not the point of what I’m trying to tell you which is that Can told her he’d always be there if you needed him. Told her you mattered to him.” Techno nodded. “Then they kicked her out.”

Tin wasn’t often lost for words but right now, he couldn’t formulate anything.

“You understand what I’m saying, right? You’re a clever guy.”

“I—” Alright, still no words.

“I’m not blind, know you care for him. You saved our asses because of him.” There was a knock on the door and Techno stood and called, “Be right there!”

Tin watched Techno as he stood made the two steps to the door. Finally, he managed to speak and said, “I understand.” Techno nodded at him and slid out into the reception area leaving Tin alone with his own whirring thoughts. To the empty room he said, “What the hell?” He palmed his face, covering his eyes.

When he emerged five minutes later and returned to the café, he found Pete and Ae were nowhere to be seen which was hopefully a good sign. Checking his phone, he found a text message from Pete confirming he’d left with Ae.

Tin drove home and found Hin sitting at the kitchen island reading something on his tablet. They greeted one another and Tin said, “He know you’re here yet?”

Hin shook his head. “He’s keeping to his room.” He looked sad for a moment. “I want him to come out of his own accord, because he’s feeling better, before he sees me.”

“Whatever you think is best,” Tin said, patting him on the shoulder and helping himself to a coffee from the filter machine before sitting down at a right angle to the other man. He looked at him and said, “You still love Tul, even with all he’s done. How did you bear it? Being apart from him for so long I mean.”

Hin smiled sadly. “I didn’t.”

Tin nodded and took a sip of the hot coffee, relishing in the bitter taste. He needed it to keep himself alert today. There was no point in sitting around overthinking things. He needed to get out there and—

The front gate chimed. Tin raised an eyebrow at Hin who shrugged. Obviously, he wasn’t expecting any guests. Tin had not long moved back into the house, and it was running on minimum staff. When he was on his own he could fend for himself, but he did need people to

clean and take care of the garden. When he'd brought Tul back from the hospital he'd employed a nurse to look after him but so far that was it. Everyone was probably busy, so he walked over to the intercom himself. "Medthanan," he said, fully expecting it to be a delivery of some kind.

"Tin? It's me, Can."

Tin's finger lifted off the button in shock. Apparently, he didn't need to 'get out there' at all. Can had come to him.

-o-

When the line went dead Can thought that was it, game over. Tin didn't want to see him after all. Of course, *of course*. Mrs Medthanan was right, he wasn't good enough for Tin. What was he even doing there?

He jumped in surprise when Tin's voice came back through the intercom. "I've opened the gate at the side. Come through and meet me in the garden."

Once he was looking for it, Can spied the gate and slipped through it easily. He walked down a long characterless path that was a tall hedge on one side and house wall on the other until it suddenly opened out into a wide but narrow expanse of land that stretched the length of the house but was probably the width of a couple of tennis courts between the house and the lake. The lake was vast, all tall glass sided buildings and busy road on the other side.

He found Tin at balustrade, his back to Can as he stared out over the still water. Can walked up beside him and leant his forearms on the railing in a mirror of Tin's pose. He felt Tin notice his arrival and then nothing. They stood like that in silence for what had to be at least five minutes. Can was aware of every breath Tin took.

Tin broke first, turning towards Can, hip resting against the railings now as he looked at him. Can turned his head and when he saw Tin's expression he turned to face him. He'd never seen him look like he did now. Not even the time he'd confessed and Can had rejected him. He looked sick with nerves now as he looked at Can.

"News has reached me that my mother paid you a visit," he began, eyes boring into Can's as if trying to read the answer from there. "I'm sorry she was rude to you."

After Tin's mother had left the night before Can hadn't been able to rest. He'd been so tired at work that morning he'd left Lizzy in charge and gone home to catch up with himself, but it hadn't worked. He couldn't stop thinking about it. Why had she come to him? Eventually he came to the conclusion that she would not have done it if she hadn't believed there was something to worry about.

Regardless of any of it, looking at Tin now, Can knew he had to say what he came here to tell him. It had to come from him. He had to be the one to put himself on the line. He hadn't made it clear enough before, on that weekend by the sea, simply *showing* him wasn't enough. He had to *tell* him.

He shook his head. "I don't care how rude she was. Her coming to see me had the opposite effect than she intended." He stepped in closer to Tin, tiptoed up and kissed him on the lips. Pulling back, he said, "Gave me the courage to tell you that I love you."

The expression on Tin's face was hard to read. His actions, however, gave Can hope. His arms went around him and Can found himself lifted up on the balustrade with Tin inserting himself between his legs and kissing him thoroughly. Long minutes passed, Can wrapped his legs around Tin's back and his arms around his neck. It wasn't like other kisses they'd shared which had nearly always been a prelude to sex. This was kissing for kissing's sake. Not that Can wouldn't be amendable to it leading to something more. He kind of always wanted Tin.

Tin pulled back and rested his forehead against Can's, their breathing hot and heavy. "Did you mean it? You love me?"

"I love you," Can repeated, with another kiss.

"Love me as in you'll be my boyfriend?"

Can nodded, gaze blended with Tin's to watch the wariness fade and the joy replace it.

"How about fiancé?"

Can thought he should probably be saying it was a bit too soon for that, but he also knew he never wanted to be apart from Tin again, so he said, "Maybe in a couple of weeks. You might have forgotten how annoying I can be."

Tin smiled then, so handsome in that moment that Can's breath caught. "I don't need a couple of weeks. I love you. I think it started that first day, when you were covered in mud and glared at me, though I was oblivious at the time. I've never felt like this about anyone else before." He tipped Can's chin with his forefinger. "Marry me."

Can didn't need asking again. "Yes." Then, huge grin plaster over his face. "You're not after my inheritance are you?"

### One year later

Weddings take a long while to organise. A wedding between two guys was still illegal in Thailand for a start. Go somewhere quiet, Tin thought, then come home and have a bigger celebration. The legal side, where Thai law wouldn't recognise the union could be sewn up in other ways by Tin's legal team.

How wrong he was. Now, a whole year after asking Can to marry him, Tin had found himself part of a *double* wedding, in Australia, shared with Pete and Ae with all of their combined friends and family. He'd even invited his mother who was now acting like she hadn't tried to warn Can away from him.

In a twist of fate, Tin's best man was Tul. He didn't think they would ever be close as he they once had been because that hadn't been real. However, once Tul had recovered from his injuries and been reunited with Hin, the brothers had sat down and had a long talk. Aired

everything. Tin had learnt how his grandmother had really treated Tul, realised that while Tul's actions had been unacceptable he could understand how Tul had ended up in the place he had. All of it had caused him to lose the love of his life. Now that Hin was back Tul's anger had left him. After the wedding, Tul and Hin were relocating to the States for a couple of years so Tul could head up the business over there. He knew it was his last chance, Tin had to trust that this time he'd learnt his lesson.

"You're not regretting this already are you?" Can came up behind him where he stood on the balcony and wrapped his arms around Tin's waist and pressed his cheek to his back. The ceremony was over, they'd done photographs, champagne and canapés and now they had an hour to change before the reception.

Tin grabbed his hands and turned around in the circle of his arms. "Never." He kissed Can's forehead. "You're mine now."

Can snorted. "I always was."

Can had moved in with him the day after they had declared their feelings to one another. Tul's presence in the house had made for an interesting dynamic, but it seemed that Tul's liking for Can had been genuine and after some awkwardness, mainly around Tul's fraudulent activity to Can's friends and dubious marriage deals with his sister, they had got along quite well. Can and Hin had become immediate fast friends. Can seemed to have that effect on most people. Except maybe Fong.

Tin had set his lawyers onto Can's grandfather's will and the marriage clause had quickly been deemed unreasonable in law and thrown out, which meant Can and Lemon inherited. It wasn't a huge sum of money to Tin but it was enough for Can to pay off his business loan, give some money to his parents and have some left over. Aside from living rent free, something Tin would not compromise on, Can refused to let Tin fund him and insisted on paying his way with everything else, even the wedding.

"So," Can said, wrapping his fist around Tin's tie and raising an eyebrow. "We've got an hour to kill. Whatever will we do with the time?"

"I have no idea, Cantaloupe Medthanan. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I have a few ideas," Can said and pulled Tin in for a kiss.

They were fifteen minutes late for their own reception, even beating Ae and Pete who managed to only be ten minutes late, and not one single guest was surprised.

## End Notes

Not beta read. Feel free to point out any blunders.

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