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Jiraphat¹

Will be a Good Boy

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Jiraphat Will be a Good Boy 1

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Introduction

A few years ago, my father fell ill and passed away. He was sixty then, and it made me question why his life was cut so short and why he didn't live until seventy or eighty.

Little did I know that my life would be double shorter than his. I wish I could laugh, but I'm drained of strength.

I'm currently lying in a pool of my own blood in the middle of the intersection, dying, at the hands of an irresponsible drunk driver. Fuck my life.

A kind passerby has called an ambulance, but I understand my body well. My time is running out.

I suppose I'm still able to think due to my last strength before I pass on.

But wait. This is not a tragic story or a tear-jerking drama.

You don't need to mourn my death at the age of thirty.

How do I put it? My life wasn't awful. I have no unfinished business.

I was born into a middle-class family, with my father, mother, and older sister.

Thankfully, our parents never burdened their two children. They paid off their debts, got life insurance, and never asked for financial help.

My father passed away. My sister married and moved to another country with her husband, taking our mother with her.

I was a typical office worker, living in an apartment that I had paid out long ago. I had no financial burdens or lofty dreams to achieve. I simply lived on my salary, saving for insurance and making occasional investments.

See? I had a blessed life, free from any burdens or issues.

No regrets.

"..."

Damn, the ambulance is taking its sweet time. Who says death happens suddenly? I've already finished reminiscing about my life.

Or did I forget anyone? My lover? I have none.

Friends? I only ever had colleagues, who constantly changed as they often switched jobs for higher pay. I was never close to anyone enough to disclose anything but general information, so I can't call them friends.

High school friends?

None. I had no best friends and was never invited to any meals to vent about working lives after graduation.

Lying hopelessly on the ground, I have nothing left to think of. I flick my eyes around to engrave the last scene before I go.

Apart from people flocking around me, the last thing in my vision is a gigantic LED ad banner on a building.

What draws my attention isn't the banner but the person on it.
'Ruth Atiwitch'

A famous actor everyone knows, including me, but as a high school friend, not as an actor.

This is hilarious. We went to morning assemblies together and wore the same student uniforms.

But one of us became known by the entire country. He could say one word and all attention would be on him. Meanwhile, the other one went as far as to sprawl in his own blood, yet nobody recognized him.

I never wish to be famous like him, but I can't help but wonder what it would be if the person lying here was him.

He would have many stories and loved ones to think of with no time left to envy someone else's life like me.

The ad banner begins to blur as my consciousness fades.
This is death, huh?

In the last second, I realize what I regret the most in my thirty years of living.

I don't regret not being remembered.

I regret my action...

...for living my life without remembering anyone.

Chapter 1

Not Telling

Old people say that if you do good deeds, you go to heaven, and if you do bad deeds, you go to hell. Since I've died today, let me give you a review.

The first thing I feel after death is stiffness.

It's extremely hard, like a teak bench, ah, or perhaps a teak bed? I'm unsure what it's called, but it can be used for sitting and lying down. You can sometimes use it as a backrest when sitting on the floor. It's a piece of wood furniture in a household with an elderly member. No matter what style your house is, it will appear one day and can never be removed or destroyed. Can you imagine it?

In addition to stiffness, it's also cold.

It's not as frosty cold as the North Pole, but the coldness comes in waves, like someone has turned on a fan with a Japanese brand name ironically invented by a Thai company and aimed it at my face.

Am I in hell or heaven? Why does it feel like I'm napping in my old house?

Wait, my old house?

"Get up if you're awake. Stop frowning and mumbling," says a girl's familiar yet more youthful and cheerful voice in my ear.

I open my eyes and sit up to figure out where I am.

"Where is this place?" I once considered it ridiculous and unreasonable when a protagonist in a soap opera uttered those words when they were obviously in a patient's bed in a hospital with an IV drip connected to their body, yet I said it myself today.

I'm not too stupid to recognize this place. Why wouldn't I remember the house I lived in for eighteen years before moving to a dormitory when I got into a university? It's a concrete wooden house with a teak daybed in the middle and a neon-colored fan. These things always embarrassed me when we had guests but also felt welcoming whenever I returned home.

As a dead person, the situation baffles me. I should have either awakened in a hospital if the ambulance had arrived in time, or encountered grim reapers, guardians of the underworld, or angels if I had indeed died. The least probable explanation is that the accident was just a dream. If that had been the case, I would have been in my bed in my apartment, not my old house that had already been sold.

"Quit acting like you're a protagonist in a drama. Scoot. Let me sit with you." The girl before me dismisses my question and slaps my shoulder repeatedly until I straighten up and make room for her.

As I study this girl's appearance, I realize she's 'Jean Jitrada,' my only sister who is five years older than me, and who had married

and moved abroad with her husband.

I'm now considering another possibility. Maybe my soul was transported to this place because I thought of my mother and sister before passing away. That must be the reason. I'm still recalling the past. I haven't died.

With that conclusion, I regain composure and start inspecting P* Jean from head to toe. If this is a flashback before death, I will memorize her as much as possible. She's still my beautiful sister. I remember she cut her hair short the last time we met, but her hair now hangs past her waist with some highlights in a soft mullet style. She loves wearing makeup, but her eyebrows are darker than usual today. The eyeliners are somehow thick despite her obsession with natural looks. Her fashion isn't awful but quite outdated.

Wait.

"Why are you dressed like this?" If this is just a flashback before death, I should be able to ask the question without getting a slap.

"Ji, shut your fucking mouth. I carried you from the main street and you didn't even thank me."

"You carried me? But why?" Damn, things are getting complicated.

"Weren't you the one who went to the main street for water fights and fainted, startling the hell out of other people? Why would you play water fights so early?"

My old house, my sister with her outdated fashion,

* P' is used to address someone older.

me fainting while playing water fights. It all reminds me of an incident in the past.

I quickly look at the free calendar that we got from a drugstore on the wall.

'April 15, 2010'

Now it's clear that this is the incident when I was in eleventh grade. I was playing water fights with the other kids in the alley on Songkran Day and fainted, and then P' Jean awkwardly carried me home.

The flashback feels way too real. Perhaps it's true that the guardian of the underworld has been recording every human's sins before sending the humans to each part of hell, or I'm still dreaming.

To prove my theory, let's do a pain test. I pinch P' Jean's arm as hard as I can.

"Ugh! Ji, why the hell did you pinch me?!" P' Jean yells, startling me. She's about to say something more but decides to save her breath.

The pinch hurts, which means this is not a dream. For a moment, a bizarre thought pops up in my head.

"Meowww~"

"Bear!!!" A meow from a calico cat snuggling against my foot draws my attention from P' Jean.

We got this little female cat a year ago and named her Bear for an embarrassing reason.

It was late one night when everyone had gone to bed. I heard my mother, whom I addressed as 'Madam Narumon,' shouting 'Bear' loudly. We all rushed downstairs to see what was going on and spotted a dark shadow with large ears in the backyard. My father, 'Mr. Jira,' took charge and went to investigate. To our surprise, he ended up capturing this little cat.

We all had a good laugh afterward, realizing that we had mistaken a cat for a bear. Besides, it seemed absurd to think that a bear would be wandering around in the city.

The cat became a new member of our family. Later on, Mr. Jira fell ill and had to be tended to by my mother at all times, and P' Jean was flying back and forth between Thailand and another country. I landed a job after graduation, moved to a pet-friendly condominium, and took Bear in. A few days after my father passed, turning into a star in the sky, Bear followed him.

As it's been a while, I immediately lean down and pick up the cat for a snuggle.

"Stop, Bear. Don't scratch me," I protest in a high-pitched voice, though I'm willingly sticking out my face to her like a scratching post.

"What's all the fuss?" asks the important woman walking out of the kitchen, presumably having heard P' Jean yelling.

Madam Narumon, in her forties, is as gorgeous as ever. Compared to the last time we met, I like her more in this state because the entire family is together.

"Mom, that brat pinched me," P' Jean roars.

"How many times have I told you not to call your brother

a brat? Ji, why did you pinch your sister?" Either admitting it or arguing, I listen to my mother nagging with a smile. I've really missed her voice. Nobody nagged at me like this after my working life had begun. I stare at the middle-aged Madam Narumon for some time before realizing something.

If this is the year 2010 and my mother is in her forties, it means...

I look past my mother to a man who will be fifty soon walking in.

"Dad!!!"

"Your mom told me on the phone that you fainted. I told you to wait to play water fights together in the evening." I put Bear back on the floor, charge forward, and throw my arms around Mr. Jira, ignoring his scolding.

Mr. Jira embraces me despite his confusion. "Why are you hugging me? Out of guilt?"

"..." I tighten my arms.

Mr. Jira soon notices something unusual.

"Ji, are you crying? Did P' Jean pick on you?" asks Mr. Jira in worry. He has never experienced this situation after seventeen years of raising his son.

"Dad, I didn't do anything. It was Ji..." P' Jean's voice trails off, probably stopped by someone.

I did cry when my father passed. But since my mother and sister were bawling at the funeral, I, as the only son, kept my composure and let my tears trickle down in silence to prevent adding any dismal to our family. I decided to be cheerful and light up the mood to comfort my family. From then on, I never

cried again.

When Bear went to heaven, my mother and sister moved to another country. Everybody moved on except me.

Right now, Mr. Jira is standing in front of me with Madam Narumon and P' Jean, all living peacefully in our old house. Bear meows and nuzzles me, begging for food.

I thought my tears had dried for over a decade, but they'd actually been waiting...

For me to bawl my eyes out today.

In the silence, amid the three family members and one cat, there's only the sound of the old fan and my sobbing.

I no longer care about my speculations about hell and heaven. As long as the guardian of the underworld hasn't snatched my soul, I will not go anywhere.

The day I cried, I told them it was because of sunstroke. Even though they knew it was a lie, they didn't press me. And when I went to bed, I braced myself to wake up in either hell or heaven.

As it turned out, I continued to stay in my old house for one month already. I wondered if I'd traveled back in time, but it was hard to believe. Whatever it was, I aimed to spend time with my family while I could.

After Songkran, P' Jean returned to her university dormitory, Mr. Jira resumed his job as a banker, and Madam Narumon made Thai sweet treats for shops. Meanwhile, I had no responsibility.

The first few days were quite exciting as I got to help my mother make sweet treats, though I kept messing up and

had to clean the cooking tools instead. It was fun to try, nonetheless. Some days, I explored outside and felt the most thrilled when I went out with twenty baht and came back with some money left. This experience would be impossible years later.

Well, I had a great time only in the first few days. Given that I died at the beginning of 2023, I'd read every manga available at the rental shop. While others waited monthly for new volumes, I had to wait for years for the latest ones as I already knew what happened. I also found it difficult to watch a drama with my mother, unable to fathom how I used to enjoy it back then.

As an 8K human, I was struggling to adjust to the 144p version of life.

Today is no different. I'm in the kitchen washing the dishes while Madam Narumon complains about our neighbors. I just listen.

"Ji, school's starting soon. Why don't you go out and play with your friends? Aren't you bored of staying home all day?" Here we go. It's always circling back to me.

How am I supposed to tell her I have no close friends?

I let silence be the answer.

"I'm glad that you stay home and help out with chores, but I want you to go out and play like other kids."

"..."

"When your dad, P' Jean, and I are no longer here, I don't want you to cry alone. Do you understand?"

I lock eyes with Madam Narumon.

Like earlier, I give no response.

At night, I ponder what she said.

And I come to a realization.

If I continue my life here until the day I'm meant to die, does it mean I have to look at the ad banner, helpless, in the middle of the intersection again?

I've made up my mind.

If I'm still here when school starts, in eleventh grade this time, I will make an effort to socialize more. School activities are a different story since there's nothing I can do about them anyway. But I will try to go to school early and won't go straight home right after classes.

I don't expect to have friends or be well-known. That's wishful thinking. However, spending more time at school will allow me to create more memories to reminisce about when my time comes, which is better than feeling jealous of someone from the same school.

Ji Jiraphat will be a new person!!!

May 17, 2010

A new person, huh? Students are considered late after eight. It's seven-fifty, and I'm still in Mr. Jira's car.

I didn't wake up late or forget my resolution. Actually, I woke up at six. Mr. Jira, who usually left early in the morning, was surprised to see his son at that time and offered a ride before heading to work. Since he looked so happy to give his son a ride for the first time in years, I accepted his kindness when I usually took a bike taxi to school.

As you can see, the traffic is heavily congested due to the start of multiple schools, almost like there's an accident.

I will be late in ten minutes. Despite my will to change, fate plays a joke on me.

"You'll get there in time if you run. Your school is in the next alley," says Mr. Jira upon my defeated state. "I never have a problem with you being late. But are you going to let yourself be late after waking up so early?" he adds.

Are you going to let yourself die alone again? I ask myself.

"Go, Ji."

As soon as my father unlocks the car, I sprint to the alley.

You might think it's ridiculous to believe going to school early will change anything.

You wouldn't understand. For me, who was stuck in the same place from the day Mr. Jira passed away to the day of my death...

I'm not running for dear life just to get to the assembly in time, but it's my first time stepping forward in my miserable life.

Thanks to my seven-teen-year-old body, I successfully arrive at school before eight. I hope to take in the atmosphere of my old school, but it's already eight and students are singing the national anthem. I need to find my class line.

My class, Class 7, is the language-mathematics program. The students in this area look familiar, so I assume this is the correct direction and quickly get in line.

Not a fan of morning assemblies, I secretly observe my classmates while everyone chants prayers and sings the marching

song.

I recognize many of them. Even though I don't remember their names, I know the tiny shoulder-length hair girl at the front.

She's 'Pim,' or 'Phappim.' Since she's at the front, she has to check attendance by default. Normally, I would be in the late assembly and never get to converse with her that much until graduation, so I shouldn't have remembered her name. However, she would become a nationally famous lawyer in charge of well-known cases and appear in loads of interviews. I've categorized her in the same group as Ruth Atiwitch.

After the assembly, Pim starts checking attendance down the line, letting the classmates head to our classroom one by one. Eventually, she stops in front of me.

"Jiraphat, number 7. Um...wait." She looks like she's just seen a ghost. Maybe I am? She repeated, "Jiraphat?"

I nod.

"Did you sneak out of the late assembly?" She accuses me of being late without even checking my name.

How terrible was I last semester to ruin my credibility this much?

"No, I didn't..." I deny.

"What's going on? Oh, Ji, aren't you in the late assembly?" asks another person before I even have a chance to convince the first one.

It's Lalita, as known as 'Lita.' She's a member of the SC, or 'the student council.' I know her despite being from a different class because she's part of the truant patrol and checks

the late students every day.

But how does she know my name when there are tons of late students?

One explanation: 'Lita knows everyone.' Her nickname is the generation's civil registration records. She even recognizes me—a nobody who comes to school late and goes home fast without participating in any activities.

"You think you can just sneak out of the late assembly? This is the first day of school," Lita chimes in, well aware of how hellish the late assembly is. It's actually not that scary. They just check the names of the late students and dismiss them before the first classes, never keeping them unnecessarily long.

It's the teacher who makes it hellish. We all know that we must escape if we get a chance. I'm not going to elaborate now. If you still follow along, you will get to meet him someday.

"You were late on the first day last semester," Pim, who has no clue about the cruelty, points out.

I snap back and pause immediately, "This semester will be different because..."

"Because?"

I swallow the reason 'I don't want to die alone at thirty' down my throat. If I said that, they would think I was crazy and send me to the nurse's office instead of the late assembly.

What would be my excuse, then? I happened to wake up early? But who would suddenly wake up at four or five in the morning? I wanted to see my friends? But I don't have close friends. None of the excuses in my head make sense. What do I say?

"...because I will be a good boy this semester," I mutter unconsciously.

Shit, out of hundreds of good excuses, I picked the most ludicrous one. I hope they missed that.

Me: "..."

Pim: "..."

Lita: "..."

"Pfff," one of them laughs.

Okay, they heard me.

"Lita, don't laugh at your friend."

"No, I'm not laughing, oops, ha...hahaha." *Both of them laugh.*

Noticing my glowering, they stop laughing but look at me teasingly.

"Sorry. You talked like my little nephew at kindergarten, and your serious face was just too funny. I couldn't help but laugh."

"Given your earnestness, you probably didn't sneak out of the late assembly." Pim notes my serious expression and checks my name on the list without any more questions.

Attendance checkers normally have to submit the lists to the disciplinary office, but since Lita, a truant patrol member, is here, Pim hands the list directly to her.

Since I'm the last person in line, everybody else has returned to the classroom. Lita now heads to the disciplinary office, leaving me and Pim staring at each other. This means we will go to our classroom together.

It shouldn't be a big deal, but it is for someone who hasn't been to school for years and has just embarrassed himself.

I look at Pim, who has stopped laughing and is currently pressing her lips together to stifle another laugh.

"I'm going to the restroom," I quickly find a way out.

Reading my mind, she replies, "Sure. Homeroom starts in ten minutes. You managed to get to the assembly in time, so don't skip classes on the first day."

Before leaving, she turns around.

"Sorry for laughing. Rest assured. About what you said, 'I'm not telling anyone.' See you in the classroom."

Five minutes after Pim has gone to the classroom, I start heading there. I still remember where it is because our classrooms remain the same for three years in high school, except for some subjects.

I can hear conversations through closed doors, which is normal for the first day after a two-month school break. Everyone has a lot to share.

Even though Pim's words bother me, I shake off my worry and muster the courage to open the door.

Slide...

"Oh, guys, the good boy Jiraphat is here. Give him a round of applause," says a boy in the classroom. Before I can identify the voice, everyone starts clapping for me. Some are even banging on their desks like drums. High school is different from adult life because people are always ready to stir things up, whether you're close to them or not.

Nice, Jiraphat, you started your first day right.

I flick my gaze to Pim, who gives me a sheepish smile, and realize why her words bother me.

No matter what era, 'I'm not telling anyone' means 'I'm going to tell the whole world.'

Little did I know, Lita is also on it. She begins spreading the word to the SC members from various classes. She might just talk about it like a casual gossip, but it turns out to be the beginning of something that will change the course of my life.

During the school break, as I tried to figure out how to change myself, I didn't realize that just one sentence would end up changing the lives of many people, not just mine.

Chapter 2

That School President

To me, 2010 was a confusing transition period.

How come?

The year marked the release of a fourth smartphone model by a well-known technology company. This launch sparked competition in the technology industry to develop touchscreen phones, replacing button phones. Additionally, various industries underwent changes.

These advancements were great as they drove society forward, offering us easier communication.

Regardless, not everyone could keep up the rapid progress. Not everyone could start anew or adapt to the new developments.

Try imagining it. Growing up, I was immersed in the remnant of the 90s culture, enjoying early morning manga shows, visiting CD and manga rental shops, and watching game shows in the evening. But then, one day, these once-crowded shops became deserted and closed down one by one. When I turned on the TV, I found some shows had been canceled.

Not to mention the economic effect from years ago,

a turbulent political crisis, a deadly epidemic, and a new university admission system (GAT/PAT) that had only been in use for a year.

As a teenager, who should've gotten to enjoy life and explore my passions with the sources the older generations provided, I was lost and confused.

It was the period where you could lose touch with some people unless you made an effort to stay connected.

Unlike the future, where you could exchange contact easily when crossing paths as it was deemed essential.

In 2010, those things weren't essential for everyone. If you were quite wealthy, you would have a personal cellphone. Some started engaging in social media. Some registered email. Some still used old websites. Some communicated through landlines. Some did none of that and preferred communicating in person.

The only piece of technology I had was a flip phone with only the numbers of my father, mother, and sister. After changing my number, I lost contact with people from high school. I basically cut myself out of their circle. I once thought that if I could turn back time, I would hold on to someone more tightly.

But well, it was just a thought.

Once my classmates are done hollering at me, I stride to my seat by the door. Before I can even put my backpack down, someone greets me.

"Hey, P' Ji, how was your school break?" asks a blond boy with blue eyes, looking contradictory in his Thai student uniform. He may look like an exchange student, but he's not.

He's 'Tyler,' a mixed-race boy who, despite having no Asian features, speaks Thai more fluently than Thai people. We call him 'Ty.' He addresses me as P' Ji because he's two years younger than all his classmates, though his height of 190 centimeters masks that fact.

Our classroom seats are arranged in pairs. Right, he's my seat partner.

"Good. How about yours?" *Washing dishes and doing chores every day was pretty good, I guess.*

"I had a blast. My dad took me out to play water fights for the first time. See, the lady at the restaurant mistook me for a foreigner and charged me a hundred for the omelet with rice when it was written twenty. That really sucked, and..." I told you he was fluent in Thai. One brief response or question could trigger him to narrate his whole life story.

You're probably wondering why I didn't think of my seat partner in the blink of death when he was such a friendly dude.

First, Tyler was transferred to this school in the middle of the second semester of the tenth grade. Despite his friendly demeanor, his foreign appearance made him seem unapproachable. Plus, he moved here after everyone had already formed their own groups of friends, so he didn't belong to any specific groups. He might've even seen me as his closest friend.

Second, it was my fault for isolating myself from others. I was always late for morning assemblies, so I never had time to hang out with anyone in the morning. After classes, I went straight home. During group projects, I just followed someone along. I also never

participated in school activities.

It felt similar to regretting not taking naps in kindergarten.

In high school, I had no passion for studying or socializing. Preferring to nap, I made no effort for anything else. When I began my working life, I regretted not doing more back then.

Third, this one was important.

Tyler would resign this semester and move abroad. I remember he suddenly quit without a chance to exchange contact.

With these three reasons, we grew estranged thirty years later. I let go of him when he was the closest I could call a friend.

He was one of my goals to fix things with.

"Let's play water fights together next year," I say, though I know he won't be in this country anymore by then.

I don't want to just say, 'Um,' like before.

Tyler stops complaining about his Songkran experience and stares at me, his eyes popping out.

"What?"

"Holy shit, did you just invite me out to play? I'm going to cry," he says, shaking my body with his eyes sparkling. He drops the topic about himself and starts listing where to play water fights next year.

If it were before, he wouldn't touch me despite how cordial he was, presumably too nervous to joke around with me.

To my surprise, one sentence has brought us closer to this extent.

Tyler keeps talking and planning as if we're going tomorrow, but I don't interrupt him. Instead, I try to listen to everything

he says. Once our homeroom teacher enters the classroom, he shuts his mouth and straightens up.

Our homeroom teacher is Mr. Tinnapob, a young social studies teacher loved by students because of his great teaching and handsomeness.

Getting to the point, Mr. Tinnapob briefly introduces himself and asks for each of our short names. This gives me a chance to learn my classmates' names as well. Next, we have to select the class president and vice president.

I have no interest in this. There's nothing exciting because the class president and vice president are the same people as in tenth grade.

The class president is 'Ked Kedsarin,' a cool girl and basketball player, popular among female students.

The class vice president is Pim, who checked my name during the morning assembly. The one and only. Her seat is right in front of mine.

Everything is finished within half an hour. Another trivial thing like the cleaning schedule is arranged according to the order of our student numbers with no specific scheduling method. The first half of the day ends with all of us transferring textbooks from the bottom floor to our classroom.

Oh, I also listen to Tyler yapping and complaining about his school break whenever I can.

I spend my lunch break exploring the school, going in and out of different buildings. Everything remains exactly as

I remember it. There are wooden and concrete buildings with all the trees uncut.

For the record, a few years after my generation, a new principal appeared and renovated the entire place, demolishing buildings and rebuilding them, cutting down all trees, and lowering the budget to the point where there were barely any school activities. Students and parents of the later generations protested and made it to the news.

The lunch break is almost over when I reach an old men's restroom at the back of the building, which I regularly use. Most students prefer new restrooms on the upper floors. I enter the restroom and find a tenth grader and a closed stall. I'm not sure if someone is inside or if the door is broken.

In a desolate, old men's restroom, you're bound to smell one thing.

Cigarettes.

After taking care of my business and washing my hands, I look in the mirror and notice a boy smoking in a corner. I don't know his name, but I know he's a student of the same generation. Perhaps a language program student.

I really hate people who smoke in public areas. It reeks.

Instead of minding his business, he tries to coerce the tenth grader to smoke with him.

"But I'm going back to my classroom."

Jiraphat, stay out of it. Today has been great so far. You made it to the morning assembly and listened to Tyler yapping. You will get to go home in half the day. Don't look for trouble.

"What are you scared of? Try it."

*You managed to avoid the late assembly. Don't get in a fight.
Keep in mind that you will be a new person.*

Right, stay out of it and go. Leave them alone. Walk slowly, Jiraphat.

As I tell myself to walk slowly, I somehow stop in front of the smoking boy.

SLAP!!!

I swat his cigarette away and stomp it out with my foot.

Shit.

I turn to the younger boy to form an alliance, but he has fled without thanking me. I'm deeply touched, little bro.

"What the fuck?" I stop grieving the departure of the tenth grader and shift my focus back to the current situation. I look at the name embroidered on the right side of his chest.

'Kongpob Saetung'

Holy shit. I remember this name. He was a troublemaker who frequently visited the disciplinary office. While I often went there for being late to school, his visits were due to fighting. We're definitely not a match.

Noticing me checking his name, he flicks his gaze at mine.

"Jiraphat. Oh, the good boy Jiraphat." My intimidation is minus zero. How many people know about my nickname?

"You smoke in school," I soldier on.

"So? What's your problem? Is the good boy Jiraphat worried about other people's health?" Wow, look at his glare. *I'm more than*

a decade older than you.

Whatever. This won't end well anyway. Let me deal with him.

"Listen, I don't care if you smoke a hundred cigarettes a day. Do you think it makes you cooler than everyone? No, I don't give a shit. Take it as a friendly warning. If you continue smoking, one day you'll either die from lung cancer or get beaten to death because of your lack of manners to smoke in public areas."

"You son of a bitch!!!"

Phweeeet!

I hear the whistle from afar. You might think it must feel like a sound from heaven, but no.

That's the sound from hell I'm awfully familiar with.

Do you remember the disciplinary teacher from hell that I mentioned? This is him, Mr. Narong, but students call him Hell (Narok) as it sounds similar to his name. If someone says, 'Hell is calling you,' it means you need to go to the disciplinary office.

Does he live up to his nickname? I would say no.

Looking back as an alumnus, he was an excellent disciplinary teacher. He was never violent, unnecessarily punished students, or listened to only one side of stories. He was an upright teacher.

But try imagining it. When you get caught doing something wrong, you make all sorts of excuses to avoid heavy punishments. That makes Mr. Narong scary. Despite his old age, he sees through all of our tricks. Being interrogated in an extremely air-conditioned disciplinary office feels like being judged by the guardian of the underworld after death.

I managed to save myself from the late assembly, but I couldn't

save myself from him.

Kongpob and I are standing away from each other. I notice him covering the cigarette with his foot.

Still, the smell reeks. There's no way to escape from this.

"Kongpob, Jiraphat, a tenth grader told me you two were smoking," Mr. Narong accuses us before even inquiring.

A tenth grader told me you two were smoking... This is what I got after helping someone.

"Go to the disciplinary office."

Whatever. Mr. Narong isn't hard to talk to, so I'll just explain later. I was wrong for provoking Kongpob with that remark, anyway.

"Mr. Narong, Jiraphat has nothing to do with this," says a familiar voice from behind. I turn around.

Someone emerges from the closed stall that I thought was broken.

I know who he is, of course. He was the last person I saw before I died. 'Ruth Atiwitch,' the future famous actor, is currently the school president.

"I've also been here. Jiraphat didn't smoke. The tenth grader must've mistaken." I watch him explain on my behalf.

Super cool. I can tell he's handsome even from here. This could've been a spectacular scene if not for a rundown restroom in the background. Ruth tips his chin up like a poser in a way I can't comprehend. I assume it's an actor's instinct. No wonder he becomes so famous later. When he opened the old wooden panel, it was almost like he was on a stage.

"I see. Atiwitch, go back to your classroom. Jiraphat, come

with me to the disciplinary office." *What? Why don't you let me go after learning the truth?*

"Mr. Narong!!!" Ruth and I protest.

"What? You think I don't know this? Jiraphat might be late to school all the time, but he's always the first to leave after classes. Why would someone like him cause trouble to get grounded and miss his chance to go home early? But I can't let him return to his classroom reeking of cigarettes. Go put on some spray at the disciplinary office. And you, Kongpob, we need to talk."

"..." I know Mr. Narong has sharp eyes, but he doesn't need to elaborate to that extent.

Being seen as a student who wouldn't break the rules to go home fast is quite an odd compliment.

After preparing tons of excuses, I go to the disciplinary office where Mr. Narong just sprays me with a floral spray commonly used among elders and sends me back to my classroom before the afternoon class starts. He will deal with Kongpob after this.

Maybe Mr. Narong would rather not waste time with a silly kid like me. Moreover, I believe he has things to discuss with Kongpob other than smoking that I shouldn't be aware of.

I don't care. I've survived the disciplinary office crisis. There's still time on lunch break. I'll just go back to my classroom before I get myself in another trouble.

Since most of my classmates are still outside, I seize this chance to go into the classroom and sit quietly like nothing crazy has ever happened. To my surprise, Tyler notices me. He dashes over and spins me around while asking a question.

"P' Ji, are you all right?"

"What's with you?"

"I heard you got in a fight with Kong from Class 9. Be careful. I always saw him full of bruises last semester. He's dangerous."

"It was just a misunderstanding. No big deal. How did you know about this?" It hasn't even been an hour. How is news spread so fast in this school? Did the school president, Ruth, tell everyone? He doesn't look like the type to do that.

"Pim told me."

Hearing her name, Pin turns around and explains.

"I heard it from Lita." *Oh, Lita knows, the world knows.*

Considering she let everyone know about my embarrassing moment this morning, it shouldn't be a surprise that everyone already heard about the smoking incident.

"It's a relief that you're okay, P' Ji. You're such a small guy. If he messes with you again, I'll deal with him myself." *Who's small? You're just bigger than everybody else.*

By the time Tyler is done inspecting my body to make sure I'm unharmed, the bell rings and the teacher soon arrives.

Today's classes are uneventful, with teachers simply explaining the content, asking students to introduce themselves, or just chatting. Some teachers are even absent, letting us relax until three in the afternoon when the gate opens for us to go home.

Like this morning, I continue listening to Tyler recounting his life. He's currently talking about building a sand castle at a temple instead of Songkran.

As he describes how a kindergartener destroyed the sand

castle he'd built with care, I think back to the school president at lunch break.

I'm sure I didn't hear the toilet flushing before he burst out of the stall.

That means he finished his business some time ago but stayed inside.

I don't know why he remained quiet and didn't just come out. There was no way he wouldn't hear anything in that tattered stall.

Was he too scared of Kongpob to get out? A school president wouldn't be fazed by that kind of situation and would quickly help a bullied tenth grader. If he'd shown up earlier, Kongpob wouldn't have dared to smoke in the first place.

Or did he want to see how I would deal with the situation and come out only when I faltered because Mr. Narong appeared? Could there be other reasons?

Come to think of it, as a school president and famous actor, his image of being kind, loved, gentle, sincere, and approachable is what other people say about him.

To succeed before thirty, I doubt he could achieve that with mere gentleness and sincerity.

Even I, a thirty-year-old man, can't comprehend his actions at seventeen.

Okay, I've decided.

For a happy high school life, I will stay away from that school president.

Right, we shouldn't associate with each other. I can't handle him.

A drunk driver's recklessness ends the life of Ji Jiraphat,
an ordinary office worker,
in the middle of an intersection.

But fate pulls a trick on him,
bringing the thirty-year-old man back into his seventeen-year-old body.
Well, with this rare second chance granted by heaven, he vows to improve himself.
He resolves to no longer isolate himself, be late for school,
and rush back home right after school.

He intends to live life to the fullest with his friends.

In this second chance in life, 'Jiraphat will be a good boy!'

However...his life would've been less complicated if 'Ruth Atiwitch,' the quiet school president,
hadn't kept looking at him strangely.

Besides, those eyes seem to hide an unexpected secret from him.

