

Prologue: The Moon in the Sky

“Being alone only begins to feel lonely when we think of the person who once stood beside us.”

As night slowly descended, a slender young man stood facing the winter wind on the balcony of his bedroom. The owner of that delicate, handsome face drew the fresh air into his lungs. Though cold gusts of wind swept past in waves, the atmosphere of this night somehow offered a warmth that felt like a fireplace gently surrounding his

shattered heart. The comfort nature gave him washed away every trace of unease within.

The feeling in that moment was like the small flame of a lantern, quietly lighting the night. And it was exactly as his mother had once told him.

“No matter how much coldness you encounter, the final warmth a life has left is the warmth you give yourself.”

In truth, Phakai had heard that sentence many times. His mother had explained it to him when he was young, but back then he had never really understood it. Who would have thought that, on an ordinary night, standing there and taking in the beauty of this waterside home, he would suddenly come to understand those words?

Phakai found himself smiling faintly as he took in the scene before him, a view free from the roads, traffic

lights, and buildings he had once seen from his condominium. Around him were only trees and grass lining both sides of the canal. And without the lights of the capital, the stars above shone brilliantly, their glittering reflections captured in his beautiful eyes.

When he lowered his gaze a little, he saw pure white roses blooming nearby. Their fragrance did not fill the air so strongly that it could be sensed at once. He had to lean in, bringing the tip of his nose closer, before he could catch the soft sweetness hidden among the petals.

The young man with the smooth, refined face lifted his head when he heard the call of a bird soothing the night. Strangely, Phakai's first intention had been to search for the source of that sound. Yet when he looked up and

found the stars scattered across the sky, all he could do was stare, unable to look away.

Thousands of stars competed to shine against the clear sky, unobstructed by clouds. Just looking at them made the loneliness and sorrow in his heart fade. A gentle smile slowly appeared on his beautiful face.

And when his gaze moved to the moon before him, his heart grew even softer. Though tonight's moon was only a thin sliver, not shining in its full round brilliance, he knew very well that the moon was still the moon, always. Even on nights without moonlight, even when clouds drifted across its glow, even through its waxing and waning, even when it seemed dim beyond recognition, in the end, the moon never truly went anywhere.

It had always remained in the sky. It might disappear from sight, but it had never faded from memory.

The eyes of the lonely young man slowly closed, letting the clock of life move forward without expectation. But then the smile that had been on his face vanished. Tears slipped down without reason. Phakai did not even know what was happening to him.

Why did it hurt this much?

Sorrow returned to visit his heart. His eyelids opened once more. In just a few seconds, as his heart was overtaken by the memory of someone, his mind was carved again with the pain of the past.

“I told you not to cry so often, didn’t I?”

A familiar voice spoke from behind him. When the slender young man turned to look, the scene before him changed in an instant. The house once decorated with clean white wallpaper and light brown furniture popular among young people became an old wooden house filled with a distinctly Thai atmosphere. A vase of flowers stood beside a large wooden door.

Everything before him gave Phakai a sense of age, though it did not look hundreds of years old. Perhaps it was simply decorated according to the taste of the person who lived there.

The graceful figure of the young man before him made it feel as though time had begun to move more slowly. Something stirred in those eyes. Phakai could feel the gentleness he had once known from this gentleman. His

damp eyes shimmered with tears. Then, without realizing it, Phakai broke into a smile of joy.

“Duean... I miss you. I miss you so much.”

“Stop crying. Weren’t you the one who said you hated yourself when your eyes got swollen?”

The other man did not only speak. He also opened his arms, ready to gather him into an embrace filled with deep love. But just as the smaller man moved toward him, the figure of the man he had longed for faded away. The warmth he should have received left behind only a cold current of air.

The one wounded by love sank to the floor in grief when he realized that everything before him had been nothing more than an illusion. Phakai slowly lifted his head and looked toward the room with unbearable sorrow.

Until all that remained before him was a picture frame
and a dry incense pot.

Chapter 01

The Moon Adorns the Sky

“Do you see how much he cares about him? He doesn’t just fuss over him for no reason.”

A soft voice spoke with tenderness, while tender eyes looked up against gravity toward the globe. His eyelids slowly lowered, along with a faint smile, as if he were taking in the latest romantic scene on the television.

Phakai's eyes trembled. The scene before him was made up of tiny fragments of pain, cutting deep into the hidden wounds in his heart.

Finally, the protagonist in the film let out his last breath. He left behind both pain and an unknown person beside him.

Who would have thought a romantic film with such warmth would end with a tragedy for its main character? It hurt so much that Phakai could hardly bear it. Each tear that fell carried a certain depth, turning every warm image of love into something that quietly changed him.

In truth, he could say he had changed a great deal. Before this, Phakai rarely watched romantic dramas. But

because his best friend, Phum, kept searching for classic romance films for him, forcing him to open his heart to them again and again, Phakai eventually became someone who watched them with tears in his eyes without realizing it.

The good old record player carried the old soundtrack from the moment the hero fell down the stairs, then slowly faded into silence. The owner of the lovely face had to pull Phakai down to sit on the sofa after that scene.

“Phu, I want to keep watching.” The sad person pleaded, his voice still thick with tears, his eyes never leaving the handsome actor on the screen.

“That’s enough. Your nose is turning red.” Phum ignored him and used the remote to turn the old television off.

“Let me watch a little longer, please.” Phakai pleaded, making the same pitiful face, hoping to move his best friend’s heart. But the more he looked, the more the other man seemed pleased with himself. Phum had only just stopped crying, yet he was already teasing him again.

“It’ll hurt your eyes. Besides, you cried over the same character for the tenth time already. And tomorrow you’re still planning to look for more films with him in them, aren’t you?”

Phum crossed his arms and raised his brows. Anyone looking at him would think he was annoyed that Phakai had cried so much. But in truth, he had already seen his friend like this more times than he could count.

Phakai made a face, then pressed his lips together in frustration. He was about to throw a small tantrum, but in the end, he stopped himself. After all, the main character in the film was the same actor who had held a place in his heart for as long as he could remember.

“That actor is so old, Phakai.”

“But he was good looking when he was young.”

“At least he’s two years older than you.”

“Then stop acting like his mother and fussing over me,
Phum.”

The owner of the soft, gentle face glared at him like an irritated cat. His slender fingers picked up a tissue from the box beside him and wiped away the tears at the corners of his eyes.

“Hey, you’re all grown up now.”

The middle aged woman with graceful skin called from above.

“Phu Jira, come check on my son. Is he crying properly or not?”

The woman shook her head in mild exasperation as she looked down from the upper floor.

“Have you eaten dinner yet, dear?”

Phakai turned to look up and shook his head lightly. At the same time, Phum heard her and called back playfully.

“He’s crying over a man again, Auntie.”

“Aren’t you worried about your own son at all? He’s crying so hard, and you’re still teasing him.”

Phum spoke as if he were sulking, though in truth he knew Mother cared for him like her own son.

“It’s not that I’m not worried. I’m just surprised that he still hasn’t gotten over the same actor.”

After saying that, Mother wandered off to tell the household staff to prepare dinner for them.

Inside the medium sized bedroom in a pale orange tone, Phakai, whose eyes were still red, stepped out to the balcony and found Phum leaning against the railing. The air outside was humid, and an orange glow still lingered in the sky, though it was no longer too bright.

“What’s wrong?” The owner of the delicate face walked over to stand beside him, using a small hand towel to dry his damp hair.

“Nothing. Just thinking about someone.”

“Who?”

Phum tilted his head and let the other man wipe his hair. That person stood behind him, holding the same towel, which made him seem slightly taller.

When Prapha, their housekeeper, came to see the two of them from a distance, she could not help smiling. It was a familiar sight, but every time she saw it, she felt happy for the young master.

“You should let me stop acting now. Then your life won’t turn out like that actor’s.”

Once again, the owner of the slender hand turned and covered his friend's mouth with force. All this time, Phum had cried because of pain, but that little action did not hurt as much as his friend's words.

“I just got an offer. Don't talk nonsense.”

“You can quit. You're not even that famous yet. Go compete with that actor if you want.”

Phum spoke without taking his eyes off the sky.

“I'm not quitting. I still have a few things left to do. Have you forgotten?”

“I didn’t forget. I was just asking.”

“What about you, Phakai?”

Phum turned to look at the face that had changed. In that moment, truth revealed itself through the pale light of an aging sun, which reflected against the sparkling eyes of the person before him.

“I... I can do it. Besides, I don’t want to love anyone again.”

The truth that happened that day pushed the events of the past back to the surface, when the boy had been dragged into his father’s quarrel without knowing what was going on. It had been so long ago, yet it had never faded.

That was the wound buried deep inside him. Back then, he was only a child, so he did not understand that the true cause came from every argument, or from the sound of a vase breaking because his mother had been abandoned.

The idea that he had once had a good father vanished completely. Phum patted Phakai's head gently because he knew what his friend was thinking. He understood that someone who had grown up in a family where parents fought with each other all the time might build a wall against love.

The two of them fell into silence. Phakai still had many other things he wanted to say, especially to the person

standing beside him, but in the end, that sharp mouth chose to say only one thing.

“Besides, even if that actor is old now, he’s still handsome in the film. I wonder what he’s like now.”

The young man let out a heavy sigh before smiling with genuine warmth again, though it nearly dropped when his friend answered.

“He’s already dead.”

“The actor who played Duan, Traithan Dolpraseat, died. He was a very famous actor.”

When he heard that, Phakai immediately turned to him with interest. He remembered watching news from ten years ago with his family about this man's mysterious death.

“Really?”

Phum nodded lightly.

“Then why did he decide to kill himself like that?”

Phum shrugged, as if he did not know, aside from a rumor.

“It might have been because of the weather. They said he felt suffocated.” At that moment, he lifted his hand

toward the sky as he spoke. Then he held it out in front of Phakai and slowly spread his fingers, not wanting the other man to lose the feeling he had too quickly.

“It’s a pity, isn’t it? If he were still alive, he would probably have gone much further.”

His friend followed him into the room before picking up his phone to search for information about the actor who had just died years ago.

“Traithan Dolpraseat, actor and talented star. Owner of the nickname Moon Adorning the Sky. He made the bold decision to end his life at the age of twenty four, when he was already at the peak of his fame, a moment considered a golden era of Thai entertainment. His

biography and departure were reported extensively by television news, and according to reports, if procedures had gone as planned, he would have had an opportunity to audition for a Korean series from a major studio.”

Phakai sat still and looked at the video clip without taking his eyes off it. The young actor had only been able to fix his gaze on Duean in the Sky. Of course, Phum did not let his friend spend too long on Duean’s story. When he saw that Phakai was becoming gloomy again, he quickly snatched the phone away and used his playful, overly familiar way of speaking to help ease the mood.

“Phu...”

“Even though someone you were thinking about isn’t Duean in the Sky anymore, sometimes he may have wanted to be Duean for someone.”

“And I can be the moon for you too.”

“I don’t know. Do moons bark like this?”

When he heard that, the deep part of Phakai wanted to shout, “Nonsense.” But at least Phum’s attempt to change the subject made his sadness over the film ease as if by magic.

The melody of the last song was turned up as Phakai watched it. The sound from the old radio filled the atmosphere like a quiet night.

A cold breeze touched Phum's soft skin. He bent down more than the smaller man, as if offering warmth. Phakai liked to tease him for being a large dog, perhaps because he had always been gentle and fond of him. It had been that way ever since they were children, long before a difficult story appeared and nearly destroyed the wall around his heart, the same one his mother's repeated love had used as an example.

By the time they finished eating dinner, it was almost late. The sky outside the balcony had grown darker after the sun set. Phakai had just finished showering, wearing only loose white pajamas. Drops of water clung to the ends of his hair, reflecting the faint light from outside until they shone gold. The young man stood at the mirror

absentmindedly, combing his hair, before someone knocked on the door.

After a moment, Phum opened the door and stepped into the room like an old habit. In the past, the owner of the beautiful face had always allowed him to come and go freely. Ever since the time Phakai had accepted him throughout the period when he left the entertainment industry because of a scandal involving a senior actor, Phum had never stopped loving his friend with a heart that was never anything more than friendship. Even now, Phum was ready to help whenever there was a chance, because his status had long since become nothing more than friend.

The owner of the lovely face narrowed his eyes against the sunlight spilling in through the room. He could not look directly at the person eating food so carelessly in front of him, and muttered that the man should hurry back to his own room, since he had already come in here far too often.

For Phakai, Phum was like the bright moon in the sky outside the window. Mother had always said Phakai's moon was a beautiful moon, perhaps more beautiful than any other. But no matter how brightly it shone, it was not bright enough for just anyone to find it. Even so, Phakai felt that what she had said was almost true. Although he could not see the moon, he was a gifted actor. Who could know that somewhere far beyond the earth, there might be one human being quietly gazing at that moon and

hoping the moon would someday find its own light
within itself?

Even if the moon does not shine as brightly as the sun, it
is still beautiful in its own way, is it not?

A soft breeze drifted through again, bringing a faint
ringing sound that caught the tall man's attention. Phum
took off his shirt in one movement, then picked up the
towel around his neck and headed straight for the
bathroom, saying it was about the same time Phakai
came in for a bath. The man with the moonlike face
looked away almost instantly, closing both eyes and
turning his back at once.

“Phu! Go change clothes in your own room. Why are you doing that here?” He pointed at one of the closets. Last night, Phum had carried a pile of clothes and stuffed them into that closet without asking.

“I’m so different from you. I never get embarrassed by your body.”

The man was startled and turned back quickly. At that, Phakai had to look away.

“But this is my room!” Phakai tried to fight back. No matter how prepared he was to lose, the action made his cheeks puff out from how tightly he pressed his lips together. The man lowered his head and clenched his

fists, ready for a second round. It seemed he would not back down easily.

Just as the world turned on the soundtrack of a romantic drama, the atmosphere outside Phum's room grew confusing, thick with a glittering pale sunlight. Phum was also thinking too much, but the person standing at the door only looked at his friend as he lowered the clothes he had been holding. His eyes blinked again and again in bewilderment.

Until Phum leaned closer, close enough to hear the other man's breathing. Both their hearts trembled. The man's eyes swept over him playfully like a winner in that day's game. Phakai looked away in anger, but when he saw his friend's face more clearly, he still did not understand

why such an intense emotion had turned into something so strange.

“Don’t come at me like that!” Phakai said in a sharp voice. “Get dressed and hurry up.”

“What are you doing? Wiping my hair?” Phum asked, lifting the wet ends of his hair to circle around his fingers.

“I’m going to wash my face. I’m not going to hit you! Are you out of your mind?”

His slender hand pushed against the other’s shoulder, creating distance between them.

“You’re like a child. I won’t tease you anymore. But don’t ask me to get up and wash my face with you.”

Duean smiled brightly in a way that made the heart of someone who had seen him as both brother and friend melt again, for a second time.

“Don’t be cheeky. Go wash your face. Hurry.”

The words that sounded like a command made Phu hesitate, when he realized that everything he had seen with his eyes had disappeared.

Phum gave a soft laugh. He knew the owner of the room would soon go out to get something from the refrigerator, just as planned.

“Phakai...” The soft voice called without any meaning.

“What is it?”

“I just wanted to know whether you were still in the room. That’s all.” The tall man took a large shirt from the closet.

“And what if I am? Are you going to the bathroom now or not?”

This time, Phakai smiled in amusement. Phum did not need to think too much. Before he could turn and head for the bathroom, the tall man’s arm reached out and

caught him, then pulled him closer. After that, Phum said softly beside his ear.

“Oh! Okay, okay. I’m going to shower now. Oh, and don’t sneak off and do anything without letting me see, all right? If you want to do something, ask me first. I’ll give you permission to do it all the time. Whether it’s...”

“That’s enough. Go. Take a bath. Hurry up!”