

Jiraphat²

Will be a Good Boy



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Chapter 24

Jiraphat's Special Typical Day

"Hey."

"Hey."

The same greeting, the same place, the same people. To others, we've been the same since before Sports Day and after. Only the two of us know what's in our hearts.

"Have you eaten?"

"No, I've been waiting for you." He gestures to two sealed breakfast boxes.

I once tried the dishes made by Ruth's housekeeper and found them quite on par with Madam Narumon's food. After that, Ruth sometimes told me he would bring us food when he gave me wake-up calls.

Oh, I'm still using a basic phone, so we prefer calling to texting.

"Nice. These are from Madam Narumon. Let's eat them together." I place popular desserts from the province Madam Narumon and Mr. Jira went for a private, romantic trip on the desk, unwrap them, and share them with Ruth.

"..."

I swallow a bite of the painfully sweet dessert and ask Lita a question, noticing her glancing our way as she's having grilled pork with sticky rice with Tawan.

"Is something wrong?"

"No."

"..."

"..." *No, then.*

I can guess what's on her mind. An observant person like her must've caught what has been going on. But since she's not the type to gossip about every single thing, my trust in her increases as we grow closer.

"Why don't you have dinner at my house after school today?"

I divert my attention from Lita to Ruth's invitation.

Dinner at Ruth's house...

"My dad won't be home today."

Okay, the president's twin will be absent.

"Sure, I'll call you after school."

At lunch break in the cafeteria, we always sit at the table by the cool air from the fan. Kongpob's class, the luckiest, gets dismissed early every day, so he reserves the table for us.

Ruth and I get our regular noodles from the booth, and once we're seated, I scoop my fishballs into his bowl and transfer his vegetables to mine.

"..."

But then, I change my mind and return some vegetables

to him, leaving only some in my bowl.

"Eat some greens."

No, I shouldn't indulge him any more than this. He's already spoiled. Someone who has to work with many people must not be picky. I can spoil him when it's just the two of us.

He protests with his eyes.

Very well.

"I'll try to eat some fish balls." I take some fish balls from his bowl.

"..."

After mixing everything together and getting ready for the first bite, I sense an odd silence.

As expected, I look up to find Tyler and Kongpob wolfing down their food, as if they've been starving, and the other three girls and Tawan staring at us with their utensils in their hands.

Apart from the ravenous guys, the others stay silent until Lita starts.

"Since when? Before or after Sports Day?"

Despite the zero implication of something other than questioning the timeline, I understand what she means.

Before or after?

"Ah...on the second day," I admit.

After two seconds of dead silence, Ked bangs on the table and announces.

"Yes! I won. Get me a milk and butter crepe with whipped cream after this."

"Hey!" I knew some of them might've caught it, but I never

imagined they would make a bet on it.

Let me make it clear. Betting is an act of vice, even if no money is involved. Do not imitate this behavior.

"Rest assured. Nobody else knows about this but us. I'm not telling anyone," Pim reassures.

Saying 'I'm not telling anyone' always leads to chaos.

Knowing what happened last semester, she emphasizes it.

"I promise, for real this time." She flicks up her little finger, and the others follow suit, even Tyler and Kongpob who have their mouths full.

"Just keep a low profile," Tawan warns, raising his little finger.

Me: "..."

Ruth: "..."

The lights were off in the SC room. We were keeping a low profile.

My best friends have been quiet for a long time. Now that they've finished their food, they begin inquiring, starting from Kongpob.

"Will Ploy be okay about this?"

"Right, right. You can't play with P' Ji's heart if you already have Ploy. P' Ji is a pure boy," Tyler chimes in, scowling at Ruth.

The question makes me turn to Lita for an answer.

"Hahaha, she'll be fine. I bet these two would be official before Sports Day, so I mentioned Ploy to provoke Ji. She has no feelings for School Pres. No worries."

I saw that coming.

Even though Lita said Ploy could be dating Ruth, I believed she had a crush on someone else.

"Another couple in Class 7, huh? I'm also in Class 7, but things like this have never happened to me. I'm jealous," Ked groans with envy, no longer happy about the free milk and butter crepe.

Another couple in Class 7...

From all the gossip I've heard from Lita, it seems that my classmates, including one from Rose's group, were dating but often fighting before breaking up after Sports Day.

"Is there another couple? I thought they broke up..."

"Broke up, my ass. Be careful what you say. If Gun heard that, he would beat the shit out of you."

Gun...

If I remember correctly, Rose's friend didn't date Gun.

"Huh?"

"Huh what? It's Gun and Thiti. We wouldn't have suspected you two so quickly without an example."

"Huh?!" Tyler and I cry out, banging on the table.

Almost all of them look slightly surprised, but they quickly compose themselves.

"Don't tell me you didn't know. They've been dating since middle school. Everyone knows that. You two gotta stop having egg ice cream too often and be more attentive to other people."

Middle school? How many years has it been?

"Do you know about this, Kong?" Tyler looks for an ally.

"Yeah, I was in the disciplinary office at that time.."

Gun, Thiti, and the disciplinary office, how are these three things connected?

Gun and Thiti are already an unlikely match, but how did

Thiti end up at the disciplinary office? It's not an easily accessible convenience store.

Ah, forget about when I visited the disciplinary office day in and day out. It was all just a misunderstanding.

Lita clears her throat, adjusts her voice, and acts like a carrier pigeon filling Tyler and me in on the past events that we were completely unaware of.

"I'm not exactly sure how it started, but Gun and Thiti had apparently been dating for quite some time. When the others found out, they were ridiculed by their classmates. I mean, yeah, by those middle school assholes. Eventually, a conservative disciplinary teacher, not Mr. Narong, heard about it. He's retired now. Anyway, instead of reprimanding the bullies, he called Gun and Thiti to the disciplinary office and put them on probation, even though our school wasn't against dating..."

"Oh, that's homophobic," Tyler muses with a serious face, prompting our friends to gasp and give him a thumbs-up, considering his usual playfulness.

I'd be willing to bet that Tyler would have taken things further than just pulling a man-eating bush prank if he had been there.

Let me remind you again. Betting is an act of vice.

Lita puts her appreciative thumb for Tyler down and continues.

"It blew up, like, seriously. Their parents came to the disciplinary office and berated the hell out of that teacher, and nobody stood a chance against them. Well, since both Gun and Thiti won in

competitions as much as School Pres did, the situation soon died down and no one dared to mess with them again. I don't know what their classmates thought or if they changed their attitudes, but none of them dared to taunt them again. Besides, half of those kids moved to different high schools because they weren't qualified to stay here..."

As Lita fills us in, the couple that we're gossiping—ah, caring about—passes by.

I lock my sharp eyes on Thiti walking freely and Gun carrying two plates of food.

This feels like a math problem you can't solve even with a provided formula, but then you've been given the answer that instantly enlightens you.

"It's so obvious. Are you really a Class 7 student?"

That explains why nobody ever brought up our relationship, even though Ruth and I didn't seriously hide it. Even when we went to Tyler's house and met both their dads, no one said anything rude.

The path with rose petals in this school was built by the couple before us.

Enough of someone else's business. If I keep being nosy, my soup noodles will become dry noodles.

I notice something strange before I start eating.

Why are there more vegetables in my bowl?

The answer is right by my side. I turn to find a half-full bowl of noodles with nothing green in it.

Unabashed, the sly boy speaks to me.

"Eat more greens."

This lunch ends with our friends' laughter, and I have to eat all the vegetables because of this naughty boy.

Today's school is over at 2 p.m. because the teachers have an afternoon meeting. Still, students aren't allowed to leave until 3 p.m. Many of my classmates leave their backpacks in the classroom and play in the schoolyard while I contemplate my current situation.

The way I think of Ruth as a naughty boy makes me uneasy. Ruth is seventeen right now...

I, a thirty-year-old man, and a seventeen-year-old boy...

Wait, Jiraphat, you're in a seven-teen-year-old body. Minors can legally date. It often feels like we're the same age. Relax.

No, I can't relax about this. Although he gives me consent for this intimacy, it feels wrong for me as an actual adult.

I pause my contemplation and ask the expert.

"Pim."

Pim turns around as she draws a draft for her portfolio for university admission next year.

"What's the punishment for having a relationship with a minor?"

The point of her pencil breaks in response. "...Huh?!"

"P' Ji, are you done? Let's go!" The half-human, half-Titan boy shakes my body, interrupting the curious conversation.

"Chill. No need to rush..." *Kongpob just asked us to play basketball together. What's the rush?* I swallow those words down my throat when my eyes land on a familiar piece of paper in his hand.

"What's that?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that we can't play basketball with Kong today."

Tyler elevates the sheet over his head, looking as delighted as when he showed off his new phone.

"I'm going to audition for the lead role. I'll become a star in the sky, a bird flying freely."

"The lead role...for the drama club?"

"Yes. I didn't have a chance to tell you because you were being all lovey-dovey with Ruth. Kwan and Ploy asked me at the end of Sports Day to give it a try. How cool is that?" He puts one foot on a chair and poses in the coolest way he can think of.

"..."

"Come cheer for me, P' Ji."

Forget about being in a relationship with a minor for now. This is more shocking.

"Tyler!" As we reach the fourth floor, Ploy suddenly appears and rushes toward us before we even arrive at our destination.

Spotting me behind Tyler, she inquires.

"Are you auditioning, too, Ji?"

"No, I'm just accompanying him."

She nods and turns to Tyler.

"Do you have a partner? If not, why don't we audition together? No need to waste time." Upon hearing their conversation, I excuse myself. Tyler has prepared his part well, so it's more beneficial for him to be with a talented person than with me. Ploy is auditioning

probably just for the sake of it. Apart from her beauty, her acting skills are undeniably spectacular.

When Tyler said he would audition for the lead role, I was speechless, but then I remembered he would have to pass first. Just because Kwan personally invited him doesn't mean he will get the role.

After Tyler decided to not move schools, he caused all sorts of mischief. It was no surprise that he would receive attention. Also, the fact that he can fluently speak English is an advantage the drama club seeks because the play is all in English. No lip-syncing. And since there will be singing and dancing parts, casting people who already possess these talents will save time. The open house will take place in two months, so they might not make it in time if they cast someone with subtle potential and have to teach them everything. I suppose that was the reason Ruth was given the lead role last time.

The audition will be taking place in an unoccupied small meeting room on the fourth floor, as the teachers are having a meeting in a big meeting room in another building. Before I even arrive at the audition room on the fourth floor, I see a crowd of middle and high schoolers over there. In addition to the lead roles, all supporting roles will be auditioned today. Some students are memorizing the script while others are practicing with their friends.

Are they passionate about acting or yearning to be part of the play all that much? I don't think so.

It's known that the actors in the drama club have a chance to

shine since there are rumors that they might be scouted by the alumni. Even I, an outsider, am aware of this.

While there are plenty of people hoping to be actors, not many are willing to be part of the staff, except for Ploy. Based on her responsibilities during Sports Day, she's a monster like the SC, given that she was involved in all activities, both out front and behind the scenes.

Instead of calling the SC a group full of monsters, the entire 'Class 1' should be recognized that way.

Mmmm.

I search for a certain person in the crowd and fail to find him. I attempt to call him, but his phone is turned off. Perhaps he's busy running lines for a grand entrance.

Sorry, Tyler. I'm not rooting for you this time.

"Wanna get some cool air inside?"

"...!!" She startles me again.

Is she the drama club president or a ghost, always scaring me to death? Even though she needs to secretly search for suitable actors for the play, she doesn't have to be this sneaky.

Kwan answers with a smirk.

"You're waiting for Tyler, right? You can come inside. It's hot and loud out here."

"But I'm not a club member."

"That's all right. I won't appoint you as one of the judges. Just watch quietly at the back." She stands on her toes and whispers in my ear with an unsettling tone, "But you can join our club at any time. The club members are nice and friendly. You'll like them."

I heard School Pres invited you to be part of the SC. That means you're no ordinary individual. Feel free to contact me if you change your mind."

She undoubtedly heard that from Lita.

I don't think they're short of staff because it's hard work. Look at how the club president persuades people.

It's like when you interview for a job and the interviewer says, 'Our company is like a family.'

"The audition for the first role will start in ten minutes. What do you say? You can't come inside after this because I'll lock the door."

Those words make me hesitate. My basic phone vibrates and displays 'Kongpob' on the screen, but he's not the one I'm looking for.

I turn around and look at the students practicing with scripts in their hands, and then I answer the call and tell Kongpob I can't play basketball with him.

I must be right. That person always shows up last minute like a male lead in an evening drama. I should get into the air-conditioned room and wait to witness his performance.

Finally, I slide the door open, accepting Kwan's invitation. The cool air hits my face as she promised. I sweep my eyes over the drama club members inside.

These people will play a big role in my new life in the second semester of eleventh grade.

Behind the scenes

"Ruth, are you free...? Oh, he's at the drama club, isn't he?" Tawan answers his own question, not seeing the person he's looking for in the SC room.

Lita corrects him, playing on her new phone.

"No, the teachers need him at the meeting." Even after withdrawing from some jobs, he's still demanded to handle trivial tasks. She feels sorry for him.

"Isn't he joining the play?" Ruth's close friends have always known about him accepting Kwan's request to play the lead role since last year.

"He decided to pass up on it at the start of this semester and recommended Tyler instead, and Kwan agreed," Lita explains, lowering her phone after losing a game.

"Ty playing the lead role...? Well, it suits him. Ruth sure has sharp eyes." Tawan heard from the circles about the story the drama club would perform. He can imagine Tyler pulling it off while speaking his mother tongue.

"Ugh, whether the role suits him or not doesn't matter." Lita helped replace an extra who suddenly withdrew from the play last year, and she had to rehearse day in and day out with barely time to gossip. Therefore, she can guess why Ruth gave up on the opportunity to be a star and sent Tyler instead. "He just wants to get rid of the third wheel."

Tawan nods, then cackles.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Think about it. The exam and school break for twelfth graders is brought forward one month earlier. The drama club has always

been short of staff. Without the members in twelfth grade, it will be even harder for them. If Tyler gets the role, do you think he will join the club alone?"

The speculation draws an evil laugh out of Lita, as she also recommended Ji to Kwan.

Congratulations, School Pres. You dug a hole for yourself.

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Chapter 25

The Bitterness of the Lemon Zest

After scanning the people in the room, I rub my eyes and take another look.

"..."

I take two steps back, close the door of the small meeting room, blink repeatedly, pull myself together, and reopen the door.

Slide...

"..."

Upon finding that the sight remains unchanged, I contemplate retreating, but one of the club members sitting in the front with a script in his hand interrupts my action.

"How long are you going to keep playing with the door? It's affecting the airflow."

Kwan pushes me inside and blocks the door.

"Ah..." I point at the person who complained about the airflow, feeling puzzled.

"Oh, Thiti is our scriptwriter. He's written scripts for us every year."

The cheesy script Tyler showed me was written by Thiti?

I can't believe an extremely academic boy like him is part of the drama club.

Seemingly sensing my thoughts, he adjusts his square-frame glasses and jibes back.

"What? You think someone like me would spend all my time just in school or cram school without doing anything else?"

I almost nod.

"You think it doesn't suit him?"

Hearing the person sitting behind Thiti, I abruptly shake my head.

"No, no. It really suits him, unarguably." I give him three thumbs-ups, like when I was a Boy Scout in middle school. *Excellent, excellent, excellent.*

I have no intention of ending up like the retired conservative disciplinary teacher.

"That's Gun, the head of the backdrop team. You know him, right? You're both in Class 7." *Yeah, I know. No need to remind me.*

I expected to meet new people, but when I entered the room, my eyes landed on the two familiar faces. I was baffled for a few seconds, thinking I accidentally opened our classroom door.

I quickly regain my composure. Despite not wishing to judge the book by its cover, all my close friends have hobbies that reflect their personalities. I can't help but feel surprised to find that Thiti, who is believed to be unable to think outside the box, is behind all these whimsical scripts. It's been half a year, yet there's still so much about my classmates that I don't know. There are surprising things to learn every day.

"Guys, this is Ji, Class 7. He will help us out. I haven't appointed him to do anything, but Lita recommended him. He's a great coordinator."

"Huh?"

Who will help out? Who recommended me again?

"Isn't that right, Ji?"

"Ah..." I'm about to turn her down the way I rejected Ruth's invitation to join the SC, but then it occurs to me.

Ruth is going to play the lead role. If I want to see him, I'll have to visit the drama club. While the SC room welcomes everyone, the drama club doesn't allow outsiders for confidentiality reasons. There's only one way I'll get to spend time with Ruth.

"Ah, yeah...right. You're short of staff, aren't you? I don't have to prepare for the open house. Still, I doubt I'll be of any help..."

Everyone gives me a welcoming round of applause before I can dodge any responsibilities.

"..."

I've never felt so wanted in my life. There are less than ten club members, from what I've counted. Don't tell me these are all the people who will be working for such a large-scale play.

"Why are you so pale? This is not a sweatshop. We have more members. The only people present here today are the heads of each team. We will force, ah, ask those who don't pass the audition but have potential, like you, to be staff."

Those who have potential like me? What potential? The potential to be easily coerced?

My puzzlement about my two classmates is now resolved.

I don't personally know the others, but I feel familiar with this one student in eleventh grade. She's wearing a navy P.E. shirt and school skirt instead of sweatpants, with her hair pulled up into a shoulder-length ponytail, smiling and waving at me.

"The one waving at you is Min from my class. She's the head of the costume team."

I know her, as I've always heard of her. 'Min,' Class 2, is the new name she's given herself to replace the old name, 'Mr. Mana.'

The name speaks for itself. Students in my generation are no ordinary folks.

I hope it's not rude to address Min as 'she/her.'

Around the same time as Gun and Thiti's situation, she brought her parents to the disciplinary office to negotiate about clothes. It must've been a big deal, though I have no memories of it. Lita was all dramatic when she told me about the incident, so I suppose it's true.

Nonetheless, despite her insistence, the Ministry of Education's dress code policy couldn't be overlooked. They decided to compromise: Min has to wear a male school uniform to school, but, after school or during school activities with no strict rules for clothes, she can wear whatever she wants and do any appropriate female hairstyles, with the school closing one eye, hence her wearing a P.E. shirt and a skirt today.

"Next..." Kwan introduces the other members. Some I knew but never learned the name. Some names I heard of but never met in person. Some are familiar faces from the SC room. All in all,

the heads of each team are all in eleventh grade, so there's no problem and it's not awkward. Many of them already know my name.

I'm quite famous, aren't I?

"Why the fuck are you standing there? Go sit in the back. Don't block the draft."

"Gun, if you cuss again, I'll tell Aunty."

"Thiti!"

I watch them argue and think of Lita's words.

"It's so obvious. Are you really a Class 7 student?"

Even if Gun hadn't shooed me away, I would've sat at the back of the room anyway. I'm a lone wolf, not wild enough to blend in with a new social circle in the first hour. Besides, Kwan forbids everyone from using the front door until the end of the audition. If the air, as chilly as in the disciplinary office, makes me need to pee, I can sneak out through the back door.

I observe this den, where I might be frequenting more than the SC room for two months from now, and believe I've made the right decision. There's a platform serving as a small stage at the front with the most advanced speakers and equipment this year, as expected of a club with a high budget and financial support. Although this is essentially a common meeting room, as I said, it's small. Teachers prefer holding meetings in the big meeting room in the new building, which allows the drama club to take over this room.

I wonder how they got permission to use this room. Even the SC room that's more equipped than typical classrooms isn't

provided with this privilege.

Running out of things to observe, I skim the script Kwan gave me, though Tyler actually showed me some parts on our way to the fourth floor.

Imagining Ruth saying those cheesy lines, I feel tingles in my heart and deeply regret not watching him perform last time. The play is really cheesy, and I can tell how cheesy it's going to be from the story the drama club has chosen.

The world-famous drama the drama club selected and adapted is...

Slide...

Since no one inside is permitted to leave, the sound of the front door opening signals the previous candidates have finished and the next ones are coming in. This time, it's one of the people I've been waiting for.

"P' Ji."

I read his lips as he mouths my name. As Ploy gets into the character as soon as she steps inside, Tyler waves at everyone, including Gun and Thiti.

He only calms down when Kwan clears her throat.

Because it's my best friend's turn, I pay more attention than before and even move to the seat closer to the stage.

I flip through the script to the part the two will perform. I'm not worried about Ploy. Tyler, on the other hand, always forgets to write either teachers' names or his own name and misses some questions during exams. I'm on the edge of my seat, feeling like his third father by the day.

I'm worried for nothing, apparently. Tyler runs the lines fluently, which is no surprise. We've been communicating in Thai for so long that I sometimes forget his mother tongue is another language.

Seriously, although I didn't pay much attention to the previous candidates, I could grasp the vibes and overall pictures and predict which roles they would get.

I'm not exaggerating when I say Tyler is exceptional, fully embracing the character. Alongside Ploy setting the mood, everything is just right. I'm not one to criticize as I'm not an expert in this field, but even in plain school uniforms with no backdrop, lighting, or props, their talents shine brightly. Given this is Tyler's first time, he will improve even more with practice.

This is the result of watching evening dramas every day with his Little Dad, I suppose.

Ruth has a formidable rival. Well, the outcome of who gets the lead role doesn't matter. With such talent, Tyler will surely be part of the play.

After a brief scene that lasts a few minutes, the judges comment on their performances. As it seems there's nothing to worry about, I leave the room through the back door to hit the restroom so I can stay until the person I'm expecting shows up.

Once I've taken care of my business, I return inside through the back door, whistling cheerfully.

"That's all for today. You can leave after completing your parts. The casting team can take a break and come back in half an hour. Thank you, everyone."

"..." *Huh? What?*

Upon hearing Kwan's words, everyone in the meeting room stands up. Some hurry out of the back door to the restroom, some stretch and move around, and some briefly chat with friends before waving goodbye and leaving.

They disappear faster than the egg ice cream lady.

Wait, what does this mean?

"Aren't you leaving? Tyler is waiting for you," asks Kwan, noticing me standing here despite not being an official club member after everyone else is gone.

I'm not startled by her sudden appearance in front of me this time, feeling shocked by something else.

"Is the audition over? Will there be a next round?"

It took me less than five minutes to take care of my business in the restroom. Ruth couldn't have auditioned in such a short time. I'm not imagining this.

"No."

"Was there an audition before this?"

"No, just today. How could we possibly have time for multiple auditions? Is something wrong?"

"Ruth didn't audition?" I ask straightforwardly, not beating around the bush.

"Ruth...Ahhhh, don't mention him. I'm still upset."

"Why?"

Kwan stands on her toes and whispers in my ear in an unsettling voice as if to tell me a horror story.

"Will you snitch on me if I tell you?"

"..."

She glances around. When she's certain everyone has left the meeting room, she speaks to me in her normal voice.

"Just kidding. It's nothing much. I asked School Pres to take the lead role to attract attention to the play, but he suddenly passed up on it, saying he was busy with the SC work. Like, how can he be busy when he's rejected lots of jobs? Anyway, he recommended Tyler and persuaded the teachers to let us use the small meeting room, so that was that. Well, your friend did a good job, so yeah, I guess I'll forgive School Pres."

Busy with the SC work...

In my past life, Ruth accepted every job yet still had time for the play, but he rejected the role now even though he had more free time?

He recommended Tyler...

Why? Did he see Tyler's potential since he hadn't moved schools?

My buzzing phone snaps me out of my thoughts and displays 'Tyler' on the screen. I excuse myself from the meeting room.

I answer the call and turn down his invitation to have bread shaved ice together.

I'm not in the mood for bread shaved ice at all. *I'll make it up to you when we celebrate you passing the audition.*

Perfect timing. The moment I hang up Tyler's call, the name of the person I've been waiting for since two o'clock pops up on the screen.

Despite having prepared what to say, not a single word escapes my lips when we see each other. As we catch up with each other at the front gate, take an old bus to his place, and cross the footbridge to the alley leading to his house, I stay quiet.

During the bus ride, I gazed out the window and pondered over my disjointed thoughts.

Every time I caught something unusual, I assumed that he, along with my two best friends, Pim, and Ked, could change just like I could. However, upon reflection, I realized that some changes were unlike any other.

It was so subtle that I failed to notice it back then, like Gun and Thiti's relationship.

I couldn't see it at first, but the answer gradually showed me the light.

Lita once asked me privately if Ruth had spoken to me about the man-eating bush, claiming that he was a nerd who had no idea what a man-eating bush was. Yet, whenever I mentioned it, he seemed to understand what I meant perfectly. And yes, the man-eating bush incident occurred before he got knocked out by the deadly volleyball.

What if he began to change after the volleyball incident...?

Ruth became eager to take care of me.

Ruth used a shortcut to deal with Ms. Suda.

Ruth seemed to know about things that people in this era didn't.

I had this thought when we went downtown together:

What if we get along well because we've experienced similar

situations in the future, not because of our childhood memories?

I often forget to consider our age gap because it feels like we're the same age.

Not in the sense that we're both seventeen.

But in the sense that we're both thirty...

I stop walking halfway across the footbridge, and he halts beside me.

"Kwan said you were originally going to join the play."

"..."

"Why did you recommend Tyler? He will likely play around more than focus on being the main lead."

I paste on a teasing smile, but it comes out stiff.

Honk, honk, honk!!!

The honks from the road below jolt me, prompting Ruth to tighten his grip around my hand.

The honking car drives off. I stare down at the road from the old footbridge.

Here's an update: in the past few months, my nervousness when crossing roads has lessened to some extent. As long as there's a crossing guard, I can cross the road without trembling. When I go to Tyler's place or anywhere without Ruth, I can manage just fine.

My friends aren't clueless about my fear of crossing roads. Tyler and Kongpob noticed it quite early on. After learning I've been feeling better, they always flank me while crossing the road.

But if Ruth is with me, he always leads me to the footbridge. His reaction is totally different from my friends', like he's afraid of

something.

It feels similar to the fear I felt when I encouraged Mr. Jira to undergo more thorough checkups aside from his annual health checkups.

"This footbridge is very old." I give up on waiting for his response regarding Tyler and the play.

If he refuses to answer, I can switch the subject.

I'll test him.

"Let's cross the road next time. My legs feel tired."

"No."

He replies so fast that it takes me aback. His grip on my right hand is so tight that it feels like blood can't circulate well in it.

"..."

"..."

"Ruth."

'Beware of the bitterness of the lemon zest. That person is hiding a secret from you.'

There's no guarantee that what happened to me won't happen to others.

"Do you have something to tell me?"

He remains silent, so I ask a new question.

"Since when?"

"..."

"..."

"Shortly after you."

In dramas, when the protagonists discover their love interests have been hiding secrets from them, their first reactions are often

anger, upsetness, and confusion. The love interests then try to win them back before the stories proceed to happy endings.

When I heard the prophecy, I considered messing with him for keeping something this important from me for such a long time.

But that's not how I feel right now. In the storm of my emotions, there's not a single spark of rage.

If my condition to go back in time was to experience that situation, what about him? Did he...?

I inhale, my breathing louder than I thought.

My eyes feel hot, and my throat feels dry.

"Are you tired?"

The question sounds similar to what I asked him when he was awake after getting hit by the volleyball, but we both know it's different this time.

He loosens his grip around my numb hand and pulls me into his arms.

He buries his face in my shoulder.

His soft sobbing and tears seeping through the old school shirt to my shoulder are the answer.

He's just like me, when I woke up and saw Mr. Jira on that day.

Behind the scenes

In the empty classroom in the evening, Tyler rests his head in the crook of his arms at his desk, feeling disappointed by P' Ji's rejection of having bread shaved ice together.

"It's accurate. He's been acting different lately and wouldn't

answer any of my questions. He must be cheating on me. Rose! Did it say anything more in the magazine?" The loud complaint from Rose's friend gets his ears perked up, activating his nosiness.

"No, yours is 'the sun, leaves, mountains, and flowers,' right? It says your relationship is like a lemon...Eh? That's not it. I read the wrong one. That's for 'the sun, leaves, flowers, and mountains.' I'll read the correct one for you."

"What?! Do it now."

"Ah, for 'the sun, leaves, mountains, and flowers,' your relationship is like a seedling counting days to sprout. There will be some difficult and struggling times, but the deeply rooted seedling will grow beautifully. See? You and your boyfriend are fine. Stop testing each other and make up. Oh..." Rose looks up from the magazine in her hands to find her friend already gone, leaving only the empty seat and a foreign boy with her.

"Aren't you going home, Tyler?"

"Rose, let me take a look at the magazine."

Rose passes it to him.

"What are the dates on the cover?" Tyler asks in curiosity.

"Oh, they suggest the period of the prophecies. Hm...? Wait, this is last month's magazine. I was so busy with Sports Day that I didn't check. That means the prophecies in this magazine are invalid. What do I do?" Rose snatches the magazine back in alarm and rises to run after her friend, but Tyler holds on to the other side of it tightly.

At that moment, a student walks into the classroom.

"Tyler, is this pen yours?" Ploy comes here to return the pen

he used to make notes on the script to him. She halts and looks at them tugging the magazine back and forth in bewilderment.

"You don't have to do anything..."

When Tyler lets go of the magazine, Rose stands there to see what her classmate is going to do instead of following her friend outside.

"A bird flying freely may feel tired and rest at times, but it will never stop flying until it dies. Your friend will be fine, Rose, trust me. My dad taught me this."

Tyler then puts one foot on a chair and spreads his arms like a bird, though he looks more like a bird with broken wings.

Rose: "..."

Ploy: "..."

Rose, who has been preparing for the GAT since the middle of this year, wonders how his statement links to her friend's situation and only sees the answer code '99H' in her head.

Eventually, Ploy claps for Tyler with a smile. Rose places the magazine down and claps along. Tyler smiles in response to the applause.

What's going on?



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.