US THIS TIME

(บุหงามลาซอ)

by Samha

English Sample
Chapters 1-2

Amarin Coporations PCL.

Chapter 1

Buhnga shot upright in bed with a gasp, dragging a huge breath into her lungs. Her soft, beautiful eyes, perfectly suited to her finely shaped face, blinked rapidly as they adjusted to the pale morning light.

The Pipatchot mansion.

How had she ended up here? Last night, as far as she remembered, she had been in the luxury condominium she had once been so proud of.

She had been killing herself.

Had she survived?

How?

One slender hand flew automatically to her throat. She ran her fingers beneath her chin again and again before realizing there was no wound at all.

A dream? Had last night been a dream, or was waking up in the Pipatchot household again the dream?

Her final wish had been to go back and fix everything she had done wrong.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

Buhnga flinched at the shrill alarm clock. She reached over and switched it off out of habit, only to hear a voice she knew better than any other.

"Buhnga, are you still asleep, sweetheart? Didn't you say the university star contest is today? If you don't hurry, you won't have time to get ready." Her mother, Ratree, called through the thick door.

"Mom..."

Her mother greeted her like this every morning. It should have been ordinary. Yet Buhnga's eyes burned and a painful ache tightened inside her chest.

"The university star contest..."

She forced the sadness away, replayed the words in her head, then widened her eyes and scrambled out of bed.

Calling the mattress soft would have been generous. It was nothing like the bed in her condominium. She had spent a fortune on that bedding...

Wait.

If the university star contest was today, then she was still a student. In that case, where would she have gotten the money for a condominium, let alone expensive bedding? Her mother was only a servant in the Pipatchot household, and she herself was merely a servant's daughter.

So that luxurious life had all been a dream?

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She should have felt relieved. At least her life did not have to end the way it had in that nightmare. One look at herself in the mirror seemed to confirm that this was reality.

In the dream, the skin beneath her eyes had been hollow and dark. Her face had looked haggard from drinking and abusing drugs. It had been a miserable life she could not seem to pull herself out of.

Now Buhnga smiled at the youthful, glowing face in the mirror. She turned left and right, pleased with what she saw, until her smile slowly faded.

A fine necklace hung around her neck, set with a red gemstone.

She reached for it slowly. Her saliva suddenly felt thick, her throat going dry.

It was the birthday gift she had received from the man she loved most in the world: Kirin Pipatchot.

Buhnga clenched the necklace in her fist. Her breath caught, and every fine hair on her body stood on end.

Her brows drew together.

If everything she remembered had only been a dream, then how had this necklace come to be around her neck?

Kirin had given it to her for her twentieth birthday. But if the university star-and-moon contest was today, she was only eighteen now.

This was insane.

Had she lost her mind? Maybe she had bought it from some roadside stall and then invented an entire fantasy about Kirin giving it to her. Why did her memory feel so unreliable?

"Bu, are you awake? You're going to be late," her mother called again when the room remained quiet.

Buhnga stared at her own strange expression in the mirror, then raked both hands through her soft hair until it was a mess.

"I'm awake, Mom. I'm coming out now."

She left the bedroom.

The Pipatchot family came from old money. They had founded a major financial institution and, over the years, expanded into several other branches of the finance industry.

They were enormously wealthy.

It was perfectly normal for some of the household staff to line up in the morning to see the masters of the house off to work. Buhnga had no duty to do so, but she had always made a point of standing there whenever Kirin left for the office.

She watched Lady Yupa, Kirin's mother, walk out of the grand mansion first. Behind her came the tall, lean, handsome young man Buhnga had adored for years.

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Kirin was talking with Khathakorn, his fourth uncle. Although Khathakorn was technically his uncle, there was not much difference in their ages. Their features and builds were similar enough that they looked more like brothers.

Buhnga's eyes had always belonged to Kirin alone. Everyone in the Pipatchot household knew how desperately she loved him. She had never hidden it or cared what anyone thought. Perhaps that was because she was confident in her own undeniable beauty. Or perhaps it was because Kirin had never seemed particularly bothered by her shameless persistence.

But that had all been before the strange dream.

This morning, she could no longer look at him with the same easy certainty.

She still watched him, and the affection in her gaze was unchanged. But when Kirin glanced in her direction, her heart dropped.

He never loved you.

The cruel sentence repeated itself in her head, and Buhnga looked away.

She pressed her lips together, nails digging into her palm.

Avoiding his eyes? That was nothing like her. Normally, she would have beamed at him, making absolutely certain he knew she was there and that she had come to see him off.

Unsettled by her own behavior, Buhnga quietly stepped away without noticing how many people found the change strange.

"Kirin, aren't you getting in?" Khathakorn called from inside the car.

"Yes."

Kirin answered, though his eyes were still following Buhnga's slender figure in her university uniform. His brows drew together.

"Strange," he murmured.

"What is?" Khathakorn asked.

"Nothing, Uncle."

Kirin pulled his attention back to the conversation between his mother and Khathakorn.

If her dream had truly happened before, then the question in the university contest should be...

"If you could choose to be any animal, what would you choose, Buhnga?"

There it was.

Exactly the same question.

In her previous life, she had said she wanted to be a cat because cats were cute. Then she had actually meowed in front of the entire auditorium.

Humiliating.

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And possibly the most meaningless answer imaginable.

She had the unnerving feeling that she had lived through this once already. This time, she was absolutely not going to give the same ridiculous answer.

And there would be no meowing.

"I'd choose a hornbill," she said. "Hornbills are loyal. Once they choose a mate, they remain with that mate alone. Even if their partner dies, they don't take another. I want to be able to stay faithful like that."

Because she knew how much it hurt to fail at the kind of faithfulness she had once promised herself.

Romance always appealed to people their age. In any case, the title of university star was hers. Even if she had meowed again, she probably would have won.

Later, while waiting in the contestants' room, Buhnga sat thinking for a long time. The dream had been far too vivid to dismiss as an ordinary dream.

Her thoughts wandered into increasingly absurd territory.

Had she traveled back in time?

Had she somehow been reborn into her own past?

While her mind spun, the old-fashioned mobile phone beside her began to ring.

Buhnga frowned at the name on the screen.

P'Ple.

Her manager.

She searched her memories. She remembered signing with P'Ple's agency at around this age, but not exactly when. She answered the call.

"Hello, P'Ple."

"Bu, the client wants to see you in person. They'd like you to audition this Saturday. Are you free?"

Her first bottled-water commercial.

That memory was not pleasant. She had been torn apart with criticism at the audition and had even made an enemy there. She had still been chosen in the end because she was the best option available at the time.

She really did not want to go.

"Saturday? I was thinking that maybe..."

"You're free, right? I really want you there. If you land this job, it could launch you. All right, Saturday at nine in the morning, Building C. I'll send you the address. Talk later."

The call ended, leaving Buhnga staring oddly at the phone as she swallowed.

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That first audition had been brutal. She had been criticized from head to toe, and the whole affair had created an enemy she would later regret making. She did not want to go through it again.

Actually, she did not want to become an actress at all anymore.

That career had been the true beginning of her downfall.

Buhnga sighed, unsure what to do. If she broke the contract, there would be a penalty. Where would she get the money? Could she borrow it from Kirin?

Absolutely not.

If she really had returned to the past, Kirin was the one person she needed to stay away from. She needed to stop loving him as quickly as possible.

But how was she supposed to do that? She had loved him for years. You could not simply cut something like that out of your heart.

Buhnga clenched the fine necklace again and decided she needed proof.

She walked straight into a pawnshop.

If Kirin had really given her this necklace, it had to be valuable. If she had imagined everything, perhaps it was just cheap jewelry she had picked up somewhere.

Buhnga lifted an eyebrow as the owner and an employee examined the necklace, occasionally glancing at her.

"One point two million," the owner said, opening a Chinese fan and fanning himself against the heat.

"One point two million!"

Her eyes widened. It was worth far more than she had expected. She had never known what it cost.

Kirin had given her something this expensive?

"Fine, fine. One point six million at most. I can't go higher than that," the man said, fanning himself harder as his eyes swept over her.

A girl this beautiful must have received it from some rich man.

Buhnga blinked, then held out her hand.

"I'm not pawning it. Please give it back."

She walked out of the pawnshop in a daze.

So she really had come back?

It was impossible. Had God taken pity on her, thrown her into the past, and given her a chance to repair her own life?

A chance to avoid the same pitiful ending: disappointment, pain, and death.

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Idiot, Buhnga. Why didn't you bother remembering the winning lottery numbers? Five first-prize tickets would have been thirty million baht. You could have taken the money and run far away from every problem.

Not that she had money even to run away now.

And there was someone she needed to see first. The person she had wronged most deeply. The one person who had truly loved her.

"Mom, are you preparing Lady Yupa's afternoon snack? Here, let me do it."

Buhnga wrapped her arms around her mother from behind, forcing her voice not to tremble.

How had she ever managed to kill herself?

There had only ever been the two of them. How could she have made such a shallow, selfish choice and escaped her problems through death?

Could she blame the alcohol? The drugs?

Could she blame everything she had consumed, even if she had been the one who chose that path?

"What's gotten into you? You're home late today," Ratree said.

"But she's still in time to wait for Khun Kirin," Kaew, the head housekeeper, added with obvious amusement. Normally Buhnga found some excuse to hover near him at every opportunity.

"I'm not waiting for him today. And from now on, I'm not chasing Khun Kirin anymore," Buhnga said while helping her mother around the kitchen.

"What?"

Ratree and Kaew exclaimed in unison.

Buhnga raised her brows slightly.

"Is that really so strange?"

"Very," Kaew replied.

Buhnga could only give them an awkward smile.

It was strange. She had never surrendered where Kirin was concerned.

But she had lost.

And the road had ended in death.

Better to put out the fire before it began. From now on, she would devote herself to her mother.

As for Kirin, she would stay where she belonged and let him live his own life. She would not ruin his life a second time.

Her love for him had roots too deep to pull out. She could not stop loving him, but she was ashamed enough that she no longer dared to go near him.

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If God had truly returned her to the past to make things right, then all she wanted was for Kirin to be happy.

As for herself, she would simply try to stay alive this time.

"Mom, is this one ready?" Buhnga pointed to the plate of snacks and tea prepared for Lady Yupa.

"I'll take it up to the main house. You don't have to go. Your back hurts, doesn't it?"

She picked up the tray.

"What did you eat today?" Kaew demanded. "Why are you suddenly volunteering to serve Lady Yupa? And you're really not going to wait for Khun Kirin to come home?"

In the past, if something had nothing to do with Kirin, Buhnga barely lifted a finger.

"I've grown up. I'm a new person now. From today onward, you'll be meeting hardworking New Bu. Mom can start preparing for an easy life."

She raised her chin with theatrical confidence.

"And about Khun Kirin... I met someone more handsome, so I stopped liking him. That's all."

It was an enormous lie, but nobody would find it particularly suspicious. Buhnga had always been shamelessly full of herself anyway.

"This girl, honestly."

Buhnga shrugged and carried the tray to Lady Yupa.

Lady Yupa usually went to the office only in the morning. Her afternoons were reserved for whatever she wished to do.

Buhnga found her reading in the library.

How long had it been since she had seen this kind woman alive and well?

One of Kirin's greatest losses would come when Lady Yupa died in an accident. Kirin had suffered terribly afterward.

Could Buhnga stop that from happening?

"Not going to keep watch over my son today?" Lady Yupa asked.

Buhnga smiled awkwardly. So everyone really did know how obsessed she was with Kirin.

"Not anymore, Your Ladyship. If you tease me like that, I'll get embarrassed."

She set down the snacks and hot tea.

"If there's anything I can do, would you call me instead of my mother sometimes? I want to help you and take some of the work off Mom's shoulders."

Her mother often complained of back pain, and in the future it would become chronic enough to require surgery.

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Lady Yupa looked up from her book and studied the girl properly.

Ratree was one of her favorite servants, but that was not the only reason she felt fond of Buhnga. The girl could be vain, but she was fundamentally straightforward and good-hearted. More importantly, she had always been very good to Lady Yupa's son. As long as Kirin himself had never objected to Buhnga following him everywhere, a mother who indulged her son had seen no reason to interfere.

"You..."

Lady Yupa stopped, then changed what she had been about to say.

"You've grown up, haven't you?"

"I think so."

"Good. Then I'll call on you sometimes instead of your mother."

"Thank you. I'll leave you to your reading. If there's anything at all you need, please call me anytime."

"All right. Go on."

Lady Yupa gave a small nod and returned to her book. Buhnga bowed slightly before leaving the library.

Later, when Kirin returned home, Buhnga hurried over as usual.

"Khun Kirin, give me your jacket and briefcase. I'll put them away for you."

The tall man who had just stepped out of the car glanced at the slender figure circling around him.

Kirin handed her his suit jacket but kept the briefcase himself.

Buhnga's eyes dimmed for a moment before she smiled and accepted the jacket. He had never once let her carry his briefcase, no matter how many times she asked.

Kirin walked into the house with Buhnga trailing obediently behind him. Everyone in the household was used to the sight: the servant's daughter following the master's son everywhere, refusing to listen to anyone who told her to stop. Since neither Kirin nor Lady Yupa had ever complained, Buhnga had only grown bolder.

Bold enough to convince herself that perhaps Kirin felt something for her too.

Buhnga gave a bitter little smile at her former self.

Always appearing before him. Always offering herself. All while he remained indifferent.

She had kept fooling herself until the very end, until she finally understood that everything he had done for her came from responsibility alone.

Love had been nothing more than a fantasy she had created by herself.

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Standing before the door to Kirin's bedroom, Buhnga rested her palm against the wood, then pressed her cheek to it.

It was not that she had never known he did not love her. She had simply chosen to look away, to deceive herself and pretend it did not matter.

Because being near him had been enough to make her happy.

Stop loving Khun Kirin?

Impossible.

She could not do it. She had never even imagined doing it.

But her love had destroyed both their lives. Kirin's marriage had ended. She knew he had suffered, and it had all happened because of her actions.

It would be better if she stepped away.

Kirin's life would be happier without her interfering in it.

And so Buhnga decided to retreat, even if she could not make herself stop loving him at all.

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Chapter 2

A large European luxury car passed through the gates and headed toward the Pipatchot mansion.

Kirin's expression grew more severe the closer they came to the house. By the time the car slowed, his face had become almost unnaturally stern.

Khathakorn watched his nephew with familiar amusement. Kirin did this every time they came home. Because he and his nephew were close and not very far apart in age, Khathakorn knew exactly why Kirin acted this way.

It was because of the small figure of Buhnga, who usually came rushing over to hover around him the moment he arrived.

Khathakorn let their conversation die and leaned back against the seat, waiting alongside Kirin.

The car door opened automatically. Kirin stepped out, then stopped.

There was no bright voice greeting him.

No smiling face waiting as it did every day.

He handed his briefcase to a servant and swept his eyes around the entrance.

Strange.

Buhnga had not come to meet him.

Maybe she was not home yet. She had started university, after all. Perhaps she had more activities now.

Kirin wondered about it but refused to ask and risk looking interested. The suit jacket he had removed in the car remained draped over his own arm.

"Has Buhnga not come home yet?" Khathakorn asked.

Kirin's ears practically perked up.

"She's back, sir," a servant replied.

The answer made the eavesdropping man frown.

"Is she sick? Why didn't she come to welcome Khun Kirin today?" Khathakorn asked as he walked inside beside his nephew.

"I don't think so. I saw her in the laundry room just a little while ago."

Khathakorn nodded, then glanced at his nephew, who was still wearing his carefully composed expression.

Kirin was only four or five years younger than he was, yet when he put on that solemn face, he somehow looked older.

Khathakorn smiled to himself and parted ways with him to rest until dinner.

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Later that evening, Kirin tapped his fingers on his desk and glanced at the wall clock.

Dinner had ended quite some time ago. Normally, Buhnga would have brought him a cup of hot tea by now.

She was thirty minutes late.

Not a glimpse of her.

The day had felt strange from the moment he woke up, and Buhnga's strange behavior only made it worse.

Kirin abruptly pushed himself up from his desk.

He was going to demand his tea from the troublesome girl himself. She had avoided his eyes and walked away that morning too. That was nothing like Buhnga.

"Khun Kirin, do you need something?" the head housekeeper asked when she saw him come down from his study.

"Auntie, tell Bu to make my tea and bring it upstairs."

Even as he spoke, he wondered whether Buhnga was unwell.

Order the tea first. If she was sick, Auntie Kaew would tell him.

"Oh dear. Bu still hasn't brought it up? I'll go tell her right away. Please wait a moment." Kaew muttered as she turned away, "Honestly, that girl. Finds someone else more handsome and suddenly forgets her responsibilities."

"What did you say?"

Kirin had heard every word perfectly well. He simply had not been prepared for it and needed to hear it again.

"I said I'll have Bu make the tea, Khun Kirin. You can go upstairs and wait."

"Not that. The sentence before it."

Kaew tilted her head, thinking, then exclaimed softly.

"Oh. It's nothing. This evening Bu said she wasn't going to chase you anymore. But that doesn't mean she can abandon her duties. I'll have to teach her a lesson. Please wait a moment, Khun Kirin. I'll sort it out right away."

Kaew hurried out of the mansion toward the staff quarters.

Once Kirin was sure the corridor was empty, he stopped in front of a mirror.

He tilted his face left, then right, examining his handsome features with great seriousness.

Finally, he stared at his reflection.

"She's only been at university for a few days. Fine. We'll see whether someone she just met is really more handsome than the man she's been chasing for years."

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He pushed a hand through his hair and returned to his study to wait for his tea.

In the staff quarters, Buhnga sat against the metal frame of her narrow bed. Her gaze was distant as she stroked the red gemstone at her throat.

She had gone back seven years, to a time before anything had begun.

Kirin had no commitments yet.

And she herself was still only Buhnga, the girl who loved him from afar, without fame, wealth, or status of her own.

Soon Kirin would become engaged.

Lady Yupa would die in an accident.

Afterward, Buhnga would become an arrogant, vicious woman. Her acting career would lift her to the highest point imaginable, only for scandal to knock her down overnight.

"Bu! Bu, are you asleep?"

The half-shouted voice pulled her from her thoughts.

"Not yet, Auntie Kaew. What is it?"

Buhnga got up and opened the door.

"Khun Kirin told you to make his tea and take it upstairs," Kaew said, looking at her reproachfully. "Whether you stop loving him is your business, but work is work. Don't make him come asking for it. That's no good at all."

"What time is it? I forgot to look at the clock. Sorry, Auntie. I'll do it right away."

Buhnga pretended to be startled and hurried toward the kitchen, leaving the head housekeeper still grumbling behind her.

She handled the tea set with the familiarity of long practice. It did not feel like something she had learned yesterday. It felt like something she had repeated for years until her hands knew what to do without thought.

She had not forgotten the tea at all.

She had simply decided to step back and, in doing so, had stopped every little habit connected to Kirin all at once.

Buhnga watched the high-quality tea leaves in the infuser and glanced at the clock, timing the brew after pouring in the hot water. She rested her hip against the kitchen counter.

"He never cared before. The one day I don't bring it, he asks for it."

She bared her teeth at the teapot and sighed.

She did not want to see him.

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She loved him enough to give him almost anything, but that did not mean his indifference had never hurt her.

Sometimes Kirin was kind to her. Sometimes he was not.

Whatever. She already knew how the story ended.

So she needed to remember one thing.

He does not love you.

And you bring him nothing but trouble.

Buhnga added a little honey to the tea, arranged everything on a tray, and carried it to his study.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

She knocked, then pushed the door open out of habit. She had never waited for his permission before. Only now did she realize how rude that actually was.

Next time, she would wait until he invited her in.

Kirin sat working and did not seem to notice her arrival at all.

Normally, Buhnga would have found some excuse to speak, anything to drag his attention toward her.

Today she had no energy for it.

Her emotions were still in chaos. She felt as if she had only just survived death itself. How could anyone expect her to act bright and cheerful?

She set the teapot and cup gently on his desk, hugged the empty tray to her chest, and turned to leave.

"Wait."

Kirin's deep voice stopped her.

He looked up and met her eyes.

Buhnga smiled automatically, her voice turning sweet without conscious thought.

"Yes, Khun Kirin?"

Her face was still smiling even though, inside, she wanted to bite her own lip until it bled.

She had answered him on instinct.

The subconscious habits of an eighteen-year-old girl were terrifying.

Kirin held her gaze without speaking.

Buhnga was forced to break the silence herself.

"Is there anything else you'd like me to do?"

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She smiled as she asked, studying his face from close range.

How long had it been since Kirin had looked at her with eyes this clear and uncomplicated, without disappointment or hatred mixed into them?

For the version of her living in this day, perhaps only yesterday.

But the consciousness inside her was not yesterday's girl anymore. To her, it felt like a lifetime.

"Why did I have to send someone after you?" Kirin asked as he poured tea into the cup.

He meant the tea.

"I'm sorry. I forgot to check the time."

Kirin nodded, then rose from the desk.

He walked toward her, using his greater height to loom over her as he lifted the teacup and took a sip.

"Auntie Kaew said you met someone more handsome than me, so now you're neglecting your duties."

"What?"

Buhnga raised her brows and stepped back as the space between them became far too small.

Her heart felt ready to stop.

She tightened her grip on the tray when Kirin followed her forward.

"About that..."

She looked up at him, her mind suddenly blank as she searched for an excuse.

"You know I drink tea after dinner. If you're late, the caffeine keeps me awake."

"I'm sorry. I'll be more careful next time."

"Don't be late again."

Kirin was nearly pressed against her now. Buhnga dropped her eyes and hunched slightly, as though making herself smaller might somehow increase the distance between them.

"Yes. If there's nothing else, may I go?"

She waited.

Kirin still did not move aside.

Buhnga glanced at him. She had only delivered his tea half an hour late. Did he really need to bring his face this close?

"You can drink it without worrying," she said weakly. "I used caffeine-free tea, so it won't keep you awake."

"Can I go now?"

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Instead of answering, Kirin asked something else entirely.

"You like me, don't you?"

"Well... yes."

There was no reason to deny it. She told him constantly, and everyone in the mansion knew. What surprised her was that Kirin had asked the question himself.

"And you like someone else too."

Buhnga's eyes widened.

For one beautiful second, it almost sounded like he was jealous.

"That's not true. I've never liked anyone but you."

The denial came automatically. Who wanted the person they loved to misunderstand something like that?

"Is that so?"

Kirin leaned even closer.

"Who you like is your business. But I don't like being compared to other men."

"I wasn't comparing you. Auntie Kaew misunderstood."

Buhnga shamelessly placed the blame on Kaew. In truth, Kaew had understood perfectly, even if the imaginary handsome man did not exist.

"But you said someone else was handsome."

"He couldn't compare to you. You're handsome, rich, and in such good shape that looking at you makes my heart race. Perfect."

Buhnga beamed, gave him a thumbs-up, and nodded vigorously to show she meant every word.

Kirin clicked his tongue and finally stepped back.

"Go wherever you want, then. And don't forget what your responsibilities are."

He returned to his desk.

"Yes."

Buhnga hurried out of the study.

Kirin watched her slender back disappear through the door, then the corner of his mouth lifted.

So Buhnga still liked him after all.

"What was that?"

Back in the kitchen, Buhnga set down the empty tray and muttered to herself.

What had Kirin meant by acting that way?

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He had suddenly brought his face so close to hers. Had he ever done that before? Was he annoyed simply because she had called another man handsome?

Had he been teasing her?

Could that even be called teasing?

And her useless heart had gone wild the instant he came near.

This version of Kirin made her heart race more than even the times they had been physically intimate.

No. She should not think about that.

That relationship had been one where she loved him alone.

What happened just now was better. Kirin had leaned close and said strange things. Even if one or two sentences had been cruel, they were nowhere near as cruel as what she had already endured.

Buhnga smiled shyly to herself.

Something as small as that could still make her happy.

Had she really just died?

Speaking of death... perhaps God had taken pity on her and created this moment before tomorrow returned everything to reality.

Her body might already be lying in a coffin while monks chanted funeral prayers.

The shy smile faded.

She had not wanted to die.

Her surroundings and her drugged state had driven her into that choice.

How sad that she had failed even to protect her own life.

Would she wake up here again tomorrow?

Or was all of this nothing more than a dream her mind had created?

"Mom, I'm sleeping with you tonight."

Buhnga entered her mother's small room carrying a pillow.

"What has gotten into you?"

Ratree complained, but shifted over to make room on the narrow bed.

Buhnga lay down close beside her mother. She did not know whether she would still be alive when morning came, so she wrapped both arms tightly around Ratree.

"Is something wrong?" her mother asked, gently stroking her soft hair.

"I had a nightmare last night."

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"You're grown and still afraid of nightmares?"

Ratree teased her but continued stroking her head.

"Do you want to know what I dreamed?"

"If it was a nightmare, don't talk about it anymore."

Her mother's calm voice soothed the chaos in Buhnga's mind.

"You're right."

Buhnga fell quiet, then said, "In the dream, I was a terrible daughter. I became a famous actress, but I treated you very badly."

"What nonsense."

"Do you want me to become an actress?"

"Hmm? You're the one who wants to be some television heroine, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Then try. If it doesn't work out, quit. You've already decided to sign the contract, haven't you? Don't hesitate now."

Buhnga was silent for a moment.

She loved acting, even if that career had also been one of the first steps toward everything that later went wrong.

"If I become famous, I'll take really good care of you."

"We'll see if you actually do."

Ratree laughed.

"Mom, hypothetically... if you had the chance to fix something you did wrong in the past, would you fix it?"

"You can't change what's already happened, Bu."

Ratree stroked her daughter's hair affectionately.

"I said hypothetically. Suppose you found out later that what you did was wrong and you were given one chance to change it. But choosing differently this time would also make you sad. Would you still do the same thing, or would you choose what you now believed was right?"

Ratree was quiet for a long moment before answering.

"If you know it was wrong, that means you regret doing it. So either way you'll be sad. But if you have a chance to make it right, why wouldn't you? At least the guilt in your heart would probably be lighter."

Buhnga said nothing.

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Ratree looked down at her.

"Was the dream really that bad?"

"Very bad, Mom. It hurt so much I could barely bear it. I died before I woke up."

"It was only a dream. It will pass."

"Yes. Only a dream," Buhnga whispered, closing her eyes.

She knew people could not truly change the past.

Perhaps this was the exception.

If someone really had sent her back, then please let her final wish come true.

Her mother's happiness.

Kirin's happiness.

Buhnga made herself a promise.

This time, she would make the people she loved happy.

All she asked in return was the chance to wake up in this time again tomorrow.

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