

STAR SCOPE

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INTRODUCTION

The ended relationship is like a star orbiting far away.
Invisible yet still impactful.

The plane soaring into the sky marked 'the end' of their relationship.

The sole desire of the star was to reunite someday, but since the other party wished for no further contact, the desire was kept in a box, permanently locked until it was forgotten that once...

There was a boy who never gave up on his dreams no matter what.

"So freaking sleepy!"

The boy with dark brown eyes shouts and stretches, looking around the room, his raven hair all disheveled from ruffling. He staggers into the bathroom and mindlessly examines his face in the mirror.

His dark circles make him look like a panda. A zit pops up on his chin, either from stress or careless face washing. Not to mention the red eyes from sleep deprivation.

The boy who never gave up on his dreams is still the same after two years, except for those dreams. In the mind of the boy who has grown up well (?) or maybe not so well...

They've changed into...

Graduating -> Landing a respectable job -> Having time to sleep

I think that's quite a great mindset. What do people dream about their future? Good families and good lives. As for someone with a fucking broken family and messed-up life, he simply wants a decent job that leads to wealth, then lives quietly before dying alone.

Oh, having lots of time to sleep is more like the major purpose of life.

I brush my teeth and wash up roughly before dressing up quickly to attend classes. The student shirt, though it's supposed to be ironed, is good enough that it's white and clean these days. Since I decided to apply for the Department of Fine and Applied Arts and join the art club, my student clothes resemble rags more and more each day.

I hop on the minibus. My routine has been repetitive for one full year, and it still is in the next. I study, go to my club, do homework, make money, sleep, wake up, and study.

The morning breeze drifts across my face, wafting the smell of the sea around thirty steps away from the front of the residence. This is what I dreamed of in high school, to get into a university near the sea. I love the sea.

The folk song from the market nearby in the morning is still

the main element of this area.

Buzz, buzz.

My phone vibrates. I glance at the name on the screen and heave a sigh.

I don't know what my sister wants. Our family was ruined that day, and it was the reason I moved out to live alone without ever contacting my family. It was initially a struggle because, besides being broke, I wanted to go to university like others. I borrowed my sister's money and paid her back in a year. I've even paid the tuition fees for this year.

"What?" My weary voice probably wears her out to an extent, but as she's seemingly the only one feeling terrible about forcing me to move out, I talk to her despite myself.

[Any problem with the tuition fees?]

"All paid."

[What about the food cost?]

"I eat at the restaurant."

[Do you need more money?]

"If you're going to ask the same questions, stop calling me."

Since the semester started, Ning has given me calls for a week, I think, as if worrying about something. She wasn't this persistent when I was a freshman. When she calls, she always asks if I have enough money or have a hard time.

[I'm just worried.]

"I live with Sorn. Everything's all right. Sorn treats me like his own child. No worries."

I hear a soft sigh on the other end. I know she's worried, but

no one stopped me when I moved out.

[Are you dating anyone?]

Kaning's question halts me from passing a coin to the driver. I pull myself together and place it on his palm before entering the university.

"What about it?"

[Nothing.]

Ugh, are you sure? Aren't you spying on me for our parents?

"What if I'm dating a boy?"

[Kieng!]

Haha. I want to laugh myself to death.

"I'm not dating anyone. Shouldn't you know it best?"

I hang up and stride along the path in aggravation. Don't ask whom I'm dating. I can't even be interested in anyone these days.

To be accurate...

My heart is in ruins.

My body at present functions with my brain and muscles. I used to be meticulous, but I've turned sluggish and uninspired. The once determined guy can no longer concentrate on anything for long.

I guess this is what they say about how people can change entirely.

Loads of things in university aren't what you expect, I know. Therefore, I separated myself from everything after freshman year, isolating myself with no friends, no nothing. There's one thing calming me down and keeping me sane.

Painting.

That's why I go to the art club, my emotional support, every day after class. As it's not popular like the music club, there aren't too many members. Besides, no one bothers me. The club president is also a quiet person. We come here and vent through our paintings, never chatting about anything.

Today is another day I've stayed in the club room until almost late in the evening. Usually, there are three people left before closing the room—me, Fou, the club president, and Aun, the vicious-looking club vice-president.

"Aren't you going home, Kieng?" The club president's drowsy voice reaches my ears. I break my focus from my oil painting and crane my neck to look at him.

"I'll leave soon."

"We don't have new members lately."

"Good. I enjoy peace."

"You want the club all for yourself? You and Oat are somehow the only ones left in the second year."

"Yeah, this is my club."

"In your dream."

Knock, knock.

The knocks interrupt the conversation. The members rarely knock on the art club's door. They push it open without caring if it hits anybody's face. The knocks imply it's not the member.

"Why knocking? The light is brighter than my future. What's it for?"

Fou diverts his eyes from his canvas and walks to the door, grumbling. He stops short and turns his head toward me.

"What? Why are you looking at me?"

"I forgot the door's locked."

Does he need to tell me that?

I turn my attention back to my oil painting. I love the freedom of the art club because I can do whatever I want. If any of my pieces catch the higher-ups' eyes, they will occasionally be displayed in the library or on the walls somewhere in the university. Sometimes the pretty ones are selected to decorate the restaurants nearby. If lucky, I'll gain some money from it.

"Oh, you're not the member. Wrong room?"

I don't know whom Fou is talking to by the door. Aun and I don't care in the slightest.

"I'd like to apply."

"Oh, yeah? All right. Come in."

The door is closed as they both walk inside.

"You're a freshman?"

"Yes."

"Great. We're short of freshmen this year. Now we won't be lonely." Hearing it's a first-year student, I pay no heed. It would be a different story if it were a third-year or fourth-year student.

"Well...The club room is open every day after four. If you want to come here earlier, you can get the key from me or the vice-pres." I crane my neck toward Fou again and open my mouth to tease him with, 'I also have a key as I'm the pres' favorite,' but when my eyes meet the new boy, the forgotten nightmare floods back into my mind.

It seems I'm not the only one in shock and wondering why

there's a familiar face in this room. He's probably as dumbfounded as I am. Why is he in a student uniform? Why is he handing a piece of white paper to the club president?

There's no mistaking it. Why wouldn't I recognize him when we've known each other since middle school? He's just older. His facial features are sharper than back then, and he's gotten much taller. What remains the same is his fierce eyes. Aside from that, the most noticeable thing is the faint aura exuding from his body, as light blue as ever.

He reacts by putting an emotionless face back on as if we're strangers, and I react by grabbing the closest object, the brush-washing bucket, and throwing it at his face, making Fou shout.

"Kieng, what the hell?!"

"Why did you come back?!"

I hope my trembling shout gets him to reflect on his actions. Even though I want to hurt him...

But why? Why...?

"Why did you come back?"

Why am I the only one hurt to death in the end?

...

Why did you come back, 'Ket'?

Chapter 01

'Are you okay?'

The boy asked in a voice hinted with worry as I climbed over the fence in the back. I saw the usually deadpan face dropping and answered.

'Of course. I've done this many times.'

Ket still cheered for me quietly. Okay, my ass. My legs were short and the climb was a struggle. My balls hurt every time I landed.

It was fucking tough.

Our relationship had been a secret for three years and continued to be. I always climbed in and out of the backyard to meet up with Ket at night and return home at dawn.

I spent my middle school years to the fullest.

'That's a shooting star.'

He mumbled in a soft voice. The boy before me gazed up at the sky full of stars tonight. I looked up, still straddling the fence. Even though I couldn't spot it, I knew it was there.

'They say to make a wish.'

'Oh, yeah?'

I closed my eyes and wished upon the shooting star.

I hope I can be with Ket longer than this. Even if we hated each other, I'd still wish to be with him.

Ket always loved the stars. I didn't see the appeal, though. They were merely dark tones.

I landed smoothly on the ground. I checked my body and flashed an amused smile at the boy standing outside.

'Goodnight.'

'Goodnight.'

THUD

"Ouch."

I stub my pinky toe against the table leg and a cry escapes my mouth. Since Ket's return, I've spaced out so much. I've often noticed the way Sorn, the owner of the residence and the restaurant I work for, glances at me in worry. Even so, he's never asked.

I don't remember how many times I've stubbed my toes. All I know is my toes and head hurt.

I drag my tired body into the kitchen during the break. The small yet clean kitchen indicates how strict the owner is toward sanitarianess. I've never found a cockroach since I started working here.

Sorn has converted the floors above the restaurant into a residence for students, renting out a total of four units, which are currently full. I heard the one opposite mine would be available soon since the graduate was about to move to Chiang Mai. The

bottom floor is a restaurant open from seven in the evening to midnight. Sorn can't handle the crowded restaurant alone, so he has Mee (bears), a bulky chef, helping him cook in the back kitchen. I grab a glass and get myself some orange juice. Yes, as a worker, I have the right to drink anything I want while working. When the restaurant is closed, Mee always locks the dispenser to prevent the mischievous kids from drinking from it.

"Why are you spacing out?"

Mee asks, preparing a fish. Ah, his name is not actually Mee. It's Wan (whales). But since Sorn calls him Mee, everyone addresses him the same. Plus, his body isn't as large as a bear's. He's tall and handsome at a lead-actor level, so Sorn keeps him in the kitchen. His restaurant would be in shambles otherwise.

"Nothing much."

"Is something wrong?"

"What would you do if your ex came back?" I lean against the doorframe and drink from the straw in boredom.

"I don't have one."

No way. How come an attractive man like him has no exes?

"Liar."

"I really don't have one." He chops the green onions. "So what's with the ex coming back? Do you still love them?"

"No. The face just reminds me of the old memories."

"You don't need to do anything, then. Just ignore them."

"It's annoying."

"Not everything will be as you wish."

Yeah. He's right.

"Ignore them if you can. When Sorn caught me taking bites of the salmon, I ignored him and acted dumb."

How does that relate to the topic?

"Sorn told me you fought with Kaning recently."

I nod gently. It's no surprise that Mee knows about Kaning. Sorn and Ning were best friends in high school. Mee and Sorn were also close enough to open a restaurant together.

"My sister keeps meddling."

"Isn't it out of worry?"

"I doubt that. You didn't see her kicking me out like some street dog."

"What did you do to be kicked out?"

"I dated a boy."

Without looking at me, Mee tosses the fish into the pan as if this is another casual conversation.

"She didn't like it?"

"She considered it shameful and humiliating to our family. My parents shared the same thought."

"It doesn't make sense."

That's what I thought. Well, if they believed it did, then it did. After breaking up with Ket, I wasn't allowed to be close to any boys. Apparently, they thought I'd be into all males.

"That explains it. I've never seen you in a sour mood. It's like you're possessed whenever you touch your phone."

"I'm a human, not a rock."

"Oh, yeah? I thought you lost all emotions."

"You want to be a dead bear or what? I wonder."

The tall man raises his cleaver to chop my head, so I swerve out of the kitchen as the second batch of customers begins to come in.

I hate working, but I have no choice. Studying is exhausting enough, yet I have to work after that to pay my rent. Nonetheless, I'd rather work my butt off than go home and beg those who have never cared about me.

As a result, my life ended at a small restaurant near the university. The modern glass room gives off a feeling-at-home vibe. The paintings from the art club line the walls, with some set on the floor in various spots for coziness. However, the distinct feature of Sorn's restaurant is the painting of a massive whale by the entrance, suiting the name, 'Wun Wan.' You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know whose idea it is. It's from the man who's addressed differently from his real name and always has his intimidating face on with his cleaver in the back kitchen.

Two hours later. Three hours later. My exhausting legs are a sign that I'll get to rest soon. Finally, it's the heavenly time. I throw my black apron on the bed, toss the whale-embroidered white shirt into the basket, fling my pants onto the chair, and plop down without a care in the world.

I'll shower in the morning.

I exhale a deep sigh, gazing at the oil painting I worked on in the art club. It's a painting of a shooting star. I walk closer and stare at it for a while.

I often drew shooting stars back when I missed him, venting the suppressed feelings in my heart. I've never been interested in

stars. I love the sea and the sound of the waves crashing on the beach. The one who likes stars is Ket.

We talked about our future universities before the breakup, so it didn't surprise me that he knew where I studied. Ket hates the sea. I hate mountains. Ket wished to go high up to see the stars clearly, while I inched toward the waves at the beach.

It's been evident that our preferences differ.

Oddly enough, despite hating the sea, Ket is in the uniform of the university near the sea.

I don't believe in making wishes upon the stars. I played along because I was young. But if it's true, then it 'undoubtedly' works. I wish I could return to that day and say, 'If we end up hating each other, let's never reunite,' instead.

I take the oil painting of the shooting star set in my room for almost a year in my hands, then walk outside and throw it into a trash can in front of my room with no emotions. The door upstairs opens at the same time.

"Not sleeping yet, Kieng?"

"Why are you still up?"

I look up at the man with deep dark circles, whom I hardly exchange words with. His face is covered in stubble and a beard as he rarely gets out to say hi. Tong narrows his eyes at me, nearly shutting them.

"I'm passing through the levels."

"Of what?"

"Mario Neko."

He picks a letter from a small mailbox at the front and

disappears into his room, leaving me in silence.

I live aimlessly, and Tong is just the same.

My emotional support, the art club, no longer works its magic, but I wouldn't switch to another club due to my love for painting. It's my best outlet. I settle on my regular chair, the one with a whale sticker, and, out of the corner of my eye, notice someone who shouldn't be in this room doing something over the table.

"Ket, you like drawing?"

The cheerful voice of the youngest member, Mi, lightens up the mood. The others are focused on their pieces. Fou is the same as usual but with a huge pile of documents before him this time.

"Yes."

Fucking liar!

My nosy ears get me swearing in my mind. Ket hates drawing the most. His dream is to run a café on the mountain to gaze at the sky and sparkling stars. I've never seen him touching a drawing pencil, only a coffee machine.

"Done."

"Let me see." Mi charges toward Ket after he seems so proud of his drawing on A4-size paper. Fou even turns his eyes from the thick stack of documents and steps behind the tall man, who suddenly shoots a piercing glance at me as if to say he will never lose to me.

"Ah."

Fou pauses and pats Ket's shoulder to offer comfort.

"We all can improve. You made the right decision to join the

art club."

"Is it that good?" I ask Mi in a grumble when she retreats and sits at the table next to me, letting Fou and Ket talk alone. The small round-eyed girl with shoulder-length hair with a Hello Kitty clip offers me a sheepish smile.

"W...Well..."

"Is it really good?"

"It's art." Mi smiles at me sweetly and turns her attention to her piece. The art club falls into silence once again.

I concentrate on the tip of my brush, moving it on the canvas freely. I never repeat the pattern in my paintings. Every time I close my eyes, thousands of colors appear infinitely. I can paint whatever I desire without being controlled by anyone. That's the perk of being a member of the art club. In class, your freedom is limited by something called 'subjects.'

'Draw an animal and explain how it represents your personality.'

The homework today was a piece of cake. I grin and place the square notebook on the marble table under the tamarind tree. Ket and I were in different classrooms in high school, so his homework differed from mine. It seemed he particularly enjoyed science and social studies, whereas I loved art.

"What's with that bright smile?"

"It's art."

I started drawing a bird with no hesitation.

"A bird?"

"Yup."

'Why? You never mentioned it.'

My favorite animal was actually a cat, but my personality was similar to birds the most.

'It's free. I want to have the freedom to fly anywhere and do whatever I wish, uncaged.'

Ket went quiet and continued working on his astronomy homework, his favorite. Even so, he didn't get up and leave.

'If you became a bird one day, where would you go?' he asked in a clear voice, taking my attention from my drawing. I stared at the boy the same age and smiled.

'The sea.'

FWIP.

My brush slips as I'm lost in memories. I shake my head a few times to rid this worsening feeling, glancing at the man still in his seat but reading instead of drawing.

I can't figure out why someone like him would join the art club, but what confuses me more is the reason he's here.

Why did someone who loved the mountains choose to come to the sea?

Ket gets up and walks out after a while, leaving only a leather bag and a piece of his completed drawing. Unable to hold back, I stride toward the now empty table.

I wonder why Fou and Mi were stunned like that. Plus, Mi looked really surprised. Is Ket that good at drawing?

Fou has never reacted that way to my paintings since I joined the club!

I pick up the face-down A4-size paper on the table and flip it. The drawing makes me look up at Fou, who's already looking at me.

I've learned it today.

The saying, 'There is no right or wrong in art, but what the fuck did you draw?' is true.

This is a stick man!

Ket opens the door the moment I put the drawing back down. He holds my gaze as if asking what I'm doing to his masterpiece, and, indeed, he speaks first.

"What are you doing?"

Ket's unfamiliarly strange voice gives me the creeps. I only heard his young voice when we were kids. His voice after puberty tickles my ears.

"Nothing."

"I saw you holding my drawing."

"It slipped onto the floor." Fou looks at me, his eyes saying, 'How smooth.'

"Oh, yeah? The airflow is strong, huh?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing."

He copied my word! What a pain in the neck, heart, brain, and soles of my feet. How annoying.

"What are you looking at? Wanna fight?"

I lift my fists to hit Ket, but I won't actually do it. I was used to his quiet, timid, young-master looks. Now that he talked to me bluntly and shortly, I couldn't help fighting back.

"Wait, Kieng, you bastard. This is an art club, not a world-class international boxing club."

Ugh, I would've knocked him out had I not been stopped in time.

"You don't like Ket?" Mi asks after I flop on my chair in frustration. The small girl is moving her brush over her canvas. Besides Fou, Mi is great at drawing anime characters.

"No."

"Why? He's handsome."

"More like troublesome."

Come to think of it, I calm down really fast when I talk to Mi. I'd usually suppress my feelings and vent them out by painting. However, this girl with glowing cheeks in front of me is like my hamster pet. Mi is a girl with a faint, light-pink aura, brighter than others. She also talks sense more than the big guy acting childish who fixes his irritated eyes on me.

"Were you on bad terms before?"

"Yeah."

I rest my chin in my hand and gaze at Mi's painting style. Her hand movements are so stable that it's pleasant to the eyes.

Since I got into this university, I've never had a single best friend besides my classmates. I'm close to a few club members, but those I feel comfortable with are only Fou and Mi.

On bad terms...? No. We were on such good terms and ended up hating each other one day.

I still remember everything back then well. When he turned his back on me, my flowing tears, the painful misery, and the lost

freedom. I still vividly remember the day my mother set a surveillance camera behind the fence, the day I got my leg caught up in barbed wire installed by someone while climbing over, and the day she said she would cut ties with me if I didn't break up with Ket.

"Kieng."

"Huh?!" I'm startled by Mi's cold palm on my arm.

"You zone out so often."

"Sorry."

I lean my forehead against the table next to Mi. The hotness rushing up to my face causes me to stifle my tears as those awful memories painfully flash in my mind.

Despite saying I don't care, my nearly healed scar is cut open again.

Should I be the one running away?

Chapter 02

I turn away from the sunlight seeping through the blinds hitting my eyes. I stretch on my bed before sitting up, and the first thing I feel is...

My sore throat.

I get out of bed early to make myself a warm drink. My throat feels so itchy that I lose appetite. I assume it's because I didn't sleep well. I worked on a project until morning to distract myself.

The cocoa powder dissolves in hot water from the kettle. I flick my eyes to the entrance, open since morning, and the open back door. If the restaurant is open this early, it means either Sorn will clean the vacant room today or Mee is out at the market to get ingredients. I bet on the first one since I hear the laundry machine from the back.

I slide the whale notebook and open it to check the name of the graduate that has moved out. The next box that's supposed to be empty is written neatly in blue ink.

'Mr. Khobket Sawasdipak'

Huh?

Khobket...? Why does it sound familiar?

I march to the back of the building and find a lanky man humming while flipping the laundry to hang.

"Sorn."

"Hmm?" Sorn focuses on hanging the sheet as if it's fun, not looking at me. He's the only one enjoying this. Cleaning is Sorn's happiness.

"Who's the new resident?"

"Oh, Kaning told me on the phone that he was your friend."

"Cough, cough."

I choke on my cocoa. It flows out of my nostrils.

"Huh?!"

No, no, no, no, no. I can never believe my ears.

I quickly call my sister, not knowing what she's planning or up to. A few minutes after I keep tapping the table, she picks up.

[Hello?]

"What the hell have you done?"

[What?]

"I'm asking what the hell you've done. Why will Ket move in here?!" I yell into the phone as Mee carries a Styrofoam container into the restaurant. I greet him briefly and go upstairs.

[It's nothing. Ket was looking for a place, so I gave him Luksorn's address.]

"I don't understand."

[Why are you upset? You don't love him anymore, do you?]

Her words hit me. I slowly let go of my frustration and stay calm. I no longer have feelings for him, but I don't want to see his

face. It's worse that we go to the same university. I'll throw up if we see each other every day.

"I'm not upset. I just don't like it. You forbade me to see him. Why did you recommend this place?"

[It's the only place I know. Where else am I supposed to recommend?]

"There's plenty of condominiums in Chonburi. So many other dorms. A rich guy like Ket can even afford a house. Why would he stay here?"

[Ket had a fight with his family.]

"It has nothing to do with me."

[I'm just telling you. If there's nothing else, I'll hang up.]

Ning ends the call, leaving me in silence, stunned.

Does he have to be closer to me after the fight with his family? I was the reason he was on bad terms with his family and sent abroad. I don't understand a single thing. How come Ning knows so much about Ket when she couldn't even look at him in the past?

Seriously, no matter what my sister and Ket are planning together...

When I find that out, I'll never forgive both of them.

I drop my backpack on the floor and sit next to it before ruffling my hair until it goes messy, shocking Fou. Even so, he doesn't ask. Aun is nowhere to be seen today. Given the past few days, I suppose he's as busy as Fou. Tons of work to deal with.

Everything seems to go well today. I put on my earphones, turn on the music, and close my eyes to take a break. No one

bothers me, like usual. It's so peaceful that I feel like falling asleep.

But then, someone enters the room and ruins everything before my eyes. Ket puts his backpack on the table and settles on the chair with two new members. Mi is painting at the table beside me. Oat skips the club activity, going somewhere. The other seniors come in one by one, changing the quiet room into the crowded one.

I forgot Fou set a meeting today.

Fou informs us about all the activities that will be held this year. I don't pay much attention to it. We'll mainly sell our goods in booths to increase the small budget of our club. The seniors are discussing the products for this year. Shirts are boring, and our paintings are constantly purchased.

"Oh, I forgot." The club president raises a piece of white paper over his head.

"I want you to participate in the applied arts contest this year. Last year, our university missed the first-prize award for the recycling topic. Let's work on some new ideas this time." He lightly flips the piece of paper.

"We'll go on a trip if we win."

They all holler. The others look enthusiastic about the contest, but I...

"Kieng."

"Huh?" I exclaim when Fou suddenly calls me amid the group.

"I'm not letting you get away this year. If you refuse to participate, I'll kick you out."

What?

You can't do this to me!

I sit in sadness for a short moment before Mi settles by my side.

"Why did Fou say that?"

"Because Professor Saman once visited our club and complimented him, I guess?" someone chirps over us. Oat, who has been absent for days, appears in front of me all of a sudden.

"He rarely gives compliments, so Fou wants him to be involved, not just sitting here stupidly like this."

"Wow, Kieng must be great at painting."

"He is, Mi. Besides that, his creativity is top-notch."

"Nonsense," I grumble. Oat and I are the only sophomores in this club, but we're not that close. Oat is like a ghost, not staying in the same place for long. Had Fou not pointed out we were the only second-year students here, I would've assumed I was the only one.

"I'm praising you."

"I'll participate, too, though I'm only good at anime characters." Her blushing cheeks draw attention from the guys in the club. I stare daggers at them, making them avert their eyes.

Don't even think about this. I'm protective of this girl.

"Have you ever gotten hit on?" I ask Mi, and she cracks a dry laugh.

"Yes, but I'm not interested."

"What kind of person do you like?"

The girl goes silent, slowly turning red from her face to her ears as she glances at the club president. Oat and I meet each other's

eyes simultaneously. You can tell she's into him even from afar.

"I can't tell you." Mi looks down at her lap.

"What about your type?"

"182 centimeters tall, with beautiful eyes and dark brown hair. Loves painting. He might look careless at times, but he's responsible!" She describes her type to me. Oat and I flick our gaze to the club president again.

He did say he's 182 centimeters tall.

Are his eyes beautiful? Well, they are. They're long like leaves.

He definitely has dark brown hair.

He likes to paint.

Even though he sometimes looks careless, he's the club president that keeps the art club going to this day.

Mi has feelings for that motherfucker Fou without a doubt.

"I hope it works out, Mi," Oat laughs in worry. It's known that Fou cares about nothing except art. He's inactive like a sloth. I can't fathom why Mi likes someone like him.

My eyes catch someone glaring at me with his arms crossed.

I mouth words to mess with Ket.

What-the-fuck-are-you-looking-at?

Why did I fall for someone like him? Oh, Ket wasn't like this back then. He looked solemn on the outside, but he was very attentive on the inside. But now...

He's emotionless physically and mentally.

I don't like him. No matter how I look at it, I don't like him!

I don't remember when I fell asleep. I recall getting irritated

after looking at Ket, putting on my earphones, and listening to music until I drifted off. The sky is already dark when I'm awake. There's no one else in the room besides that bastard who came back into my life for an unknown reason. Fou is nowhere in sight, but I think he'll be back since his backpack is left here. Mi has probably gone home.

I sit up slowly and yawn. It's been days since I had enough sleep. After recharging my energy, I feel pretty refreshed.

It's not that refreshing because of the man scowling at me.

"Got nothing to do?"

"It's cool in here."

"Why are you back?"

I actually don't want to converse with him. I wish to ignore him and exit the club room as if we're strangers, indirectly pressuring him to return to his mountains. However, I drag my chair over and sit opposite him, driven by the thing eating at me.

Ket looks like he needs to poop. He clears his throat and hides his smile.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing."

"Then why the fuck did you laugh?"

"Who?"

"You were stifling a laugh."

"I wasn't." He puts on his usual emotionless face.

"Why did you come back from England?"

"I graduated."

"Why didn't you apply for a university in Chiang Mai? Why

did you come to Chonburi?"

"I wanted to." I fight the urge to smack his head.

"But you hate the sea."

"Right."

"Then why did you come to the sea?"

"I have something to deal with."

"Why did you rent the same place as me? Are you afraid I won't remember your face?"

"No. I just wanted to. The room is nice."

"What a pain."

"Oh, yeah?"

Enough!

I've had it!

Giving up, I walk back to get my backpack and leave in a deadly rage. I open the door to find Fou coming back with Mi. Judging by the bags of food, they must've gone to the street behind the university.

"Kieng, your face."

Mi says while Fou tries not to laugh. When I glower at him, he keeps a straight face and suppresses his laughter.

What is Mi talking about? I rub my chin. I shaved last week.

"You leaving? I bought you something." The club president lifts a bag of fried meatballs, but I don't want to eat it. I've lost my appetite, furious.

"Yes."

It doesn't take me long to arrive at Sorn's restaurant, but

people look at me and giggle all the way on the minibus. I'm not suspicious of anything until I'm about to ascend the stairs and Sorn appears out of the kitchen.

"Oh, Kieng."

"Hey."

"What's that on your face?"

Sorn isn't the only one pointing it out. Mi also said that. I frown at Sorn.

What's with my face?

Mee cranes his head out of the kitchen and looks at me. He bursts out laughing like a madman.

"Why are you laughing?"

Sorn fumbles in a drawer and hands me a small mirror. I check my face in it.

Whiskers. Freaking whiskers. There are three lines in black ink on both my cheeks.

It's not hard to figure out who the culprit is. When I woke up, I was in the room alone with that bastard.

I clutch the mirror so hard my body shakes.

Ket, you son of a bitch!

The clock on the wall ticks. I sit cross-legged on the floor with my arms crossed over my chest on the second-floor balcony while Sorn plays a game on his phone on the stairs. The restaurant is closed today. We only prepared the ingredients for tomorrow, the weekend, when it'll be especially crowded. I've been frowning since the early evening until now.

"You hate it that much?"

Sorn asks after his cookie character falls off the cliff to its death. I glare at him.

I've rubbed my face with my cleanser until it swells, yet the trace of the black-ink whiskers remains. Don't ask who else saw them. Tong was out to get his letters like usual, and Tou unexpectedly returned home at the same time as me.

Everyone saw them, including the minibus driver.

"I hate it."

"Because it's your ex?"

I sigh softly. It's no surprise that Sorn is aware of this since he's Ning's best friend. Ning probably tells him about her worry. I know that well. The first time I stepped in here, Sorn took care of me as if we'd known each other for a long time.

"Isn't it good ~~that~~ it's over? I don't know why he's back."

"He might have a reason."

The sound of Cookie Run starts again as the phone owner pays attention to the game more than his distressed brother.

If there's a reason, why now?

'Ket went to the airport this morning.'

I froze in front of the gate of the Sawasdiapak house, my fists clutching around the polished black steel pickets as if I was scared they would disappear. A lump got stuck in my throat, robbing me of the ability to speak.

My head was full of 'Why?'

Why didn't he tell me he'd leave? Was I in a place where I

didn't deserve to know?

I dragged my weak body away and flopped on the grass. This was the first place I headed after running away from home. I hadn't understood anything since I got caught dating Ket. After that day, my dreams were destroyed into bits.

Ket had changed. He wouldn't talk to me or tell me he'd study abroad. He didn't even leave anything for me, as if all the time we'd spent together meant nothing.

The first teardrop trickled down, followed by the second, third, fourth, and fifth. Soon after, as the rain poured down from the sky, I sobbed alone.

I tried to look for the stars, yet they disappeared far away.

BAM!

The sound of a car door being shut comes before the doorbell. Sorn puts his phone in his pocket and turns to me, his eyes showing visible concern like the first day.

"Are you Ket?"

"Yes."

"Your room is on the second floor."

"Okay."

He walks through the restaurant to the stairs. That face. The man who left me heartlessly without saying goodbye is right in front of me. Mee strides past me with a huge suitcase as Sorn hands Ket a key before returning to the restaurant.

The darkness makes it hard to spot Ket's faint aura. It feels like he's far away. Still, it's not a challenge to pinpoint this is the

same person as the one two years ago. I haven't looked up at the night sky for two years.

"You drew the whiskers on my face."

"Any evidence?"

I advance toward him and point at the trace of the whiskers on my cheeks.

"Quit acting dumb. You did it, right?"

"I'm asking for evidence. You were asleep. You can't just accuse others."

If my gritted teeth could make a sound, it would sound like I was ready to crush his bones.

"You got the nerve to mess with me."

A smirk flickers on the corner of Ket's lips. He seems content to get me worked up.

We hold each other's gazes for thirty seconds, and I'm the one shaking in anger.

Okay. I admit it. His return is driving me insane.

The stars float up in the sky with no direction or purpose.

Stuck in the past, he lives soullessly.

Unable to step forward. Unable to change.

But when someone returns into his life...

Pulling him into the man's universe,

Leading the star into the orbit, where it belongs

Kiengdao's heart beats again.

However, the feelings stuck in his heart prevent him from moving forward.

He has no clue why **Khobket** is back..

*He can't bring himself to trust this man this time...

Even though, deep down, he hopes Khobket will be by his side again.

