your hands and lips (know their way around)

by incendir

Summary

He tells himself that he wouldn't want this any other way.

Notes

companion and expansion of sorts to when it gets late (i can't help but think of you) - but can be read as a standalone
Chapter 1

Shortly after their debut, Minho takes Seungyoon out to more formally meet Jiho for an introduction that isn’t quickly done in front of cameras for a humorous behind-the-scenes cut. Jiho is the one travelling the farther distance to a restaurant close to Minho and Seungyoon’s dorm, since the former is the one with more years under his belt, and far more freedom what with how he lives on his own now. Jiho arrives after they do, of course, cap pulled low over his eyes, but a smile evident immediately the moment he reaches their table, grasping Seungyoon’s hand and squeezing Minho’s shoulder.

They drink and eat and talk nearly the entire night - Seungyoon and Minho don’t have curfew in the strictest sense, but rather as long as they are within the neighborhood of the apartment complex their dorm is in, they can be up and out as long as they want. Minho knows Jiwon and Jiho are on friendly terms, having found each other without Minho connecting them, but somehow this feels different.

Even though Jiho had messaged Minho himself the way he had with Jiwon, asking about him, about what kind of friendship Minho had with him just simply in the way that anyone would when they’re interested in connecting with a friend’s friend, this - tonight with Seungyoon - feels different. Seeing the one of his best friends of so many years - someone he originally began his dreams with, someone who he had thought he would fulfill his dreams alongside - smiling and laughing with and approving of a friend that he will be fulfilling his dreams with leaves a surreal sort of emotion that Minho can’t decipher or name for himself.

He pretends to look hurt, playfully irritated, when Jiho jokingly starts on how he’ll message Seungyoon for tripe and drinks in a few weeks and Minho isn’t invited. Seungyoon laughs, playing along on how he won’t tell Minho when Jiho texts him from now on anymore.

Jiho leaves first - while he doesn’t have a curfew, he still has schedules in the morning. He says the entire meal is on him even though Seungyoon tries to insist otherwise, but Minho just waves Seungyoon down because Jiho is even more stubborn than the two of them put together. They stay back a bit after Jiho pays and climbs into a cab, finishing the alcohol that’s still on the table and the meat that’s still on the grill.

Once all the food and drinks are finished, and they’re standing up to pull their coats on and pick up their phones, Seungyoon says lightly, “I like him. He’s cool.”

“Yeah?” Minho watches his teammate’s expression.

Seungyoon’s smile is warm and amused when he meets Minho’s gaze. “Yeah.”

During their first Japanese tour, it strikes Minho how little he knows about Seungyoon.

Being with and near Seungyoon, working with him, spending time with him, talking with him, comes so naturally and easily that he doesn’t quite realize how recently he has met Seungyoon compared to other friends he would consider close. The same goes for all of his members, and Minho is comfortable with all of them, but for some reason, the realization is more striking with Seungyoon.

The thought comes to him late, late at night - far past when he and Seungyoon should be asleep what
with rehearsal starting tomorrow early in the morning - and they are together, alone, in the lobby of
the hotel. They’ve exhausted talking about the actual concert tomorrow as well as the plethora of
songs they have partially started but not even close to finishing on their laptops, and somehow, both
of them are looking through old school photos.

Most of it is trying to keep to a reasonable volume for two in the morning their incredulous laughter
at each other’s varying levels of haircuts they’d rather erase from their, and everyone else’s,
memories. Another part of it ends up being Seungyoon narrating, almost detachedly, in a low voice
the details that weren’t included when he revealed his past on national television years ago.

He doesn’t say anything Minho doesn’t already know - that anyone doesn’t already know when it
was broadcasted out to the entire country - but, here, just the two of them, in the emptiness and
silence of the vast lobby, shoulders and legs touching as they sit close on a two-seater, the version of
the story Seungyoon offers has all of the regrets, all of the aspirations borne out of them, all of the
determination and resolve.

Minho expected it would, naturally, since it isn’t an edited snippet injected for views and sympathy
entertainment in the middle of dozens and dozens of other montages for hundreds of other
contestants. He doesn’t quite expect for the way it makes him feel, hearing it, and looking into
Seungyoon’s eyes afterwards.

He thinks, then, it would only be fair if he return the favor - that Seungyoon also should know all of
the fears and anger, regrets and resolutions, hopes and goals, that brought Minho to this point. He
knows Seungyoon has heard the abbreviated version before, but he thinks Seungyoon deserves to
know everything else.

“I want to do what Jiwon and Hanbin did,” Minho says at the end, glancing for Seungyoon’s
expression - for his reaction.

“You want to go through another debut survival?” Seungyoon teases, and Minho rolls his eyes, but
he’s smiling. “You’re going to ask to join that show,” he says, a statement rather than a question,
once the playful tone of his voice is gone.

“I think it’d be good,” Minho says. “I think it’d be good timing, too.”

Their eyes connect in silence, and Seungyoon holds Minho’s gaze for a long time. “I think so, too,”
Seungyoon finally says. “You’re good, after all.”

Minho grins. “I know.”

The next day, they go to the beach with a couple of cameramen.

It’s bright and early in the morning before rehearsals begin, and it was Seungyoon’s idea - bolstered
by the encouragement of one of the directors for the tour DVD for extra footage. They fool around
accordingly for the cameras, making embarrassing puns and jokes in their rudimentary Japanese -
Seungyoon’s far more fluent than Minho’s - and they walk along the shore with the cameras
following in their wake.

The staff begin head back to the hotel first, and Minho’s head turns, watching them walk away for a
moment and wondering if he could stay out here for longer when he notices that Seungyoon hasn’t
even glanced away from the ocean. Minho wonders if it makes him think of home - his home, not just their dorm back in Seoul. Seungyoon’s eyes are covered by sunglasses, and Minho wishes they weren’t, suddenly - wishes he could better see his teammate’s expression right now.

Seungyoon’s bangs are dark and choppy and too long, brushing near the top of his sunglasses when his hair is undone the way it is now. His cheeks are pale and soft in the sunlight and when the seaside breeze blows a little too hard, his full lips purse together as he ducks his head slightly so the wind will blow against the back of his head rather than into his face. The border of large rocks that they are sitting on is expansive but they sit close together, arms and legs touching, and Minho is glad that he too is wearing sunglasses.

It wouldn’t do if Seungyoon could so easily see how Minho is watching Seungyoon through the corner of his gaze.

To say the least, it’s hell.

He acknowledges the mistake he has made, and he has apologized, but the criticisms continue turning into condemnations regardless of what he does. He thinks he’s dreamed about the day that he’s put into the spotlight - he himself as a name and an image - but he had never dreamed that it would be like this. He had expected hatred to an extent, he had expected and prepared himself for the worst sort of vitriol, and what he is receiving is no worse than what he’d told himself could happen.

He hadn’t expected exactly the way it made him feel.

If they are treating him like this when his performance every round had been nothing short of flawless, he doesn’t want to imagine what would happen if he slipped up for even a moment - even a second, one word missed, one line confused, one vague show of uncertainty or doubt or fear - he doesn’t want to know what they would do to him then. He doesn’t want to think about what they would say, and he’d never known until now how much exactly words alone from faceless names could hurt.

He had always thought that when the time came, he could take it - drank in all the advice from Jiho and Jihoon about what it will feel like when the time inevitably arrived that they too would swarm and attack him for his character, personality, past, family, friends. He figures now it was one of those feelings that couldn’t be described - that would always seem manageable when someone else was telling you how it felt, but when you felt it yourself, it was entirely far more terrible.

The night after the filming of the battle round, he asks the manager to drop him off at the agency rather than the dorm. Minho gets a look of intense concern through the rearview mirror, and he avoids his manager’s gaze, looking down into his phone and pretending as best he can that he’s fine, and he just wants to get a head start on the next round even though that’s naturally impossible as the team producers haven’t even chosen yet who remains for the following round.

But it’s the best and only excuse he has, and their manager seems to know that Minho needs this right now. Minho only has his wallet and phone with him, leaving his bag in the van after he hops out of it and heads on through the doors of the company entrance. He knows that if he rummages around somewhere in his studio, he’ll find enough alcohol to get him a little past tipsy at the very least, which is all he needs and probably all he can handle right now.
If he gets too drunk, he knows he’ll end up in a worse place than he already is in - a place he doesn’t want to return to, and swore that he never would.

By the time the studio door opens and Seungyoon steps in, expression clearly taking in the lack of lighting and the stench of alcohol, Minho has gotten himself to the precise stage of inebriated that he had been aiming for. He doesn’t look up as Seungyoon takes a seat across from where Minho is on the couch. “Did Seho-hyung text you?” he asks, as the vocalist settles into the office chair at the studio table.

“No,” Seungyoon says, simply, taking the paper cup out of Minho’s hand and peering into it before draining the rest of its contents. Minho raises his eyebrows mildly at that. Seungyoon doesn’t usually drink so easily. “I heard you come in down the hall.”

“You knew it was me?”

“I guessed,” Seungyoon grins slightly, putting the cup down. He eyes the empty bottles.

“Filming was rough,” Minho says, even though he doesn’t owe anyone any explanations - least of all Seungyoon. He’s never been that kind of leader and he never will be - it’s why he makes a good one, in Minho’s opinion.

“I guessed that, too,” Seungyoon’s voice is light.

Minho moves his eyes away from Seungyoon’s hands, glancing at his teammate’s expression. Seungyoon’s gaze is as light and unassuming as his tone. From the loose shirt, jeans, and frames, Seungyoon has most likely been working since this morning. Minho remembers him already being gone when Minho came out of his own room to get into the van for filming. There’s hair falling along the top ridge of Seungyoon’s frames, and Minho knows it’s the stress and weariness and alcohol playing on him, but his fingers twitch slightly against the cotton of his sweatpants. He inanely imagines what it’d feel like - what it would be like - to reach up and brush Seungyoon’s hair back away from his glasses.

It isn’t a normal thought to have about your teammate - Minho knows that.

Seungyoon doesn’t ask Minho if he wants to talk about it and Minho is thankful. Minho knows that Seungyoon knows Minho doesn’t need advice or comfort. Seungyoon knows Minho knows in his mind everything that he needs to - his heart just can’t help feeling what it does when the hatred and judgment ceaselessly pour in day after day.

They sit there in silence for a while. Minho isn’t sure how long exactly, but enough time passes that Minho finishes the bottle he had opened when Seungyoon came in and two more following that. Minho is glad Seungyoon doesn’t take the lack of conversation as a cue to leave, and he’s also glad that Seungyoon doesn’t attempt to make conversation.

He’s grateful - so, so grateful - for the company and the quiet.

He’s grateful for Seungyoon.

Minho’s phone tells him that he’ll get barely four hours of sleep tonight by the time they reach their dorm, but he insists to Seungyoon that they walk back anyway rather than take a cab. The summer air is muggy and sweltering, but Minho doesn’t care - he’s too drunk to do so, and he doesn’t want to be in a car right now.

Any other time, Minho knows Seungyoon would have complained and convinced Minho with ease to take a taxi instead. Tonight, Seungyoon goes along with Minho’s request without even an
expression of reluctance or protest, and Minho wishes he didn’t understand the way his heart stutters in his chest as he watches Seungyoon wordlessly pack up his bag to leave his own studio.

He wishes he didn’t understand why he feels stone cold sober when Seungyoon smiles at him on the way to the door, sling the strap of his bag over his shoulder.

The walk back is filled with muted conversation that is mostly Seungyoon talking about the pieces he worked on today - the new pieces he began and the ones he has begun to wrap up. Minho’s drunken haze relaxes him enough to be able to walk and listen to Seungyoon’s voice without focusing on how much he likes hearing it wash around him and calm the frayed edges of his mind from today.

When they’ve reached the apartment building, as they stand in the elevator, waiting to arrive on their floor, Minho feels Seungyoon’s eyes on him suddenly. Minho has seen this gaze before but he hasn’t seen it in a few years - hasn’t felt it on him since they were fighting for their future and Minho made a mistake that, at the time, seemed so painfully monumental and crushing.

*It’s okay*, Seungyoon had said and he hadn’t been Minho’s leader yet. Minho had still been the leader, but even if to Minho’s mind, those were the words and tone that only a leader should have, Seungyoon hadn’t been saying it as one and he never did - never does. There is never and has never been anything patronizing or pitying in Seungyoon’s voice, and even though he’s the leader now, he doesn’t say it as one.

He just says it as Seungyoon, and even if he suddenly weren’t the leader anymore, nothing would change.

That same expression is in his eyes as he says, in that same tone, warm and sincere and simple, “You’re doing it right, if you’re scared - I think.”

From the walk through the midsummer’s night humidity, the edges of Seungyoon’s hair that have gotten a bit too long curl almost damply from the thin sheen of sweat at the sides of his face. They stick slightly to the top curves of his ears and his frames have slid down his nose so that his eyes look over them rather than through them. Minho doesn’t have a response to Seungyoon’s words, and he doesn’t trust himself to speak when his heart seems to want to crawl its way up his throat.

The elevator arrives in time for the silence between them to remain comfortable even if Seungyoon had been expecting a reply. Knowing him, however, Minho doubts he was. A glance over to meet Seungyoon’s eyes confirms that as he aims a small smile at Minho while they step out together, walking down the hall towards their dorm.

“Thanks,” Minho says as Seungyoon unlocks the door.

“Should’ve known you forgot your key again.” Seungyoon continues to smile, even though his eyes make it loud and clear he knows what Minho means - he always does.

When the filming wraps up, it’s late enough at night that it could be considered morning in barely an hour or two, and Minho is solidly buzzed. They filmed the scenes with Alexa first before it became too late, and then finished up with the takes of him drinking inside before packing up for the night. He had been drinking casually throughout the filming but it became more than one bottle, maybe two, maybe three and it was the good stuff - on the stronger side - and Minho was glad for it.
Seungyoon had insisted on watching it all, mostly the first portion of filming and then he was pretty much stuck at the site after the others had been shuttled back, so he had ended up sticking around waiting for Minho to finish entirely before they could both head back to the hotel. This means that, now, Minho is in a dark car, his head leaning against the cool glass of the window, face tipped to the side just enough that he can make out Seungyoon’s eyes glinting from the lights of the passing buildings.

“She said you’re a good kisser,” Seungyoon’s grin is visible even in the blackness surrounding them. “A great kisser,” he adds, teasingly, and Minho can’t do this right now - he can’t - not at this time of night, not when the fact that they’re so far from home tempts him with how dissociated an encounter here could be, not when he’s on the right side of tipsy, not when this has been all he could think about for past weeks - he just can’t do this now.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” slips past Minho’s lips before he can stop himself.

Seungyoon laughs.

That’s right, after all, this is how their relationship has always been. Their banter has always skirted suggestive, they’ve always been on the edge of flirting on or off cameras - in front of fans or when there was no one else but each other. This is how it has always been between them since Minho arrived at the company, since they’ve become comfortable around each other, but somewhere amidst greeting the early mornings after sleepless nights, somehow through the afternoons spent together in vans looking through the music on each other’s phones, at some point - for Minho - friendship became a concept that blurred itself into something else entirely.

Minho waits for Seungyoon to follow-up the laughter that rang musical, and melodious, in the quiet of the car.

*I’ll pass.*

*No thanks.*

Either of those, any of those, anything along those lines - Minho waits for the strange tightness in his chest to be alleviated by the peace of indirect rejection, but nothing comes. Seungyoon’s laughter simply settles into an easy, small smile, eyes turning to look out through his own window. Minho stares across the space between them. Seungyoon had taken his jacket off as soon as they’d climbed into the car, tossing it onto the empty seat that separates them. The leopard-print shirt that was part of the costume beneath the leather jacket is still on him, sleeves rolled up now however to his elbows, but the buttons are still left open below his collarbone, and it’s still haphazardly tucked into his dark pants.

His hair has gotten long again - as long as it’d been when they’d first met, and it was back to the same color, too. Minho thinks maybe it’s even longer than before because he doesn’t remember it curling at the ends like this the first time he’d seen it down to the vocalist’s eyes.

The rest of the ride goes by in silence, and Seungyoon falls asleep halfway back to the hotel. Minho looks away.

At the same time that they tell him about the nomination, they also let him know that he’ll be performing that night and that Seungyoon will be sharing the stage with him. The performance is
going to be minimal and simple, quite literally just him and Seungyoon going around on the stage set as they please, and since they’ve got group schedules crowded in these days finally, they don’t bother rehearsing together until a few nights beforehand.

They decide to leave the key as it is since Seungyoon has no problem with it, and from there, they look at the stage blueprints sent to them by the director and organizers. There’ll be plenty of time to figure it out more during the dress rehearsal tomorrow, but both of them like to go over a rough idea of what’ll happen before they try it out at the actual venue.

Going over the song itself takes all of twenty minutes, and then, technically, they’re free to go - free to call the manager to drive them back to the dorm. Minho takes a seat on one of the benches near the sound system, flipping his mic around in his hand once he’s turned it off and staring at the screen of his phone in his other. The time reads half past midnight, and they really should be heading back.

Seungyoon sits down beside Minho. “You’ve texted Seho-hyung already?”

“No.” Minho pockets his phone and glances at the other man. “Let’s eat here.”

He earns a look that is equal parts unimpressed and highly amused. “I’m not eating chicken again,” Seungyoon says, and Minho will never understand how he manages to have a wide, easy grin on his face while still sounding utterly and fatally final about whatever he is stating.

Minho wraps both hands around Seungyoon’s wrists and tugs them back and forth, shaking the vocalist imploringly. “What do you mean again - we haven’t chicken in like a week - c’mon.”

“We had it like three times last week because of you,” Seungyoon yanks himself out of Minho’s grasp even though he smiles. “Either we get sushi or I’m leaving.”

“You get sushi,” Minho says, “I’m getting chicken.”

Seungyoon’s smile broadens. “Either you get sushi too or I’m leaving.”

Minho blinks. “What the fuck?” the words come out laced around an incredulous laugh.

“I’m doing this for your arteries, you can thank me later,” Seungyoon says, making a show of pulling out his phone and dialing the Japanese restaurant they always order from whose number Seungyoon - naturally - already has stored. “So - what do you want?”

“I’ll leave, then,” Minho stands up, jokingly, and when he looks back down at Seungyoon, he’s met with dancing eyes and full lips pursed with bit back humor.

“Be my guest,” Seungyoon salutes Minho, even as the rapper simply sits back down and elbows Seungyoon in the side. Seungyoon’s small laugh is smug as he hands his phone over so Minho, who hasn’t memorized the entire menu of this place, can decide what he wants to eat.

The entire day was an emotional rollercoaster from start to finish, and it definitely ends up being the latest they’ve ever finished filming for the show. They don’t get back to the dorm until near midnight, which, before they’d begun a show with young children whose body clocks were nearly the opposite of theirs as young adults in the industry, would’ve been considered absurdly early. Now, however, their bodies are already ready to fall asleep as they cross over the threshold of their
apartment, and there is also the addition of their early wake up times now - they have to be up in less than seven hours.

Minho does a short stream with Jinwoo and Seunghoon to greet the fans as it is his birthday, and even though he can’t give away the details of the filming, he wants to at least show his face and converse with them even if for just ten minutes. His birthday is more or less over by the time the stream finishes up, and Seunghoon and Jinwoo go to wash up, but Minho stays on the sofa. Both bathrooms will be occupied right now anyway, and he ends up reaching over to where he’d placed the kids’ letters near the lamp on the table next to the couch.

He’s still looking over them again - slower now that he has the time to do so, and without the obstruction of hot tears trying to be held in - when Seungyoon walks into the living room, in pajama pants and nothing else as he often does, dark hair damp against his flushed face, Bei cradled in his arms. The cat jumps smoothly down to the floor off of Seungyoon’s lap seconds after he takes a seat on Minho’s free side, as the rapper is sitting right up against the arm of the long sofa.

Being around Seungyoon after he’s taken a shower is always the worst - his skin is sensitive to temperature, and just warm water coupled with the steam generated by it is enough to turn him pink at the hands and cheeks. Because Seungyoon has been using the same shampoo since Minho has ever begun living with him, the scent of that exact shampoo, mixed with the clean smell anyone has after taking a hot shower, never fails to make Minho’s throat dry.

After Bei had taken his leave, Minho sees that Seungyoon had actually come out here with more than just a cat in his arms. “What’s that?” Minho asks, jerking his head down at the small, wrapped lump in Seungyoon’s lap. He already has a feeling what it might be, however, the ends of his mouth curling upward before Seungyoon even hands it over.

“Don’t cry on me, okay? I just showered.” Seungyoon snorts at the size of Minho’s grin at this point and the expectation that the rapper knows he can’t keep off his face anymore.

“Can I open it in front of you or should I open it later in case I don’t like it?” Minho says, already tearing through the paper.

“Have I ever given you anything you didn’t like?” Seungyoon snorts again, as Minho finishes unwrapping the gift.

Minho crumples the wrapping paper up and places it in the pocket of his sweatshirt so none of their pets end up eating it, and shakes the shirt that was within it out. The fit is loose, the sleeves are long, and there’s an extremely realistic and perfectly imperfect spray paint job done all over it. The entire affair is exactly his style - as everything Seungyoon gives him always is - and beneath how happy he is about the gift, how he already is thinking about when he can first wear it and what he’ll wear it with - beneath all of that, his throat goes from dry to tight at the thought of how well Seungyoon knows him.

“I like it,” Minho says, when he realizes that the silence is anticipatory and Seungyoon has been waiting for a response. “It’s fucking my style.”

“Of course,” and, there, again, there’s smugness laced through his voice that only makes Minho want to close the distance between their mouths with a hand against the back of Seungyoon’s neck. Seungyoon leans back into the cushions, tapping his palm against his thigh hard enough to make a sound and then Rei is appearing from around the corner, running towards them and then hopping gracefully into Seungyoon’s lap.

Minho folds up the shirt, taking the letters from the kids off the table again and consolidating it all
together in a neat pile in his arms. He doesn’t hear the water anymore from either bathroom, meaning Jinwoo and Seunghoon must be finished showering - and yet, Minho can’t bring himself to stand yet. Seungyoon’s bare shoulder and arm are pressed up against Minho’s with Rei lying nearly on his back in Seungyoon’s lap, balanced half in the crook of the vocalist’s elbow, ears poking into Minho’s own arm.

“I can’t believe you actually really thought we’d forget your birthday,” Seungyoon snickers - the way his eyes smile softly at Minho however is at odds with his tone and expression. “I can’t believe you thought I’d forget.”

Stop.

Don’t say that.

“You forget to feed Jhonny all the time, though,” Minho counters casually, even as his chest aches and caves.

“She’s your cat,” Seungyoon’s voice rises at the end with equal parts amusement and indignation.

Minho shakes his head. “Heartless,” he says, putting the cards into his sweatshirt pocket and slinging the shirt over one shoulder. He stands up and takes Rei out of Seungyoon’s arms. “Well, this isn’t your cat either.”

As soon as Minho makes an attempt to let Rei curl against him, however, the cat suddenly squirms and jumps back for Seungyoon, landing beside him on the sofa and giving Minho a flat look - though most all of Rei’s expressions are flat. Minho glares back - just a bit - he knows Rei’s favorite is Seungyoon but Minho had been the one to clean up Rei’s mess at least twice yesterday night.

“He isn’t yours either clearly,” Seungyoon laughs, mouth open wide and head bowed forward slightly. His laughter rings through the late night silence of the apartment, fading into a pleased expression as he runs his fingers around the backs of Rei’s ears.

“I’ll give you two some privacy, then,” Minho pretends to sniff, turning to head in for a shower finally.

He’s just about to round the corner for his room to drop off what’s in his arms when he hears, “Minho.”

Seungyoon is fully turned back to face the rapper on the sofa, arms resting on the back ledge. The smile on his face knocks the breath out of Minho’s lungs, makes that ache in his chest intensify to the point where Minho is actually rather impressed at how he manages to still remain upright. “Happy birthday.”
Chapter 2

The three of them and their staff, their managers and stylists, all have dinner together at a restaurant that the concierge of their hotel directs them to. They just need something filling and fast because the following day was going to be one filled from dawn to well past dusk with filming and waiting, and then waiting and filming. Despite the staff’s attempt to get ready for bed as soon as possible, the three of them end up hanging around outside in a sort of small park-courtyard hybrid around the hotel’s property.

Jiho’s manager remains with them while Seungyoon and Minho’s, as well as all of their stylists, head back up. They snap photos to post, talk about who their partners might be tomorrow, talk about nothing much at all - simply chatting and bantering for the sake of it - and it goes on for a fair few hours as neither Minho nor Seungyoon have seen Jiho in person for what feels like months and months. It might even possibly be the first time they’ve truly all been together, the three of them, for the first time since that night at the restaurant near Minho and Seungyoon’s dorm. If there were other times between then and tonight, it must have been few and far - Minho distantly recalls they had converged together at Epik High’s concert and an end-of-year show.

For some reason, having Jiho here when Seungyoon is also here - having Jiho see him laugh and talk with Seungyoon - unsettles Minho in a way he doesn’t know how to explain even to himself. He doesn’t keep secrets from Jiho, not huge and important ones, at least, but now there is this thing - this thing that Minho has been trying his hardest to shove down, to hide, to leave unacknowledged and in the deepest recesses of his mind and heart.

If he doesn’t think about it, if he doesn’t say it to himself - not even in so many words within his own thoughts - it won’t be real. It doesn’t have to be real, and he won’t ever get hurt.

He can’t tell Jiho.

Even though he wants to, even though he needs to in some ways because the best advice that has propelled him forward through the worst times of his life has always been from Jiho, he can’t. He can’t tell Seungyoon, he can’t tell Jihoon, he can’t tell Hyuntae - Minho can’t tell anyone because, even more certainly than thinking it to himself, if he says it aloud to another person, regardless of who it is - it becomes real.

By the time they head inside, it’s just about one in the morning. Jiho and his manager are on a different floor than Seungyoon and Minho and they bid them goodnight as they get off the elevator first together. They have their own rooms since it’s only the two of them the company has to house for these trips over, but somehow, Minho instinctively follows Seungyoon to his and Seungyoon doesn’t question that they enter Seungyoon’s room together.

They end up lying across Seungyoon’s bed with the covers still made since both of them haven’t showered or changed after a day of travelling. They are sitting propped up against the pillows and headboard, touching from shoulders to legs, and for a long moment they are just silent, going through their messages, looking through social media - Minho sees that Seungyoon has already begun going through the photos they took with Jiho to decide which one he wants to post.

One of the many things Minho has never let himself think about is this precisely - how comfortable silence is whenever he’s with Seungyoon. As easily as Minho can laugh and converse with Seungyoon, as easily as Minho can speak quietly with Seungyoon about his troubles, just as easily can Minho lie beside or sit with Seungyoon and do nothing at all - not even speak, not even interact with him, simply being with him and being alone at the same time.
Minho still isn’t allowing himself to think about it, but the thoughts and realizations form now against his will as Seungyoon faces him, turning only his head, cheek pressed up against the corner of the pillow he’s leaning back against. He’s so close to Minho, their faces are so close and Minho could count Seungyoon’s eyelashes if he wanted to, can see some of the sweat that had formed against the sides of Seungyoon’s face when they were outside in the humid, Beijing night air -

He could press his mouth over the curve of Seungyoon’s lips if he wanted to.

They’ve been on a bed together so many times - in their dorm, in other hotels throughout all of their concert tours abroad and out of Seoul - but it’s different tonight. The other members aren’t gathered here with them in the room, discussing what they want to eat after the concert is over or deciding where they want to shop before their flight. They aren’t in their dorm where their managers have the passcode to enter, where their bandmates are only footsteps away, where doors are never closed so that all of their pets can pass in and out.

They’re in a different country, alone, just the two of them here in a hotel room on a wide, hotel bed.

“This one’s good, right?” Seungyoon asks, arm resting warm against Minho’s stomach as the vocalist leans in to show Minho one of the photos with Jiho taken outside just moments ago.

Minho barely glances at the phone. His heart is suddenly thundering in his chest, and that’s all he can hear. Seungyoon’s voice sounds as if Minho is hearing him from the end of an extremely long tunnel. Their faces are even closer now because Seungyoon is leaning in, and his waist is right up against Minho’s thigh - he can feel Seungyoon’s hipbone poking into him because Seungyoon has always been so thin.

“Yeah,” Minho says, relief flooding through him when he hears how steady his voice is. “I might just use the same one.”

Seungyoon rolls his eyes, bumping Minho’s shoulder with his own. “Always copying me,” Seungyoon shakes his head playfully, as he settles back into the pillows to start cropping the photo.

If Minho were stronger, if Minho were *better*, he would have simply shoved Seungyoon back and retorted with how Seungyoon was the one who bought the same sneakers Minho had gotten recently after making envious glances at Minho’s feet while he was breaking them in last week for the first time.

As it stands, Minho can’t do that - can’t be as controlled about his useless, pointless, *stupid* emotions as he’d like to be - and he needs to leave now, right now, before any damage is done. He rolls off the other side of the bed even though, in a simpler time - during a time when Minho could think of Seungyoon truly in the same way that Seungyoon thinks of him, as just a friend - Minho would have intentionally rolled over Seungyoon, crushing him against the bed and eliciting indignant squawks as Minho would laugh and make himself heavier just *because*.

Minho misses when being with Seungyoon didn’t hurt all the time.

“You going to bed?” Seungyoon looks up from editing the photo, blinking.

“We have to be up in - like - six hours, so yeah, I’m going to pass out - probably shower tomorrow instead,” Minho says, crossing the room without looking at Seungyoon. “‘Night.”

He’s out of the room before Seungyoon can respond.

Minho doesn’t shower the next morning.
He showers that night, before he goes to bed, hand wrapped tightly around his cock, moving up and down in rapid motions that are meant more for a means to an end than any kind of true pleasure. His back is pressed up against the wall, eyes closed as the hot water jets onto him. In the blessed blackness of his eyelids, within his mind’s eye, he imagines a reality that he could control - a reality where everything he wanted came true.

Minho imagines kissing Seungyoon when the vocalist had leaned in to show Minho that picture on his phone - pulling him on top of Minho and holding him there with his fingers tugging through the loops of Seungyoon’s jeans. If reality gave Minho everything he wanted, Seungyoon would kiss him back, mouth opening against Minho’s and tongue curling around the rapper's. Minho would grind his hips up off the bed into Seungyoon’s, the friction and pressure bringing both of them to hardness.

They’d do something easy and fast because their schedule begins early tomorrow, but it would end with their hands holding their cocks against each other, stroking each other to finish and they’d never stop kissing throughout it all - not even for a moment, not until the end to catch their breaths. Seungyoon’s body would be a hot, familiar weight on top of Minho and his eyes would open slowly, head coming up from where it had leaned against Minho’s shoulder in the aftershocks, and his gaze would be heavy-lidded and affectionate and warm.

When Minho comes, he leans even more heavily against the wall, breathing hard and watching almost dazedly as his release swirls down to the drain of the shower.

The pain is gone for now, but the emptiness that replaces it is even worse.

If Minho thought he had been busy last year, he barely has time to breathe this year.

As soon as there’s a lull in filming for the Collaboration, he’s told that he’ll have solo activities and unit activities with Jiwon. While there is already some material to be had, for the most part, he’ll be creating from scratch and even the pre-existing material needs to be heavily rearranged with Jiwon - a feat that proves fairly difficult since the younger man is hardly ever in the country these days and when he is, sometimes Minho will have his own separate schedules. It means that they have to make do during the few hours and times that their schedules collide, and they have to work on their solos during the odd, late hours when they aren’t working with each other or completing their other obligations.

Generally, this makes for nights at the studio that start once Minho finishes his personal schedule and end well after when the sun rises or when Minho needs to leave for the following day’s personal schedule - sleep and meals are usually done in the car these days for him.

Tonight is one of those nights, even though at least Minho doesn’t have anything penned in for tomorrow, which means he can collapse into bed at a beautiful noon - just in time to wake up later that night when Jiwon is supposed to return from Japan.

He’s right in the middle of ignoring his stomach’s insistent growling, putting off for another few hours ordering the inevitable delivery food that comes as almost a packaged deal with sleepless nights, when the door opens without a knock and the smell of greasy, fried chicken fills the studio. Minho turns in the swivel chair and is met with Seungyoon’s bright eyes, mouth twisted into a pleased grin at look of utter entrancement Minho gives the bag hanging from Seungyoon’s hand.
“Heard you were hungry,” Seungyoon says, a laugh in his voice, as Minho makes a dive for the bag and instantly folds his legs on the floor, unboxing the food without another thought.

The vocalist sits down across from him, grabbing the other pair of chopsticks out of the bag and breaking them apart. “Oh,” Minho remarks mildly, or as mildly as he can make himself sound around a mouthful of meat, “you’re eating, too?”

“I paid for it,” Seungyoon raises his eyebrows challengingly, taking one of the drumsticks with his chopsticks and tearing into it.

Minho grins back. “Thanks,” he says, and means it. He thinks it’s gotten a bit easier for him to handle recently, the way Seungyoon always seems to know exactly what Minho needs and wants. Minho would like to think he isn’t so anxious over that fact anymore. Seungyoon is extremely attuned to the wants and needs of most all the people he cares about. That’s just who he is as a person. Minho is simply one of those many people Seungyoon happens to care about.

He isn’t special.

Seungyoon asks Minho about how the music is coming along, especially his solo, and that ends up carrying the conversation through the rest of the meal. They eat more than they talk, naturally, and whenever they do this over food, they hardly finish their sentences. Minho only has to begin a statement, before meeting Seungyoon’s eyes as the rapper starts biting into his next piece of chicken, and he’ll know that Seungyoon understands the unspoken half.

At some point, Minho’s response to something Seungyoon says about Bei nearly biting Haute’s tail off earlier today has Seungyoon laughing so hard he’s collapsing into Minho, and Minho ends up laughing too, leaning in with his arm resting on Seungyoon’s thigh. It stays there for the rest of the meal, Minho eating with one hand, and Seungyoon still treating Minho like the back of a chair, shoulder warm against Minho’s upper arm.

They finish the food like that, and the conversation never ends - just like that - with their limbs tangled as always, leaning on one another, hardly any space between their bodies. They’re still talking even as the grease on the napkins crushed into the boxes dries, and the time for Minho to be getting back to work starts to tick by.

He doesn’t know why tonight - they are both sober, there’s nothing special about tonight at all - but the air is charged strangely around them and the light in Seungyoon’s eyes is uncertain and almost confused even as he continues to meet Minho’s gaze and smile as if the sudden tension in the room isn’t there at all.

Minho moves slowly at first, sliding in even closer than he already is, and he doesn’t look, but he hears the rustle and feels Seungyoon suddenly unfolding his legs. Minho doesn’t take his eyes from Seungyoon’s face as he slides until he’s half-kneeling and half-sitting in between Seungyoon’s legs. The vocalist’s smile is beginning to falter, fading from his lips as his throat constricts visibly. Minho finally leans in to erase the bit of distance still separating them. He presses his mouth against the underside of Seungyoon’s jaw, the movement simultaneous with Seungyoon tipping his head back to allow Minho in even more. The sigh that falls out of Seungyoon’s parted mouth is dangerous, low and husky, and Minho hadn’t known how much he’d needed to hear that sound.

One of Seungyoon’s hands grabs at the cloth of Minho’s shirt, pulling him in closer, while the other cups the back of Minho’s head, securing his face at Seungyoon’s collarbones and throat and jaw. When Minho looks up to catch a breath and to gauge Seungyoon’s expression, the other man dips seconds after their eyes meet, and then Minho feels his heart stutter in his chest - feels his breath knocked out of his body as Seungyoon’s full lips touch down on where Minho’s neck meets his
shoulder.

Having Seungyoon’s mouth on his skin is so surreal it makes Minho’s head spin - it’s been the centerpiece of his dreams for weeks now, it has him waking up wherever he wakes up, whether that be the bed in his dorm or in a hotel room, sweaty and sticky and filled with that emptiness that he doesn’t know how to sate. He buries one hand in Seungyoon’s hair and reaches down with his other hand to cup Seungyoon between his thighs.

At the same time that Minho presses his hand in and up, kneading Seungyoon through the thin cotton of his joggers, Seungyoon makes a sound right up against the column of Minho’s neck that has Minho’s own hips jerking forward almost involuntarily. Minho glances up one more time at Seungyoon’s face, swallowing dryly as he slips his fingertips between the waistband of Seungyoon’s joggers and the warm, flushed skin stretched over his hipbone. Seungyoon meets his eyes and Minho doesn’t find any resistance there, only something unreadable that Minho is scared to look too deeply into right now - not now.

Right now, Minho pushes his hand past the elastic of Seungyoon’s boxers and when his fingers wrap around Seungyoon completely, Seungyoon’s forehead tips forward onto Minho’s shoulder. “Fuck,” slips past Seungyoon’s lips, almost half-laughed, a murmur under his breath, and he turns his face to press those lips right back to the base of Minho’s throat.

Minho wants to echo that sentiment as he settles himself so that he has one of Seungyoon’s thighs between his own. Seungyoon is leaning on his side, balanced on his elbow with Minho half on top of him, the rapper rocking against Seungyoon’s leg as he moves his hand up and down Seungyoon’s length steadily at first, squeezing in a rhythm he himself knows works well, thumbing the tip.

Seungyoon’s mouth gets sloppier against Minho’s jaw and neck as Minho’s hand moves faster, and Minho’s hips are already unsteady and stuttering. Minho can hear Seungyoon’s panting right beside his ear, it’s less air and more voice, keening and almost desperate for some reason. Minho bites down on Seungyoon’s shoulder, over the soft cloth of the vocalist’s shirt as he feels himself come, and Seungyoon also comes over Minho’s hand.

Before Minho can catch his breath - before he can even stop seeing tiny white lights dotting his vision as he tries to blink the world more steadily into view, he suddenly feels himself shoved to the side, the sticky dampness between his jeans and his thighs all the more jarring and uncomfortable as he falls against the floor. Seungyoon has somehow already tucked himself back in, standing up and wiping what’s gotten on him with one of the few clean napkins left.

Minho’s chest feels as if it’s caving in on itself, as if his heart has suddenly become the size and weight of a boulder and he can no longer breathe - can no longer contain this pressure and pain. He watches dumbly, his voice unable to come out even if he tried, as Seungyoon doesn’t look at him at all - as the vocalist gathers all of the trash together in rushed movements before dashing out the door without a single word or glance at Minho.

They don’t talk about it the next morning.

Minho watches Seungyoon carefully, trying to detect avoidance - trying to detect intent, trying to detect wariness or discomfort or awkwardness, but regardless of how hard and carefully he searches and observes the vocalist, Minho doesn’t feel any of those. He supposes that there would be no
reason to. Seungyoon, after all, is an absolute professional at compartmentalizing - the best out of all of them, and they barely touched more than they had to last night anyway.

Nothing happened last night that couldn’t have happened between very, very close friends - it was extremely late at night, and neither of them had gotten much sleep in the past few weeks, really. There have been plenty of events that had also happened recently to bring their stress levels high, their tension even higher, and most likely what had happened was brought about by that.

Or - at least that was what Minho supposed went on in Seungyoon’s mind. For Minho himself, the reasoning as to why he went along with what occurred in the studio that night was as clear as day - and something he had accepted and realized months and months ago.

They don’t talk about it that morning nor do they talk about it any of the mornings afterward. Seungyoon doesn’t avoid Minho nor does he act any differently, and it’s unnerving only for the first day afterwards - until Minho realizes that this is the best way to go about it. So that no one will know, so that they don’t have to deal with a messy aftermath, so that their friendship doesn’t suffer.

Minho tells himself that it doesn’t hurt.

He tells himself that it’s a positive thing - that he should be grateful Seungyoon can be this nonchalant about what happened.

He tells himself that he wouldn’t want it any other way.

It happens again - and again.

And again.

He doesn’t think he’s realized until now how often they’re alone together despite how busy they are. He thinks maybe that’s the worst part about it, that that’s the reason it continues to happen. The only times they see each other will often be so late at night that most people would consider it early morning, and even if they’re completely sober, there’s something about those dark hours that blurs Minho’s inhibitions and good sense to engage in something that will only end up with him hurt and Seungyoon confused and wanting to no longer have anything to do with him.

It happens several times in the studio and once on the set of Minho’s music video filming - during a long lull while the staff were setting up anew and Minho was supposed to be in the bathroom under the guise of washing out his hair with Seungyoon who was supposed to be helping him.

Instead, Minho had had a hand around each of their cocks with Seungyoon’s lips and teeth and tongue grazing all over Minho’s neck, the vocalist’s own hands beneath the front of Minho’s shirt, running up and down his chest and sides and abs. Only by some miracle, Seungyoon hadn’t left any marks on Minho, and the marks Minho left, Seungyoon simply covered with a sharp pull of his shirt’s collar. He went on filming his music video, and Seungyoon left after dropping off the coffee for him and the crew.
Outside of whatever this is, during the daytime, during - any time at all that they aren’t alone, their relationship hasn’t changed. They haven’t changed. They still haven’t spoken about it, after weeks and weeks, but nothing has changed and, while at first Minho could force himself to be thankful for just that, it’s already getting harder and the empty feeling in his chest whenever Seungyoon pulls away from him in the aftermath of their shared orgasms gets worse and worse.

If it remained as emptiness, that would be preferable to how the hollowness in his chest has begun to manifest as an acute ache that at times throbs so intensely, Minho wants to double over and vomit.

After a unit schedule with Jiwon ends late, he and the younger man end up going drinking with a few members of the staff until even later. By the time he’s safely ensconced in the backseat of the car with his manager driving both him and Jiwon away from the bar and towards their apartment complex, Minho is just on the worst off side of buzzed. He asks Seho to drop him off instead at the agency, and luckily Jiwon is completely and fully drunk - too drunk to look at Minho strangely because there wasn’t any more work for him to do for now.

There is a strange look aimed at Minho through the rearview mirror, but other than that, Minho receives a noise of assent, and Seho turns the car around.

Minho’s phone is still alight with the message from Jinwoo in response to Minho’s question of whether Seungyoon was at the dorm or not. He closes out of it, locking his phone and tucking it into his pocket just as they pull up to the company. Minho taps Jiwon’s shoulder, grinning at him and telling him to drink plenty of water before he heads to sleep tonight, and then Minho alights from the car.

As he walks down the long corridor, he peers briefly through the glass of each door he passes. There isn’t anyone else working this late tonight. Minho’s heart begins to beat a little faster, and he isn’t sure if that’s anticipation or the alcohol beginning to truly work through him. Maybe he should have eaten something before he drank.

Each of them have personal studios where they work on the earliest stages of their songs before bringing them to the recording studio to be looked over by the other producers in the agency, and Seungyoon is perhaps the one who spends some of the most time in his, whereas Minho takes on the bulk of his work with the equipment he has in his room back at the apartment. Seungyoon’s is perhaps definitely the most personalized among them.

Even though at first glance the glass of Seungyoon’s small studio seems dark, Minho knows that the vocalist is inside working. Once he draws closer, he catches the familiar tell-tale slight glare from the desk lamp - the only light Seungyoon prefers to have on when he’s composing.

Minho doesn’t knock. He’s come in just like this hundreds of times before in the same way that Seungyoon has come into Minho’s workspace hundreds of times before. Even when they aren’t working on the same project, even when they aren’t working together, they’ve kept each other company through those long nights so many times - remaining awake, remaining determined and motivated, after all is always easier with company, both of them find.

Seungyoon is sitting at the desk, turned to the side rather than facing the desk itself and the laptop open on it. There’s composing software clearly open on the screen, but Seungyoon is hunched over the guitar resting across his thighs. He’s tuning the instrument, and also fiddling with one of the
strings itself, the furrow of his brow telling Minho that there’s something worryingly wrong with the guitar most likely.

“Hey,” Seungyoon says without looking up.

Minho takes a seat on the blanket-covered bench. He doesn’t think he even remembers what the large, cushioned bench pushed up against the wall of the studio - emphasizing exactly how closet-sized it is further - looks like beneath the blanket. He has absolutely no idea where Seungyoon even found something made with such excessive fleece - to the point where, even in the wintertime, sitting on it for a mere few minutes would make Minho overheat.

“It broke?” Minho asks, watching the crease between Seungyoon’s eyebrows grow steadily more pronounced as he bends lower over the guitar.

“No,” Seungyoon’s response comes slow and soft. Minho is in a sweater and jeans, having to dress at least semi-presentable for the walk between the car and the building where there would inevitably have been fans waiting. Seungyoon has no schedules at all, and whereas Minho would’ve settled for joggers on a day like that, the vocalist is the true embodiment of dressing for oneself. He’s told Minho before that he needs to feel and know that what he’s wearing looks as if he’s about to head out - feeling good rather than feeling comfortable - in order to make music well. Thus, Seungyoon is in black jeans with more holes and tears than actual fabric - as always - and a shirt that looks like a normal t-shirt from the shoulders to the waist before it disintegrates and frays towards the hem. The collar is a low, low shape, stretched out by design, and it shows more skin than Minho’s intoxicated state can handle right now.

The vocalist sets the guitar down with a mildly frustrated huff that then suddenly causes his expression to change, eyes whirling to Minho. In the back of his inebriated mind somewhere, Minho realizes Seungyoon must have finally breathed deeply enough to smell the scent of alcohol that is probably filling the room right about now. “Thought you had schedules all day,” the corners of Seungyoon’s mouth tugging upward lightly.

“Had a drink with Jiwon after,” Minho shrugs. He watches the small shift in Seungyoon’s expression after the vocalist’s eyes seem to gauge Minho’s tone and gaze.

“And then you came here?” The nonchalance in Seungyoon’s voice comes out stiff and far too intentional. He stands and moves from the small chair at the desk to the opposite end of the bench, one leg bent underneath him as he takes a seat facing Minho.

They look at one another in silence for a moment - only the desk lamp is on, and when Seungyoon sits across from Minho here on the bench, his face is in the shadows and Minho can only barely discern what expression the other man wears. Minho doesn’t know why tonight feels different - why his heart is suddenly beating in his chest as quickly as it had the first time they did this when they haven’t even touched each other yet.

He doesn’t know why he moves so slowly, maybe because even if Seungyoon doesn’t expect anything to be different tonight, Minho knows it will be. He reaches out, hands hooking against the back of Seungyoon’s knees and pulling the vocalist closer. Seungyoon lets himself slide forward towards Minho, shadowed expression morphing one into slight confusion.

Minho holds Seungyoon’s thighs apart and settles between them, pushing Seungyoon back into the bench with Minho’s own body. He realizes that every time before now they’ve both always been upright somehow - whether sitting or standing, against walls and doors maybe, but Minho has never held himself above Seungyoon like this, looking down at him as his hair splay's around his head on the blanket.
Seungyoon’s lips are parted with his breathing - which is becoming shallower and shallower, Minho notices, as Minho presses their bodies together and leans down closer. The vocalist’s eyes are wide open, searching Minho’s face, and one of Seungyoon’s hands comes up to cup Minho’s face.

This is stupid.

This is so incredibly trivial and stupid.

Seungyoon has touched nearly every part of Minho’s body so many, many times before - and nearly all of it has been recorded, filmed, uploaded on the internet several times over. They’ve embraced, played around, shaken each other, smacked each other teasingly - everything about them is about comfort and closeness, and Seungyoon has touched Minho’s face so many times before.

Yet, in this moment, when Seungyoon’s palm and fingers press against Minho’s cheek, thumb skimming the top of his cheekbone, Minho finds it so incredibly difficult to draw his next breath. He swallows and gently wraps his own hand over Seungyoon’s, pulling it off and away from the rapper’s face and pressing the vocalist’s wrist down back into the bench, pinning it beside Seungyoon’s head. He sees the flash of initial puzzlement move through Seungyoon’s eyes before it’s replaced with hurt - obvious, clear, disappointment and hurt and Minho hates himself but he can’t risk something like that.

Better Seungyoon is hurt here - just a little - than hurt more over Minho destroying their entire friendship.

Minho slides his hands up beneath Seungyoon’s shirt, pushing it up and pressing his fingertips into the skin of Seungyoon’s sides. When he feels one of Seungyoon’s hands cup the back of Minho’s neck, bringing the rapper’s mouth to Seungyoon’s throat, Minho obliges - lips and teeth and tongue ghosting and grazing over Seungyoon’s skin. Minho hears a low sigh beside his ear, and then a noise that sounds as if it’s being pulled from the back of Seungyoon’s throat. He feels Seungyoon’s hips suddenly come up to grind against Minho’s, Seungyoon’s legs lifting to frame Minho’s waist - pulling him down for better friction.

He leans back slightly, detaching his face from Seungyoon’s neck and looking down at the vocalist as their bodies move against each other. Seungyoon’s eyes are so, so dark and it’s more than the shadows cast on his face from the dim lighting that make his expression undecipherable to Minho. Both of them are hard, and even though Minho can feel that if they went on like this, there would be no problem at all in both of them finishing in a matter of minutes now, Minho puts his hands on Seungyoon’s hips and holds him down - stops him.

Seungyoon props himself up on his elbows, eyebrows furrowing in confusion as he watches Minho pull back even more - as the rapper starts moving down on Seungyoon’s body, settling between the vocalist’s thighs and spreading them wider. Minho doesn’t look at Seungyoon’s expression as he unbuttons and unzips the other man’s jeans.

“Minho - “ Seungyoon’s voice is no longer confused - there’s anticipation and apprehension, but Minho ignores both of those emotions in his friend’s tone, and pulls Seungyoon’s jeans and boxers down just low enough. He wraps his hand around the base, and he hears and sees out of the corner of his eye, Seungyoon falling back on the bench with that same torn off sound - low and primal.

He works Seungyoon with his hand for a moment, watching Seungyoon watch him, and the next time that Seungyoon throws his head back, Minho leans down and takes Seungyoon into his mouth.

Seungyoon must know that there’s no one else working in this hall at the moment - and that even if
there were, the whole concept of these rooms is that they are all soundproof - but the vocalist still has his wrist in his mouth, biting down. His other hand is fisting the blanket, and Minho lets go of Seungyoon’s hips then - letting him fuck Minho’s mouth until the end.

Minho doesn’t know what he would have done if he were sober, but as it is, when Seungyoon comes - hot and pulsing - inside of Minho’s mouth, he swallows with the taste only registering somewhere faintly in the back of his mind. His hands are resting on Seungyoon’s bare thighs, not really holding them apart anymore because Seungyoon is limp and pliant already now.

As he hears Seungyoon’s breathing louder, realizing that Seungyoon has taken his arm out of his mouth and is now propped back up on his elbows, panting so hard that his shoulders are moving with the force of his breaths, Minho only then comes back to his own body - only then does his mind comprehend what has really happened.

He’s drunk but he isn’t drunk enough for this. He doesn’t think he could ever be drunk enough for this, and he stands up, glad that he never removed his wallet or phone from his pockets - glad that he knows his way around the building well enough that when he runs out of the studio, slamming the door behind him, he can easily find his own studio even while his head is spinning and he feels like he might vomit at any moment.

Minho locks the door once he’s inside. He doesn’t bother turning on the lights - it’s better that way, anyway. He slides down against the wall, hitting the floor with a thump, and nearly ripping the fastening of his jeans. It’s the least pleasurable orgasm he has ever had - torn out of him more than anything else, and when he’s sitting there, with his hand sticky and clammy at his side, a part of him wishes he had never met Kang Seungyoon.

(And maybe that night would have been okay - maybe Minho wouldn’t have been driven to madness if he hadn’t drank - if he hadn’t gone to find Seungyoon on a whim -

If he hadn’t looked up after Seungyoon had come, and seen the way Seungyoon’s eyes shone through the dimness at him - if only Minho’s heart hadn’t felt like it was going to burst out of his chest at the sight - maybe that night would have been okay.)

Minho is still inside his studio, in the darkness, on the floor, when he hears Seungyoon leaving. Sometime before the sun rises, probably, a few hours before dawn most probably.

Minho doesn’t know how long he himself remains there - long enough that he’s completely sober when he stands, wipes his hand and himself down, and heads out.
Seungyoon is busy.

Nowadays, Seungyoon is the one who is barely seen at the dorms and even at the agency. If he isn’t filming for the drama, then he’s at the agency either to work on music or sitting in on talks for him to be permanently part of a cast for a show he guested on some months back. As things stand, Minho hasn’t seen him for literally weeks since the night he came in after the unit schedule. Whether it’s been because Minho has been flying to and from Japan and the filming now takes up most of Seungyoon’s days or Minho has simply pretended he was catching up on sleep every time Seungyoon has been home, is irrelevant at this point.

The point of the matter is that Minho misses Seungyoon.

Until now, until there has been something significantly barring Minho from seeking Seungyoon out—that something being so stupid and childish and possibly easily overcome—Minho doesn’t think he has truly realized and noticed how much of his life Seungyoon had become a part of. They’ve always been busy separately before—after all, previously it had been Minho who had barely been at the dorms for weeks on end. Minho hadn’t realized how jarring of a difference it would be to have Seungyoon on radio silence except for their group messages with producers, their managers, and the other members.

The week he has a full day off, he asks their scheduling staff about where Seungyoon’s filming will be. The location ends up being a restaurant not too far off from where Minho goes with his friends whenever there’s a rare time when all of them can meet. That day ends up becoming one of those rare times with Minho asking Hyuntae and Jihoon if they want to meet him a few streets down from where the filming will be. He tells their manager he’ll be dropping by but not to tell Seungyoon about it, and he sets a time with Hyuntae and Jihoon a little over an hour after he plans to arrive at the filming.

They are filming inside the restaurant when Minho arrives that Sunday, and finds their manager easily, standing beside him and tapping his arm to announce his arrival. He watches the filming with Seho until a break is announced once the scene is finished, and then the manager is clapping Minho’s shoulder, letting him know that he has to go speak to the assistant director about scheduling and Minho can go ahead on into the restaurant now.

There is bar-style seating in the tiny corner where the scene had been filmed and Seungyoon is sitting on the stool closest to the wall, very clearly in the middle of plowing through a full plate of food. When Minho takes the seat beside him, Seungyoon’s head doesn’t turn for a solid few seconds, too busy eating—and Minho realizes that Seungyoon must have been shooting since early morning without anything in his stomach except possibly some weak coffee that was more milk and sugar than anything else.

Minho twirls his phone in his hands, placing his arms out far enough so that Seungyoon will see them, if he doesn’t sense someone in his periphery soon enough anyway once he surfaces from the mound of breaded pork and rice his face is currently in. Seungyoon’s head comes up mid-chew, one hand reaching for his glass of water when Minho’s arms seem to come into his line of sight, and then his head is spinning towards the rapper’s direction.
Their gazes meet, and for a split second, there is something in Seungyoon’s eyes that Minho only ever sees during the nighttime—or the early hours of the morning, when they are together during those times they never mention to each other while the sun is in the sky. Minho only has to blink and then Seungyoon’s expression is smoothed out into amused surprise. “This is a private shoot—you’re trespassing.”

“They asked me to cameo,” Minho plays along easily - everything is always easy when it comes to Seungyoon, being near him and with him has always been as easy and natural as breathing and it hurts Minho to realize how much he’s missed this—and him.

“Excuses,” Seungyoon smiles. “Why’re you so obsessed with me?”

“Why’re you so self-centered?” Minho grins back.

Seungyoon holds Minho’s gaze a moment longer, before turning back to his food, eating slower now, expression seemingly considering more things than just the food before him. “You’re off today, right?” the vocalist asks lightly. “You were hanging around in the area?”

Minho starts twirling his phone in his hands again, looking at the device rather than his friend. “Yeah,” he lies.

“Did you go see Jinwoo-hyung yet?”

“He’s still filming,” Minho says, and even as the words come out of his mouth, he has no idea why he’s lying again—why he’s lied more to Seungyoon in this moment, in these past few weeks, than ever has in all the time they’ve known each other.

Seungyoon turns to face him, expression indecipherable and blank for a short second before he smiles again. “Great—you can entertain me on my break then.”

Minho snorts, reaching his hand out as if he was making to grab Seungyoon’s plate away from him even though the rapper had already eaten earlier. Seungyoon moves the food away swiftly in any case, kicking ineffectively at Minho’s shin beneath the bar countertop. Minho smiles to himself slightly, stretching his arms out on the counter again and settling in to play on his phone, glancing over at Seungyoon eating occasionally.

When Seungyoon is finished with his meal, he signs an autograph for the owner of the restaurant and then tugs at Minho’s elbow, indicating with a jerk of his head that they should go outside now. “I’ve been filming inside all day,” he says, as Minho follows him out. Minho watches as the vocalist stretches his arms over his head, muscles audibly making small popping noises that Seungyoon echoes with sighs of relief.

They’re in an area where music is blasting loudly from the open doors of surrounding stores as well as in the street itself. It’s something they’ve always done—for as long as Minho can remember ever having known Seungyoon, ever having been friends with him—they’ve always danced together whenever there’s music playing, whenever they’re bored, whenever they’re both just feeling good. In the loosest use of the term, they dance—neither of them are dancers, and at worst, both of them during these times are just flailing their limbs into each other’s spaces while music plays loudly in the background. Regardless, it’s just something they do—something they’ve always done—and like many things that fall into that category, Minho has missed it.

Seungyoon’s break doesn’t last long, and Minho leaves when he has to return to filming. “See you at home,” Seungyoon says, bumping the back of his hand lightly on Minho’s chest as he walks back with their manager to the set.
Minho watches him leave, hands in his pockets, the autumn breeze hitting his face. He turns away once Seungyoon has been swarmed by staff and assistant directors, pulling his phone out to ask Hyuntae and Jihoon if they were already at the previously promised destination or still on their way.

He isn’t sure how to feel for the rest of the day. He isn’t sure how he feels—doesn’t know how to pinpoint the emotions that welled up in his chest other than longing while he was with Seungyoon for that single hour. He doesn’t know how to read Seungyoon anymore—and that might be the strangest, most infuriating, maddening part of it all—that one of the core reasons why Minho was so attracted to Seungyoon in the first place, one of the things that pulled him to Seungyoon like a moth to a flame, was how easily they understood each other, most times without words, with gazes that lasted split seconds.

If Jihoon and Hyuntae sense anything off, they don’t say it, but Minho sees it in the way they exchange glances with each other when they think he isn’t watching. He supposes though also they most likely know anyway that he has noticed—friendships that have lasted for as long as theirs have leave little room for hiding anything in both directions. He knows that they know he wants to tell them—just as well as he knows they also know he isn’t ready yet.

He returns to the dorm later than he’d planned—Jinwoo and Seunghoon are already back, from the gym and the company respectively, he finds out, as he passes them talking in the kitchen, greeting them lightly and asking them where they’d spent their day. Both of them look like they’re about to head in to sleep—Minho’s phone informs him that he really had returned much, much later than planned, nearly a few hours past midnight.

He’s a little past tipsy, and even though he is clearly aware of this, both Seunghoon and Jinwoo feel the need to inform him of it anyway, tones teasing as they state that of course, Song Minho spends his day-off drinking. He laughs, floating on the alcohol and the good spirits that being with his closest, oldest, friends always leaves him in. They wave him off into the shower, teasing further that he smells too obviously like a bar crawl, before they return to the late night delivery they seemed to be finishing up together.

Minho walks to his own bedroom first, flicking on the lights and smiling to himself when he finds Jhonny curled up in the middle of his bed. She rolls onto her back when she sees him approach, and he stretches himself out on his side, stroking through her soft fur with his fingers, rubbing his thumbs behind her ears. When she turns back onto her stomach, standing up and jumping from the bed down to the floor to stalk off into her own bed near his desk, Minho himself stands as well.

He picks up the t-shirt and pajama pants he’s been wearing for the better part of this week, grabbing a clean pair of boxers from his underwear drawer as well. Somehow, even in the state he’s in, his eyes catch the towel thrown on the corner of his bed that he forgot to hang back up in the bathroom and he snags that too so he won’t have to make a wet run back for it.

When he steps out of his room, all of the lights in the rest of the apartment have been turned off, and Jinwoo and Seunghoon have clearly gone into their own rooms to sleep—it’s doubly confirmed in Jinwoo’s case when Rei and Bei come stalking up to Minho’s ankles, making unhappy sounds at how their owner has shut the door on them for the night and their usual bed partner isn’t home yet.

“Go sleep with Jhonny,” Minho murmurs, leaning down and stroking between their ears shortly before holding his door open wider, leaving it like that so they can walk in and rest in his room until
whenever Seungyoon returns.

He dumps everything onto the space beside the sink once he gets in, pulling the door shut but forgoing locking it—they’ve lived with each other long enough that for showers or simply brushing their teeth or washing their faces, locking the door just seems unnecessary in case multiple people need to use the bathroom. This late at night, however, there is also no point in locking the door anyway even for privacy.

He turns on the shower, letting the water heat up, and stripping down in the meantime. He hangs the clothes he was wearing on the hook attached to the back of the bathroom door, and steps under the warm spray of water as soon as the mirrors begin to fog up with the heat. It takes all of a few seconds to get his hair thoroughly wet, but he just stands there, staring at their row of shampoos and conditioners—some of them specifically for bleached hair for when each of them, save for Seungyoon, had had their turn with blond hair and their hair stylists had sent the bottles home with them.

The soft buzz of his undercut is getting longer, not noticeably enough, but he supposes he’ll get it trimmed back down whenever he goes next to the shop. It’s been nearly a year since he’s done anything to his hair whether coloring or cutting, and he thinks back to how his stylist had suggested some months ago during another trim that they try perming it if he’s that worried about how much hair he’s lost recently.

He’s drunk enough now after some more time for the alcohol to work its way through his system that he’s starting to feel sleepy even though he had more sleep the night before than he’s gotten in weeks. He doesn’t realize how long he’s zoned out for, still not yet even picking up his shampoo, until there’s a light knock on the door, a single rap of knuckles that startles him back to himself.

His eyebrows furrow as he instinctively glances in the direction of the door through the frosted glass. The fact that there is a knock at all is odd—Seunghoon and Jinwoo clearly went to sleep, or were otherwise already in their rooms winding down and there was another bathroom at the other end of the dorm that they could use. Even in the case of one of them wanting to use the toilet in here, they had all reached a point where knocking was no longer necessary anyway.

The cats often made sounds against the doors but the knock was not a rap or a scratch—the sound was too much alike to that that could only be made by a human hand.

He settles for simply calling out evenly, “I’m just taking a shower.”

The door opens slowly, and Minho shakes the water from his eyes, slicking his hair back out of his face to look through the frosted glass of the shower door. He frowns, eyes narrowing because the colors he can make out through the glass and water are neither that of what Jinwoo or Seunghoon had been wearing. He supposes he hadn’t heard Seungyoon come home since the water was on, but it doesn’t explain why Seungyoon would want to use this bathroom to wash up when Minho is using the shower and there was a completely unused one down the hall.

He has a hand ready to slide the door open to ask when he realizes what Seungyoon is doing on the other side of the glass. Minho’s entire body feels like it’s locking into place as he watches, in blurred colors and silhouettes, Seungyoon strip his clothes off and dump them on top of the closed toilet. He wonders if it’s the alcohol that’s making his heart feel like it’s beating so hard in his chest that he wants to vomit.

Before he can take his hand from the handle and step back, the door opens, Seungyoon’s long fingers appearing wrapped around the metal edge. Minho’s hand falls to his side as he moves away wordlessly to let Seungyoon in. There is something final and hollow about the sound the glass makes
against the metal as it snaps closed again.

Seungyoon has always existed in the dorm, ever since Minho first came to the agency and began living with the members, with as little clothing as possible—summer or winter, the vocalist wears little in the confines of the apartment. Minho is more than used to seeing Seungyoon nearly naked, quite literally in his underwear, day in and day out. Since they began—whatever this is—between them, Minho has also seen the only part of Seungyoon that was left to the imagination previously.

He’s seen it all separately, so he doesn’t know why seeing it all together—why seeing Seungyoon completely unclothed—affects Minho so much more than he ever thought it could and would.

Minho is all but melding himself into the corner of the small shower space while Seungyoon stands under the spray and soaks his hair all the way through, until it’s wet and matted against his forehead. His long fingers slick it back out of his eyes the same way Minho had done to himself just moments ago before Seungyoon had arrived.

Seungyoon didn’t look at him—didn’t meet his eyes once as he stepped into the shower—doesn’t meet his eyes as he backs Minho against the tiled wall. At this proximity, with Seungyoon’s face so close, Minho breathes in and smells the unmistakable scent of alcohol on the vocalist’s breath. Minho wonders who smells more strongly of it right now—himself or Seungyoon. Regardless of who drank more, Minho knows Seungyoon is more intoxicated. The same amount of alcohol would have vastly different effects on either of them.

Minho’s hands snap up to Seungyoon’s hips almost out of reflex, in surprise, when he feels Seungyoon fit a hand between them, wrapping around Minho at the same time that the vocalist presses his lips against the corner of Minho’s jaw. Minho’s breathing is so, so loud to his own ears, even with the sound of the water jetting out of the showerhead over them. Seungyoon’s mouth makes its usual path across Minho’s jawline and over his throat, sucking down against the a spot on his collarbone hard enough that Minho knows will leave a mark he’ll have to hide.

He wonders if Seungyoon did that on purpose.

Seungyoon pumps Minho to full hardness in one hand, the long fingers of his other hand running down over Minho’s chest and stomach, fingertips digging and dragging down the skin of Minho’s side—the skin stretched over his hipbone. Minho’s hands move before his brain catches up with the striking realization that in all they’ve done together, they’ve hardly ever even been partially undressed.

There’s hot water streaming on their skin, and Minho somehow wishes they weren’t in the shower right now—he wishes they were on a bed so he could feel more of Seungyoon’s actual soft skin rather than the jetting water running down both of them. He presses his hands everywhere that he’d always imagined, thoughts that he wished he could kill—thoughts that, even in this moment, he wishes he could have controlled because all they incite in him is guilt and misery.

When Minho pulls Seungyoon closer with his hands cupping the insides of the vocalist’s thighs, spreading them slightly, Seungyoon’s entire body goes stiff for a split second, and his fingers grip down onto Minho’s with enough force that Minho wonders if he’ll have marks there too tomorrow morning. The exhale Seungyoon lets out isn’t a sigh or a moan but something that sounds like it was wrung and extorted out of him. Minho slides his hands higher from where they are, hesitantly, the tips of his fingers skimming between Seungyoon’s cheeks, and then Seungyoon is abruptly pulling back, hands flying to wrap around Minho’s wrists and pull his touch off of Seungyoon.

The way Seungyoon’s fingers encircle Minho’s wrists isn’t a rejection—it isn’t reluctance to proceed. Even though Seungyoon isn’t meeting Minho’s eyes, Minho can still see Seungyoon’s
expression and there’s nothing on his face that even faintly resembles not wanting the way Minho had been holding him just seconds ago. Minho’s throat is tight, cutting off any of the words that want to come up in this moment as always, and his mind is too muddled right now to fight through it.

He barely stops his legs from buckling under him when he sees Seungyoon kneel onto the tiles and that is the only warning Minho gets before he feels Seungyoon’s mouth stretch down over him. Minho can only look down for the briefest moment at the way Seungyoon’s lips are stretched red and swollen down around Minho’s base. He shuts his eyes after that, knowing that if he looked any longer he’d come embarrassingly soon—he doesn’t even know why it matters, suddenly, that he lasts more than a couple of minutes. He hadn’t cared previously that all it took was some necking and Seungyoon’s hands.

Minho’s skin is overtly warm from being surrounded by the hot water and the steam that fills the small bathroom now because of it. His entire body feels sensitive—he wants to shut the water off, he wants to tell Seungyoon to stop taking him in as if he’s trying to prolong the moments before Minho’s orgasm as long and painfully as possible, and most of all he wants to crawl out of his own mind and sleep.

When he does come, he pulls sharply at the hair on the back of Seungyoon’s head—a wordless warning since Minho doesn’t think anything comprehensible would come out of his mouth right about now. He expects Seungyoon to spit out towards the drain, but Seungyoon wraps a hand around Minho’s wrist again, stilling his hand in Seungyoon’s hair, and Minho opens his eyes as he comes, just in time to see Seungyoon’s throat constrict visibly.

He wishes he wasn’t so pathetic—wishes he wasn’t so easy and so gone, but that sight brings Minho to the floor, his back sliding down the wet tiled wall, knees finally buckling beneath him until his face is level with Seungyoon’s. Whether Seungyoon hadn’t expected for Minho to come crumbling down or whether Seungyoon finally decided that he actually wanted to look at Minho’s face at all tonight, their eyes meet then, and Minho has no idea how to describe the emotions he sees swimming in Seungyoon’s eyes.

All he knows is whatever is reflected in Seungyoon’s expression makes Minho feel as if someone has a hand wrapped around his own throat, cutting the air off until his head spins, until little white dots spark before him whenever he blinks. The feeling that he might not be able to draw another breath isn’t one Minho likes—he doesn’t think anyone particularly would—so, like the coward he has always been, he pulls his gaze away first, focusing instead on how Seungyoon’s cock is hard and leaking against the hard planes of his stomach.

Minho leans forward, taking Seungyoon by the backs of his knees and pulling him close until he can switch their positions. He presses Seungyoon back against the wall of the shower, settling between the other man’s legs for a moment, daring to look into his eyes again to gauge his expression now.

Something has softened in Seungyoon’s gaze, something that emboldens Minho to lean even closer, feeling Seungyoon’s erection pressed against the corner of his hip. The alcohol still strumming through Minho, making him sleepy and dizzy and brave for just that moment, brings him away from Seungyoon’s neck and shoulders—instead, towards Seungyoon’s face.

Their lips are moments away from each other, Seungyoon’s lips parted and the puff of his breath warm over Minho’s mouth. The rapper’s eyes are already half-lidded, nearly closing, so he doesn’t know what Seungyoon’s soft expression has hardened into when the vocalist draws back and turns his head away.

Minho wouldn’t say that his entire world caves in on itself—that would mean that his entire world revolves around Seungyoon and that isn’t true. Minho doesn’t feel for Seungyoon to that extent—not
yet, anyway—maybe—maybe he could. One day.

He would say, though, that he thought the most painful ache he could ever feel grip his heart was when Seungyoon smiled and wished him happy birthday before walking away when all Minho wanted to do was stand up and follow him into his room. He thought that he already knew longing and heartache—he thought he knew how to handle it, he thought he knew how horrible it felt to constantly have to swallow everything into silence.

None of it—nothing before this—could have ever prepared him or compare to how he felt now.

There is almost a numbness that envelops him because the pain is so cutting and sharp, so dark and encompassing. He moves on autopilot now, mind without heart, body without brain, to dull the white, hot sting in his chest—like needles pricking him from the inside out.

Minho spreads Seungyoon’s thighs wider, feeling a strange sort of relief overtake him when he feels Seungyoon’s thin fingers wring through his wet hair as Minho eases Seungyoon into his mouth. He digs his fingers down into Seungyoon’s thighs, soft beneath his fingertips and his eyes glance briefly at how his skin turns pink almost immediately. Seungyoon’s eyes are closed, face tipped up towards the ceiling, and something about that brings feeling back into Minho. Something dark and warm replaces both the emptiness and the hot prickling that had previously filled him out.

He wants Seungyoon to look at him.

He still feels as if he’s moving with someone else in his mind, but his heart comes back to him, even if tattered—a little shredded, worse for wear, but it’s back inside of him, and that’s all that matters for now. Minho lets Seungyoon thrust into his mouth a moment longer, gripping him at the base and relaxing his throat and jaw. When he hears Seungyoon’s breathing start getting louder, faster, Minho looks up. Seungyoon’s lips are open, a furrow forming between his brows as he slips a hand into Minho’s wet hair to hold the rapper’s head down further.

Minho keeps one hand around Seungyoon, but he hooks his other arm underneath one of Seungyoon’s knees and pulls him forward gently so the vocalist is leaning back further against the tiled wall. Seungyoon’s arm shoots out to hold himself up after Minho does that, and his eyes open slightly, half-lidded as they take Minho in with some confusion and curiosity. Minho licks around the inside of his mouth—the taste of Seungyoon in every nook and cranny—realizing just now how hard he’s breathing himself.

He can’t help that his heart is about to burst, can’t help that his heart is beating so hard and fast in his chest that he feels like the force thrums through his entire body. He approaches too slowly, enough so that Seungyoon clearly realizes what Minho is about to do, but maybe not so slow that Seungyoon can react more than a sharp inhale before Minho presses his tongue to Seungyoon’s puckered opening, fingers parting Seungyoon’s cheeks for an easier angle.

“Minho—” is wrung out of Seungyoon, and choked off when Minho pushes his tongue inside, hand beginning to pump Seungyoon in rhythm to what his mouth is doing. The hot water jetting around them, Minho thinks, makes everything easier—makes Seungyoon limp and pliant, and the alcohol certainly as well helps them both. The fact that it’s late enough in the night to nearly be considered morning helps as well.

When Minho raises his eyes for a split second, Seungyoon’s face is no longer unreadable and his eyes are no longer closed. Now, the expression on Seungyoon’s face is everything but indecipherable—there’s so much, too much, at once for Minho to be able to capture everything in just a glance, before the moment passes and he stares longer than he should. Minho finds, in the vocalist’s eyes, disbelief, desire, hope, want—so much want—and yet still a reluctance to let go— of
what, Minho doesn’t know—

Seungyoon comes with a sound that he muffles against the inside of his wrist, over Minho’s hand, onto the vocalist’s own stomach—the water washing it down the drain. Seungyoon’s breathing is still harsh though muted, somehow harmonious and fitting against the jetting sounds of the shower stream against the hard tiles.

Minho straightens up onto his knees, and presses the back of his hand against his mouth for a reason he can’t explain. He watches as Seungyoon closes his thighs, legs visibly trembling, pink all over after having been under the hot water for so long. Their gazes meet, and Minho isn’t afraid to hold it now, reaching out and cupping Seungyoon’s face. Minho hears Seungyoon’s breath catch in the vocalist’s throat, the same way Minho’s has—breathless and anxious.

Seungyoon’s cheeks are full and soft in Minho’s hands, the locks of wet hair caught between Minho’s fingers and around Seungyoon’s ears. This is when Minho would kiss Seungyoon—if the situation was different, if Seungyoon hadn’t turned his head when Minho’s mouth had been moments away from the vocalist’s just now, if Minho wasn’t so scared of so many things.

If Minho wasn’t terrified of losing Seungyoon, maybe he could’ve had him by now.

His hands fall from Seungyoon’s face, and Seungyoon stands first.

Seungyoon leaves first.

It’s easier, now, that he’s accepted reality.

Now, that he knows where he stands with Seungyoon—where Seungyoon stands—being near him and with him is easier. Now, that Minho knows what Seungyoon wants from him, there is no longer a sharp pain in his chest every time he’s pressed up against Seungyoon on the couch, zoning out to whatever is on the television until they have to leave again for their next schedule—Minho no longer feels like the air is being sucked out of his lungs when Seungyoon leans against him in the car, late, late at night when they’re being shuttled home after long hours at the studio.

He can live like this—at the very least, he can survive like this.

From there, then, it gets easier and they can fall back to old patterns even more freely, with even less burden, than before. Seungyoon is his friend again, as if the past few weeks had never happened, as if the night of Minho’s unit schedule had never happened. They aren’t the same as they were before the very, very first night—that night at the studio—but they can be at least as they were before Minho couldn’t handle the way Seungyoon had looked at him one night and ran out without so much as an explanation.

This is for the best, Minho tells himself, being Seungyoon’s friend—his teammate, a companion, a comrade, someone that Seungyoon can lean on and someone that can stay beside Seungyoon—this is what matters more than being more. After all, Seungyoon still touches Minho—still lets Minho touch him. Nearly every night they are alone in the studio together now ends with them barely letting the sweat dry from their bodies before putting their clothes back on, disposing of the tissues they use to wipe themselves down in the toilets of the bathroom down the hall.

They still don’t talk about it, and they don’t kiss.
There’s nothing to talk about, and—friends wouldn’t kiss.

Day-to-day, anyway, Minho doesn’t think about it and he’s happy. Both he and Seungyoon are busier than ever with individual schedules and the time that they do happen to come across in the studio is when they are so tired, and needy, that after they finish what they need to finish for the night, they don’t have energy to do anything else but fall into each other.

His mind will especially have no time to slip into unwanted places in the upcoming week. He’s leaving for the second trip of the season in a few days, and he has recordings as well as a song that needs to be tidied up for another show and event.

The day before he’s due to meet at one of the staff’s apartment for the pre-mission, the pre-trip filming that is customary, his schedule begins early in the morning and he’s only free to be dropped back off at the dorms to pack late, late at night. He has another schedule early the next day before he needs to meet the rest of the cast at the apartment in the evening, which means Minho has pretty much resigned himself to a sleepless coming forty-eight hours.

When he steps through the front door, Haute runs to greet him while the cats slink around his ankles. He kicks off his shoes and kneels down to hand out ear-scratches and belly-rubs. The sight of bare feet fall into Minho’s view then, accompanied by the sound of a suitcase being rolled down the hall. Seungyoon stands with his luggage near the doorway of Minho’s bedroom, eyes amused as he watches the rapper try to stop Jhonny from scratching at the hem of his jeans.

“By the way,” Seungyoon says, as Minho straightens up and walks toward him, “I changed the passcode again.”

Minho groans over Seungyoon’s laughter, dragging the suitcase behind him into his room. Seungyoon follows in, closing the door behind him, and Minho almost laughs out loud at himself—the way his heart skips a beat just at that click. They’ve been in each other’s rooms with the door closed more times than they can count of course—late night talks that turn into early mornings where they barely get an hour of sleep before it was time to wake up for the day’s schedules, making the barebones beginnings of songs that could turn into more or that could remain between them on their notebooks and laptops forever, running through each other’s closets for ideas and figuring out what they can fix up or tear down next.

Minho’s mind unhelpfully, dangerously, supplies that this, however, is the first time Seungyoon has been in Minho’s bedroom without anyone else in the dorm, door closed, since they’ve started this thing between them.

Seungyoon shoves the suitcase down, the sound of it colliding onto the floor loud in the otherwise quiet of the room. The vocalist flops backwards onto Minho’s bed and then rolls onto his side, chin propped in one hand as he regards Minho. Seungyoon is fully-clothed—a thin, nearly sheer t-shirt with a collar that is both distressed and loose enough to dip down almost to his stomach, and cotton joggers that also look too flimsy for him to wear anywhere but their dorm and the company. When he was standing, the shirt had fallen well past his hips, but as he’s rolling over on Minho’s bed, watching Minho open the suitcase and start dumping in what he’ll need, it begins riding up Seungyoon’s body and the waistband of his joggers begin slipping down.

The rapper trains his eyes onto folding his clothes into his suitcase, strapping them down in place so they won’t move. He waits until he can hear the rustle of Seungyoon taking his phone out to swipe through messages before he glances up and sweeps his eyes over the expanses of soft, bare skin. The moment Seungyoon tucks his phone back in, Minho looks away, pulling his lower lip under his teeth. “So what’s the new passcode?” Minho asks, since the suitcase had already been unlocked when Seungyoon set it down just now.
Seungyoon doesn’t miss a beat, pulls himself towards the edge of the bed so his upper half can lean down and enter it himself. When Seungyoon reaches past Minho to enter the numbers in, their faces end up directly side by side, Seungyoon’s hair brushing against Minho’s cheek. “You got it?”
Seungyoon says quietly, after closing the suitcase and unlocking it in front of Minho. The vocalist turns his head and they are so close the tips of their noses could touch with just one, single mistaken movement.

Minho wonders if he’s the only one who time stops for—for just a second, just a breath—when their gazes meet. Seungyoon’s hair has gotten so long that his bangs fall into his eyes when it hasn’t been textured by stylists. Without make-up, this close up to him, Minho can see the pinkness of his nose and cheeks, the slight shadows beneath his eyes regardless of how much sleep he gets, some freckles on his pale skin.

“Yeah.” Before he does something incredibly stupid, something that he will regret, Minho breaks the moment that was probably ever only a moment in his own mind anyway. “You’ll probably have to remind me again, though, before I go.”

Seungyoon slides himself back on the bed, grunting in difficulty, and Minho grins, meeting his eyes again as the vocalist struggles from falling face first onto the floor. “I purposely made it easier than the last one so I wouldn’t get another call when I’m about to sleep.”


Seungyoon merely responds with his own grin and settles back on the bed, this time on his back rather than his front. His hair flops up to expose his forehead as he arches his body to look upside-down at Minho. “Hurry and pack,” is the only reply Seungyoon counters with, a laugh in his voice, “you have to go soon.”

Minho rolls his eyes, and heads to the bathroom to grab the toiletries he’ll need.

As he packs, Seungyoon chats, animated and brisk, without warranting any responses for anything he’s saying—Minho interjects only when he wants to, and it’s something that Minho hasn’t realized exactly how much he’s missed and how much he’s come to need this. Lately, he notices he’s been realizing a lot of things Seungyoon does (a lot of things Seungyoon is) that have been so deeply integrated into Minho’s daily life, that it’s as if Minho has formed expectations around Seungyoon’s habits and quirks. He never relaxes as thoroughly, he notices now as just one example of many, as when Seungyoon is talking inanely in his soft, soothing voice, not demanding reactions and replies, but simply content with filling Minho in about his own day.

Minho finds out that Jinwoo had left for the gym shortly before Minho had returned, and Seunghoon had gone to the company with Seungyoon earlier that day but Seungyoon had finished up first. The rapper finishes packing surprisingly quickly, he’s about to close the suitcase, but his hands still, and as he decides to ask once more for the passcode, Seungyoon says, before Minho can voice anything at all, “You should just write it down, if you’re so worried, and if your memory is that shit.”

“Shut up,” is Minho’s response because he suddenly goes on autopilot, unable to formulate a real reply in the moment that he realizes this is something Seungyoon has been doing for a long time now—and Minho has been doing it too—speaking, not as if they can read each other’s thoughts, but as if they know what the other is about to say next.

There’s a smile dancing on Seungyoon’s lips, light and warm, he’s propped himself up on his forearms, long fingers loosely tangled together, pink at the knuckles as always. Minho’s desk lamp is on, aimed right towards his bed, turning Seungyoon’s eyes the clear brown they truly are.
Minho needs to be up in just a little over four hours in order to leave for his next schedule in the morning, the last one before he heads for the pre-filming, and he’s returned to the dorms and finished packing far earlier than he had anticipated. He could sleep—should sleep, technically. Four hours is far better than nothing at all, especially since he’d barely gotten any sleep the previous night as well.

The door is only closed, not locked, but Jinwoo and Seunghoon aren’t home yet anyway. Those are the thoughts that run through Minho’s mind as he closes the suitcase and lets the locks snap into place, but they evaporate slowly when he crosses over to the bed, pushing at Seungyoon’s legs with his foot. “Move,” Minho says, and knows then, as Seungyoon does absolutely nothing but stare back up at Minho thoroughly deadpan, that Minho won’t be sleeping tonight at all.

Minho falls forward onto Seungyoon’s back, grinning when he feels the wind knocked out of the vocalist and the accompanying squawk. It would make sense, a lot of sense, for them to take the opportunity that they rarely get with both being in the dorms without the managers or the other members, with their pets well-behaved enough in that moment to be quietly falling asleep in the living room and other bedrooms rather than wreaking havoc.

Somehow Minho doesn’t mind letting this opportunity slip through his fingers at all.

Minho eases up to allow Seungyoon to wriggle his way from beneath Minho until they are lying side by side on the bed. Seungyoon makes more squawking sounds as he tries, and succeeds because he is mildly stronger than Minho, to shove Minho over for more room. The rapper blinks at the ceiling while he lets the vocalist jostle him to the side. Something like contentment blooms in Minho’s chest, just at the warmth at his side that has become so painfully familiar, something that Minho has only now truly begun to realize he associates with returning, with coming back, with coming home.

He turns his head to face Seungyoon, the eyes that Minho has memorized the shape of—the deep color they are in the darkness, the light color they turn in brightness—the full mouth that Minho has imagined against his and yet resigned himself to never being able to kiss through no one else’s mistakes but his own, the cheeks that Minho’s cupped in his hands before, the hair that Minho has run his fingers through.

Seungyoon’s expression is odd, searching Minho’s gaze for something Minho wishes he could understand better—if he could understand, he’d give Seungyoon whatever it is he looks for. Instead, Minho does what he only knows how to do, the only thing he can fall back on when he feels too vulnerable and bare. “Don’t miss me too much,” Minho smiles over at him as best he can, wondering if maybe this will take away that look in Seungyoon’s eyes.

The expression doesn’t get worse or better—but does it quite leave, rather it settles into something different, and Minho doesn’t know how that makes him feel either. He watches an array of further emotions passes by Seungyoon’s face, all of which simply confuse Minho more. Seungyoon swallows visibly, a crease appearing between his eyebrows, eyes lowering from Minho’s to Minho’s mouth.

When Seungyoon begins sliding in closer, the space between them disappearing and Minho feels first their thighs touching and then their arms, hands, it feels once again as if time has stopped—and Minho somehow wishes it never begin moving again. Time seems to have stopped, but eternity still seems to pass before Seungyoon’s lips finally press over Minho’s.

Minho wants to let Seungyoon kiss him for longer first, wants to wait so that he doesn’t give himself away with how much he’s wanted—longed, craved, dreamed of—this. He doesn’t last any more than some seconds until his fingers are clutching and fisting at the loose cloth of Seungyoon’s shirt, bunching it up the vocalist’s sides and pulling Seungyoon closer against him. Minho kisses back, and maybe if he wasn’t desperate enough to nearly lose his mind in this moment, he would be
embarrassed with how he kisses back—there is nothing impressive, nothing skillful about it. If this is the kiss that Minho had had to depend on to try and convince Seungyoon to be with him through his experience and prowess, Minho has already lost. It’s messy and sloppy, and Minho keeps forgetting to breathe, there’s no rhythm, but Seungyoon doesn’t seem to care either, isn’t pushing Minho away like Minho had expected.

The process of things, the chain of events, all blur together. For everything they’ve done already with each other, this is their first time in a bedroom, on a bed, knowing that no one else is on the other side of the door. The possibilities suddenly seem endless in that single moment, but it all ends up with their mouths taking each other in at the same time, Minho’s nose pressed down against the coarse hair between Seungyoon’s thighs, letting the vocalist hit the back of his throat, Seungyoon’s own swollen lips stretched around Minho’s length.

Minho doesn’t know why, but when Seungyoon comes inside of his mouth, he just can’t do it today—maybe he’s too sober, maybe he can only swallow it down when he’s inebriated enough, but even though he’s on the edge himself, he tugs at the hair on the back of Seungyoon’s head lightly, pulling the vocalist off of him and stumbling out of the bed to spit into a mug lying on his desk. He blinks down at it, the entire fact of what he just did rushing at him, and when he glances back at Seungyoon with whatever expression he wears on his face now, Seungyoon simply stares back, his entire face covered in perspiration and a bright pink flush.

Seungyoon’s chest is heaving with loaded breaths, mouth puffy, red, and wet with Minho’s pre-come. The moment of strange stillness ends when Seungyoon breaks abruptly into laughter, falling onto his side, mouth open and eyes curving almost in disbelief. “That’s gross,” Seungyoon says, between peals of laughter and correspondingly disgusted sounds from the back of his throat.

“I’m going to wash it,” Minho says, and it sounds absurd even to his own ears, which is most likely why Seungyoon only laughs harder.

Seungyoon runs a hand through his hair, damp with sweat, and sticking to his forehead. He rakes it back and gestures with a jerk of his head towards Minho. “Think you have some business to finish before you do the dishes,” the vocalist suggests impishly.

Minho sets the mug back down on his desk, close enough to where his phone is that he won’t possibly forget about it and leave for an entire five days with anyone able to peer into the contents. He walks back to the bed, expecting anything and everything except for Seungyoon to pull him down with long, warm fingers curled around the back of Minho’s neck, dragging him in for a kiss. He lets Seungyoon tug him back onto the bed, lets himself be maneuvered onto his back with Seungyoon propped up on an arm beside Minho. Seungyoon stretches himself out next to Minho, one hand slipping down to grasp the rapper at the base, moving up and down in a maddening rhythm. Minho threads his fingers through Seungyoon’s hair and brings him back down for another kiss.

He comes over Seungyoon’s hand, letting out a gasp that Seungyoon takes into his mouth and silences by kissing Minho deeper and harder. Minho curls an arm around Seungyoon’s neck and tugs him down so that half of the vocalist is pressed up against Minho’s side. When they surface, their eyes meet, and the realization that pierces through the fog of pleasure still thrumming through Minho leaves him breathless longer.

Terrified. Terrifying.

This is terrifying.

Seungyoon’s cheek is pressed somewhere between Minho’s shoulder and the pillow, his hair tickling
Minho’s jawline—long, thin fingers flushed pink as always, tracing the letters inked onto Minho’s skin. They’re both sticky and sweaty, the blankets tangled uncomfortably beneath them, and the lights are suddenly absurdly bright—they should have turned some of them off, he can’t even fall asleep like this—and he almost laughs out loud at even having that thought, as if he could fall asleep at all in the state his mind is in right now.

A year ago—months ago, perhaps even just a week ago—if someone told Minho that they could know for certain Seungyoon felt the same way Minho has felt for too long, Minho would think all of his problems are solved. He would think everything was more than solved, that now he could live with his heart whole again, he could live being with the first person to ever make him feel more than what he recognizes now was simple infatuation.

Yet, he’s terrified.

The fear that blooms in his chest as he lies here, looking into Seungyoon’s eyes, watching the way Seungyoon gazes back at him, feeling the way Seungyoon presses their mouths together, is crippling. Minho realizes that he knows nothing—for all that he understands so well of Seungyoon, for all that they’re normally so incredibly synced with each other, Minho realizes he suddenly knows absolutely nothing about how to have this with Seungyoon.

How to be with him.

He realizes he doesn’t even know exactly what Seungyoon wants—if Seungyoon even wants what Minho wants—if Minho is just imagining everything he believes, wants to believe, he’s seeing in Seungyoon’s eyes right now, if—

Seungyoon suddenly grasps Minho’s hand that had just been about to stroke through Seungyoon’s hair, the vocalist’s expression concentrated, body stiff. His eyes flicker to Minho’s face, and then to the side, towards the door. If Seungyoon hadn’t reacted like this, Minho doesn’t think he would have focused enough to hear, but in the distance, he hears Haute suddenly barking, and the cats scratching and whining near the entrance.

“Jinwoo-hyung,” Seungyoon says, and pushes away from Minho in a way that makes him feel as if ice water has just been dumped over his entire body. The vocalist doesn’t even look at him once—not in his direction, not meeting his eyes. He’s dressing quicker than Minho has ever seen him, gathering his clothes from where they’ve been strewn on the floor and over the end of Minho’s bed. “I’m going to turn the lights off, pretend you’re asleep,” Seungyoon’s voice is low and urgent, so detached and brisk that that tone Minho recognizes only as his leader tone has come out.

It hurts.

By the time the door opens, Seungyoon is already there to intercept Jinwoo from entering completely into the room. Minho has his eyes nearly closed, just enough that he can see the room flood into darkness when Seungyoon reaches the doorway. He hears Jinwoo’s voice drop into a quieter tone once Seungyoon flicks the lights off. “Is he asleep? I was going to ask if you guys haven’t eaten yet.”

“Neither of us have,” Seungyoon says lightly, drawing the door shut slowly behind him. “Minho’s knocked out, though. He has to be up in a few hours, so—”

Jinwoo makes a noise of agreement. “Yeah—he’s leaving the day after tomorrow, right?”

The conversation drifts off out of Minho’s range of hearing as they both seem to head towards the front door, probably to leave right away to ask their manager to take them somewhere for a dinner
late enough to be a midnight meal.

Minho doesn’t sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I ended up having to split the final part into two parts both because of length, and because things just played out in a way where I think the last two sections will be best on their own. Hopefully, the waiting period won’t be so long, though for the fourth part.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for being so patient, and I hope you enjoyed reading as much as I did writing this. All of the comments and kudos meant so much, as well as on my twitter and ask. Thank you!

The last night of the trip, they all end up drinking together. The laughter fades a little that night, the matters they talk about in front of the cameras now tinged with sincerity and solemnity. When the cameras turn off for the night as some of the members begin to turn in, the conversations grow deeper as the night does—as the ones who remain in the common area outside, Minho included—grow tipsier.

Or it could just be him.

Perhaps it’s just him—he knows, after all, that even though he’s fond of alcohol, likes the way it tastes and the way it makes him feel, likes having a good time with its help, he isn’t the most impervious to its effects and it doesn’t take as much as someone would probably think when they look at him. Normally, when he drinks alone, or in a quiet setting, drinking for the sake of it, he’ll prefer something as light as beer only. Right now, everyone has gone inside to pack or start getting ready for bed—only Jiwon is still outside, sitting beside Minho on the swinging bench.

There’s beer left, but there’s also the hard liquor that some of the staff had brought back for the entire crew and cast to drink some of, whoever wanted some and whoever could handle it. Minho had drank some of it sparingly in between cans of beer, but now he reaches for it without it being offered to him, grabbing one of the glasses the others left as well.

Jiwon’s eyes are on him, but he says nothing, his facial expression doesn’t change from what Minho can see out of the corner of his eye. Minho is drunk enough to be able to shove the thoughts of the possible judgment radiating from Jiwon’s gaze as the younger man pours himself a generous glass of the liquor and tips half of it down in one swallow. It burns on the way down exactly the way Minho wants it to, and he pushes his feet against the floor of the porch, swinging the bench.

They rock back and forth for a while until the bench loses momentum and Jiwon stops it before it stills on its own. Minho is about to take another sip, fully expecting for Jiwon to wrest the glass from his hands, but the younger man gets as far as placing the rim against his bottom lip with still no movement from Jiwon. He takes a small mouthful, and while it no longer burns, it no longer soothes the way the first large gulp had either.

Minho brings the glass back down to his lap, and at that, Jiwon murmurs, “I’m not going to stop you no matter how much you drink, if that’s what you were banking on.”

He glances at the older man, and there is none of the judgment he thought—he expected, and almost wanted.

“You’re going to make your own mistakes—I won’t stop you.” Jiwon takes one of the few beers left around and pops it open. He takes relaxed swigs, looking out into the darkness of the rural area they are in.
Minho suddenly feels childish—the smallest and youngest he’s felt in a long time. Throughout this trip, although his second, there were still times he’d felt inexperienced, but he hasn’t felt young—he hasn’t felt immature and small and foolish for a long, long while now. The feeling comes rushing back to him as he watches Jiwon, so different from when the cameras are on—face lined with age but somehow handsomer because of it, even beneath just a cap.

“I don’t want to,” Minho says finally, looking into the clear liquid in his glass. “I don’t want to make any mistakes.”

Jiwon fixes a gaze on him this time that makes Minho’s mouth dry. There is still no judgment in it, not even a bit. Minho would rather it be judgment though, he would so much rather it be simple judgment rather than the way Jiwon always seems to see right through everyone even when the older man doesn’t realize it himself. “You remembered the code for your suitcase lock this time,” he says suddenly, and the glass nearly slips from Minho’s hands and lap.

“Yeah,” Minho swallows.

“You said it wasn’t yours, right?” Jiwon chugs down some more of his beer. “Who’d you borrow it from again?”

Minho finishes off the remaining contents of his glass and then places it on the table near his end of the bench. He leans back, hands tugging down his sleeves. “Seungyoon.”

“Seungyoon,” Jiwon echoes with the tone of already knowing everything. It isn’t assuming and smug, it isn’t cruel or prying—it’s the same tone that comes over the older man’s voice whenever he echoes any of their members’ words or a staff’s directions and hints, already knowing what is about to happen. “Right.”

They sit there in silence for another few minutes—or it could have been another hour and Minho wouldn’t have known. His phone is in the room he’s sharing with the others, buried somewhere in the suitcase (Seungyoon’s suitcase) that he hasn’t yet packed even though they are leaving early tomorrow (this) morning.

He hears the older man reach the end of the can of beer, hears it being crunched in Jiwon’s fist before it’s placed on the porch floor near the legs of the bench. “D’you know what’s worse than saying something you regret?” Jiwon asks abruptly, voice and expression as casual as if he was asking Minho what gate they’d be departing from tomorrow.

Without the glass to keep his hands steady anymore, Minho digs his fingers into the fabric of his pants as he looks over to meet the other man’s eyes. “There’s nothing worse,” Minho says. “You can never take it back, you can’t—”

“You can try to fix it,” Jiwon cuts him off smoothly. “You’ll know what happens after you say it, you can take the consequences, and you can try to fix it.”

Minho feels as if he has a bucket of bricks perched at the crown of his head. He’s dizzy, and he knows he’s lucky the floor hasn’t begun to move beneath him yet. He’s here, in China, hearing Jiwon’s voice and smelling the alcohol around them but somehow in the darkness ahead of them, he sees the look on Seungyoon’s face as the vocalist had drawn back from the last kiss, the last brush of their lips before they heard the front door open. He sees the soft, pale expanse of Seungyoon’s bare skin against the dark sheets of his bed, beneath the bright lights of his room.

He sees the smile that had curved Seungyoon’s lips and eyes when Minho had pulled him close on the bed, legs tangling, bare bodies pressed against each other.
“What if you can’t?” Minho asks, and he doesn’t mean for it to come out vehement and angry—
every way he should never be speaking to someone so much older than him and someone so many
years his senior in the industry. He’s drunk, and he knows that he’ll only get drunker as the alcohol
works its way through his system. He’s horribly drunk and he doesn’t want to be told that he’s
missed his chance, not just once, but several times all because he was too scared at what he would
lose than what he could gain.

Jiwon looks at him steadily. “I don’t think there’s anything you would ever do,” he begins slowly,
“That he wouldn’t forgive.”

The floor definitely feels as if it’s spinning now beneath Minho’s feet, his temples pulse hard and
forceful, and it suddenly feels as if he is seeing and hearing Jiwon from the end of a long tunnel. “I
—” the air is being sucked out of his lungs, and he swallows several times before he stammers on. “I
never said—”

“If you say something you regret,” Jiwon goes on as if he doesn’t hear Minho’s stuttering breaths, as
if this is the simplest, lightest conversation they could have ever had, “you’ll know what’d happen if
you said it. You’ve said it. You move on, and try to fix it if it changes things.” The expression that
overtakes the older man’s face at that moment grounds Minho somehow—it’s a look that Minho has
never seen, would never thought to ever be able to see on Jiwon.

“Saying nothing is worse?” Minho asks softly.

“It’s safe,” and when Jiwon meets his eyes, Minho realizes what it is he never thought he’d be able
to see on the older man. Jiwon looks vulnerable—for once, he doesn’t look invincible, he doesn’t
look certain and solid. “For sure, it’s safer. You—both of you can be happy, can be friends.” The
strangest, oddest smile tugs slightly at the sides of Jiwon’s mouth. “You can move on—see other
people, do other things, you—you can get married. You can do it all, and you can still be friends.”

Rather than comfort, there’s a gaping darkness that opens up in Minho’s chest at these words. They
paint a picture for him, a future, that is full of hopeless oblivion—of always wondering, of far, far
more regret than if Minho had blurted out what he had stored in his heart for already too long. He
imagines a future where there is someone who isn’t him at Seungyoon’s side, imagines a future
where Seungyoon is someone he sees once in a while as a friend—when they inevitably no longer
live together as members of a young team.

When they no longer—

Minho’s head whips around, facing Jiwon with a realization that pieces itself together so clearly in
his mind, it pierces through exactly how intoxicated he is. “Hyung,” he says, even though he has no
idea if he should even say anything all—he has no idea how to say it even if he was certain he could
say it.

The strange smile turns almost brittle. “You think you’re waiting for the right moment, and you just
keep waiting. You’ll keep waiting. You’ll keep wondering.”

Minho still feels all the heaviness in his limbs, the sluggishness and drowsiness in every cell of his
body, but his mind is almost painfully, stingingly, clear now. “How long?”

Jiwon leans back, raising his arms and spreading them to rest against the top ledge of the bench. His
face tips up to the dark, night sky, and the mysterious smile has faded into something far less
melancholy and more nostalgic, equal parts at peace and resigned all at once. “Long,” he says, before
turning to face Minho in return and grinning at him in a way that is back to familiar territory, a Jiwon
that Minho recognizes.
Minho licks his lips. “Like—twenty years? Or more?” he half-whispers, not knowing how this possible overstep will be received.

Jiwon’s eyes don’t waver even for a moment, he doesn’t look the slightest bit taken aback, composed as always. His smile now is even more enigmatic than the last.

“Are you still waiting?” Minho ventures, when he realizes that Jiwon won’t answer or elaborate the previous question other than that loaded expression.

Jiwon reaches out for the nearly empty pitcher of water on the table near his end and reaches across Minho for the now empty glass. He fills it nearly to the brim and presses it into Minho’s hand firmly. “Drink,” he says, voice full of authority for the first time all night. Minho drinks, eyes on Jiwon the entire time as he chugs it all down. “No,” Jiwon says finally as Minho rounds off the water. “No—I’m not still waiting.”

Minho searches Jiwon’s face as the older man fills Minho’s glass with more water and instructs him to finish it again. The younger man recalls a moment during the first trip, when Jiwon was one of his roommates and there was a time, late, late at night as they were all winding down, Jiwon had paced around in the bathroom, laughing and speaking so warmly with someone on the phone—warmer than Minho had ever heard the other man up to that point, the sort of affection, the sort of lengthy call Minho is fairly sure isn’t either of Jiwon’s parents nor is Jiwon the type of person to be on call during the trip with just any of his friends or colleagues.

“Finish this,” Jiwon taps the pitcher and then the glass Minho is still holding, “and then stop thinking and go to bed. Maybe you’re wasted enough to pass out through Hodong-hyung’s snoring.”

Minho laughs quietly, reaching up and clasping Jiwon’s hand as the older man stands and passes him to walk back into the house.

He sits there a while longer, drinking down the rest of the water as Jiwon had requested of him, until the first rays of sun begin peeking through the rooftops and trees, and then he heads in to finish packing. He wouldn’t have been able to sleep anyway—regardless of the two chronic snorers he has as roommates tonight—there’s too much filling both his mind and his heart, too much he needs to resolve and plan before the plane lands.

They land in the evening, and there are messages sent by Seungyoon waiting for Minho on his phone. Minho had slept the entire time through even if he’d left his phone on and connected to the service the airline offered. The timestamp of the messages tells Minho that Seungyoon had only sent them recently. They ask Minho if he could stop by the studio once he lands, once he has dropped his luggage off at the dorm.

By the time they’ve made their way through all of the control checks and endured the usual forty minutes or so of trying to stay awake on their feet during baggage claim, it’s well into early night. The drive from the airport back into Seoul will add at least an hour, and the sleep Minho had gotten on the plane only made his body ache for more—they hardly ever sleep during the shoots, after all, that was mostly the entire point of the show.
As the others, both staff and cast members, bid him goodnight and good job on the filming one more time—as Minho climbs into the car with his manager inside, it would be so easy, so tempting, to simply remain silent and let his manager drive him straight to the dorm to sleep. He stares down at his phone through the darkness of the car as they leave the airport lot. He can’t close the message, and he knows Seungyoon must have seen by now that Minho has read it.

He’s tired. He’s sleepy, and his mind is possibly even more exhausted than his body. He barely slept last night, even less than he had all of the other nights during the filming period, because of the conversation with Jiwon. Minho is a bundle of nerves, and at the same time he can barely keep his eyes open right now, especially with the quiet whir of the van around him. Seungyoon’s first message has a follow-up—telling Minho that the bridge and lyrics could wait until another day if Minho needs to rest first, which he most probably does.

Nothing would be easier, honestly, than to put it off just one more night—a few more days—just a little more time to think, to gather what he needs to say.

He hates that Jiwon’s voice finds its way into his head—Jiwon’s words from last night repeating themselves in Minho’s mind as clear as if the older man were sitting right beside him in the car.

You think you’re waiting for the right moment, and you just keep waiting.

“Hyung,” Minho says softly, meeting his manager’s eyes in the rearview mirror. “Can you drop me off at the company?”

When he opens the door of the studio, the scent of alcohol hits his nostrils with the first breath that he takes as he steps inside. He closes the door behind him, and takes in the sight of Seungyoon leaning back in the chair, phone balanced between his hand and his stomach. The vocalist’s other hand is wrapped around the neck of one of the miniature liquor bottles there have lying around in the main studio’s small refrigerator—the sort you’d find in hotel rooms.

Minho doesn’t get a chance to look at the label of the bottle because of the angle of Seungyoon’s hold, but it must be strong if he can smell it from the doorway. Strong, and something Seungyoon would normally absolutely hate to even sip. “If you want to go sleep, you can,” Seungyoon says in a low voice, without even looking at Minho. “It won’t make much of a difference whether you finish the lyrics tonight or tomorrow—since it’s basically already tomorrow.”

If Minho lets himself read more into Seungyoon’s tone, into all the emotions Seungyoon isn’t allowing to bleed into his voice, the rapper thinks there will definitely be an out somewhere in there. Seungyoon is giving Minho a way out, in the (definite) case that tonight turns into all their other nights alone for the past half a year, and Minho forces his thought process to stop there—brings the dark clouds that begin leaking into his mind right on cue to a screeching halt.

He doesn’t think about how—maybe—Seungyoon is done, and Seungyoon is tired—of whatever this is, whatever this has been, with Minho. He swallows, and sits down on one of the nearby empty chairs, pulling it closer to the desk so that he’s seated beside the vocalist. “I slept on the plane,” he says, and turns his head to glance at Seungyoon, but the other man has already turned back to face
the screen.

He stares at the side of Seungyoon’s face rather than the monitor before them, but Seungyoon continues only to look ahead, pointing out in a quiet voice and gesturing with his long fingers at the parts of the song that need filling in.

Seungyoon’s hand is shaking.

Minho’s gaze falls back down to the small, nearly empty bottle beside Seungyoon’s elbow. The vocalist is silent now, hands—pink as ever—gripping the armrests of the chair in what Minho assumes is supposed to be nonchalance. He still is looking straight at the screen even though he has finished explaining to Minho what needs to be added in minutes ago. The expression on Seungyoon’s face is almost unfamiliar—it makes him look like a stranger to Minho.

“Why’re you drinking?” Minho asks, standing up slowly, grabbing his phone and tucking it into his pocket. The tone of his voice sounds safe enough to his own ears, and he hopes that it sounds similarly as casual to Seungyoon. He prays that it does, and yet at the same time he prays that it doesn’t. He has no idea what tone he should take on in order for Seungyoon to tell him the truth rather than give him an answer.

The corners of Seungyoon’s lips quirk almost imperceptibly. Like many things about the vocalist lately, it’s something Minho wishes he hadn’t noticed but he has been watching Seungyoon too closely not to. He notices even the things he doesn’t want to about Seungyoon. “Felt like it,” Seungyoon finally says, and Minho’s chest feels hollow at those words. “C’mon.”

Seungyoon isn’t like Minho—isn’t like Jinwoo. Seungyoon doesn’t drink for the taste of it, doesn’t enjoy a beer after coming back from a long day of filming or being shuttled from interview to interview. He drinks for the atmosphere, for the mood—he drinks to be with people and have fun, and a part of Minho wonders why Seungyoon would even bother lying such an obvious lie.

The fact that the vocalist doesn’t meet Minho’s eyes when he’d given that answer, and doesn’t meet Minho’s eyes as he leads the way out to their usual outcropping of sofas, makes it clear that Seungyoon also knows precisely how useless of a lie that was. Minho keeps a close eye on the vocalist’s back as he follows him—Seungyoon walks steadily.

While Seungyoon regards the seats that spread out in front of them, Minho glances back down to the small bottle in the vocalist’s hand. Minho wordlessly takes it out of Seungyoon’s hand, expecting some resistance—expecting the vocalist to at least turn around and frown, but the bottle slips out of Seungyoon’s hand and into Minho’s with a light tug.

As if Seungyoon wanted Minho to take it.

Minho finishes whatever is left, and it burns on the way down.

The vocalist settles down into a seat across from the ball chair Minho curls up into, immediately pulling out his phone and ducking behind it. Minho pulls out his phone as well—opens up the notes to write what Seungyoon had asked him to write, the portions of the song that are still unfinished, that Seungyoon is having difficulty completing.

Minho scrolls up and down the rest of the lyrics that Seungyoon had sent through a text file in their chat with each other. The bridge is where Minho is supposed to begin writing, the empty space highlighted with a few dots and brackets. The rap part is still missing as well, to be filled in during the incoming weeks by himself and Seunghoon—the current matter at hand is the bridge, the climax of the song where the words sung should drive home what the piece as a whole wants to express.
It’s laughable, truly, that Minho even thinks focusing is an option when his brain is both this exhausted and muddled. It’s even more laughable that he even thought tonight of all nights would be ideal to tell one of the most important people in Minho’s life right now something that would inarguably change the course of their relationship from here on out for better or for worse.

The bitter alcohol taste is still coating the walls of his mouth. He hadn’t had anything to eat except the late dinner option they’d offered on the plane. He glances tentatively once more to Seungyoon, eyes lowered to his own phone, the glare of the screen illuminating his soft cheeks and eyelashes. Minho looks down at his own screen, at the waiting cursor after he’s touched the first line.

He thinks about how they’ve never talked about it.

Minho realizes he has no idea what Seungyoon wants—what Seungyoon wanted, what he was unsure of. Everything they’ve done together thus far was never premeditated, everything simply happened and more times than not, too fast for either of them to think about what was even happening. He wonders if there was ever a time Seungyoon simply went along with something they did simply because it was happening.

He thinks about how he’d rather they never be physically intimate ever again than have Seungyoon be uncomfortable with him for even a moment. Minho wishes he could say that he could be an all-or-nothing kind of person—that he would rather the person he had feelings for be nothing to him than a friend if they couldn’t be with him—but he knows he could never. He isn’t that type of person, and he doesn’t want to try to be.

He realizes he wants to be to Seungyoon whatever Seungyoon needs and wants him to be. Whether that be any combination of or simply just one—a lover, a teammate, a brother, a friend, a colleague.

Minho risks another glance across the space between them. Seungyoon’s expression is hidden by the visor of his cap now that he’s turned his head downwards, looking solely at his phone. The vocalist’s fingers, dry and pink as always, poke out from beneath his sleeves. His hands look cold even though he wears a coat over a sweatshirt, even though they are inside a heated building. The only visible part of Seungyoon’s face is his lips, pushed forward into a pout of intense concentration.

In spite of everything, Minho feels the corners of his mouth tug upward slightly as he looks back down towards his work.

Not everything is black and white—not all answers fall into the categories of rejection or acceptance. Minho realizes that doesn’t matter to him anymore. If what Seungyoon needs the rapper to be in this moment might not be what Seungyoon wants him to be one day, then Minho knows he can wait.

While Minho knows, in his heart, all of these thoughts—all of these decisions—are sincere, it doesn’t mean his heart his beating any less loudly, any less quickly and anxiously. Just because Minho knows that a lack of acceptance doesn’t necessarily mean rejection or an end to everything they’ve ever been and ever could be—it doesn’t mean he doesn’t yearn for that simple reciprocation.

He doesn’t even need certainty—he doesn’t need his feelings returned exactly as he presents them or makes them known. All the weight in his heart and on his shoulders, all of the emotions he’s swallowed down night after night, he knows that all of it would immediately fly away from him if he even so much as heard out loud that there was a possibility of even a fraction of what he felt also felt by Seungyoon.

Minho suddenly hears Seungyoon stifle a yawn, the poorly muffled sound pulling Minho out of his thoughts. He swallows and pulls his phone down from his face slightly.
The bridge is finished.

He goes over it again, mouthing the words to the tune and number of counts he knows has been set aside for this part of the song. Everything flows, there’s the proper enough rhyme, and it fits into the counts.

All that is left is to copy and paste it back into the original text draft that Seungyoon sent over through their chat, but somehow it feels almost inappropriate. It feels as if something fragile will be broken or pushed forward too soon if Minho just does that now. Somehow, these eight lines make Minho feel incredibly vulnerable, and the thought of Seungyoon reading them (of anyone reading them—which is absurd because soon, if all goes well, thousands and thousands of people will be hearing this) makes his heart clench.

“I can get this done tonight,” the words leave Minho’s mouth before he even knows what he’s trying to lead to—what he plans to do following this. Or whether he has any plan at all.

He looks up at the same time Seungyoon does, and when he meets Seungyoon’s gaze, another entire realization fills Minho’s chest with a strange aching.

**Right.**

It seems like such a trivial thing now, but because of everything that had transpired between them in just this past recent week, it had completely slipped Minho’s mind in this moment what the situation is—the two of them, alone, at the studio late, late at night. Something like this once seemed like a golden opportunity, something the two of them would jump into without words, without true agreement—now, it just felt like an obligation.

“You can head back,” Minho says because while he doesn’t think he’s ready to say it now, tonight, just yet—while all of his thoughts are still muddled and fragile and a tangled up, fucked up mess—he knows that what he can do tonight is put a stop to whatever they’re doing to each other by continuing something that they both know hurts. That, for certain, is something he could do tonight—until they know what they want to be to each other, or what they can’t be, tonight, they can stop.

He doesn’t expect Seungyoon to look back at him the way he does.

There are so many expressions Minho has seen on the vocalist for the first time ever since they began—whatever this is—but the emotions that swirl in Seungyoon’s eyes now, carefully kept from the rest of his face, are beyond what Minho would ever have thought he’d see on the other man. They have both seen each other through difficult times, through low points in both their careers and lives, but Minho doesn’t think nor did he ever expect to see Seungyoon—strong-hearted, resilient, brave (so much braver than Minho ever will be), nearly tearless Seungyoon—silently begin to shatter into little pieces right before him.

The vocalist stands. “Sure,” Seungyoon seems to force his lips to quirk into a brief smile that makes Minho feel as if someone has just thrown a weight into his stomach. “Send me what you have when you finish.” He turns away before Minho can even fathom what he should say—what he could say.

Minho watches as Seungyoon leaves the room with even more misunderstandings between them, even more terrible thoughts that the vocalist might conjure that will be completely wrong. He watches his leader, his teammate, his friend, his—someone whose presence has become to Minho in these past few years more than Minho could ever put a true label or name to—leave without knowing how much he means to Minho once again.

He stands up, frozen in spot with his phone clutched in his hand at his side, staring after
Seungyoon’s wake. He can feel how hard his heart is beating all the way to his ears, his face and neck feel flushed and horribly hot. Minho can hear Seungyoon’s footsteps leading down back to his personal studio to pack up.

His body moves before his mind does—he body moves even though his mind is in shambles, even though there seems to be something wreaking havoc in both his chest and his stomach, banging and screaming in equal parts fear and anticipation.

Seungyoon isn’t in the hall anymore, but Minho sees the light shining from the door of his small studio. There’s no irony lost on Minho at how it was this exact path that led him to the first night he realized there was perhaps more, so much more, too much more to what he felt for Seungyoon. He tucks his phone into his back pocket and walks on—steps speeding up so he makes it before Seungyoon packs up or calls their manager to be picked up.

When he reaches, the door is open, and Seungyoon’s back is turned to the entryway. The vocalist is sitting on the edge of the long, blanket-covered bench, facing the furthermost inside wall of the studio, stuffing earphones and a powerbank into his backpack.

Minho closes the door behind him once he’s inside, and the noise has Seungyoon turning around, eyebrows rising when he sees Minho. Seungyoon opens his mouth, blinking in slight confusion, undoubtedly to ask if Minho needs anything (he would never ask why Minho is here, wouldn’t ask if Minho has finished the lyrics, Seungyoon always asks for Minho—about Minho).

“I’m scared,” Minho says, before Seungyoon can speak, before anything else becomes twisted between them, before Minho loses the tiny spark of courage that bloomed in his chest in the seconds it took for him to walk here.

The confusion on Seungyoon’s face intensifies, gains an edge of concern. “Scared of—”

“I’m scared that it won’t work,” Minho can hear his own voice start to shake already, and he shoves away the crippling thought of how pathetic that is, “that we’ll try and we don’t—we don’t fit or we can’t make it work like how we think we’ll be. And then we can’t go back. I’m scared of that the most—that anything or something happens and we can’t go back. I’m scared—”

His voice falters for a moment when he sees whatever color had been in Seungyoon’s face at all, from the heat and from the alcohol, drain out. Seungyoon looks absolutely frozen, and Minho doesn’t know if he can go on if he tries to meet the vocalist’s eyes, so he looks away, stares at the lamp in the back of the tiny room.

“I’m scared that I’m going to stop talking and right now, or tomorrow, you’re going to tell me that you’re sorry—and you don’t even like me back like this,” Minho really hadn’t been planning on the tinge of hysterical laughter to leak through, but it does. It’s humorless and muted, it probably comes out as more of a self-deprecating smile, but nonetheless, it’s there in his tone and he really had wanted to come off as only slightly breaking down. “I’m scared that I’ve already said enough as it is to mess everything up again, and that I’ll regret ever even—trying whatever I’m doing right now. I’m scared that people will see how we are and know that we’re more or know that something went wrong.”

Minho closes his eyes. The few, dim lights Seungyoon even has in this room suddenly feel far too bright, and the exhaustion that he had been suppressing from the past few days hits him in an abrupt wave. “I’m scared you could hate me.”

At that, there’s a sharp inhale that has Minho’s eyes snapping open. Seungyoon’s expression is no longer stiff and blank, there’s something almost like incredulity in them—fierce disbelief. Minho
realizes the vocalist’s hands are in his lap, redder than their usual pink, fingers clenched tightly into fists.

“But,” Minho swallows, and he hates how quiet his voice gets, but he doesn’t think even if he gathers up all his willpower he could ever say this loudly. “I’m terrified—I’m really, seriously, fucking terrified—of—of not saying this. Any of this. Of—of never saying it.” Seungyoon has suddenly gone so still, it doesn’t even look like he’s breathing. “I’m scared,” Minho whispers, before he clears his throat and forces himself to truly speak—because there’s no point if Seungyoon doesn’t hear every word, “of wondering. I’m scared that one day, when—when I can’t just walk out of my room to yours, or get in the car with you, or pass by your studio—I’ll wonder if I should have said it. Maybe if I’d said it, you’d—you’d be there with me.”

He takes a deep shuddering breath and lets himself finally look at Seungyoon again, lets their gazes meet.

Seungyoon’s expression is unreadable. Impassive.

Minho isn’t sure if he has a heart left, but whatever is still beating in his chest drops with a heaviness that feels as if all of him is being pulled along with it. Baring so much of himself has left him feeling empty—incredibly tired, wrung dry, and all he wants to do, suddenly, as Seungyoon wordlessly turns back to continue packing, is instantly be in his bed, in the dark, so he can sleep away the reality of what he has just done.

After all, he hadn’t exactly entertained this outcome—so anticlimactic that it stings, that it makes him feel even more pathetic than when he had begun speaking. He never would have considered that Seungyoon wouldn’t react or respond at all, that the vocalist would appear to want most to pretend as if this never even happened.

Seungyoon has turned enough that Minho couldn’t make out the expression on his face even if there was one, but the vocalist’s hands are still in sight, and Minho stares at the way Seungyoon’s fingers tremble violently as he wraps up a few more cables and stuffs them into the side pockets of his backpack.

There’s no other way that his grave could be dug any further, so Minho reaches for his phone and places the lyrics he had finished into the text file, sending it off into their chat because he might as well leave with at least something to show Seungyoon that even if their relationship otherwise has now just gone up in flames, Minho will maintain their professional relationship seamlessly regardless of how much it hurts. “I finished, by the way,” Minho says, unable to keep the exhaustion out of his voice. “I just sent it over.”

He tucks his phone back into his pocket and makes to leave. Wherever Seungyoon had found that bottle in the main studio, Minho is sure there is more—plenty more—and since their manager had dropped him off here for work anyway, he’ll just give the usual excuse of pulling an all-nighter. If he falls asleep on one of the couches outside, it would be far from the first time anyway someone spends a night in this building for one reason or another.

“Minho.”

The rapper pauses, one hand resting on the door handle. Seungyoon’s tone is low and soft, and most of all, far from angry or upset. There’s some confusion in the way he says Minho’s name, some uncertainty and almost something like shyness.

He lowers his eyes as he turns, not sure what he’ll find when he brings his gaze level with the vocalist’s this time. Seungyoon is holding his phone in one hand, the screen so obviously open to the
lyrics Minho has just sent. It isn’t quite a smile on Seungyoon’s face, not quite a frown either. Seungyoon’s full lips are pursed into an odd expression, a gentle look filled with hesitance and determination at the same time. He has slid backwards slightly on the bench, backpack moved into the corner against the wall, and he’s sitting facing the door now.

“I think we should talk,” Seungyoon says softly, gesturing to the space in front of him on the bench.

Minho has to repeat in his mind, over and over again, Jiwon’s words—about how things can be fixed, about how—how someone who reads people as well as Jiwon does doubts that Minho would ever say or do something that Seungyoon would ever find truly unforgivable. Minho tells himself, convinces himself, as he takes the seat Seungyoon offers, that at the very least, he will never have to regret not saying it.

He will only have to regret saying it.

After Minho sits down, Seungyoon places his phone to the side and slides forward slightly, closing the gap between them. Minho feels his head starting to pulse, and, even though he’s glad that things will work out between them—that Seungyoon seems ready and willing to work through this—he thinks that he’s going to have to tell Seungyoon the talk needs to wait until tomorrow. There’s only so much heartbreak Minho can take in one night, especially when he had gotten less than a few hours of sleep every night for the past five nights.

He gets only so far as formulating the sentence on how he wants to go to bed first, before he realizes Seungyoon has leaned forward on his hands, and is pressing his mouth against Minho’s.

In retrospect, Minho will know that it was supposed to be a simple, swift kiss to drive the point home—but he thinks that it’d be quite fair to put the blame on Seungyoon for not cutting it off to still be able to fall into the category of a kiss and not whatever it ended up being—the vocalist pulled forward even more, legs over Minho’s thighs, Minho’s hands discontent with how thick Seungyoon’s jacket is and how there is nowhere to touch or hold onto.

It’s a fair few minutes before they part, long enough at least for Seungyoon’s lips to be dark pink and even fuller than they are usually—long enough that Seungyoon’s usually cold hands are warm from being against Minho’s neck and jaw.

“I thought,” Minho’s honestly, truly, stupid mouth goes, breathlessly, without even waiting for his brain’s permission, “we were going to talk.”

Seungyoon smiles—really, really smiles. “We can talk now.”

“Or we can talk tomorrow,” and Minho really needs to do something about that—he really—needs to ask someone, the Internet perhaps, on how to reconnect your brain-to-mouth filter during dire circumstances.

“Let’s talk now,” Seungyoon sits back, slightly off of the rapper, but he reaches out carefully, and Minho knows what he wants before the vocalist needs to move any further. Minho intertwines their fingers lightly. “So we can do other things tomorrow.”

He’s still tired—still worn down to the bone mentally, emotionally, and physically—but when he looks into Seungyoon’s eyes, feels the weight and warmth of Seungyoon’s hand in his, there’s an energy and comfort that spreads throughout his entire body that makes him feel the way no amount of sleep or rest could. There are so many names for what this is, and Minho knows quite a few of them, but feeling it himself renders those words so inadequate and cliched.
For now, he thinks that’s enough though. For now, it can be enough. All he knows, and all he needs to know is how he feels and what he feels—and that, now as well, he knows Seungyoon feels the same way, the same thing.

Let's meet right now
I have something to tell you—

I like you.

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