## Party in the AUS

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### Party in the AUS

by **jezza, musicanova**

#### Summary

"I swear to God if my soulmate is named Shazza I'm gonna kick the bucket!"

OR, Wonwoo moves to Australia for his dad's work, and what he encounters there is far more terrifying than drop bears.

[A bogan!soulmate AU; updates every Monday]

#### Notes

This fic was inspired by the wonderful Bogan!AU by divabooT, who is a wonderful author and if you haven't read their works you're missing out. This fic is also a present for Naia, or
tumblr user ah-sugakookie, who we sincerely hope won't find this fic until we've finished writing it...

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by bogan!AU by divabooT
Wonwoo takes one last look at the place he used to call home before hopping into the taxi behind his mother. It’s cold – December tends to bring on the worst of winter, and Wonwoo can’t imagine a life of not needing three long-sleeved t-shirts under one sweater, a hoodie and a down jacket with a scarf and a beanie. It’s the coldest temperature recorded in over a hundred years, and he’s glad to be leaving it behind, but at the same time, he can’t help but feel a little bittersweet.

He’s spent his whole life thus far here, and now, all of a sudden, right when he can almost taste freedom on the tip of his tongue, he’s being whisked away to a new country.

He almost can’t believe it. It feels so surreal to him; the news that the whole family will be moving to Australia of all places, and because of his father’s job. Wonwoo thinks the most logical thing would have been for him to complete his final year of high school while staying at his grandparents’ place, but no, this “will be a wonderful bonding experience”, a “chance of a lifetime!!!!”, and “a nice change of scenery” for the family.

Beside him Bohyuk looks ready to jump out of his skin from excitement, but Wonwoo can’t seem to find it in him to match the energy that emanates from his brother. For starters, he doesn’t think he’s ever had that much energy in his body at any given moment in his life, but also, he feels a tingling feeling of dread over his wrist, right where his soulmate’s name will appear when he turns eighteen.

What he fears most right now, more than moving to a country where he can only speak in stilted sentences, more than the prospect of having to make new friends in an unfamiliar environment, more than losing the one best friend he’s had growing up, is waking up on his eighteenth birthday to find a name on his wrist attached to someone he’s left behind.

Will it say ‘Sooyoung’, in the neat handwriting of everyone’s favourite girl-next-door affectionately dubbed ‘Joy’? Will it say the name of someone he’s bumped into while doing the groceries with his mother without realising? Or will he look down to find an exotic name of some tanned beach girl scrawled across his wrist?

Wonwoo shivers. He doesn’t want to be soulmates with Calypso, the blonde, blue-eyed girl with the weird anklet tan who isn’t seen without her surfboard. Not that this made-up beach babe actually exists, of course.
Boarding the plane is a blur for Wonwoo who’s lost in thought, wandering the forest of possible soulmates in his mind. After Calypso there’s James, with red curls bouncing in every direction in a way that Wonwoo has never seen hair move before, and then there’s Maria, who’s half-Puerto Rican, then Emma the clarinettist, then Jennifer but with a ‘G’ and one ‘n’ and a ‘ph’ instead of an ‘f’; Wonwoo really hopes Genipher won’t be his soulmate.

“Wonwoo-yah,” his father pokes his shoulder, snapping him out of his reverie. “You should buckle up your seatbelt before the stewardess comes around.”

It startles him; he doesn’t remember having sat down, but he obligingly does up his seatbelt before unceremoniously shoving his earphones into his ears to tune out the world. Safety instructions are for people who actually care about living, and emo teen Jeon Wonwoo ain’t about that life.

He’s kidding, he values his life a lot, but he’s not in the mood for listening to nasally voices over tinny speakers. He closes his eyes briefly to the sound of his brother tapping at the screen in an effort to find a good movie to watch.

~*~

Wonwoo slowly wakes up, his eyes fluttering open to Bohyuk’s hand on his shoulder and the seatbelt sign flashing off. His earphones are tangled into his hoodie strings, and he can already tell it’ll be a pain to untie, not to mention that the hoodie will have to go as soon as he steps off the plane; the sun caressing the tarmac does not look like it will be kind to his body temperature. All around him, people are rising out of seats to grab their bags, and it’s all somewhat orderly until a sharp screech fills the plane.

“What the fuck has happened to my Stradivarius? Do you even know how valuable it is?”

Wonwoo sighs. It seems like there’s a temperamental musician on his flight; the type he always tiptoed past when going through the arts building at his old school. As the shouting continues and the exhausted flight attendants struggle to placate the violinist, Wonwoo briefly wonders if Emma would be as uptight about her clarinet. He really hopes not.

They finally start to exit the plane, only briefly held up by Bohyuk nearly leaving his landing card and passport in the seat pocket. Customs, however, is messier, as Wonwoo’s mother discovers they have to declare all the food they brought in their suitcases.

The customs officer, whose name tag reads ‘Warren’ stares them all right in the eye, his gaze occasionally dropping to the absolute mountain of groceries. Wonwoo stares dejectedly back at him, wondering why his name is the same as the English word for a rabbit’s home, and he suddenly has a flashback to his textbook with its little picture of domestic rabbits, Warren hopping alongside them.

As the adults all engage in a vigorous conversation about the legality of bringing in pickled vegetables and various spices, the brothers find some seats a few meters away. Bohyuk immediately takes out his phone, powering it up and frantically telling his friends that, no, he did not die in a plane crash, and no, he has not fought a crocodile yet. Wonwoo slowly takes out his own phone, leaning back into the uncomfortable chair with the ugly pattern, wondering if Australia is going to continue being such a drag.

His phone hasn’t connected to the network yet, the little ‘searching’ message taunting him as Bohyuk happily types away next to him. Finally, he has success, and three bars with the word ‘Virgin’ pops up. The growth of his celebratory grin halts as he registers just what his phone says. Virgin? He must be confused about that translation.
Just as he’s about to open up Google Translate, his mum beckons him over, to where all the food has been packed away back into the suitcases.

“So, how long are you planning on staying in Brisbane?” Warren asks Wonwoo’s dad, his eyes on the family’s immigration documents.

“Indefinitely,” Wonwoo’s dad says with a smile, “We’ve moved here for my work.” Warren nods in understanding, and seems to make up his mind.

“Well you’re all good to go, as long as this mud you’ve reported on your shoes is purely from suburban environments.” Wonwoo is just about to join in on his mother’s nods, but then remembers his school’s class trip to a national park a few weeks ago and raises his hand timidly. They’re not out of the woods yet.

~*~

The journey out of the woods takes another hour, as it turns out Warren was only on his second shift and didn’t yet know how to deal with international forest mud. Once another officer, this one called ‘Barry’, finally turned up, they were able to make some progress and managed to escape the airport.

Wonwoo thinks that’ll be the end of it, and it seems Bohyuk does as well, but their parents lead them over to the car rental office. He is once again thoroughly confused by the names of things in this peculiar country, when he spots the name ‘Thrifty’. Do Australians just disregard the meanings of words when they choose names?

Once all the paperwork is done, they are led out to their family car for the next few weeks, a Jeep. The rental man cracks a smile, exclaiming “we bought a Jeep!” Wonwoo just stares at him, wondering about the mental capacity of Australians.

No shit Sherlock (SHINee’s back), he thinks, staring at the white SUV, which, obviously, has been purchased by ‘Thrifty’.

The crazy Thrifty man finally leaves, and the family pile into the car, all immediately scrambling for the air con. Just as Wonwoo’s dad goes to put the keys into the ignition, he belatedly realises that the steering wheel is not in fact on the left side, but the right. Wonwoo thinks he hears something suspiciously like “fucking Australia” come out of his dad’s mouth as he gets out of the car to swap seats with his mum.

Once Wonwoo’s dad has figured out which side of the road to drive on, the passengers all relax into their boiling leather seats to watch the city passing them by. Wonwoo sees a lot of ugly houses, three different McDonald’s within ten minutes, all dubbed Macca’s (since when was that its name?), and exits off the freeway for about five different coasts. Gold? Sunshine? The almost optimistically happy names make him uncomfortable; surely a place can’t be that fabulously shiny and happy?

When they make it into suburbia, Wonwoo immediately notices the hills. On the first one, a terrifying thing that came out of nowhere, he feels the car is about to fall backwards down it, the prowess of this Jeep be damned. It’s a whole ‘nother experience when they’re going down the hill once they’re over the crest. Brisbane is obviously the playground for Satan’s children; devilishly hot, geographically torturous, and filled with unpleasant, primitive arses.

They finally arrive at their new home, something that Wonwoo has only seen pictures of before, but where they’ll be living “indefinitely”. He remembers his mum telling him it was a Queenslander, whatever that meant, but Wonwoo finds himself quite liking the wrap around veranda and the large room under the house that his parents have already decided to leave to him and Bohyuk.
His bedroom is towards the back of the upper level, at the end of a corridor which boasts Bohyuk’s room, their shared bathroom and a spare bedroom, which is taking on the role of a storage space for all their unopened boxes. Wonwoo has a view of the back garden from his window; he sees a pretty overgrown lawn enclosed by a wooden fence, with a few large trees that have an absolute abundance of purple flowers spilling from their branches.

After setting his suitcase down, not quite bothered to open it yet, Wonwoo walks through the rest of the house and out into the garden. His shoes are back upstairs, so he just steps out onto the grass and makes his way over to the trees.

Something wet squishes between his toes, his nose wrinkling as he brings his foot up. All he sees is a mess of purple mush, supposedly what once was one of those flowers. He dismisses it easily enough - flowers are going to fall. Wonwoo puts his foot back down, preparing himself for more squishy steps. What he doesn’t expect however, is to be stabbed right in the big toe by something in the grass. He brings his foot up again, but this time, sitting in amongst the purple mush is a little barb. Bending down to look more closely at the lawn, he sees little weeds interspersed throughout the grass, barbs sitting happily in their little green home. Even the plants are out to get him.

“This motherfucking country!” Wonwoo curses, fleeing the garden to wash the mess of barbs and purple off of his feet.

He doesn’t notice that it’s only been a mere few hours in Australia, and yet he’s already swearing like a native.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Leave a kudos or a comment if you enjoyed this train wreck. Updates will probably be pretty slow, but we’re currently working on chapter 3!
Open Wide, Come Inside (it's high school)

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

We're sorry to mobile users for this chapter, it's not really an update but a crappy powerpoint introduction to the characters of this fic. Enjoy!

Note: All images used in this powerpoint were taken off of Google, and as such credits go to the owners of the photographs. If we've used your image and you want us to take it down, please tell us!

NEW NOTE: THESE SLIDES ARE OUT OF DATE SO IF AO3 ACTUALLY LOADS THEM FOR YOU (we know most of the time they don't turn up) THEN PLEASE KNOW THERE'S INFORMATION ON THEM THAT ISN'T RIGHT ANYMORE OOPS THIS FIC HAS COME A LONG WAY

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

welcome
wonwoo
jeonghan
scoops
vernon
ほし
dino
woozi
joy
chanyeol
baekhyun
suho
kai
sehun
Your Australian Dictionary (please tell us if we're missing anything, we don't have a concept of how much of our slang is known to the outside world):

- **Bogan**: The Australian version of an American redneck, basically.
- **Assembly**: You probably know what this is but we just want to reiterate it's a gathering of the whole school in one room where announcements and such are made.
- **Schoolies**: A stupid *stupid* end of year celebration for year 12 graduates. Don't google it. It's bad.
- **Dux**: The first in year, or student with the best grades.
- **Golden Gaytime**: A legitimate (and very delicious) ice cream. As they say, it's hard to have a Gaytime on your own!
- **Cheezels**: A cheese-flavoured snack shaped like a ring. Also the love of Elise's life.
- **Deliveroo**: You'll know what this is depending on where you come from. Like ubereats or foodora.
- **Auskick**: Young kids generally play AFL (Australian Football League) with Auskick.
- **Tuckshop**: The canteen/cafeteria, if you will.
- **Strandbags**: A bag shop. That's it, kids.
- **Red Rooster**: A fast food chain that specialises in roast chicken.
- **Buddy**: A system usually set up by high schools in which a senior student (generally in year 11 or 12) will be like a guide to a freshly starting high school student (which is year 8, or 7 now because the year levels changed but that's a mess we won't explain here).
- **Salvos**: Stands for the Salvation Army, the abbreviation is usually used in reference to a Salvation Army Op shop.
- **Op shop**: A charity shop. I think American's call them consignment stores....?
- **Hungry Jacks**: A questionable fast food chain. That's all you've gotta know. A place that's probably not worth your time.
- **Macca's**: We're pretty sure you already know this. In case you don't, it's McDonald's.
Wonwoo wakes up with a feeling of dread pooling in his stomach. It feels like just yesterday that he had arrived in this literal hell hole, and he’s been dying of heatstroke sitting around in his boxers and a singlet; he can’t imagine having to wear the trousers of his school uniform without needing to peel sweat-drenched shirts off his body every five minutes. He can already imagine the light blue of his school shirt turning navy as his cold-accustomed body works itself into overdrive.

He ties his necktie, glaring at his reflection in the mirror as he goes. He curses Denborough Institute of Science as he looks down at himself in disgust. Paddington School of Later Education had the decency of providing readily-tied neckties that just needed to be buttoned onto the school shirts, and Bohyuk looks immaculate in his crisp white shirt and neat tie. Wonwoo, on the other hand, looks closer to a train wreck despite the fact that his buttons are done up correctly and he spent ten minutes knotting his tie.

In this moment Wonwoo wishes he hadn’t been accepted into Denborough Institute of Science. He doesn’t even like science, he’s just there for the hulking library that looks like it was pulled straight from Harry Potter and the fact that somehow his grades had convinced this place that he was smart enough to be a valuable asset to the school.

He sits down at the breakfast table and chews on the mediocre grains of rice that the grocery store worker had recommended as the best Australia has to offer, wondering how exactly it was that he’d offended God for him to allow this to happen.

Perhaps in his past life he had been a particularly troubling citizen.

Wonwoo slides his socked feet into clunky black school shoes and heads out the door, school bag hanging off one shoulder — the most poorly designed thing he’s ever come across, with a heavy board lining the base that provides no positives and a couple unnecessary (hundred kilo)grams to the weight of the bag. At least, he thinks, with a ghost of a smile on his face, the bag is a suffering that Bohyuk needs to experience as well.

Traveling to high school is somehow an even worse experience, and Wonwoo is speechless as he stands, defenseless against the crowd coming towards him, black eyes glinting with the knowledge of his fear.

_They’re just birds_, he thinks. _What is there to be so afraid of?_
It's the most stupid thought he's ever had. They're not just birds, they're magpies, and they're a force to be reckoned with. He's almost bursting to tell his friends back in Korea.

He’ll hobble home, head full of grey hair and leaning heavily on a cane: “you don't know fear until you've met a magpie, son.”

He has a feeling they wouldn't believe him.

~*~

It's a mess.

The kid in his “home room” who’s apparently going to “show him ‘round the block” is “Korean”.

Okay, the guy is actually Korean, but if Wonwoo’s going to be honest he doesn’t think he’s ever met a Korean quite like this.

It is a universally well-known fact that Wonwoo doesn’t like dogs. And yet somehow, this person is the human embodiment of not one, but ten puppies, he swears like a trooper, he went to shake Wonwoo’s hand with the same hand he had scratched his butt with, he smiles too brightly? Not to mention he also looks at Wonwoo like as if he’s hung the stars simply because “showing him ‘round the block” entails skipping the one period of class that’s on.

The day is filled with introductions and intimidating speeches of how the world is his oyster, and just when he thinks he’ll be able to clear his mind in a class of mathematics to start the school year off, he’s being dragged out of the classroom by ten puppies.

“This is the art block!” the guy waves a hand at the two-storey building that’s covered in murals, but falling apart at the seams. It is an “Institute of Science”, but could they not have the decency to respect artists?

The music block is in an even worse condition, although that’s apparently what happens when the school saves up to buy one Steinway grand piano. The entire thing looks like it’s covered in spiderwebs and dust bunnies, but hey, as long as there’s one so-expensive-that-everyone’s-too-scared-to-touch piano, right?

“Wonwoo! When is your birthday, should I be calling you hyung?” the puppy boy links arms with him out of the blue, skipping down to the sports complex.

“Mingyu…” he sighs, struggling to keep up. The guy has freakishly long legs that take strides that are far too wide for him to follow.

Mingyu looks at him expectantly, and he utters a reluctant “17th July, 1999” while looking at the ground.

“Well how disrespectful of me!” Mingyu exclaims, although he makes no effort to remove his arm from where it’s linked with Wonwoo’s. “Forgive me, hyung!”

Before he can reply, the puppy boy is running towards the science department, claiming that it will take him four hours to introduce Wonwoo to the seven-storey tower that shadows over the school swimming pool.

Wonwoo sighs (again, it’s probably the 107th time today, not that he’s been counting) and follows suit. Despite everything, he finds himself enjoying Mingyu’s company, the friendliness that exudes from him a comfort to the foreign boy.
This is why, when Mingyu invites Wonwoo to eat lunch with him, the boy says yes. It is, quite possibly, the biggest regret of his life.

~*~

Wonwoo looks at the table and sees a zoo.

If Mingyu was ten puppies, then that Jun in the corner is a cat, the Minghao sitting beside him is a sassy goat – the kind that would chew on your clothes if they weren’t stylish enough, the guy named Seokmin is nothing but a horse, and basically, this group is next level to the point of indescribable.

To Wonwoo, it’s like this is the moment where it really hits him that he’s in Australia, not Korea. Even being surrounded by people who can speak his preferred language does nothing to help him; it very quickly dawns on Wonwoo that Australians are an entirely different species of human.

He watches as Mingyu pulls out a sandwich from his lunchbox that is slathered in something as black as soot, and across the table the guy Wonwoo dubbed as the horse of the group has nothing but apple slices and a tub of peanut butter. And a knife, because apparently he’s “not a peasant”.

“Oh!” Mingyu startles Wonwoo, and puts down his sandwich to give the boy a bright smile. “We should probably all introduce ourselves individually. I kind of just spurted names at you earlier and I get that probably wasn’t very helpful.”

They go from eldest to youngest as they introduce themselves, and Wonwoo thinks the only thing it’s helpful for is indicating to him that he should start running for the hills, or at least to another group of people who aren’t quite as crazy as this.

“Hi! I’m Seokmin,” the horse guy says. “I’m a year older than everyone here because I repeated preschool, which means I’m going to get to find out who my soulmate is really soon!”

“I’m Vernon, but these guys call me Hansol. You can too, if you want. I’m the squash captain for our school, and I’m a year older like Seokmin. I promise you it’s not that I’m stupid, I just used to move around a lot because of my mum’s work.”

“I’m Chan,” the next guy pipes up, still chewing on a muesli bar. “I’m Seokmin’s little brother and I’m married to Michael Jackson.”

“Hi! I’m Mingyu! But you already knew that.”

“I’m Junhui, but just call me Jun. I’m a library monitor, so if you ever need any help in there you can ask me. I know it looks like a pretty intimidating building.”

“My name’s Seunghceol, but most people here just call me Cheol because it’s a bit of a mouthful to pronounce for people who speak English.” The guy waves with an orange hand, before offering Wonwoo a ‘Cheezel’. He politely declines.

“I’m Jeonghan, I’m a boarder since I come from Maleny.” Jeonghan gets nudged, and he adds on a quick, “that’s a small town out north, by the way. We’re famous for dairy farming.”

“We call him the fairy farmer,” Mingyu grins. “He always reminds us to drink our milk for strong bones.”

There are three people left at this point, and Wonwoo’s brain already feels like it’s bursting at the
seams.

“I’m Minghao, I’m from China and I moved here four years ago,” the goat kid says. He seems… cute, almost sweet, but Wonwoo knows – he just knows – that Minghao would swipe him bald if he ever showed face in an ensemble of check on check on plaid.

Again, he’s a sassy goat.

“My name’s Jihoon, I’m the music co-captain. No I’m not twelve,” a mouse-like boy says stiffly, before returning to his laptop.

“Hi Wonwoo, it’s really nice to meet you, I’m Joshua. You can call me Jisoo, though.”

He lets out a breath. Jisoo looks normal. As does Junhui. He considers that it must be something to do with names starting with J, before he remembers that Jeonghan exists.

“I’m Wonwoo, I’m turning 18 in July and I’m from Korea. Thank you for having me at your table,” he says in reply to everyone, figuring that it’s only polite for him to be thankful of their generosity. Although they seem like a bunch of monkeys, he knows he should be grateful for the fact that now, he doesn’t need to initiate interaction with people to make friends.

“You’re so formal, hyung!” Mingyu throws an arm around his shoulders. “Loosen up, you’re in good company in a fair dinkum society. You’ve got nothing to be so uptight about.”

Wonwoo doesn’t know what fair dinkum is, but at this point, he’s not sure he wants to.

Chapter End Notes

Additions to the Australian Dictionary (again, please tell us if we’re missing anything, we don’t have a concept of how much of our slang is known to the outside world):

- Magpie: This is what you need to know.
- Home room: At our school, we called it house group, and the gathering of people differs from school to school but generally speaking it’s just where you call the role.
- Vegemite: Just wanted to say that when I wrote "Mingyu pulls out a sandwich from his lunchbox that is slathered in something as black as soot", this was definitely Vegemite.
- Fair Dinkum: True, genuine? This is... hard to explain, actually.
It’s a Friday afternoon; the sun is beating down on the concrete like no one’s business, and not a cloud can be seen in the sky.

If this were Korea, this would be beautiful weather, but because he’s in Australia, and more specifically the ‘Sunshine State’, it’s not beautiful, and Wonwoo wants to impale himself on the school’s picket fence. He thinks he can physically feel the soles of his school shoes melting into the ground, and when he looks over at Jeonghan, he doesn’t understand how the boy is standing beside him, sweat-free, flawless, and without a hint of death in his eyes.

As if to console him, Mingyu comes out of his last class and runs over to him, visible patches of sweat forming on his school shirt and skin glistening in the sunlight. It’s not comforting though; in fact, it’s more uncomfortable than anything, because while Wonwoo looks like a hot mess in this heat, Mingyu looks like a hot mess.

Life’s just unfair like that sometimes.

“Come on!” Seokmin gestures to the small group gathered at the front of the school. “Let’s head over to Hungry Jacks. They’ll have air-con there, and we can wait for the others.”

With that, their group of Seokmin, Mingyu, Jeonghan, Jihoon and Wonwoo begin on their trek to Hungry Jacks.

None of the route is shaded, Wonwoo pouts as he walks, sweat trickling down his back and trying his best to glare at the sun in the same way that the sun is glaring at him. He realises belatedly that he should have worn sunscreen if he didn’t want to burn like a forgotten strip of bacon, but he supposes he’ll have to make do with the pain of red, peeling skin; a small price he’ll have to pay to redeem himself of his sins.

If only his skin tanned like Mingyu’s, then maybe he’d get a shot at being able to look like a real walking Adonis.

Not that weird, smiley, ten-puppies Mingyu looks like a real walking Adonis, of course. Because he doesn’t.

(He does.)
It’s a twenty minute walk, Jihoon’s watch tells Wonwoo, but he’s almost certain it was an hour, because there’s no way he could’ve sweat his whole body weight off in just one twenty-minute walk under the sun.

The moment they arrive Seokmin whips out a purple box, filled halfway with melting chocolate.

“Eat up, kids, my treat!” he yells, shaking the chocolates out onto the sticky table.

Wonwoo curiously sorts through the bars that fall out of the box labelled ‘Favourites’, and stumbles upon an unfamiliar red wrapper.

“What’s this?” he asks as he picks it up, taking in the bold yellow font that reads ‘CHERRY RIPE’, when all of a sudden he finds the chocolate abruptly slapped out of his hands.

“That,” Jeonghan sneers at the offending chocolate bar that’s now lying on the ground, “is Satan in a chocolate and you will never try to eat it, think about its existence, or come into contact with one again. Understood?”

At Wonwoo’s confused expression, Jihoon cuts in to help.

“It’s disgusting and not worth your time. Might I suggest the Boost instead? It’s a neutral bar that’s to most people's taste.”

He slides the bar across the table just as the group hears a gasp from behind them.

“Cherry Ripes are a blessing to this country, thank you very much!” a rainbow-haired noodle of a guy comes stomping over, half-dressed in a Hungry Jacks uniform. “It has been an iconic symbol of Australia since 1924, and it doesn’t deserve your rude comments!”

The name tag that sits haphazardly across the guy’s shirt reads ‘Sehun’, Wonwoo notices, as the person bends down to pick up the Cherry Ripe from the ground.

“If I catch you slandering the great name of Cherry Ripe again I’ll kick you out of here for life, you good-for-nothing Denborough snobs,” Sehun says, voice oozing with contempt.

There’s a clearing of a throat, and Sehun shrinks visibly, losing about 5 centimetres from his height.

“What I meant to say was,” Sehun fixes his uniform and straightens up his posture once more, plastering a fake smile to his face. “Save a poor, starving university student today by donating one bar of Cherry Ripe?”

His eyes are pleading, and Wonwoo can hear Mingyu trying to stifle a giggle.

“It’s all yours, Sehun. Trust us,” he tells the guy.

As Sehun walks away, the remainder of their friendship group swaggers into the place in different levels of disarray. Wonwoo wonders if it’s because their assessment schedules for the term had just been released yesterday, or if it’s because of the heat.

“Come on guys,” Hansol waves a hand. “Time for a Macca's run!”

Wonwoo is glad that in the few weeks that he’s started school he’s been catching up on the ‘Aussie lingo’ (he found a useful website that helped him out a lot, but he has a feeling it was slightly outdated) and he at least knows what ‘Macca’s’ is, and that a ‘Macca's run’ means they’ll be heading over to McDonalds.
What he’s not glad about, however, is how Hansol had near shouted the words out loud inside the store of a competitor (had he no tact?), and that going on a Macca’s run required stepping outside into the sweltering heat.

It doesn’t take long for him to find out that the group never eats at Hungry Jacks and only uses it as a meeting point because it’s the closest place to the school. Apparently, Hungry Jacks contains food that’s so bad that it can’t even be compared to a Cherry Ripe – and if that’s the case, he never wants to set foot in there again, Australian summer heat be damned.

McDonald’s is significantly busier than Hungry Jacks; clearly the more popular choice between the two fast food chains.

He mildly registers Minghao shooting towards the counter in his mind as he takes in his surroundings.

“Tao Ge!” the sassy goat shouts, jumping up and down and waving his arms from behind the line up of three other customers waiting to be served by this ‘Toga’ man. At least, that’s what Wonwoo thinks he said.

It’s rather uneventful after that; it turns out the rainbow-haired noodle who would take a bullet for a bar of Cherry Ripe is acquaintances with the toga man, and the toga man was a graduate of Denborough. He’d actually been a bit of an older brother-type figure for Minghao when he’d first arrived in Australia, which explains why the boy had been so excited upon seeing him at the cash register.

“I’m sorry about Sehun, he’s such an idiot,” Toga says as he takes his apron off, his shift having just finished.

“But he’s your idiot,” is apparently what Minghao says, but Wonwoo’s not entirely sure if Junhui is a trustworthy translator. He can’t read Toga’s scandalised expression well enough to be certain.

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They decide to part ways some few hours later, when they start feeling like a nuisance at McDonalds and Seokmin’s box of Favourites are empty.

Belatedly, Wonwoo remembers that his parents have a Korean Community event to try and make friends, and that he was supposed to go grocery shopping so that he could cook dinner for Bohyuk and himself.

When he tells the group this, the majority of the members say their parents are also going, and why don’t they just have a big party at Hansol’s house with too much fried chicken? (Apparently it’s always Hansol’s house, and it’s always fried chicken that’s somehow always delivered by the same guy for 2 years straight.)

Jisoo shoots the idea down, claiming that although it’s a Friday, the term’s basically just started and they should save their energy lest they burn out before exam block.

“Besides, you have to wake up early for squash tomorrow, Hansol,” he tells the dejected guy with a pat to his back. “We can’t be a burden to you like that when you have to wake up at four in the morning. You’re team captain now, we can’t sabotage our school’s Squash Golden Boy so early in the year.”

That seems to acquiesce Hansol, who nods and mutters “gotta beat that damn Boo”, whatever that’s supposed to mean.
They decide to take a trip to go grocery shopping though, to “help Wonwoo out”, which is to say they’re there to be a bad influence and get him in trouble with the sheer amount of junk food that will line the pantry cupboards. He’s supposed to stock up on the week’s food supply, not host a party for his street.

After a five minute debate of whether to go to Coles or Woolworths that looks like it would have become gory had Wonwoo not stepped in to say the store closest to his house was a Coles so they should just go there, the group bumbles out of McDonald’s, leaving the fast food chain store significantly quieter than it had previously been, with Junhui, Jihoon and the Lee brothers heading home with their own reasons.

As seems to be becoming a tradition, Mingyu hooks arms with Wonwoo as they walk, pulling his dawdling pace into a semi-jog.

“So, you can cook?” the taller asks.

“No really, but I know how to not burn stuff. Most of the time.”

“I can…” Mingyu starts, before hesitating a moment, falling out of step with the rest of the group and letting them go ahead. “I can help you cook, if you want? My parents are at the Community gathering too, so I was going to have to make food for myself, but it’s always easier cooking for more. My sister’s conveniently staying over at her boyfriend’s and uh,” he pulls out his phone as it buzzes. “The other one’s going... clubbing?”

The boy actually seems a little nervous, and Wonwoo can feel a blush starting to creep its way up past his collar bone towards his cheeks.

“And how do I know you won’t burn my house down?” he says, because he’s cool and suave, and not internally screaming at all.

“I’ll have you know I’m known as Ming Housewife around these parts and I will not burn your food or your house down thank you very much,” Mingyu says, indignant, with his nose turned up. “I’m the neighbourhood legend.”

Wonwoo makes sure to double check with Jisoo (the closest thing to a reputable source he has) later, because he’s sure his parents wouldn’t appreciate coming home to, well, not having a home.

Seungcheol leaves part way through the trip, having received a phone call from the babysitter that his little sisters were causing trouble, so by the time they make it to Coles there’s only six of them. They’re still a sizeable crowd that’s likely to cause a massive disturbance to the other customers, but at least not all eleven of them are there.

Jeonghan immediately runs for a shopping trolley and sits himself inside, uncaring of the odd looks he receives from passers-by as he pulls on Jisoo’s arm in an effort to get the boy to push the cart for him. Jeonghan asks everyone to put their school bags in with him so that they don’t have to lug around the masses on their shoulders, then Minghao grabs another trolley, pushing it forward while leaping onto the back so that he can ride it around.

As he watches his new friends goof around, Wonwoo wonders how the school’s reputation is doing. Surely Denborough Institute of Science is not held in high regard when they have two of their seniors (let him repeat: Seniors) using a grocery store as a playground.

“My turn!” Mingyu runs after Minghao, and Wonwoo (predictably) sighs. Make that three seniors out to ruin Denborough’s prestigious name.
He looks around, noticing that in the mere seconds that they’d arrived at Coles, Hansol has disappeared. He needn’t have worried though, as the boy comes bounding over, his arms spilling over with sweets (or should he say ‘lollies’ – go Jeon Wonwoo getting into that Aussie spirit!) that he definitely definitely doesn’t need to buy.

“You’re paying for that yourself,” he tells Hansol, eyeing the mountain.

Tim Tams, Fantales, Red Frogs, Caramello Koalas, Freddo Frogs, Allen’s Snakes, Natural Confectionary Co. Snakes, Witchetty Grubs, Clouds, Minties, Wizz Fizz, Bananas and… Killer Pythons?

More than anything, Wonwoo observes, Australia has a weird obsession with naming their snacks after animals, and namely, deadly animals. Which is to say he’s a little afraid of approaching the packet of Killer Pythons. He’s also not entirely sure he wants to be putting Witchetty Grubs in his mouth, even if they’re not real insects.

“We gotta get Doritos too!” Hansol leaps about a metre high before running for the snacks aisle, and Wonwoo isn’t fast enough to stop him. At least, he thinks, Doritos are something he’s familiar with.

Mingyu returns moments after that, the brightest smile on his face.

“The meat’s on sale!” he waves excitedly, reaching over for Wonwoo’s arm to pull him to the beef section. “It’s a steak kind of day, don’t you think? The Angus beef is half price, just saying.”

As he finishes that sentence, a short, grumpy looking man swoops in and takes what Wonwoo is just going to assume is about ten of the steaks, ink black eyes daring him to judge the man.

He looks about in his mid-twenties, dressed in a Shell uniform and therefore smelling like petrol, muttering to himself as he continues to stack steak into his basket.

“But hyung!” another guy whines, confirming his suspicion that the man may be Korean (although, now that he thinks about it, when did that guy even get there?). “I want chicken!”

Wonwoo laughs silently to himself; the guy sounds like he could be soulmates with Hansol.

“But Jongin, steak,” the grumpy guy shoots back, giving his friend(?) a withering look.

That’s when Wonwoo notices the name on said grumpy guy’s wrist, a very clear print that reads ‘Jongin’.

It’s right when Wonwoo’s trying to discretely peer at Jongin’s wrist when Mingyu pounces on him, triumph lighting up his eyes.

“Wonwoo hyung! Do you like broccoli? You have to like broccoli they’re on a two for one sale! And you have soy sauce at home, right? And oyster sauce? I was thinking we could do a bit of a Thai-style vegetable dish. Wait, do you have rice?”

Overtaken by the onslaught of questions, Wonwoo misses the chance to catch the name on Jongin’s wrist and confirm the two odd men to be soulmates. He wonders when exactly it was he had suddenly become so invested in all of this, but he supposes it’s natural to be hyper aware of the whole soulmate business when he’s just months away from finding out who he’s supposed to spend the rest of his life with himself.

“Are you allergic to anything?” Mingyu near yells in his ear, prompted by the can of coated peanuts they walk past.
Grocery shopping has never been more tiring.

At the checkout, Wonwoo escapes to go pay for his groceries. While the other boys are shouting over at the self checkout and generally making a mess of it, Wonwoo stands alone at a separate counter, ‘Tim’ serving him while swaying along to some guy singing about how life isn’t fair and wanting his share. Share of what? Food? That’s all people seem to share in Australia. Wonwoo can’t count the number of times he’s been told “hyung, have some of this, you gotta try it”.

After fumbling with the money when it comes to pay (damn these stupid Australian coins), Wonwoo finally leaves the supermarket. The others are all waiting for him, and immediately start selling out Hansol for spending forty dollars on lollies alone, a fact that he doesn’t seem too concerned about. Hansol keeps insisting that “most of them are for the squash game on Saturday”, but judging by Jisoo’s worried mutterings about the health of Hansol’s teeth, the boy is probably going to eat them all himself.

Jeonghan is starting to get restless, hopping around Jisoo, dragging on his clothes and hair, murmuring in his ear. Wonwoo is sure he wants to leave, to go do whatever it is that weird dairy kids do before he has to get locked up for the night at Denborough. Jisoo finally seems to cave to Jeonghan’s tactile persuasion, and not for the first time, Wonwoo wonders just what is going on with those two. Both their wrists are blank, and there’s the added factor of Seungcheol to consider; one is always with another, and more often than not all three are together.

The dilemma of those three aside, Jeonghan and Jisoo start to say their goodbyes, Jisoo seeming to have a personal message of advice for each boy, telling them to remember to brush their teeth or do their homework. Jeonghan keeps pulling his arm, and eventually starts to skip away, Jisoo gripping his elbow tightly to stop him running too far ahead.

Minghao seems to have disappeared during Jeonghan’s dramatic exit, and Wonwoo looks around for him, before leaning towards Mingyu.

“Where did Minghao go?” he asks, still scanning the area for the skinny boy who has a talent for slipping in between crowds to disappear whenever he so chooses.

“Oh, he just went to the busway, hyung,” Mingyu says, pointing towards the small staircase in the corner of the shopping centre that Wonwoo had honestly thought went to a basement or something.

“The busway? I thought that was near the train station?”

“Oh not King Charles Busway, this is Queen Road Busway,” Mingyu explains, “they connect underneath the city, but have different entrances and stops.” Wonwoo can’t keep up. His mum had given him a bus number, a stop location and told him the times it ran. Nothing about connecting busways or Queen Charles. Australian transport really is a mess.

“Oh,” is all he says back to Mingyu, choosing instead to turn his attention to Hansol, who is now eating something that looks like cocaine with a pink plastic spoon. With that, Wonwoo decides he’s had enough of Australia for one day and, choosing the lesser evil, takes hold of Mingyu’s arm. “Mingyu, we’re going home.”

When Wonwoo gets the bus home, it’s an uncomfortable trip full of loud twelvies who keep their school hats on inside the bus and angry commuters who want to escape the children as much as he
does. Today, however, Wonwoo actually enjoys his bus ride, and it’s all thanks to one Kim Mingyu. Instead of sitting as far back in the corner as he can get, the two boys sit in the middle of the bus, chatting happily and ignoring a kid yelling about his Minecraft failures.

Wonwoo decides to ask about Mingyu’s cooking abilities, something he’s been wondering about since he was given the offer to cook together.

“Mingyu, why do you like cooking?” He asks quietly, not quite sure whether Mingyu thinks they’re good enough friends yet for him to ask about something so obviously close to the taller boy’s heart. He really hopes Mingyu thinks they are.

It seems he has nothing to fear when Mingyu tilts his head and scrunches his eyes up in a way that Wonwoo has seen before, when Mingyu is getting ready to compliment one of their friends or eat something particularly delicious.

“Well, it’s just something that I’ve always done. My family is really close, so we would all come together in the evenings to cook together. My mum started teaching me when I was really young, so it just comes naturally to me now.” Mingyu explains all this with a dreamy smile on his face, looking so entranced by the thought of cooking that Wonwoo wonders if his soulmate wouldn’t turn out to be a frying pan or something.

“That’s really nice,” he replies, head suddenly conjuring an image of him and Mingyu together in a kitchen, cooking together, being all domestic. Well, shit. Wonwoo ignores his imagination, knowing full well that soon enough, that scene will be playing out in Wonwoo’s life. Just maybe with a little less domestic bliss. Wonwoo tries really hard to not hit his head on the bus window in frustration. Fucking Australian heat messing up my head.

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Wonwoo unlocks the door, praying to every deity he knows, which now includes Jisoo, that Bohyuk isn’t home yet. He can be a little touchy with Wonwoo’s friends, and he’s hoping that letting Bohyuk meet Mingyu after a delicious dinner has been prepared will make the introductions a little smoother.

It seems Jisoo has blessed Wonwoo, or he’s just received some good karma, because Bohyuk is nowhere to be found, except for a text on Wonwoo’s phone saying he’ll be home “later”. Bohyuk has been mysteriously absent since school has started, and Wonwoo knows it hasn’t been studying taking up his brothers time. He’ll have to find out what Bohyuk’s been up to, but right now, he has bigger priorities, namely Mingyu, who is getting himself acquainted with Wonwoo’s kitchen, pulling pots and pans out of the cupboards, and ingredients out of not only the shopping bags, but the cupboards and the fridge as well.

Mingyu seems to have a sixth sense when it comes to kitchens. He’s managed to find everything without a problem, and Wonwoo thinks he wouldn’t mind keeping him around. Purely for the cooking, of course. Soon enough, though, Mingyu seems to hit a wall, opening cupboard after cupboard but never finding whatever it is he needs.

“Hyung, where’s your rice cooker?” Mingyu looks at a total loss, like his entire meal plan has to be put on hold until he can find the rice cooker. Wonwoo hates to wreck his perfect cooking bubble like this.

“Uh…” he starts, scratching his head hesitantly, “we don’t actually have one.” At this, Mingyu appears to have a heart attack, his face draining of colour and body falling to lean back against the counter.
“But hyung, how do you make rice? You do eat rice, right? I’ve seen you eat rice at lunch…” Wonwoo isn’t entirely sure why Mingyu is getting this worked up over rice, but he doesn’t like the way the other boy’s brow is scrunched up and the frown practically dripping off his face.

“In a saucepan, Mingyu, it’s alright. We can just make it a different way.” Wonwoo pulls out another saucepan from under the stove, and Mingyu stares at it, before raising his head to look Wonwoo in the eye with something like wonder.

“I’ve never met someone who doesn’t have a rice cooker before.”

Wonwoo snorts. “I’m sure you have, you just haven’t offered to cook for them. Speaking of, what are we doing first?”

With this, Mingyu’s eyes get back their usual sparkle, and Wonwoo knows that directing his focus back to the rest of the meal was the right thing to do.

“Chopping! We’ve got to prepare the vegetables. You start with the carrots, and I’ll do the broccoli. Then you can do the bok choy, and I’ll start on the steaks. Sound good?”

“Yes,” Wonwoo says with a small smile, grabbing two knives for them. He passes one to Mingyu who takes it and, of course, starts playing around with it.

“Et tu, Brute?” he smirks, before playfully jabbing the knife in Wonwoo’s direction, causing the latter to jump back with a glare.

“Mingyu! That’s kind of dangerous. You probably shouldn’t do that.” Wonwoo knows he’s right, but the pout on Mingyu’s face almost convinces him that playing with knives is okay just this once.

“Start chopping.”

Mingyu just shakes his head with a small grin, no doubt used to Wonwoo’s lack of humour.

They settle into a calm rhythm, their slicing occasionally stopping for either boy to munch on a bit of veggie, until Wonwoo starts to feel himself sweating. Since coming home, being inside the house has helped with the heat, but now he’s starting to feel the Australian weather in its full force again.

“Mingyu? Do you mind if I put the air conditioning on?”

“Air-con?” Mingyu checks his phone. “Hyung, it’s only 28 degrees,” he says with a laugh. “You haven’t gotten used to it yet, have you?”

Wonwoo shakes his head, walking over to the remote. He clicks it on with all the anger he has, because no, he definitely has not gotten used to this shithole of a country and its toaster weather. “I’m from South Korea. 28 degrees is fucking boiling.”

“Don’t worry hyung, it’s February already. A few more months and it’ll go back to the early 20s,” Mingyu reassures him, chopping the last of the broccoli.

_A few more months?_ Wonwoo is sure he’ll have melted by then. He wonders absently whether he should buy some shares in an ice cream company.

Mingyu grabs the steak and moves over to the stove, getting the pan heated, humming to a tune that sounds suspiciously like the one from the supermarket earlier. Wonwoo knows he’s getting a share of the food this time, and his stomach is telling him to cook more quickly. It seems Mingyu hears his stomach’s cries, as he soon adds the steak and lets them rest in the pan while setting a timer on his
Once again, for what feels like the millionth time, Wonwoo is hit with this feeling he can’t quite describe, and all he knows is that he always wants Mingyu next to him, being so painfully silly and domestic. It’s all Wonwoo can do not to blurt this out, to break the soft soundtrack of this moment, to interrupt Mingyu’s beautiful hums that fill the air along with the sizzle of the steak and Wonwoo’s accelerating heartbeat.

He’s so caught in the beauty that is Mingyu cooking steak for him, that Wonwoo doesn’t notice his knife coming down slightly too far to the left.

“Shit!” he cries, looking down at his thumb, where a fairly shallow cut is starting to seep a little blood dangerously close to the bok choy.

“Wonwoo hyung! Did you cut yourself? Let me have a look,” Mingyu comes over to him, takes his hand in his, and brings it up to his eyes. Wonwoo is still holding the knife, suddenly frozen when he feels Mingyu’s fingers cradling his hand. It feels right.

Sadly, Mingyu soon deems the cut not too serious and his concerned face is replaced by his regular cheeky puppy look. “Were you too busy checking out my ass?”

All Wonwoo can do is splutter. Mingyu is unfortunately close to the truth, and Wonwoo won’t have him knowing that.

“Of course not, you idiot. Some of us just aren’t at housewife level yet.”

“Ah, give it a few more years, hyung. You’ll get there, and then we can be housewives together.”

After the cutting incident, they go back to their respective culinary duties, Wonwoo finishing the chopping without any more injuries and Mingyu starting on the rice. Soon enough, everything is ready, and three plates sit on the bench, ready to be eaten.

Wonwoo checks his phone again, wondering where Bohyuk is. He’s just about to call him, when the front door bangs open, and there is a “Hyung!” ringing through the house.

“I’m in the kitchen, Bohyuk!” Wonwoo yells back, sending a worried face towards Mingyu, hoping the comfortable atmosphere doesn’t dissolve into the awkward mess that is Bohyuk.

Bohyuk walks into the kitchen, dumping his school bag in the corner and grabbing a glass from the cupboard. “Hey hyung. Hey hyung’s friend.” He doesn’t seem too bothered by Mingyu, just a little skittish, until he sees the food on the counter. “Did you cook?”

“It’s all Mingyu. He’s something of a culinary genius,” Wonwoo explains, watching Mingyu’s happy little smile with a happy little smile of his own.

“Huh,” Bohyuk says, grabbing a plate. “Smells good. Thanks Mingyu.”

With that, the boy is gone again, and Wonwoo really needs to find out what on earth it is that Bohyuk is doing all the time.

“Yeah, so that’s my brother,” Wonwoo offers, hoping Mingyu won’t get too upset at his brother’s minimal attempt at respect.

“He seems cool. A little like a moody teenager, but then again, aren’t we all?” Mingyu grins, picks up their plates and carries them to the table. “Come eat, hyung!”
Wonwoo can only smile. He walks over to Mingyu and that delicious looking steak, and decides that this night has turned out a lot better than he had expected it to.

They eat their dinner with occasional small chatter, and Mingyu maka production of trying the saucepan-made rice. He chews slowly, considers for a minute, and then makes up his mind.

“It’s pretty good. Could be better, although Seokmin always has the best rice.”

Chapter End Notes

A continuation of the Australian Dictionary:

- Favourites: A purple box filled with assorted cadbury chocolates.
- Exam block: Some schools have different names for this, but it's a week where the students come into school only for their exams, and don't have any classes.
- Coles: A grocery store, competitor to Woolworths.
- Woolworths: Another grocery store, often abbreviated to 'Woolies'.
- Trolley: I've gotten weird looks in front of Americans using this word, but it's a cart.
- Lollies: Candy; sweets.
- Life isn't fair song: If you're not Australian, you must go on a quest to find this yourself. If you don't know and you are Australian, shame on you.
- Hansol's 'cocaine': Google 'wizz fizz'. Like cheezels, Elise is also practically married to this.
- Twelvies: We're not sure if this is an Aussie thing? But twelvies are just entitled tweens, basically.
Seokmin shoots up out of bed. His alarm still has thirty minutes on the clock and it’s not even a week day, but he can’t keep still. He flies through his morning routine and rushes to his mother, eyes squeezed shut.

“What does it say?” he asks, words spilling out of his mouth as he reveals his wrist to his mother; the same wrist that holds the name of his soulmate. “Wait no, don’t tell me.”

After he confirms that his mother has seen the name on his wrist and he has his arm out of immediate sight, Seokmin slowly peels his eyes open, to find that his mum is giving him a weird look that almost looks like a knowing smirk. The problem is, Seokmin’s never seen a knowing smirk on his mum’s face before, so he’s not sure if he’s reading the expression correctly. Not to mention the fact that he can’t think of a reason why she would be giving him a knowing smirk.

Breakfast feels just like any other birthday after that, stacks of pancakes piled up on plates next to whipped cream towers, three bottles of Coles brand maple syrup (gotta save money where you can) and enough berries to feed the street. Pancakes for breakfast on one’s birthday is a family tradition in the Lee household, and Seokmin tucks into his overflowing plate just as his little brother makes his way down the stairs.

“Guess who has a birthday present for you!” Chan shouts, his usual early-morning sleepy demeanour nowhere to be seen. “It’s me! Your little brother! I have a birthday present for you!”

Chan rushes forward, placing the box to Seokmin’s left, practically vibrating out of his skin in anticipation.

“Mum chipped in because I couldn’t pay for it all myself. You know how I spent too much of my allowance last month…” the boy trails off, looking a little ashamed of how large the Michael Jackson shrine in his room has been growing.

Seokmin puts his pancakes aside to open his present, a medium-sized box that’s wrapped with old, reused wrapping paper.

“When he says your mother chipped in, he means it’s from all of us, but it was his idea,” his father
says, having come out of the bathroom. “I also chipped in, Chan neglected to tell you. I’m not that bad of a parent, you know.”

Inside the box is another box, followed by another box, and… another.

“I swear to God,” he starts, but when he opens the last box, the sentence withers from where it’s been sitting in his mouth.

There, in the mess of absolutely unnecessary boxes, sits plane tickets for a family trip to Korea plus one, and two tickets to a Goddamn Yoon Dohyun concert.

*Yoon Dohyun.*

Seokmin thinks he’s going to faint.

“You bought all this? For me?” he asks, voice cracking on the question.

“We hope your soulmate is a Yoon Dohyun fan,” his mother says, patting his shoulder, again, with a knowing smirk.

Seokmin stands up abruptly from the dining table, his pancakes forgotten.

“I’ve gotta tell Soonyoung,” he mutters in a daze, rushing over to his neighbour and best friend’s house.

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It turns out, that before Seokmin can get himself out of the door, Soonyoung is already sitting on his windowsill, having used the rickety old bridge they’d made when they were really young to connect the windows of their rooms together.

He really shouldn’t have, the thing is falling apart and Seokmin doesn’t need his best friend injuring himself, but it’s kind of sweet, so he supposes it’s okay.

Soonyoung knows how excited Seokmin was about getting a soulmate tattoo. He can become a bit of a hopeless romantic at times, and the boy had often told stories about his stupid little fantasies with his best friend.

Soonyoung also knows that despite this, Seokmin’s going to be nervous about the name on his wrist.

“Happy Birthday, bud,” the boy smiles, sliding into Seokmin’s room and plonking himself down on his best friend’s bed. “Got you a little something.”

It’s a latex unicorn mask, covered in glitter, and Seokmin can’t even say he’s surprised. He sighs, although he’s secretly overjoyed, and places it on top of his head before giving one headbang to suavely drop the mask over his face.

“Do I look sexy?” he asks, stroking the mane of his mask.

“I mean, if you’re into that sort of thing,” Soonyoung laughs.

Then, tentatively, he questions, “Do you… know who your soulmate is yet?”

Seokmin pauses momentarily, before baring his wrist to his best friend and looking away, telling him that he hasn’t had the courage to look at the name there yet.
“Break it to me man, do they have an arsehole name?”

There’s a sound that seems suspiciously like Soonyoung choking on his spit, but Seokmin can’t really tell when everything’s a little muffled by the unicorn mask.

“Yeah, I’d say so,” comes the reply not long after, and what Seokmin can’t see is the sheer panic in Soonyoung’s eyes, seeing his own name scrawled across his best friend’s wrist for the world to see, and God, Soonyoung had hoped for this; had wished it upon multiple stars since the age of nine, but now that he’s seen it, he doesn’t know how to feel.

Because sure, his name is there on Seokmin’s wrist, and it’s like all his dreams have come true, but in all his years on Earth, his stupid, stupid self had never thought to wish that Seokmin would be his soulmate – he’d only ever prayed that he could be Seokmin’s.

He has a year, he supposes, to turn fate around in case it’s not headed in the direction he wants it to. A year to pray and wish on every star he passes that they will be each other’s.

“Oh my God, the suspense is killing me, why are you so silent? Is it really that much of an arsehole name? Oh Christ, it’s fucking Trinity, isn’t it. No one names their kid Trinity and expects them to not grow up to be a bitch. No, don’t tell me, it says Chad. Goddamn Chad, never thought I’d live to see the day when someone actually has Chad written on their wrist.”

While blabbering on, Seokmin removes the mask from his face, and ever so slowly takes his wrist from Soonyoung’s grasp to bring it to his line of sight, to find that the name on his wrist says:

“Mm, yeah, you’re right,” he nods. “That’s definitely the name of an arsehole.”

There’s a second of silence before it’s broken by boisterous laughter, the two boys clutching on to each other as they shake, stomachs aching.

After a few more moments of laughing, Seokmin relays the morning’s events without leaving out a single detail, almost yelling by the time he gets to the end of the story.

“That’s five tickets to Korea, Soonz! And I get to go and see a Yoon Dohyun concert with my soul-”

Seokmin stops mid-sentence.

“Oh my God, Soonyoung. We’re going to Korea!” he shouts, the realisation hitting him in the face. “We’re going to fucking Korea! We’re gonna see a fucking Yoon Dohyun concert. Live! Fucking live, Kwon Soonyoung, do you hear me? We’re gonna see a Yoon Dohyun concert together, in Korea, because we’re soulmates! And the extra tickets are for my soulmate!”

He can’t stop his mouth, he’s so overjoyed, and Soonyoung honestly looks like he’s on the verge of tears.

“Fuck, I’m so glad, I’m so happy it’s you, you don’t understand,” Seokmin whispers, coming down from his high as he wraps his arms around his best friend.

They spend at least ten minutes there in each other’s arms, rocking back and forth on Seokmin’s ratty old bed he’s had since the age of six, before Seokmin lets go, then says, as if none of this just happened, “Hey, do you want some pancakes?”

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There’s a joint birthday party that afternoon in Hansol’s back yard, with Seokmin and Hansol decked
out in every cheap birthday boy gear that can be found, which includes a party hat, a shining badge and a pair of suspenders.

On the table is a Freddo ice cream party cake, just like old times, and Hansol looks like he’s about to cry as he hugs the table.

“So, have you found your soulmate yet?” Jeonghan asks curiously, poking at Seokmin’s side.

“You idiot, he just got the tattoo this morning, be patient,” Jisoo scolds before he can reply, and Jeonghan easily moves on to pestering Hansol about the name on his wrist, because “Seokmin’s no fun” (to which Seokmin would like to take full offense to, because that’s so not true).

It’s just as well he cut in, though, because otherwise Seokmin would have just blurted out an entire essay about Soonyoung, and that’s kind of dangerous, especially considering the school Soonyoung goes to.

Seokmin is so sure that if he were to reveal his soulmate’s identity, the entirety of Denborough Institute of Science would go bat-shit crazy on him, so he makes sure to zip his mouth shut and make it seem like he doesn’t know who his soulmate is. If he were to even begin to mention “oh yeah, he goes to Paddington School of Later Education” well, rest in peace Lee Seokmin, he’d never see the light of day again.

There’s a reason why none of his group know of the existence of one Kwon Soonyoung, despite the fact that the boy has been best friends and neighbours with him for almost their entire lives, and to put it simply, Paddington School of Later Education and Denborough Institute of Science are sworn enemies.

So instead, Seokmin shoves a slice of ice cream cake into his mouth, inducing a painful brainfreeze that has him flopping to the floor.

“You’re such an idiot.” Seungcheol laughs, nonchalantly shovelling inhuman amounts of ice cream cake into his own mouth.

Unfortunately for Seokmin, Seungcheol doesn’t get a brainfreeze, and he’s left to wallow in his suffering by himself.

When he recovers, he looks over to find Wonwoo sitting by himself, his plate of cake untouched as he mumbles to no one in particular. Seokmin approaches quietly, lest he startle the new boy, but finds that he’s the one that’s startled.

Seokmin never thought he’d see the day that he’d see such a quiet boy singing, much less his current favourite song *Ice Cream Cake*.

He smiles before making his presence known by approaching noisily, then takes a seat beside the boy.

“So, how’s your first Australian birthday party? We tried to make it as authentic as possible.”

“It’s uh… different,” is the disappointing response he gets.

“Good different, I hope. You’ve tried the fairy bread, right? It’s kind of an urgent ordeal, because if you don’t like it I’m going to have to ask you to leave,” Seokmin threatens, running back to the tables as he shouts the words over his shoulder.

He stacks a pile of the bread onto a paper plate, earning a glare from Mingyu who had been trying to
enjoy hog the platter by himself, and jogs his way back to Wonwoo.

“It’s a small piece of heaven, I promise,” he grins, before handing him a plate of the bread and waiting for his reaction.

By the end of the day, Wonwoo is appointed a secure spot in the group, tongue painted rainbow with food colouring and brain on the verge of lighting on fire with the amount of sugar that had been consumed in one sitting.

After all, any friend of fairy bread is a friend of Seokmin’s.

He’s… pretty sure that’s how the expression works.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Fairy bread: Absolute magic, an Australian classic that everyone has to grow up with. Consists of white bread with butter and hundreds and thousands. You have to get the balance between the hundreds and thousands and the butter right!
- Hundreds and thousands: Rainbow sprinkles. For fairy bread purposes they must be spherical sprinkles, not long ones! We cannot stress this enough.
So: A Needle Full of Thread

Chapter Notes

There's a special prize for the person who identifies all the references!

We've decided that we're going to aim for weekly updates every Monday, so get excited, everyone! Thanks so much to all of you for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

20/02/17

Hi Bob,

I realised this morning that it’s been almost ten years since I’ve started writing these entries. When dad came to me with that little leather-bound book, I didn’t expect to keep it up for ten years (I totally wasn’t forced to write in you for the first two years, pshhht, what are you talking about?). This diary has been somewhere for me to put my most private thoughts; the things I’m too scared to say to anyone else, my dreams and nightmares. But most of all, it’s been fun. So, thank you, Bob. I’m still not quite sure why I thought Bob was a good name for a diary, but you’re stuck with it now.

Also, APOLOGIES, it’s been over a week since I’ve last written. I’ve been… distracted. By what you ask? Well, first of all it’s sentient, a human, in fact. A male human, at that. He’s tall, I guess, but miles shorter than I am, he wears stupid glasses like Harry Potter, and his name is Weon Jonwoo.

Just kidding! Did I trick you, Bob? His name’s actually Jeon Wonwoo.

I don’t know what it is about him, but he’s gotten inside my head and he’s refusing to leave. The main reason for my distraction was the Friday before last, when The Dinner That Shall Not Be Spoken Of took place.

We were all in the city at Macca’s, as usual, and then Wonwoo said he had to cook dinner for him and his brother. And, because I have no impulse control, I offered to help him cook. You know me and cooking, I’ll always offer to help. But this time, I mainly just wanted to spend more time with Wonwoo.

Cooking dinner with him meant I got to go to his house (friend level upgrade!) and then I discovered the most disturbing thing so far. Jeon Wonwoo, this fabulous, beautiful boy, does NOT OWN A FUCKING RICE COOKER. I’m not entirely sure what that bodes for our friendship.

Aside from that sin, the rest of the night was amazing. Wonwoo was by far the best person I’ve ever cooked with, despite him cutting himself, that idiot. Everything he does is just so endearing, from the way he chops vegetables to his quiet worry for his brother that he tries so hard to hide.

I’m not sure how I’m in so deep so fast. This crush, or whatever it is, I have on Wonwoo, it’s surprising the hell out of me and I don’t know what to do. I really like him, that part’s easy enough. But is it really worth it, so close to our eighteenth birthdays? I’ve seen those people that date when
they’re sixteen or seventeen, and then have to deal with having a completely different name on their wrist.

Chances are Wonwoo isn’t my soulmate. But I still want to date him. That’s the thing about this fucked up world. We have such screwed autonomy. Choose the name on your wrist or the love you find yourself. The ones that face that dilemma are the unlucky ones. God, I really hope I’m not one of them. Maybe Wonwoo and I will be the lucky ones.

As you can probably tell, I’ve been finding myself thinking more about soulmates recently. I’ve wondered whether I’ll still need this diary when I find mine. That’s what soulmates are for, right? To understand you more than anyone else? To listen to you? To be the perfect fit to that gap inside? I hope my soulmate will be able to be that person for me. But until then, Bob, you’re it.

Tomorrow is Home Ec again. More Wowwoo. Ever since the Dinner That Shall Not Be Spoken Of I’ve been a little nervous around him, like if I make a wrong move he’ll know exactly what’s running through my head. And more often than not these days, it’s all about him. Let’s just hope I don’t make too big a fool of myself.

xoxo Min-girl

~*~

Mingyu awakes to the sound of his sister frantically banging at his bedroom door. He turns groggily to his bedside table where his alarm clock sits to find that it’s 5:30 in the morning.

“Whaddya want?” he grumbles out, eyes adjusting to the light that floods into his room when his sister loses all of her patience and simply barges in.

“Look at my hair!” Minseo screeches as soon as she’s by Mingyu’s bed. “How is Zitao supposed to fall head over heels in love with me if I turn up to my tute looking like this? It’s a complete and utter fucking bird’s nest!”

Quite frankly (my dear, I don’t give a damn), Mingyu isn’t in the mood to listen to his sister’s pining over some hot guy in her tutorial at university. First of all, he’s sick of hearing her whine about one guy after another for over ten years straight, and second of all, what’s the use of making Zitao fall head over heels in love with her when neither of them have each other’s names on their wrist?

You see, Mingyu wants very badly to believe that one’s soulmate is picked very specifically for them; a little tip of the hat from God that they will be loved, and that they will have someone to love. He knows that every now and again there’s evidence that goes against this, tells Mingyu that he’s being stupid. Sometimes the evidence tells him that soulmates don’t always mean romance, they’re simply the person who gets you the most. Sometimes it tells him that God gets it wrong from time to time, and your soulmate isn’t the one for you. But Mingyu wants to believe, damn it, and every time Minseo comes to him to mourn over the lack of Zitao in her life, his heart cracks, little by little.

But that’s something that he’ll keep for only his diary to know about.

“We’ll do a crown braid to hide your terrible bed head,” he yawns into his hand, arms already reaching out for his sister’s hair, even in his sleep-induced haze, a clear indication that his sisters have trained him all too well from the tender age of five. “But if I find another fifteen bobby pins stabbing me in the arse tonight when I get to bed…”

It’s not threatening at all, the sluggish slurring of Mingyu’s words taking away from any bite that could’ve been present. The boy rubs his eyes before taking the proffered comb and beginning his
preparations for a braid.

Minseo makes herself comfortable between her younger brother’s legs, wondering when exactly it was that her precious, tiny little brother had grown so tall. She’s over a head shorter than him, and she yearns for the days when she could easily reach down to ruffle her brother’s hair, instead of needing to grab a stool to complete the action.

“I’m done, now get out,” Mingyu shoves his sister unceremoniously off his bed before burrowing under the covers the moment he’s tied and bobby pinned the last of the braid off, ready to sleep until he has 5 minutes to run down to the bus stop.

He’s so successful in the whole ordeal that when he hops onto the bus he has his shoes on the wrong feet, his shirt is done up two buttons out (not to mention the corner of it is stuck in his belt buckle), and now he’s the one with a bird’s nest for hair.

He also hasn’t eaten breakfast, and his necktie is nowhere to be seen.

~*~

Tuesdays are an exciting day for Mingyu. Not only is Tuesday not Monday (praise), it’s also the one special day where he has a class with Wonwoo.

And Jihoon and Jeonghan, but that’s… less important.

Home Economics is something of a breeze for Mingyu. He doesn’t want to boast, but as much as he loved kicking around a ball in the park and shooting hoops with his neighbours as a little kid, he’s always adored spending some quality time with his mother.

Call him a Mama’s Boy, he doesn’t mind, not if it means he’s becoming the most eligible bachelor of the school, what with his flawless reputation as Ming Housewife, the expert chef.

His entire family’s learnt knitting from his grandmother (although he’s less talented at that), he’s gifted in the art of dishwashing, and sewing is a thing that he is able to not murder himself over.

Except for today, apparently.

Without getting too deep into the details of what happened, the story goes like this:

Here is one Kim Mingyu (or Meangyooo Keem, according to his teacher), learning how to sew a chain stitch for the small unit in embroidery they’re doing, when he looks over to one Jeon Wonwoo (or Onewoo John) – the biggest mistake he’s made all year.

Wonwoo has his tongue stuck out between his teeth, wiggling up and down with each movement of the needle, a crease forming between his brows where he’s lost in concentration.

There’s something incredibly endearing about the amount of attention Wonwoo is paying this one simple embroidery skill, and his determination is…

It’s hot.

Like it’s not- it’s not sexy or anything, but it’s enough to make Mingyu-

“Cucking funt!” he screams, falling backwards to the ground, crappy school chair and all, needle sticking out at a perfect 90 degree angle from his finger and blood slowly seeping its way through the fabric.
distracted, was the word he had been looking for before he’d gone and stabbed himself with a needle.

“I’m okay!” he yells to the class, sitting upright from the ground with an embarrassed smile on his face. “I didn’t swear and I don’t have a needle buried in my finger, I’m okay!”

The teacher overlooks Mingyu’s language, too busy fluttering about the room trying to remember where the first aid kit is, muttering something about unhygienic needles and tetanus shots and deadly infections.

Amongst all of that, Mingyu hears Wonwoo’s distinct chuckle ring in his ears, and he looks up to find the boy crouched over him, a smirk on his face.

“Were you too busy checking out my ass?” Wonwoo whispers into his ear, like as if he knows just what he’s done to Mingyu. Great, a taste of his own medicine. He shouldn’t have said those words back at The Dinner That Shall Not Be Spoken Of.

He can’t help but pout in response.

Wonwoo seems to take pity on him, because his expression changes as he collects Mingyu from his heaped bundle of blood and dishevelled school uniform off the ground, injured arm in his grasp.

“You’re so clumsy, Mingyu,” the boy follows his arm down to his finger, examining the depth of which the needle is buried. “Come on, how about we ask Mrs. Montgomery if we can go see the nurse?”

His poor little heart flutters, just a tiny bit, and he nods his head in a frenzied manner, an audible gulp making its way out of his throat.

As Mingyu is pulled out of the classroom by the wrist, he thinks he hears Jeonghan snicker to Jihoon, which he doesn’t appreciate, because if there’s one thing he knows about Jeonghan, it’s that he’s a notorious gossip, and therefore this tale will surely become one for the books.

Mingyu dreads lunch time, where he knows the entire table will be throwing him suggestive looks while Wonwoo’s not paying attention. If he knows Jeonghan at all, every member of his friendship group will know of this Home Economics Incident before the next period even starts.

FUCK.

Chapter End Notes

[ work skin by La_Temperanza ]
Wonwoo is quick to learn the great Australian proverb “with great Fridays come great Macca’s runs”. He’s yet to spend a relaxing afternoon in the lead up to the weekend since coming to Australia, continuously being dragged outside into social atmospheres. Just for once, would it kill his friends to give it a rest? How did they all have so much energy, anyway?

“Yo Wonwoo!” Seokmin yells, voice thunderous over the chatter of excited students ready to get out of the school grounds. “We’ve been having some serious talk, us boys, and we’ve just realised we haven’t done something.”

His step falters. Knowing his new group of friends, this couldn’t end well. What was it going to be? Fake ID’s and sneaking into nightclubs? Australia was famous for its drinking culture, right? Wine bags and four ex and the stench of yeast pouring out from vats in Milton.

But that couldn’t be, they had Jisoo, and he’d never let that happen.

Would he?

Maybe they were going to go kangaroo fighting. Why else would souvenir stores sell kangaroo pens with boxing gloves on them? Was he going to have to learn how to fight a crocodile?

He shivers, then turns to Mingyu with the most pained expression he can muster, praying that the boy will receive his telepathic screaming.

“Hyung,” the boy sings, oblivious to his pain.

This doesn’t bode well.

“We haven’t properly taken you to the city yet!”

It’s Seungcheol who jumps up, waving his arms around like a maniac.

“Aish, we’re a bunch of idiots, how could we take so long to initiate you?”

“Forgive us, hyung?” Jeonghan bats his eyelashes from where he’s wedged between Seungcheol and Jisoo, trying desperately not to get slapped in the face by the former’s octopus arms.

Wonwoo stumbles, almost collapses straight into Mingyu’s chest in relief, leaving behind his bad thoughts about fake ID’s, boxing kangaroos and fighting crocodiles in a dusty corner of his mind.
He almost can’t believe how much he’d let his imagination run wild. Sure his friends are crazy, but they’re not *that* crazy. At least, he sincerely hopes so.

“L-let’s go then?” he says, crooked smile taking over his face.

His response is met with cheers that are far too loud for how close they’re all standing together.

~*~

“Man, this is what real music is, don't you think?” Minghao stretches his arms as they come up from King Charles Station.

There's a jazz pianist reigning the space of four tiles, hat spilling over with ten cent coins as he performs his very own rendition of Take the A Train, to the delight of the old couple that's passing by to go to a dinner with their children.

“Why can't kids these days appreciate real music? Those good for nothing youngins strumming away in front of Strandbags are nothing compared to this.”

Minghao barely finishes his sentence before there's a hand on his collar and he's being dragged towards the ground.

“Say that again, punk.”

“The Strandbag kids don't know music?” Minghao says, tentatively, voice a hair’s breadth away from trembling.

“As the music co-captain of our school and the concertmaster of the very orchestra you got kicked out of, I’ll ask for you to take that back,” Jihoon says, voice slithering out from between clenched teeth.

Wonwoo genuinely fears for Minghao’s life as he watches the boy’s face pale.

“You don’t know squat about music, son. Run back to your dubstep and b-boy bull before you shit on Chanyeol with jazz that you don’t even listen to.”

As he’s released, Wonwoo hears Minghao mumble that he was just joking, but Jihoon’s usually pink fingertips are now white, and he’s got a snarl plastered on his face that looks as if it won’t fade for a while.

Jihoon thrusts a hand out to the group and grunts.

“You can blame Minghao for this one, coins out, boys.”

Wonwoo reaches for his wallet, confused, but contributes two dollars, the coins clinking as he drops them into Jihoon’s hand.

Seunghceol drops his change of three dollars in the form of five cent coins, Minghao makes sure to proffer up a crisp fiver to save his own arse, and the rest grumble as they lose a few cents to their names.

“Oi Park!” Jihoon yells as the group approaches the aforementioned ‘Strandbags’.

“Well if it isn’t Hoonie Hoons!” a man shouts back fearlessly.

Wonwoo can see Minghao’s eyes shine with adoration for the busker who dares to call Jihoon by a
nickname.

“Just you hold on for a bit, Baekhyunnie’s break starts in less than five, so he’ll be down soon.”

Jihoon gives a tight smile, no doubt because of the nickname, and introduces the guy as Park Chanyeol, an aspiring musician and student at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. Despite looking more or less like he’d rolled out of bed with his legs wrapped around his guitar, Park Chanyeol is apparently a musical genius, and if that’s according to Jihoon, Wonwoo will take his word for it.

“I’ll wait for Baekhyun before we chuck you some change, then. Don’t need him rummaging through my pockets more than once a month. In the meantime, I might as well introduce you to the newest addition to the group.”

Jihoon holds out a rigid arm as he points over to the unfamiliar face in the crowd.

“That’s Wonwoo. He just moved here from Korea. He’s pretty cool, I guess.”

Just as Jihoon finishes the sentence, the group hears a screech ringing from across the street, and a guy with matching silver hair to the busker comes bounding over.

“It’s my little Woozi! What brings you here, darling?” the guy who Wonwoo assumes to be Baekhyun wraps his arms around Jihoon, and Wonwoo makes a mental note to not cross either of the two, because if they’re reckless enough to be friendly with Jihoon, then who knows how wild they might be.

As he looks between the two silver-haired boys Wonwoo wonders if he should suggest Minghao to bleach his hair silver; that must be the secret to not being afraid of being murdered in your sleep by one Lee Jihoon.

“This change is from all of us,” Jihoon says, shrugging Baekhyun off of his much smaller figure and thrusting the money he’d collected into Chanyeol’s hat. “I think Yixing’s been stealing your audience from down at Country Road, so consider it a treat. Also, don’t forget to come to the studio on Sunday at 2 or I’ll skin you alive.”

Chanyeol somehow manages to completely ignore the threat, or is just unphased by it, because he only gives a quick thanks to the money before launching into whining about “Yishing”.

“God, I know right? I swear, last week I was just trying to have a nice day and treat myself to a t-shirt from Uniqlo when this kid thinks it’s okay to sing a song that I’d sung just the day before? And with a nicer rendition than mine? The disrespect is real, man.”

Before the group troops off for their customary Macca’s run, Chanyeol makes sure to hand out business cards to the lot of them, not forgetting to yell “subscribe to pcwhy on YouTube! That’s P-C-W-H-Y! I’ve got a collab with your groovy Woozi coming out soon so you better support him!” to their retreating forms.

~*~

Jeonghan leads them towards Macca’s, running over to what Jisoo tells Wonwoo is their usual table in the food court. When they all finally reach the table in the group’s usual haphazard fashion, Wonwoo sees two boys sitting there, legs draped over chairs, relaxed, cocky attitudes seeping over to meet the Denborough boys. They’re wearing the same uniform that Bohyuk has, so they must be students from the Paddington School of Easily Tied Ties. Jeonghan looks like he wants to bitch slap them, but can’t quite get his arms to work over his disbelief.
“Hey boys,” one of them smirks, flicking his heavily bleached hair out of his eyes, which, strangely, seem to linger heavily on Seokmin. It’s Hansol who answers though, fighting his way to the front of the group.

“Piss off Boo, this is our table,” he spits at the second boy, who rolls his eyes lazily.

“Well, Chwe, I don’t see your name on it.” Jeonghan seems to have regained control of his body and scoffs loudly at ‘Boo’.

“Well, Boo, I think you’ll find that it’s been our table for the last five years. This is the only table in this food court that can seat all eleven of us. Hell, the old guy that runs the kebab shop even knows all our names,” he says, waving over at the kebab shop opposite Macca’s. The middle-aged man at the counter cheerily waves back, and once again, Wonwoo is struck by how disgustingly friendly Australia is, because he is about 98% sure the boys have never bought anything from that kebab shop.

“Yeah,” interjects Seungcheol, “go over to Oporto or something, this is a Denborough table, no Paddingtons allowed here.”

Bleached hair sits up straight in his chair at this, eyes narrowing on Seungcheol as he gasps and slaps his hand down on the slightly greasy looking table. “Excuse you, we are the hottest shit since Now: The Hits of Spring 2008.”

“That was a great album. The Veronicas slayed as usual,” Mingyu whispers from the back, and Wonwoo can’t help but roll his eyes, because of course that’s the only thing Mingyu has to contribute during what Wonwoo is sure will go down as The Great Macca’s Showdown of 2k17.

“Regardless of that, this is still our table,” Jeonghan says, sending glares that Wonwoo is sure would frighten the largest of dairy cows. “So, please kindly vacate it so we can continue our afternoon.”

The two Paddington boys exchange a look, and Boo tilts his head in a frighteningly condescending manner.

“I think,” he starts, “that Chwe here is just frightened of our upcoming squash game. He knows that his team has nothing on us Paddingtons.”

“Are you kidding!? Our team is better than ever, Boo, and you’d do well to remember that when the competition comes around. We’re taking the championship this year and there is nothing you can do about it.” Hansol looks far too pleased with his little squash rant, and he turns to grab Minghao. “Come on Hao, let’s get rid of these Paddington idiots.”

Hansol and Minghao grab the boys’ arms and drag them up from the table. They pull them all the way through the food court and out onto the street, Boo’s cries of “hands off my blazer, you drongo” filtering back to Wonwoo and the others where they’re following behind.

They all sort of make a defensive wall at the entrance to the food court, and the Paddington boys moan about the loss of their McOzs. Boo is still muttering about “that damn Chwe”, and they seem to be engaging in a conversation involving lots of violent hand gestures, Hansol’s middle finger getting a very energetic workout.

Bleached Blonde seems to have accepted defeat, and after sending a wink to Seokmin (whose cheeks become a very suspicious pink) the boys turn to duck across the road and soon disappear into the sea of bikies that have just come down the street. They’re all sporting Elmo and Cookie Monster helmets, and Wonwoo isn’t sure if the two boys just got run over or not. He turns to Seungcheol,
opens his mouth, but before he can even get a word out, Seungcheol claps him on the shoulder, saying “Straya man,” before turning away to throw an arm around Jisoo.

Jihoon comes over from where he was sitting on top of a garbage bin and claps his hands at them all. “Alrighty boys, now that we’ve disposed of the dipsticks, I want the new frozen raspberry and passionfruit from Macca’s.”

They all follow him back to Macca’s and finally sit down at their table, Seokmin hugging a chair and crying fake tears of joy. Jeonghan goes over to get free water from the kebab man and Wonwoo wonders if all Macca’s runs are so dramatic.

~*~

Somewhere along the way they find themselves in Target, dragging the decibels up with them as they enter.

Wonwoo is informed that the routine is to firstly try on all the ridiculous high heels and place bets on who can walk down the aisle the fastest without falling over, before they scavenge the makeup section for the most poorly named colours, from Bimbo to Hollywood Housewife to Corporate Femme (and not to mention Husband Shopping — to which Jeonghan simply says “same”), then finishing by travelling down the escalators to their favourite section: the toy section.

Which is how Wonwoo finds himself surrounded by absolute children who make no haste to be subtle in their swordfight escapades.

When Wonwoo looks over to Seungcheol, the guy has pulled out a mini whiteboard out of thin air, complete with markers to keep a tally of the winners, and he watches as his friends line up, battle weapons in hand ranging from lightsabers, to foam swords, to plastic swords, to… okay, that’s not a dildo, but it looks scarily close to one for being in a kid’s toy section.

He slowly backs away, step by step, into the books section and out of sight from his so-called ‘friends’. He’ll refer to them as his friends once more when they’re done embarrassing themselves into the next century.

~*~

There’s a loud crash followed by a bang when Wonwoo reaches for an intriguing novel by the name of Smoke & Stone. His head snaps up, waiting for a Target employee to start yelling at his not-friends-until-they’re-acting-their-age-again, but there’s frantic footsteps and then — nothing.

Curiously, he sets the book aside and takes careful steps back to the toy section to find that it’s devoid of seventeen to eighteen year-old boys, save for Jun, who’s huffing as he carries battered swords around to place them back where they belong.

“Where is everyone?” Wonwoo questions, taking some of the load off Junhui’s arms.

“I don’t know, I heard a loud sound so I came rushing over, and all I find is the mess they’ve left behind.”

They put the last of the errant weapons back, and Jun gives him a tired smile.

“I almost stacked it for them tripping over a dinosaur plushie, and this is how they repay me. Can you believe it?”

The two chuckle, standing amongst the colourful aisles of the Target toy section.
“Should we go looking for them, or?” Wonwoo asks.

“Well they’re not lost, we basically all grew up here, so what say you and I go and have some fun by ourselves?”

Wonwoo thinks now is a bad idea to notice that Wen Junhui is quite a handsome person, although he will say he finds the boy’s nose rather intimidating, for lack of a better word. Asides from that, the only problem with Jun is that his smile lacks pointy canines, and he’s- ahh, nice one, Wonwoo’s brain, but Wonwoo’s not going to get tricked into daydreaming about Mingyu again.

No, not today.

Pushing away thoughts about Mingyu and how striking Jun would look if he had blue hair (why couldn’t students have dyed hair at school? Surely if it were in the school colours it could be chalked up to enthusiasm and school spirit), Wonwoo nodded, following the Chinese boy out of the toy section and up the escalator into the clothing section.

“Target is a blessing for us poor, money-lacking high school students who struggle to leech off our parents,” says Jun with a flourish of his hand as he leads Wonwoo through racks of t-shirts.

Jun spends a good five minutes cooing at children’s clothing before he seems to come to the realisation that he’s not four years old, and he doesn’t know someone who’s four years old either.

“Wonwoo! Here!” he whisper-yells from halfway across the men’s section, and Wonwoo wonders when it was he’d gotten so far away.

When he reaches Jun’s side, the boy is holding out two flannel shirts.

Wait, let him say that again.

The boy is holding out two matching flannel shirts.

“We should get these, don’t you think?” he says with a sweet smile. “I’ll even buy yours for you.”

Wonwoo tries to protest, but he’s immediately shot down.

“You keep me company in the library all the time. Let me do this for you.”

Wonwoo gives Jun a weak smile in response, knowing that there’s no use in arguing. The shirts are quite nice, after all. He jots down a mental note to make sure Jun’s birthday present is as grand as it can get with thirty bucks to spare.

Wonwoo stands awkwardly behind Jun, feet shuffling as the other boy pays for their two shirts at the cash register.

As the cashier hands Jun his receipt, Wonwoo hears the girl chuckle a soft “you and your boyfriend are really cute”, and he feels an urgent need to escape Target bubbling up inside of him.

“Aw yeah nah, we both have our eyes on other people,” Junhui flashes the girl a winning smile, and while Wonwoo is grateful that his friend has shot down the idea that they’re together, he’s not entirely sure what he means by that. Not to mention ‘yeah nah’ is an absolute contradiction and the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’ probably don’t belong side by side.

“Well good luck with that mate, yeah?” the cashier gives the two of them a shit-eating grin, and Wonwoo is pretty sure she’s being much too friendly for a simple employee. Was this what it meant
to be ‘True Blue Australian’? Too friendly, too bright, and way too nosy?

“You’re both stunners, I promise whoever you’re crushing on won’t be able to say no.”

With a wink, she turns around to sort out the plastic bags, leaving Wonwoo impossibly more flustered and ready to leave the premises than before.

“Come on,” Jun takes Wonwoo by the sleeve of his school shirt. “There’s a place I want to take you to.”

It jars Wonwoo that ‘the place’ Jun had been talking about looks alarmingly like a cozy cafe exclusively made for couples. And cute couples, at that.

He frowns at the girl who swipes whipped cream onto her boyfriend’s nose, her perfectly sculpted brows sparkling under the shop’s light fixtures — and who knew eyebrows could sparkle? Wonwoo learns something new every day of being in Australia.

“We discovered this place last year,” Jun tells him. “It’s great for studying ‘cause there’s heaps of tables out the back. The good desserts and drinks are just a bonus, you could say. I know it’s kind of like a ‘girl’s hangout’, but honestly you’ll regret having a weak masculinity once you’ve tried anything off this menu.”

The boy then proceeds to order ten drinks, before asking Wonwoo for what he might like.

“You’re seriously buying for them when they ditched us?” is all he says in response.

“Fair point,” Jun nods, then turns back to the man taking his order. “Sorry, would you be able to make that three?”

As they’re handed their buzzer and they look for an empty table, Wonwoo asks Jun who the third person is.

“Hao would kill me if I didn’t get him a drink. I mean, he already lost five bucks being stupid today.”

He says it with a fond smile, his eyes cast down, and Wonwoo instantly understands what he had meant earlier, when he’d told the girl at the cashier at Target that he had his eyes on someone else.

Wonwoo smiles too, to himself, and hopes that the two are each other’s soulmates. They make a good duo, and with how close he’s growing to Junhui, he’d hate to see the boy down.

“You know in all this time, I never thought to text the guys to ask where they were,” Jun murmurs, pulling out his phone with a dumbstruck look to his face, no doubt perplexed by his own stupidity. “Not that I mind, we had a great afternoon together.”

When the group is reunited, taking up the space of three tables at the back of the cafe, Jun and Wonwoo look to their nine friends with tilted heads, wondering why they all look so bloated.

“Free nachos at GYG?” Seokmin offers with a bashful chuckle, hand coming to scratch the back of his head. “We’re sorry we didn’t tell you, we just got a bit excited and then… yeah.”

“In our humble defence,” his brother shoots in as a helping hand, “it was for a limited time only.”

“And you guys were the ones who’d wandered off in Target anyway!” Jeonghan points an offending finger to the two. “So, I’d like to call it even.”

Wonwoo can’t help but smile at the dumb excuses, and he thinks he’ll remember this day for a while;
his new life, his new friends, all his weird experiences of becoming an Australian. He almost feels guilty for having dreaded coming here so much, and he mentally scolds his past self for being so reluctant.

“Y’all I don’t know about you but I’m fucking parched,” Mingyu stands up from his seat. “I’ll shout you if you beat me to the counter!”

With that, the table is left empty save for five people, all of whom look at each other and sigh at the chairs that have fallen to the ground in their friends’ haste to receive free drinks.

“Honestly,” says Jisoo, an exasperated look pulling his eyebrows up and together, “they ought to ban us from being here. I don’t know how they deal with the mess we make.”
Australian Dictionary:

- "four ex": Wonwoo's interpretation of XXXX, Australian beer.
- Country Road: A clothing store that's a little exsy tbh.
- Oporto: A Portuguese-style fast food chain.
- The Veronicas: Google Untouched.
- Drongo: Along the lines of idiot.
- Bikie: A biker, in American.
- Straya: Abbreviation of Australia with our terrible accents.
- "Yeah nah": Basically, if someone says "yeah nah" it means "no", and if they say "nah yeah", it means "yes".
- GYG: Guzman Y Gomez, a Mexican fast food chain that's quickly spreading over the world.
- Stacked it: To trip over something and fall over.
Squashing the Competition, But Hopefully Not the Chicken

Chapter by jezza

Chapter Notes

This is my first solo chapter! Yay? Elise and I hope everyone has survived the Alone trailers and no one died from all the aesthetic beauty and suspense. This chapter is split between Hansol and Wonwoo's POVs! Enjoy!
- jezza

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4th March, 2017

Hansol is of the opinion that 7:30am is far too early for a squash game. Sure, he loves the sport, the rulebook is his bible, but he does have his limits. And when he’s been up until 2:00am finishing his Study of Religion assignment, the morning sunlight is a little grating on his already frayed nerves.

It doesn't help that today of all days they’re competing against Paddington School of Later Education. Despite all his talk about how they’re so much better and how he can easily beat Boo and his posse, Paddington is their toughest competition and Hansol needs his team to win.

The captaincy is a bit of a mixed gift. He’s insanely proud of his team, he loves them as his third family, and squash feeds his rather large competitive streak. But sometimes Hansol does find it a little draining, the pressure of training and competitions, of points and rankings, bearing down on his shoulders until it combines with the stress of Grade 12 and OPs, and the burden of now knowing the name of his other half, of having to find that one person in the entire world that is perfect for him, and having to be perfect for them in return. It’s a little too much for the brain of one 18 year-old boy to deal with sometimes.

Hansol does like the idea of soulmates; he’s secretly a romantic and all those rom coms and princess books he’s sat through with Sofia have left their mark on him. Finding Seungkwan, this person whose loopy and slightly pretentious handwriting adorns his skin is definitely high on his list of priorities. He just wants to make it through Grade 12 first. Then he can worry about the rest of his life.

Soulmate troubles aside, squash is presenting a trouble of it’s own when the coach jogs over to Hansol with a grave look on his face.

“Vernon, there you are. Bad news, James is out with chickenpox. You’re gonna have to play an extra match today,” his coach tells him, eyes creased in concern, both for Hansol and for James. Hansol knows that he doesn’t have a choice in this matter, and despite the fact that it might just kill him to have to play a third match on top of his two scheduled games, he feels like Christmas has come early.

“Who was he playing against? It was Boo, wasn’t it?” he asks, as if he hadn’t already memorised the draw.

“Yeah, you’ve played him before, so you know his game. Captain against captain again, hey? Your
last match with him was tight, let’s try to keep strong at the start and get a lead today. We need to add some points to the leaderboard after last week, so do your best, okay?” The coach claps his hand on Hansol’s shoulder, smiles proudly, and walks off to go check on the gear.

Hansol’s left standing in the middle of the sports centre, his bag (full to the brim of containers of lollies and sliced oranges — the most important duty of any sports captain) hanging by his side and dragging slightly on the floor. A slow grin spreads across his face because this day has suddenly become ten times better. He was already relishing the chance to obliterate Paddington and Boo’s team, but to be able to play Boo himself, well, it was truly a gift he would make the most of.

~*~

Hansol’s halfway through his warm up when he hears a sudden tide of voices coming in through the doors. The Paddington team has arrived, Boo standing front and centre, his high voice leading their ridiculous chant of “squash, squash, lemon squash”. It’s something that’s been going on for years, this idiotic war cry that Boo adopted after he decided it was in his best interest to annoy the shit out of Hansol.

It had all started in their first match against each other, back when they were tiny Grade 8s. Back then, Boo was a hell of a lot shorter and his voice was a hell of a lot higher. Before the start of their match, in what Hansol presumes was a bout of nerves, Boo started jumping around singing “squash, squash, lemon squash”. Hansol, in all his twelve year-old maturity had ground his teeth together and rolled his eyes, as he considered himself far more grown-up. Boo noticed his reaction, his nerves seemingly disappeared, and then he decided to follow Hansol around for the rest of the day with his never ending singing.

Hansol had lost most of his matches that day.

Ever since, it’s become the unofficial war cry of the Paddington squash team and Hansol doesn’t hate it any less. If anything, it’s even more annoying now that Boo actually has a slightly more than halfway decent singing voice.

When the Paddington team passes by Hansol’s corner of the gym, Boo makes sure to send a smirk at him, and Hansol can’t help but reply with an eye roll and a few gestures Jisoo would be scandalised to see. Squash is his sport, this is his gym, and he’s damned if he’s going to let Boo win against him even once more.

When the time for their match comes, Hansol meets Boo outside the court. They make quite a picture; a beautiful symmetry of hands gripping racquets, determined stares fixed onto each other, and sports shoes squeaking ever so slightly on the wooden floor.

“Boo.”

“Chwe.”

They stay like that for a few moments, just staring, letting the other know just how determined they are to win. It’s the sort of hype up that Hansol needs before the match, he needs the competition set into his veins and then he can have the drive he needs to win and prove Boo wrong once and for all.

Just when Hansol breaks the stare to shut his eyes and gather his thoughts together to get right into the perfect zone, Boo breaks the silence.
“You know, you really should do something about that middle part. It’s not the most flattering of haircuts,” he says with his usual smirk, and Hansol isn’t sure if he wants to punch him or grow his hair out even more out of spite.

“Well perhaps you should invest in a better insult, Boo, because I get by just fine with this fabulous middle part of mine.”

If you can’t argue with it, own it.

Boo’s opening his mouth to send another insult out when a slim boy pops around the corner with a sly grin on his face.

“Wow, this is some West Side Story shit right here. You guys need to sort out your sexual tension you know, or someone’s gonna get stabbed.”

All Vernon can do is gape in astonishment at this random kid who seems to latch himself onto Boo, and strangely enough, looks a little like Wonwoo?

“Alright, Bohyuk, whatever, the match is about to start. Go sit in the stands,” Boo sends him off, while refusing to make eye contact with Hansol.

“West Side Story, hey?” Hansol asks. “Does that make you Tony or Maria?”

Just as he’s getting the words out, the referee opens the door for them. Boo pushes past Hansol to walk onto the court.

“Watch what you say, Chwe, or you’ll be the one getting stabbed,” he lets out over his shoulder, and damnit, Hansol has got to win this match.

~*~

The match passes by in a blur of points and shots, each one better than the last, and Hansol is loving it. It’s been awhile since he’s been able to play against someone as good as Boo, and while he’s got that niggling reminder in the back of his head that he really needs to win this with a decent lead, he can’t help but get lost in the rhythm of the game, this precise dance that he and Boo perfect together, a fact that he doesn’t want to think too closely about.

Suddenly he finds himself one point away from winning, and Hansol doesn’t let his eyes wander to Boo’s face, because he knows that whatever expression he finds there is, it won’t help him secure this victory.

Boo hits a particularly nice skid boast, and Hansol panics for just a few second, until he manages to return the shot with a volley just in time. In some mad stroke of luck, fate, or just the blessing of Jisoos, Boo misses it, and Hansol’s just won the match.

~*~

Wonwoo isn’t exactly sure how it happens, but on Saturday night he finds himself at Hansol’s house
with all of the group. Everyone is lying around on sofas or the floor, no one really doing anything except Jisoo, who is continuously congratulating Hansol on his win, and Jihoon, who’s slowly but steadily destroying Seungcheol at poker.

None of them had actually gone to Hansol’s squash game, but he’s been told that it’s something of a ritual for them to meet after every game for a party. Jun tells Wonwoo that Hansol wins most of the time, but apparently even losses don’t stop the boys from partying.

It’s strangely quiet in the living room, the remnants of the February heat lingering on and challenging Hansol’s air conditioner to keep up with eleven sweating, grumbling teenagers. Wonwoo doesn’t mind the heat so much anymore; he cares more about the insufferable way Seokmin feels he needs to strip most of his clothes off for the sake of ‘climate control’.

Soon enough someone calls out for chicken and a cheer goes up amongst the boys. Hansol grins, pulling out his phone to get delivery. The promise of chicken has made them all gain some energy; everyone is smirking and Jeonghan is even giggling a little. Wonwoo doesn’t know what it is about chicken that’s making them all get so amused, but at this stage he’s just rolling with it.

“Twenty five minutes, guys. Who wants to do it this time?” Hansol asks, and Wonwoo looks around as about half the room lets out shouts while the other half lose it laughing.

Only Jihoon looks unamused, a mildly disgruntled look sitting on his little cupcake face. Wonwoo knows he’s the only one who will give him any kind of coherent answer, so he moves to sit down next to him.

“Uh, Jihoon? Why is everyone- ” he breaks off, not really sure how to put the scene in front of him into words. They’ve regressed to lying on the floor and cackling, screaming “wassup!” for reasons that Wonwoo isn’t sure he even wants to know. He settles for waving his hands around at them, and thankfully, Jihoon gets what he means.

“We always order chicken at these things, and we always end up getting the same Deliveroo driver. His name’s Kris and Hansol, with all of his sixteen year-old wisdom, decided to be gangster and greet him with “ayo whaddup Krease”. Apparently Kris responded with “ayo wassup”, but no one else has ever actually seen it. So now, every time we get chicken from Kris, they take turns to answer the door, trying to get him to say it again. It’s honestly one of the more dumb things they’ve ever done, but it’s frighteningly hard to separate Hansol from a meme, so,” Jihoon explains, rolling his eyes four separate times.

Wonwoo gets the impression that over the years of this group’s friendship, Jihoon has always been the silently disapproving one in the corner, but from what he’s seen, someone who will never let any of the others down, no matter how stupid they get.

He nods his understanding to Jihoon, and then Minghao and Seungcheol appear on either side of him, hoisting him to his feet.

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“Alright, Wonwoo, Kris is nearly here. It’s time for your proper initiation!” Seungcheol says happily, patting Wonwoo on the back like a proud father.

“I thought that happened when we went to the city?” Wonwoo asks, wondering just how many initiations he’s going to be forced through in Australia.

“Ah, see that was your initiation to Brisbane, this is your initiation to the group,” Minghao adds in, and before Wonwoo can even register it, they’re standing by the front door, Hansol already waiting with his phone pressed right to his face.
“Driver arrival in two minutes, guys!” Wonwoo has never seen Hansol this excited, the boy honestly looks like he’s ingested helium with how much he’s bouncing around.

Soon enough, they can see a scooter turning into the driveway, the bright Deliveroo box on the back bobbing as it skips over the curb. Whoever this Kris is, he isn’t a very good driver, and Wonwoo hopes their chicken hasn’t been thrown around too much.

Chicken should be tender, not pulverised.

“Oh my god, he’s wearing tracky dacks with thongs? What a legend,” Seungcheol exclaims, his hands and forehead pressed against the window in awe. Wonwoo can’t see the legendary fashion choices, all he sees is a remarkably badly dressed young man with a scowl on his face and numerous piercings that rival the holes he’s seen in Jisoo’s ears.

Hansol starts jumping up and down again.

“Alright, Wonwoo, you’re up. All you need to do is answer the door and say “ayo whaddup Krease”, and get the chicken. Make sure you tell us exactly what he says back to you, alright?” With that, Hansol leads the other two boys away, and Wonwoo is left staring out the window at Kris, who is currently getting the bag off the back of the scooter.

He walks up to the front door and knocks by bashing his fist against the wood with barely suppressed frustration. Wonwoo hesitantly opens the door, and when he makes eye contact with Kris, he immediately feels like he’s going to be having a very awkward conversation that he’ll never have the blessing to forget.

“Uh, hello,” he starts, ready to forgo all of his dignity for the sake of friendship when Kris interrupts him.

“You’re new,” he says, tilting his head curiously, “sucks for you to get sucked into that hellhole of a group.”

This conversation was definitely not going in the way Wonwoo expected. He lets out a little laugh though, and perseveres with Hansol’s stupid joke.

“Ah yeah, well… Anyway, I’m sorry but I was told to say... ayo whaddup Krease?”

Kris curses.

“Well, they’re nothing if not consistent, even if they do make me want to chuck a sickie every Saturday. You know, just to piss off that DiCaprio kid, I’m gonna have some fun. Get ready for it.”

Kris shuts his eyes in what seems to be preparation, and then opens them, smirks, and says “ayo wassup.”

Wonwoo gets the feeling he’s just been let into Hansol’s meme and he honestly doesn’t know how to reply. Kris isn’t fazed by his lack of response, however, and pushes the bag of chicken into Wonwoo’s hands.

“There you go, kid. Don’t get too sucked in by those fools.” With that, he’s striding off back to his scooter, thongs slapping against the driveway with every step, and Wonwoo is sure that he will forever associate that sound with chicken and questionable memes.

When he gets back into the living room, all the guys are waiting for him, and they seem more eager for the story than for the chicken.
“Well? What did he say?” Hansol asks, rushing over to Wonwoo in excitement.

“He said that he was going to piss you off and then said ayo wassup.” Wonwoo replies, honestly done with this meme and not really caring if Hansol does indeed get pissed off.

Hansol doesn’t looked pissed, just like he’s ready to cry, and lets out the softest “the meme is alive” and then sinks down to the floor to lay out like a starfish. The rest of the boys are, once again, all on the floor losing it. Wonwoo goes over to Jihoon once more, and offers him the bag.

“Want some chicken?”

~*~

The chicken disappears alarmingly fast, probably because Jisoo kept hoarding multiple pieces in the corner and glaring at anyone who came near his little pile. Wonwoo hadn’t known that he was capable of such devilish looks.


They’re all just sitting around, making the occasional moan of contentment, because despite the drama of Kris and Hansol, the chicken is damn good. Seokmin is the one to finally break the relaxed atmosphere when he jumps up and crosses to the TV.

“Hey guys, let’s see if there’s a movie on or something. We need to digest before we can do anything else.”

Everybody struggles their way into a sitting position, and unsurprisingly, they all end up in a bigger mess than they were when they were lying on the floor. Jisoo is squashed by Jeonghan’s weight across his legs and Seungcheol’s head on his shoulder, whose feet are resting in Jihoon’s lap, who reluctantly gives up his spot on the wall to lean against Chan’s side. Seokmin moves to join his brother and Hansol sits with them, collapsing across both of them, still unrecovered from Wonwoo’s encounter with Kris. Jun, Minghao and Mingyu seem to have formed some kind of massage train, and Wonwoo decides it’s safest to sit next to Jun, who’s taken up the spot at the back.

Seokmin starts to channel flick, skipping past all the reruns of crappy British murder mysteries and foreign news broadcasts, finally landing on what seems to be a cartoon of… bananas? Wonwoo leans towards Jun to ask what the hell it is, when a shriek comes from the other side of the room.

Chan has bolted upright, eyes fixed on the screen with what can only be described as hate.

“Lee Seokmin, brother or not, you better get this abomination off this TV at once, or I won’t play SingStar with you for a month.”

Chan does not look like he’s fucking around, his glare now turned to Seokmin, who is fumbling with the remote in an effort to change the channel. Everyone else is laughing, which makes Chan start to pout, which really shouldn’t work on Wonwoo, Chan’s a goddamn teenage boy, he shouldn’t be able to pout.

“Come on guys, this is an insult to my childhood. The original Bananas in Pyjamas was so much better. Not this weird animated shit,” he says, surrendering his pout to properly educate them all on cartoon bananas.
“He has a point,” Minghao pipes up, “the costumes were so much better. As was B1. B2 was an idiot.” It seems this is the wrong thing to say however, as Jeonghan shoots up now, eyes ablaze.

“Excuse you, B2 was the far superior banana. You don’t know what you’re talking about Xu,” Jeonghan rebuts, flicking his fringe out of his eyes, and immediately shutting down any chance of argument with his attitude alone.

It’s Seungcheol who ends the banana debate, pushing Jeonghan back to lie down again, and sending calming glances to Chan and Minghao. “It’s alright guys, we can all agree that the old version is far superior and that there are major character differences between the bananas, whatever you think they may be.” He grabs the remote from Seokmin and points it back to the TV. “Now let’s find something else to watch.”

The next channel is running a show that seems to be about dancing teenagers, if the shot of a dance studio with a prancing brunette is anything to go by. Seungcheol is about to change the channel again when Jihoon shoots a hand out and steals the remote from him.

“Not a chance Seungcheol. We’re watching Dance Academy,” Jihoon says, and everyone else groans.

“Jihoon, no one else cares about this silly dancing show,” Jun tries, but he’s immediately shot down by a single glance from Jihoon.

“Sorry boys, but I have the remote. We’re watching Dance Academy. And if I’m right, which I am, it’s late season 2.”

No one knows what he means by this, and they all exchange looks of confusion until Minghao lets out a gasp.

“That’s just cruel, Jihoon,” he hisses, and jumps up to leave the room. The looks of confusion are now doubled, and Minghao comes back with a box of tissues he found god knows where.

“Wait, Mingao, you actually watch this show too?” Seokmin asks, disbelief clouding his voice.

“Maybe,” Minghao grumbles tucking himself further into his hoodie and Jun’s stomach. Seokmin starts to laugh at him, until Minghao chucks the box at his head, effectively shutting him up. “You just wait and see how much you’re laughing in three episodes time, Seokmin.”

~*~

Wonwoo learns very quickly that ‘Dance Academy’ is about a bunch of teenagers who navigate the tough life of dance school and love, all while trying to secure some prestigious dancing achievement (the one for this season is apparently a big international competition). He also learns that Jihoon is a very loud and proud fan who is a big shipper of Sammy and Abigail, while Minghao has just tonight been outed as a fan, but one who tends to support Abigail and Ethan. The one opinion they share is that Tara is a bitch who does not deserve Christian. Wonwoo swears he hears Minghao mutter “God Christian, just date me instead” at one stage.

All the boys have gotten drawn into the plot frighteningly quickly, and Seokmin and Jeonghan are huddled in a corner, arranging bets as to who will end up with who by the end of the season.
Mingyu suddenly appears beside Wonwoo, a green tin in his hands, along with two spoons. “Wonwoo hyung, try this,” he says, popping the lid open to reveal a brown powder that honestly just looks like drugs. Wonwoo dips a spoon in, and after an encouraging nod from Mingyu, sticks it into his mouth. It’s a new taste; a little like those Malteser things Seokmin had made him try, but also entirely different, and Wonwoo can’t help himself from reaching his spoon back inside. He’s forgotten all his manners about double dipping and sheepishly looks back at Mingyu, but he’s just smiling softly and motions for Wonwoo to keep going.

“It’s ok, all rules of propriety are broken for Milo.”

Wonwoo nods, gladly getting another spoonful. Mingyu puts his own spoon in, glancing happily at Wonwoo’s delighted expression. They continue like that for the rest of the episode, and through the next ones, gradually getting closer until Wonwoo is tucked into Mingyu’s side with the taller’s arm wrapped around his shoulders. As they watch Tara come off stage at the Prix de Fonteyn to Christian bringing the news of Sammy’s death, Wonwoo is grateful for the comfort of Mingyu’s warm body next to him. He stubbornly eats another spoonful of Milo, determined not to cry at the injustice of this tween TV show.

By the time the episode of Sammy’s memorial rolls around, all the boys are in similar states. Minghao is sitting in a mess of tissues with Jun wrapped around him, Jihoon has more emotion on his face than Wonwoo has ever seen, and even Jeonghan has shed a few tears.

When the credits finally roll no one says anything for a few moments.

Jihoon breaks the silence.

“Take that, you motherfuckers.”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- OPs: The mark Queensland students get at the end of high school and the most idiotic thing ever
  Tracky dacks: Tracksuit pants! Or sweatpants?
- Thongs: Flip flops, though I’m sure you all already know about this one
- Milo: The most legendary thing it’s chocolate malt powder you mix with milk (also comes in biscuit and ice cream form, pronounced mylow)
- Chuck a sickie: To call in sick when you’re totally fine
- Bananas in Pyjamas: A kids show about anthropomorphic bananas (I don’t know if it screened in other countries?)
- Dance Academy: A tween show about teenagers that go to dance school, most of the plot being that the main character falls in love with about fifty different guys in three seasons (Elise and I both love this show far too much) (I’m pretty sure this one did screen in other countries)
- Maltesers: Chocolate coated malt balls that all of Australia worships
Chapter Notes

We hope you're all pumped for Seventeen's comeback today! In the mean time, have another chapter! We thought that before we moved on we might list the members in age order just in case you missed it, because it's kind of confusing.

- Seungkwan, 1999 (We tend to find that people who move up from New South Wales are a year older because Queensland is a stupid state that starts school a year before everyone else so we graduate at the age of 17. Yes, Seungkwan was originally a New South Welshman before coming to Queensland!)
- Seokmin, 1999 (As explained in the story, he repeated preschool, which makes him a year older than everyone else.)
- Hansol, 1999 (Also mentioned in chapter 3, he had to repeat a grade because he moved a lot as a child.)
- Wonwoo, 1999
- Chan, 2000
- Mingyu, 2000
- Junhui, 2000
- Soonyoung, 2000
- Seungcheol, 2000
- Jeonghan, 2000
- Minghao, 2000
- Jihoon, 2000
- Jisoo, 2000

This chapter makes references to the previous chapter, so if you've forgotten, you might need to skim over it again. As always, the dictionary can be found in the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3rd March, 2017

Wonwoo’s mother is, in all aspects of the word, a mother.

Don’t understand?

Well, who else would revolt at the sound of the word ‘boarder’ and demand Wonwoo’s friend stay at their house for at least the weekend because “how long has it been since he experienced the feeling of a real home?” and “who knows how those schools treat those poor young boys”.

Wonwoo knows that Denborough Institute of Science is renowned for their stellar boarding house that trumps all other private schools this side of the river, but his mother won’t hear a word edgewise, claiming that any school can promote themselves as number one without hard evidence so long as they don’t have any charges against them.

“Jeonghan, was it? Tell him we’d love to have him over. Are there forms to fill out to hand to the school? Do I need to talk to his parents?”
Sometimes, Wonwoo thinks his mother has been wasted as a stay-at-home-mum. The world needs more amazing people like her, and he feels bad for hogging it.

But it’s also how he ends up sitting shoulder to shoulder on his bed in awkward silence with Jeonghan at midnight, so… maybe his mum’s not all that great.

They’d picked the weekend that Bohyuk had some kind of nerd camp for, apparently he was picked amongst ten other students to represent the school in some national chess competition or rather. For Wonwoo’s mother, it meant hospitality could be amplified, without having to worry about a second son.

“Your family’s nice,” Jeonghan says, for what’s probably the fifth time since they’ve retired to Wonwoo’s bedroom.

He knows the boy can only say that because he’s unaware of Bohyuk’s existence. Had the little devil brother been here, Jeonghan would be complimenting the house, not the household.

Instead of saying his thanks again, Wonwoo decides to try and start a conversation, because something tells him it’s going to be the one thing to save him from awkward silence until eventually both of them nod off.

“So are you gonna go watch Hansol compete tomorrow?” he asks, a question that he’s been genuinely curious about.

“Oh nah, we only go to the big ones, or if it’s compulsory. It’s too much of an effort waking up early, you know?” Jeonghan replies with a yawn. “He’s got enough fangirls there screaming his name as it is, he really doesn’t need us to add to the noise. Takes away from his concentration.”

Jeonghan pulls a face, then pitches his voice up.

“We love you, Vern! Marry me, Vern! Hashtag save Denborough two-k-seventeen!”

Apparently, Denborough Institute of Science had lost to Paddington School of Later Education by one point at the final tournament last year, a defeat that had been caused purely by one of the graduating boy’s rookie mistake. The whole student body had booed him out of the school on his final day, which Wonwoo thinks is terrible, but Jeonghan only laughs and says the arrogant shithead deserved it.

From there, the weird atmosphere dissipates, like as if Jeonghan complaining about ‘Richard Ten-Dicks’ was the cure to melting the tension of being alone and without their loud group of three thousand friends for the first time.

When it comes time to fall asleep (at two in the morning, they’re both struggling to form coherent sentences), Jeonghan unabashedly takes the bed Wonwoo offers, and the latter slides down onto the ground where the blown up air mattress lies, trying not to fall off of it as he makes himself comfortable.

By the time he finds a safe position where he’s convinced the mattress won’t swallow him whole, Jeonghan is snoring softly, already fast asleep.

~*~

Wonwoo is the owner of a rather obnoxious alarm, otherwise known as the native Kookaburra, a name derived from the Wiradjuri ‘guuguubarra’, a terrestrial tree kingfisher of the genus Dacelo.
It cackles at him from its perch on the tree in Wonwoo’s front garden, taunting him for his terrible life decisions of staying up until two in the morning chatting to Jeonghan.

Said person is still currently away in dreamland, and Wonwoo envies how he manages to be blissfully unaware of the screeching happening right outside the window.

Deep sleepers are the bane of his existence.

Wonwoo stares at the ceiling for a while; not moving much, not really doing anything at all. He just lies there, the occasional thought drifting through his head in the early morning haze. The sunlight coming through the window is typically Australian bright, and Wonwoo is glad that Jeonghan has taken the bed so he’s for once shielded from the glare.

Jeonghan himself seems to have none of the issues with the punishing sun Wonwoo does. It dances around his form, glinting off his hair and making it shine. With all his angelic features and quasi-halo, Wonwoo would expect to see the other boy in some medieval masterpiece rather than a teenager’s messy bedroom in the suburbs of Brisbane.

To be honest, Wonwoo isn’t sure how all of his friends are so exceptionally beautiful. Every single one is above averagely attractive, it’s baffling.

There’s Seokmin’s smile that could actually outshine stars, Hansol’s broody look that’s striking in its own way, Chan’s adorable pout that never fails to give way to a cheeky grin. Not to mention the way Jihoon’s eyes beautifully scrunch up when he laughs, the gorgeous flop of Seungcheol’s hair, that slightly odd yet endearing and mesmerising sassy goat walk of Minghao’s. Then there’s Jisoo’s piercings that only add to the sparkle that is always in his eyes, and Jun’s everything, because he is just unbelievably handsome.

And Mingyu. Mingyu. Perhaps the most beautiful of all his friends, if Wonwoo wants to be honest with himself and listen to that tiny little voice in the back of his head that has lately been creeping into his heart as well.

The younger boy would be indescribable had it not been for Wonwoo’s self-proclaimed eloquence. (Listen, he’s been told he has a way with words, okay?)

Wonwoo doesn’t know where to begin when he thinks about Mingyu.

There’s his height — the guy is unbelievably tall to the point that it’s kind of unfair, even for Wonwoo who’s only a handful of centimetres shorter than him. He feels absolutely swamped beside Mingyu, never mind how Jihoon feels, but there’s something oddly comforting about it, though Wonwoo wouldn’t be able to explain it despite his aforementioned eloquence.

Next, he supposes, is Mingyu’s hair. It looks so unbelievably soft, it’s almost as if the boy foregoes shampoo and just washes his hair in conditioner. He’s sure that’s not the case, because he imagines hair would be an inconceivable texture if one were to do that, but it’s in the feeling such a thought conjures up.

Wonwoo knows he could spend more than a couple of hours carding his fingers through that hair, but that’s something he’ll admit to himself later, in a few years, when they’ve lost contact and he’s left to wallow in his own thoughts.

Starting systematically from the top, Wonwoo figures the next thing he should comment on is Mingyu’s eyebrows. It sounds incredibly peculiar when put into words, but to Wonwoo, Mingyu’s eyebrows are a comfort. The Americanised beauty culture that’s cultivated itself amongst Australians
causes all the eyebrows around him to be defined and arched like Disney villains, and in comparison, Mingyu’s eyebrows are just… eyebrows; soft lines that frame his eyes in the way that eyebrows should.

Speaking of eyes…

Perhaps Wonwoo shouldn’t finish that sentence. He has a scary feeling that he could go on for far too long daydreaming about Mingyu’s eyes. They’re not quite as black as they seem at a first glance; like a 90% cocoa chocolate bar, if he’s going to use a typical YA romance novel description. They’re soft, like as if he wouldn’t be able to glare or look angry (not entirely true, he has seen a death glare shot in Minghao’s direction, but that’s not the point, the point is it wasn’t all that threatening and instead rather cute), and when he smiles, they just…

Wonwoo regrets proclaiming himself as an eloquent person. He’s at a loss for words.

But something that Wonwoo can certainly talk about, is Mingyu’s lips. He doesn’t mean to sound like some teenage girl with long blonde hair she twirls around her fingers as she gushes about her crush, but What. The. Fuck?

How can lips be endearing?

The answer is they straight up just shouldn’t be described that way, and Wonwoo would have thought it to be impossible before meeting Mingyu, but clearly it’s a legitimate description if that’s the word he’s using to describe them now.

Yes, Kim Mingyu’s lips are endearing.

And also perpetually chapped, which is, quite frankly, concerning, and Wonwoo has considered investing in some expensive lip balm for the boy multiple times, before shooting the idea down because what if he thinks I’m always looking at his lips? So, with a heavy heart he refrains from purchasing lip balm, and instead watches pink, cracked lips form words.

It’s a tough life, only made harder by the angle of Mingyu’s jawline. Which is, objectively speaking, an otherworldly thing.

So, Wonwoo knows his jawline is pretty damn nice. It’s been mentioned more than once by the girls who had crushes on him back at home. But, and not to be biased or anything, Mingyu’s jawline is, in Wonwoo’s very own opinion (sorry, mum, it’s not like I don’t love the jawline you’ve given me), sharp as a diamond sword and Godly enough to make him lose his mind.

In other words, his jawline is dangerous.

Wonwoo lets his mind drift away from Mingyu’s jawline, and, prompted by the sunlight filtering through the windows, floats towards thoughts about Mingyu’s skin. The golden expanse of it that quite literally glows under the sun is, to a certain extent, intimidating. And to a pasty, non Australian sun-adjusted boy like Wonwoo, it’s mind-boggling.

Mingyu’s skin stretches over a broad chest that Wonwoo has not (not!) looked at through the sweat-drenched shirt of the boy’s school uniform in the hotter days, but more importantly, Mingyu’s skin stretches over arms sculpted from the finest quality of marble, rippling with the simplest of movements and setting Wonwoo’s brain on fire in the middle of class.

Not to over-exaggerate things, but for someone who only enjoys playing sport recreationally and otherwise prefers the couch potato life over exercising, Mingyu’s arms are a deity to be worshipped at the altar.
So, basically, Wonwoo is utterly and entirely screwed. He’s honestly so overwhelmed with Mingyu’s beauty that he can’t help but sigh loudly (he would scream if Jeonghan wasn’t asleep) and curse.

“Goddamn it, Mingyu, why do you have to be so perfect?”

As soon as he’s gotten the words out, however, Jeonghan sits straight upright in bed, eyes darting around the room until his gaze settles on Wonwoo.

“Mingyu? What’s this about him being perfect? Jeon Wonwoo, do you have a crush?” Jeonghan squeals, flopping down on the bed with his upper half dangling off the edge, his face ending up far too close to Wonwoo’s.

“It’s not like that… he’s just… pretty?” Wonwoo tries, knowing that he’s probably just digging himself deeper because now that Jeonghan knows, he’s never going to be able to hide it.

“Oh yes, Kim Mingyu is indeed particularly aesthetically pleasing,” Jeonghan smirks, “so, tell me all about it, Wonwoo.”

“Oh…” Screw it, he decides. If someone knows about his infatuation with Mingyu, he may as well take the opportunity to rant about it. “He’s just so perfect. I mean, who even looks like that? And he’s so nice? Like, inhumanly so? And he’s caring and funny and damn Jeonghan, he can cook well.”

Wonwoo hates the way Jeonghan’s smirk only grows the more he talks.

“I just have all these feelings and I can’t do anything about them. We’ll be getting our soulmates soon enough and I can’t date anyone else when that happens, it’s just not right. That’s even assuming that he feels the same way, which is so unlikely I don’t even want to think about it. And then what if these feelings never go away, Jeonghan? And I’ll have this name on my wrist that I’m meant to love and treat as the most important person in the world, but what if I just can’t stop thinking about Mingyu?”

Wonwoo doesn’t realise that he’s shouting until he finishes his little brain dump, but Jeonghan doesn’t look terrified or judging, he just gives Wonwoo a small smile, perhaps the first lacking scorn and mischief he’s ever seen from the younger boy.

“The concept of soulmates is actually pretty fucked up if you think about it. The idea that there is only one person who is perfect for you; that you could love? What if your soulmate is dead? What if they’re a terrible person and you can never love them? Hell, what if you love two people at the same time?” Jeonghan says, and Wonwoo gets the feeling that Jeonghan’s eyes aren’t seeing him anymore, what with the way that they’re glazed over with emotions that match Wonwoo’s own.

“But Wonwoo? Don’t discount the fact that Mingyu could be your soulmate, yeah? I know the odds say otherwise and you’ll never believe it, but a long time ago I chose to believe that the universe actually takes a look at our lives, and chooses the best person for us, and that could well be someone you already know. Maybe that’s why we don’t get our names until we turn 18. We’re given a chance to find that love ourselves. It’s called fate for a reason, right? Have some faith in the system. Even though it’s blatantly flawed, it’s the only way you’ll be able to sleep at night. Take it from me.”

It’s at this stage that Wonwoo decides he needs to be a better friend to Jeonghan, because despite the other’s carefree attitude and sass, there is a hell of a lot more going on inside.

Wonwoo thinks of something to say that will cheer him up and get rid of that damn sad smile.
“Thanks Jeonghan. I almost forgot to tell you though, did you hear about how Seokmin’s pants ripped in the middle of P.E.?”

It works. Jeonghan starts flailing around on the bed in a bout of laughter and the two boys spend the next half hour losing it over the antics of their crazy friends.

They eventually drag themselves out of bed after their ‘D and M’, as Jeonghan put it, and migrate into the kitchen to get breakfast. Wonwoo makes them toast, lazily swapping stories of childhood sleepovers and old friends.

Wonwoo can’t help but feel a lot closer to Jeonghan with this easy friendship evolving between them, and he’s grateful that there’s now one more person in the group that he knows he could call if his car was broken down in the middle of the night.

When Wonwoo places a mug of green tea in front of Jeonghan, he takes a sip, but soon sets it down and comes out with the most bizarre question Wonwoo has ever heard.

“Hey, can I have some milk, please?”

Wonwoo scrunches his nose up in distaste, because the one thing that should never be allowed near green tea is milk.

“For your tea?” he asks incredulously, despite already reaching into the fridge for the carton.

“Oh no, not that I don’t love milk in my tea, I just want a glass of plain milk,” Jeonghan replies, smiling so wide at the thought of milk that his dairy farmer roots are undeniably showing.

“Oh. Well yeah, sure.” Wonwoo pours Jeonghan his milk, and the other boy downs half the glass in one go before emerging with a few drops on his upper lip (which doesn’t make him look any less angelic) and the same giant grin.

“I’m always a slut for milk, Wonwoo,” he says, “that’s one of the most important facts about me. It’s on my Tinder bio.”

This is again one of those times that Wonwoo is struck by just how weird his friends are, good looks and kindness be damned. He settles for just nodding along, letting Jeonghan drink his milk, and they finish their breakfast with mild chatter scattered amidst the clanking of mugs and the crunch of toast.

~*~

Wonwoo decides that they have to at least attempt to get some homework done, despite Jeonghan’s protests of “it’s no fun”.

He sets all his books up on the dining table and encourages Jeonghan to do the same. He eventually drags out his schoolbag, bending over to pull out his books.

His shirt rides up just slightly at the back, and while glancing up from his algebra for just a second, Wonwoo catches a glimpse of dark ink on tan skin, in the shape of something that looks vaguely like a star.

“Holy crap Jeonghan, that isn’t a… tattoo, is it?”

Jeonghan turns to look at him, hair falling just ever so slightly into his eyes.

“Oh, this?” He asks, lifting the hem of his t-shirt to show Wonwoo the full expanse of the Southern
Cross, tattooed onto Jeonghan’s back, perhaps just a little messily. “Yeah, I’ve had it for about a year now. My cousin did it for me in the hay barn back on the farm. I have another one as well.”

Jeonghan spins, pulling down the front of his shirt to reveal some chemistry symbol over his heart. “It’s the electron configuration for calcium. Cool, huh?”

Wonwoo had been sure that he’d witnessed the full extent of Jeonghan’s dairy obsession. This tattoo though, reinforces the impression that Wonwoo had gotten many weeks ago: that Jeonghan was one of the most ridiculous Australians to ever exist, and that they definitely bred them differently out in the country.

After a few hesitant nods and vague agreements, Wonwoo and Jeonghan settle into their homework and spend the next few hours getting lost in fractions and grammatical structures, until it’s time for them to go over to Hansol’s for the post-match celebration.

~*~

They boys don’t get back to Wonwoo’s house until nearly midnight, and by the time they settle into bed (but not before setting the alarm for 7:00am, because Jeonghan needs to be up early to go to church with Jisoo) they’re too tired to do much but occasionally mutter a few sentences across the dark room. Wonwoo is nearly asleep when he hears Jeonghan’s voice, a sly hint to his usual melodious tone.

“You know,” he starts, “I don’t think you’re gonna have an issue with Mingyu. I saw the way you guys were sharing that Milo.”

That seems to be all Jeonghan has to say, and Wonwoo can’t help the smile that spreads across his face as he falls to sleep, probably to dream of Mingyu and his fabulous jawline.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Kookaburra: A native bird that laughs instead of sings. Incredibly annoying when it's in the background while you're trying to record your songs (What? Elise isn't salty), and has a tendency to wake up half the city in one go.
- P.E.: Stands for Physical Education, Australians never really shorten it to Phys Ed? It's always P.E. (I've been corrected by our Lord and Saviour divaabooT, Western Australians say Phys Ed)
- D and M: Stands for deep and meaningful; a heart-to-heart session.
- Southern Cross: A constellation that is loved by many tattoo-wielding patriots.

P.S: Can y'all tell Elise is a Mingyu stan I'm a Mingyu stan oops
Seungkwan peels his cheek off the desk from where it's firmly planted on the cold surface. He’s not going to admit that he’s still hung up over his loss to Denborough a week ago, but that’s exactly what he’s admitting to.

His non-iron school shirt is a little crumpled, a little more grey than it is white, the threads starting to loosen up.

Today, Seungkwan feels a lot like his shirt.

“It’s been a long day,” he sighs to the guy sitting next to him, and said guy looks up from where he’s been writing a reminder in his diary.

“Kwan, we’re in home room, it’s barely 8:30.”

“And what day of the week is it?” he asks, voice weak.

“Monday.”

Seungkwan’s head finds its way back on the desk, and he sighs, not for the first time this morning.

He doesn’t understand.

He’s been training so hard lately, and things just don’t add up.

His new friend, Bohyuk, who he’d found eating lunch by himself on the first day of school, has been helping him train almost every afternoon as some sort of ball boy, and he’d even gone to America
over the holidays to train alongside international squash stars.

He whips out his phone discreetly from underneath his desk so the teacher doesn’t see it, and shoots a text to Bohyuk, telling him simply that he’ll only need to be ball boy for one hour this afternoon. Aside from having lost motivation, sometimes Seungkwan can’t help but feel like he’s using the younger boy, and he thinks at some point he should start treating him like more of a friend.

*U ok?* is the almost immediate response he receives, and Seungkwan gives his phone a sad smile.

He doesn’t deserve this Jeon Bohyuk, the innocent little 15 year-old who’s done nothing but support Seungkwan through these few months they’ve known each other.

But Seungkwan isn’t in the mood to be feeling guilty. If he’s going to throw a pity party for himself, he’s sure as hell going to blame that damn Vernon Chwe from Denborough Institute of Science.

Who does that boy think he is, always out to ruin Seungkwan’s day. Doesn’t Vernon know squash is *Seungkwan’s* thing? Like Jesus Christ catch a bloody hint and run along to find another sport, would you?

He just manages to be the most agonising person in existence, and the kid doesn’t even have to try hard at all.

For example, Vernon has a terrible habit of stifling Seungkwan’s fabulous fashion sense.

Seungkwan and fashion go hand in hand. He knows all the latest trends, and he’s always looking stunning, even when he’s in bed in his pyjamas. But Vernon, with his baggy black sweats covered in pills, thinks that he has the right to *always* fix Seungkwan’s collar down.

Over the years they’ve competed against each other more than a handful of times, and each time, Vernon has the nerve to reach over and pull his collar back into place, effectively killing his stylish interpretation of the Paddington school squash uniform.

He’d done it at their last match too, fingers loosening their grip around his racquet and making their way to Seungkwan’s standing collar to fix it into place with a sigh.

Surely after five years Vernon should realise it’s intentional? And he does it so thoroughly too, making sure that it’s folded right at its original crease line, and perfectly angled with his shoulders.

Freak.

To make matters worse, at their last tournament, Vernon had had the nerve to make fun of his school. What was wrong with Rose Quartz as a school colour, anyway? Only people with masculinity as brittle as old parchment turn their noses to the colour pink. Seungkwan loves Rose Quartz; he doesn’t want to be getting mushy, but the meaning behind it is more than anything Denborough’s stupid ‘Serenity’ would hold. Like, that’s just sky blue? Stop trying to be cool?

Rose Quartz is unconditional love. It’s compassion, comfort, peace, and God damn it more schools need to teach the importance of that. Seungkwan thinks there’s nothing better than Paddington School of Later Education, where everyone is supportive of each other, and where school spirit is ingrained into their bones. Even their school motto, *altius exaltatus fueris*, is second to none.

Life’s not always about winning, it’s about being a good person. Except, that is, when it comes to squash, of course.
When the bell rings to signify their first period of class, it strikes Seungkwan that he’s in a spectacularly bitter mood today.

Again, he blames it on Vernon Chwe.

~*~

“Hey.” Seungkwan hears Bohyuk’s voice from above him, and he looks up. “You’re not having soulmate troubles again, are you? I told you it’s just going to take us time to decipher the name on your wrist, you’ve got nothing to worry about. We’re here to help.”

The kid’s voice is soft, supportive, and Seungkwan feels like crying.

“It’s not- that’s…”

“So it is about your soulmate, then?” Soonyoung plops himself down next to him. “Man, loosen up, would you? You’re eighteen, you’ve got time!”

Seungkwan bites into his apple dejectedly. He hadn’t been thinking about his soulmate, but now that his friends have brought it up, he’s feeling down about that too.

“It’s been like a month and a half!” he yells around his piece of fruit. “What if I’ve already met them and I’m missing out because I can’t read this damn chicken scratch!”

Soonyoung only pats him on the head at that, hops up, with the coins in his pocket clinking, and tells the distressed boy he’s in dire need of a Golden Gaytime.

“I’ll be right back, I don’t think the line at the tuckshop is too long, it’s only morning tea anyway.”

He feels a hand on his wrist, right where his soulmate tattoo is, and finds Bohyuk has taken his arm away to study his tattoo again. The boy’s eyes are squinted in concentration, and his teeth are digging into his tongue where it’s sticking out.

“I’ve got it!” he yells, suddenly, almost making Seungkwan drop his apple. “It’s Handsoap!”

“Aye, you’ve done lost yer mind, ya ningus,” Seungkwan shoves the back of Bohyuk’s head, but he has to admit he’s already feeling a lot better.

He takes his wrist back to study the name on his skin, and then looks back up at Bohyuk with a horrified expression plastered to his face.

“Fuck, you’re right, it is Handsoap.”

~*~

By lunchtime Seungkwan is back to normal, skipping down the corridor with a tune on his lips.

“You whistle too well,” Soonyoung grumbles the moment Seungkwan’s joined them.

“No Soonyoung, you just don’t whistle well enough,” he grins.

“ Fucking bastard, I bought you a Golden Gaytime, I deserve better than this!”

Seungkwan sits down under the shade of the tree that him and Soonyoung claimed back in Year 9, the one that’s had a penis engraved into it for eight years without a teacher noticing, and pulls out a sandwich from his lunchbox.
“I’ll buy you six Subway cookies if you shut up. And also if you don’t practice your whistling in front of me because 1. Your face is really ugly when you try to whistle and 2. It’s offensive to my ears.”

Soonyoung rolls his eyes, but accepts the offer, glad that his friend is back to being himself. He knows that he’ll waste money on as many Golden Gaytimes as the tuckshop has to offer so long as it’ll eventually make his friend smile.

“So,” Bohyuk nudges his side. “Any idea what this Handsoap is like?”

“You bet I do mate,” Seungkwan starts. “They’re white, they don’t have celiac disease, they’re not lactose intolerant, but they still don’t eat gluten or dairy. Except for ice cream, because it’s ice cream. And bloody Breaka flavoured milk, probably. They could be a vego? I feel like Handsoap’s the kind of person who’d stop eating meat because animals were too cute. And I feel them, honestly, but meat’s just too good to give up, you know? Their little brother’s name is like, Kale or something.”

Soonyoung is in tears on the ground by the end of the spiel.

“That’s rude to white people, dude. And vegetarians.”

“Yeah, but there’s a difference between vegetarians and Vegetarians™, Soonyoung.”

“I, on the other hand, am a carnivore.”

They end up in a laughing pile on the floor, and nothing they’ve said the entire lunchtime is even all that funny, but there’s something about being young and carefree that makes everything so much more enjoyable. Even eating lunch while not thinking about the impending doom of fifth period.

“Oh shitballs!” Soonyoung’s head pops out of the pile. “I have maths next!”

“Sucks to be you,” Seungkwan and Bohyuk share a smile.

And so, as they lift themselves off the ground to get ready for their respective classes, Seungkwan thinks, screw Vernon (but not literally, because ew), and screw Handsoap, because he’s going to have a good day today, thank you very much.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Morning Tea: An actual blessing, usually at around 10:00-10:30 depending on the school, it used to be called little lunch way back when, but it’s like a short amount of time to eat snacks and take a break between classes. It’s the same concept as afternoon tea!
- Breaka: A brand of flavoured milk. There are some horrendous ones, like lime. I’m too scared to try it.
- Vego: An abbreviation for vegetarian.

I’m pretty sure that’s all for this chapter’s dictionary? But feel free to correct me if I’m wrong.
Lots of Love, Motherfuckin’ Mingyu, Man

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

I'm literally so excited for all my assessment to be over, and I'm really glad to have written a couple of chapters up in advance! So, here's another update, courtesy of Elise.

It's in Mingyu's POV!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

19/03/17

Hey Bob, just thought I’d pop in to say hi again.

You’re probably sick of me by now, in all honesty. You’ve been listening to me bitch and moan for like, four weeks straight every day of the week without a break now? But hey, that’s what you’re here for, right? You can handle it?

I mean I hope so, because if you can’t, you’re terrible at being a diary, Bob.

So anyway, what I was going to say when I opened you up today was, predictably, about Wonwoo hyung.

Aren’t I great and respectable, using my honorifics? Ain’t a thing like that in this sunny land. Everyone’s your chingu ‘round these parts. I think he appreciates that I say ‘hyung’ though. I mean, I’m not entirely sure? But I feel like it makes him feel that slight bit more at home.

He’s so cute, have I told you that before? Like, when I first saw him he was pretty scary, I’ll be real. I already told you that back on the first day of school though. He looked totally bad-arse and like he could kick me onto the next planet if I pissed him off but everyday he keeps proving me wrong!

You probably wouldn’t believe me if I told you he’s the fluffiest person I’ve ever met. He’s like a big, soft scottish fold kitty that you just want to hold tight in your arms. Or like, a little raccoon. Like, I don’t know what raccoons are like for real? I’ve only seen one in a zoo, but I feel like he could be a raccoon. But are raccoons soft and fluffy and cuddleable?

I feel like I’m going off topic. Like I’m not? Because I’m still talking about Wonwoo? But this isn’t what I’d aimed to be talking about when I put my pen on the paper. Not that I have to follow set structures or shit like that, you’re a damn diary I do whatever the fuck I want, but you know.

So anyway, Bob, what I was trying to say was um, what was I trying to say?

Right, Wonwoo hyung.

You know he’s doing really well these days?

He’s gotten pretty close to Jun, they’re always in the library together and it’s super cute. I think Hao’s a little jealous because of that, but don’t worry Bob! I’ve been a good friend and I’ve been
spending ample amounts of time with him to get his mind off it all.

He’s so obvious, you know? Remember last year? It was like, the middle of winter, June or whatever and we still had swimming because we have too many students and not enough pool space for everyone to do swimming in summer. And us three’d gotten into the same sports class and Minghao literally had his eyes glued to Jun as he was getting undressed?

Fuck, that was so funny.

It’s cute though, I think Jun likes Hao back. I don’t know about you but I have a gut feeling they’re soulmates. It’s just an air about them. Remember that weird aura I was talking about when they first met each other back when Hao was fresh from China in Year 8?

Maybe that was the rotten pumpkin I ate the night before though. You remember that one, right? The disaster where the expensive pumpkin got hidden at the back of the fridge and the front of it was all mouldy? But it was so expensive that we just cut off the mouldy parts and cooked it anyway? Yeah, that was probably a mistake.

Oh shit, did I get off topic again?

So as I was saying,

Oh fuck I’m so sorry! I left the pen on the paper for too long and now you’ve bled through like five pages.

I was just trying to look for what I was talking about before I got sidetracked…

So I was gonna say

Ah Bob we’re gonna have to leave this for tomorrow, Mum’s screaming for me I think I forgot to do the dishes.

Lots of Love,

Motherfuckin’ Mingyu, Man
(aka your alliteration genius)

~*~

“Hyung, where’s your lunch?” Mingyu asks as he sits down beside Wonwoo, who sits at the table, forlorn and with a cloud over his head.

“Left it at home,” the boy mumbles in response, and Mingyu pouts at him.

“Aww that sucks, man! I’ll split my sandwich with you.” He hands it over to the elder with a smile, immediately tucking into his own half himself. He’s already made it halfway through his sandwich when he hears choking sounds coming from Wonwoo’s direction, and finds the boy with a hand over his mouth, retching, desperate not to spew out the contents in his mouth.

When Wonwoo has calmed down, his sandwich missing two bites and fallen to the ground, he looks up at Mingyu, teary-eyed.

“Did you just try to poison me?” he asks, breathless. “What was in that?”
Mingyu pauses, looks down at the food in his hands, then comes to a realisation.

“Ah, probably should’ve asked you if you liked Vegemite, hey. I’m sorry. I love Vegemite, so I slather the stuff on, but usually people just have it in moderation with butter. God, I can’t imagine how terrible that must’ve been for you…”

Jisoo looks over at Wonwoo, worried as he approaches the table, and turns an accusing eye to Mingyu (which is quite offensive, if he’s being honest, because what evidence is there for this to be his fault? It’s not like he always pulls shit like this, it was an accident) as he takes a seat.

“Vegemite,” Wonwoo rasps, noticing Jisoo’s stink eye, and grasps desperately for the water bottle that Jun offers with a stifled laugh.

“No one warned you Mingyu doesn’t have taste buds? I don’t know how he does it, honestly. Everyone knows Marmite is where it’s at.”

Jeonghan’s shrill voice comes slicing down before Wonwoo can ask what Marmite is, and he almost chokes again, this time on Jun’s water.

“Fucking stop it with the Marmite oh my God!” he screams. “No one likes that shit! All mite is weird and you need to stay away from it! Vegemite, Marmite, same shit smell, same shit taste!”

“Obviously your unrefined tongue doesn’t register the-” Mingyu tries to stop Jeonghan, but he can’t continue when Jisoo puts a firm hand on Jeonghan’s shoulder, face dark.

“That’s enough of that language on school grounds, Han,” he says, jaw tight.

“That’s enough of that language on school grounds, Han,” he says, jaw tight.

“So anyway!” Jeonghan chirps, like as if he hadn’t just been scolded (although it’s probably just that he’s too used to it… Does anyone not Jeonghan actually get scolded like that by Jisoo?), “Jisoo here is our resident Marmite enthusiast, and the only one. Mingyu loves Vegemite, as you’ve gathered, but everyone else finds both mites disgusting. Contrary to popular belief, not every person on this wonderful country of the land Down Under enjoys Vegemite.”

“It’s for heathens,” whispers Minghao with wide eyes, earning a great big smack from Mingyu.

“I’m a pure angel,” he hisses back at his friend. It’s unbelievable sometimes how the people you trust can turn their backs on you like this.

The tension rises tenfold as Mingyu snarls at Minghao, before ultimately he ends up bursting in laughter. He looks over to Wonwoo, who seems to have recovered from his escapade with Vegemite, but he looks completely and utterly lost, and Mingyu loses it all over again until he’s clutching at his stomach and almost in tears from the stitches.

“Hey guys?” Chan says, quietly, all of a sudden, and all ten of the heads turn to face the boy in concern.

Chan is looking down at his wrist where his soulmate tattoo will appear in just less than a year, his expression laced with fear. No one had noticed when he’d arrived, too busy fighting over Vegemite and Marmite and laughing over Wonwoo’s evident culture shock, but it’s clear whatever is on Chan’s mind has been resting there, brewing, for at least the whole day.

“Do you think there’s a chance a name won’t appear here?” a frail voice breaks over the words, and Seokmin rushes over to bundle his little brother up in a big bear hug.

“Hey, stop that, you. What’s got you thinking about stuff like that?”
“I had Biol just before and they were talking about statistics and-” Chan hiccups.

“Chan, darling,” Jeonghan coos, reaching a hand over to pat the boy’s head, “there have literally been fifteen cases of that happening in all of history. That’s since the start of time! It’s so rare, you have nothing to worry about. The last recorded person without a soulmate on their wrist was two centuries ago.”

“But how do you know-” he tries to start again, but the group won’t take it.

“Because you’re a great catch, and God’d be stupid not to put you with a pal for you to live out the rest of your life with,” Mingyu says, coming over to crouch in front of Chan. “You’ve got all of us to confirm that.”

The group turns into somewhat of a cuddle pile after that, lunchboxes thrown to the ground and all of them squished onto the metal table in an effort to wrap their arms around each other. Even Jihoon has a comforting hand on Chan’s back, patting slowly.

“Of all the things,” Seokmin laughs, after they’ve gotten in trouble by the teacher for sitting on the table and they’re back to using the piece of furniture like normal humans do. “Of all the things you’re worried about, it’s if you’re not going to have a soulmate?”

He’s cackling at this point, and Chan looks a little hurt that his brother suddenly seems to be belittling his problems.

“Man, do you know how fucking stupid you’re making me feel? While you were fretting over that, I was sitting right here, with my mind screaming ‘What if my soulmate has an arsehole name? What if her name’s Trinity? What if he’s bloody Chad?’ and here you are, with legitimate problems! What kind of an older brother am I?”

Chan cracks a smile slowly until he’s giggling, shoulders moving along with the sound.

“I thought I was the only one worried about that!” Seungcheol says next. “Because I swear to God if my soulmate is named Shazza I’m gonna kick the bucket! Let me tell you son, I will not live to see the day I have that name scrawled over my wrist.”

“Fuck, now you’ve got me scared!” Mingyu pulls a face.

“Right? I’d prefer no name over fucking Shazza any day.”

Wonwoo tilts his head ever so slightly, and slowly inclines himself in the direction of Junhui. He thought he’d been getting better at this whole True Blue experience thing, but today, on this bright, sunny lunchtime of the 20th of March, he has no idea what’s going on.

“What’s a Shazza?”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Marmite: The UK’s vegemite, to put it simply.
- Shazza: A horrendous nickname for the name "Sharon".
[work skin by La_Temperanza]
Step Eight

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little different, we're not entirely sure if it went in the direction we wanted it to? But we hope you enjoy it nonetheless! Props to Jeremy who shouldered most of this chapter and blessed us with beautiful, warm, fluffy domesticness.

To all you non-EXO people, we hope you enjoy this nonetheless!

And also, thank you ever so much for 100 kudos! It feels amazing knowing that you guys are liking this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

21st March, 2017

Junmyeon yawns; scrubs at his eyes.

He feels a terrible urge to wag school.

There’s nothing fun about spending a whole day surrounded by good-for-nothing delinquents wrapped up in wrinkly blue shirts and sloppy neckties, black school shoes scuffed until they look grey and non-school regulated banana-patterned socks peeking out from underneath too-short trousers after a growth spurt.

Junmyeon curses the day he ever said he wanted to thrust himself into hell like this.

“I want to become a teacher!” he mocks himself, voice pitched high and lips curled in a snarl. Then his cheeks droop into a pout. “Oh, Satan take the wheel.”

From beside him, a blanket-covered form nuzzles closer. “With the utmost of sincerity babe, shut the fuck up I’m trying to sleep.”

“This is your fault, you know!” Junmyeon pushes the man off of him and sits up. “I wouldn’t have become a teacher if you hadn’t encouraged me to change my course half way into first semester of university!”

“Myeon, I didn’t even meet you until the end of second year I-”

“I don’t have the time for this, Yifan. I actually have a job that I need to get to, unlike you.”

It’s a low jab, but honestly, Junmyeon isn’t in the mood.

“Besides, you know Yixing’s morning alarm is the smell of bacon, so I’ve gotta get cracking.”

As Junmyeon leaves the bed, he hears a low mumble of something that sounds suspiciously like “why does Yixing get bacon when Yifan doesn't”, but he decides to pay it no mind.

Soulmate or not, Yifan always has something to say about Junmyeon’s bacon.

Too salty, too oily, why did you choose this cut of bacon, don’t you know not to use that type of oil to
Acturally, can someone tell Junmyeon why on Earth the name on his wrist isn’t Yixing? That guy has the sense to appreciate Junmyeon’s bacon, even when it’s a little burnt at the edges.

But no, he sees the tattoo loud and clear; ‘YIFAN’ in wonky block letters stamped across his wrist for the world to see.

He reminisces as he heats the frying pan up on the stove, remembers the first time they’d met. The man had been introduced to him as Kris, and he hadn’t understood why the other had clammed up upon hearing the name ‘Junmyeon’. They were sitting at a round table, and-

“Is that bacon for me?” a sleepy voice says, revealing a half-naked man standing in the doorway.

A terribly unmanly scream leaves Junmyeon’s lips.

“Jesus, Xing! Put some clothes on!”

~*~

To live the life of one Kim Junmyeon, there are some necessary steps to be taken:

1. Wake up to your soulmate having stolen all of the blankets
2. Drag yourself out of the arms of said soulmate who never wakes up before 9am
3. Cook breakfast for your roommate who will otherwise not wake up in time for work
4. Wash the smell of bacon and grease off of yourself
5. Dress yourself presentably and choose a fun tie for the day
6. Wear your lightsaber tie bar if it’s May the 4th
7. Greet fellow teachers with a warm smile and uphold your reputation as a respectable student teacher that is invaluable to the school
8. Teach class and play with the gullible minds of ESL students
9. Sigh at lunch
10. Sigh some more
11. Play more with the gullible minds of ESL students with the sweetest smile on your face because even though you’re just a student teacher you’ve been left alone to your devices because Denborough Institute of Science doesn’t care enough about ESL to actually replace the real teacher who’s on long service leave
12. Tell off the students who don’t have their hats on
13. Come home to your soulmate grumbling as he pulls socks on because there’s always some noob who wants food deliveroo’d to their house for an afternoon snack
14. Cook dinner and mark homework or assessment depending on what point of the term it is and give a valiant effort at not spilling food on your students’ work
15. And so on and so forth because who the hell are you to be snooping around someone’s personal life?

Today, Junmyeon wants to particularly focus on step eight.

~*~

Junmyeon always likes to play with his students a little.

Sometimes he’ll get to the classroom well before class starts and be sitting at his desk, waiting for them with a small smile that never fails to creep out a few of the teenagers. Other days he’ll be late anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes, just to keep them on their toes. Sometimes he’ll wait
until the bell rings and walk in with the students, joining in on their conversations and laughing at their jokes, breaking the barrier of student and teacher in a way that kids hate and find terribly awkward.

Junmyeon knows the students hate it when he does that. It’s perhaps his favourite way to arrive to class.

Today, however, he’s sitting with his feet up on his desk, a fresh pile of worksheets sitting next to his boring black leather shoes, still slightly warm from the printer. The bell is going to ring in a few minutes and Junmyeon is appreciating the last few minutes of silence before today’s ESL lesson begins.

The kids in ESL are slightly more tolerable than the ones in other classes he’s had. Most of them don’t want to be there and resent the dean that assigned this dreaded compulsory class. All the kids have near perfect English, and Junmyeon mostly finds himself correcting the occasional wrong conjugation or misplaced apostrophe. In fact, it’s the native speakers who often need more help with the language.

Subsequently, Junmyeon needs something else to teach other than grammar that everyone in the room knows, and that’s where the class starts to get fun.

When Junmyeon had moved to Australia in primary school his friends had endlessly pranked him about everything Australian. He’d spent most of his first year in Australia believing that they were on the brink of a second Great Emu War and Brisbane could be invaded by emus at any time.

So naturally, Junmyeon considers it his duty as an Australian to pass on the knowledge he’d received.

His ESL classes have become somewhat famous around the school. His students often leave the class in either disbelief or horror, depending on whether Junmyeon decides to enlighten or prank them that day. No matter what he does, the ESL kids always leave with some new knowledge of Australia and all its quirks.

Today’s lesson definitely falls on the prank side. Junmyeon had spent a few hours last night preparing the worksheet for this class, and it was possibly his best yet. He’d decided today was the day to introduce the legend of the drop bear.

He’s made a wordsearch of Australian animals for them to do, citing it as ‘cultural studies’ and completely necessary for their ESL education. In between ‘cassowary’ and ‘crocodile’ (with a sneaky dundee after) is ‘drop bear’. The plan is to hand out the worksheet, then sit back and wait, until one of his students asks the inevitable.

Today will be a great day.

Once the bell rings all the boys file into the room in various states of enthusiasm. There’s one or two, like Youngjae, who absolutely love this class and never fail to warm Junmyeon’s heart to temperatures rivaling those of the Australian outback, and then there’s the likes of Jaebum who sit in the back and scowl.

“Mr. Kim! Can you tell us more dreamtime stories today?” Youngjae calls out, looking up at Junmyeon eagerly from his seat in the front row.

Junmyeon laughs a little. “Not today, Youngjae, maybe next lesson. I’ve got something planned for this lesson already.”
Youngjae pouts a bit, he really loves the dreamtime stories Junmyeon tells them, and never fails to ask for more of them nearly every lesson.

“Today,” Junmyeon starts, walking around the classroom to hand out the worksheets, “I’ve got an activity about Australian animals planned. I made a wordsearch!”

When he looks around the classroom, Junmyeon knows that those expressions on his students’ faces are incredulity and embarrassment on behalf of his dorky self. Never mind that though, he’s getting ready for his best prank yet this year.

“It’s super easy, guys, just find all the Australian animals and pay attention to the occasional odd letter combination, you know the drill.”

With that, Junmyeon goes back to his desk, his unsuspecting students pulling out pens and highlighters to complete the sheet. Showtime.

It comes sooner than he expects. It’s only been a few minutes and one of the students is already raising his hand. It’s Wonwoo, the newest in the class and Junmyeon honestly isn’t sure if he’s ever heard him speak.

“Uh, Mr. Kim? This says ‘drop bear’, right? Is that an actual animal?” Wonwoo asks, looking almost afraid of the answer and Junmyeon thinks he’s found the student most scared by Australia.

Before he has a chance to answer, Hoseok interjects, in Korean no less, to say “oh, they’re not real Wonwoo, it’s just a joke.”

This was not part of the plan. Damn Hoseok for nearly ruining his prank. Junmyeon makes sure to glare right at him when he says in the most fake nice voice he can “no Korean in the ESL classroom!”

He then turns to Wonwoo to do some damage control, ignoring the “yo, yeah man” he gets back from Hoseok.

“Drop bears are a quite rare species of koala that live mainly towards the coast of Australia in bushy areas. They’re really quite violent, actually, and drop down from trees onto tourists and campers a lot. There’s a lot of documented cases of them. The most famous is the story of... Kath Day-Knight! She was a camper who was out bush walking by herself, when she got attacked by a drop bear. She wasn’t found until two days later and nearly died!”

Junmyeon thinks he’s done quite well with his little spiel, but then Kunpimook, that little troublemaker, who Junmyeon had actually liked up until now, says “but they’re just a myth, aren’t they?”

Shit. Time for desperate measures.

“Oh, no! They are most definitely real! My boyfriend even nearly got attacked by one!”

“Oh, wait, you have a boyfriend?” That incredulous reaction was not the one that Junmyeon had been hoping to get. It came from that French kid who sits in the back and never contributes in class discussions. Junmyeon can feel himself getting offended, and can’t resist the urge to defend himself.

“Yes, I do! His name is Yifan, here look at this picture!” Junmyeon whips out his phone, quickly connects it to the electronic whiteboard, and projects a cute selfie of him and Yifan for the whole class to see, showing the students that yes, he does actually have a boyfriend, thank you very much.
Most of the class just look a little confused, and again, embarrassed (yes, Junmyeon has gotten the memo that he’s one of those teachers), but Wonwoo’s eyes go wide and he suddenly yelps out “Kris?”

Junmyeon lets out a little laugh. Of course.

He only smiles at Wonwoo and takes the photo down off the whiteboard.

“So yes, I do have a boyfriend, and yes, he almost got mauled by a drop bear.”

“So they are real?!” Wonwoo almost shouts, eyes wide for an entirely different reason.

Mission accomplished.

~*~

Junmyeon is still grinning when he gets home that evening, the high of ESL still not quite worn off. No matter how much he messes with those kids, he does love them. He goes through his getting home routine; he unpacks then repacks his bag for tomorrow, changes into some comfier clothes, he waters the pot plants on the balcony, making sure to not forget the orchid that sits by the kitchen window.

He potters around the apartment for a bit, tidying the messes that Yifan and Yixing have left scattered about the place. Neither of them are home yet, but Junmyeon moves to the kitchen to start dinner anyway, knowing from experience that they’ll turn up at some stage before he’s done cooking.

Once he’s in the kitchen Junmyeon hooks his phone up to the speakers and queues Delta Goodrem’s Innocent Eyes. It’s not unusual for him to dance around the kitchen when he’s cooking, doing what Yifan describes as his ‘hoppy bop dance’. Admittedly, it is just Junmyeon dorkily jumping around and shaking his shoulders but he doesn’t let that stop him.

By the time he’s nearly chopped everything and is just finishing up the carrots, the front door opens for the second time that evening, and he turns around to see Yifan coming through the door.

Yifan kicks his shoes off into the pile beside the door that Junmyeon had just tidied, slipping his bag off his shoulder to the floor where it squashes at least at least three different shoes, all of them Junmyeon’s.

“Hey babe,” he calls, walking over to rest his head on Junmyeon’s shoulder, back bending to accommodate the height difference in a way that Junmyeon knows is going to warrant multiple physio trips in approximately twenty years.

“Hey Fan,” Junmyeon rests his head against Yifan’s putting down the knife for a minute. “How was work?”

“The usual,” he hums, “lots of food, lots of traffic, but no annoying kids today.”

“Always a bonus.”

The two of the them stay there for a minute, Junmyeon relishing the feeling of Yifan pressed up against his back and the warmth that doesn’t bother him despite it being nearly thirty degrees out. Yifan closes his eyes and simply listens. He listens to Junmyeon’s breathing, listens to the sound of traffic on the street outside their apartment, listens to the soft hum of air conditioning and the melody of Delta Goodrem.
Just as Junmyeon moves away to pick the knife back up, Born to Try comes through the speakers, and Yifan pulls Junmyeon back against his chest.

“Dance with me, Myeon.”

Junmyeon huffs a little, and although he’ll never tell Yifan, his heart is melting just a little. “I gotta cook, Yifan.”

“Never mind that for a minute,” Yifan smiles down at him, that ridiculously huge smile full of teeth and gums that Junmyeon had laughed at when they’d first met, but now never fails to make him smile back.

Junmyeon lets himself be pulled into the middle of the kitchen and into Yifan’s arms. The taller starts up a gentle sway with his arms resting on Junmyeon’s waist, temple pressing against the shorter’s forehead.

They spin slowly around the small kitchen, Yifan humming softly, having lived with Junmyeon long enough to know most of Delta’s lyrics. Junmyeon loves the moments like this - the ones where words aren’t needed, and it’s enough to just be Junmyeon and Yifan, two men who live in their small flat that they share with a crazy man called Yixing and somewhat successfully try to navigate the wild years of their twenties. It’s the downward curve of Yifan’s neck and the delicate curl of Junmyeon’s fist in Yifan’s shirt that speak for them. Movements that say I love you in so many different ways neither of them can express with words.

Yifan tightens his arms around Junmyeon’s waist, and he can’t help but push his face into Yifan’s neck in an effort to get closer because it’s absurd how purely content and safe he feels in these long arms. Despite never having enough blankets and the endless shoes that will get ruined and the expensive physio bills he knows will come, Junmyeon silently thanks whatever deity it was that made this ridiculous man his and wrote a name even more important than his own across his wrist.

Because, despite all his flaws, Kim Junmyeon loves Wu Yifan.

And later that night, when Yifan comes back from taking out the rubbish wearing socks and thongs, Junmyeon shakes his head, pulling up his book to hide the small smile he can’t stop from slipping onto his face. Because Kim Junmyeon loves Wu Yifan.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Wag: To wag is to skip; the same concept as the term "chuck a sickie".
- ESL: Stands for English as a Second Language, we don't know if other places use different abbreviations for this? But yeah I (Elise) used to be in ESL, and it's basically just a class for people who might be a little behind in their English skills.
- Long service leave: If an employee has been with a business for a very long time, they get long service leave for their efforts. It's like a thank you holiday.
- Drop Bears: Surely we don't need to tell you any more about them?
- Cassowary: The Devil version of an emu.
- Crocodile Dundee: A horrendous movie.
- Dreamtime stories: Really beautiful Aboriginal tales about the spiritual ancestors. Definitely worth a look at!
• Delta Goodrem: A singer-songwriter.
“Wonwoo hyung, hurry up! You’ll miss the supporter’s bus!” Jisoo calls, beckoning the frazzled boy over.

Sometimes he can’t believe that Jisoo is the youngest of them, considering how responsible he seems. They all treat Chan like as if he’s the baby, when in reality he’s the third — now fourth, since Wonwoo has joined the group — oldest, so it’s easy to forget how old everyone is. In fact, Seokmin and Hansol can be so childish sometimes, that he almost can’t believe he was born in the same year as them.

Jisoo holds a massive banner that reads ‘GO VERNON!’ painted carefully in the school’s signature Serenity Blue colour. Jeonghan has a glittery rendition in the form of a poster, and consequently is also covered from head to toe in blue glitter, his usual glowing aura now intensified by a thousand.

GPS, Mingyu tells Wonwoo on the bus to the event with great care, stands for ‘The Great Public Schools’ Association of Queensland Inc.’, and is the biggest inter-school sporting competition Wonwoo will ever witness in his life. It’s intense, and so much effort goes into team spirit and cheering on their school that apparently by the end of it all he should be sweating just as much as the sportsmen.

At Denborough Institute of Science, Hansol has been the star player ever since Year 8, and it turns out that he’s actually attending Denborough on scholarship thanks to his hard work and raw talent. He’s been first-in-line from day dot and hasn’t slipped once, and none of the newer students have been able to throw him off his throne. Even the second-in-line, a determined boy from two years below, is significantly behind Hansol in speed and skill. When it comes to squash, the whole school refers to Hansol as ‘King Vernon’.

Wonwoo finds that a laughable matter; knowing Hansol personally has lead him to believe the boy is anything but a king.

The jester, maybe.

“I bought a family pack of Butter Menthol, so we should be okay, but try to save your voices until we at least get to the stadium, alright?” says Chan as he shakes his bag while they’re waiting impatiently to get off the supporter’s bus and into the stadium.

“We’ll make sure those damn Paddo’s will hear us roar,” Seungcheol growls, drawing a line across
his neck with his thumb.

Which is why, to this day, Wonwoo has neglected to tell his new friends he has a little brother who attends said school. In fact, he’s straight up been too afraid to tell them he has a sibling at all. At this point he’s not entirely sure if he can get the words ‘Paddington School of Later Education’ past his throat and out of his mouth.

He figures that if there’s any day to say something though, that’s today, so with a somewhat strengthened resolve and the knowledge that if he ends up friendless all he needs to do is start a hermit life in the library, he decides that when there’s a good break he’ll tell his friends about Bohyuk.

Wonwoo’s ears begin ringing the moment he steps into the stadium, the sound of adolescent boys screaming their lungs out a massive punch to his eardrums.

The squash representatives of all the schools are off warming up, and Wonwoo thinks he spots Hansol’s unruly bedhead from up in the stands.

When he looks around to see all the other schools that they’ll be up against, Wonwoo spots multiple seas of blue, along with some greens and reds, until of course, his eyes land on the pastel pink parade that is Paddington School of Later Education’s section in the stands.

“My school’s colour is *Rose Quartz*, hyung.” Wonwoo can hear Bohyuk’s voice nagging him in his mind.

He sits down beside Mingyu where he’s gesticulating wildly in an effort to relay some crazy story to Minghao, and watches as Jisoo, Jeonghan and Seungcheol buzz around trying to distribute little Vernon Support paddle pop sticks, all complete with dorky photographs of him screenshotted from Snapchat.

Jihoon struggles to tape up a poster to the back wall of their stand due to his height until Seokmin steps in, and Chan and Jun are off in their own world trying to come up with an effective cheer and dance to show their support.

With much trepidation (GPS is a much larger ordeal than he could have expected despite being warned, and it’s a little intimidating to be surrounded by this many teenage boys who look just about ready for war), he settles back into his chair, waiting for the matches to begin.

~*~

As the seniors of the school, Year 12s must supply the younger grades with ample energy to keep them cheering for the day.

According to Jihoon, the greatest tool for a sugar high is cordial. Specifically, Cottée’s Raspberry-flavoured Red Cordial. And as a senior and henceforth in charge of supplying energy, Jihoon has five bottles of said red cordial, barely diluted, sitting in a tower of multiple 20L drink eskies.

Jisoo is equipped with a mountain of lollies that puts Hansol’s previous Coles-escapade pile to shame, although Wonwoo sees many of the same treats that Hansol had picked up amongst Jisoo’s collection. Only this time, there’s the addition of ‘Wagon Wheels’, which he assumes to be the Australian version of a choco pie, ‘Roll-ups’, which are... well they’re nice, but Wonwoo can’t seem to get them out of his teeth, and ‘Chicos’, which, despite Chan’s vehement appraisals towards it, seem like Satan’s pointed devil tail in candy form.

He can’t confirm it from being too afraid to put one to his mouth.
Although the teachers seem to be concerned that there’s no sight of fruit (or anything remotely healthy, for that matter) in the vicinity, Seungcheol has the mind to bring with him _savory_ treats so that the entire school doesn’t end up in the bathroom with stomach aches.

Seungcheol being Seungcheol, this of course includes Cheezels, but the boy also introduces Wonwoo to two new snacks called ‘Burger Rings’ and more importantly, ‘Jumpy’s’, a snack that Wonwoo is endlessly amused by as he looks into the packet to see kangaroo-shaped chips.

Jun pulls out a never ending stack of containers from his bag like as if he’s Mary Poppins, and opens one of them up to offer Wonwoo its contents.

“I’ll be real and say these are my specialty. I mean, they’re shit-easy to make, but that’s not the point.”

He reaches into the container to hand Wonwoo one.

“It’s called a chocolate crackle, and I promise it won’t hurt you.”

While Jun makes the rounds through the gathered students, Wonwoo reaches a tentative hand to fold the patty case over so that he can get a bite of this ‘chocolate crackle’ that his friend seems to be so proud of.

It’s crunchy, which Wonwoo feels like he should have predicted considering the name includes the word ‘crackle’, and despite its simplicity Wonwoo has to agree that Jun has made it well.

That is, until Mingyu blows the boy completely out of the water with the contents of _his_ containers.

Show off.

“The party’s never started until Gyumingtons are in town!” he yells, ripping open a container as he steals the show.

Apparently, Mingyu’s lamingtons are so famous amongst Denborough students that they have their own name, and they’ve been a bake stall staple ever since he started making them back in Year 9.

The difference between a lamington and a Gyumington, Wonwoo is told solemnly by a passing tenth-grader, is all in the coating of the sponge cake. A traditional lamington, he has been made aware, is a square sponge cake covered in chocolate sauce and dessicated coconut. A Gyumington, alternately known as the fairy lamington, however, is covered in chocolate sauce and followed by dessicated coconut _and_ hundreds and thousands, with the emphasis on the hundreds and thousands.

Watching the squash matches entails a lot of stealing too many Gyumingtons and in general not paying much attention when the competition is not against his own school, and it seems to be a notion that the rest of the students around him are also familiar with.

When the Gyumington containers are empty save for stray sprinkles and the lollies and chocolate crackles are running low, Denborough Institute of Science is buzzing with energy, prepared for their representative to step into the court.

Needless to say, Wonwoo regrets not bringing earbuds with him so that he could plug out all the screaming. Not that he wasn’t also screaming in support, but like… maybe Australian’s need to calm down a little? It’s just a sports competition, not the end of the world?

~*~
Hansol is a true star on the court, and he obliterates the opposing school in what feels like just seconds of playing. The other guy is wearing a red and black uniform, his bulky body looking menacing all until Hansol serves (in the literal sense), then serves his arse to him on a plate (not in a literal sense).

When he comes up to the stands after his win, all the students go crazy trying to climb over each other just to congratulate him, and Wonwoo is quick to notice Hansol’s actually captured quite a few hearts, as he watches an idiotic group of guys literally flutter down towards the boy, eyelashes batting a mile a minute as if they were six-year-old girls trying to get their parents to buy them a puppy.

“So uh, you were really cool out there. I liked when you did the Mizuki,” one of the guys says. He’s so obviously trying to play up the fact that he knows a squash term (Wonwoo can’t tell if Hansol actually did do this ‘Mizuki’, let alone well, so although he’s judging he probably should’ve brushed up on his squash knowledge too), winking as he’s egged on by his friends.

The boy is thirstier than a koala found in a bush fire, if that’s even possible, and he looks familiar too. Ah, that’s right. This is the same arse who was harassing a girl two years below him because she wouldn’t give him a kiss.

Thirsty.

Luckily, Hansol seems to have other priorities, when all he does is say his thanks and moves to stand right in front of Mingyu.

“Please tell me you saved me a Gyumington,” he pleads, voice desperate. He’s on his knees, sweat dripping down his skin in waves, and he looks so overwhelmingly pitiful that Wonwoo hopes for everyone’s sake Mingyu has an extra Gyumington.

“Well, I might’ve made one just for you…” Mingyu trails off, before producing an entire slab of Gyumingtons that quite literally has Hansol’s name plastered over it in white chocolate icing.

“I love you, I love you, I love you!” Hansol proclaims, jumping up at Mingyu before taking a step back and remembering that the boy is probably not going to accept a hug from him in his sweaty state.

Once Hansol is considerably cooled down and the attention of the students has been bought by a gruelling match by two other schools that Wonwoo quite frankly does not give two shits about, he comes to the conclusion that it’s now or never to introduce his friends to his little brother.

It seems the two are telepathically connected when Wonwoo’s phone buzzes to a text message from Bohyuk that reads “Hyuuuuung! I want you to meet my friends before next year damn it!”, and honestly, where was this kid’s respect? Had it gone down the drain with the lax Australian culture?

“So, guys,” Wonwoo starts slowly, brushing a hand through his hair out of nervousness. “There’s someone I want you to meet…”

~*~

“Hyung!” a voice calls from the corridor that connects all the stands, and Wonwoo physically feels the breaths of every boy behind him stop.

“Who’s that?” Seokmin breaks the silence, voice just above a whisper.
“My uh, my brother Bohyuk, guys. Didn’t I… didn’t I say I had a little brother?”

There’s a palpable silence that settles once more, as Wonwoo’s friends look at each other in disbelief. He can’t tell if their faces are like that because they’re having trouble wrapping their minds around Wonwoo having a little brother, if it’s because said little brother is a student of Paddington School of Later Education of all places, or if it’s a combination of the both.

“Hyukkie my darling! Where’d you run off to?” an unfamiliar voice sings, floating down to where the boys are gathered.

“Boo,” Hansol says, almost as a snarl when a familiar face is revealed.

“Oh, Seungkwan hyung this is my older brother I told you about!” Bohyuk says, seemingly unaware of the tension that’s been slowly bubbling up. Wonwoo takes it that either this Seungkwan has neglected to tell his little brother about the rivalry, or Bohyuk has been, as always, quite painfully oblivious to everything.

“Wait,” Hansol steps forward before anyone can say another word. He throws a pointed look to the competitor he’s come to know and hate as ‘Boo’ for five years. “How do you spell your name?”

Boo scoffs, before deciding to answer the question.


Seungkwan isn’t able to finish the sentence as Hansol shoots towards him and grabs at his wrist, pulling the boy forward with a “give me that”.

Seungkwan protests, jumping backwards as he proclaims that he can’t let his precious squash wrist be damaged by Hansol, but after another growl from the boy, he acquiesces.

“What the actual fuck?” Hansol then whispers, more to himself than anyone else. “It’s you.”

Everyone in the corridor tilts their heads slowly, confused.

“It’s you .”

As if a miracle has blossomed in the heart of Wonwoo’s little brother, Bohyuk is the first one to catch on, although if Wonwoo’s being honest, it couldn’t be the worst time for him to be the first one to understand something.

“You’re Handsoap!” he yells, startling the pair.

“I- my name is not Handsoap , have you even looked at your own friend’s wrist? It clearly says Hansol.”

“Hansol-ah,” Minghao whispers, knowing full well that now is not the time. “Your handwriting is shit.”

In retaliation, Hansol whips around and drags Seungkwan towards his friends, baring his wrist for them all to see.

“It says Hansol!”

“Listen, buddy. Hate to break it to you. Was there a mix up on your birth certificate? That says Handsoap.”
“Jihoon, I swear to-”

Hansol is abruptly cut off by his newly-found soulmate, who seems to snap out of his daze as he yanks his arm back and gives the boy a once over.

“I think you’ve got something wrong. Maybe I’m your soulmate, but you’re sure as hell not mine. For starters, your name’s not Handsoap, and um, hate to break *this* to you, but it’s not Hansol either, *Vernon*.”

Wonwoo gets a queasy feeling in his stomach at that, and he turns to Junhui, wincing.

“Ahh,” Mingyu is the one brave enough to step in this time. “More stuff that we hate to break but… Vern is his English name and uh…”

“Ducking motherducker of all ducks!” Seungkwan yells. “Are you kidding me?”

In a burst of outrage, Seungkwan stomps off to the bathrooms, screaming for no one to follow him, leaving Hansol to muse by himself.

“Fate is crazy,” he mutters into the quiet.

Of all the people his soulmate could have been, it’s his number one squash nemesis, and the very guy he’s despised for five years straight. Not to mention, now that he thinks about it, what are the chances that the guy is also born early in 1999, to already have his soulmate tattoo too?

“The world is crazy.”

~*~

Boo Seungkwan returns, some handful of minutes later, cheeks flushed with colour but breath no longer short.

Before another potential fight can even begin to manifest, Jeonghan steps in.

“So Wonwoo, introduce us to your little brother, would you?”

Wonwoo tries to shake his head no, but it’s no use once the sentence has left Jeonghan’s lips.

“This is Bohyuk, he’s two years younger than me, and he goes to Paddington School of Later Education. And Bohyuk, these are my new friends. You’ve met Mingyu-”

“Hold up, he’s met Mingyu?”

“Stop it with the suggestive eyebrows, Cheol.”

“-that over there-”

“I am not a *that*, I am a *he*, thank you very much.”

“-is Seokmin, his little brother Chan, Jun, Minghao, Jihoon, Jisoo, Jeonghan and Seungcheol. Obviously you’re aware of who Hansol is by now.”

“Well this is Seungkwan,” Bohyuk says, pointing to the red-faced boy. “I gather you’re all familiar with him judging by the previous… happening? He’s super nice. He found me when I was eating lunch by myself and I help him practice squash sometimes.”
“He’s a good dongsaeng,” Seungkwan says, voice incredibly soft compared to the usual shouting the group has become accustomed to. He still seems so lost, struck like lightning by the new information he’s been handed and unable to recover.

“Oh guys, I was wondering where you’d disappeared to!” another face pops into the corridors, and hold on, isn’t that bleached hair guy from the Great Macca’s Showdown of 2k17?

It dawns on Wonwoo that the two friends Bohyuk sometimes talks about when he’s feeling like not being a moody stereotypical teenager are the same two people that had tried to steal their Macca’s table back some Fridays ago, the same Friday that Bohyuk had been grounded because their mother had found out he’d broken a precious family heirloom.

He can easily see this becoming very messy. So long as nothing else-

“I feel like now’s a good time for me to introduce you guys to someone!” Seokmin chirrups, voice ten times brighter and louder than usual, as if it’s being forced. “This is my neighbour and best friend of sixteen years, my soulmate, my other half, the love of my life, Kwon Soonyoung, guys!”

The response he’s met with is perhaps not ideal, but considering the shitstorm they’ve all been hit with in the space of around thirty minutes, it probably could have been a lot worse.
Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- GPS: An inter-school sporting competition amongst some select schools. Obviously, Denborough and Paddington are made up, but GPS is a real
competition!
- Butter Menthol: A cough lolly (lozenge?). Tastes pretty good, all things considered.
- Esky: A... cooler box? You know, like you chuck ice in it and put your food/drinks in there and it keeps it cool? In this case it's a specific drink esky, so it's just like a jug with a tap that keeps the drinks cool??
- Wagon Wheels: Quite a few countries have these, I believe, but they're a chocolate-coated marshmallow biscuit sandwich.
- Roll-ups: Kind of like a fruit leather? But definitely more like candy and 100% not healthy at all despite what they try to tell you.
- Chicos: You know jelly babies? Those, but chocolate flavoured. Jeremy likes them but Elise...
- Burger Rings: They're like onion rings, but supposedly they taste like burgers? They don't, but they're not bad, so.
- Jumpy's: A classic. Cracker chips shaped like kangaroos.
- Chocolate crackle: A bake stall staple; chocolate and rice bubbles (the cereal) mixed together.
- Lamingtons: Sponge cake dipped in chocolate and covered in desiccated coconut.
“I can’t believe you got that job and not me,” Seokmin pouts, crossing his arms.

“If it makes you feel any better, it’s probably because I’m not eighteen yet, and that means they don’t have to pay me as much,” Chan soothes, running a hand over his brother’s shoulders.

“Well if that’s their focus I don’t want to work for them anyway,” the older of the two turns up his nose. “They don’t deserve my car-washing prowess.”

Chan laughs, shaking his head.

“Trust me hyung, you’re much better off with a job at Coles.”

“But,” Seokmin starts, “imagine the pun privileges!

The younger gives his brother a disappointed look before straightening the polo shirt of his uniform and heading for the door. It won’t do for him to be late for his very first shift at Everyday Broom Broom, especially not when Seungcheol is on the same shift as him; he knows, as two years his car-washing senior the kid will tease him mercilessly if he screws up.

As Seokmin watches Chan close the front door, he can’t help but feel betrayed by the universe — how dare his little brother get a part-time job before him? It’s not like it’s his fault for being born a year earlier.

He takes his sulking back up to his bedroom.

~*~

There are many things that make Chan a very talented human bean. For example, his expert dancing skills, his overwhelming love for Michael Jackson, and his ability to have his hair shaped like a duck’s tail each and every day.

These, however, are not helpful skills in car-washing.

Despite what musicals may fool one to think, being able to sing and dance at the same time in nothing but your togs in the middle of summer is not useful for being employed at Everyday Broom Broom.

In fact, it is a skill that is entirely unneeded.

Not, of course, that Chan thought he would need it, it’s just that…
Well, maybe Everyday Broom Broom should’ve hired the other Lee brother, because washing cars is not his thing.

“Chan, oh my Lord that is a microfibre cloth! That’s not for cleaning the-” Seungcheol runs for the shorter boy, knocking him over and onto the wet concrete ground to stop him from making a mess.

The younger sighs, ruffling his fringe in thought.

“How do we convince the manager to get you to only man the till without getting you fired for being incompetent?”

~*~

It’s two hours later that Chan finds his talent in car washing.

Yes, you may all hail Lee Chan, master of wheels.

Seungcheol watches on in awe as the manager literally awards (awards!) Chan with a bonus for being the most proficient employee in wheel-washing, leaving each car’s hubcap spotless and shining like no one has ever seen before.

“Chan, you must be a natural!” the man praises, shaking his head in disbelief. “Look at that, it’s shining like a diamond!”

Childishly, Chan pokes his tongue out at Seungcheol, who stands agog with grease smudged across his cheek, a petulant look forming across his features.

He huffs once, then chucks his rag into the bucket of soapy water, before claiming a toilet break.

~*~

By lunchtime Seungcheol is over his petty moping, and the two sit together with their own renditions of acceptable lunch food, ranging from pop tops and sandwiches to nothing but cheezels (you can guess which one’s lunch is which).

From where they sit leaning against the wall on the floor of the break room, Seungcheol’s legs stretch far past Chan’s, who kicks his own up and down at the unfairness of genetics.

Seungcheol looks down at him, seeing the other boy’s eyes lit up with his trademark youthful glee, and realises just how much it has been missing. Suddenly, Chan is squashed under the weight of a much heavier body, and a hug is being forced on him.

“Yah, Seungcheol, get off me. We’ve talked about this; my body cannot hold the weight of ten idiots,” Chan scolds, slapping Seungcheol’s back in a desperate attempt to get him to move.

“But Channieeeeee,” Seungcheol coos, not letting him go for anything, and the two roll around on the floor, one getting repeatedly hit, the other getting a slightly sore palm.

Eventually, they abandon fighting in favour of just lying on the slightly dusty floor, feeling the cool tiles seep into their skin in an offering of a weak opposition to the never-ending summer.

Their food lies forgotten off to the side, and if one of Chan’s sandwiches has gotten squashed under Seungcheol’s boot, that won’t prove an issue until much later.

Seungcheol sighs, brings his chin up to rest on his hand, using the other to ruffle Chan’s hair, disturbing his precious duck’s tail. None of them really know why they all baby Chan, there’s just
something about him that they want to protect (Seungcheol has a feeling it’s his height, because he’s the shortest apart from Jihoon and there’s no way anyone would ever try to baby him).

“Channie, really though,” he starts, “are you okay?”

Seungcheol is genuinely concerned, but all Chan does is roll his eyes and hit him again.

“God, you’re not that heavy, Seungcheol, your muscles aren’t that big.”

If Seungcheol pouts for a moment, he’ll deny it forever, but he really has been working on his arms and is only a little disappointed that Chan isn’t impressed by them.

“No, Chan, I mean… well, ever since that time at lunch when we were talking about soulmates, I don’t know, you just seem a little… sad? Even though you said you were okay, are you really?"  Seungcheol doesn’t stop patting Chan’s hair, giving the other boy some comfort while he tries to find the words he wants.

“I suppose it’s just that even though I know I will get a name, I just can’t believe that someone will ever love me that much? When I look at all of you, and Seokmin hyung especially cause he already has his name, I can see how you would all make someone the luckiest soulmate ever. I don’t know that I’ll ever be good enough to be someone’s whole world. I mean, I’m just an average kid whose only skill is dancing to Michael Jackson. I find it easy to be confident when I’m performing, I can do that in my sleep. But when it’s just me? When I’m just Lee Chan? I can’t help but wonder if someone could ever be content with being stuck with me forever.”

Chan ducks his head into Seungcheol’s shoulder, taking comfort in the smell of industrial strength soap and petrol that has become so familiar to him after only half a day. Seungcheol only moves to hug him, wrapping his arms Chan in a way he desperately hopes is comforting enough.

“It’s okay to have doubts, Chan. We all do. It might not be about soulmates, but you’ve seen the number of times one of our group has been freaking out. When I look at you though, I see a brilliant guy who’s going to make someone so, so happy. And you’re more than just a dancer. You are amazing when you’re performing, but that’s just one part of you. There are so many other things that make you you, from your silly little duck hair to the way we all know you care so deeply about every one of us under that pout. Don’t ever imagine that you won’t be good enough for anyone, because one day someone will come along that will make you happy, and you will make them happy, and that’s all you need. Don’t doubt how much you have to offer someone, Lee Chan.”

The boys sit there, half lying on the floor, wrapped around each other for the rest of their lunch break. It’s only when they’re getting up after their boss has called out for them that Chan finally speaks.

“Thank you, Seungcheol. Sometimes I wonder how you’re not my hyung. You always know just what to say.” With one last hug, Chan ducks out of the break room, leaving Seungcheol staring after him, a small smile on his face — one that isn’t exactly happy, but isn’t unhappy either.

~*~

Seungcheol opens his front door with a sigh, stretching his back as he walks down the hall. Car washing strains his back on a good day, and today is leaning towards a little below average. After two years he’s gotten used to the push and pull on his muscles, making him feel ten years older than he really is, which only serves to make the others call him a dad even more than they already do.

He can’t stop thinking about Chan and the devastated look on his face, about the whole mess with
Hansol and the kid from Paddington, and Seokmin and this Soonyoung guy who’s apparently been around for a lot longer than any of them. The next year is going to be tough for all of them, and Seungcheol will be damned if he’s not there to help his boys through every single tiny problem.

It’s just as he’s coming out of the shower, humming the last of Guy Sebastian’s latest single Set In Stone, when he moves to hang up his towel and notices something. Something that was most definitely not there a minute ago, and something that should not even be there in the first place.

Something that is going to change his life a hell of a lot quicker than he had been prepared for.

Seungcheol’s life is about to get a whole more complicated, because sitting right on his skin are not one, but two names, curling starkly over the pale inside of his wrists.

Jeonghan.

Jisoo.

Fuck.

Seungcheol leans against the bathroom wall and slowly slides down to the floor. He’s only seventeen, his tattoo shouldn’t be turning up for months yet. And two names? He’s never heard of anyone whose tattoo has come early, let alone anyone who has two names. The one thing Seungcheol doesn’t even want to think about is how well he knows the names on his wrists. He really doesn’t want to think about the fact that his two best friends are apparently his soulmates.

A shaky laugh bursts out of his chest.

It’s just his luck.

Despite helping Chan out with his soulmate troubles, Seungcheol really has no idea how to deal with his own new-found problem. The easiest solution is to curl up in his doona and fall asleep, a few tears mixing their way into his dreams.

~*~

It’s a flash of early morning sun through his window that wakes Seungcheol up the next day, coming through the gap between his curtains that he neglected to close before he regressed into his hibernation the night before.

It’s not like the movies where he wakes up and thinks everything is right with the world until he remembers all his woes. Seungcheol wakes up staring straight at the word Jisoo on his right wrist and it’s like he never went to sleep.

Rolling onto his back, Seungcheol stares at the ceiling for god knows how long, ignoring his phone from where it buzzes on his desk. If he were to check, he knows he’d find a few messages from Jisoo, the usual twenty from Jeonghan when one will do, something in the group chat the three of them have, and probably a meme in the group chat with all eleven of them.

There’s too much Jeonghan and Jisoo for his sanity to remain intact, so he leaves the phone alone. He knows from experience that he can’t ignore their messages for too long. Back when he’d had the flu in grade nine and hadn’t replied for a day and a half, they’d blown up his phone and eventually turned up at his house.

It takes him a while to get the energy to move, but he manages to send out a short sorry i’m sick to pacify them, falling back into his bed the moment he hits send.
His mother eventually finds him like that, the phone on the floor lighting up every few seconds with a new message, Seungcheol tucked into his doona like a little caterpillar in a way she recognises, but thankfully hasn’t seen too many times before.

Seungcheol only feels the slight pressure of her hand slipping through his hair, and she trusts her son enough to tuck the doona more firmly around him, slips quietly out of the room and goes to call the school to let them know her son won’t be coming in today.

~*~

Seungcheol decides one day of moping is enough. He forces himself out of bed, dresses himself in the uniform that, for once, does not seem ugly to him, just blessedly long-sleeved. He’s planning to keep this soulmate business to himself, and it’s somewhat comforting to know that at least the stiff school shirt is on his side.

On the way to school he keeps telling himself you can do this, you can face your two best friends knowing you are now bound to them for life without breaking down in a puddle of confusion, tears and despair.

The usual route he walks doesn’t seem as bright as it usually appears. The flowers winding delicately through that one house’s fence don’t capture his eyes for once, for the first time ever he doesn’t stop to pat the dog from the place on the corner, and it’s been a long time since he’s walked past Mrs. Rogers who lives a few doors down without saying hello.

You can do this, Seungcheol tells himself as he walks through the school gates and towards his locker. He can see Jeonghan and Jisoo waiting for him, leaning against the wall and looking the same as ever. Nothing is the same, though, and it never will be.

He can’t do this.

Seungcheol turns, walks right back the way he came and sits down under the fig tree near the school’s front fence. He doesn’t realise he’s crying until there’s a body slipping in next to his and an arm sliding around his waist. Seungcheol sees the spikes of a familiar duck and hugs Chan tighter to him, burying his face in the other boy’s shoulder, laughing sadly at the irony.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Togs: A swimming suit.
- Pop Tops: A brand of fruit juice that comes with a specific style of bottle cap.
- Guy Sebastian: An under-appreciated Australian singer who’s kind of fallen under the radar right now.
- Doona: A duvet.
- I’m so fucking sorry: An Australian way of apologising for an angsty chapter (Love from, Jeremy).
For maybe the hundredth time today, Soonyoung curses his very narrow responsible streak. Thanks to that pesky thing, he’s wandering around the oval of the local primary school, setting up marker cones in preparation for the influx of rabid children that’s going to swarm him in about fifteen minutes.

What hell is he in?

Auskick.

Now, Soonyoung has fond memories of Auskick himself; running around with his friends after school and on the occasional Saturday, messing with the coaches, getting sunburnt in the most inexplicable of places.

But.

Why he thought it would be a good idea to surrender his own Saturdays to the mercy of twenty eight-year-olds attempting to play Australian rules football, he’s not quite sure. It was something to do with an extra line for his resume and Seokmin being the one to ultimately fill out the form for him, that idiot.

So here he is, running all over the ant-infested grass trying to prepare the equipment so the kids can have the best time they possibly can, and he’s not even the coach.

That title belongs to the one and only Luhan.

Luhan is the epitome of the irresponsible uni student, hence why Soonyoung is doing his job for him. He turns up just on time to every session, sits in the shade more than he participates and leaves all the hard work for Soonyoung.

When the time comes to volunteer for next term, Soonyoung is very tempted to cite the difficulties of year 12 as an excuse and get as far away from the smell of rubber footballs and the twenty clingy kids as possible.

He knows he won’t though; he can’t leave them alone with Luhan (because despite them being terrors, he has gotten rather fond of the children over the past term — though he’ll struggle to admit it).

Luhan wanders onto the oval from the vague direction of the teacher's carpark, dressed in loose tracksuit pants and a shirt that looks more suited for clubbing than children’s Aussie rules. He’s got a
minute to spare before the kids start turning up, and Soonyoung knows that that minute won’t make any improvement to the loser of a coach in front of him.

Soonyoung knows from experience that Luhan’s eyes are slightly bloodshot behind his mirror-tinted aviators, and if he walked any closer there would be a lingering trace of vodka circling him like Satan’s halo.

“Hey Soonyoung,” he greets, dumping his bag under a tree and sitting down on top of it like he’s getting ready for an afternoon nap. “Nice day for it.”

“Hi Luhan. Yeah, it’s pretty sunny today, so I got the sunscreen out of the shed for the kids. We’ll have to get them to put some on before they start,” Soonyoung gestures towards the industrial sized bottle of sunscreen that you’ll only find in primary schools. Luhan, however, doesn’t even bother to look.

“Yeah, good thinking. I’ll leave you in charge of that.” And with that, Luhan’s eyes are closed and he’s off with the fairies in his delinquency tinted dreams.

~*~

It takes a good ten minutes for all of the kids to arrive, and Soonyoung spends the next ten minutes after that trying to get them to behave enough to run around the oval to warm up. They finally start running, but not until after they’ve clung onto his legs begging him to let them off just this once Soonyoung, please. Soonyoung would be close to cracking if they didn’t do that every week.

He starts them off slow, getting them to throw the balls back and forth to each other in pairs. There’s an odd number of them, so whenever they do this drill Soonyoung gets to be a stand in eight-year-old, which really just translates to him being the target for someone’s overly eager throwing.

Today he’s paired up with Johnny, who’s secretly his favourite, because despite all that fuss about ‘teachers don’t have favourites’, they totally do. Soonyoung smiles when he sees Johnny struggling to get the right grip on the ball with his tiny hands and goes over to help him.

He crouches down beside Johnny, bringing his hand up to adjust the boy’s grip on the ball.

“Move your thumb here, and it’ll make it easier for you,” Soonyoung explains, heart melting at the way Johnny nods at a million kilometres an hour, screaming out an “Okay Soonyoung!”

Soonyoung moves back to where he was stand before and opens his hands out wide, waiting for Johnny to throw him the ball.

Perhaps he’s improved the kid’s technique a little too much, because approximately five seconds later, Soonyoung is hunched over on the grass in pain, all thanks to the football Johnny threw right into his crotch.

~*~

By the time they get around to playing an actual game, Luhan has finally gotten up to help, letting Soonyoung go rest in the shade for a few minutes. He leans back against the Jacaranda at the edge of the oval, and just watches the very messy game of football that’s playing out in front of him. From here, he can see Yuta run into Johnny, who then falls into Taeyong, and then there’s a mess of eight-year-olds on the ground. If Soonyoung was the one supervising, he’d be right there helping them up, but all Luhan does is step over them and walk over to where he’d left his phone.

When he raises his arms to look at God knows what on his phone, Soonyoung can just see the faint
ink scrawled across Luhan’s wrist, in the same spot he’s been seeing it for the last ten weeks. Soonyoung has never asked Luhan about his tattoo; he doesn’t know if it’s a totally faceless name, or if it’s the name of the one person he goes to the clubs with and if they spend copious amounts of time lying around nursing hangovers together.

He’s always been curious about other people’s tattoos, and when he was a kid he’d go around pestering anyone and everyone he could see with one. It took a month or so for his mother to drill that particular habit out of him, but he’s never lost that childish wonder about them. It baffles him, how there’s a near perfect fairytale magic that’s so incongruent to the rest of their unfair world.

Soonyoung wonders about the mechanics of it; is it biological? Is it magic? Is it fate? Who decides? He’s secretly spent hours poring over research papers and studies, searching for a better understanding of this crazy phenomenon that the experts barely even understand themselves.

It’s only gotten worse since Seokmin’s gotten his tattoo. Soonyoung had been so insanely happy knowing that he was the soulmate of the single most important person in his life. There was that lingering feeling of insecurity though, that small part of him that screamed about his own unmarked wrist and pulled up every statistic he’d ever read about mismatched soulmates.

It was a long time until his own birthday - months that he’d spend worrying over the likelihood of waking up to a big fat Seokmin on his wrist if the weeks since Seokmin’s birthday were any indication. Soonyoung feels so goddamn lucky to be that one special person for Seokmin, the one to be there when no one else is and the one to love him unconditionally. He can only hope that the universe will let Seokmin be that person for him.

Soonyoung suddenly has the urge to march over to Luhan and demand he tell him everything there is to know about the other boy’s soulmate. He’d been planning to wait until they knew each other a bit better to start asking such personal questions (his mother’s lessons had worked), but he finds the need to simply know outweighing all the rules of polite conversation.

He skirts around the outside of the marker cones, careful to mess up his hard work from earlier. The kids are still shrieking uncontrollably and running around with the endless energy you’ll only find in children under ten. Soonyoung only just manages to duck in time when the ball comes flying towards his head, courtesy of Taeil, who, despite a whole term of training, still can’t kick a ball with any accuracy at all.

Soonyoung manages to get over to Luhan without sustaining any major injuries, and he slides up next to the other with a quiet “hey.”

Luhan looks over at him with a hint of surprise; they’ve never really talked outside of Auskick related matters, and there’s something in Soonyoung’s tone that betrays his intentions towards this conversations as those of a somewhat more personal matter.

“Uh, hi. What’s up, Soonyoung?”

“I was just wondering… who’s your soulmate?”

There’s something in Luhan’s expression that makes Soonyoung think that he knows exactly just why he’s asking and it makes him squirm a little. Goddamn Luhan and his X-Ray eyes.

Luhan sighs before he replies.

“I don’t actually know,” he says, raising his wrist, so Soonyoung can see the name written there. “Matthew. I’ve never met him. I always thought that the universe would drop him into my life when
the time was right, so I never looked. It’s been nearly ten years since I got the name though. I don’t know if I’ll ever meet him, and at this stage I’m not sure if that bothers me. I go out, I have fun, I find other people who haven’t met their soulmates or who just don’t care about the entire system. It’s not that bad of a life.”

Soonyoung can’t help but gape at him. While it isn't necessarily surprising, given Luhan’s attitude to life in general, Soonyoung has never met anyone so blasé about the whole soulmate business.

“Don’t you get lonely without your soulmate though? Don’t you want him in your life?”

“Not really. I don’t need him. Especially not with this girl I found last night, now she knew how to blow it like a flute.”

With that, Luhan wanders off to get another ball because Taeil just kicked the last one into a tree. Soonyoung is left standing there, face scrunched up in confusion, muttering to himself.

“Blow it like a… flute ?”

~*~

The school provides Zooper Doopers for them because it’s the last practice, so Soonyoung stands by the Esky with a pair of scissors, chopping the tops off the ice blocks for children who have turned vaguely obedient at the promise of sugar. There’s only a minor scuffle when Mark and Jaehyun both want the last blueberry flavoured one, so Soonyoung considers it a success.

He looks around the oval, seeing the kids scattered around, enjoying the sun and getting some serious sugar highs (which won’t be his problem, they’re going home to their parents in ten minutes), and he just feels happy. The kind of happy that puts a little smile on your face and can only be ruined by something truly terrible. The kind of happy that he is around Seokmin.

While Auskick hasn’t necessarily been the best experience, and a hell of a lot of trouble for just some resume improvement, he has had fun, and he knows that despite the tortuous Australian sun and the constant threat of green ants, not to mention the coach from hell, he will be back next term, and the kids will be just as pleased to see him as he will be to see them.

You can’t get rid of Kwon Soonyoung that easily.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Auskick: an after school (and occasionally weekend) activity for primary school kids to learn Australian rules football.
- Australian rules football: the type of football played in the AFL.
- Zooper Doopers: really great ice blocks that are always handed out at school events.
Barbies, Budgerigars and wanting to forget Australia is a real country that exists

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

Time for some shameless self-promotion! I recently made a dodgy first-time mashup of dwc and gravel to tempo so please give it some love!

Also, I'm Admin C from shishiships and I'll be releasing a SVT as your soulmate series starting today so please check it out if that interests you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3rd April, 2017

For all intents and purposes, Wonwoo would like to reiterate the fact that he is not Australian, and he absolutely refuses to be held responsible for anything Australians do.

Specifically, he refuses to be held responsible for anything his Korean-Australian (and two Chinese-Australian) friends do.

Because he may be Korean, but — and he’ll say it as many times as you need to hear it — he’s not Australian.

He’s not Australian!

He just cannot stand being bunched in with the maniacs he’s started calling his friends!

He has no idea why he agreed to this or how on Earth his parents could have possibly found his friends trustworthy enough to allow him to do this!

Wonwoo curses the fact that it’s probably how smitten his mother has become with ‘Sweet Little Jeonghan’ which has led her to believe Wonwoo will be alright.

Well mother, you’re wrong.

You’re deadly wrong.

Because there is no possible way that he’s going to make it out of this trip alive.

In hindsight, Wonwoo probably should have known that this would be a bad idea the moment it was brought up, but the poor, naïve foreigner just couldn’t have guessed what was coming.

“Let’s go to the Gold Coast!” they said.

“It’ll be fun!” they said.

“I can drive!” Hansol said.
Hansol cannot drive.

~*~

For those who are unaware, the current situation is as follows:

According to his friends, Wonwoo was in desperate need of an initiation (after the umpteenth time he’s starting to think Australians just don’t understand the meaning of the word).

“But hyung, you’re yet to have a beach initiation!”

He wasn’t aware that would be necessary.

Wonwoo, accompanied by Mingyu, Jun, Minghao, Jeonghan, Jisoo and Hansol, is sitting in a caravan that Hansol’s mother “impulse-bought last year when she wandered into the annual Caravan & Camping Expo held on the Ekka showgrounds”.

Wonwoo doesn’t know what any of the words in that sentence mean, but he understands that he’s in a camping car of sorts that is owned by Mrs. Chwe.

Before any of this came to be, Wonwoo was of the belief that Hansol and Seokmin could drive. Considering Australians can begin driving at the age of sixteen, he had thought that by two years later and having achieved their ‘Ps’ (“A provisional license,” Jisoo offers him, like as if that explanation helps any), the two of them would be at least vaguely proficient in driving.

This is not the case.

It is with much chagrin that Wonwoo admits to clinging onto Mingyu’s (nicely toned, but we don’t talk about that) arm for the full one and a half hour, with a break to strangle Jun, who, after an hour of being in the caravan decides it’s a good time to mention that they could have taken the train.

For the majority of the trip, Minghao is fast asleep, face nestled into the seatbelt in a rather uncomfortable-looking position, lulled by the fingers carding through his hair. (Jun’s fingers, for clarification, in case you were unaware.)

This is when Wonwoo’s respect for Minghao grows tenfold, because anyone who can sleep through Hansol’s horrendous driving is a warrior; a saint; a deity.

From behind him Wonwoo can hear Jeonghan and Jisoo still going strong on their game of Eye Spy, which is, quite frankly, a terrifying feat, but after an hour he’s learnt to block their voices out as Jisoo excitedly takes a guess at what could possibly start with ‘T’ for about the thirtieth time.

What he unfortunately still hasn’t figured out how to block out, is Hansol’s terrible taste in roadtrip music, but he won’t start a rant on that one.

~*~

In Seokmin’s car, the situation is a little different.

All members (excluding Jihoon, who is only humming a little) have been screeching Beyoncé songs at the top of their lungs for the entire duration of the trip.

One can’t exactly say that the driving is any safer, but it is, to Seokmin’s credit, at least slightly less erratic than Hansol’s driving.
Chan, who’s had the luxury of riding shotgun, snacks on his second bag of potato chips, as Jihoon claims it’s time for something other than Beyoncé, lest his eardrums burst from all the high notes.

The comment almost gets him thrown out of the car, but he thinks it was worth it if Seungcheol is smiling normally again, reaching for the box of Cheezels everyone knows he has packed in the back.

At the bathroom of the lunch stop, Wonwoo asks Jihoon if Seokmin’s driving made him want to throw up (listen, he’s just really salty about choosing the wrong car to get to the Gold Coast in), and Jihoon artfully stifles a giggle.

“If you were up for non-stop Beyoncé, then you definitely made the wrong choice,” he tells the boy. Then, after copious amounts of complaining about Seokmin’s inability to hit high notes while driving in a straight line, his expression changes.

“Have you noticed anything… weird about Cheol?”

~*~

The question sticks to him, and he finds himself zoning out of Junhui’s explanation on his interpretation of the phallic symbolism in Hamlet (don’t ask) to study the sturdy rock of a young boy he had thought Seungcheol was.

He admits he’d been jealous of how put-together the guy seemed. Wonwoo feels bad for being such an aimless pile of only seemingly-stoic mess when he’s 13 months the boy’s senior.

But now, he thinks they must be one and the same: completely, utterly fucking lost, but faking it really well.

Or not so well, on Seungcheol’s part now.

As Wonwoo watches the boy, he wonders if this is something that's been plaguing him for a while, and something that's finally starting to get to him to the point he can't hide it anymore.

Or is this something new?

As he looks back down at his plate, he sees Seungcheol shift uncomfortably in his chair, three seats away from the people he's usually glued to.

Wonwoo decides he might need further investigation.

~*~

After the group have deemed they’ve pestered the restaurant they’re at too much, they hit the road again for Burleigh Heads.

Wonwoo sits in awe, nausea from Hansol’s driving forgotten as Jisoo tells him about his beach house.

*Beach house.*

That’s a thing people actually own in this country, like as if it's no big deal.

“It might be a bit of a tight squeeze for all eleven of us, but I'm sure we can figure it out,” Jisoo smiles. “We always keep the pantry stocked with non-perishables and whatnot so breakfast won't be a problem, and I imagine we’ll be eating lunch and dinner out? And I’ve gone grocery shopping for our barbecue tonight already, so that’s all set. There are three bathrooms, so it might do us some
good to draw up a table of who goes first while we're still in the car. Sleeping arrangements we can get to at the house.”

The thing is though, if Wonwoo was in awe by Jisoo just saying “it might be a tight squeeze for eleven but we should be alright”, then he really had no idea what was coming for him.

Jisoo’s beach house looks like an honest to God mansion; right at the beach front, and shimmering in the afternoon sunlight.

Ever the diligent boy, Jisoo immediately sets to carrying everyone's luggage into the living room, giving the house a quick once over to check everything’s in place, and giving it a sweep so that there's no dust lying around.

“Alright! Sleeping arrangements!” Jisoo smiles, giving Jeonghan a comforting pat on the butt as he groans.

“Now now, Hannie, we're all friends here.”

Jeonghan pouts a little, but otherwise stays silent.

“I suppose I should warn you straight off the bat that we won’t all be able to sleep in beds, but we’ll start with my parents’ bedroom. There’s one king size bed in there, so I’d prefer it if someone shared? I mean you don’t have to, but it’ll mean less people on the couch, so.”

Like as if they’re spiritually connected, Mingyu and Wonwoo take Minghao and Junhui’s hands respectively, and throw them up in the air.

“Hao’ll take the room!” Mingyu shouts. “I’ve heard rumours he does martial arts in his sleep sometimes, so obviously whoever sleeps with him needs to be able to defend themselves, right?”

It’s… not a reasonable argument at all, but Jisoo takes it in stride with a smile and jots the information down.

“Uh, well my bedroom’s fine for Hannie, Cheol and I, right?” he says, hands occupied by his meticulously planned clipboard.

“Joshua, I know your bed’s big, but it’s not big enough for all three of us, silly,” Seungcheol pipes up, a grimace-like grin on his face.

“That’s ridiculous Cheollie,” Jeonghan starts. “You know we’ve-”

“Well that’s sorted, Jeonghan and Josh can share a bed, then,” Seungcheol cuts in, before mumbling about wanting to “go to the damn beach already, I’m sick of my ghost-like skin reflecting sunlight into my eyes and making my view glary”, and walking out of the house.

Jisoo calls after the boy, but to no avail. He throws the clipboard behind him and rushes out the house and onto the beach with Jeonghan on his trail.

“He knows we fit on that bed, we’ve slept together before, I don’t understand why he’s…”

Jeonghan’s voice trails off and out of Wonwoo’s earshot before the sentence finishes, but when he looks at the rest of the group questioningly, he finds he’s the only one who caught the boy’s words.

In the heavy silence that follows, Jihoon picks the clipboard up off the ground, surveys the page titled ‘Bedroom Arrangements’, and writes himself into the bunk bed of Guest Bedroom 1 with
Seungcheol, before eyeing the empty space that signifies two free single beds in Guest Bedroom 2.

With a smirk, he places the clipboard away and looks to the remaining boys.

“Bad luck kids, we’re out of beds. Guess you’re slumming it in the living room.”

At that, Seokmin unleashes his rendition of Taylor Swift’s Trouble, weeping fake tears into the decorative couch cushions.

In an effort to save their ears, the group get to taking all the luggage up into the respective rooms, leaving Seokmin to lie on the cold, hard ground.

(Trouble, trouble, trouble.)

~*~

“Joshua, pass me the sunscreen, would you?”

To the unobservant eye, the scene before Wonwoo looks normal, untroubling… a genuinely dime a dozen happening.

But as things go, it’s (unfortunately) not.

While Wonwoo finds himself surrounded by boys who seem relieved that Seungcheol has patched it up with his best friends while they were sorting out bed arrangements, and is comfortably asking for sunscreen so that they can finally have some long-awaited fun on the beach, there is something about Seungcheol’s words that sits oddly in Wonwoo’s stomach.

He studies a crab that scuttles across the sand at his feet, and pulls Jihoon towards him by the collar of his t-shirt.

“Joshua.”

The shorter boy looks up at him, before realisation dawns across his features.

“Not Jisoo. I see where you’re getting at,” Jihoon muses. “Thanks. I’ll keep an eye out for more. You go and enjoy the Australian beach. It is your initiation.”

With that, Jihoon walks away, nearly stepping on the crab Wonwoo had been observing earlier.

He takes the words as an order for him to stop worrying about Seungcheol and to leave it to him.

~*~

When everyone is lathered in sunscreen (something to do with ‘Slip, Slop, Slap’? Wonwoo’s not sure, but he’s not really keen on becoming a punching bag for his friends so he complies) and Chan has abandoned his shirt to go barrelling head-first into the crashing waters, Wonwoo deems it time to remove his shoes.

As the first experience of an Australian beach of probably many to come, he wants to appreciate everything, and since they have a handful of days down the coast, he supposes this afternoon can be dedicated to exploring the sand dunes: the golden, the black, the white, the hard, the soft, the wet, the dry.

He starts to walk towards where he can see grass and weeds growing from the sands, when an arm abruptly stops him, pulling him back.
“Binch!” Seokmin all but screeches, pushing him to the ground. “No friend of mine is walking on a beach with their fucking socks on!”

Wonwoo turns around, quite genuinely confused.

“What’s wrong with… what’s wrong with socks?”

The question brings a look of alarm to all the people who are around him, and suddenly he’s being yelled at in High Definition Surround Sound, and somehow even Chan has come back from the waters just to join in.

“What the fuck is wrong with you!” Hansol cries, “It gets all in your socks, and then you have to wash them and it goes in all of your clothes while in the washing machine, and then your socks are tainted for six years until the sand finally comes out; have you not learnt anything from doing long jump?”

“I’m a high jumper,” Wonwoo replies, slowly, and he sees Mingyu fall to his knees.

“Hyung,” the boy croaks out. “Please, take them off, you’re killing me.”

With much trepidation, he removes the oh-so-repulsed pieces of cloth from his feet, and puts them next to his sneakers.

Unsurprisingly, even so, he’s yelled at for another five minutes, in an apparently ‘well-deserved scolding’, in Jeonghan’s words.

Wonwoo still doesn’t know what he did so wrong.

~*~

Wonwoo ends up collecting sea shells, with the help of Jun and Jihoon.

Everyone else is being thrown brutally to the shore by the waves of the ocean, and while it looks like fun, it’s been a long day of travels, so the three are happy to take a calm afternoon.

Jun tells him he can make necklaces out of the shells, and that it could make a nice present for his mother; Junhui himself loves making new accessories for his nieces, carefully drilling holes into the shells and stringing them together with glass beads, but not before covering the centrepiece in shimmering pink glitter.

(It’s always pink.)

To Wonwoo’s absolute horror, while on the beach he learns what a budgie smuggler is, and so, for the rest of the afternoon from that point onwards he finds himself buried into Junhui’s chest so as not to be tainted any further, collected shells sitting limply in their plastic bag at his side.

“What’s a budgie?” he’d asked, ever the naïve foreigner.


“You guys have pants made specifically for stealing birds?”

His question stands unanswered, but in seconds he receives a visual exemplar of the piece of clothing.

Jihoon cackles, the bastard, as he so very kindly tries to shove in his face googled pictures of their
previous prime minister in a pair of his very own budgie smugglers.

Wonwoo thinks the world would break if he ever found his own president in a pair of skimpy speedos strutting down the beach, but Jihoon has stories that makes him fear Australia and their 28th prime minister even more.

“He ate a raw spring onion on national TV, once,” he says.

Wonwoo doesn’t need to look up from his view of Jun’s t-shirt to know that Jihoon has a smirk plastered to his face.

He takes everything back.

Australia is not okay.

He wants to go home.

~*~

Dinner time rolls around all too quickly for the saltwater-drenched boys, but Wonwoo’s kind of sick of his view only being Jun’s shirt, and he’s relieved to finally be leaving a place that has more potential to scar him for life.

“What’s wrong with him?” Jeonghan jabs a thumb at Wonwoo, and he shrinks in on himself.

“Budgie smugglers,” he whispers, shivering, and in return he receives a bouquet of sympathetic smiles.

“Worse than the Great Emu War, I swear,” Hansol shudders, patting him on the back.

The group trudge back towards Jisoo’s beach house, thankfully not bumping into any strangers wearing budgie smugglers, their trip slow and weighed down from exhaustion.

The chefs of the group have first use of the showers, while the rest of the useless sloths of the group set up the kitchen for them.

Useless sloth #1, otherwise known as Jeon Wonwoo, spends his time learning what compartment of the ridiculously massive refrigerator holds what, for fear of waking up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, still not knowing where the actual fuck the corn is.

Useless sloth #2, also referred to as Yoon Jeonghan, does nothing of the sort, and instead picks sand out from underneath his fingernails in between slathering his sunburnt friends with aloe vera gel in an attempt to look like he’s being helpful.

It is perhaps also worth mentioning not-so-useless sloth #3, Xu Minghao, not all that much of a cook but proficient enough to prep and heat up the barbecue without setting himself on fire, as kind-of-sometimes-useless sloth #4, Lee Chan, very nearly did after declaring his pure Australianness and undoubtable ability to operate a Ziggy.

Other sloths that vary in usefulness include Hansol, Jihoon and Seungcheol, who sloppily make their way through chopping vegetables for dinner while they have their shoulders and backs rubbed with aloe vera by Jeonghan.

By the time world-renowned Ming Housewife exits the showers with a towel around his neck, there’s a bowl and a half of haphazardly prepared vegetables, and the boy sighs before shooing the
useless sloths away and taking a knife for himself.

Jun obediently follows to assist him, while Seokmin starts in on the rice (however Australian they may be they are Asian, after all) and Jisoo goes to check on the barbecue that Minghao set up.

“Man, this is going to be one hell of a barbie ,” Seungcheol smiles, rubbing his hands together.

Up until this point, everyone has been referring to their meal as ‘dinner’ and the sudden appearance of the word ‘barbie’ jars Wonwoo, and he stops his task of learning the contents of the fridge to face Seungcheol.

“Hell of a barbie?” he mumbles to himself, wondering if he’s missed the part of the conversation where Jisoo said they’d be preparing severed plastic dolls as food.

That certainly does sound like hell for a barbie doll.

In all of Australia’s… wilderness, it doesn’t occur to Wonwoo that ‘barbie’ is simply an abbreviation for the word barbecue, and while he feels stupid for it, he’s more overpowered by the fact that he’s been so desensitised to the absurdity that he didn’t even question that they could have been eating plastic dolls for dinner, in the same way that he wouldn’t question anyone if they told him Australia was formed after a Great Cassowary War.

(For one, cassowaries are far scarier than emus, which therefore leads to his second point that if there was a Great Emu War then a Great Cassowary War is not so far out of the grasps of reality.)

“Hey Cheol, you wouldn’t mind chucking some dingoes on the barbie, would you?” Mingyu calls out from where he’s artfully cooking sausages.

“I refuse to consume any apex predator of the Australian species, especially not a canis lupus dingo,” Wonwoo exclaims, jumping up. He’s learnt enough harrowing facts about them from Mr. Kim in ESL class to know not to mess with those dogs.

At the same time, Minghao punches Mingyu square in the stomach and growls.

“I’m not falling for that one again, dumbarse.”

“Well you’re not, but Wonwoo did,” Mingyu gives them both a cheeky grin, and returns to transferring sausages onto a platter so that he can move onto grilling some earlier-prepared butterfly lamb.

He’s clearly feeling a little peckish as he puts dinner together, and in need of a snack to keep him going. Hence the dingoes.

“To chuck a dingo on a barbie is to put popcorn in the microwave, or make popcorn,” Minghao all but grumbles to Wonwoo. “They made it up to give me a fright when I first moved here, like as if I don’t come from a country that up and eats scorpions on sticks. You sure have chosen the right group of people to become friends with.”

“Next thing you know they’ll be telling me that we’re eating spit-roasted koala for breakfast,” Wonwoo supplies a weak laugh.

“Let’s pray we won’t,” Minghao smiles. “I will say though, you can try kangaroo meat if you want? There’s some good kanga bangas at any supermarket. I’m sure there’s a Woolies nearby if we ask Jisoo.”
Wonwoo shakes his head in a vigorous no in time to Jisoo telling them the closest supermarket is “a Coles, thank you very much, Xu”.

Other than that, their barbie dinner is rather uneventful, if Wonwoo is to be honest.

There’s no Australian wildlife on his plate (he checks his salad three times, just in case there’s a Tassie Devil hiding in there), and Mingyu is a splendid cook, although that’s no news to him.

Chan smears ketchup (“it’s called tomato sauce here, hyung, get with the times”) all over his sausages, Seokmin sandwiches the zucchini with two thick slices of lamb, Hansol decides it’s a good idea to follow suit and make a burger with no bread and just meat patties, and there are no shrimps involved, because Australians call the damn things prawns anyway.

“We should go for fish and chips tomorrow,” Mingyu says over his second bowl of rice and fifth lamb cutlet.

“So long as we’re not the ones putting the fucking shrimps on the barbie I’m in,” Jeonghan grins.

For what feels like about the five-hundredth time, Wonwoo decides not to question it.

~*~

The bathroom is grotty with sand by the time Wonwoo has the pleasure of showering, and he mentally thanks Hansol for stopping him from walking the vast expanses of the beach in his socks; he suddenly understands why the notion had been met with such revolt.

When he comes out supposedly refreshed, he’s almost certain there’s sand in his underwear, and most of the house has retired to their respective sleeping quarters.

He walks past Junhui and Minghao’s bedroom to find a scene he hadn’t quite expected, but he makes sure to give Minghao a smirk as the boy retracts his hand like as if Junhui’s head is made of fire when he sees Wonwoo watching him.

“Don’t mind me, take good care of your cat,” he laughs, waving the indignant Chinese boy goodnight before making a stop for Jihoon and Seungcheol’s bedroom while the latter is still in the shower.

“I told you not to worry,” Jihoon tells the footsteps that approach his door, not even bothering to look up from his phone.

He hasn’t much to say but to leave it rest for the day, so Wonwoo decides to pad back to the living room that he’s going to have to share with four other people.

Shudder.

Chan is already curled up in his brother’s side when Wonwoo switches the lights out, and the boys make the most of the pull-out sofa that’s somehow more luxurious than Wonwoo’s own bed back at home.

He falls asleep to the sound of Mingyu shuffling to find a comfortable position, and Hansol’s breaths on the arm he has thrown over his eyes.

Waking up, however, is an entirely different affair.

Wonwoo was of the impression that the five of them had gone to sleep in a line, starting from
Seokmin, then through to Mingyu on the end with Chan, Hansol and himself in between.

The only plausible conclusion he can make is that he must have been dreaming, because there’s just no way a straight line of five could turn into *this*.

‘This’ being five boys literally braided into each other so that they make one pile in the middle of the sofa bed and no one can tell whose appendage is whose.

“What’s this?” Mingyu prods at a limp arm hanging out from between Wonwoo’s torso and Seokmin’s leg.

“I dunno, is that Chan’s?” Hansol yawns, before Wonwoo finds some sort of extremity he can use to hit him with.

“Idiot, that’s your arm.”

“What?” Hansol exclaims, jostling the pile of bodies. “I swear I’m not that pasty.”

It earns him a kick in the face from Chan, before the five finally figure out how to untangle without finding themselves dismembered.

“YouTube’s gonna love this one,” Minghao cackles as he turns away.

Suddenly, Wonwoo regrets teasing the boy for being caught stroking Junhui’s hair.

~*~

They spend the morning being dragged all the way to *The Spit,* Mingyu yelling all the while that it’s worth the drive up to the particular beach because it’s the best beach to “meet nice puppies!!”, and who is Wonwoo to say no to Mingyu?

Besides, the way half the boys’ eyes lit up at the mention of puppies is worth sacrificing his sanity, although he could really deal with not hearing a bark for another 350 years.

(He’s fine, really. He’s *fine.*)

They replenish their energy with fish and chips along Surfers Paradise, yet another beach, but this time packed with what Wonwoo feels is like the most number of people he’s seen since their weekly assembly at school.

True to its name, he spots many surfers running across the golden sand, young children following suit with their boogie boards.

After spending a good five minutes battling it out with a flock of seagulls over the last few pieces of chips, the boys dust their shorts off to explore the town.

It’s a little more eccentric than the crowd that Brisbane has to offer; more wild, more free, and more sunny too, if you could believe it.

For starters, when his friends said “let’s go into town”, he never expected to be hit in the face by a large, rainbow sign bearing the words ‘CONDOM’ like no one’s business.

“Jun, what the fuck?” he whispers, frantic as he eyes the sign.

“Look away, my son, I can’t have you be tainted like this,” Junhui brings up a hand to shield Wonwoo’s eyes.
“Oh Wonwoo you have to go in!” Seungcheol shouts. “Its initiation!”

“Everything is a damn initiation with you,” he snaps. “I know what a condom is, I don’t need to step a foot inside Condom Kingdom before having the birds and the bees talk with you! Need I remind you I’m the older one here?”

His outburst, thankfully done in Korean to spare him the embarrassment from passers-by, leads the group away from the offending store, and Mingyu immediately glues himself to Wonwoo’s side.

“Hyung we’re- we’re really sorry,” he stutters out, worried, but Wonwoo only throws him a smile.

“I’m not actually angry, Mingyu,” he laughs. But it’s fun to toy around with you lot to pay for the trouble you give me, is what he doesn’t say.

Following the group’s apparent need to purchase more ‘togs’ (“Why do you use such an ugly word? It’s simply swimming gear!” “Wonwoo, we really can’t do anything about the way the language has been shaped in times before us.” “I don’t care. Fix it.”), they find themselves in an attraction named Infinity, a depressingly underwhelming… walk-through light show?

There are trippy lights, then less trippy lights, and then corridors, and some more somewhat trippy lights, and Wonwoo feels like, had this been 1984, he would have been endlessly mesmerised, but as it stands, it’s 2017, and he has no idea why the boys thought this would be a good idea.

“I just wanted to try it once,” Chan pouts at the unimpressed expression Wonwoo’s face can’t seem to shift from, and he can’t help but feel bad.

“Well, it was an experience.”

He doesn’t really have any other words to offer.

It is, however, his turn to be disappointed, when right before they start heading to dinner he spots a cozy looking cat cafe.

“Mingyu,” he whines to the boy beside him, allowing his voice to grow just that slight bit petulant.

He points to the cat cafe silently, cocking his head to the side.

“They’re just about to close, hyung,” Mingyu tells him, and Wonwoo wouldn’t be wrong to think the boy was trying to hide his laughter (the disrespect of Australian kids, tut tut).

Without the visit to the cat cafe, Wonwoo no longer finds the rest of the day worth documenting, and erases their blasé dinner by the beach from his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Ekka: Brisbane’s show holiday. It's basically like a carnival.
- Ps: As Jisoo said, a provisional license. A P plate means you can drive by yourself without supervision, but you're still fairly new to the roads.
- Budgie Smuggler: Men's swimwear. Speedos, in which the budgie is... ya dick.
- Ziggy: A brand of barbecue? I personally use a Webber oops.
- Barbie: Short for BBQ.
- Cassowary: Truly the most terrifying of birds.
- Dingo: A wild dog.
- Chuck a dingo on the barbie: A phrase my friends and I made up to trick an American friend; to make popcorn.
- Kanga Bangas: Short for Kangaroo Sausages.
- Tassie Devil: An abbreviation of Tasmanian Devil, actual devil animals.
- The Spit: A nice, dog friendly beach!
- Condom Kingdom: A very real store that exists and has existed for far too long.
- Infinity: Truly a disappointing attraction.
They’re standing in an infernally long queue with the sun beating down on them, and if this isn’t hell, Hansol doesn’t know what is. The boys had all decided yesterday that they wanted to go to Wet n’ Wild, something most of them hadn’t done since primary school.

It had started with Jihoon sitting bolt upright on the sofa, a strange glint in his eyes.

Setting his eyes on the rest of them, he’d smirked a little before saying, in the most terrifying voice they’d all ever heard, “Wet n’ Wild.”

Once Jihoon had mentioned it, Jeonghan had jumped on the bandwagon and started screeching about his undying love for the Tornado. Any sense of order they’d probably never had had completely disappeared then. Chan and Seokmin were jumping around in excitement, Jisoo was yelling about sunburns and banana boats, and Seungcheol was already googling how long the drive would take.

Junhui was sitting on the floor in the middle of the living room, a frown on his face as he watched the rest of the boys. No one really paid him any mind until he’d all but shouted “but I want to go to Movie World!”

His outburst stopped them all, and they just stared for a minute, watching the tall boy pouting on the floor, before turning back to whatever they were doing before. Only Wonwoo had actually bothered engaging with him, going to sit on the floor next to him before quietly murmuring, “What’s Wet n’ Wild?”

And so here they were. Hansol leaned further into Seungcheol’s shoulder, slipping his sunglasses down over his eyes in an effort to live in any semblance of denial. They’d left the house a good hour later than they’d planned, all thanks to Junhui’s incessant moaning about Movie World. It had taken Minghao hitting him with a newspaper to shut him up, and the result was being stuck in this line. It seemed all of Queensland had the same idea as them today.

They finally reach the front of the queue, and then they dissolve into a mess of who owes who money and ‘oh I’ll pay for you’s. The ticket boy looks vaguely terrified, especially when Seungcheol lets out a sharp whistle, bringing the boys to heel and arranging them into order.

“Oh, Jeonghan you’re paying for me and Jisoo, you owe us both a fortune. Jihoon, just pay for yourself. Hansol same goes for you. Seokmin and Chan, you know what to do. Jun and Minghao you practically have a joint bank account, sort your own shit out. And Wonwoo, I think you should let Mingyu pay for you.”
With that, Seungcheol grabs Jeonghan and Jisoo and walks up to the ticket window.

Hansol looks over to Wonwoo, who seems to be reeling (but, honestly, when isn’t he?) not just at the whole Wet n’ Wild experience, but at the gentle hand that Mingyu is wrapping around his arm in order to tug him over to buy their tickets. Hansol snickers. Seungcheol isn’t as oblivious as he looks. And he’s certainly not as oblivious as Wonwoo.

After they all manage to pay in one way or another, eleven rowdy boys are set loose into what should be a fun family environment. Hansol’s sure that will change in approximately thirty minutes. Mingyu’s already made his transformation into an excited puppy and Jihoon has the most bizarre grin on his face, one Hansol is confident will send children running.

Once again, the incessant bickering starts, this time about what ride to go on first. After about five minutes, a map consultation, and a little blackmail from Minghao and Jihoon, they boys are heading over to Mammoth Falls.

Hansol has a lot of good memories of Mammoth Falls, but also a lot of the mammoth stairs you have to climb up. He’s hoping his childhood memories have greatly exaggerated the amount of climbing they’re about to do.

He’d hoped wrong.

Looking up at how far it is to the top of the ride, with a queue already formed a quarter of the way down, he realises it’s going to a long day of standing in the sun.

They start climbing, and Seokmin decides that’s the perfect time to decide who’s riding down with who. Hansol blocks most of it out; he’ll happily go with any of them and at this stage he’s mainly concerned about preserving his energy after getting next to no sleep on the couch the night before. He’s content to rest against and pole and watch his friends make fools of themselves many metres in the air.

After about ten minutes of waiting and observing, Hansol notices Wonwoo looking over the railing and squinting at something. He squeezes past Jeonghan who’s splayed all over Jisoo’s back, to come up next to Wonwoo.

“Hey, whatcha looking at?”

Wonwoo turns, his sleepy eyes blinking a few times in surprise.

“Oh. Just the building over there. What’s the Australian Outback Spectacular?”

Hansol just snorts at how genuinely curious Wonwoo looks.

“Oh that old thing, I’d forgotten about it. I’ve never been, I actually know no one who has, but I think it’s just a show where they bring out a heap of Australian animals and sing at your for a bit. You should go, might be educational,” Hansol laughs, and Wonwoo only blinks more.

“Huh,” he finally says, and turns back to look at the building, half leaning over the railing, as if getting as close as he could would reveal the secrets of the outback to him. Hansol joins him, resting his forearms on the railing, content looking at the dusty outdoor arena and listening to Wonwoo’s steady breathing paired with the babble of their friends.

They finally make it to the top.

It’s been decided that Hansol will be going down with Chan, Seokmin, Jihoon and Jisoo. They all
look absolutely stoked climbing into the raft, and Hansol’s no different, feeling a grin spread over his face and the adrenalin starting to flood his system. It’s been awhile since he’s been to a theme park, and he’s just getting back into the groove of it.

When they’re finally pushed over the edge of the slide, he feels his stomach drop and he lets out a whoop of joy. It’s not the wildest of rides, but there’s something about the turn of the raft combined with the happy shouts that are reaching his ears that makes it all live up to his childhood memories. Mammoth Falls was always his favourite ride and he can’t see that changing anytime soon.

When they reach the bottom, his hair is soaked through and falling into his eyes. Pushing it away with a laugh, he turns to see the rest of the boys coming down the bottom of the slide and he feels a sudden rush of happiness, of belonging, and he knows that while he had gone to Wet n’ Wild with his family when he was a kid, his second trip as an adult was also with nothing other family.

They climb out of their rafts, dragging them over to an attendant. There’s hissing all around as wet feet make contact with hot concrete, and they’re once again holding a debate on which ride to go on next.

Jisoo, surprisingly, wants to on the Kamikaze, and the only other one who’s game enough is Minghao. There’s some grumbling about wasting time, but they all agree to wait for them to go on that death trap.

The queue isn’t as bad as the one for Mammoth Falls, and it seems like barely any time has passed when Jisoo and Minghao plunge over the slide, going up and back, up and back, the near ninety degree angle making Hansol wince a little. He loves crazy rides, that’s for sure, but he’s not one for a ride that literally screams death.

It seems the ride has freaked out the majority of the boys, because the next stop is Calypso Beach. Even though floating around fake islands on inflatable tubes sounds a little boring, there’s the added fun of making raft trains and blocking kids from overtaking you. Hansol takes these raft trains very seriously, thank you very much.

This time however, it seems that Hansol and Chan are the ones who get blocked off, and when Hansol looks around he can’t see any of the others around at all.

“Hey, Chan,” he calls, “can you see any of them?”

Chan looks around, ducking his head a little to see through the millions of palm trees around the water.

“No, they probably left already, those idiots,” Chan huffs, grabbing onto Hansol’s tube. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

They’re not sure whether they should bother to look for the others, resulting in them wandering aimlessly around the theme park. They don’t have their phones, because Jisoo, ever the mum, had stolen them all and shoved them into a locker ‘because they might get wet’.

“Ah hyung, we should’ve arranged a meeting place if we got lost, we’re never gonna find them,” Chan sighs, stopping for a moment to lean against the height restriction guide for one of the rides. He’s still in the middle of his growth spurt, his shoulders resting just over the minimum height line.

“Yeah, probably,” Hansol agrees, somewhat halfheartedly. He honestly doesn’t mind the quiet that surrounds them without the rest of the gang filling the air with chatter. His ears are starting to hurt from the constant screaming of children and Jun’s been squealing particularly loudly today.
It seems, however, that Hansol’s ears will never be free, because suddenly there’s an almighty shout of “CHAN! HANDSOAP!”.

He doesn’t want to believe it. There’s only one person (or devil, take your pick) that calls him Handsoap and Hansol hasn’t had a chance to put his game face on.

A body slams into Chan, and Hansol recognises the unhealthy strands of Soonyoung’s hair. Turning behind them, he can see Seungkwan walking over to them, a strange look on his face, one quite similar to what Hansol’s seen at squash games.

Soonyoung is babbling something at Chan, and Hansol is content to say nothing when Seungkwan reaches them, letting Chan do all the talking. He’s not sure if he’s met Seungkwan before the whole GPS incident, but knowing how overly friendly Seokmin is, and he’s guessing Soonyoung as well, he wouldn’t be surprised.

He settles for a nod, and it seems Seungkwan is content to do the same, and they leave it at that. They both turn at the same to watch the other two who are talking a mile a minute, no air seemingly needed.

“Wait Seokmin is here?” Soonyoung suddenly screeches. “Take me to him little Lee!” He declares and Chan just rolls his eyes.

“Well, hyung, that’s the problem. We kinda lost the rest of them.”

Soonyoung visibly deflates and Hansol is baffled at how Seokmin has never mentioned this bizarre boy who obviously holds a very large stake in his life. Chan is patting him on the back and Hansol is just staring really, when Seugnkwan pipes up from beside him.

“Uh, is that them over there? I think that’s Seokmin.”

Hansol’s never seen someone move so fast in his life. Soonyoung dashes the fifty metres or so over to Seokmin and crashes into him with far more force than he did Chan. Hansol, Chan and Seungkwan choose to walk over instead, and if the silence between them is somewhat awkward, Hansol isn’t choosing to dwell on it.

The rest of the boys seem much the same as when they’d last seen them half an hour ago, if not a little more pink. The only new thing is the strange old man voice that Seokmin has adopted to talk to Soonyoung.

Hansol slips over to Seungcheol, asking quietly, if not a little petulantly, “where did you guys go?”

“Ah… well we thought we had everyone and then we just left? Don’t worry though, you only missed going to the Black Hole,” Seungcheol says, having the grace to look a little embarrassed.

Hansol just rolls his eyes, he’s not even surprised. His dongsaengs can be real idiots sometimes.

When he tunes back in to the group conversations, somehow it’s been decided that Seungkwan and Soonyoung are going to stick with them for the rest of the day. Hansol doesn’t say anything, just moves subtly back over to Chan, who takes his hand, squeezing gently when Seungkwan laughs particularly loudly. With that, the group moves towards the Tornado in order to shut up Jeonghan.

~*~

After a few more hours of fun in the water and sun, they find themselves back in the carpark, ready to crash for the day. Hansol is for once annoyed at having his Ps; he’s not keen for the drive back to
the house.

It’s at this point that he decides he really needs to stop zoning out of group conversations though, because while he’s leaning against Mingyu (God bless his height) he suddenly hears something that makes him freeze.

“You’re welcome to stay with us, if you’d like?” Jisoo says, to be met with static silence.

Every conversation that had previously been going on comes to an abrupt stop, and Hansol almost drops to the ground, mid-gesture and unbalanced on one leg. Even Minghao, who generally looks either nonplussed or unimpressed, and is in control of his facial expressions, has let his jaw hit the ground.

“It’s a little late for you to be driving back, Seungkwan, I don’t think that’s entirely safe for you. You mentioned this was a spur of the moment action, so it’s clear you haven’t booked anywhere to be staying, and after such a big day and with Soonyoung still on his Ls, it’s really not a good idea.”

The problem with Jisoo being such a reasonable person is, even though they’re against his olive branch of golden, sparkling kindness, they can’t argue with it, because it’ll just make them look like arseholes. Which they probably are, to be honest, but they’re good arseholes, you know?

“If you insist and really don’t mind,” Soonyoung smiles bashfully, which earns him a glare from Seungkwan.

And that’s what makes Hansol step forward.

“What’s wrong, Boo?” he asks, voice sickly sweet.

“Nothing, I was just thinking that it’s rather rude of us to be doing this to you, is all,” the boy replies nose stuck up in the air.

After Jisoo confirms that it’s really not a problem at all, the enlarged group head for his family beach house, with a lot of low grumbling from a number of people, Hansol himself absolutely included.

He’s not one for heated conflict, and he is, as his grandparents say ‘slow to anger, quick to forgive’. And he’s lived all his life by that, he can swear on it, but squash is a different field. Squash is just a sport, he can get a little huffy over it, peg a ball at the wall in a bit of dejected frustration (but never his racquet, that shit’s expensive) and things will still be fine.

Boo Seungkwan, however.

However…

Hansol just doesn’t have the words to complete that sentence.

(He does, but he’s on holidays, and he can’t be bothered to string said words together, so maybe if y’all could wait a couple weeks until he was up and kicking again? Great, thanks, that’d be minties.)

“So!” Jisoo grins once they’ve all gathered in the living room, “there’s one spare room for you two—”

“So there’s one spare room?!” Seokmin all but screeches, almost sending Jisoo flying into the wall with the velocity of his words.

Yeah, there’s two guest bedrooms here. I just assumed you guys wanted the couch together since only Cheol and Jihoon took a guest room.”
Chan is the one to yell this time, taking over from his brother with a, “In what fucking world would we voluntarily choose to sleep on a sofa with four other people?”

“Language, Channie,” Soonyoung whispers under his breath, and receives a look sharper than a bag of daggers along with a grumble about respecting hyungs.

Meanwhile, Jeonghan has wrapped his arms around Jisoo and has weaseled the clipboard from his hands, and he smirks (a smirk not unlike the one Jihoon had given before telling the couch-condemned boys that there were no more beds left) before he opens his mouth.

“I think Seokmin and his soulmate can share the room, yes?”

The smirk disappears as he says the words, replaced by an angelic little smile.

Hansol’s heart breaks.

~*~

“Hey… Hansol?” a small voice prods, and the boy whips around. If this were any other person he’d be there with a reassuring smile and a ‘what’s up?’ but he can’t say the same thing when he’s faced with Boo Seungkwan. He feels like scowling; like asking Seungkwan who gave him the permission to call him by that name.

“I,” Seungkwan starts, but struggles to continue, flustered. “You’re the only person I know here and I… I really need a change of clothes.”

Hansol’s breath catches in his throat, and he looks to the ground, uncomfortable. He’s not all that much taller than the boy, the most that will happen is that his clothes will be a little baggy on Seungkwan, but the size isn’t what’s stopping him from saying yes.

They haven’t spoken since they found out they were soulmates, and, if such a thing is even possible, the air between them has become even more tense.

Why he can’t just be his normal self around Seungkwan is beyond him. He could just…

“What, you didn’t pack any when you knew you were gonna get drenched at Wet n’ Wild?”

Fuck, Hansol, no.

“We literally just decided to take the trip at one in the morning before going to bed, I’m sorry if my spontaneity-proof planning is poor.”

“I’m just kidding,” Hansol smiles breezily. “You sure you’re gonna fit in my stuff though?”

Seungkwan kicks out at his shin then, and he puffs his cheeks out.

“I’m not that fat!” he exclaims.

“What?” Hansol splutters. Having never even begun to consider Seungkwan falling under the category of ‘fat’, the accusation takes him by surprise. “I meant the vertical way! I don’t want you complaining that you caught a cold because my shirt slipped off your shoulders or whatever! I’m not being held responsible if you scream that the wind pantsed you while you were on the way to the toilet! Jesus fuck who calls you fat?”

“I’m not that short either,” the boy grumbles back with a pout, but his eyes are clear of the slight shine that was apparent just seconds before, so he’s evidently not quite as miffed as he’s trying to
Hansol mentally notes that his soulmate is conscious of his figure, but as he watches the boy walk away to the living room where they’ll have to sleep, he can’t place a finger on why.

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For fear of catching Soonyoung and Seokmin canoodling away in the second guest room that has been in existence from the start of this trip that Jihoon just ‘forgot to tell them about’, Hansol rushes to the living room where Mingyu has already reset the sofa bed up for the new group of five to go to sleep.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to ask Seokmin?” he hears Chan’s voice say, and after a muffled response, “alright, I was just checking in case you’re uncomfortable with sleeping with strangers.”

“I’m not a stranger,” Hansol pipes up when he’s entered the living room, and is immediately punched in the face by regret.

“You’re right, Hansol,” Wonwoo says slowly. ‘Too slowly. “Well we don’t want our guest to feel uncomfortable, and we’re certainly not letting him sleep next to Mingyu,” he looks pointedly at said boy, “so Sangkwan can sleep next to you, right?”

“It’s Seungkwan,” Hansol replies in unison with the owner of the name, and he gulps. It’s like as if, more so than the name he bears on his wrist, this is the moment where he realises this boy is truly his soulmate.

He watches as Mingyu settles down on one end, with a considerably large gap between him and Wonwoo (“miss me with those octopus-out-of-water sleeping habits”), and Chan tucks himself in beside Wonwoo, conking out practically as soon as his head hits the pillow.

Finally, he slides in next to Chan, in the space that Seungkwan has tried to leave for him, nervously clutching at the sheets.

While Hansol understands Wonwoo’s need to be as far from Mingyu as possible (really, that tangled mess from the first night was the biggest pain in his arse), he wishes that the boy would just grin and bear it for his sake.

He hates to admit it (in fact, he doesn’t admit it, even to himself), but the warmth that emanates from the boy beside him (not Chan, for clarification — that boy is reptilian cold) lulls him quickly to sleep.

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Hansol awakes toasty, content and safe. He hears a snort, probably from Mingyu, although there’s a possibility it’s the sound of a snore that got stuck on its way out (still probably from Mingyu). But the sound that follows; a loud, resounding smack, basically answers all his questions, telling him that the sound, whether snort or snore, was from Mingyu, and the smack was definitely by the hand of Wonwoo.

Slowly drifting into consciousness, he snuffles, then shifts a little, only to find that the exact thing that’s been making him feel safe is constricting him.

“What the-” he begins to slur out as his eyes flutter open, but the words die on his tongue.

When he opens his eyes, he’s faced by Chan in a starfish position with three pillows stacked on top
of his face.

But more importantly, he finds an arm wrapped firmly around him, and another beneath his head, with which he’s clasped hands with.

Startled, he withdraws his right hand and bolts upright, dislodging the arm that’s around him with the sudden movement, and waking the owner of the arm in the process.

Mingyu guffaws, much to his dismay, but Wonwoo drags him out of the room for which he is grateful, until he remembers he probably wouldn’t have woken to find himself in such a position with his squash nemesis had the boy not left such a large gap between himself and Mingyu when going to bed.

“Good morning, Seungkwan,” Hansol lets out through his teeth, his voice straining.

“Morning, Vernon,” he responds, rubbing at his eyes with his right hand before squinting at his left arm that doesn’t seem to want to comply to his brain’s orders.

Hansol wants to tell him why he’s unable to move his arm, but more than that he wants to preserve his sanity and avoid intentionally throwing himself into embarrassing situations, so he zips his mouth shut and stands from the sofa bed.

“Come for breakfast when you’re ready,” he yawns behind his shoulder, and leaves his soulmate to breathe air back into the life of his left arm.

~*~

Wonwoo slips away after breakfast, saying he wants to go back to the beach for a bit, and the rest of the boys wave him off, content to laze around the house while they’re still full. Of course, Jisoo tries to implement the ‘wait half an hour after eating before swimming’ rule on Wonwoo, but the poor boy just brushes it off, because he is obviously not well versed in the art of Australian summers.

It’s barely twenty minutes later that he returns, dripping water all over the house with a sodden towel hanging by his side. Everyone sort of rushes at him, because they know the signs of a dunking when they see them. It’s in the set of Wonwoo’s shoulders and the defeated glint of his eyes. Hansol shakes his head, he knew it was bound to happen eventually, and even though it is a little amusing, a dunking is never fun.

Wonwoo just splutters, making vague wave motions with his hands, until Hansol cuts him off.

“Good job! Your first dunking, you’ve now completed your Australian initiation!”

Wonwoo just looks at him, tilts his head, narrows his eyes into a glare, and stumps off to the bathroom.

It’s Jeonghan who speaks first.

“We’ve done it boys. Australia has finally broken Jeon Wonwoo.”

~*~

The boys are sprawled all around the living room, in various states of alertness. At the awake end, there’s Wonwoo, calmly reading a book, seemingly over his unfortunate beach experience, and at the sleepy end, there’s Jeonghan, limbs splayed out over at least three different people, head drooping off the side of the couch, the angle of his neck surprisingly not waking him up.
No one seems to have energy to move, and even though there are vague noises about not wasting their last day at the beach, no action is taken.

There’s a peaceful feeling in the air that doesn’t happen much around these boys, and Hansol basks in the silence that’s only occasionally broken by a soft murmur or two. He loves moments like this, where he has nothing to but sit, so he basks in the early afternoon sun, happily listening to his Drake playlist, head nodding to the beat.

Suddenly, his cherished peace is broken, by none other than Jisoo. He stands up suddenly, pushing Jeonghan’s leg off of his lap, sending the older boy falling onto the floor. He still doesn’t wake up.

“Momma needs a new pair of shoes,” Jisoo declares and Hansol grimaces because really, Jisoo, really?

Jisoo has a sly grin on his face, and Hansol isn’t the only one that’s slightly nervous if the amount of shuffling going on is any indication.

“Come on boys, we’re going to Robina.”

~*~

Hansol is once again the designated driver. He doesn’t really mind ferrying all his friends around, he at least gets control of the music. He’s just glad that Seungkwan and Soonyoung aren’t in the car with them again, having decided to catch an Uber back to Wet n’ Wild to pick up their own car. Hansol is feeling a little better about Seungkwan, there’s something about him off the squash court that makes it hard to keep hating him, but he’s appreciating the room to breathe without the constant presence of the other half of his goddamn soul.

But when there’s a gap between songs or a break in the chatter, Hansol finds himself listening for the boisterous laugh he’s gotten so quickly acquainted it’s almost scary.

He settles for humming along to his favourite tracks, all nicely queued, and he sinks into the music, no room for thoughts of anything other than green lights and key changes.

By the time they make it to Robina, everyone’s hungry, so they make a detour to the food court where everyone inevitably gets some form of chicken. There’s mostly nuggets, with the occasional burger thrown into the mix. Hansol steals some of Seungcheol’s fries when he’s not looking, quickly stuffing them into his mouth and sending nothing but a smile towards the other boy when his eyes narrow on Hansol. He knew he’d want fries, but it’s honestly so much easier to just steal from one of the others. He considers it his driver’s tax.

It takes them far too long to finish eating, and Jisoo finally gets to search for his shoes, but only when Jihoon is done scooping up the last of his tomato sauce. He’d death glared anyone that had suggested just throwing it out.

They all start to follow Jisoo to whichever shop he’s going to, but before they can get there he turns around to face them all.

“I do not need ten people to accompany me to buy some shoes, you’d fill the entire shop for god’s sake. I want Minghao and Mingyu and that’s it. The rest of you can amuse yourselves,” he says, nodding decidedly and striding off. Minghao and Mingyu follow after him with a not so subtle fist bump and the others sort of just stand there, watching, not quite sure where to go in this massive beast of a shopping centre.
It’s Seungcheol who finally makes a decision.

“Let’s go to, like, City Beach, or something?”

It seems no one has any objections so they head off, all the way to the other side of the shopping centre. It’s only a bit of a hike and Hansol’s squash fitness helps him out. Some of the others don’t seem so lucky; Jun, for one, is moaning about how eating twenty nuggets doesn’t exactly make for the best walking experience.

They mess around in City Beach for a while, Jeonghan and Chan trying on snapbacks while Seungcheol looks at watches. Jihoon disappears into the change rooms with about ten pairs of identical boardshorts to try on (“go big or go home” he’d said before he’d slammed the door shut).

Hansol goes with Jun over to the shoes, and honestly Jisoo should have come here because there’s almost too much choice and if he isn’t careful, Hansol will be going home with that awesome pair of high tops over there. Unfortunately, he is too broke for his liking, so he turns away with a sigh to find Wonwoo hovering behind them.

“Hey, I’m gonna head to the bathroom guys, are you just gonna stay here, or…?” Wonwoo asks, and Hansol scratches his head, considering.

“Nah, I think Seungcheol said he wanted to go to Cotton On, so maybe just meet us there? I don’t think we’ll be here for too much longer.”

Wonwoo nods a few times and wanders out of the store with that signature walk of his that doesn’t quite hide his slight fear of all things Australian.

Hansol was right in thinking they’d be gone from the store pretty soon; not even a minute after Wonwoo leaves, Jihoon comes banging out of the change room, dumping all of the boardshorts onto a surprised shop assistant.

“They don’t have what I want, let’s go guys.” He leads them out of City Beach, short legs not holding him back from marching right on over to Cotton On.

Hansol doesn’t need any clothes so he just follows the rest of them around, not really browsing, not really not either. He picks up a few things, tosses some over to Seungcheol who always seems to need more clothes. He’s just looking at a truly ugly hoodie, when his phone buzzes in his pocket.

It’s Wonwoo; which honestly shouldn’t surprise him, it’s been awhile since the boy’s been gone, but Hansol had honestly pretty much forgotten about him.

“Yo, Wonwoo, where you at?”

“I’m not actually sure…” Comes the confused reply, and Hansol should have known this would happen. “See, I asked someone how to get to Cotton On, but then there were two of them? And you weren’t in either of them? And now I’m surrounded by women’s underwear and I’m so lost, please help me Hansol.”

Hansol can’t help it. He just laughs. It’s been a long time, probably never if he thinks about it, since he’s encountered someone who doesn’t know Cotton On for all of its complexities.

“Ah, Wonwoo you ended up in Cotton On Body, rookie mistake. We’re in the men’s section at Cotton On. Just go to the escalator at the back, we’re downstairs,” he chuckles, wishing Wonwoo luck before hanging up.
It’s only a few minutes later that Wonwoo finally joins them again, muttering something along the lines of “motherfucking bogan country”.

Hansol grins. Wonwoo’s finally learning.

~*~

After wandering aimlessly through far too many shops, Jisoo calls and says he’s finally found his shoes, and just like that, it’s time to go back to the house. Their last dinner is nothing fancy, just finishing off whatever perishables are left in the kitchen, and it’s no surprise that Mingyu kicks them all out to go wild with the strange combination of ingredients the fridge has to offer.

They eat slowly, worn out from their holiday. Hansol hadn’t expected Robina to be what broke them, but here they were, in a retail coma, surrounded by Jisoo’s five shoe boxes.

As he lies down on the couch that night, Hansol doesn’t really think about the drive back, or the new term that’s waiting for them back in Brisbane. The only thing his brain is bothered with at the moment is a certain squash player that Hansol is wishing to ignore for just a little longer, and the uncomfortable press of the sofa springs into his back.

He just wants his goddamn bed.

Chapter End Notes

Your Australian Dictionary:

- Wet n’ Wild: A great Australian theme park, basically just filled with water slides.
- Banana Boat: An Australian sunscreen brand that has a really annoyingly catchy jingle.
- Movie World: A theme park that’s got movie theme rides.
- Australian Outback Spectacular: Pretty much what Hansol says which is actually straight from Google because we have never been.
- Stoked: Excited, looking forward to something.
- Ls: Learner’s driver’s license.
- City Beach: the best surf shop there is in Australia, surf dive n’ ski cannot compare.
- Cotton On: a clothes shop with multiple offshoots (e.g. Cotton On Body) that is literally everywhere.
As far as Wonwoo had known, it was just a normal weekend.

That was, until Seokmin had practically jumped on him on Wednesday morning when all he wanted to do was get into his locker. Seokmin didn’t seem to notice that however, what with the shrieking into his ear and tugging on his hair.

“Wonwoooooooo, you’re not busy on Sunday, are you?” Seokim asked, his tone hopeful, and despite Wonwoo’s caution regarding anything his friends wanted him to do, he couldn’t bring himself to lie.

He sighed.

“No, Seokmin, I’m not busy.”

The other boy practically screeched.

“Perfect! You’re coming over to my house, it’s the annual Family Fun Easter Extravaganza!”

Wonwoo tilted his head, running the words slowly through his mind and coming up with nothing.

“The… what? Actually, no never mind. I’ll be there.” He knew it was a losing battle at this stage of the game.

“Great,” Seokmin smiled, “It’s at me and Chan’s house, twelve o’clock. Don’t be late!”

With that, Seokmin ran off, mixing into the crowd gathering around the lockers, leaving a resigned Wonwoo in his wake.

And so here he was. Waiting on the Lee’s front door step, with his parents and Bohyuk behind him, looking all too eager to meet his friends and their families.

Because, what Seokmin had failed to mention and had only texted him later that evening, was that everyone was invited to this thing.

Literally everyone.

Wonwoo didn’t know why it was strictly necessary to have a get together with the entire group’s parents and siblings (hell, he heard that even Seungcheol’s aunt was coming), but it seemed that it was a regular thing.
To be honest, he was a little worried about abandoning his parents into the mess of his friend’s families, but he didn’t really have a choice. No one could refuse a darling like Seokmin when he wanted something.

All too soon, Seokmin himself was opening the door with a huge grin on his face, looking all too pleased to see them.

“Wonwoo! Bohyuk! Mr. and Mrs. Jeon!” Wonwoo swears he could see literal sunshine coming out of Seokmin’s face. “It’s so good to see you all, please come in.”

Walking into Seokmin’s house was a similar experience to what Wonwoo imagines walking into someone’s memories would be like. The walls are layered with pictures, almost too many to look at individually. There are ones of Seokmin, as many of Chan, plenty of the two of them together, a fair few with their parents, some just of their parents, and a hell of a lot of this one kinda ugly looking dog.

Wonwoo’s shocked for a second. His own house looks nothing like this; sure they have heaps of family photos and the like, but they’re tucked away in albums that they only really get out when his mum feels particularly sentimental or when Bohyuk wants to mock for him for that terrible bowl cut he had when he was eight.

He can see the love in Seokmin’s family; it already practically radiates from him and Chan, but here, in the middle of this goddamn shrine, Wonwoo can almost taste it. It’s nice. More than nice. This is what he wants for his future home. He wants pictures of children and pets and Mingyu-

Probably not Mingyu, but the same applies. Wonwoo wants to his house to practically radiate with love like the Lee’s does.

He doesn’t realise he’s stopped and is just staring at the hallway until Seokmin starts to tug on his arm.

“It’s a lot, isn’t it?” Seokmin chuckles, “come on, Wonwoo, everyone’s outside.”

Wonwoo follows the other boy through the living room and out into the garden, where it seems the entire group (and his family - when did that happen?) are already sitting around on the garden furniture.

He can even see Soonyoung and Seungkwan messing around on the trampoline, which he really should find surprising, but doesn’t, because it seems they’ve just become a part of the group at this stage.

It’s hard to know who to talk to first. The impulse to go greet Seokmin’s family is strongest, his mother certainly brought him up right. But he sees Mingyu and Jun messing around over by the food and it feels like it’s been all too long since he’s seen them.

Neither of his plans work, however, because it’s at that stage that Jeonghan appears out of nowhere to drag him over to one of the ugliest table and chair sets Wonwoo has ever seen.

The glass of the table is kind of bumpy? And a little foggy? And the chairs are this ugly mess of green plastic that feels strangely like lino?

Jeonghan sits him down on said seat, plopping down onto his one a moment later.

“So Wonwoo, ready for the annual Family Fun Easter Extravaganza?”
Wonwoo just blinks.

“I’m still not entirely sure what it is, to be honest. It seems… nice?”

Jeonghan smirks back at him, eyes glinting beneath the fringe that he’s just started to grow out.

“Oh, you’ll see. I think the easter hunt is going to start in a moment. Just wait…”

Wonwoo looks around, looking for whatever sign it seems Jeonghan is waiting for, and then he sees it.

Chan is walking out of the house with a pair of giant rabbit ears perched on his head, looking far too cute for a seventeen-year-old, and Wonwoo refuses to believe he’s one of the oldest of the group, he looks like a goddamn toddler.

“Easter hunt time, everyone!” Chan calls out, waving everyone over to him. “Time for the rules. Get into groups of three, and find as many of the hidden eggs as possible. They’re all around the garden, and maybe even a few in the house, so search hard. The group that finds the most eggs gets the grand prize, which is, as usual, the giant chocolate bilby! As soon as you have a group, you can start. Happy hunting guys!”

Chan skips away to the hammock at the corner of the yard, seeming content to just sit and supervise while gorging himself on chocolate.

Wonwoo looks around, trying to find Jun and Mingyu, hoping to rope them into being in a team with him. When he finally finds them, they’re already running off with Jihoon, so Wonwoo just sighs and looks around for someone else to team up with, expecting to end up with his parents.

What he doesn’t expect, however, is to be bowled over by two small bodies that slam into him in what he hopes are hugs.

“Wonwoo! Wonwoo! Be on our team!”

It’s Fengjun and Sofia, two adorable kids he’s only ever seen pictures of, so frankly, he has no idea how they know who he is. He rolls with it though, wrapping his arms around both of them in greeting.

“Hey Fengjun, hey Sof. Let’s go find some chocolate, yeah?” Wonwoo smiles at them, loving the way their eyes light up with delight.

They both let out some kind of squeal, making him laugh, and then they drag him off to the house, because that’s where they’re sure Chan put all the chocolate.

The next hour or so is spent with Wonwoo trailing helplessly behind the two hyped up kids as they try to find as much chocolate as they can.

Wonwoo is nursing his right hand which got hit by Fengjun when he tried to fish a chocolate egg out of their basket.

“No, Wonwoo!” He’d said, curling protectively around the basket. “You can’t eat any, we need to win the bilby.”

And that had led to Wonwoo getting confused, because he really has no goddamn idea what a bilby is. Not that he’d admit that in front of Fengjun, he’d probably get slapped again.
So here he is, wandering around the garden, brainstorming possible definitions of ‘bilby’ and not really contributing to the Easter Hunt at all.

When it’s finally over, Chan rises out of the hammock to call them back over to him. He then goes around counting all the eggs in the basket, and Wonwoo must have really not been paying attention (what the hell is a bilby!?) because they’ve got a grand total of 57 eggs, which makes them the winners.

It’s adorable to see Fengjun and Sofia so happy- they start squealing again as soon as Chan announces the result, and then they launch themselves onto Wonwoo again.

He really doesn’t mind though, and is happy to lie on the grass with them, stomach slightly sore from where Sofia’s elbow is digging in, but he doesn’t make any attempt to move her.

It’s only when Chan comes over with a giant chocolate thing that he bothers to get up.

It looks sort of like a somewhat cute large rat, but not, like a mammal of some kind.

“Is that what a bilby is?” he asks, and everyone just looks at him in disbelief, Fengjun slapping his hand again.

“You’re not a real Australian Wonwoo,” he says, getting up. He picks up the bilby, takes Sofia’s hand, and off they go, leaving Wonwoo on the grass.

He doesn’t get up for a long while.

When Wonwoo finally forces himself up, he goes over to Mr. and Mrs. Lee (it’s taken him far too long, don’t tell his mother), smiling as he waits for them to break away from their conversation with Jisoo.

It’s Jisoo who notices him first; a glance away from the adults turning into a double take spreading to a full blown grin.

“Wonwoo!” Jisoo calls out, leaning into Wonwoo in a delicate hug. “It’s good to see you out of uniform,” he grins, tugging on the collar of Wonwoo’s polo shirt. “Have you met Seokmin and Chan’s parents?”

The boys turn to the Lees who are watching with that typical parental look that Wonwoo just knows he’ll get tired of today.

“Nice to meet you, Wonwoo,” Mrs. Lee says, “the boys have told us about you.”

“You too,” Wonwoo murmurs, shaking their hands.

They chat for a few minutes, talking about Wonwoo’s experiences in Australia, his family, the usual, until the most dreaded question any year twelve student could ever hear comes out of Mr. Lee’s mouth.

“So, Wonwoo,” he says, “what are you going to do next year? Are you staying here or going back to Korea?”

Wonwoo opens his mouth to respond, as he’s gotten used to, his usual response being that he’s not sure what university course he’ll be doing just yet, but when he fully processes Mr. Lee’s question, he finds he can’t answer.
He’s been considering the question of what course for a long time, it’s not a new dilemma. But what country? That one is. He’s just been operating under the assumption that he’s going back to Korea; he hasn’t even considered anything else.

He has a life in Korea, one that he was planning on returning to at the end of this year. He does have a fantastic life in Australia. One full of new friends and new places and new joys. But Korea is his home.

“I’m gonna go back to Korea. My parents are staying here for the next few years at least, but my grandparents are still in Changwon. I really like Australia, but Korea’s my home, you know?”

Wonwoo scratches his head. He feels a little awkward explaining this, and seeing the way Jisoo’s eyes widen in surprise is more than a little upsetting, but he knows that going back to Korea is the what he wants.

It is.

He excuses himself to go get some food, spinning with a smile fixed on his face. He turns just in time to see Mingyu trying to fix his own smile, offering a small smile to Wonwoo before running off to Minghao.

Wonwoo’s own smile slowly dies; he’d been hoping to talk to Mingyu, but it seems the other boy doesn’t want to talk to him.

Luckily, he doesn’t get the chance to dwell on it for too long, because just then, Jun runs up to him, pulling on his shoulders to bring him over to the food.

“Wonwoo, you gotta have some of these chocolate hot cross buns, man,” Jun practically yells, jumping around as a result of what Wonwoo suspects is a sugar high. He looks around for Minghao, ready to scold him for letting Jun get so hyper.

He finds Minghao and is about to call out to him, but then he follows the line of Minghao’s arm down to his hand resting on Mingyu’s shoulder, and oh.

Wonwoo isn’t messing with them at the moment. Mingyu’s head is down, his adorable puppy smile so painfully absent, his bubbly energy drained from his body. Wonwoo wonders if it was him that made the younger boy so downcast, but he hasn’t even said anything to him today, other than their daily ‘good morning’ Snapchat.

Should he go over? It looks like Minghao is doing just fine comforting Mingyu, but goddamn it, Wonwoo wants to put his hand on Mingyu’s shoulder and be the one to ask whether he’s okay.

So that’s what he does.

Wonwoo pushes Jun off of him, and walks slowly over to them. Mingyu sees him coming, eyes flickering with a brief flare of happiness, before dissolving once again into turmoil.

“Wonwoo… hey,” he starts, offering up a small smile, nothing near his usual wattage.

Wonwoo does his best to smile back.

“Hey guys. What’s up? Are you alright, Mingyu?”

Mingyu has never looked so torn, his brow scrunching up, his hands wringing together.
“Uh, I’m just not feeling the best today, hyung. Don’t worry about it. I’ve just gotta go talk to Seokmin for a second, I’ll see you later, okay?”

And with that, he’s gone.

Wonwoo just stares after him, then helplessly looks at Minghao, desperate for whatever answers he can get.

Minghao just shrugs, patting Wonwoo on the shoulder.

“Don’t worry hyung. It’s not your fault, he’ll be alright. Just give him some time.”

Then Minghao walks away after Mingyu.

Wonwoo knows that he was only trying to help, but Minghao has done a terrible job of reassuring him, and he’s left standing alone in the garden with the annual Family Fun Easter Extravaganza carrying on around him.

Chapter End Notes

Your Australian Dictionary:

- Table and chair set: An outdoor furniture set that at least one of your friends has, probably comes from Bunnings.
- Easter Hunt: A fun Easter activity where you hunt for hidden eggs (probably somewhat universal and very self explanatory).
- Chocolate bilby: a bilby is an iconic Australian animal, and we love to eat chocolate ones at Easter.
- Hot Cross Buns: Yummy sweet buns that you eat at Easter time, with an icing cross in the middle. I think they come from England and are eaten mainly in Commonwealth Countries? Also come in the chocolate variety.
Burnt Toast, Swear Jars and Betty Crocker Cookies

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

This chapter of 100% Junhao goodness(?) has been dedicated to my co-writer, jezza, or Jeremy.

At the end of this chapter you'll find a map to tell you whereabouts everyone lives, just to... give you a bit more of a grasp of things. If you want to know the name of the suburb they live in, I suppose you'll just have to keep your eyes peeled throughout the fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

18th April, 2017

Jun considers it a good day when he’s woken up by the chirping of birds, murderous cackling of a kookaburra. When the alternative is either the blaring alarm clock on his bedside table or his brother screaming in a fit of not wanting to comply with their parents’ wishes, he’ll take the rowdy kookaburra any day.

However, any day is not today, because today, Wen Junhui’s ears are blessed by the blood-curdling cries of his younger brother.

Would you believe him if he told you the little runt was already seven years old? Junhui sure wouldn’t, not with the way the kid liked to throw a hissy fit the moment something didn’t go the way he wanted it to.

Jun swears he wasn’t this bad at that age.

But then and again, he figures that’s what everyone says when they look back on their times as a bratty little ankle-biter.

(Still though; he really wasn’t that bad. He’d stopped the whole tantrum debacle at the age of five.)

It’s a blessed pupil free day today, the last day of holidays before term starts up again, and Junhui curses the fact that he was naïve enough to think he could lie in his bed doing nothing all morning until Minghao came over.

Just because he always wakes up early doesn’t mean he has to physically haul himself out of his bed at arse o’clock in the morning.

Except.

While pupil free days are a blessing that should be praised upon every altar across the globe, pupil free days mean that the parents are at work. More importantly, pupil free days when his parents are at work (and aren’t feeling generous), mean Junhui slaving away on his precious last day off to look after his little brother.
He quickly shoos his parents out of the house and to their respective jobs to rush to his brother’s bedside, sickly-sweet voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Fengjun honey, time to wake up!” he calls. Then, dropping his voice back down to its normal octave, “Hao’s coming at 9, FengFeng, and you know he doesn’t like it when you’re asleep because it means you can’t play with him.”

As expected, that comment has Fengjun shooting out of bed and dashing for the kitchen to get himself a piece of toast to start the day.

Junhui smiles, before flopping down on Fengjun’s car-shaped bed and reveling in the short-lived silence while he can.

“Junnie! My toast is black!” a voice cries.

Rest in peace, silence. You will be missed.

~*~

“Hao’s here!” Fengjun screams as he spots the Chinese boy walking up his driveway.

Feng all but throws the door open, almost lodging the door knob straight into the wall if not for his older brother being there to stop it from creating a hole.

“Hao Ge!” the kid yells as he runs straight into Minghao’s open arms, clinging to him better than any koala out in the bush.

“We like to invite our guests into the house before attacking them, FengFeng,” Junhui says, shaking his head as he leads his friend inside by pulling on his sleeve.

Fengjun has never really had any manners when it comes to Minghao (or anyone, for that matter), but it took enough of an effort just to get the little thing to sometimes call him with honorifics, that it’s come to a point where they’ve given up. Minghao seems to find it cute anyway, so Jun supposes it’s alright that all his little brother ever wants to do is climb him like a tree and force him into playing games together.

“Hao Ge, will you make some toast for me?” Fengjun says as soon as he’s settled himself comfortably on top of Minghao’s shoulders, and he tugs on the boy’s hair as he asks the question.

“Junnie Ge burnt my toast so I can’t trust him.”

Jun takes the liberty to give the kid a light smack on the head at that, before stalking off to his bedroom, grumbling all the way.

“You’re the one who burnt your own toast, I was the one who had to make a mess of the sink salvaging it with my professional burn-scraping skills but sure! Fine! I’m the one who can’t be trusted.”

“You know y’all should just invest in a normal toaster instead of a toaster oven and you wouldn’t go through this pain?” Minghao laughs, but Junhui spins around on his heel halfway to his room and glares his friend down.

“Why would we get a normal toaster when a toaster oven is ten times as useful and versatile? How are you gonna create a true innovative masterpiece with a shite piece of metal like a normal toaster?”

“Junnie, swear jar!”
“Yeah Junnie, pop some change in the fuckin’ swear jar.”

“HaoHao, swear jar!”

“Damn it.”

“Swe-”

“No.”

~*~

“Hao Ge, what did you bring in your backpack?” Fengjun prods once he’s finally satisfied with his breakfast.

A curious young boy, he’s always sticking his nose in every crack and crevice, and of course, Minghao’s bag doesn’t go unnoticed.

After receiving ample drumrolls from small fists hitting the table, Minghao reveals boxed cookie mix for the three of them to bake together and snack on while they watch movies. In fact, he has two boxes (“they were on sale at Woolies!”), both from Betty Crocker, as any sensible man would know to purchase, and while they’re no homemade recipe, they are just a bunch of vaguely-proficient-in-the-kitchen boys. Well, Minghao and Junhui are vaguely proficient. The same can’t be said for Fengjun.

“FengFeng, will you get the butter out and set it on the counter?” Minghao instructs once they all have their hands washed, the kitchen cleared of clutter, and they each have a hideous apron from Jun’s mother’s atrocious collection tied around their waists.

“And your Junnie Ge can get two eggs from the fridge for me. We can make both of the boxes at once, right?”

“What, are you implying that the Betty Crocker police is going to break down our door and drag us along the concrete to take us hostages?”

Fengjun shoots his brother a horrified look at that, almost dropping the butter.

“We should make them one at a time,” he says, stoically. “I’m not letting any of you go to jail.”

Jun can only ruffle his brother’s hair at that, and with a smile he hoists the boy up onto the counter to sit next to the slowly softening butter.

“You have nothing to worry about, FengFeng. No one is going to jail for making two boxes of cookies in one batch. I promise.”

Fengjun sniffs, if only a little, but nods his head slowly.

“Now, your Hao Ge will preheat the oven for us, and I’ll crack the eggs so that you can mix everything together, alright?”

“You’re darn diddly tootin’ I’ll preheat the oven for you,” Minghao sticks his tongue out, which earns him a hard smack from Junhui, and a pout from Fengjun, who unfortunately can’t call the elder out on the swear word, since it’s technically not bad enough.

“I could kill you with no less than a bobby pin and a pack of Werther’s Originals,” Minghao hisses to Jun in passing, but he obligingly turns to heat the oven anyway.
Fengjun only makes a small mess stirring the cookie mix together, and Junhui only has to stop the boy from consuming the batter once (and himself about three times, because he needs to set a good example; raw eggs are not safe to eat Goddamn it) before all the cookie dough is rolled into balls and placed neatly onto the tray to be placed in the oven.

The wait for the cookies to bake is filled with an alarmingly intense game of Jenga – a family favourite and unfortunately something Minghao is startlingly terrible at – and all too soon the smell of freshly-baked cookies is wafting throughout the house and to Fengjun’s nose.

It takes both Minghao and Junhui to hold the little boy down while they wait for the cookies to cool to a somewhat acceptable temperature (note the word ‘somewhat’), and the boys move half the cookies into a container so that they won’t all contract bad tummy aches, with the rest piled up onto a plate for the movie.

“What’re we gonna watch today, Feng?” Jun asks, praying to every God in his mind that he doesn’t choose Mulan again (as much as he adores the movie, he did have to watch it straight three times in a row in one day, and that was only two weeks ago).

“Senchikamki!” Fengjun screams at the top of his lungs, and Minghao gives Jun the most distressed look, like as if his friend’s little brother had started in on a demonic chant.

“Alright, *Spirited Away* it is.”

At that, Jun’s friend almost snaps his neck turning around, as if to say, ‘how on God’s green Earth did you get that from what he just said?’.

“*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*,” Jun says, slowly. He probably has the pronunciation all wrong since he only took Japanese for two years back in primary school when it was compulsory, but he enunciates the words carefully for the poor guy, before settling into the couch, Fengjun sandwiched in the middle with his limbs firmly wrapped around the plate of cookies.

Despite insisting on watching the movie, Fengjun cries once (though that’s an improvement since the first time he watched it where he cried five times) when his favourite character Haku gets injured. He almost sheds a tear at the end when Chihiro has to leave without looking back, but, like the strong, grown up boy that he is, he holds it in, his bottom lip only trembling a little.

Jun has half the mind to think they should have chosen Totoro as he watches his brother chew on his lip in an effort to stop himself from crying, but, although he hates to admit it, he has a terribly hard time saying no to the little kid. He figures, so long as Fengjun doesn’t start insisting on watching *Grave of the Fireflies*, they should be alright.

(Junhui knows that that’s where he’s going to have to put his foot down; he can’t be seen crying over Setsuko in front of Fengjun and Minghao.)

Sometime into the movie Junhui pulls his phone out to take a sneaky selfie of the three of them, Fengjun’s tears included. He opens up snapchat to send it off to Wonwoo with the caption ‘Ghibli with the fam <3’. He rolls his eyes when he sees the notification that the other has screenshotted the photo, and in about five seconds he receives a response that reads ‘c*te’.

Typical of Wonwoo to need to censor the word cute.

When the plate of cookies is free of crumbs and the credits are rolling, Fengjun uses his arms to swipe away at phantom tears from earlier in the movie, and turns to face his older brother.
“Junnie, can we dress up for Halloween like that?” he asks. “I’ll give Haku to Hao Ge so that you can go together with him as Chihiro.”

With the most innocent smile on his face, Jun doesn’t have the heart to protest at this hypothetical of dressing up as a girl. For God’s sake, the kid is even giving up his favourite character for Minghao.

“And I’ll be No-Face and I’ll beg people for lollies until they give me all of it!”

“Feng I don’t think-”

The words ‘you should steal all the lollies from other kids’ are cut off by Minghao, who grins over Fengjun’s head with a thumbs up.

“I reckon we can do it. How hard could it be, right? You’re going to look totally bad- bad… butt as No-Face! And if your Junnie Ge really doesn’t wanna be Chihiro, I can do it. I think I’d look good in pink, don’t you, FengFeng?”

“You’d look better than Junnie Ge in pink, Hao Ge!” Fengjun says, eyes already sparkling.

“I resent that,” Jun grumbles, but he can confidently say he’d make a pretty damn good-looking Haku, so there’s nothing much to be complaining about.

Once it’s pretty much confirmed that the three of them will be roaming the streets on the night of Halloween, Trick-or-Treating as No-Face, Haku and Chihiro, Fengjun deems it time to tap around on Junhui’s phone getting the password incorrect twenty times in a row in an attempt to start looking for materials they’ll need for their costumes.

“FengFeng, it’s April.”

Not to mention, they’re going to have to go to a neighbourhood that actually celebrates Halloween, since theirs doesn’t.

Perhaps they’ll have to venture into the rich bitch territory of Ascot for a little bit of Halloween fun. Or alternatively, he could stop being a stereotyping bastard and just pay Jisoo a visit, since his area of Clayfield has always been big on celebrating Halloween. Although, if he thinks about it carefully, Jisoo and his Bellevue Terrace crowd is just as, if not more loaded than some of the… people of Ascot.

(He vaguely remembers passing some RDM worker or rather gossiping away about how they would need to make the new precinct in Ascot attractive for all the ‘yummy mummies’ to spend all their money on, if that’s enough to give anyone a clue as to the kind of ‘people’ Jun is referring to.)

“Does anyone even celebrate Halloween in Albion?” Minghao asks, like as if he’s caught the drift of Junhui’s thoughts.

“Not that I know of, so we’ll probably have to go Clayfield way. They’re big on Halloween ‘round where Jisoo is. But even back where we used to live we only ever had some kids knock on our door once in like 2007 with their shoddy costumes and pillow cases to fill with lollies. It wasn’t even Halloween! They were leaving early for the holidays so they just came around in the middle of October and stole all my Tiny Teddies. Never saw another Trick-or-Treater again.”

“Dude, that’s fucking weird,” is the boy’s response. And then, “I’m too broke for the swear jar and you’re gonna live with it, Feng.”

With that, Jun dusts himself off as he stands from the couch, taking the empty cookie plate.
“I’ll go wash up, and you can play with HaoHao, alright?” he says to Fengjun.

“Uh no, I brought the cookie mix and therefore I should be the one washing up.”

Junhui can’t believe his friend is fighting over something that he despises doing, and he tells the boy so.

“I may hate washing dishes when I’m made to, but I know how to set a good example for little boys like Fengjun, and that’s what I’m doing right now,” he crosses his arms, trying very hard to stop his lips from forming a petulant pout.

“Hao, don’t be stupid, I invited you over to help me look after Feng, I can’t keep owing you peach sodas instead! I’m a poor, penniless high school student.”

Suddenly, from another room floats Fengjun’s voice, bright and cheery.

“Junnie Ge, HaoHao Ge, look! No more burnt bits!”

As the two boys dash into the kitchen, Fengjun holds up the washed baking tin, dripping with water and suds and all, a proud smile on his face.

“Kid, you leave the washing to me, hey?” Minghao tries to take the tin from Fengjun’s hands, but is met with resistance.

“I’m a big boy and I can wash up all the things by myself!”

Junhui and Minghao exchange a mildly concerned glance, but hoist themselves up onto the kitchen counter to watch Fengjun dutifully scrub away at the utensils in the sink.

While Jun keeps an eye on his little brother, Minghao takes his phone from his back pocket where he felt it buzz, and unlocks his phone to find two messages from Wonwoo.

One is a photograph, the one that Minghao assumes to be what Jun took during the movie, then below that, a text that reads…

Minghao abruptly stands, feet landing heavily on the kitchen floor, before punching Junhui square in the face and sending him sliding off the counter.

“You bastard! What have you been telling our friends?” he yells, his cheeks slowly becoming a burning crimson.

Bewildered, Junhui merely picks Fengjun up from where the little boy is confusedly wringing his hands after just finishing washing all the dishes, and takes him away to his bedroom to go play on his DS or rather.

“One,” he starts as he walks back into the kitchen, “that really bloody hurt. Are you sure my beautiful nose isn’t crooked now?”

He tilts his head to the side for his friend to see.

“Two, what have I been telling our friends?”

At those words, Minghao’s scowl disappears, and he suddenly looks… small, reluctant to respond.

“It’s nothing. Let’s go play with Fengjun.”
“HaoHao-” Jun tries, but the other boy is already halfway up the stairs.

“Congratulations! Didn’t realise you were already together. You look good I guess?” Minghao’s phone reads, but he doesn’t quite have the strength to be able to show it to Junhui.

~*~

It’s not until they’re crowded on Fengjun’s bedroom floor building a Lego world together that it dawns on Junhui how warm and fuzzy he’s feeling.

It’s a feeling that he’s become so accustomed to when around Minghao that he’s learnt to ignore it, but there, on Fengjun’s truck-patterned rug, constructing a castle for the Lego dragon to sit on and protect, faces far too close to each other for his liking and feeling more like a parent than a brother, Jun’s heart starts to pick up speed.

Shit, his mind supplies.

Then, after some further consideration, fuck.

Looking after Fengjun is so comfortable for him and Minghao. It’s routinely, they all get along well, and Jun just loves watching his best friend interact with his little brother.

It’s adorable, it makes him want kids.

With Minghao.

Again, fuck.

He’s not like, in love or anything, but at the same time, he’s pretty sure he’s never looked at Seokmin babying Chan too much for their lack in age gap and thought ‘damn, I want a kid with Seokmin’.

Suddenly, the domesticity is suffocating. He feels like he’s falling through a black hole.

“I’m uh… I’m gonna go grab myself a glass of water. Anyone else want a drink?”

He runs out of the room far too quickly for things to not seem suspicious, but he can’t stop himself.

~*~

When he’s taken far too long for just a glass of water and he’s recollected himself, Junhui returns to Fengjun’s room to find the two smashing the Lego castle with foam swords, screeching and howling as they go.

“Hey,” Minghao pants, noticing Jun at the doorway, “what’d you do, secretly go and take a dump?”

“No, I just,” Jun starts, before having to pause to think of an excuse, “I spaced while filling my glass up and the water went everywhere so I had to clean it up.”

Once the Lego castle has been completely and utterly destroyed into smithereens, Junhui suggests lunch, and the three troop down to the kitchen to make themselves some burgers.

With the help of a trusty frying pan to ensure that no one contracts any stomach bugs from eating raw
meat, Junhui constructs three classic Aussie burgers, beetroot, pineapple and all.

“I’ll eat it, but for the record, you Australians are fucking weird,” Minghao mumbles around a large bite from his burger, the beetroot staining his fingers red. “We’ve got the world in turmoil screaming about pineapples on pizzas, and here you guys are putting them on burgers.”

Junhui scoffs, then puts his burger down.

“You forget you yourself became a citizen last year.”

Minghao has no rebuttal for that, and continues to munch on his burger instead, picking up the slices of beetroot that Fengjun has cast aside on his plate with a scowl to eat for himself.

They all wash up together this time, and it turns into a water fight that’s taken outside with the hoses and water guns so as not to make too much of a mess inside the house, lest Jun’s mother rips him a new one when she returns home.

“You’ll never catch me!” Fengjun bellows, before running straight face first into the trampoline net and falling backwards onto his butt.

Minghao takes the chance to shoot Fengjun with his water gun right in his belly button where his shirt has ridden up, and the little boy squeals before turning over and crawling away, but this turns out to be a mistake when Junhui uses this as his chance to shoot, as Deadpool so eloquently put, right up main street.

With a shriek, Fengjun runs inside, tracking grass into the house behind him. Laughing, Jun and Minghao put their water guns down so that they can wash off and get changed into some dry clothes.

When everyone is clean and dry, Junhui flops onto the soft rug of the living room, exhausted, with his little brother following close behind and landing right on Jun’s stomach. Minghao follows suit too, collapsing beside Junhui and on top of Fengjun’s legs, who kicks in protest with a giggle.

They lay there for some time, with Fengjun the first to drift off in a matter of seconds, using Junhui as a mattress with his head pillowed on his brother’s chest and arm dangling off the side of Jun’s torso.

Junhui himself doesn’t remember falling asleep, but when he awakes to Minghao’s sleeping face just inches away from his own, an arm around his waist and his younger brother nestled in between them, he gets quite a shock.

Minghao looks peaceful when he’s asleep. And cuter, if Junhui can say that. Without his sharp tongue when he’s alert, the boy looks as innocent as a lamb, small snuffling sounds coming from his nose and drool starting to collect at the corner of his mouth.

He vaguely remembers the sound of Minghao’s voice as he retold a crazy family story from two nights ago, and letting out a painful snort in an effort to laugh quietly so as not to wake Fengjun.

Jun thinks it was some short time after that when he fell asleep.

Not wanting to wake anyone, he shuffles minutely to look up at the wall, where the clock reads fifteen minutes past three, and he deems it a safe time to go back to sleep, just for a little while longer.

The second time his eyes flutter open, Fengjun is gone (as is his phone, but he doesn’t have to think hard before coming to the conclusion that his brother has no doubt taken it to try and unlock it and play games. Instead, he has one Xu Minghao firmly wrapped around his middle, or rather, Jun thinks
the weird contortions his body is making is meant to imitate that of a blanket.

“HaoHao my God,” he locates the boy’s forehead and gives it a flick, which startles the boy awake. “I’m not your doona, and no matter how much you try, my body’s not going to flatten itself out into one.”

In the absurdity of it all, neither have the time to feel embarrassed, and only laugh at each other as Junhui releases the tension in his bones from being in such an odd position.

The clock reads 4:45, and with Jun’s father coming home in 15 minutes and his mother in just over an hour, they conclude it’s a good time for Minghao to get home.

It’s about a half hour bus ride back to Minghao’s place, and Jun ushers his friend out of the house to try and get him to his stop before the rush of businessmen leaving their offices for the day.

“Text me when you get to Paddington,” he says, like as if it’s a likely occurrence that Minghao will just up and disappear into particles of dust upon reaching his home if he doesn’t contact his friend.

Later, Jun opens his phone to a text from Minghao that reads ‘I’m dead and got attacked by a rabid ibis before being eaten alive’. He goes to take a snap of himself rolling his eyes to send to the boy, but notices a photograph in his camera roll he knows he didn’t take.

“FengFeng, dear Lord,” he whispers to himself when he opens the photo app and scrolls through the seemingly endless stream of photos of him and Minghao fast asleep on the floor of the living room.

Despite everything, he can’t seem to delete any of them, even the really blurry ones.
Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Ankle-biter: A kid. You know, they're small, they bite your ankles.
- Werther's Originals: These aren't Aussie, but in case you haven't encountered them before, they're like butterscotch candies.
- Halloween: I'd like to take this time to mention that Australia's not all that big on
Halloween. Basically, there'll be pockets of communities who do celebrate it, and the rest of us don't. I think it's becoming more popular?

- **Ascot**: A very rich suburb for some very rich people, let me tell you. All the kids with the tennis courts and swimming pools in their back yards and just, fancy stuff.
- **Clayfield**: A suburb, not all too fancy, has its own train station that literally everyone and their mother forgets exists.
- **Bellevue Terrace**: A very rich street in Clayfield.
- **Yummy Mummies**: Idk if this term exists out there, but these are like your stay-at-home mums with money to blow.
- **Tiny Teddies**: Little teddy bear-shaped biscuits!
- **Ibis**: Also known as the bin chicken, a terrible bird that smells even more terrible.
- **Paddington and Albion**: Just more suburbs!
The first day of term two isn’t friendly to Wonwoo. His alarm goes off far too early; his ears filling with a terrible rendition of the Australian National Anthem that Bohyuk had set as a prank and Wonwoo hasn’t figured out how to get rid of yet.

He rolls over in bed, groaning slightly as he tries to deny the fact that he actually needs to get out of his doona cocoon sometime in the next few minutes. Wonwoo manages to live in denial for a little longer, until he remembers that term two means *blazers*.

He’d gotten his blazer at the start of the year along with the rest of his uniform, and knowing that he wouldn’t need it for months, he’d put it away to deal with later.

Unfortunately, Wonwoo cannot remember where he put the goddamn thing. He knows it’s gonna take him at least ten minutes to find because at this stage, his room is an absolute mess. It’s not his fault though. Goddamn Bohyuk has taken a liking to too many of Wonwoo’s clothes of late, despite Wonwoo being a head taller, and the result is one very messy room and one very baggily dressed teenager.

Deciding to blame Bohyuk for this too early morning, Wonwoo drags himself out of his cozy bed and winces slightly at the cool air that attacks his bare shins. It may only be mid-April, but Wonwoo has somehow synced with Australian weather, and he finds what is probably only 20 degrees or so to be a little brisk.

It makes him somewhat grateful for their long pants and the disgustingly posh felt blazer he wrestles out from under a pile of novels that were shoved haphazardly into his cupboard back in the days of unpacking.

He spends far too long just standing in front of the mirror, looking at his reflection. The blazer fits him well, he hates to say, and it makes him look just like the posh little private school boy that he is (he really isn’t, but who’s gonna know).

It’s starting to hit Wonwoo just how Australian he is becoming, and the proof is right in front of him. He looks like he belongs, in this silly felt jacket that matches his silly felt hat. He looks exactly like all the other boys at Denborough, but Wonwoo finds he doesn’t mind. He belongs.
The sight of school at the end of the holidays doesn’t fill him with quite the same amount of dread that he got back in Korea. This time he finds himself looking forward to seeing everyone again, to starting his classes, hell, he even misses his locker.

The magic of Australia. It’s a wondrous thing.

He’s barely made it two steps inside the gate when he sees Jun bolting straight at him in that weird gallop run he does. Wonwoo pulls his backpack in front of him just in time, and Jun bounces (how exactly, Wonwoo isn’t sure, because humans definitely do not bounce) right off, onto the ground.

He doesn’t stay down for long, jumping back up and brushing stray leaves off of his blazer. Now that Wonwoo is looking closely at it, he can see a few lines of embroidery on one of the pockets, just under the school crest. They all seem to be for extra curriculars; he sees something about swimming, a few reading music, all stitched into the fabric in a mess of colours.

Just as he’s about to ask about them, his eyes rise up to look at Jun’s face, and he sees it. A huge bruise sits right in the middle of his face and Wonwoo is more than a little shocked. He’d assumed Jun would be able to defend himself well enough, what with all those taekwondo thingies, but someone seems to have landed a damn good hit on his angelic face.

“Dear lord Jun, what happened to your face?” He asks, astonishment colouring his tone.

Jun pouts a little, eyes filling with a slight hint of embarrassment, a little pain and what, strangely enough, seems like affection.

“Hao may have… punched me yesterday,” he mutters, gingerly pressing his fingers against the bruise.

Wonwoo just raises his eyebrow, sure that Jun will elaborate given time and an inviting silence.

Not two seconds later, Jun delivers.

“I don’t know what I did, Wonwoo,” he whines, “something about telling our friends something? We were having such a nice day as well. And then he had to go and punch me. I mean, we did have a good time after that as well, but it’s never fun when Hao punches me. Even though he looks all cute and righteous when he does. It hurts, Wonwoo.”

Jun keeps moaning about how unfortunate the whole thing is and Wonwoo tunes him, patting him on the back a little.

“It’s okay, you still look beautiful,” (because let’s be real, that’s definitely Jun’s main concern), “Hao still loves you,” (his other main concern). Jun nods a little and Wonwoo deems him cheered up enough, so he grabs the other boy’s hand and drags him to the lockers.

“Come on, my textbooks aren’t gonna get themselves.”

~*~

Wonwoo doesn’t get to see everyone until it’s lunch and they’re back at their table. He can’t stop
himself from smiling as he observes his idiotic friends. It’s business as usual, about fifty different conversations going on at once that make enough noise to slightly piss off the tables closest to them.

Jeonghan is trying to subtly steal Wonwoo’s grapes, but he doesn’t really mind, he’s too preoccupied with trying to steal Mingyu’s Twisties. They’re chicken flavour today, and Wonwoo’ll be damned if he can’t steal at least three.

Jihoon suddenly shoots up, eyes on his watch, making grabby hands at Jun.

“Jinho, give me your blazer, I have a meeting with my head of house.”

Wonwoo hadn’t really paid too much attention to the fit of everyone’s blazers, although he did notice earlier that Jun’s was a little small. But now, seeing Jun standing next to Jihoon, he can see the effects of having the same blazer for five years.

Jun’s sits far too tightly across his shoulders and rides up whenever he lifts his arms past ninety degrees.

Jihoon’s, on the other hand, drapes off of him, sleeves rolled up multiple times, making him look like a tiny kitten wrapped in an ugly felt blanket.

But then the magic happens.

The boys shrug off their blazers, swap them, and then Wonwoo is suddenly faced with people who look just as good in a blazer as he does.

“Ah, much better,” Jun sighs, waving his arms around like a windmill. “And I get to look so impressive with all of Jihoonie’s pockets.”

Jihoon sighs.

“Shut up, you twerp. Get some achievements of your own.”

But Wonwoo doesn’t miss the way Jihoon smiles softly and looks all too snug in Jun’s blazer, pulling the sleeves down over his hands to rest at the comfortable length of sweater paws.

Wonwoo also doesn’t miss the mass of stitching running down Jihoon’s blazer. It’s like Jun’s on steroids. There’s embroidery on not one, but two sides of the blazer, and Wonwoo’s sure that it’s something impressive from the way Jihoon stares at it longingly, then scowls at Jun’s measly five lines.

He’s curious, to say the least, about why exactly they have these things written on their blazers.

“What’s the deal with these… pockets?” he asks.

Everyone exclaims suddenly, all variations of shock, and Wonwoo once again feels like a fool in this goddamn country.

It’s Jisoo, as usual, who takes pity on him.

“Pockets are just there to show your achievements. See, I’ve got some for being in choir, a few for service and one for tennis. Jeonghan, on the other hand, only has one for Opti-Minds from grade eight,” he explains. “It’s really just a posh private school way to be even more ridiculous and extra than they already are.”

Wonwoo just nods along, and then it seems like it’s time for Pocket Show and Tell.
Seungcheol has two for touch; Mingyu has three for band and one for swimming; Hansol has more than he can count for squash; Minghao and Chan have some for something called ‘Denborough Dance’; and Seokmin has a bunch for choir.

It’s unsurprising that Jihoon has the most, the script ranging from band and choir to athletics and service. Wonwoo is astounded at just how much he seems to have achieved. Honestly, where does he find the energy to do all that and be so grumpy.

Jun, on the other hand, has far too few for what Wonwoo would expect of his too talented friend.

“Jun, why do you have so few? Don’t you do so much extra curricular stuff?” Wonwoo asks.

It’s clear this is a sensitive topic, what with the way Jun’s eyes narrow and his shoulders set in a defensive position.

"Well, I should have almost as many as Jihoon. I do a lot of stuff, but it’s mostly outside of school. And when that happens, you have to apply for them. Like, I went to nationals for a piano competition, but for some reason, they didn’t accept that. The same happened with my debating competition. I got nothing just because they thought it wasn’t relevant enough. But I applied through the school for god’s sake. I won the damn things. The entire system is a little messed up, Wonwoo. Cause you only get pockets if you win or do really well at a school run activity. That’s why poor little percussionist Hansol doesn’t have any for band, he’s always skipping rehearsal to go to squash practice."

Everyone snickers at that, and Hansol turns a little red, mumbling something about how squash is the most important thing in this world. They let him mumble, it’s nothing they haven’t heard before.

They all start swapping stories about pockets, and Wonwoo just takes it all in. Sometimes his friends are more educational than all of his classes put together.

All too soon it’s time to go back to class, and it’s now time for the true hell to begin. Waking up this morning has nothing on what Wonwoo is about to endure.

It’s time for QCS practise.

Now, Wonwoo hasn’t actually sat one of the practise tests before. They’d done the first ones at the end of last year, so of course he’d missed them, and they’d only had assemblies about it in term one.

From what he’s heard about it, QCS practise is something to be avoided at all costs. Jeonghan, in fact, has gone to the nurse, faking a stomach ache, and Wonwoo just knows he’ll be spending the next two hours sleeping in the comfort of his bed back in the boarders’ house.

Despite all the bad things Wonwoo has heard about it, he’s still not entirely sure what to expect from QCS. Sure, he’s sat through assemblies hearing about how “it’s a team sport” and how “they’ve got to get the biggest piece of the subject pie they can”, but doing a practice test is a whole nother thing.

He’s expecting it to be a pretty easy class, to be honest, and he might even come away with some tips for the real test in August. It can’t be as bad as all his friends say, after all, Wonwoo knows first hand how inclined towards exaggeration they are.

He expected wrong.

As soon as he steps inside the classroom, he’s met with a teacher he’s never even seen before screeching “PHONES ON THE FRONT DESK”, something he’d been well acquainted with during exam block last term. The desks are all set up individually, with goddamn name tags on them, like
this was a real exam. Wonwoo gets the feeling that he’s a little out of his depth, and that he perhaps should have paid more attention to the near breakdown Hansol was having at the thought of QCS practise.

When everyone’s finally sitting down, they get to read what seems to be the standard exam instructions on steroids, because honestly, who the fuck is going to try to sneak a dictionary into the exam room. There’s almost ten minutes of this, and then they are finally allowed to start.

Wonwoo opens the front page.

The first question is something about the message that some cartoon is giving, and he knows he can deal with this, it’s just the art of bullshitting. He manages to survive on his bullshitting prowess until he hits the sixth question.

This one is asking him to draw the next alphabet flashcard (for the letter Q no less) that fits into the pattern of the ones given. Now, Wonwoo isn’t sure, but he can’t really understand how drawing a goddamn alphabet card is going to help him get into university.

Wonwoo manages to make it past the question by drawing a weird looking quilt which took him a good fifteen minutes. And to think this question was only two stars.

The next few questions seem pretty okay in comparison, until he hits what may be the dumbest thing he’s ever seen in his life.

Now, Wonwoo wants to meet whoever wrote this test that determines their entire goddamn future, because this question wants him to analyse a pattern of bat sonar signals.

He scowls at it for a few moments, completely uncomprehending, until he decides, fuck it, and skips the question entirely. He’ll come back if he has time.

The rest of the test is a blur of white out (why aren’t they allowed to use pencils?!) and hand cramps. He’s never written so much nonsense in his life, not even when his parents made him write an apology letter to Bohyuk after one of their fights.

He’s just flicking through the paper with a little under two minutes to go, when he spots the bat question again. Wonwoo glances at the clock, back at the question, and at the clock again. He knows he doesn’t have enough time to answer the question properly, so in all his teenage rebellion, he draws a massive frowny face in the middle of the page and slams his test paper shut.

QCS can go fuck itself.

When their time’s finally up, Wonwoo all but runs to grab his phone from the front desk and books it right out of the classroom, straight into the arms of Mingyu who’s waiting outside with an understanding smile on his face.

At this stage, Wonwoo isn’t capable of forming coherent sentences, so all that comes out of his mouth is a garbled mess of whining.

Mingyu just pats his head.

“I know, hyung, it’s shit isn’t it?” he asks, voice rich with fake cheer. He takes Wonwoo’s hand, and pulls him away from the classroom that will haunt the shorter boy’s dreams. “Come on, let’s go to your locker.”
Australian Dictionary:

- Twisties: A really great Australian corn based snack that’s usually cheese or chicken flavoured.
- Head of House: The head teacher of your school house… we’re not sure if other schools use this or if was just ours.
- Opti-Minds: I really have no idea how to explain this so if you’re curious here’s a link http://opti-minds.com/about-us/.
- QCS: The most idiotic thing in the history of the world. It’s a QLD thing, the test that year 12s do to determine what their exit mark will be. None of the questions are relevant to anything at all and it’s honestly just a dumb system. The questions Wonwoo does are real questions from past years’ exams. Each question has a star mark (ranging from 1-4) which tells you how long you should spend on each question.
Wonwoo lies in bed, pillow squashed over his face to hide his eyes from the light coming through his window. It’s close to ten o’clock on Monday morning, and his mother has already burst into his room to open the blinds and not so subtly suggest he “gets out of that damn bed for once, Wonwoo, you can’t sleep the whole day”.

It’s Labour Day today, another one of Australia’s endless public holidays, which means no school. It’s the second holiday in less than a week, ANZAC Day having been last Tuesday. Wonwoo’s not quite sure what all these holidays are for exactly, but he understands ANZAC Day at least. He remembers learning about the ANZACs in his history class back in Korea, but it was a whole new thing to be in Australia on such an important day.

He’d been under the impression that Australians, while on the whole nice people, weren’t particularly serious and didn’t have much in the way of national pride that wasn’t some kind of joke.

It had been nice to see this beautiful, complex day so full of history and spirit taking utter control of the country, watching the whole nation stop for something so important.

Wonwoo isn’t Australian, he knows he’s not really a part of it all, but he couldn’t help but feel like he belonged, singing the national anthem in school assembly and saying the ode along with the rest of the room. But maybe living in Australia is enough; he feels the same kind of belonging when he’s with his friends and when he’s given the finger and called a drongo for jaywalking.

He didn’t really get what everyone had told him about Australian spirit when he’d first arrived, but now, he thinks he understands.

Labour Day, on the other hand, is completely off Wonwoo’s radar, so he’s just enjoying the free day and making the most of it by lying in bed for as long as he possibly can.

Wonwoo usually has a routine. He gets up, gets dressed, eats his breakfast, and then he goes to his calendar. It’s sort of a special one; it’s not for keeping organised per se, it’s more for his own sanity. Every day he crosses a box out, and every day he watches it get closer and closer to the date that’s circled in bright red pen.

Monday 17th July.

His birthday.

The day his life will change forever, the day the oceans will dry and the world will stop turning.

He’s been hanging out with Jun too much. While his 18th birthday is stressing him out a lot, it isn’t quite that dramatic.

But it’s dramatic enough to make him ditch his routine and lie in bed moping.

He knows he still has over two months until he gets his soulmate. It sounds like a while, but two mere months after he’s been waiting for nearly 18 years doesn’t seem that long. It’ll go by so quickly
in the mess and bustle of grade 12, and before he’ll know it, it’ll be his birthday and he’ll have a soulmate.

Wonwoo knows he’s not ready for a soulmate. He’s barely got his own shit together, he doesn’t have the brainpower to worry about someone else’s as well. He’s always sort of assumed that his soulmate will just naturally come to him, be it someone that he knows already or someone that he just stumbles across. But now, he’s wondering if his soulmate will live Korea or Australia, or if they’ll be from some country God knows where.

He’s heard the story of how his parents found each other, of how his dad had searched for his mother as soon as he’d gotten his name and found her, and then they lived happily ever after. But Wonwoo doesn’t want that. He’ll defer to the universe on this one. He’s willing to wait for it.

He burrows further into his bed, content to live in a world of denial where the only thing that matters is his pillow. The calendar can go die in a hole and Wonwoo isn't going to cross off today until tomorrow out of spite. Today is a day where soulmates don’t exist.

Today is a day for flying solo.

~*~

Someone’s shaking Wonwoo, rather violently he might add, and he reaches out blindly, hands slapping at them until he’s left alone.

“Wonwoo, get up. It’s midday. Stop moping,” His mum scolds, dragging his pillow out from under his head. She always could read his moods too easily. “Come on, get up.”

She leaves with the pillow, and Wonwoo rolls over to face the ceiling. It’s in his best interests to get up, his mother can be terrifying when she wants to, and he’s really not in the mood for that today.

He lets himself wallow for five more minutes, the ticking of his alarm in the background the countdown of his own time bomb.

Just as he’s managed to pull himself out of bed, his phone goes off with a text, giving him the perfect excuse to flop down on his mattress again for the sole purpose of reaching for his phone where it’s sat on his bedside table.

It’s Mingyu. Of course it’s Mingyu. It’s always Mingyu.

Boggyu

hey hyung do you want to hang out this afternoon?

Wonwoo sighs. That goddamn kid. It’s not like he’s angry at Mingyu, he’s more just angry at his existence. He usually wants to be around Mingyu and feel his constant happiness osmose into everything he touches. But no, not today. Today is for moping, and if there’s one thing Wonwoo can do well, it’s mope.

He ignores the text. He feels a little guilty; he’s not usually one to ignore messages and Mingyu doesn’t deserve his silence, but Wonwoo is prepared to be selfish today.

There’s a few messages in the group chat from earlier when he was asleep, and he skims through them, learning of Jisoo’s awkward encounter with the sparkie that was in his house (Wonwoo doesn’t even want to know). Everyone’s been paying Jisoo out for the last few hours, and Wonwoo decides he can skip that particular roasting session as well.
He reckons he’s doing pretty well with this whole ghosting thing until he opens the snapchat Mingyu sent him a few hours earlier. It’s just for their streak, the usual happy selfie from Mingyu which Wonwoo always replies to with a shot of his floor. It’s probably not an adequate reply, but Wonwoo knows Mingyu doesn’t mind. He’s on autopilot when he sends his reply, a little sticker of a giraffe in the bottom corner.

"Shit," he mutters, because Mingyu will now know for sure that he’s ignoring him. On reflex, he tosses his phone onto the bed and steps back, as if the distance will give him a plausible alibi. Running a hand through his hair, Wonwoo sinks down against his cupboard, waiting for the messages he knows will come.

It only takes about five minutes for the clear sound of his text tone to fill the room, the silence of Wonwoo’s sanctuary broken by the one boy that will never leave him alone. Wonwoo might love him a little for that.

He doesn’t want to read the message yet. It’s a good time to bring back the denial, he thinks, and he lets his eyes roam, finding entertainment in his room that’s slowly becoming more personalised. His eyes rest on his bookshelf that holds a few less books than usual; Jihoon’s started asking him for book recommendations and Wonwoo’s only too happy to provide. The result is a book returned to him at the end of each week and an intense lunchtime discussion. It’s nice.

His eyes wander to the glow in the dark solar system on his ceiling that he’s had since he was about five. His mum tried to throw them out when they moved, but Wonwoo’s far too attached for that. The planets sit in a neat line, nestled amongst the stars that he put up in the shape of constellations. Of course, there’s no glow in the middle of day, and Wonwoo feels a little like the stars; his heart extinguished and waiting for a catalyst to spark it into life.

He manages to waste about fifteen minutes with his staring before he gives in.

Boggyu

wonwoo?
are you ok??
y u no reply <\3

Mingyu’s concern is practically radiating through the phone. The messages might come off as bit obsessive and stalkerish to anyone else, but Wonwoo knows that Mingyu just cares. Goddamn that boy, doing things to his heart.

He’s run out of things to stare at in his room, so, deciding the living room is his next haunt, he wanders out into the hall for the first time that day. His phone stays on his bed.

Before he reaches the living room he takes a quick detour into the kitchen. He opens the pantry, scanning the shelves for that one tin. Wonwoo’d found a discounted kilogram tin of Milo at the supermarket, reduced to basically nothing because it had been bashed up in transport to the point where the label had fallen off and the tin looks like it’s been run over. So naturally, he bought it. When you see a bargain, grab it. He finds a spoon, and then he’s heading straight for his favourite brooding spot.

It’s started to rain; the sky a droopy grey that’s the same shade as Wonwoo’s shirt. He snorts. How fitting.

He sits down on the couch by the window, legs tucked up to his chest, eyes chasing raindrops as they race down the glass, and shoves a spoonful of Milo into his mouth.
Milo can be his one true love. Milo will be there for him when he wants no one else, and Wonwoo’s content to live one day of domestic bliss with chocolate malt powder.

And when he walks into school the next morning, Mingyu’s waiting for him at the gate. Wonwoo goes straight into the taller boy’s waiting arms, tucking his chin over his shoulder.

“Sorry,” he mumbles, “just one of those days.”

Mingyu just hugs him tighter, and Wonwoo feels like his heart is about to burst open with little cupids.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Anzac Day: A day to commemorate Australian and New Zealand soldiers, also a public holiday.
- Boggyu: Mingyu’s bogan contact name.
- Sparkie: Slang for electrician.

[ work skin by La_Temperanza ]
Where we going? (The future)

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! So, I'm sure if you're from or in Australia you'll know about KCON in Sydney, and we were wondering who was going because it'd be great to meet you guys there!

Hit us up at our tumblr's: wintersolqiers (musicanova) and thyme-machines (jezza)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1st June, 2017

“The future,” Bucky Barnes had said with excitement, approximately ten to eleven minutes into Captain America: The First Avenger.

“The future,” Wonwoo groans into his hands as yet another teacher stands at the podium to tell him that the world is his oyster and his future is his to take charge of and mould into the life he wants to lead; the legacy he wants to leave.

“The future,” another teacher (yes, another one since Wonwoo last groaned) says into the microphone, “is in your hands!”

He wonders how many different ways there are to positively tell a bunch of teenagers to not screw up your QCS exam because this is an important factor in you being able to get into a good university, but this about more than just yourself, it’s about upholding the school’s precious prestige, don’t you dare go out there trying to slander the Denborough name-

“Oi Woo, stop looking so angry, the teacher’s gonna pick on you if you glare at him like that,” Seungcheol hisses, and he gets nudged in the side.

He snaps out of his small reverie of reading in between the lines of the teachers who have large, clown-like smiles plastered to their face, and fixes his face up to look impassive and unsuspecting to the naked eye.

After much talk about ‘QC-Yes!’ and ‘Together you’ll be a success!’ Wonwoo can’t really say he quite understands what this QCS is. Sure, it stands for Queensland Core Skills Test, but past that, what? For someone who’s spent his whole life thinking he’ll be going to university in Korea, is it even relevant?

He gets that the mark he gets from this QCS test, along with how well he does in his school subjects compared to the rest of his cohort has something to do with whether or not he’ll get a good OP. And then something to do with this being a team sport and everyone’s grade affects each other’s grades so if one person royally screws up everyone gets pulled down a bit?

And then OP stands for overall position(ing? He’s not sure if the -ing is supposed to be there) and if he gets a good score for that then he can get into whatever the hell he wants to at an Australian university.

It doesn’t entirely make sense, but at this point, Wonwoo’s actually stopped trying to make sense of
it, so he just goes with the flow and trusts his friends when they say it’s hell.

In fact, he actually thinks the reason that their description doesn’t stray far from the words ‘it’s hell’ is because they don’t really know how the system works either.

(And in which case, good job, Wonwoo, you’re completely correct.)

Wonwoo’s been to the Careers Counsellor. He knows that should be a helpful ordeal, but all the woman seems to be doing is trying to convince him to stay in Australia because “applying to other countries with an OP score is a very big hassle that you need to be prepared for”, like as if going to university in Korea isn’t something Wonwoo’s been prepared for his whole life. Honestly, he doesn’t know if she thinks she’s fooling anyone, but Wonwoo knows she’s just too lazy to deal with the whole ordeal.

It does make him stop and wonder though, if choosing to go back to Korea for university is the right decision.

His grandparents have already said he can live with them, and he has enough cousins to scam off of if he needs to. The logistics aren’t the issue. Wonwoo’s parents have always told him ‘do whatever you want within reason’ and if that is going back to Korea, then so be it. He’s not stupid though. He hasn’t missed the hints his mother’s been dropping so he knows that she wants him to stay in Australia. There’s no denying he’s miss his parents and Bohyuk, and they him.

And then there’s his friends. Wonwoo’s never been the type to make decisions based on friends, but moving to a different country for the interminable future is a little different.

There’s something different about this new group of friends he’s found. Sure, he was close to his friends back in Korea and he still is, but he doesn’t feel the same sense of kinship with them. It’s like he’s gained a whole new family complete with a Papa Cheol, Mama Han, and a whole shit ton of brothers. ‘Straya, is all he can say.

So yes, maybe he does feel conflicted about next year, and yes, he does know that things will change if he goes back to Korea.

Change is something Wonwoo can deal with.

A broken heart, maybe not.

He thinks about the forms he’s printed off, all filled out and waiting to be sent back over the ocean to set his fate. The envelope’s been sealed for weeks, taunting him from where it’s hidden under his brick of a maths textbook. He thinks of the program at Korea University he’s been eyeing since he was 13. He thinks of Australia, his life here, and all it’s wonders. He thinks of Mingyu.

And he’s no closer to knowing what to do.

~*~

Mingyu is trembling, if only minutely, when Wonwoo approaches him. He will admit it’s been a long school day, but he has to say he’s surprised when he finds the usually bright-eyed boy slumped with his figurative tail between his legs when the bell rings to signify the end of the day.

“Hey, Mingyu,” Wonwoo offers him a feeble smile with a bit of a nudge of his shoulder, trying to see if he can get the boy to at least lift his head up. At this point, Wonwoo almost thinks he’s taller than Mingyu, with how much he’s shrunk into himself.
He gets only an “mm” in response, and it worries him.

“What’s uh… plaquing you?” he asks.

“Plague. It’s plaguing.”


He can’t bear the tense air between them, and in desperation, Wonwoo takes Mingyu by the hand and drags him up onto his feet.

“My mum is desperate for your input on a new dish she’s trying to recreate, and she was really hoping you could give her a hand? You’ve stirred up quite some trouble in our household and you’re going to have to pay for it, you know. Bohyuk refuses to eat sundubu-jjigae that’s not made by you.”

That manages to crack a smile on Mingyu’s features, and the boy obligingly follows Wonwoo’s lead out and away from the school that holds Mingyu’s usual cheerfulness hostage.

“You’re damn right Bohyuk refuses to eat sundubu-jjigae that’s not made by me,” Mingyu grumbles after two stops on the bus, breaking their silence. “It’s because I like to put- oh, hot sizzling shit balls!”

Wonwoo slaps Mingyu’s thigh to get him to keep his voice down after a particularly scalding look from an elderly woman towards the front of the bus.

“What?” he hisses in retaliation, “My secret ingredient is really important! And really fucking secret.”

“Doesn’t justify you screaming expletives in a public bus,” Wonwoo sighs back, to be met with an argument along the lines of ‘this is Australia’ and ‘if you can’t accept me for who I am then you don’t deserve me’.

When they reach Wonwoo’s house, Bohyuk isn’t home yet, although he can’t say he’s surprised considering his little brother always, without fail, dawdles and takes his dear sweet time to clock back into the house.

He wants to blame Seungkwan and Soonyoung for that (Seungkwan especially, with all that squash ball boy stuff that he has Bohyuk doing), but the fact of the matter is that Bohyuk likes to be a cool, suave high school kid, which is to say he enjoys fucking off to the city and swaggering down the streets with his bag slung over his shoulder.

And he isn’t a cool, suave high school kid, by the way. He just looks like a dumb-arse delinquent out to get him some Goddamn sour watermelon slushie or whatever the hell it is the youth of this generation does these days.

Maybe Bohyuk comes home so late because he’s out picking up chicks.

Wonwoo shivers.

“Do you want my blazer?” Mingyu asks immediately, halfway to shimmying himself out of the jacket.

Wonwoo shakes his head, warning Mingyu that he’ll get a detention if he’s caught outside of school without his proper winter uniform on.

“I just had a scary thought about Bohyuk,” he explains.
He receives an odd look.

“No seriously, picture this: a gangly, acne-ridden pubescent boy testing out his pick up lines in front of Strandbags.”

It’s Mingyu’s turn to shiver.

“Jesus, give me a warning before saying something like that!”

When they make it to Wonwoo’s house, his mother is standing in the kitchen crushing eggshells with her bare hands, letting the sliminess of the residual egg slide through her fingers.

“Eomma!” Wonwoo exclaims in shock, causing his mother to drop the mess of eggshells into the sink.

“Mingyu!” the woman shouts cheerfully, ignoring her son. “Thank goodness you're here! I just dropped some egg into this miso soup and I think it's the biggest mistake I've ever made!”

“Oh Mrs. Jeon you're always far too harsh on yourself! Egg goes wonderfully in miso soup, I can promise you that.”

“Well then I must have done something wrong because it's bubbling like lava!”

Wonwoo retreats to his room at that, happy to see Mingyu’s left his troubles behind. He's got studying to do anyway, he's a big senior now with his QCS and exam block, nothing like Bohyuk who spends his time picking up chicks with terrible one-liners.

(He actually wastes all his money skipping around the town chucking change in busker’s hats, but it's okay, Wonwoo doesn't need to know that.)

~*~

Wonwoo spends a full hour in his room getting ahead on his Mathematics C assignment (it’s alright, you have full permission to judge and scold him for taking the subject), having only gotten a question and a half further with the help of throwing his graphics calculator across the room once, bashing his head onto the desk three times, and being very close to chucking his laptop out the window about fifteen times.

Mingyu knocks on his door around the sixteenth time Wonwoo almost picks up his laptop to let fly through the window, hair a bit of a mess and a soy sauce stain streaking his cheek.

“Your mum asked if I wanted to stay over for dinner since I cooked most of it,” he says, rather bashfully, head tilted to the side.

“And your parents are cool with that?” Wonwoo asks.

“Relieved, rather. Overjoyed that they’ll be getting more portions of lamb cutlets without me and my large stomach getting in their way.”

Wonwoo smiles at that, then moves himself down onto the carpeted floor of his bedroom from his desk. He pats the space beside him and Mingyu settles down with his school bag by his side, pulling out his laptop to work on.

“Let’s get started on drafting that English essay, hey?”

Mingyu grumbles that he’s never met someone quite so studious, but complies anyway. He supposes
it is rather strange of him to be writing a practice essay for each of the five topics the actual exam might be on, but you can never be too prepared for an unseen topic, especially when the school defeats the purpose of the essay being unseen and basically hands them the answers on a silver platter.

“You call that a silver platter?” Mingyu gives him a look. “I call it silver platter when they ‘discreetly’ drop you the topic so that you ‘don’t know it’ and it’s ‘completely unseen’. What you’re saying is more like a… copper platter, a rusted metal platter, where you’re still better off than not knowing the topic at all, but you’re not getting an easy pass.”

“Hush, you,” Wonwoo scowls, “I need the practice with writing essays in English anyway.”

So practice they do, with faces screwed up, books highlighted and tabbed with important quotes, and fingers at the keys tapping away ferociously. Or ferocious on Wonwoo’s part, and at a key-a-minute pace for Mingyu, who at current has his head lulling towards the ground at a dangerous angle and…

Oh, there we are, Mingyu’s head’s hit the ground and he’s seconds away from letting rip a snore.

Wonwoo shakes his head, noting that the time is a mere 5:30pm. He lets Mingyu rest as he continues to type out the second body paragraph of his essay, determined to get the whole thing finished before he gets called downstairs.

He texts Bohyuk to ask if his mum can forego yelling when dinner is ready for a quiet text or phone call so as not to wake Mingyu, before going back to his essay before he loses his train of thought and has a mental breakdown wherein he’ll no doubt tear out half his scalp.

It’s 6:30pm when his phone screen lights up.

JeonMa

Honey can u set table plz ?
U can wake Mingyu when table is set .
Soup finish heat up in 5 .
Be down then .

Wonwoo takes a moment to give a little giggle to his mother’s obvious attempt at speaking condensed texting style, and wonders if he’ll be able to write rap lyrics comprised entirely of his mother’s texts.

With his eyes tired and five minutes before needing to be downstairs, he shuts his laptop and puts it aside to look at Mingyu, sprawled across his bedroom floor with his mouth hanging ajar, and his blazer draped across his torso like a blanket. He can’t help but smile looking at Mingyu, it’s a natural reflex, although one that is unfortunately continuously overpowered by plaguing thoughts these days.

He lets a sigh leave his lips, the previous smile gone. Even though Mingyu’s asleep, he avoids looking at him where his eyes are, for a fear he can’t quite place, instead opting for fiddling with the boy’s fringe in an effort to calm himself down.

With another sigh he stands up, letting his whisper hang in the air before heading downstairs to help his mother prepare for dinner.

When Wonwoo leaves the room Mingyu’s eyes instantly flutter open, and he scrubs at his eyes before sitting up and shaking his head twice. He blinks a few times, then looks to the ceiling, like as
if he'll be able to see Wonwoo’s mumbled words dangling from the ceiling there.

“I don’t want to leave you,” Mingyu repeats Wonwoo’s words, chewing on his lip as he finishes the whispered phrase.

He gets a sick feeling in his stomach as he remembers what he’d so desperately been trying to forget, the words Wonwoo had so brightly relayed to Seokmin’s parents about the future he had planned for himself.

The future he had planned for himself not in Australia, the future he had planned for himself in Korea — the future he had planned for himself away from Mingyu.

He hears the door to Wonwoo’s room open and immediately flattens himself back onto the ground to pretend to be asleep.

“Mingyu,” Wonwoo’s voice caresses him, soft enough to make him forget the words that stab at him when he’s defenseless and unprepared. “Come on sleepy head, it’s time for dinner.”

“Five more minutes,” Mingyu rolls over and grumbles with a pout.

“The noodles’ll go all soggy and weird,” Wonwoo tries with a jab.

That gets him up.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Mathematics C: Maths C is the hardest maths subject you can take. I can go into more depth if anyone’s interested but you don’t really need to know lmao.
Wonwoo looks down at his phone.

Standing in his bedroom in worn-out jeans, one sock and no shirt on, he’s starting regret the actions that yesterday’s Wonwoo took.

You see the thing is, if yesterday’s Wonwoo hadn’t been such a blooming idiot, today’s Wonwoo wouldn’t be panicking in his room half dressed, delirious from the school term having just ended, and staring at a text message and reading it for the eighty-seventh time to date.

Boggyu

Great! See you at 11:00 hyung!

And so, Wonwoo is here, now with mismatched socks, but still without a shirt on (he’s convinced that Bohyuk has stolen his clothing because he swears he had something nicer to wear that didn’t include his school shirt) because he’s agreed to go on a date with Kim Mingyu to Southbank.

Wait, did Wonwoo say date?

It’s not a date.

No words of that sort were exchanged at all, and it’s not a date. He’s not even remotely in denial, they’re friends, and they’ve hung out together before, and this time it’s just that instead of chilling at his house, they’re going to Southbank.

People do that kind of shit with their friends all the time, and it’s not a date.

The only person who’s mentioned the word ‘date’ in his vicinity is Soonyoung, and that’s because the little blabber-mouth bumped into him one afternoon and decided to tell Wonwoo the wonderful Friday dinner that he had planned out for his boyfriend.

It was cute, except for the fact that Wonwoo didn’t care at all and also really didn’t want to hear any
So basically, there’s literally no reason for Wonwoo to be thinking of this as a date, even though he is, and now he’s standing in his room with worn-out jeans, mismatched socks and the matching shirt that Jun bought for him at Target, cursing himself about how stupid he is over and over again, which is fair enough because he is pretty stupid, but it’s kind of not helpful right now because he’s panicking about this not-date that is very much a not-date because no one’s ever mentioned the word ‘date’, so Wonwoo’s brain could you just like… shut up?

He sucks in a much-needed breath.

At 10:15, Wonwoo leaves the house in his worn-out jeans and mismatched socks and Target plaid shirt that’s matching with Jun to head for the bus that’ll take him to Southbank.

Truthfully, he’s only been to Southbank once, and with his family at night to see a show at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, or “kewpack”, as the locals like to say. It was a performance of The Winter’s Tale by The Royal Ballet that his mother had been dying to see, and it was stunning, although he has to admit he did feel a little tired by the intermission.

He’s been too afraid to tell his friends he hasn’t really seen Southbank yet though, for fear of being screamed at that he needs another initiation. Now that’s something Wonwoo doesn’t think he’s ever going to need again.

He makes it to Southbank with ten minutes to spare, and decides to sit down on the bench outside of GOMA to wait for Mingyu.

All too soon, he hears a booming voice that startles him into almost dropping his phone.

“Hyung!” Mingyu calls, bounding up the stairs.

He’s panting when he reaches the bench, and he quickly grabs at Wonwoo’s wrist to pull him up so he’s standing.

“Come on hyung, if we’re not fast all the little kiddies’ll be swarming, and that’s no fun!”

With that, Wonwoo gets all but dragged into the gallery, but once he’s inside he understands why the pulling at his arm is so incessant, as he sees a queue steadily growing from the counter that reads ‘Marvel: Creating the Cinematic Universe’.

There’s nothing painful about the wait to purchase a ticket, not with Mingyu talking his ear off about his morning, and how he saw his neighbour walking the most adorable puppy that they’d adopted just two days ago, but the actual purchasing of the ticket itself is what he finds most painful.

He almost yelps when he realises a ticket is $20, but he holds it in and hands over the red-orange note to the man at the cash register without spilling any tears.

Once he enters though, it comes to light very quickly that he has absolutely no regrets, and he lets his inner nerd bloom so that he can fully geek out.

Beside him, Mingyu absentmindedly plays with the string of his Captain America hoodie (really, Mingyu? A Captain America hoodie to a Marvel exhibition?) as he reads the panel on the wall that talks about Spider-Man.

“Have you seen Homecoming yet?” Mingyu turns to Wonwoo, eyes bright.
“Uh, not just yet. My dad wanted to make it a family thing, so I’m going next week though.”

Mingyu pouts a little, before asking if he can go along with the Jeon family.

“I’ll watch it a million times over if I can, trust me, it’s amazing and you won’t be let down!”

With that they move into the second room, only almost tripping over a little kid once, and Wonwoo swears he hears Mingyu honest to God squeal as he rushes over to the mannequins that display all the costumes.

“Bucky!” his voice rings out over the screaming of young kids, and Wonwoo restrains himself from slapping a hand hard over his friend’s mouth.

In a matter of seconds Mingyu’s phone is whipped out and he takes countless photos of the Winter Soldier costume from Civil War, gives his most valiant attempt at taking a panoramic photograph of the Civil War costumes (with many disjointed limbs and heads of other people), before finally giving his phone to Wonwoo with a bashful smile, asking him to take a photo of him and Bucky.

Not too soon after, Mingyu is drooling over the glass cabinet that holds various weapons.

“Look at that immense detail!” Wonwoo can’t help but exclaim as he examines a piece of Chitauri weaponry.

They manage to get a good selfie together with all the costumes from the Avengers (after three tries, because Wonwoo has unstable arms and they’d forgotten that Mingyu is literally a personal, walking talking selfie stick), but Wonwoo doesn’t leave the room before paying his respects to Hawk-eye.

“I’m sorry they got rid of your disability,” he whispers to the mannequin. “Renner’s great at being you, but you still could’ve been deaf.”

He tuts a little at Marvel, feeling guilty that he enjoys the films so much when there are so many things that could’ve been done better (Wonwoo is looking at you, Joss Whedon and yes, he is very salty).

When they step into the next room though, Wonwoo is (embarrassingly) hit by a wave of emotions, and he has to rest a hand on Mingyu’s shoulder for stability, although his friend doesn’t seem to be faring all that much better.

The Captain America room nicks at a soft spot in Wonwoo’s heart, and when he turns to Mingyu, he sees that the boy is legitimately blinking back tears.

While Wonwoo wouldn’t quite go to that extent over a simple exhibition, he certainly understands why Mingyu’s eyes are glistening, as his ears catch on the audio from the Smithsonian exhibition.

‘Best friends since childhood, Bucky Barnes and Steven Rogers were inseparable on both schoolyard and battlefield. Barnes is the only Howling Commando to give his life in service of his country.’

Coupled with the backdrop of the Howling Commandos uniforms, displayed exactly like the Smithsonian exhibit in the movie, the voiceover is somewhat harrowing, and, with a comforting hand to the small of his back, Wonwoo pulls Mingyu away to instead examine some of the other props on display in the room.

Walking through the next rooms, nothing is quite as emotional, but each prop is so spectacular that Wonwoo feels his breath constantly being taken away.
Every prop is so expertly thought through and designed, from the infinity stone, to the ancient books, to the armour, good lord.

Wonwoo could have shed a tear over Lady Sif’s costume had he not been so emotionally detached (on the outside, at least) and constantly suffering a little bit of dry-eye.

He marvels (get it? Wonwoo’s getting good at this English business) over Iron Man’s displays, and comes to a stop at the towering Hulkbuster to take enough photos to rival Mingyu’s collection from the Winter Soldier.

The next rooms display props from the latest Thor film, and Wonwoo almost feels cheeky looking at it when the movie itself is months away from hitting the cinemas.

He laughs at the siblings who are standing before one of the props fighting over which superhero is better, and it reminds him a little of the fights he used to have and still has with Bohyuk, that DC cinematic universe-loving fool. (No disrespect to Wonder Woman, in all her glory.)

The end of the exhibition comes too soon (although not before Mingyu takes a selfie with Captain America’s stealth suit — “ohmygodohmygodohmygod it’s my favourite Cap suit ohmygod!”), and before they know it the two are lining up to get a green screen picture.

“I’m taking Cap’s shield,” Mingyu says with such force that Wonwoo almost needs to take a step back.

“I’m taking Thor’s cape and hammer,” he grins back, and the two pose before the camera like as if no one else is in the room. Which is to say, Wonwoo throws all pride to the wind for the sake of a badass photo in the hopes that no one else he knows is visiting the exhibition and sees his spindly self dressed in Thor’s get up while flexing his basically non-existent muscles.

~*~

They make it out of the exhibition safely without being seen by any classmates (or friends, to be honest, because Wonwoo would probably send his head flying straight through the rainbow art piece on the second level if he so much as heard Jeonghan’s voice while out on his not-date-that-is-very-much-a-not-date-because-no-one’s-ever-mentioned-the-word-‘date’), and Wonwoo doesn’t buy another Goddamn funko pop figurine because he doesn’t need it. Mingyu, on the other hand, is unable to convince himself otherwise, as he walks away from the exhibition shop with not one, but three funko pops.

Oops?

Mere seconds after they’ve exited the gallery, Mingyu grabs for Wonwoo’s wrist again, and this time starts pulling him in the direction of the museum.

“Mingyu, seriously, at one point today you’re going to rip my arm off,” Wonwoo starts to complain, but the boy comes to a sudden stop while he’s mid-sentence, so half his words are muffled into the back of Mingyu’s head.

“Mingyu, what the hell?” Wonwoo scowls, and pulls his arm back, before he’s startled by a terrifying screech that haunts him through to the marrows of his bones. He immediately goes to clutch onto Mingyu’s hand, the same one he’d just thrown away, as he cowers into the boy.

The feeling is almost gut-wrenching, and Wonwoo bites back a shiver as his eyes slowly travel up to
where multiple whale sculptures are dangling from the ceiling there.

“Jesus fuck!” he squeaks, but Mingyu only laughs at him.

“Aren’t they crafted so well, Wonwoo hyung? Look at the detail!”

“And what are the cries that sound like they come from Satan’s lava pit in hell?” Wonwoo asks, incredulous. He doesn’t have the time of day to be appreciating the artistry of the sculptures with *that* sound attacking his ears.

“You mean the whale’s song?”

In all the reading he’d done on whales, he hadn’t thought that a whale’s singing would be quite so terrifying, and he has to admit he’s a little taken aback. Of course, he’d never thought it would be anything beautiful, but he had expected it to at least have better timbre than… than whatever the shit he was listening to now.

Mingyu seems to take pity on him (*finally*, took him long enough), and takes him away from the ‘Whale Mall’, that Wonwoo doesn’t think he would ever want to voluntarily visit again.

“Hyung, cheer up! It’s an iconic spot, and the whales are cool, right?”

Wonwoo nods in response; a very small, sad nod, because his joints are too rigid from the experience he’s just had. So when Mingyu suggests that they go for some ice cream, he wholeheartedly says yes, and feels his trauma melt away and into a puddle he leaves behind at the museum.

Mingyu takes him to a swanky (a new word that he’s learnt that originated in the 1840s) gelato store that looks like ordering anything over half a scoop will consume his wallet whole, leather and all, and he feels a little out of place in his plaid shirt and horrendously old jeans.

“Salted Coconut and Mango Salsa sorbet sounds interesting,” he muses to himself, but when he goes to order, he finds that his ice cream is already purchased and being shoved into his hand.

“Mingyu!” Wonwoo scolds him, and the worker who had just served Mingyu looks startled. “I’m your hyung, I’m supposed to treat you!”

“Aww, just this once, hyung, please,” Mingyu pouts. “We can just have ice cream again later and you can pay then! I promise.”

Wonwoo sighs and accepts, but not before getting a spoon and giving himself a gratuitous serving of his dongsaeng’s Salted Caramel and White Chocolate ice cream.

~*~

Wonwoo’s no longer surprised when after finishing the ice cream he’s being dragged down the street again. This time it’s to a pizza place that looks equally as swanky as the gelato place, and Wonwoo can’t help the way his heart flutters a little bit when he notices that Mingyu had reserved them a table in advance for this place.

Even though it’s only lunchtime, the place is swarming with customers, and Wonwoo had been expecting a long wait until Mingyu had caught the eye of a waitress and asked about a table for Kim.

Wonwoo takes a look at the menu to find that the place is alarmingly expensive, and he kicks at Mingyu’s leg under the table until he has the boy’s full attention.
“I don’t know what you’re on, but if you think I can afford eating at this place you’re wrong, kid,” he hisses.

“Oh don’t worry, hyung!” Mingyu’s face lights up. “I’ll pay today!”

Now the reason Wonwoo’s facial expression plasters itself into an immovable glower is because one, Mingyu already paid for ice cream and he’s the dongsaeng, and Mingyu paying for all these things is just wrong on so many fronts, and because two, it’s becoming increasingly harder to consider today as a not-date-that-is-very-much-a-not-date-because-no-one’s-ever-mentioned-the-word-‘date’ when Mingyu keeps doing stuff like this.

“If it makes you feel better we can just order two pizzas, and then you can get us ice cream again afterwards, alright?”

Wonwoo doesn’t think lunch is supposed to be a dessert sandwich, and he’s pretty sure consuming ice cream more than once in a day is not the best of ideas, but he huffs once, the air lifting his hair up off his forehead for a second, and agrees dejectedly.

“We’re going out again so I can pay you back, you know,” he grumbles, right before Mingyu calls the waiter over to their table.

~*~

Stuffed and satisfied from their ice cream-pizza-ice cream sandwich meal, Mingyu and Wonwoo stroll leisurely through Southbank with their bloated stomachs spilling out and over their jeans.

Surrounding them are thick branches filled with pink flowers, and Wonwoo observes them curiously; he supposes they’re not native to Australia since they look vaguely familiar, but the name of the plant isn’t coming to mind.

“They’re called bougainvillea,” Mingyu tells him, like as if he’s heard his thoughts, and Wonwoo turns around.

“Bogan villa? That’s a terrible name. And really contradictory, too.”

Mingyu laughs, and they continue walking down to the big ‘BRISBANE’ sculpture, because the boy insists that Wonwoo needs a photo there.

“You can make it your Facebook profile picture,” he says seriously. “Promise I’ll make you look stunning, ’m a great photographer.”

One terribly embarrassing photoshoot later, Mingyu and Wonwoo are walking along the brown mess that is the Brisbane river, with Mingyu enlightening Wonwoo with terrible facts about said river that he perhaps didn’t really want to know.

“There are sharks in there,” Mingyu says.

Wonwoo’s never going to get on a ferry in Brisbane ever again, dear lor-

“What is that terrible smell?”

~*~

While documenting Wonwoo’s first encounter with an ibis (otherwise known as the bin chicken; yes, he spotted the foul bird and immediately his mind started replaying David Attenborough’s very
Would be wholly entertaining for the detached audience who was not there to experience the unfortunate happenings, Wonwoo himself is of the intention to never remind himself of the fact that he’d come into contact with the... thing.

Besides, he’d much rather think about the ferris wheel trip that he took with Mingyu.

Wonwoo forcefully paid for it, like the good hyung he is, although he earned a bruise in the process trying to bat Mingyu away from the cash register. He’ll wear it like a badge of pride, though, and his nose crinkles as he laughs at his friend who is pouting petulantly as he waits in line for their carriage.

Pushing aside the fact that, again, going on a ferris wheel makes the whole day feel terribly like a date and that doesn’t bode well with the fact that today is really only a not-date-that-is-very-much-a-not-date-because-no-one’s-ever-mentioned-the-word-‘date’, the ride is an enjoyable one.

They sit across from each other and Mingyu playfully rocks their carriage for a little while, before he decides that they’re too high off the ground and he needs to sit on the floor of the carriage and rethink every life decision he’s ever made thus far.

Wonwoo laughs at him and pats his head as he watches the hustle and bustle of the city from up above.

It’s breathtaking, and he can’t help the smile on his face.

He treats Mingyu to ice cream again at the end of the day before they part ways, because the boy threw away the fact that he hated heights without a second thought just so Wonwoo could live his life-long dream of going on a ferris wheel.

All things considered, it’s a very fun not-date-that-is-very-much-a-not-date-because-no-one’s-ever-mentioned-the-word-‘date’.

Very fun indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Southbank: A precinct right next to the city that’s quite cultural and rather green.
- QPAC: Short for the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, it’s the go-to for live performances from dances to musicals to classical performances. I have probably spent an exceptional amount of time there for a range of shows...
- GOMA: Stands for Gallery of Modern Art! It’s a pretty darn cool place. It’s currently hosting a Marvel exhibition, which my heart sang for!
- $20 note: I’m sure everyone’s aware of how colourful our money is, and 20 bucks happens to be a red-orange colour!
Ice Ice Baby

Chapter Notes

Listen I’m sorry for any mistakes but honestly I couldn’t see my screen for the tears streaming down my face because of the beauty that is My I so you’re going to have to forgive me (Elise).

For any of you thinking that 26 degrees in winter is hell, it was 30 degrees today : -)

2nd July, 2017

It’s 26 degrees outside, the sun is shining like there’s no tomorrow and Wonwoo can feel the sweat running down his neck. Next to him, Minghao shifts a little uncomfortably, flapping his arms around in an effort to cool himself down.

Winter in Australia is truly a force to be reckoned with.

The boys had all woken up to a mass text from Soonyoung that morning, demanding they all turn up to King George Square at midday sharp so they could partake in what Wonwoo learns is a Soonyoung and Seokmin tradition.

This tradition, it turns out, is to ice skate in the pop up rink in the middle of the square. Now, Wonwoo isn’t sure why Australians think it’s a good idea to stick a giant piece of ice in the CBD in winter, but he’s not gonna argue with the way Seokmin’s jumping around in happiness.

Perhaps it's the bogans’ way of feeling a little more wintery, because Wonwoo certainly isn’t feeling one tiny bit of cool, and he desperately wishes Jeonghan and Jisoo would just turn up already. They’re the last two to arrive, and the others are huddled on the one shady bench in the square, a mass of limbs fighting for cover under the slowly dying tree above them.

Wonwoo’s right arm is left out in the cold, or in this case, the heat, and he’s mentally cursing Jeonghan and Jisoo’s inability to arrive on time. Jeonghan, he’s not so surprised about, but he certainly expected better from Jisoo.

He sighs. They’d all been watching for any sign of them coming out of the busway, but Wonwoo decides the others can manage that without him, so he rests his head on the back of the bench and simply sits. Minghao’s suffering right along with him, obviously cursing Australian weather, and Wonwoo smiles at the way Jun just strokes his hand through the younger boy’s hair.

The heat’s getting to the best of them; even Soonyoung is looking a little red in the face and keeps picking at his jeans. Wonwoo is glad for his shorts, even though it seems he and Chan are the only ones wearing them. How the others aren’t boiling is beyond him.

He leans down further into the seat, shifting when his thigh hits the hot metal rail. The sting is sharp on his skin and there’s a high chance he’ll come out of this day with at least one battle scar.

It’s at that moment that someone jumps over the back of the bench, over them, and lands right in their laps.
Of course it’s Jeonghan.

“Hi kids! Miss me?” He all but screeches, and everyone mumbles something vaguely affirmative back at him, and they turn to see Jisoo just walking up to them like a normal person.

Jisoo gets far more enthusiastic greetings, mainly because he didn’t jump onto anyone, and he smiles back, greeting all of them, ending with Seungcheol who’s at the opposite end of the bench.

Seungcheol seems to be a bit out of it, which Wonwoo has noticed isn’t too unusual these days. He barely hugs Jisoo back, and although it’s brief, Wonwoo doesn’t miss the flicker of hurt that passes over Jisoo’s face. It’s not unlike the one that was on Seungcheol’s when Jihoon had said that Jeonghan and Jisoo were coming together.

Wonwoo doesn’t know what’s going on with Seungcheol, but as far as he can tell something’s happened since the start of the year when those three were ridiculously close. Now Seungcheol’s distancing himself, and not even being subtle about it.

It’s obviously hurting Jisoo, and it’s hurting Jeonghan, if the drunk text he sent Wonwoo a few weeks ago was any indication. It wasn’t particularly coherent and lacked any proper grammar, but Wonwoo got the gist. Jeonghan was drinking because Seungcheol had bailed on their plans once again, and he wasn’t being as open with them as he used to be. Jeonghan didn’t want to lose his best friend. And if Seungcheol doesn’t do something soon, that’s exactly what’s going to happen.

Jisoo doesn’t make an issue of it though, he simply fixes the same smile as always and starts to lead them all over to the ice skating rink.

“Come on guys, let’s do this!”

Wonwoo envies his enthusiasm. It’s an effort to get back up off the seat despite how hot the wood has gotten, and he’s not really feeling the need to go fall over on some ice with sharp as hell blades attached to his feet.

The things he does for his friends.

They wander across King George Square, Wonwoo hanging back and just watching as he’s prone to do. He realises that there’s actually a goddamn lot of them, especially with the addition of Seungkwan and Soonyoung. They form a messy parade across the concrete, stringing from Jisoo, Soonyoung and Seokmin at the front, all the way to him taking up the rear.

It’s even worse when they reach the ticket queue. There’s already a bit of queue formed, and they don’t help the line at all, spilling right past the roping and generally making a mess of it. Wonwoo supposes there’s not much to really be done about it, so he just shoves himself in there at the back next to Mingyu.

Mingyu’s useful for a lot of things, Wonwoo has come to learn. But today, when the sun is far more fierce than it has any right to be in winter, and his brain isn’t functioning quite as quickly as usual, he likes using Mingyu’s shoulder as a pillow. So that’s exactly what he does.

Mingyu lets out a little oof and then a laugh, and Wonwoo knows by now to expect the hand that pats his back gently. He shuts his eyes, trusting Mingyu to nudge him forward when the line moves.

They stay like that for a while, Mingyu’s arm moved to Wonwoo’s waist to guide him forward so he doesn’t have to stand back upright. It’s not ‘til someone in front of them starts shouting that Wonwoo opens his eyes.
“What do you mean this coupon isn’t valid anymore?”

The guy in front of them in the line is giving the ticket person a hard time for something Wonwoo suspects is the guy’s fault anyway, judging from the general asshole look he’s got going on.

“Well, what I mean is that the expiry date right there in the corner, yes that’s the one, was about two weeks ago,” the ticket guy replies (Wonwoo can squint just enough to read his name badge, Minseok, it says), “you’ll have to pay the full price for entry.”

Despite Minseok’s perfectly reasonable explanation, the asshole doesn’t seem to get it.

“But it says I can have the second ticket half price, you can’t just not give it to me, I’m entitled to it!”

Minseok just shakes his head sweetly at the man.

“Well, no, you aren’t entitled to anything, really,” he says in perhaps the most fake polite voice Wonwoo’s ever heard. “I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

Wonwoo can see the man getting ready to yell, and yell he does.

“What do you know, you’re just the ticket boy! Get me a manager or something!” he screams, eyes narrowed and arms waving.

Minseok opens his mouth to respond, but before he can get a word out a boy who looks kind of like a camel (although he has nothing on Seungcheol) jumps out from behind the ticket desk and lets out the most inhuman screech Wonwoo’s ever heard.

“This man right here, Kim Minseok, is in fact the manager, so I suggest you man up and say your issue to his face you bag of rubbish!” the camel boy yells with an actually somewhat melodic tone that vaguely reminds Wonwoo of a dinosaur.

“Who the hell are you?! Do you even work here?” the customer asks, shocked enough by the appearance of this camel kid to stop yelling.

“Well, no, but Minnie’s my soulmate so stop being a rude shit, hey?” camel kid replies, glaring sullenly at the man.

The man himself seems to have had enough of them both, so he turns and leaves, not before muttering various complaints about how he’ll contact the owners and blah blah blah.

Wonwoo, as well as the rest of his friends, just sort of watches as Minseok chastises his soulmate with no real malice, until Seungkwan just blurts out “aren’t you the Salvo’s guy?”

That manages to catch Minseok’s attention, and he looks over to them, sheepishly smiling as he realises he’s forgotten about customers.

“Ah yes… I do work at the Salvo’s, I think I recognise you actually; you come every few months with the same woman?”

Seungkwan nods enthusiastically.

“Yeah! That’s my mum! We come to drop off old stuff every so often!”

Minseok smiles at him.

“Well, it’s nice too see you here. I’m Minseok, if you didn’t already know,” he laughs, flashing his
They all coo and exclaim at that, and Minseok just shakes his head as Jongdae seems to revel in the attention.

“Let me guess,” Jongdae asks, “you guys are just starting to turn eighteen? I can tell by the way you find soulmates so fascinating, soon enough it’ll just become normal. Like my Minnie here! See him everyday, love him a bunch, just like my bed. It’s a good life, hey?”

Jongdae grabs Minseok’s cheeks and squishes them, and they all laugh, except Minseok, who just splutters at Jongdae.

“Tell us how you met!” Chan calls out, and Jongdae seems only too happy to tell them.

“Well, it was many, many years ago now, back when I was just entering high school. Minnie was assigned as my grade 12 buddy, and we became friends because of that. Fast forward a year, and Minnie gets his name. And of course, it said Jongdae. But Minnie here, he didn’t tell me anything about it. He covered it up for years. Just because he wanted me to have a chance to grow up without being tied to him.

“So imagine my surprise when it’s my eighteenth birthday and Minseok shows up on my arm. I went over to his house and yelled some rather rude things at him, all of which he’d been expecting. And then we lived happily ever after!”

It’s a cute story, and everyone else seems to think so; Wonwoo’s sure he even hears Seungkwan sigh and mumble “how romantic”.

“Yeah, but why are you here?” Jihoon asks.

“Oh. I was bored,” Jongdae shrugs.

“Um, alright, so you guys want to buy tickets, yeah?” Minseok asks. They all scramble for their wallets, pulling out a variety of notes, coins and cards that have Minseok banging his head against the desk. “Ugh, just form a line like normal people,” he grumbles, and the boys sheepishly work themselves into something resembling a line.

They all get through eventually, but Wonwoo is glad he managed to sneakily pay for Mingyu’s ticket. When the younger boy starts to complain, Wonwoo just smirks and thanks god for the ease of slipping his card in to PayWave ahead of Mingyu’s.

Minseok directs them over to the skate hire area and shoos Jongdae away with them, telling him to ‘help them and be useful or something’.

“How may I help you?” a friendly voice calls out from the wall of skates, and a girl pops out of practically nowhere, honey blonde ponytail following behind her.

‘Jisoo,’ her name tag says, except the ‘Soo’ is crossed out and above it is says ‘Hyo’, like as if they couldn’t afford to get her another damn piece of paper to slip into the plastic holder.

“Jisoo!” Jeonghan yells from the ice skating rink, already making his way around, having slipped his way earlier in the queue for the skates.

Three heads turn towards the boy: a girl in the rink uniform who looks like she’s on break and is
sipping on a Starbucks, JiSoHyop(?) the skates girl and of course, their little boy Hong.

“I-I meant this one,” Jeonghan grabs Jisoo (Hong, for clarification)’s arm as he trips a little on the ice.

Wonwoo turns back around to JiSoHyop, none of the questions surrounding her strange name tag answered, but points to his size of skates and slinks away from the girl to struggle with squeezing the death blades onto his feet.

“Some twelves please, Jihyo,” he hears Seungcheol say, his voice entirely too chipper.

He’s compensating for something, and Wonwoo hates it.

He’ll do something about it later.

~*~

They finally manage to get to the rink, and Wonwoo’s actually sort of excited now. He sees heaps of children playing around; spinning somewhat gracefully, others somewhat not. He has a feeling he’ll be joining the later group.

His fears are confirmed the moment he steps out onto the ice. His legs buckle beneath him, feet slipping in all directions as he tries to balance on the thin blades. Wonwoo ends up lying on his butt on the ice, the cold seeping through his rather thin shorts and he now knows why the others were all wearing jeans. His knees took some of the fall, bright red skids across his too pasty skin.

“Hyung!” Mingyu calls, running over and crowding him, the others following soon after.

“I’m alright,” he winces, grabbing Seungcheol’s outstretched arm and pulling himself up. He eyes Chan’s exposed legs and hopes he won’t be taking a dive any time soon.

Wonwoo doesn’t let go of Seungcheol, gripping his hand (probably far too tightly) and lets the younger boy lead him around the rink. It takes a while, a lot of cursing and some nearly broken bones on Seungcheol’s behalf, but suddenly, Wonwoo’s skating.

He lets out a little laugh. It’s not something he’s done since he was a kid, long enough ago for him to barely remember it. It’s fun.

Seungcheol tries pushes him away gently, but Wonwoo isn’t ready to let go yet.

“Come on Wonwoo, you gotta let go of me sometime,” he says gently, still trying to extract his hand from Wonwoo’s grip.

“No, don’t leave me,” he whines, limpeting himself onto Seungcheol’s back. “If you keep helping me you can continue to avoid Jisoo and Jeonghan. Especially Jeonghan.”

Oops. Wonwoo didn’t mean to let that out, but Seungcheol tenses, and it seems to have worked.

“Well, what are you talking about?” he asks trying to sound puzzled, but it really just comes out as sad.

“Cheol, I didn’t mean anything really, it just- you seem to be avoiding them lately?” Wonwoo squeaks, not wanting to add the downcast light in Seungcheol’s eyes.

“Everything’s fine,” he mumbles. Wonwoo doesn’t argue. From the brittle set of his shoulders, it seems like this could be what breaks Seungcheol.

“Let’s just get you skating, yeah?”
Wonwoo lets Seungcheol gradually pull away from him, and soon enough, he’s tottering around the ice by himself. He feels quite proud, actually, he’s certainly doing better than Jisoo who’s acquired one of children’s penguin skating aids, and is now shuffling around in it’s wake.

And then he sees Chan. The kid is gliding around like a pro, arms bent gracefully and legs moving perfectly to his every whim. Any concern that Wonwoo had about his bare legs evaporates; it’s clear that Chan isn’t falling down anytime soon.

The same goes for Soonyoung and Seokmin, who are darting around Hansol and Seungkwan, trying to push them over into each other.

Wonwoo starts to skate over to tell them to knock it off, but he’s cut off by Jeonghan who’s zipping over to the other side of the rink. Wonwoo looks after him, and sees what looks like Jun and Minghao having an argument with a couple of girls.

“Junnie that’s literally the most stupid thing I’ve ever heard coming out of your mouth. And that’s saying something,” a young — maybe around Bohyuk’s age, if Wonwoo can consider that young — girl hisses at his friend.

“It’s just all in good fun!” the boy in question throws his arms up, and Minghao nods along.

Wonwoo doesn’t know what’s going on, but he thinks whatever it is doesn’t sound like it’s going to end all too well, so he decides to step in with a, “Jun, for God’s sake don’t terrorise young girls into submission. I thought you were better than that.”

Jun sputters over the word ‘terrorise’ for a good five or so seconds before being able to form a coherent sentence.

“Terrorise young girls into submission! Jesus could you not have chosen better words? You make it sound like I’m going to assault my own cousin! That’s like, incest!”

“Well technically,” Wonwoo begins to correct Junhui’s definition of incest, but he’s knocked off his feet when Jun slaps his hand over his mouth with too much force, and Wonwoo finds out that it’s actually much nicer to land on your butt when you’re pushed over rather than by the force of your ice skating incompetence.

“You should listen to Bohyuk, Junnie,” the girl nods solemnly, which promptly has Wonwoo back up on his feet. She looks to him then, a quick glance. “Gee, you’ve grown an awful lot in two days.”

“And who are you?” Wonwoo asks, slowly.

“It’s Tzuyu,” the girl falters. “You literally helped my grandma cross the road and got on a first-name basis with her in a matter of five minutes! I honestly thought you’d remember me, but I suppose I got a little ahead of myself.”

“Bohyuk helped your grandma cross the road?” Wonwoo squawks in disbelief, stumbling a little on his skates. “The same Bohyuk who fractured my wrist because he thought I’d eaten the last cookie when he was six years old?”

It’s a bit of a mess after that. Tzuyu’s face lights up as she realises the person she’s talking to must be “Brother Won-woo?” (all w’s clearly pronounced), then she proceeds to ask if a slew of clearly fabricated stories are true. She’s a little naïve, her soft-spoken words stalling every now and again at the sheer velocity she’s producing questions, but Wonwoo finds he’s not really struggling to hold a conversation with her in the same way he does most strangers.
Taking the chance to escape Wonwoo and Tzuyu’s wrath when he can, Junhui drags Minghao out to the other side of the rink with two girls, a grin on his face as he whizzes away.

By the time Tzuyu notices her cousin has disappeared from her side, she sighs and slaps her forehead in shame, just in time to Jun falling out of a pirouette and onto his hands and knees, unaccustomed to the slipperiness of the ice.

She speeds over to him and picks him up before Minghao has the chance to, dusting him off.

“I thought I told you, they’re literally going to regionals for figure skating, no matter how much ‘for fun’ it is, you’re not going to win.”

“I’d say Jun won, to be honest,” one of the girls says breezily. “I’ve never seen anyone with no figure skating experience attempt a lutz with such gusto, much less two of them together. And so yeah, they didn’t exactly land on their own two feet, but they landed at the same time, and that took Mina and I literally months to get.”

“Momo!” Tzuyu cries, as if the last thing her friend should be doing is encouraging her cousin to continue to do idiotic things.

“Besides, they won’t be able to do a salchow anyway, so it’s not like they’re hurting my ego.”

“Do you want to bet on that?” Minghao grins cheekily, and Wonwoo swears Tzuyu loses around three shades of colour from her skin.

He sets his arms on the girl’s shoulders and guides her out of the rink, deciding it’s not the safest of ideas to get stuck in the middle of a figure skating battle between total amateurs and total not-amateurs.

In their wake, the stupid competition continues.
The stars are telling me to get jiggy with you

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

Hello!!! Have another chapter amongst all this uni suffering!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

6th July, 2017

It eats at him, constantly.

It hangs over his head every moment of his day, and it whispers in his ear as he turns over in his bed, unable to fall asleep.

It follows him; haunts him during his school classes, rendering him unable to concentrate, and he can tangibly feel his grades slipping away from him, one notch, two notches, three…

It’s funny, really. Just simply laughable, how six words have consumed him completely.

What if Seokmin’s not my soulmate?

Soonyoung feels like crying.

But no, he won’t do it again, he’s cried enough as it is. He’s probably shed more tears over this than he should have, and he doesn’t need to be wasting any more.

Still, even so, the doubt gnaws at him, and he kicks the blanket off of himself, frustrated.

He’s on holidays, he’s supposed to be having fun. Lazing around, doing nothing and surfing the internet, binge-watching TV shows, going out shopping for cool new shoes and stuffing his face with food or whatever. He shouldn’t be moping around day in, day out over something that’s basically entirely out of his control.

Not that that stops him, lmao. RIP in peace, Kwon Soonyoung.

I want Seokmin to be mine, Soonyoung’s mind says; claws desperately up towards the sky where God (or whichever higher-up is in charge of all of this) is supposedly pairing them all up.

He chuckles a little, an empty laugh, when he thinks about how up until a few months ago his wish was always ‘I want to be his’. But now Soonyoung’s a little older, a little wiser (possibly debatable, he wouldn’t put it past that new guy Wonwoo to shoot him down if he tried to say he was smarter than he used to be), and while he’s Seokmin’s, he fears that Seokmin won’t be his.

He wants to be able to look at Seokmin and call him his soulmate.

He wants every sappy, cliché, bullshit movie scene.

He wants Seokmin.
He hears a clink at his window, then a muffled “Soonyoung-ah!”

Soonyoung rolls out of bed, landing on the blanket he’d kicked away earlier, and crawls over to his window to open it.

“My Soonyoungie is such a sleepy head,” Seokmin grins, ruffling Soonyoung’s hair until it stands up straight like a troll doll’s.

There’s only one time when the thoughts that continuously plague him fly away, and that’s when he’s with Seokmin.

So, locking up the bad thoughts away in a box in a dusty corner of his mind, Soonyoung stands up from where he’s kneeling on the ground, and gives the boy the brightest smile that he can possibly muster, although no smile of his could ever top the way Seokmin’s smile could light up the sky better than the sun.

“Minnie, I’m hungwy,” Soonyoung pouts suddenly, patting at his stomach that grumbles in unison with his statement.

Seokmin sighs, although it’s a fond one, and he rolls his eyes.

“Come on, I’ve gotta fill up the petrol anyway, let’s hit the servo.”

At that, Soonyoung basically runs for Seokmin’s old, dinged up hand-me-down car, the one his grandparents gave him when they weren’t quite healthy enough to drive it anymore, and the one that has small artificial flowers decorating the radio wire that sticks out from the roof.

The car putters along to the petrol station, coming to a stop that sounds dangerously like as if it just broke down, but Seokmin gets out unworried, like as if this is a common occurrence.

“Do you mind being a babe and cleaning my windows?” Seokmin smiles bashfully.

“Anything for my baby,” Soonyoung laughs, “I’ll give you a show.”

Soonyoung heads for the closest station and takes the bucket, before strutting back towards Seokmin’s car.

He starts scrubbing at the back window, chewing on his lip as he goes, then starts singing, much to Seokmin’s surprise.

“Raindrops, drop tops! Smokin’ on cookie in the hotbox! I forgot the lyrics but we’re gonna ignore that, that, that! Something, something, something crockpot?” Soonyoung begins, and he notices the way Seokmin buries his face in his free arm out of embarrassment.

“We came from nothin’ to somethin’ nugget! I don't trust nobody, grip the trigger! Call up the gang, they come and get you! Cry me a river, give you a tissue!”

He’s moved the bucket to clean the side windows now, and he makes sure to slap Seokmin’s butt as he walks past.

“My bitch is bad and squeegee!”

Seokmin drops the hose at that, and scrambles to pick it up and put it back in its slot while cackling.

“Soonie,” he wheezes, “put the squeegee and bucket back before we get in trouble, please.”
“You dream killer,” Soonyoung grumbles as he trudges back, but they’re empty words. “What if this was my destiny, hey? What if my destiny was to sing Bad and Boujee parodies at servos?”

Seokmin locks the car and the two walk into the petrol station to choose the snacks they’re going to binge on, and they both march up to the counter with overflowing arms. After coming to the sad realisation that they probably don’t quite have the money to be throwing away on just bags of lollies and chips, they settle for one tube of Pringles and some gummies that are on a two for one special.

When they reach the counter, Seokmin’s face lights up.

“Kyungie hyungie!” he yells, and the dark employee startles.

Seokmin doesn’t seem deterred by the lack of positive response, and Soonyoung just looks on, confused.

“Hi, Seok-ah,” he says in return, then, without even smiling, “this one’s on the house. See you around.”

Seokmin all but skips out of the petrol station, with a very puzzled Soonyoung following behind.

“You know that guy?” Soonyoung asks, incredulous. “You’re friends with the Satansoo and I didn’t even know?”

“Oh man, I knew he was like, the neighbourhood legend but I didn’t know you guys called him Satansoo!” Seokmin laughs. “Chill, we’re family friends, and he tutored Chan for a short while in English at some point.” Then, as an afterthought, “An alarmingly good teacher despite being the number one advocate against studying.

With that, they hop back into the car and drive the short distance to the closest Red Rooster to pig out in — seeing as they’d managed to limit their snacks, they obviously deserved a reward.

“Oh my God,” Seokmin nudges Soonyoung, and in the least secretive whisper, he tilts his head down to Soonyoung’s ear. “That’s Kyungie’s soulmate!”

Soonyoung finds it hard to believe that someone as terrifying and fear-instilling as Satansoo could have such a cute, fluffy teddy bear-looking soulmate (in fact he finds it hard to believe that Satansoo has a soulmate at all), but he supposes he’ll take Seokmin’s word for it.

They order a Big Feast like it’s no big deal, and Satansoo’s soulmate (‘Jongin’, his nametag says) gives them a large, approving grin; clearly a fellow chicken lover who was fully supportive of their choice of meal.

As they wait for their order to arrive, Soonyoung and Seokmin find an empty booth to occupy, and Soonyoung kicks his feet up so that he’s lying across the seat.

His ears catch on a familiar annoying voice, and he looks at Seokmin with his head tilted.

“Subscribe to pcwhy on YouTube! That’s P-C-W-H-Y!” they both shout in unison, before dissolving into laughter.

“Oh man,” Soonyoung hiccups, wiping away a tear that’s formed from laughing too hard, “I think I have about five of his business cards, and I still didn’t even realise he was a radio talk show host.”

“You only have five? I have about fifty-five, and all because Jihoon’s kind of friends with the guy.”
It’s not much to boast about, in fact he shouldn’t be boasting about having more pesky business cards, but he does it anyway.

“Speaking of Jihoon though,” Seokmin looks his soulmate straight in the eye, “really?”

Soonyoung shrinks back into his seat a little, and he winces.

“I couldn’t help it! He’s my one true love!” he starts to defend himself, but gets kicked in the stomach from under the table for his efforts.

“I thought I was your one true love!”

“Well, yeah, but you don’t count. Woozi is the light of my life and he holds a very special place in my heart. I’ve been with him right from the very start of his YouTuber career, alright? I was there for him when his voice cracked five times in the middle of his song and he got all flustered and he covered his face with his cute little hands and groaned for a straight three minutes because he hated puberty, and—”

“Do you have a point with this?”

“All I’m trying to say is that I couldn’t help the fact that I freaked him out asking for an autograph! I didn’t realise he went to Denborough, alright? I thought he was from Sydney or something! You can’t seriously blame me for this.”

“I can’t believe Jihoon actually agreed to riding The Black Hole at Wet ‘n’ Wild just to get away from you,” Seokmin mutters. “And people tell us we should be afraid of the fangirls.”

“I wasn’t that bad.” Soonyoung protests, but he’s cut off by the arrival of their chicken, and suddenly, any and all conversation goes out the window and the only thing the two can think about is eating.

When they make it half way through the roast chicken, finish one box of chips and have had about three cheesy nuggets each, they start to slow down, and finally start conversing again.

“You know, I found this astrology website the other day,” Seokmin says around a crispy strip dipped in gravy, “I tested our compatibility and it was like, wildt.”

Soonyoung looks up from his drumstick, suddenly worried.

“The stars are literally telling me to get jiggy with you, because apparently we desire each other and can satisfy each other’s needs.”

Soonyoung laughs, and shakes his head at the wiggling of eyebrows Seokmin gives him.

“There was all this shit about us having misunderstandings, like as if we haven’t known each other forever and that’s literally impossible. But, it did say that we were a couple that was happy to be alive and live together with a pleasant family and home. And like, a strong desire to make each other happy? So like, you will marry me when we’re older, right?”

“Soekmin, what the fuck?” Soonyoung whispers hoarsely, and the smile on Seokmin’s face disappears. “You can’t just propose to me in a Red Rooster you unromantic fuckhead!”

“I’m sorry!” Seokmin cowers behind the second box of chips. “It just kind of slipped!”

“Whatever,” Soonyoung rolls his eyes, but he can’t stop a grin from spreading over his face. “Come
on, where’s your phone, let’s see who else is compatible.”

Seokmin puts his phone down on the table for him to take it and enter in the birthdays of Seungkwan and Handsoap.

“Jesus Christ,” Soonyoung manages to get out through his teeth. “Is it just me or is this stuff accurate as shit because?”

Seokmin slides over to the other side of the booth to look at his phone, and he almost chokes.

“There may be some resentment,” he cackles.

“They are capable of charming each other,” Soonyoung sniggers in return as he glosses over the descriptions. “I mean, you could suppose their little squash thing they’ve got going on is a mating ritual. I wouldn’t put it past them.”

“Hansol would probably cry if I told him that.”

Next, Seokmin goes to input Minghao and Junhui, and curses the fact that he doesn’t know Wonwoo’s birthday, because the kind of matchmaking antics that him and Soonyoung could have gotten up to with this… well, it’s an opportunity missed. Soonyoung tells him they still have time to find out the boy’s birthday.

“Yo, your Chinese buds are literally made for each other,” Soonyoung says, almost spilling a half-chewed nugget from his mouth as he speaks.

They continue to laugh as they try to think of birthdays that they know to input them, cackling when Chan and Soonyoung’s gardener turn out to be a match made in heaven.

As they’re dusting themselves off to head out, Chanyeol puts on an original song on his radio show, and the mellow plucking of a guitar that drifts throughout the Red Rooster catches Soonyoung’s ear.

He smiles a little sadly to himself as he listens to the lyrics that perfectly mirror how he feels with Seokmin, and he wonders if the loud guy had experienced something alike to him now. He mentally notes down to check out PCWHY’s channel on YouTube when he gets home to see if he can find the song and illegally download stream it.

“Oi Seokminnie, wait up fuckface!” he yells to the boy’s retreating form that’s already getting into his car.

“Can’t believe I love that guy,” he mumbles to himself as he runs out of the Red Rooster.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Servo: A petrol (gas) station/service station. Where you get the fuel for your car :)

On Sunday evening, the 16th of July, Wonwoo finds himself restless, rolling around in bed and unable to fall asleep. He knows he’s going to regret it tomorrow morning when he sluggishly drags himself to school, but his mind is just so loud that sleeping seems about the last thing he’s able to do. For God’s sake, Wonwoo could probably run a marathon before he can get himself to fall asleep.

In just two hours on the dot, Wonwoo will be eighteen years old. It’s a daunting feat, if he thinks about it. Well, it’s daunting even if he doesn’t think about it, but if he does think, it’s worse.

Your soulmate tattoo appears on your birthday at the exact time your soulmate is born. It’s a weird thing that the universe had just… decided on, once upon a time.

Which means, Wonwoo can either be absolved of his current stresses (read: whAt nAMe aM i gOiNG tO gET On mY WRisT) immediately the moment the clock strikes 12, or he might be on edge for the entire day straight the way until 11:59pm.

The problem is probably that each option is equally as bad in its own way. It means that there’s no path Wonwoo would prefer to take, and, while it means he won’t be disappointed whichever lane the universe decides to take him down, it means he’s going to have to suffer no matter what happens.

For some odd reason, although quite obviously people can be born at any time of the day, people usually expect to wake up in the morning to their soulmate tattoo. Wonwoo himself doesn’t know what to expect.

Eventually, Wonwoo gives up and picks up the book on his bedside table in the hopes that it will lull him to sleep, carefully removing his bookmark (last time, he got a papercut on the tip of his nose because it fell out onto his face and he’s not in for doing that again).

Somewhere in the middle of a dull chapter, Wonwoo’s book slips out from between his fingers and tumbles to the ground, and the boy doesn’t wake until well into Monday morning.

“Wonwoo darling,” he hears his mother’s voice coo. “It might be your birthday, but I really can’t let you sleep in past 8:00, dear.”

Wonwoo shoots up and out of his bed in an instant, stumbling over the book he dropped, hair wild and eyes wilder.
He rushes through his morning routine and stumbles out of the house, without even registering that it’s his birthday; his eighteenth birthday, no less. He hadn’t heard anything his mother said except for the fact that it was already 8:00 in the morning, and when he turns up just minutes before school starts, it’s to his locker being covered in terrible photographs of him, and countless streamers.

“Happy Birthday!” Mingyu yells at him, the only person out of his friends that’s in his home room. “We got together and did this this morning! Good thing you came late or we wouldn’t have had it done in time!”

Wonwoo stands, speechless for many reasons, and Mingyu misreads the expression on his face.

“Is today not your birthday? Oh, shit! I swear you said it was the 17th, hyung! I’m so sorry!”

He’s quick to correct the boy, snapping out of his emotion-hazed daze in an instant.

“No, no I’m just- surprised, I suppose. I wasn’t expecting anything like this, we don’t have that in Korea. People just say congrats and you eat cake together, there’s no… extravagant displays, really. I don’t even remember telling you my birthday and my facebook birthday is a dummy that I’ve never changed. And like, I forgot? That it was my birthday, I mean. I’m basically late to school for the first time, and it’s only the second week of term! I’m- I don’t know.”

Before he knows it, he’s rambling, stumbling over his words like as if Korean isn’t his first language, bag hanging between his legs as he stands.

“Well happy 18th, Wonwoo hyung,” Mingyu cracks him a smile, after a long while of just letting Wonwoo collect his breath.

Wonwoo drops his bag, his head that had drooped towards the ground snapping up.

“Eighteenth?”

His expression clouds over.

“Eighteenth!” he says, this time with more urgency.

He fumbles with the watch on his wrist, then stares, as he finds it empty. Of course, there are 24 hours in a day, and there’s every possibility that his soulmate was born later in the day, he knows that, he had those exact thoughts circling his mind late last night, but secretly, he knows he was hoping for his soulmate to be born in the morning, so that he could just puzzle over the name instead of concentrating in his classes for the rest of the day.

“Don’t worry, hyung.” Mingyu only puts an arm around his shoulder and steers him into home room before they get marked as absent, leaving Wonwoo’s bag in the middle of the corridor. “It probably just means your soulmate was born at night! My soulmate’s gonna get their tattoo at 7:30pm, whoever they are, and you’re probably no different to that. Just because Seokmin got his tattoo at like, a minute past midnight doesn’t mean you should be worrying.”

Well Wonwoo didn’t want to know that, Mingyu. Now he’s going to be fretting about 7:30pm for the rest of the day in a futile attempt at praying that it’s the time his soulmate’s (please read, God: Mingyu’s) name will turn up on his wrist.

“Thanks, Mingyu. For everything.”

~*~
At morning tea, Wonwoo is smacked in the face.

By ten presents, that is.

“Happy birthday, Wonwoo!” everyone screams, before diving straight into singing loud enough for students half way across the school to hear. In fact, he’s pretty sure students half way across the school have heard it, because there are a lot of voices he doesn’t recognise joining in and clapping along.

“Oh Wonwoo, you’re not hiding anything, are you?” Jeonghan sidles up to him and tinkers with the buckle of his watch where his wrist is covered.

Taken aback, Wonwoo freezes, until Mingyu steps in and elbows Jeonghan away from him.

“Oi ya lil shit, he doesn’t like that,” Mingyu frowns. “He doesn’t have his tattoo yet.”

Chan stills at that, as if reminded of his fear of not receiving a soulmate tattoo, and he immediately shoves his birthday present for Wonwoo so that it’s sitting at the top of the pile, eager for his hyung to open it.

“Ahh, a night time baby,” Jeonghan nods. Then to Wonwoo, “Sorry man, I just get excited.”

“Now open your presents, Wonwoo!” Junhui jumps onto his back, shaking him.

He opens each one, one by one, guessing who the gift is from just by the level of gift-wrapping decency.

“Is this a normal thing around here?” Wonwoo asks quizzically as he reveals a pair of Iron Man socks from Minghao. He finds the words get a little stuck in his throat although he forces them out; something pulls at his heartstrings, and he can’t put a finger on why.

“What, presents? Birthdays are important, man! They’re the shit!” Seungcheol smiles, and by now Wonwoo has finally learnt that when something is the shit, it’s not shit. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. He hates English. A lot.

“What would birthdays be without being able to give and receive presents?” Mingyu says, like as if it’s obvious, and that’s when Wonwoo finally understands what’s making him feel emotional.

The sense of… friendliness; community, he supposes in a way, that simply emanates from people here, the way that Australians place so much importance on happiness, it’s nice. It’s warm.

He can’t say all good things. Of course, like every country, it has major setbacks. And the emphasis on happiness makes people a little too soft around the edges for his liking, but he wonders if it’s just the fact that he was helplessly terrible at making good friends back in Korea, or if it’s that Australians are so friendly that this new group of people he’s come to know already feel like family.

There, sitting at their group’s table, surrounded by cheap presents filled with love, Wonwoo forgets all his troubles, especially that one nasty thing called getting ready for the real world.

(He swears he’s not trying to endorse Queensland University of Technology or anything. Promise. )

Just two weeks into the third term of the year and already Wonwoo is swamped with work; assessments piling up from each subject and the impending doom of QCS — sorry, he means QCYes, because they’re all gonna be a success.
The bell rings, signifying class, and Wonwoo thinks he hears the entire school collectively groan. He wouldn’t be surprised if he did, really. If over 1000 people groaned at once, he’s pretty sure the sound would travel.

For being an institute of science, Wonwoo regrets to say that studying at Denborough hasn’t quite taught him how to calculate the validity of his statement.

~*~

The Jeon family eats dinner at 6:00pm, finishes up by 6:30pm, has a small celebration that takes them to 7:00pm for Wonwoo’s birthday where his parents reveal a leather-bound hardcover copy of Les Misérables; one that he’s (now apparently not so secretly) been pining over for quite some time now.

He marvels at it, handling the book with care, and takes it safely to his bedroom. He’s excused of washing the dishes for the night, his birthday present from Bohyuk that he appreciates probably much more than he should, and for the next half an hour he sits on his bed staring obsessively at his wrist as he waits for 7:30pm.

He can’t even appreciate his birthday present as he gnaws at his lip, anxious as the seconds tick past far too slowly.

As the clock strikes 7:29pm, Wonwoo allows himself to blink once to relieve his eyes, so that he won’t miss anything. He runs a thumb over the smooth, blank skin that will possibly hold someone’s name in just a handful of seconds, and he stops breathing for the last ten seconds.

At 7:30pm, he feels an odd tingling at his wrist.

Ever so slowly, a name is drawn into his skin, an imaginary pen carving the word permanently to his wrist.

He has to blink when he sees the letter ‘i’ finish, and when he opens his eyes again, an ‘n’ is halfway to forming on his wrist.

In a cowardly act he looks away, squeezing his eyes shut.

When the tingling stops, he sneaks a one-eyed glance at his wrist, before snapping his head away.

Eventually he feels stupid, and draws his wrist to his line of sight to observe the name of his soulmate once and for all.

Despite knowing what name his eyes will open to, Wonwoo gasps when he sees the familiar handwriting scrawled across his wrist. At 7:30pm he saw the letters ‘Min’, before becoming afraid and looking away. While there was still every bit of a chance that the letters following that could be entirely different, at this point, it seemed highly unlikely.

Jeonghan’s words from months ago ring in his mind at that moment, and Wonwoo almost thinks if he looked up to the sky he’d see Jeonghan there, all mighty and Mufasa-like.

“A long time ago I chose to believe that the universe actually takes a look at our lives, and chooses the best person for us. Maybe that’s why we don’t get our names until we turn 18. We’re given a chance to find that love ourselves. It’s called fate for a reason, right? Have some faith in the system. Even though it’s blatantly flawed, it’s the only way you’ll be able to sleep at night.”
With a shaky breath, Wonwoo finds himself smiling a little as he looks at the name that’s there, telling him the one person he’s perfect for.

*Mingyu.*

Chapter End Notes

**Australian Dictionary:**

- For the Real World: it's a part of a slogan for a university (namely, QUT).
- QUT: Short for Queensland University of Technology, one of two probably most popular unis to go to in our state.
Jeonghan wakes up like a sloth, nothing out of the ordinary. His limbs are splayed all over his bed and his sheets have gathered in a mess that’s half falling off the bed. Mumbles sneak out of his mouth, filling the room with the usual soundtrack of a Friday morning in the dorms. The sunlight coming through the window drives his head further under the pillow, sheets getting more tangled around his feet with his restless movement.

The dormitory starts to fill with sound, the two other occupants scrambling out of bed to get the best share of breakfast possible, claiming the bathroom for the hottest shower. One of the other guys kicks his bed on the way past, and Jeonghan grabs his pillow to chuck it at whoever decided to commit such a sin. It could be either of them - at this stage, when all the boys have been rooming together for near on five years, they take turns in trying to wake Jeonghan up.

Without his pillow it’s hard to fall back asleep, so Jeonghan reluctantly drags himself up, sitting with his back against the wall. For pretty much the entire school, Fridays are keenly anticipated and are regarded as the best day of the school week. But for Jeonghan, Friday is far too bittersweet.

Living as a boarder gets so damn lonely, and while he does love the other boarders, he’s lived with them in very close proximity for just a little too long. On Friday afternoons, the group all goes the city and goes wild, then everyone goes home to their houses and Jeonghan is left to trudge back up the hill to school.

On a rare occasion, Jisoo would ‘forget’ something and make the trip back with him, all small smiles and kind eyes. Sometimes Seungcheol would join them, claiming that it was better for him to catch the bus that stopped outside the school.

They let him have a few more precious minutes in the company of the only family he had in Brisbane. Jeonghan loved them for it.

And then came the weekends where Jeonghan was desperate for something to do, which, naturally, was usually his homework. His isolation was probably the only reason he ever gets anything done.

Today, however, there is a whole day to get through without the promise of relief in the afternoon. For some reason or another, they aren’t going to the city today. Jeonghan thinks it’s something to do with some assignment no one’s finished, but he’d zoned out after the plans were cancelled.
That was when he’d started his own planning. Friday afternoons are the highlight of his week, and a bunch of disorganised idiots will not take that away from him. And so his plan had begun.

It’s been in the works since Tuesday, and today is when it will all come together. Jeonghan had had the brilliant idea of gathering himself, Jisoo and Seungcheol at one of the other’s houses for a nice relaxing afternoon before term gets too busy. A good idea, right?

The plan simply relies on Seungcheol’s agreement. Which, these days isn’t so simple after all. Jeonghan likes to think he’s a fairly convincing person, and Seungcheol was usually the first to cave to his demands.

But Seungcheol’s pulled away so much, not even Jeonghan’s best hair flip can get him. It sucks. He misses how they used to be, the way the three of them folded into one another so easily the others teasingly called them the three musketeers.

Jeonghan isn’t one to belt out his true feelings, more suited to hiding behind his fringe and sly comments. It’s not something he’d ever thought he’d do, but the more his heart breaks, the more quickly it all comes pouring out of him. He’s pretty sure the entire group knows something’s up with them at this stage, but that’s on Seungcheol as well. Jisoo seems to be the only one holding it together, but Jeonghan hasn’t missed the way he hugs Seungcheol more hesitantly and the dull light in his tired eyes.

And so, the plan. The only way Jeonghan can see Seungcheol agreeing to spend at least a minute alone with them is to create the perfect storm attention that will scare Seungcheol into agreement. Game on.

~*~

Jeonghan runs it through his mind over and over as the day goes on, and each time he feels a little more guilty. He knows that it’s cruel, to put Seungcheol in a position where he can’t refuse, but at this stage, Jeonghan is almost past caring. Almost.

Lunch arrives and Jeonghan sets his game face. He’s already got Jisoo set up as backup, and Hansol already agreed to step in as an extra defence if necessary. He wasn’t exactly truthful with Hansol, but what can you do. He never would have agreed if he knew Seungcheol wasn’t going to be put in the best position.

Walking up to their table, Jeonghan sees everyone already there, just as he’d planned, with the only spare seat at Seungcheol’s left. Thank you, Jisoo.

“My children!” He calls out, wandering up to the table. “So good to see you all!”

He settles into the usual ruckus of their lunchtimes, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. The moment comes when there’s a lull in conversation as everyone chews.

“I’m sad we’re not going to the city this afternoon,” he says, “it’s my favourite time of the week, you know? It’s so much fun and I get so lonely here by myself.”

The other boys chorus their apologies, bemoaning the English assignment that will have them chained to their desks in approximately four hours.
It’s all going to plan. Jeonghan mentally pats them all on the back.

“Cheol! Jisoo! Let’s do something! You’re both always on track with your assignments, unlike these idiots. Can we have a movie afternoon?”

Jeonghan can pinpoint the exact second that Seungcheol realises what Jeonghan is doing. He’s always been able to read him too easily, and this time is no different.

“Oh… I don’t think we can this afternoon, my mum’s got people over today,” Seungcheol says weakly, curling up into himself as all eyes turn to him. Their movie afternoons are somewhat infamous in the group, always held at Seungcheol’s house, always taking precedence over any other plans and always resulting in the wildest of stories. Anyone declining attendance is completely unheard of, which is exactly what Jeonghan is relying on.

“Oh that’s fine,” Jisoo chirps, “we can go to my house! It’s about time we share the load, yeah?”

Jeonghan hides his smile behind his hand. Jisoo has come through for him, just like he knew he would. That boy is an angel, but even his patience is wearing thin with the silent treatment they’ve been getting from Seungcheol.

Seungcheol flounders.

“I… can’t. My mum... I need to be at home. Yeah.”

Jeonghan holds his breath. Come on Hansol, bring it home.

“But Seungcheol, didn’t you say you were free though? I remember you were sad as well about us not going to the city,” Hansol pipes up, face totally innocent (the only thought he’s having is probably of the free food Jeonghan had promised him).

And there it is. All of the pieces have fallen into place. The table is silent and all eyes are on Seungcheol. If Jeonghan knows Seungcheol even a fraction as well as he thinks he does, this should work. Seungcheol would never disrupt the order of the group and outwardly make a fuss, and this is what Jeonghan is relying on.

He doesn’t move his eyes from Seungcheol’s face, staring hard enough that Seungcheol’s gaze flips to him. Jeonghan’s gaze softens a little.

Why are you avoiding us? The only reply he can see in Seungcheol’s eyes is heartbreak that rivals his own. Jeonghan hates this. The greater good, he tells himself. Seungcheol will come to the movie afternoon and he’ll have fun and it’ll be okay.

It will.

“Well, I suppose I can come for a bit,” Seungcheol finally sighs, and then, like a switch flipped, the boys all start up their conversations again, leaving Jeonghan and Seungcheol alone in the middle of it all.

Jeonghan reaches out a hand to rest on Seungcheol’s foreman.

“Smile, Cheol. It’ll be fun.”
They’ve arrived at Jisoo’s house, but the fun has yet to start. This time, though, it’s not even because of Seungcheol.

It’s Jisoo. Jisoo and his goddamn obsession with Lee Lin Chin. Now, Jeonghan loves her just as much the average Australian, but Jisoo is totally infatuated. All Jeonghan had wanted was some nice bonding time with his best friends over The Castle, but instead, they’re stuck with world news.

“Jisoo,” he whines, “can we watch the movie already? Why do you even care about what’s going on in the real world?”

“Yeah, Jisoo,” Seungcheol pipes up, and this afternoon is starting to sound like it should. “Let’s watch something for young people, you grandpa.”

Jisoo just sighs and tosses the remote at their heads.

“Go crazy, kids,” he pouts, flopping back into the sofa.

Jeonghan gets up to load the disc and very deliberately sits back down right in between Seungcheol and Jisoo where there isn’t really enough space for an entire person. He throws his arms over both their shoulders and snuggling into them.

“Cuddle pile guys!” He cackles, not missing the glance Jisoo and Seungcheol exchange over his head. He doesn’t care. This is what they used to be like, what they should be like, and Jeonghan loves it.

They make it halfway through the movie until Seungcheol starts to to wriggle.

“It’s so hot. Jeonghan this is your fault. Cuddle piles are not meant for Australia, not even in winter,” he complains, shifting away from Jeonghan to lean against the end of the sofa.

“That’s what you get for wearing a jumper, Cheol,” Jisoo teases.

Seungchol makes a face, but moves to push the sleeves of his jumper up. From where he’s leaning into Jisoo, Jeonghan can’t read it, but he can definitely see the dark letters curling over his friend’s wrist.

“Cheol!” He all but screams, bolting upright. “Is that a name on your wrist? What the fuck?”

Jisoo scrambles up as well, diving over Jeonghan to see, but Seungcheol shoves his sleeves right back down and leaps up from the couch.

“I’ve got to go guys,” he says, already backing towards the door, eyes wide and fear creeping into his voice.


“Don’t worry about it Jeonghan.”

“But-”

“I said don’t worry. I’ve got to go.”

And with that, Seungcheol is gone, only the echo of a slammed front door betraying that he was ever there.
Jeonghan turns to Jisoo.

“What the fuck just happened?”

Jisoo just shakes his head. “I don’t know, Han. I suppose this is why he’s been distant.”

Jeonghan opens his mouth, but Jisoo beats him to it.

“No. We can’t push him, Jeonghan. Look at how much it’s already bothering him. He’ll tell us when he’s ready.”

“Ugh, why do you have to be so wise,” he mutters, banging his fist against Jisoo’s chest as he leans against him again.

“Because I’m great. Now, let’s finish the movie, okay?”

“Okay. I really hate this though.”

Jisoo strokes a hand through Jeonghan’s hair. “So do I, Han, so do I.”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Lee Lin Chin: An Australian news reader who is a national hero and totally worth a google.
- The Castle: An iconic Australian movie that is essential education for anyone and everyone.
It’s through Seokmin that Seungkwan approaches him.

“I, Lee Seokmin, have been asked by Kwon Soonyoung, also known as the love of my Goddamn life, to give you a message from Kwon Soonyoung, the love of my life’s best friend, Boo Seungkwan,” the boy announces, smiling like as if there couldn’t have been a more concise way to tell Hansol the news.

The gummy smile that had previously been on Hansol’s face slowly fades away as he looks up at Seokmin.

They haven’t spoken in months, not since the awkward parting of ways down at the Gold Coast after they’d slept on the couch together, and for Seungkwan to specifically bother through the usage of two people to relay him a message — well, it doesn’t particularly bode well. (In short, it makes Hansol feel like shit’s about to hit the fan.)

“Oh don’t look so scared, dear Vern!” Seokmin laughs, slapping him on the shoulder. “Soonyoungie just said Seungkwan wanted to invite you to a game of squash with him this Sunday.”

Somehow, those words aren’t so comforting, but, Seungkwan is offering a game of squash, and Hansol’s a squash-loving idiot, so he takes what he assumes to be the bait.

What’s the worst that could happen anyway, hey? He gets absolutely obliterated and humiliated, the whole Paddington squash team is waiting to attack him, a zombie apocalypse hits their town while they’re playing squash and Hansol gets left with the decision of either running with Boo or running away from Boo, of which he unfortunately already knows he’ll do the former, unless he suddenly receives a boost of adrenaline that tells him to pick fight over flight, in which case, he has a niggling feeling he’d fight to protect the boy.

Because like, sure, they’re mortal enemies, but they’re still soulmates.

Of all the emotional preparation Hansol does though, what he doesn’t expect, is the best to happen. He’s not saying he only prepped for the possibility of a zombie apocalypse, but that’s exactly what he’s saying.

(Just don’t… don’t check his backpack, he may have stolen multiple canned foods from the pantry and bought a new first aid kit.)
“I just thought it’d be a good stress-reliever in the midst of all this Year 12 bullshit, you know?” Seungkwan smiles at him as he opens his water bottle to tip the rest of its contents onto his face in an effort to cool himself down.

“Oh, my country bumpkin is so considerate,” Hansol grins back, but it earns him a smack.

“I’m not your country bumpkin,” Seungkwan huffs, but there’s no heat to the words like there used to be.

“Oh my sweet, sweet country bumpkin!” Hansol sings.

“Shut up, you abominable banana bender.”

“That’s a big word for a country bumpkin like you.”

Hansol wonders if it’s their deliriant state from playing squash for two and a half hours straight with no breaks that has their usual bickering turning into banter, but all that matters is that he thinks Boo-no, Seungkwan, is a great person to be around when he’s not being an insufferable dick, so he doesn’t really care what it is that’s changed.

Seungkwan, on the other hand, regards the one person he’d sworn as his biggest enemy with a newfound awe; a bit like a… by-golly-and-gosh-this-guy-is-hot-when-I’m-not-trying-to-piss-him-off kind of newfound awe. If you get what he means.

Much too tired to move, Seungkwan and Hansol take to lying on the ground, sweat steadily seeping through their shirts as they try to wait out their fatigue.

“Hey,” Seungkwan murmurs from beside Hansol out of nowhere, “you wanna come to my place? Mum’s baking cupcakes.”

Ever the sensible boy, Hansol doesn’t say no to cupcakes.

~*~

“Ma, I’m home!” Seungkwan yells as he waltzes through the door, and Hansol can’t help but snort in laughter.

“Where are you from? A ranch out woop woop in America?”

He doesn’t receive a response, because suddenly, mitten-clad hands take him by the upper arms, and an inquisitive face regards him.

“Oh darling! You didn’t tell me you’d be bringing Vernon home!” a woman (Hansol will assume that said woman is ‘Ma’) smiles brightly. “I thought you’d be out with little Bohyuk again!”

Hansol can’t lie though, he’s a little taken aback that Boo’s mother knows him by name, although in hindsight it’s perfectly feasible considering they have basically been at each other’s throats since the first day of year 8. In fact, yes, Hansol has been complaining about Boo at the dinner table to his family just as much as he suspects the other to have done.

“My baby complains about you a lot but you’ve both helped each other grow into the wonderful sportsmen you are now,” she says, patting her son on the head as she offers Hansol a plate of decadently-decorated cupcakes, fit for a french patisserie, or at least a nice bakery that Hansol definitely wouldn’t be able to afford.
“Mum!” Boo whines, and Hansol can’t help but grin.

“Aww Seungkwannie, I didn’t know you talked about me to your mother!”

“Aww Vernonie, don’t you worry, it’s all bad things!”

Boo’s mother laughs, and saunters off back into the kitchen, leaving the plate of cupcakes in Hansol’s hands. She comes back not a moment later with two large glasses of water, and ushers the two boys to the dining table.

When they sit down, Seungkwan’s mother seems to realise something, and she almost sloshes the water onto the ground.

“Oh, dear! Do take a shower first! I don’t need you stinking up the house, your father does a good enough job of that. The cupcakes will be waiting for you, I promise.”

Hansol watches Seungkwan pout, and gives him a little wave goodbye, until his mother speaks again.

“Darling, while you’re at it, would you make sure to get some clothes out for your guest, please? I’m sure it can’t be comfortable for him to be sitting in a puddle of his own sweat.”

When Seungkwan reluctantly chuck him a t-shirt, underwear and shorts with the help of his mother, Hansol stands from his seat, glass of water already empty, and gets lead into one of the two bathrooms of the Boo household.

In the shower, Hansol scrubs at his body vigorously, and wonders how exactly it is that he’s found himself in this situation. He thinks to just two days ago, where he was so sure that Boo was planning his demise (he’s going to ignore the fact that he was silly enough to be convinced a zombie apocalypse would come), and he laughs a little to himself, a small short huff that resonates against the tiles of the bathroom.

He’s had great fun today: an exhilarating match of squash (considering no one else is quite the match for him than Boo is), being invited to his place for homemade cupcakes of all things, and just exchanging genuine, friendly banter with the boy.

He scrubs down his arms, until he sees the name on his wrist, the one that won’t disappear no matter how many soaps he uses, and he stares at it for a while, letting the hot water pour over his back.

When he steps out of the shower he feels fresh and clean, and the shirt he picks up is covered in numerous paint stains that he likes to think tells different stories. Or maybe that’s... hair dye, considering the rainbow marbling of the tiles in the shower that seem to differ from the rest of the bathroom. It’s a little tight when he puts it on, but Hansol’s a strong, healthy boy, he’s sure his biceps can handle a bit of a squeeze for a few hours without needing to be amputated. He does, however, worry that he’ll be able to stuff himself with cupcakes if the shirt is constricting him like this.

He worries about the underwear, hesitating before taking them in his hands. They have an adorable teddy bear print, but with closer inspection he notices that every teddy bear is flipping him the bird, and he knows for sure that this is a gag gift, probably from ‘Soonyoungie-the-love-of-my-life’.

(He hears those words in Seokmin’s voice.)

The shorts Boo’s given him are a perfect fit, and he praises every lord above that they’re not tight, lest they add another layer of constriction for his stomach to not expand to its full potential when he goes to town on Mrs. Boo’s absolutely delectable cupcakes.
He feels bad, if he’s being honest. Should he really be this excited just for cupcakes? Is he using his soulmate’s sudden act of kindness?

Eh, he’s sure Boo will understand. It’s a matter of cupcakes, after all.

~*~

It is with great sadness and regret that Hansol says he and Boo collectively only make it through seven cupcakes before needing to call for a time out.

Hansol stands up and shakes his limbs out before patting his full stomach, and he can’t help the odd butterflies he gets when he notices Boo’s eyes on his biceps (the same ones that are suffering in the tight sleeves of his borrowed shirt), though he tries to pretend he doesn’t see.

He walks out from the dining room and into the living room, where a large TV sits precariously above a contraption clearly made from multiple cardboard boxes. He would laugh at it if it weren’t so damn clever, with each compartment clearly thought out and filled with DVDs, CDs, and framed family photos, including one terrible school photo of Boo from what looks like Prep.

When Boo follows Hansol’s line of sight to his unfortunate photograph, he flips the frame around so that the boy can’t look at it any more, and steers him out of the living room where he has the potential to find even more embarrassing things (when he’s not playing squash he’s a theatre kid, and needless to say he’s had some scarring roles that involve him dressed up as… things he’d rather not mention).

The room next to the living room happens to be the Boo household music room, which suddenly turns into something to rival a salon Mozart would have performed in.

“My sister’s an interior decorator, and this kind of just happened?” Boo tries to explain, but he doesn’t sound very convincing. “Listen, if I get to feel as talented as Liszt when I sit down at the piano, I’m not complaining."

But Hansol’s no longer listening, as he finds a stray piece of sheet music lying on a chair and picks it up.

“Hey! I know this! It’s that Susan Boyle song!”

Seungkwan rolls his eyes, because of course that’s the reason Vernon would know ‘I Dreamed a Dream’, and not because Les Misérables is a revolutionary (excuse the pun) musical.

He watches as Hansol sits down at the piano and cracks his knuckles, and immediately, he hits the wrong note.

“Well that’s middle C, which means that this is… an F?” he says, then proceeds to continuously play a B flat.

Beyond exasperated but already having wasted the energy to roll his eyes just seconds prior, Seungkwan walks up to the piano behind Hansol and places his hand over the top of Hansol’s.

“You’re unbelievable,” he mumbles in the boy’s ear as he tries to stretch the boy’s hand out, to find that it’s incredibly stiff. “Your fingers aren’t that short! You should be able to reach an octave, I don’t understand!”

Note by note, Seungkwan guides Hansol’s fingers through the melody, until they have a stilted, sad version of the melodic masterpiece that the song truly is.
All the while, Seungkwan fails to notice how rigid the boy beneath him is, barely breathing as he sits on the piano stool with a boy he’s thought of as an enemy until this morning draped over his back in what’s basically more or less a hug.

“Next time you come over, I expect you to be able to play this properly,” Seungkwan huffs when they finally reach the double bar lines that signify the end of the song, pulling away from Hansol and falling into the closest chair.

Neither of them take note on the fact that those words imply that this is not the last time Hansol will be visiting Seungkwan’s house.

After a while of silence, Hansol speaks up.

“You sing, right? Weren’t you the one who lead that *Legally Blonde* flashmob your school did?”

“That was indeed me. I got chosen because I look absolutely stunning as a blond,” Seungkwan grins. “Can’t say there were too many of us suited to be singing Soprano, but what can you do at an all boys’ school, hey?”

“Well…” Hansol starts, with hesitation. “Will you sing for me?”

“I guess?” Seungkwan answers, not really one to say no. “I’ve actually been practicing a song for an audition, it’s called *Beautiful Tomorrow*, if you know it.”

With that, Boo opens his mouth, and Hansol swears in that moment, the heavens open up.

He wants to be joking, trust him, he really does, but his jaw drops, and he watches in awe as Boo, number one squash rival and all around irritating prick that doesn’t know how to fold his collar down, turns into Seungkwan, a talented angel that Hansol has the privilege of having as a soulmate.

*I love you,* he almost blurts out, which is stupid, because he definitely doesn’t love Boo Seungkwan and he knows it. Or at least, he doesn’t love him yet. He barely knows the guy past ‘annoyingly talented at squash’, and to fall in love with just a voice isn’t just borderline idiotic, it’s straight up moronic and impossibly shallow, too. *Maybe he’s a Siren,* Hansol then thinks, because that’s totally the most logical explanation for how he’s feeling.

“You should sing more,” are the weak words Hansol offers instead, before standing up and speed-walking into the kitchen to thank Seungkwan’s mother for her lovely cupcakes and hospitality and dashing out the door.

Chapter End Notes

**Australian Dictionary:**

- Banana bender: A... strange nickname for the people of the state of Queensland (i.e. your authors are banana benders).
- Woop woop: An expression that I haven't heard of outside of Australia so I'm going to assume it's Australian? It means somewhere far away.
AN APOLOGY

To our lovely readers,

We can't thank you enough for the amazing response you've given us! Honestly, you've made our day multiple times. But we're... fairly idiotic people, one could say, and we hadn't quite realised how inundated with uni work we were.

So, while we're very, terribly sorry, we're going to be putting this fic on pause until the end of the month, so that we can slowly write up some more chapters alongside all of our assessment.

Never fear, we shall be back!

Thanks for your understanding!

- Elise and Jeremy
FuuuuUuuuuUUuuUuuUuuUuUCk!

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

Please enjoy this hastily-written mess! We’re part way through our haze of assessment, so I took a bit of a break to write this. I’m half way to finishing, and Jeremy’s a quarter of the way, but we hope to be getting weekly updates back up again!

We hope you like the AUS edition of Going Seventeen Ep.17!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

16th August, 2017

Wonwoo is startled awake at 7:00am on Wednesday morning by his phone ringing on his bedside table, and he groans.

He’d been informed that, for some unknown reason, today was a public holiday and he wouldn’t be needing to go to school. Now Wonwoo isn’t one to look a gift horse in the mouth, so he didn’t ask questions as to why on Earth they would be having a holiday again. He just took it gracefully as a blessing in which he would finally be able to rest his tired eyes.

Which he now regrets doing, because he has no idea what’s going on.

“Yo Wonwoo! We’re outside your house. Are you really going to keep us waiting?”

That’s Jeonghan’s voice, but why the hell is that Jeonghan’s voice?

“I’ve been up since five, Jeon. Don’t make my suffering go to waste,” he then hears the curt voice of none other than Lee Jihoon.

There’s whining in the background. A lot of it, actually. In fact it sounds like about let’s say… at least six people’s worth of whining? He doesn’t want to be pointing fingers or anything, but there’s no doubt about Seokmin’s high-pitched complaints about how “nippy” it is at this time in the morning, and that’s got to be Seungcheol who’s crying over all the rides he has planned that he won’t be able to go on because of Wonwoo.

Arsehol-

Wait. Rides?

“Can someone actually like, I don’t know, tell me what’s going on?” Wonwoo finally says, to which there’s a chorus of outcries.

He can hear Jeonghan getting in trouble. From what’s coming through his phone, it’s tradition for them to all go to ‘Eckah’ together, and Jeonghan’s family always has… cows? Cows that win? Mingyu is yelling about wanting to buy Wonwoo all the bags (he has his trusty backpack and that’s enough, thank you very much), and that’s definitely Wen Junhui waxing poetic about strawberry sundaes.
It sounds very fun and all, except for the fact that, still, Wonwoo has no idea what’s going on.

The next thing he knows, there’s lots of rustling, heavy footsteps, and Mingyu’s standing at his doorway.

“Hyung!” Mingyu shrieks. (How did he even get in the house?) “You’re not even dressed! This is a- an amobidation! Abomination!”

So, after shooing Mingyu out of his room to stand on the other side of the door, Wonwoo gets to putting an outfit together for the day. Mingyu crouches from the hallway so his mouth is right at the keyhole as he talks, so that Wonwoo has hope for finally (finally!) understanding why everyone is screaming at him at seven in the morning.

“Jeonghan forgot to actually tell you, but today’s a holiday because the royal show’s in town! Basically it’s this agricultural show, and you’ll never believe it actually started with people handing out coal! And that was a good thing! Now we call them showbags and you can buy all sorts of different ones with cool goodies in them. But anyway, it’s like this fête thing, so there’s heaps of rides and there’s like dagwood dogs and stuff? Jun loves the strawberry sundaes. They’re a classic so you’ve gotta promise you’ll try them, okay? Oh yeah, and you know how Jeonghan lives on a farm? Every year his family brings their cows to go in the competition. They usually win because the Yoon family are like, the masters of cows. Also, our school band’s been asked to perform, so Jihoon’s gonna be like, a big superstar today. He’ll probably get a standing ovation from all the grandmas and grandpas. Did I tell you this thing’s called Ekka, by the way? It’s called Ekka. It’s real fun except for the fact that it’s a hot spot for catching the flu!”

Now, Jeon Wonwoo had stopped listening to Kim Mingyu’s nonsensical rambling that was of absolutely no help a very long time ago. Specifically, the moment he heard the word ‘agricultural’, he knew none of the word vomit Mingyu was giving him would make any sense. But that was until he’d heard Mingyu say the word ‘flu’.

“Flu?” Wonwoo exclaims, throwing his door open. “As in influenza?”

Thankfully he’s fully dressed, but in a split second Wonwoo knows his outfit won’t be complete without his trusty mask.

“Oh hyung you’re overreacting! You’ll look like a silly little tourist if you do that!” Mingyu tries to wrestle the mask off him, but Wonwoo’s not taking any chances.

“I’m not getting sick, Kim.”

It makes him shut up.

“So,” he approaches his group of friends(? debatable, now that they’ve made him wake up at 7:00 on a holiday) who are still scrambling around on his front lawn. “Anyone care to actually tell me what this Ekka thing is?”

On the bus ride to the Ekka, Jun takes it upon himself to inform Wonwoo of what this show really is. He’s just not all that sure that he wanted to hear the entire history of how it began in 1876 and the significance of showbags (“There’s an entire catalogue in the newspaper and it’s the best thing ever. You’re not a real Queenslander unless you’ve gone through it with a highlighter and circled all the ones you want! I really want the Warheads one this year.”). He is, however, very excited to be forcing people (*cough* Seokmin) onto scary rollercoasters and crushing Junhui at darts in the ‘Side Show Alley’, although he won’t let the boy know just how strong his arm is yet.
When they arrive, the showground’s already bustling with people, and he’s starting to understand why this place is known as a hotspot to catch colds.

He's grateful for his mask.

Jeonghan declares that they all have to go visit “his babies” first because he's missed them too much, so, as any respectable teenager does, Wonwoo finds himself standing amongst many, many cows.

“Mimi my darling!” Jeonghan cries as he runs towards one of the cows (how can he even tell them apart?), and Wonwoo’s suddenly appreciative that his mask not only shields him from sickness, but hides the fact that he's gawping at his friend.

When Wonwoo turns around to ask if he's the only one who doesn't understand how Jeonghan can smother a cow with kisses, he finds half of the group have disappeared off to the petting zoo, and Mingyu’s eyes are teary as he tenderly pats a chicken’s head.

Seungcheol is playing peek-a-boo with a goat on the other side of the pen, and Wonwoo officially wants to shoot himself in the face.

“Come on guys, what’re you doing?” Jihoon strides over, and Wonwoo has half the mind to blurt out, “Thank you! Finally someone normal who thinks everyone’s gone bonkers!” until he sees that the shorter boy is literally chaining the friendship group together with a very long piece of rope.

“We can’t let anyone get lost in the Showbag Pavilion. And you all know that to get the showbag you want you have to get in early.”

“If we’re early we don’t need to be roped together because there won’t be crowds to get lost in!” Seokmin protests, but puffing up his cheeks has absolutely no effect on Jihoon. He falters, ever so slightly, but proceeds to tug on the rope and lead them in the right direction.

“Your logic doesn’t work here. Remember the Great Volleyball Fiasco of Twenty-Twelve?” he says, and the group turns eerily quiet.

Wonwoo doesn’t want to know.

The Showbag Pavilion is kind of a blur of being jerked around while attached to each other, and Wonwoo doesn’t remember anything except for Mingyu buying him a Nerds showbag (the Wonka treat, just to clarify) that apparently embodies Wonwoo’s aura. He doesn’t know whether to be offended that he’s been named the Nerd of All Nerds, or grateful that he’s been gifted with a bag of lollies when he could’ve afforded it himself.

He doesn’t get the chance to choose though, when he spots a head of familiar bleached hair, ends as frizzy as ever but roots a little longer than the last time he’s seen them.

“Hey is that-”

“Soonyoungie!” Seokmin all but shrieks, and all too soon their happy little group of eleven turns into thirteen.

Wonwoo watches on as Hansol shuffles over to give Seungkwan a… handshake(?) in greeting, and nudges Junhui with a chuckle as both their faces turn beet red.

That’s a pair he’s going to have to shove onto the ferris wheel. And the best part is he knows all of his friends will want in on it.
It isn’t hard to convince Soonyoung onto a ride. All you have to say is “I’ll treat you to a sausage sizzle” and he’s already bouncing up and down in the line. Seokmin doesn’t seem to appreciate that, because as official boyfriend it means he has to join him.

“But- but what if I die?” he exclaims to the rest of them, hands coming up to tear at his hair.

“Well then, I guess you’ll die,” Minghao throws back at the petrified boy with a shrug. He even has a red shirt on.

The ride they’re in the line for is affectionately dubbed ‘The Beast’, and swings back and forth like a pendulum with a 360-degree rotation, otherwise known as everything Seokmin adores in a rollercoaster.

When everyone is strapped in and ready to roll, Wonwoo turns to find Junhui poised with his phone up to capture every moment (typical), and Mingyu shaking in his boots on Seokmin’s behalf.

The moment the ride starts up though, everyone’s on the ground in laughter as they hear Seokmin’s distinct voice rip out a “FuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuuUuUUCk!” in chorus to the delighted squeals of children far younger than him.

Other significant moments include Mingyu screaming his lungs out on a family friendly ride, Minghao getting in trouble for being too violent on the bumper cars, Seungcheol foregoing eating his strawberry sundae to instead smash it into some prick’s shirt after he insulted Jeonghan’s hair, Wonwoo obliterating Junhui in darts and being paraded around the showgrounds and most importantly, how they managed to leave Hansol and Seungkwan in a haunted house together to have them come out the other side clinging to each other in fear.

All in all it’s a day he can say was worth being woken up at 7:00am.

Oh, except for the fact that he still got sick even though he was wearing a mask!

So anyway, fuck Australia.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Ekka: If it wasn't clear (I mean, it wasn't meant to be, Mingyu's explanation was supposed to be shite), the royal exhibition, called the ekka, is an agricultural show but really just a massive fair.
- Nippy: It's a British word too, but it's when it's a little cold!
- Strawberry sundae: A classic Ekka treat. I actually volunteered at their stall one year. It's a cone filled with strawberries that's topped with ice cream and whipped cream!
- Showbags: They're bags with all sorts of treats in them. You can look up the catalogue because honestly it's lit
- Dagwood dogs: Corn dogs!
- Side Show Alley: Is basically the alley with all the games and rides. I think
Americans call them midways...?
Wonwoo is not at all happy with Bohyuk and his desire to go to stupid places. After he’d gotten about five detentions for something involving a shopping trolley and a very old tree, the idiot is no longer allowed to go anywhere by himself. So, naturally, Wonwoo has to accompany him everywhere in order to ‘supervise’. He’d rather be anywhere else. Literally anywhere, he’d take QCS practice over this.

Because right now, they’re both standing in the middle of Central station, somewhere Wonwoo has managed to never set foot before, as people stream past them on either side. There aren’t even any trains or platforms in sight, but both Wonwoo’s phone and Bohyuk tell him that this is the station. It honestly just looks like a food court.

“Bohyuk, where are the trains? Do you even know how to get to this park skates thing?” Wonwoo groans, flopping onto the nearest chair, grateful that it’s way before lunch time.

“It’s a skate park, and uh… I don’t think that we actually need to get a train? It might have been a bus…”

“Then what the actual shit are we doing in Central goddamn station, you drongo?”

Bohyuk looks fittingly panicked at the sight of his very sleepy, angry bother.

“It’s character building, hyung! It’s an adventure!”

Wonwoo just rolls his eyes.

“At this stage, character building would be admitting defeat and going home. Come on, we’re not gonna get to the skate park anytime soon,” he says, fully prepared to go to sleep if Bohyuk keeps wasting time messing around.

“We just need some helpful directions! How about those guys at the café over there? They look Korean.”

“Again, Bohyuk, not everyone is Korean just because they look like they are.”

Wonwoo’s protests are lost as Bohyuk races across the food court to the café in the corner that’s sign reads ‘Special Food 9’. He glances at the range of bibimbap that they’re selling and the screen on the wall behind the counter playing K-pop.

Well, definitely Korean. He’ll let Bohyuk have this one.
And sure enough, he’s already rapidly chatting to the guy at the counter, an overly cheerful looking person whose name tag tells Wonwoo he’s called Youngbin.

“Your brother was just telling me that you’re a little lost? Brisbane’s like that, don’t worry. Some of the guys here might know where the skate park is, I’ll ask them.”

Suddenly, the phone rings and Youngbin holds up a finger while lifting the phone to his ear. He listens for a few seconds with an amused expression.

“Ah, no Inseong, I’ve rostered you on for counter duties tomorrow, Seokwoo and Juho are cooking for the rest of the week… Next week? I’m not sure yet… probably the same… Well I mean you could try to swap shifts, but I’m not sure how that would go… Yep, I’ll see you soon, bye.”

Youngbin turns back to them, smile fixed once again. “Sorry, just one of the workers calling to check on the rosters. Where was I? Ah! Youngkyun! Chanhee! Can you come here for a second?”

Two guys wander out from the back of the store, one tall and lanky, the other sporting the brightest orange hair that Wonwoo has ever seen.

“These guys are looking for a skate park? In Paddington? Near a dog park or something. Do you know how to get there?”

The orange-haired guy just shrugs.

“I don’t know, not really my part of town. Sorry.” With that, he wanders back out to the back, but not before Youngbin manages to grab him and plant a kiss on his hair.

“Thanks anyway Chanhee!”

Chanhee full on runs after that, and Wonwoo and Bohyuk are left with an amused looking Youngkyun and a pouty Youngbin.

Youngkyun clears his throat.

“I know where it is. You just gotta go to King George busway, you know that right?” He pulls a piece of paper from somewhere and starts writing directions on it. “Ok, then get on this bus, make sure you get the outbound one, and then get off once you turn onto a street with a shit tonne of bars, alright? You can’t miss it.”

“Thank you,” Wonwoo says, smiling gratefully at the two guys, while hitting Bohyuk behind his back to make him do the same.

They leave the café with directions attained and safely grasped in Wonwoo’s hand, just in time to hear Youngbin call out to someone.

“Hey, Juho, Seokwoo! If Inseong calls you trying to swap a shift, tell him you can’t do it. Under any circumstances.”

~*~

They make it to the busway, where they discover that the bus they’re meant to take is, in fact, the same bus that they get every damn day of their lives to and from their house, and coincidentally the
It’s safe to say that Bohyuk got hit a few times with Wonwoo’s cap.

It’s an uneventful bus ride, which mainly is due to the fact that Wonwoo is refusing to speak to Bohyuk. He’s not petty. He’s just a little mad. And maybe a lot petty.

Wonwoo follows Bohyuk across the road to the skate park. It just looks like a meeting place for a lot of youths, and Wonwoo suddenly sees a way out of what was already shaping up to be a terrible day.

“Bohyuk! I have a proposition. Let’s say, that I was to go literally anywhere that wasn’t here, you wouldn’t be at all inclined to tell mum right? And that would be because if you did, I would happily spill that the skate park you seem so determined to go to looks like a spot for kids to do God knows what irresponsible things. Sounds good?”

Bohyuk just nods at Wonwoo, looking appropriately threatened. Wonwoo smirks, and wanders off further down the street. He passes a public pool, and then there’s what must be that dog park that Youngbin mentioned.

Wonwoo likes dogs. So naturally, he goes to the dog park.

He expected dogs. He expected dog owners. Hell, he even expected dog shit.

What he did not expect was one Xu Minghao sitting on the ground surrounded by puppies.

Wonwoo’s left speechless.

Never in his life did he expect to see the terror of Denborough, dancing king and martial arts champion looking so harmless. So naturally, Wonwoo decides to make the most of it.

“Minghao!” He all but screams, while running over.

Minghao flicks his gaze up from a white fluffy thing awfully quickly, searching for whoever’s so rudely disrupted him from his puppies.

“Oh, hey Wonwoo. What are you doing here?”

“Bohyuk wanted to go to the skate park, but I really did not, so here we are! Anyway, where’s Jun?” Wonwoo asks with a smirk.

“Jun? What’s that arse got to do with anything? He’s at home, I think. Loser has nowhere to go that isn’t with me.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Wonwoo mutters.

“Huh?” Minghao looks up from the poodle he was giving a belly rub to.

“Nothing. Are all of these yours?”

There were about five dogs sitting on top of Minghao, his hands still absentmindedly patting them as he spoke to Wonwoo.

“Oh, no none of them are. I just like this dog park. The dogs are friendly and I know a lot of the owners.”
At that, Minghao waved at a group of guys sitting over at a bench who are casually chatting while watching Minghao play with their dogs. Wonwoo squints, trying to make out their faces, and one of them quite looks like Jihoon’s busker friend, but Wonwoo just blames that on his poor eyesight. Brisbane is small, but not that small.

“That’s cool. Can you just, stay still for a second? Thanks.” Wonwoo pulls his phone out.

“Wait, Wonwoo what are you doing? Don’t you dare take photos, you little shit.”

Wonwoo just laughs. It’s too late for Minghao. He’s stuck under a pile of puppies that he won’t be getting out from any time soon.

“Just you wait until it’s school tomorrow,” Minghao threatens, “I’m gonna make you regret this. What do you think will happen when I tell Jeonghan it was you that stole his instant tteokbokki?”

“You wouldn’t dare! I just wanted some tteokbokki! But anyway, I don’t think that’ll be much of a problem. Who’s going to listen to you once I send these photos to the groupchat?”

“Fuck you. You don’t get to pat the puppies.”

“But I wanna pat the puppies! They’re too cute not to pat.” Wonwoo frowns, observing all the dogs looking adoringly at Minghao.

“Ugh fine. Pat the puppies with me.”

Wonwoo starts stroking the white one’s ears, cooing softly. They’re just starting to form a real emotional bond when one of the guys from the bench, a tall guy with disgustingly perfect rainbow hair, comes running over and pulls the dog from Wonwoo’s arms.

“No Vivi! Don’t play with stray humans, stay away from the ugly people.”

And Wonwoo is once again left puppyless as Minghao rolls around on the ground laughing, the other dogs barking mockingly beside him.
“Soo?” Jongin rubs at his eyes, having fallen asleep on the sofa halfway through his lonely Netflix marathon of waiting up for his boyfriend to return from his graveyard shift.

There’s a lot of shuffling coming from the kitchen, and the suspiciously familiar sound of junk food being rustled around, and the noise has Jongin up and kicking in seconds — Jongin’s best friend is junk food.

Wait, no. That sounds sad and like as if he doesn’t have a life.

“What’s this?” Jongin points to the pile of snacks resting on the kitchen table.

“I’m making a QCS pack for Seokmin! I really craved chocolate through those two days, so I thought he could do with some.”

This response is not pleasing to Jongin.

“So you bought all of this chocolate, and you’re saying that none of it is for me, your beloved soulmate and boyfriend who has been sitting in front of the TV waiting for you all night? The same person who choreographed an entire dance to ask you out? The same person who cooked for you on Valentine’s Day this year and didn’t burn the whole building down? The same person who—”

“Jesus Christ, eat a Snickers. You’re not you when you’re hungry, you whiny bitch.”

Taking offense, Jongin swoops in to snatch the Snickers from Kyungsoo’s hands, but loses his balance as it disappears from in front of his nose.

“I spent good money on this, I’m expecting a payment,” Kyungsoo smiles shyly, as if he’s unused to being quite this teasing, and it’s a sight that makes Jongin’s heart turn into a nonfunctioning puddle of mushy feelings.

This guy is his soulmate.

This guy is his soulmate.

God, those words will never tire him.

“Fine, I’ll give you your fucking kiss,” he grumbles, crossing his arms, but he’s in no way upset.
Wonwoo trembles amongst a sea of people.

He’s become weak, he curses himself in his head. Back in Korea, this would’ve been nothing but a piece of cake; another exam of many that he should’ve cared more about but would just half-arse and still do pretty alright in.

He doesn’t know if it’s the fact that it’s all going to be in English — a language he could barely speak three words of at the beginning of the year — or if the Australian way’s gotten to him and he’s just become so relaxed, calm and laid back that something as simple as a big exam feels daunting.

He supposes it’s fair enough; QCS literally determines whether or not you can get into the university course you want to, but it’s not the be all and end all. Your school grades count, and even then there are other ways to get into what you want to.

But here’s what’s tripping Wonwoo up: he has no intentions of taking his tertiary education in Australia.

(Tertiary Education. Does he sound posh yet?)

“Have a Crunchie and wipe that petrified look off your face!” Seokmin’s hand comes into view holding a golden wrapper.

“Wow Seokmin, didn’t even think you knew such a big word like petrified. Have you been studying?” he fires as he takes the proffered chocolate.

Seokmin laughs wholeheartedly at that, but a hand reaches up to clamp over his mouth in seconds.

“Shut your damn mouth,” Jihoon hisses. “You have six different kinds of chocolate stuck between your teeth and it’s disgusting.”

“I mean, are you sure you’re not gonna have to take a shit if you eat so much before the test? Time is scarce in there and I wouldn’t waste even two minutes going to the bathroom. Especially not during Short Response,” Jun says, sneaking an arm around into the plastic bag Seokmin’s holding to grab a chocolate for himself.

“It’s Multiple Choice first though, it’s the easiest to bullshit,” Seokmin replies nonchalantly, continuing to gorge himself.

“It takes time to digest.”

“Ugh, who cares? Why are you all ganging up on me?” the boy pouts. “If I’m going to die a slow and painful death in there, it might as well be on a full stomach of my favourite chocolates.”

Wonwoo figures Seokmin has a good point, so he rips open the packaging to bite into his bar of chocolate. Perhaps this will even provide him with the energy he needs to stay awake for the whole two or so hours he’ll be sitting the exam for.

He takes a bite, and feels his anxiety ebb away as the honeycomb melts in his mouth.

He’ll be fine.

~*~

Talk about the biggest lie of his life. He’d spent about fifteen minutes he didn’t have wondering what
the hell the connection between the adverb ‘listlessly’ and the phrase ‘I can’t remember what groceries I need to buy’ could possibly be. So, naturally, Wonwoo was more than ready to bitch to his heart's content about the goddamn Tom Swiftly question with his friends.

He approaches the table, lunch in hand, ready to scream. It seems his screaming might have to wait however, as it seems that half his friends are dying of laughter. Perhaps QCS has finally pushed them over the edge.

“Uh… what’s going on?”

Ten faces turn to him, and Wonwoo isn’t sure what to make of all these grins until Junhui practically launches himself at Wonwoo.

“Wonwoo!” He all but screams, “didn’t you just love that Tom Swiftly question? The puns. I never thought that QCS would ever do something so great.”

“I literally have no clue what you’re talking about. That question pretty much destroyed my entire test paper. What the fuck does listlessly have to do with shopping?”

At this, Wonwoo doesn’t get any closer to an answer, as all the guys just collapse into laughter once again.

“That one was definitely my favourite. Tom was listless!” Seungcheol cries, and then proceeds to fall off his chair.

Wonwoo just sits right down on Seungcheol’s chair in revenge and refuses to move.

It seems he’s never going to get an explanation, so Wonwoo just starts eating, grinding his teeth occasionally when someone starts cackling again. They have a nice lunch, as nice as it can be with the looming threat of another test in the afternoon.

This lasts until Seokmin lets out one of his inhuman screeches.

“Look at this text! ‘Do you mind me freeloading off of you for the rest of our lives?’ What the hell has happened to my poor Soonyoungie?”

Seokmin frantically stabs at his phone until he’s waiting for Soonyoung to pick up his call. He sets his phone down on the table on speaker and relentlessly wrings his hands together. Everyone else is silent; it’s unusual to see Seokmin so shaken up, and they’re all worried that something could have happened to Soonyoung.

After what seems like forever, the ringing cuts out and there’s a scratchy “Babe?” coming from the speaker.

“Soonyoungie! What happened? Are you okay? You’re not going to jail are you? We’ve talked about your pyrotechnics, I swear to god-”

“Oh don’t you worry,” a new voice, which Wonwoo immediately recognises as Seungkwan’s, pipes in, “Soonyoung here has just done something unbelievably stupid.”

“Seokmin, I may have… written ‘my dick is flaccid’ for the ‘Tom said softly’ question… I’m so fucked.”

The silence from before is back. Jisoo simply gets up and walks away. Hansol is silently dying with laughter. Seokmin, on the other hand, just bashes his head against the table, before screaming “NO!” into the phone, hanging up, and throwing the phone as far away from himself as he can (which
happens to be straight into Wonwoo, thank you very much *not*, Seokmin).

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Crunchie: A chocolate bar. It's originally British? It's basically honeycomb toffee covered in chocolate and it's The Best.
- My dick is flaccid: Credit to that one kid somewhere in Queensland who actually wrote my dick is flaccid on their test paper (yes, this was a legitimate question in our paper when we took this exam).

*(bonus points to whoever finds the victor reference)*
It’s a blur, after that.

The QCS questions get crazier, the deterioration of Wonwoo’s brain gets faster, and in amongst it all he forgets that this is his last ever experience of high school and he should probably cherish it before it’s prematurely ripped from his poor, unready eighteen-year-old hands.

At the 100-day mark they have a celebration. Everyone gets given a balloon that they have to write their aspirations on to float off “to the sky”, which is to say they all gather in the sports centre where the ceiling is the highest and they watch their helium balloons battle it up to a nice spot to sit at for a few days before their gas runs out and they shrivel up and die (just like Wonwoo’s hopes and dreams!). It’s about the strangest way Wonwoo has ever celebrated something school related, but he supposes it’s nice that Denborough’s letting them blatantly say good riddance to high school days.

Except that he doesn’t want to say good riddance.

Not when he’s found such amazing friends.

Not when he’s leaving these amazing friends behind.

Mingyu looks ecstatic. His balloon is covered head to toe in tiny, scratchy scrawl and it’s one of the first to go up, proud and blue against the white of the ceiling. He’s all bouncy, chattering about on how he’s so excited to become a university student: timetables scheduled to his liking, leaving icky mathematics behind, having time for pissing off and doing shit all, learning what he actually wants to, Mingyu’s ready for uni.


He’s a disgrace.

“What crawled up your arse and died?” Junhui asks with a nudge. His balloon only has about five words on it, but they’re so small it looks like he just drew a short, straight line across the latex.
“My childhood.”
Jun gives a satisfied nod.

“Fair enough.”

~*~

With the end of the term comes not only the impending doom of adulthood, but the biggest music concert of the school year.

Jihoon is on edge because of it, and as the music captain Wonwoo feels like he hasn’t seen him in the last three weeks. Maybe it’s been a month.

The only time Wonwoo does manage to catch him, he’s frantically on a phone call, and he shakes his head weirdly to try and get Wonwoo to feed him his instant ramyeon since his hands are occupied. It seems the infallible Lee Jihoon does have a weakness, in the form of his feet and toes not being quite agile enough for him to use chopsticks with.

Wonwoo feels a little helpless, really. He can see Jihoon is carrying far more weight than he should be on his shoulders, and he thinks it’s no wonder that the music department looks so horrendously rundown.

With that, he purchases tickets to said concert for his family and for all of the group to come watch as well.

Jun gets all red and strangely blushy when he hears the news, trying to get everyone to promise they’ll go for a toilet break when he’s on stage accompanying the junior choir. Seokmin on the contrary is the one to boast about the “sick Gospel rearrangement” the senior choir has planned.

He then proceeds to almost spoil the surprise by bursting into song. It’s only lucky Jeonghan knocks him over.

Wonwoo secretly wonders if Denborough has the balls to have a rap performance at the concert. As much as he loves his opera and whatever the shit (in all seriousness, the Marriage of Figaro is a masterpiece), he’s afraid that no matter how hard he tries he might start to feel a little drowsy some way through the concert.

~*~

He ends up not having to worry about falling asleep.

No, unfortunately it doesn’t mean that the concert was so spectacular that Wonwoo was on the edge of his seat the entire time.

It actually just means he sold his ticket to someone else and decided to volunteer to help backstage.

He gets a bit of an adrenaline rush running around, and he feels somewhat accomplished as he watches from the side the success of each performance. Not to mention he really needed to be there to calm Jun down and stop him from continuously fixing his fringe (“it’s perfect and you look hot I promise”) before sending him off to the stage.

It’s about forty-five minutes into the concert when Wonwoo feels a weight on his shoulder and a voice from up above.
(No, it’s not God.)

“Newbie-woo! How are you I haven’t seen you in yonkers!”

“PCWHY?” Wonwoo’s head snaps up, and he finds the familiar busker grinning down at him. “I don’t mean to be rude but this is a school performance and you’re…”

“I’m an alumni, I’m sure no one will notice that I don’t go here anymore. My uniform still vaguely fits me. The pants only come down to my shins! Better than to my knees, right?”

Wonwoo thinks it’s more the silver hair that’ll be giving PCWHY away, but he chooses not to voice that opinion.

“So what are you playing?”

“Tonight? I’m on kit for the next performance. Apparently the kid broke three of his knuckles in art class. I don’t want to know,” the guy chuckles slowly. “I’m backup bass for the rock band performance because the amp’s being strange and the volume won’t go any higher or something?”

“Wow,” Wonwoo starts to say.

“And I’m french horn for the junior junior band, because if there’s any definite thing about a school band, it’s that there’s always shit all french horns.”

It’s after that that Wonwoo gets tasked with welcoming all the fill-ins and extras and directing them the right way, so he doesn’t seem to be able to shake PCWHY off his shoulders for the entire evening. At this point it’s also too awkward to ask what the guy’s real name is. He supposes he’ll just have to get home and dig in his rubbish bin for that business card. Or better yet, check the guy’s YouTube channel.

He shows a Kyungsoo to the brass warm up room and helps him get his tuba up the stairs, and a guy that looks suspiciously like Minseok from the ice skating rink (but it can’t be him because the name he has on his clipboard is Nimseok) to fill in for… well, he had an ominous-looking case, but Wonwoo couldn’t tell what the instrument actually was.

He only hopes he didn’t accidentally let a murderer into a school concert. He’s sure neither Jihoon nor the school would appreciate that.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you yet unaware,

WE ARE GOING ON HIATUS FOR THE NEXT MONTH AS WE ARE GOING ON HOLIDAYS TO JAPAN AND KOREA!

In more detail, we’ll be taking a bit of a break while we're overseas. We also need to plan some more upcoming chapters, since we're starting to get dangerously close to what we already have planned! So we hope this news doesn't disappoint any of you too much, but we do promise to be back right on Christmas Day for a good dose of Party in the AUS! See you soon(young)!
‘Mingyu’, the universe tells him.

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

Ho ho ho, Merry Christmas (and happy holidays to those of you who don’t celebrate)!
As promised, here’s your update!

We’ll be back to our weekly schedule from here, so we hope you’re all ready for some more partying with AUSverse!Seventeen~

19th September, 2017

“Hey hyung,” Mingyu says, giving a pause that chills Wonwoo to the bone. “I think it’s time for another initiation.”

Wonwoo shivers, then pinches himself, just in case he’s having a nightmare, but he’s very much awake.

“You’ve never come over to the south side before, it’s a shame! You’re free on Wednesday, right? I’ll take you around my part of town!”

Wonwoo sighs, because technically Mingyu’s not saying anything that’s untrue, but he’s just really Goddamn sick of initiations, and also, he’s perfectly comfortable in staying on the north side of the river, purely because he’s only just become vaguely acquainted with it, and expanding his knowledge to further lands seems… daunting.

“Okay,” is the response he gives Mingyu despite himself, and he sends a prayer up to the skies that he won’t get himself killed.

“We’ll have so much fun! You’ll feel right at home with all the Asians,” Mingyu jokes, but it doesn’t really settle him. Wonwoo wants to argue that he feels quite at home right here, with all the Asians he knows here, without needing to go over there (aka the south side), but he’s already said ‘okay’.

He’s not sure if it’s a good thing that they’re chatting over the phone and Mingyu can’t see his pained expression.

At present he leans towards not a good thing.

“Did you really call me just to see if I’d come visit you in ‘the south side’?” Wonwoo tries to change the topic, because now that he thinks about it, that’s… pretty pathetic, Mingyu. If you’re feeling lonely, just say so! Or hook up with Jihoon, since Wonwoo knows Jihoon’s about the only other person who lives in (cue deep movie trailer voice) ‘the south side’.

“Is it bad that I want to spend time with my best friend?” comes Mingyu’s voice from through the phone and Jesus, Wonwoo can practically hear the pout from all the way in Ashgrove.

“Your best friend is Minghao, need I remind you?”
“I’m allowed to have more than one best friend!”

“That’s awfully greedy of you, Mingyu. Millennials and their entitlement,” he tuts back.

“Hyung… even you’re not a millennial. We’re Generation Z.”

“Oh, po-tay-toh po-tah-toh. You could afford a house straight out of graduation if it weren’t for your smashed avocado toasts!”

“W-we don’t even have avocado in the house. Minseo’s um, allergic,” Mingyu says after some shuffling and crackling of the line.

“Sure, bud,” Wonwoo laughs.

Outside his bedroom, Bohyuk runs straight into the open shower door.

~*~

It takes two buses to get to ‘the south side’, or Sunnybank, to be exact. He texts Jihoon once with a photo of the scenery surrounding him because he’s a little too embarrassed to tell Mingyu he’s afraid he’ll turn up at the shopping centre at 11:00pm instead of 11:00am.

Wozgan

,,,,where am I is this a sunny bank what a sunny bank///
Motherf*cker if you expect me to be able to identify every gosh banging roof in Sunnybank you're a delusional f*cker and I swear to God
I'm meeting up with mingu I don't want to look stupid
Stop worrying, you look stupid anyway.
Did you turn on the translink app notifications?
MINGYU*
Yes
*breathes in*
Stop WOrRYiNg

Concluding Jihoon to be a terrible person to go to for advice, Wonwoo rushes out of his seat to push the closest stop button when the translink app tells him to, and steps out onto the street to find that he’s definitely not lost, and absolutely in the right place, because Mingyu is right there, standing at the bus stop with a huge smile waiting for him.

“You made it!” he grins, immediately putting an arm around Wonwoo’s shoulders. “Not gonna lie I was a little worried for a moment there, I took three months to be able to get home safely from school without making any mistakes.”

He supposes the words are meant to sound reassuring, but it worries Wonwoo even further for the trip he has to make home.

“Well come on!” Mingyu tugs him towards the shopping centre, skipping along.

It becomes apparent very quickly that Mingyu wasn’t lying when he said there were a lot of Asians. In fact, in a matter of seconds it comes to a point where it feels odd for Wonwoo to spot someone who isn’t Asian within the shopping centre.

“A white girl!” he gasps, just quietly enough for Mingyu to hear, as they turn a corner to find a young, piggy-tailed girl running away from her mother with a stolen toy.
Wonwoo wouldn’t particularly say he feels at home, in this shopping centre in Sunnybank where there are about fifteen different Chinese grandmas shouting at once, but he will say it feels nice, kind of comforting, in a weird way. A little bit like he’s not some misplaced doll that’s been left behind on a holiday. Of course, his friends have been welcoming, and they’ve never given him the time of day to feel out of place in Australia, but sometimes when he’s alone it comes back to eat at him, the fact that he probably doesn’t actually belong.

It amazes him how just by visiting one of many Asian supermarkets in Sunnybank Wonwoo is practically vibrating out of skin with excitement, as he spots foods he thought he had to leave behind, and he’s not ashamed of saying he spent a little too much money, not when he knows his mother will really appreciate that one specific brand of gochujang the little Korean store in the city didn’t have.

They have lunch at a yum cha place that feels about as crowded as a Chinese train in peak hour traffic, but Wonwoo finds he enjoys is, despite being mistaken as Chinese by one of the waiters and being blasted in the face with what he’ll assume to be the menu of the food in the cart — he thinks he heard the word egg tart, but Junhui has been a pretty slack Chinese teacher, and then when he peered into the cart it was filled with steamed dumplings that looked decidedly un-egg-tarty.

After lunch Mingyu suggests that they take a hike to a nice dessert place he knows, and Wonwoo doesn’t have the heart to say no.

They walk incredibly close to each other, even more so than usual, and he feels… weird.

Mingyu links arms with him after some time, and Wonwoo snaps his head around to Mingyu, shaking the boy’s hand off his arm viciously.

If he’s going to be honest, he’s starting to get sick of this. Day in, day out, Mingyu with his touchy-feely need to be constantly connected to him; it’s too much. Sure, Mingyu likes to hang off all of his friends, but Wonwoo feels personally attacked with how much the boy seems to need to be attached to him.

It feels like a mockery; an acknowledgement of his stupid crush, and then a blatant taunting of its existence.

Wonwoo wants to scream in his face.

“For God’s sake would you fucking stop that? I’m sick and tired of this! Why do you link arms with me? Why do you smile at me? Can you just- piss off, Mingyu!”

It’s nothing like the eloquent speech he’d had running through his mind before the feeling of ‘want to scream in his face’ became ‘am screaming in his face’, and as Wonwoo soaks in Mingyu’s shocked, pain-stricken expression, he can’t believe what he’s done.

So, as any responsible person would, Wonwoo runs.

~*~

Wonwoo runs fast enough to not let his guilt catch up to him.

Mingyu had it coming for him, damn it, being all clingy like that. There’s no reason for Wonwoo to be feeling guilty when this is all Mingyu’s fault.

It was Mingyu’s fault for clinging to him like that.

It was.
But… he was probably reading into things too much. Mingyu clung to everyone just as much as he did to Wonwoo, right? It was just his way of expressing friendship. But it just felt so damn suffocating, and like he was being teased, and he just…

“Shit.”

It’s not easy, knowing you’re in the wrong. Wonwoo knows Mingyu’s just being a good friend, like he does for everyone, because Mingyu’s just a swell guy like that, but here Wonwoo is, acting like some insolent child, snapping at his friend about something that the boy isn’t even aware of — he feels like a Grade A arsehole and idiot.

He turns another corner and keeps marching on, determined to stomp the irrational anger out of himself. He’s being unreasonable, and he’ll be damned if he lets it consume him.

Right at that moment a noisy miner swoops down at him from a tree, and in his effort to swat it away, his watch flings right off his wrist.

He shouldn’t be so surprised; the thing was about ten dollars and falling apart to begin with, but he scolds his watch from falling off his wrist anyway. When he picks it up and puts it to his wrist to see if he can try to somehow put it back on, his eyes meet with something he’s been trying to ignore for a long while.

Suddenly, his mind races. What happens if the watch is beyond repair? Does he have enough money saved up to buy himself another watch? Where did he buy his last watch again? Where else sells cheap watches? Should he try and sew his watch back together onto his wrist?

He needs this watch more than he needs to be alive; this crappy, limp plastic thing is the only thing that’s kept him going since his birthday.

He takes it off to go to sleep and to shower, and other than that, it stays snugly on his wrist, and has been there for two years.

Until now.

Until now, when he needs it the most, to hide the name that mocks him more than Mingyu’s actions — mocks him more than anything he’s ever experienced.

‘Mingyu’, his wrist reads, in distinctive cursive.

‘Mingyu’, the universe tells him.

“Mingyu,” Wonwoo says to himself.

And then, like the true blue Australian he’s become, “fuck.”

~*~

Somewhere between cooling off and continuing to turn around more corners, it dawns on Wonwoo that he is perhaps lost. But Wonwoo’s a resourceful twenty-first century boy, and he knows his way around Google maps so long as he doesn’t make it direct him, because that only begs to end in a mess.

He grabs for the phone in his back pocket, and, like the cool, calm and collected person he is, he unlocks it, goes to the settings, flicks on his mobile data, then hyperventilates when he finds that he’s used up all of his data for the month and comes to the realisation that he never should have trusted his
father when he said he’d be fine on a prepaid account.

With no data, there’s no Google maps. With no Google maps, there’s a very lost Jeon Wonwoo in a very new suburb that he’s never visited before in his entire life, and the one person who does know his way around this place is the exact person Wonwoo just stormed away from.

So.

He could text Jihoon, his mind supplies, but considering the reaction he’d gotten just from trying to catch the bus, Wonwoo thinks that’s not the best of ideas.

Not that he doesn’t think Jihoon will lend a hand in a time of need, of course, he knows that as nonchalant as the kid tries to be, he cares, but he also knows it’ll come at the cost of a few jabs and mighty blackmail material that he really doesn’t want.

It’s with resignation that he goes to the message icon and clicks on Mingyu’s name.

Boggyu

Mingyu?

I...

Wonwoo startles when he’s no longer able to type for the incoming call, and he immediately puts his phone to his ear, ready to apologise Mingyu’s ear off.

“Hyung, are you alright?” Mingyu pants into the phone, and Wonwoo’s heart positively snaps into two.

Wonwoo sighs heavily into the phone.

“Kim Mingyu I swear on my grandmother’s grave if you don’t stop being nice right now I’m going to implode. How can you be asking if I’m alright after I snapped at you and stormed off like that?”

There’s silence for a moment, filled with harsh breathing.

“Well, are you?” Mingyu asks, “alright, that is.”

“Yeah I mean, I’m lost? And trying really hard not to panic but it’s kind of hard. Nothing looks familiar, because why should it? I’ve never been here before! And it’s my own fault but I can’t even use Google maps because I’m out of data for the month and that means I can’t even have translink notifications on the bus on the way home, which is more than mildly concerning if I’m being honest, and now I’m rambling myself into a small pity party instead of apologising to you for being a shitty person like I should be, because I just am a shitty person I guess; surprise! It wasn’t a one-time thing and I’m still being shitty to you!”

“Wonwoo,” Mingyu says softly, for what’s about the fourth time, when the boy finally stops his ramble to hear the calling of his name.

He finds himself a little out of breath as he mumbles a small “yeah?”

“Breathe for me, then describe your surroundings. I’ll come and find you, alright?”

“Mingyu, really, you don’t have to, I’ll find a way around and you should just go home. I don’t deserv-”
“Describe your surroundings.”

It’s the first time Mingyu sounds somewhat forceful, and in a shock, Wonwoo lets his description tumble from his lips.

“Oh, the weird hot pink house!” the boy exclaims, sounding back to his usual, puppy-like self. “I know exactly where you are, just wait for me, alright?”

Wonwoo nods, before he remembers that he’s on a phone call, but Mingyu’s already hung up, and he doesn’t have to wait long before he hears pounding footsteps on the pavement coming towards him.

“You’ve walked a really long way, it’s only like a… seven minute walk to my house now? I’d say welcome to Acacia Ridge, but I don’t know if you’d appreciate that.”

Wonwoo gives Mingyu a kind of wet smile; not quite, because he’s not some hormonal twelvie and he knows better how to keep a reign on his emotions, but it’s a little overwhelming to be faced with someone so amazing.

He notices Mingyu’s hesitant arm that tries to reach for him, and he feels immediately guilty, before sidling up to the boy to walk alongside him.

~*~

Mingyu settles Wonwoo onto his sofa and bundles him up in numerous afghans like as if he’s just made it out of a chilling winter before heading into his kitchen.

“Do you want a milo?” he asks, and Wonwoo nods in response, remembering the chocolatey goodness of the strange brown powder he’d eaten at Hansol’s house with Mingyu.

Minutes later the taller boy returns with two steaming mugs and offers one to Wonwoo, who cocks his head to the side in wonder.

“What’s this? Hot chocolate? You do realise mid-September spring still feels like summer to me, right?”

“Hyung it’s- milo,” Mingyu responds, confused.

“I had milo with you at Hansol’s, I don’t remember this,” Wonwoo says slowly.

“Oh, Wonwoo!” Mingyu giggles at that, realisation hitting him. “You didn’t honestly think us Aussies just casually eat malt powder as a treat, did you? You’re supposed to mix it with cold or warm milk to make a drink!”

That… makes a lot more sense, now that Mingyu’s said it, and Wonwoo finds a smile creeping up onto his face in the same way the warmth from the mug is seeping into his hands.

The milo is sweet, the same way that Mingyu is (yuck, seriously, Jeon Wonwoo?), and as they sit side by side in front of Mingyu’s TV watching some terrible kid’s cartoon rerun while sipping from their mugs, Wonwoo forgets how scared he is of his future, and throws it away to enjoy the moment he has right now.

Chapter End Notes
Australian Dictionary:

- The South Side: Basically, we split Brisbane up according to which side of the river people live on.
- Sunnybank: An Asian (Chinese, predominantly tbh) dominated area on the south side.
- Translink: Our department of transport. Additionally, the translink app is a shitey and unreliable app that's supposed to give you bus, train and ferry timetables etc.
- Noisy Miner: The worst bird in existence.
Chapter Notes

So, as an ode(?) to K-Con, who stole all our money, here’s a new chapter! We hope you can identify all the parody groups we’ve decided to feature! We don’t intend to offend any of their true counterparts, it’s all just a part of the fun.

We also want to dedicate this horrendous, cracky chapter to our angel Jonghyun, who we hope in the AUS universe had a blast at K-Con Australia. We’re so proud of you and everything you’ve done, and we just hope that you’re out there, having a good time like you deserve.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12th September, 2017

“Wait, so. Explain this to me again. Eighteen is a boy group. But they only have fourteen members.”

“Because it’s 14 members and 3 units who make 1 group!” Seungcheol tells Wonwoo like as if he’s stupid.

“What, people need to have a bachelor in mathematics to listen to music now?” he shoots back.

Over the phone, Seokmin can hear Soonyoung tearing his hair out over Wonwoo’s apparent K-pop incompetency. In the background there’s also Bohyuk’s cackling, and Wonwoo has never felt more offended. Just because he was born and raised in Korea does not mean he has to know of every damn K-pop group in existence.

“I know EMO and BTW,” he snaps towards the phone. “Isn’t that enough?”

“Boi! Even the white people know those groups!” Soonyoung’s voice cracks with the amount of exertion he puts behind getting the words out.

Wonwoo turns around to grumble to himself, because, as things usually go with his friendship group, he doesn’t know what he did to deserve this. Of course some white people know K-pop! It’s becoming global! And if in amongst that there’s a Korean who knows less because God forbid, he listens to other genres, then so be it!

A throat clears over the phone.

“So anyway, the most important group is obviously Goodbyemercu-”

“Soungkwan, shut up.”
Soonyoung lands in Sydney, practically vibrating out of his skin.

“We’ve made it, boys!” he calls out behind himself as he runs towards the exit of the airport.

Seokmin’s mumbled, “But at what damn cost?” can be heard by only Seungkwan, who manoeuvres his duffle bag around so he can pat the boy on the back.

“And for a shit line up like this, too. How come Mexico got all the stars and then what, Australia gets…?” Seungkwan trails off, unable to finish his sentence.

What, indeed, did Australia get?

“You’re an absolute bummer, Kwan. Has anyone ever told you that? You gotta take any chance by the balls in this country because we get shit all. You sit here and complain and K-Con’s never gonna come back to this hell hole.”

Ah, yes. That’s it. Australia got a K-Con. A K-Con? Is that proper English?

Doesn’t matter anyway.
“I’m assuming that’s why you wasted all your savings on getting a two-day pass?” Seungkwan smiles brightly, before skipping off to where Soonyoung has blasted ahead.

Seokmin can’t find the energy to catch up after being roasted.

Which doesn’t end up being too much of a problem, when his knees give out from underneath him and he falls to the ground in surprise.

“Excellent execution, Joshuji!” Jeonghan slaps ten bucks into Jisoo’s extended hand that shamefully tries to help Seokmin up.

*I’m short on money after buying tickets for K-Con, I’m really sorry*, Jisoo’s eyes say, but Seokmin’s too busy trying to figure out a game plan to get the gum he’s chewing to miraculously find its way into Jeonghan’s hair.

Ten metres away, one Wen Junhui stands behind a fake tree, desperate to make sure his supposed (emphasis on supposed) cool boy reputation doesn’t get ruined by his friends finding out he bought platinum tickets to K-Con.

~*~

5:00am, hotel room, 22nd September, 2017

The day starts early for the boys.

At five in the morning they respectively groan and roll out of their beds, the “spring” heat already unforgiving.

While Soonyoung and Seokmin discuss whose hi-touch they might be lucky enough to receive, Seungkwan sulks with his legs crossed on the ground, having only bought a cheap(er, none of those tickets were easy on the wallet) ticket.

“Honestly, I’d probably kill for hi-touch with Bfriend,” Seokmin says, and Seungkwan almost tears the hostel bed sheets to shreds. He regrets buying a new case for his squash racquet now that he’s missing out on day two of the concert. In his mind though, he tells himself it’s alright, because not going to day two means that his ears are saved from being tortured by a live rendition of Pristine’s “hit debut track” *Squeaky Clean*.

And like as if Seokmin’s heard his thoughts, the boy starts singing said song under his breath as he tries to figure out if it’s going to be too hot for a t-shirt and if he should wear something sleeveless instead.

“Squeaky squeaky squeaky! Squeeeeeaky squeaky squeaky! Squeaky squeaky squeaky and clean clean clean, ah! Rub-a-dub my love, love, lo-”

Seungkwan’s hand wraps around Seokmin’s throat.

~*~

8:45am, Qudos Bank Arena, 22nd September, 2017

Dodging his friends at a large event may sound like an easy task, but it’s only 8:45 in the morning and already Jun feels tired to the bone. He’d used coloured hair spray in an effort to look less familiar, and with his bright lilac hair he sits away from the crowd, examining the goodies his ticket has brought him.
In his envelope there’s a hi-touch with Nu’west that he’s very excited about, and one with Papapoo for day two as well. He’s a little disappointed that he’s got an audience ticket for Goodbyemercury today, but he supposes he can just give that to someone who wants it and spend that time recharging for the concert.

In the distance he hears the unmistakable screams of Soonyoung and Seokmin, who’ve been the lucky winners of SHINee hi-touch tickets, and in amongst that there’s the voices of desperate fans trying to trade Fistland for BTW.

He glances around to try and see where Seokmin and his soulmate might be, and it’s surprisingly easy when he spots said soulmate jumping up and down with his arms flapping around.

Jun had forgotten Seungkwan was also going to be there (not as an offense to the boy in any way, they’re just not all that close), and he regrets wanting to keep his attendance secret, if only because giving the boy the Goodbyemercury audience ticket would probably make his day.

“It just kind of sucks that EMO’s not doing hi-touch,” another familiar voice says, far too close for Jun’s liking, and he clams up, breath caught in his throat.

“But we got hi-touch with Eighteen, Han. I can see heaps of girls around here who would skin us alive for that.”

Huh, Jun didn’t know Jisoo was coming too.

“Yeah, like that girl who’s dressed as the Eighteen lightstick that’s crying?”

There’s a small oof sound, and Jun can practically feel the exasperation rolling off of Jisoo in waves, wherever he is.

“Don’t be so insensitive,” he chides, voice finally starting to sound farther away. “Hell, even Cheol would kill us for this.”

Jun heaves a sigh of relief.

He remains undetected.

~*~

10:30am, Convention Room 3, 22nd September, 2017

The convention itself is an utter disappointment, and Jeonghan walks through it in a record time of two minutes, with Jisoo trailing behind him. He supposes it’s alright since he brought a deck of cards with him anyway, but who would have thought that the convention would consist of a mere three (three!) stalls and nothing else?

“No one cares about SBS Popasia, Jesus.”

With this development, Jeonghan feels just that slightest bit less sad about only attending day one of the concert.

“Come on, I think Maccas is calling our name,” Jisoo says, tapping him on the shoulder.

“God, yes, you always know what I want, Joshuji. This tummy yearns for a Big Mac.”

~*~
While the heat can’t exactly be described as anything as bad as what it would be if he were in Brisbane, Jun can’t say he appreciates standing under the glaring rays of peak Australian weather just for a hi-touch opportunity with Nu’west. Yes, they’re Nu’west and yes he hypothetically would do anything under the sun (ha. Get it?) for them, but he doesn’t particularly enjoy watching fellow fans drop to the ground in dehydration, only to have their water bottles snatched off them for “safety measures” by the security.

Yes, security eventually somewhat redeems themselves by giving out water once they realise people are fainting because it’s hot (honestly how long does it take them), but overall it’s an unpleasant experience that Jun doesn’t really want to go through again.

He supposes it’s all worth it though, when the irritation melts away and the anticipations settles back in. He gets a good spot towards the front as he awaits Nu’west’s arrival, bobbing along to the music blasting through the speakers.

It’s all a blur after that, although an exciting blur. He touched the hands of Nu’west? He did that?

When he finds his way back out of the convention he’s too busy staring at his hand dumbfoundedly that he walks into someone — someone he didn’t want to bump into.

“Aww Junnie! Why didn’t you tell us you were coming? We had to find out from the audience as you drooled over Aaron!”

Junhui forces a smile that feels much more like a grimace than anything else.

“Hi, Jeonghan.”

~*~

1:15pm, Convention Room 4, 22nd September, 2017

Seokmin doesn’t know if it’s his screams, Soonyoung’s screams, or the girl behind him’s screams that are really ringing in his eardrums, but at this point, he doesn’t particularly care. In minutes — no, seconds, he’s going to be able to confirm that the members of SHINee are real actual human beings that exist.

The moment SHINee actually walks into the room, it’s like everything goes silent. It doesn’t actually, the screaming gets worse, but it’s like Seokmin’s ears have stopped working and all he can feel is his eyes burning from looking at too much beauty at once, and the tight grip that Soonyoung has on his hand as he shakes it around in excitement.

“Dude, fuck,” Seokmin finally manages to whisper to Soonyoung. “Jonghyun’s wearing blue contacts.”

Soonyoung laughs a little, eyes scrunching up in knowing how wrecked Seokmin is, but he doesn’t have the time of day to respond before he’s crying over Taemin.

When the group gets to introducing themselves, Seokmin swears Soonyoung almost throws up with how excited he is.

“Hello, I’m-” Key begins to say, and Seokmin’s right ear gets blasted off by Soonyoung screeching the guy’s name. Key laughs, pointing over to Soonyoung. “Yes, that.”
When the hi-touch opportunity comes around, Seokmin has to wipe his hands on his shorts multiple times, and he gives each member an enthusiastic high-five, because who doesn’t appreciate a good high-five to get them hyped?

Soonyoung behind him though, holds each member’s hands in both of his, and tells them he loves them before moving on to the next.

When Soonyoung reaches Onew, the last member, Seokmin turns around to give him a big hug and walk off the stage together so that the rest of the fans can experience the same glory that they just have.

“I don’t think I want to wash my hand ever again,” Seokmin tells Soonyoung.

“You think? Bro I know I’m not washing my hand ever again,” the boy scoffs at him.

“That’s gross, dude.”

~*~

8:00 pm, Main Concourse, 22nd September, 2017

“Jisoo come on I wanna get to my seat! We gotta get situated and ready before the concert starts!” Jisoo just laughs at that.

“Oh my gosh Jeonghan, what even is there to get ready for? We’ve got plenty of time. EMO isn’t going anywhere.” He pauses for second. “Wow, I still can’t believe we’re going to see EMO in real life? We’re gonna be able to confirm that they’re actually real? We’re going to hear them sing live? We’re going to see them dance live? I’m going to get to stare at Shen and Kay’s beautiful faces? I am so not ready for this.

“On second thought, maybe we should walk a little faster. We do need to prepare.

Jisoo grabs Jeonghan’s hand and pulls him with the strength of the Hulk towards the entrance, because in that moment, they really gotta get to their seats and prepare (for Jisoo, to see his idols, and for Jeonghan, the inevitable loss of hearing from Jisoo’s screams).

~*~

Seungkwan can barely contain his excitement, and has taken to bouncing up and down in his seat in order to use all his energy in some way. He’s already made friends with the two girls sitting next to him (neither of them are Goodbyemercury fans, the idiots, but they do have at least some taste as they’ve come SHINee and Eighteen respectively).

He’s just taking his earphones back from Lily, the Eighteen fan, after showing her this dope mashup of EMO’s Coco Pops and Eighteen’s BangBang, when the lights go down. Sadly, it’s only the opening act. Don’t get him wrong, Seungkwan is all for the opening acts, hell, he knows how it feels to be an opening act, but the opening act just isn’t Goodbyemercury.

Truth be told, the opening act is an amazing dance group that makes the wait a lot more bearable. But soon enough, Goodbyemercury is coming out onto the stage, and Seungkwan’s screams are so loud he’s sure he sees Lily leaning ever so slightly away from him.

~*~
Jun’s having the time of his life thrashing it out in the platinum section. He’s been struck by his near constant need to dance, and this is totally the perfect time for it. Nu’west’s set is amazing, and after dancing especially crazily to *There I Am*, he desperately needs water.

Luckily, there’s some friendly security guards drifting around with water bottles, so Jun pushes his way through the crowd to get some much needed hydration. He’s just got the blessedly cold water and is taking probably more than his fair share, when he suddenly hears a familiar tune coming over the speakers.

Nu’west, currently one of the hottest K-pop groups, has just started a cover of Men at Work’s *We Come From the Land Down Under*.

It’s safe to say Jun’s water goes everywhere.

~*~

“Jeonghan! It’s EMO! They’re finally on, oh my gosh!”

Jisoo is jumping up and down, waving his arms around and all together having a great time. Jeonghan just smiles; he’s happy to see Jisoo having so much fun, and he’s not gonna lie, he’s just as excited to see EMO. He just doesn’t show it.

Reaching a hand down, Jeonghan tries to find Jisoo’s hand to grip in excitement. He finds tightly crossed fingers instead of an open palm. He knows Jisoo’s still desperately hoping that EMO will perform his favourite song *Hell*, so Jeonghan grabs his hand tight and hopes right with him.

When EMO finally comes onto the stage to *Hell’s* opening bars of piano, Jisoo lets out a barely audible “holy shit”.

It’s the second time that Jeonghan’s ever heard him swear.

And when Jisoo swoons when Kay winks right at them, it’s safe to say Jeonghan swoons as well.

~*~

The first four acts of the concert are mainly a blur for Soonyoung, he’s a little embarrassed to admit. He’s so excited for SHINee that he hasn’t been paying the best attention to the rest of the groups, and has mostly just lost himself in the music and dancing with Seokmin.

It’s nearing what must be the end of Eighteen’s set when he hears a funky hip hop beat he hasn’t heard before. He turns to Seokmin.

“New song?” He mouths.

“Cover?” Seokmin mouths back.

It turns out Seokmin was right when they hear (in a very fake Australian accent) the telltale “waltzing Matildaaaaaaa”.

“All holy shit, no way,” Soonyoung laughs, and proceeds to headbang the fuck out of the sickest rendition of Waltzing Matilda he’s ever heard.

All too soon, Eighteen leaves the stage as legends, and an even more legendary group comes on.

It’s finally SHINee.
Now, Soonyoung has reached the ultimate level of fan one can reach (Seokmin can testify to this) and he’s currently freaking out just a little. From thinking he’d never get to see SHINee live, like ever, to having a sudden chance and taking it, and for that chance to come to fruition in the space of just a few months, and then having a goddamn hi-touch with them is a bit much for his poor SHINee loving heart to take.

All through their intro he never leaves his tiptoes, desperately trying to see over the heads of all the twelvie fangirls in front of him (why are they all taller than him, this has gotta be a conspiracy). He just about screams himself hoarse during the intro alone. Oops.

But when the music begins, and the drums start, Soonyoung knows it’s only going to get a whole lot worse for his voice. Because their first song is *1of1*.

“YES MY KINGS SING IT OUT SING IT!”

And then he dances and grooves and just has a shit ton of fun revelling in the majesticity of Jonghyun’s high notes and Minho’s steady rapping.

The rest of their performance is just as legendary as he’d thought it would be, and Soonyoung may be guilty of screaming “Key why are you so good at everything?” a few too many times and he might have even cried during *Replay*.

By the end of it, when Jonghyun smiles, and says, “Australia, we love you,” Soonyoung has decided.

It’s the best night of his life.

~*~

9:30 am, Qudos Bank Arena, 23rd September, 2017

Minghao sighs, looking down at the contents of his envelope. He paid an entire three hundred and thirty-seven dollars for that. Yep, you heard that right folks. Three. Hundred. And. Thirty. Seven. And yet, after all that money, he stares down at a Pristine hi-touch ticket that is very much not a Papapoo hi-touch ticket.

They may both start with P, but you see, one of the groups is very different from the other.

Pristine is a mediocre, bubblegum cutesy bunch of twelvies whose recreational activities involve twirling their hair around their fingers. But Papapoo? Papapoo is the be all and end all of powerful vocals matched with powerful aesthetics.

Yes, he’s biased because Polar is the gosh darned love of his life, but admittedly boy groups have always been more of his thing anyway.

With the Pristine hi-touch ticket in his hand, Minghao thinks of the irony of Papapoo’s latest comeback. *No you aren’t*, he sings to himself in his head, *gonna get that Papapoo hi-touch! No you aren’t*-

“Can anyone trade me a Pristine hi-touch?”

Minghao’s head shoots up.

“I’ve got a BTW audience!”
He is not trading a hi-touch ticket for an audience.

Minghao rolls his eyes, but he appreciates the girl for inspiring him to also walk around to see if anyone will trade him for what he wants.

“Would anyone want a Pristine hi-touch for a Papapoo hi-touch?” he calls out tentatively, walking amongst the scattered crowds while holding his ticket up. “Pristine for Papapoo?”

Suddenly, he feels hands come up to cover his eyes, and Minghao yelps, elbowing the person behind him repeatedly in the stomach in an attempt to get away. His hi-touch ticket is yanked from his hand while he can’t see, and Minghao distantly wonders why no one’s bothering to help him from his untimely and far too early death.

“Anything for you,” he hears a voice whisper to his left, breath brushing against the shell of his ear.

Minghao shivers slightly, only to regain consciousness and whip around with an expert move that renders the person behind him immovable.

“Motherfucker I thought you were going to kill me!” he yells, but the person before him is just smiling up at him sweetly.

“Well you wanted Papapoo hi-touch! So I thought, you know, as any rational and kind person does, I’d give it to you! I mean, anything for my precious HaoHao, really.”

Minghao drops the boy to the ground from the position he’s holding him in and huffs.

“Thank you,” he says reluctantly, before yanking the kid off the ground with a hand to the shoulder. “I owe you one.”

“Eh, just promise me you’ll come visit Feng some time soon. He misses you.”

Minghao snorts.

“Only FengFeng misses me?”

“Fine,” the boy groans, “Junhui misses you too…”

Minghao laughs, a big, hearty laugh that has him bent over, and he throws his arm around Jun’s shoulders to walk off elsewhere while they wait for the convention to open, already chatting each other’s ears off. After all, there’s a lot to talk about considering they’ve both come to K-Con in secret.

“Should’ve known you were a Papapoo stan when I saw that album under your bed,” Jun laughs.

“And I should’ve known you’d blow your money on platinum tickets to the whole shazam when I saw the albums under your bed,” Minghao jabs back, and Jun’s ears start to turn pink. He does have a sizeable collection.

At 7:30pm Junhui tries his shot at a valiant attempt to sneak Minghao into the platinum section of the stadium, but, with it ending in a predictable failure, the two part ways to enjoy the concert by themselves.

Jun screams just the appropriate amount (thank you very much) to BTW’s latest track Water, and he has to admit he almost sheds a tear Bfriend’s Hate Shout. It truly makes him proud to see how far they’ve come. With Fistland and Pristine doing a collaboration and Papapoo wrapping up the night,
he feels satisfied with the amount of money he’s lost this month.

What he doesn’t expect though, is right after the finale, for a special act to be announced. The room fills with smoke, confetti from the finale still trailing its way down to the ground, and when Junhui squints up to the stage he sees four people striking a very familiar pose.

“Boy’s Night!” someone squeals from behind him, and as the smoke dissipates, he can’t believe his eyes.

“Hello everybody! It’s only Spring in Australia, but your passion makes it so hot in here!”

The audience would like to argue that it’s just the country’s inability to differentiate seasons, but they’re forgiven for their minor mistake.

“It is our honour to be your special guest for closing night of Australia’s very first K-Con! Every night, Boy’s Night! Hi, we’re Boy’s Night!”

*Man, Jun thinks. The people who only bought tickets for the first night are gonna be pissed.*

You’re not wrong, Junhui. You’re not wrong.

(Read: Seungkwan is *f* *u* *m* *i* *n* *g*.)

~*~

12:07 am, Brisbane, 23rd September, 2017

Seungcheol walks slowly into his room, drying his hair with a towel as he goes. It’s the old one he’s had since he was a kid, the blue ducks fading more and more into the worn yellow background with every wash. It’s his favourite towel. A favourite towel for the day he didn’t get to see his favourite group Eighteen. No matter though. There’ll be other chances.

He puts his pyjamas on, fluffs his doona down (in order to maintain the comfort of a blanket while not overheating like crazy). It’s only a another minute until he’s safely tucked into bed.

Seungcheol picks up his phone, unlocks it, ready to slowly turn off his brain with the power of social media. He opens Facebook, scrolls, not much new to see. Instagram; the same aesthetic food shots and not so candid candids as always.

Snapchat. Seungcheol smiles at Seokmin’s loving gazes of adoration at a dancing Soonyoung. He laughs at a picture of Jun frantically running away from Seungkwan until his sides hurt.

And then.

A selfie.

Jeonghan and Jisoo are wrapped impossibly close together, smiles born of utter content, which Seungcheol knows isn’t just for the sake of the photo.

He knows because *h*e used to take up the spot on Jeonghan’s left instead of that rubbish bin, an unwanted inclusion from Jisoo’s habit of holding the camera so wide to fit in three bodies.

Seungcheol rolls deeper into his doona, shuts his phone and shuts out the world.
Australian Dictionary:

- Sydney: Honestly I'd be surprised if you didn't know Sydney? It's a Big City™.
- K-Con: A Korean convention that stripped us of all of our money :)
- K-Con's Ticketing System: So basically Platinum tickets are the top of the range you get the "good shit" and it's an automatic two-day pass. From there it goes P1, 2, 3, 4 and depending on which you get your seating is different along with the stuff you get with your ticket. For example, you can assume that Seungkwan has at most a P3 ticket because he doesn't have hi-touch with any groups while Soonseok do.
- SBS PopAsia: It's a music show that broadcasts Asian pop? Not much to say tbh.
- We Come From the Land Down Under: A total bop of a song that is an Australian icon and everyone should look up right now if you don't know it. It's actually called "Down Under", but for differentiation from the term itself that we use to refer to Australia as a country, we've put in the full lyrics as the name of the song.
- Waltzing Matilda: A famous bush ballad that's known as Australia's unofficial national anthem. And honestly? This song is the biggest bop.
The Name's Bond. Josh Bond.

Chapter Notes

Quick info dump (and partial recap) before we get started because otherwise this chapter may seem confusing to you!

- **QTAC**: Stands for Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre. It processes all university applications for the state of Queensland. Each state has their own version, and basically you submit your preferences of what you want to do at university, and they have their own algorithms that'll pump out whether or not you can get into what you want.

- **OP**: Scored from 1 (the best) to 25 (the worst), as we've mentioned before, this is our "final grade" that we receive at the end of high school. It "determines everything about your future" and it's stupid and honestly irrelevant the moment you get out of high school despite it seeming like the be all and end of all of life while you're working towards it.

- **UNIVERSITIES THAT WILL BE MENTIONED IN THIS CHAPTER:**
  Bond University, QUT (Queensland University of Technology), Griffith University (and by extension, the Conservatorium of Music)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DENBRUH

Socks
y'all has it ever occured to you qtac deadline is soon because
Occurred*
Ham
oh get off your high horse hoon yes yes you'll get an op1 and be able to get into whatever course you want to we get it
Socks
:(
Shut up Jeonghan
Ham
maK e ME
Absolutely not.
Jam
Guys I'm trying to do my homework?
What's going on
Bao
Literally who does homework in this day in age
Clearly, Jisoo does
And by the way it's "day and age"
Wennonfer
biNC h be??? kinD to mY sON he's workED?? Soo haRd t o leaRN tHis laN GU agE
Bao
Shut up jun
Socks
guys,, i was bein serious,, qtac;;;;;
a real problemo my dudes///<
Spam
Whats so hard about tac
QTAC*
Obviously just do what your heart tells you


Christ grandpa go back to your rocking chair
The Chan That Can
DONT SAY THE LORDS NAME IN VAIN
Jam
How did you know I was going to say that?
Socks
alright harry high pants what do YOU plan on doing in uni then
Spam
Wait who is he talking to


you
Bao
you???
You, Seungcheol. Dumbarse.
Spam
I'm doing exercise+movement science with behavioural science duh
Socks
whomstve the funk is exercise whats a movement
He wants to become a sports teacher how much harder can this get are you really rooting for an
OP25? No wonder you're struggling.
Wennifer
This tea
This exposé
I wouldn't be smug about this Jun I saw you on the website changing your preferences again
Bao
THIS TEA
THIS EXPOSÉ
Jam
Well if we're talking university I personally am thinking about maybe going to Bond?
I'm looking at tourism or business
Might do teaching though I'm not sure


honestly politics philosophy economics? Doesn't sound too bad
The Chan That Can
Well i'm going for dance so
Socks
i'm offended i found out with everyone else what my own little brother is doing dance i thought i was
special i thought you loved me
Noot Noot
is every1 just gonna ignore the fact that... jisoo said hes considering BOND
B O N D
Wennifer
the name's bond. -josh- bond.
Wait what's wrong with Bond?

honey you could go to griffith and still be making a better choice
I'm going to Griffith.

No Jihoon darling don't be like that you don't count
It's the fucking conservatorium of music youd be stupid to not go to griffith for that
I didn't say I was going to the Con

the fuck else would you go to griffith for

Good bye me who actually considered going to griffith
Each university is unique and has its strengths and weaknesses depending on what course you decide to do.

u sound like a textbook its scary
What were you thinking of doing?

Fashion design? Looks fun

THEN STOP LOOKING AT GRIFFITH

Oh is it really that bad

no I just wnant u to go to qut with me

oh well if i get into the course i want i'll be at qut too!

YEAH JOIN US AT QUT

	no fr this time whomstd tf is eevdee

interactive and visual design!

Aight so we're just gonna keep quiet about the fact that literally miNGUS of all people has successfully decided his future before me

guys that is literally seventey (70) messages what happened here

Wennifer

Socks

whaddat

no fr this time whomstd tf is eevdee

**Solo**

Wennifer

**seventey**

Noot Noot
The Chan That Can

Solo

really? even you jihoon?

Solo

fine then seokmin i wont tell you what im doing for uni

Socks

did ill ever tell anyone i wanted to know their preferences i saiD I WANTED MORAL SUPPORT

BECAUSE I WAS HAVING TROUBLE

Socks

you're moral support

Socks: thanks :/ ur not funny

Solo

so anyway folks your looking at a future cadet

You're

Wennie

LITERALLY SHUT UP AND CELEBRATE OUR LIL HANSOLLIE BECOMING A PILOT

JIHOON I??

Noot Noot

is everyone your son?

Wennie

YES

Noot Noot

i'm older than you

Wennie

when has that ever stopped you from trying to get me to baby you

Bao

THIS TEA

THIS EXPOSÉ

Noot Noot

WHEN DID I EVER

Wennie

:-)

Socks

im still mad y'all are jun and i really the only ones who dunno what we gonna do for uni

Ham

yeh lol

Noot Noot

wait what u kno??
ye of little faith i'm a future business management student
as if you could ever
Hey now Seokmin there's no need to be like that just because you're still struggling to find your path
It's perfectly normal!
even seungkwan has his life set out for him fckn auditioned at the con for theatre and got early admission that little bitch
Oh Jesus I'm going to have to be at the same university as him?
Solo
oi
oh my godness did u just stand up for ur man
where does that conclusion even come from i just dont appreciate yall coming for my soulmate is that wrong
Socks
oh my godness did u just stand up for ur man
Goodness*
he
wait hold on does some have a cruUuUuUUuUuuuuUsh??
Solo
where does that conclusion even come from i just dont appreciate yall coming for my soulmate is that wrong
Socks
so anyway while seokmin was sobbing over his sad life i decided what i want to do next year
Bao
bet you ten bucks it'll change again next week
Fucku
i will become a film and tv major at qut just you watch me
ill come haunt you in your lectures better watch your back bitch
OMG QUT SQUAD!
Spam
SQUAD!
Hey what if i do early childhood education
You were literally fucking born for it and you should just do that. Choose it. Put it in as your number one preference for QTAC and just.

JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP I'M TRYING TO COMPOSE OVER HERE AND INSTEAD HERE I AM FOR HALF AN HOUR WATCHING YOU SQUABBLE OVER

jihoonie broke
FUCKING UNIPREFERENCES
ITS SEPTEMBER YOU SHOULD HAVE HAD THIS CONVERSATION IN JANUARY
Don't.
Text this group chat again until tomorrow or I'll come to your house in the middle of the night and skin you alive.
Ham
all right bye hoonie!!! have fun!!!!!!!

Jihoon locks his phone and sighs.

“Everything okay, bro?” Chanyeol asks, lifting his head from the mess of wires strewn across Jihoon’s floor.

“Yeah, just dumb group chats. Nevermind though, have you managed to untangle it?”

Chanyeol just winces and Jihoon is pretty sure it’s not just in response to his first statement. Jihoon sighs, again, and gets down from his chair to help Chanyeol, leaving his traitorous phone on the desk.

As much fun as it to make fun of his friends and correct their endless spelling mistakes, he does actually have better things to be doing.

Namely, connecting Chanyeol’s (probably blackmarket) loop pedal up to his computer. They’ve been wanting to do a collaboration for a while, but never really found the time, and this loop pedal had been the perfect reason to actually organise something. Jihoon’s got a sweet little melody he’s been playing around with and he’d like to see if he and Chanyeol could actually make something of it.

That something, however, might not ever happen if they can’t untangle all the wires that are now tangled around Chanyeol’s hands.

“I thought you just got this? How is it so tangled already?”

“It may have… come like this?”

Jihoon can’t believe it. Only Chanyeol.

“Like this? What with about five extension cords and what looks like a freaking HDMI cable tangled into the wire? Where exactly did you get this?”

“Don’t ask bro, don’t ask,” Chanyeol says with an air of wisdom he doesn’t actually possess, all while tugging desperately at the wires.

Unsurprisingly, the next thing Jihoon does is sigh.

“Well, I don’t need five extension cords and I know for sure that you don’t either. Let’s just cut them off so we can actually get something done today, hey?”

Chanyeol’s head shoots up at that, and he frantically grabs at all the tangled chords and rips them out of Jihoon’s grasp. He scrambles to the opposite corner of the room, and shakes his head at Jihoon, eyes mad.

“Are you kidding? Extension cords are still extension cords! I’m not cutting those, I could use them!”

“So what you’re telling me is that you’re a hoarder.”
Chanyeol squawks.

“I am not.”

“Have fun untangling that bundle of black market goodness by yourself, then,” Jihoon waves, going to sit down on a swivel chair and swiftly spinning himself around to face the desk and not Chanyeol.

“It’s not from the black market…” Chanyeol grumbles, but he obligingly plops himself on the ground to untangle the cords by himself. He’s nothing if not nifty; it’s how he got the loop pedal in the first place, so he’ll be damned if he can’t figure out how to untangle this mess.

It’s a lie, of course. Jihoon knows better.

Better being Chanyeol is just about the clumsiest person he’s ever met and in half an hour he’s going to have to cut the extension cords so that they can actually compose something together for once like they were meant to.

It’s a shame, really. They work so well together when they actually do work. And yet… whenever they’re together their jam sessions seem to be more of Chanyeol bumbling about and Jihoon watching on wondering how on Earth he’s the younger one of the two.

Rolling his eyes, Jihoon decides to check his YouTube comments while waiting for Chanyeol to give up on his extension cords.

He scrolls through the countless “UJI OPPA MARRY ME!”s and the “WHEN WILL SENPAI NOTICE ME”s which, by the way, is incorrect usage of the language because in all of Jihoon’s anime binge sessions, he’s learnt that senpai is supposed to be used when the person is older than you. User janetxoxoxmuah clearly has no grasp of Japanese because Jihoon looks about 13 at best, and this woman looks thirty-something, judging by her profile picture.

Jihoon’s eyes find the comment, “Are you ever going to collab with PCWHY again?” and he smiles. Not only is this person literate, they’re asking the real questions. He decides, after a little consideration, that he’ll answer the person’s comment, and tells them that “We’re actually working on something as we speak.”

It’s a little bit of a white lie considering Jihoon’s just swinging around on his chair looking at comments on his channel while Chanyeol is...

Jihoon turns around.

Really close to untangling one extension cord from the pile.

Jihoon goes back to the comments when he spots a familiar-looking icon.

“I can’t believe I’ve met you in real life! Multiple times! <3 <3 <3 It was such a shock but an honor too!”

PrinceHoshi back at it again, he supposes. He probably should respond to one of his comments even just once, if only to get the guy off his back. Sure he’s Seokmin’s soulmate and all, but Jihoon’s not about to let slide how the kid clearly wants to bundle him up in a tight hug and confess his adoration to him.

“It’s ‘honour’ because you’re Australian, you crooked dingo tail. See you around I guess,” he types out with a smirk.
The rest of his comments are a blur of much the same thing. Every now and again there’s some idiot who tells him he’s plagiarising Justin Bieber, or that he looks five and should go back to kindy. There’s also that one persistent user chobicob that has consistently told him for 3 years (their anniversary is actually coming up in October) that his voice sounds like three dying toads and that he needs to stop singing.

“Wooz! I did it!” Chanyeol hollers.

The man somehow looks like he’s aged five years in the time Jihoon wasn’t watching him.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- I’m pretty sure we just clarified everything in the notes at the beginning of the chapter, but if we missed something, tell us!
Jongin sighs a long, heavy sighed that carries the weight of an opening shift. He supposes he’s lucky Red Rooster isn’t a 24-hour fast food store, but he’ll still complain because he damn wants to. Also, because he’s in love with his bed and if it weren’t for Kyungsoo being his soulmate he’s convinced his wrist would bear the word “Bed” in the most beautiful cursive.

Yes Kim Jongin would love to still be sleeping, but as the story goes, he’s very much awake and sweeping the floor with a broom because someone (his name is Jiho, because Jongin isn’t above name dropping people) decided that he could shovel a scoop of fries into his mouth while the manager had to run to the toilet.

In spirit and theory, it’s funny and relatable and Jongin totally would. In real life, however, Jongin’s just about ready to snap Jiho’s neck in half. Or imagine the broom he’s sweeping with is Jiho’s neck and snap that in half, because Jongin ain’t no criminal.

By 11:00am Jongin is already prepared to drop to the ground, but his day gets much worse when he looks up to find two people he’d really prefer didn’t walk through the doors saunter in and sidle up to the counter.

“Kindly piss off,” he says with his pearly, customer service smile.

“You kiss your mother with that mouth?” Tao asks him at the same time Sehun ponders what it would feel like for Jongin to get fired because of his treatment of “precious customers”.

“You should be grateful, you know? What would Red Rooster do without us?” Sehun smirks.

Jongin knows the answer to this is truthfully “still exist”, because his two… friends(?) only ever buy garlic bread and chicken nuggets, unlike his true faithful customers, a la Mr. Photopoulos from down the road who treats his kids to a family meal every month.

But, as a good friend to Sehun, he grumbles a, “crash and burn” so that he doesn’t have to hear the guy’s incessant whining for the rest of the day.

Sehun gracefully accepts Jongin’s response and moves on to the next topic.

“We’re still down for binge-watching Jackie Chan movies this arvo, right?”

Tao’s response is immediate and affirmative, and Jongin knows he can’t get out of this one because his friends know Kyungsoo is working a double shift right until one in the morning, meaning Jongin is definitely free and alone once he finishes up at Red Rooster.
Not that he’d try to get away from Jackie Chan, of course. Tao’s taught him better than to not worship that man.

“So’re not having it at your house though, right?” he asks, pointing to Sehun. “I’m not in for getting attacked by mozzies again.”

“I taped up the hole in the fly screen it’s fine!” the guy waves a dismissive hand as he rolls his eyes.

Jongin is not convinced.

~*~

Soonyoung can’t say he’s not keen for some chicken. He, Seokmin and Seungkwan have been out for most of the day, getting up to whatever ‘shenanigans’ (his mother’s words, not Soonyoung’s) they usually do, and chicken is always on the menu on shenanigan days.

So, naturally, they go to Red Rooster. And, just as naturally, they go the one Red Rooster that they vaguely know an employee of (because Seungkwan is nothing if not stingy and will most definitely try to get a discount from Seokmin’s ‘Kyungie hyungie’ s soulmate).

After they pull into the carpark, they sit for an extra minute or so, letting the song that’s streaming from Seokmin’s phone play out. The other two are singing their heads off and out right jamming, but Soonyoung doesn’t want to wait to hear the last bars of *Beds Are Burning* for the first time in his life.

He wants the chicken. He can practically smell it; the nice, fresh, juicy chicken that will fill the holes in both his stomach and his heart. It’s been far too long since he’s last had chicken, and with the added benefit of knowing that it’s Seokmin’s turn to pay, it’s safe to say that Soonyoung is very keen to leave the car.

Seungkwan’s also kicking the back of Soonyoung’s seat in time with the beat, and that may be what finally makes him grab Seokmin’s phone, rip out the AUX cord, leap out of the car and run at full speed towards the Red Rooster.

Soonyoung can hear Seungkwan’s disdainful shrieks and Seokmin’s sad murmurs of “Peter, where did you go?” behind him, but he doesn’t stop until he’s well inside the doors and the air conditioning.

He watches the others slowly get out of the car and drag their feet all the way to the doors, in what he’s sure is punishment for ruining their singalong.

“Soonie, why did you run off like that,” Seokmin pouts.

“Because I have holes in both my stomach and my heart that only chicken will fill, now can we please go get it?”

“Come on, you drama queen.”

Seokmin grasps his elbow and starts to pull him towards the counter.

Soon enough though, Seokmin drops his arm and runs forward with a shout.

“Hi Jongin hyungie! How are you? How’s Kyungie hyungie?”

Jongin looks just a little tense, lips pursed slightly as he smiles at Seokmin.

“I’m alright, he’s alright, how about you?”

Soonyoung isn’t sure what’s made Jongin so cold when he had clearly seen him laughing with the
guys leaning over by the pick-up counter earlier.

“T’m great! Kyungie made me a super nice QCS good luck pack! Did you see?”

“Yes, I did.”

Soonyoung’s sure he can see grinding teeth now.

“Oh! Jongin, is this that kid you were complaining about the other day? The one that’s stealing all of Kyungsoo hyung’s attention?”

Jongin turns scarlet and flips around fast as lightning.

“Tao,” the guy turns to the other person standing at the counter, “this has to be him, right?”

“Sehun! Why the hell would you say that?! I wasn’t going to tell him I had issues with him!”

Sehun just shrugs, and Jongin looks ready to slap him with a chicken until Seokmin pipes up.

“Uh, not to interrupt, but maybe you shouldn’t hit Sehun because it was a little obvious that you were annoyed…” he says quietly, trailing off when Jongin’s glare comes to rest on him.

“Fuck Sehun, I may as well hit you with this chicken!” Jongin all but growls. “You told Soo he should grow his hair back! Now I can’t kiss his little bald head! It’s your fault!”

For a moment, Soonyoung is scared that his poor soulmate is about to hit in the face with an uncooked chicken, but luckily, Seungkwan steps in before anything too drastic can happen.

“Don’t hit him with a chicken. Let’s settle this like men,” Seungkwan pauses for a moment to lock eyes with all of them (he’s the drama queen honestly). “It’s time for a thumb war.”

Everyone’s heads snap up at that, and Sehun puffs his chest up like as if he’s some sort of crowned champion that has more than one trick up his sleeve. Tao merely takes a seat claiming that he won’t be caught ruining his nails in a thumb war at Red Rooster. He also tells Seungkwan that the real way to fight like men is with some good old hand-to-hand combat (not finger-to-finger), but he’s only saying that because he’d have a considerable advantage should they choose to take that option.

Jongin on the other hand plops himself right in front of Seokmin with his thumb already out, top button of his uniform already popped.

“Hold on!” Seokmin gasps, looking down at Jongin. “Are you trying to tell me you’re not going to stretch before the competition? That’s really not good for your body, you know. Even stationary stretches are better than nothing, although of course dynamic stretching is best to acquire the best condition for your fingers in a thumb war.”

“This is a thumb war, Minnie,” Jongin almost snarls.

“Hey, did I give you permission to talk to my boyfriend like that, punk?” Soonyoung steps in, shoving his over-bleached blond locks in Jongin’s face.

Jongin splutters, flailing backwards. While Soonyoung would like to think that’s because the guy got intimidated, he knows he miscalculated and kind of got some of his hair in Jongin’s mouth.

Behind him, Sehun tackles Seungkwan into a table.
Somehow, Sehun tackling Seungkwan into the table turned the thumb war into a free for all wrestle in the thankfully deserted Red Rooster. They’re now all lying on the floor, splayed all over each other and too lazy to move.

That is, until Soonyoung remembers what they came here for. Chicken.

“Can we order our chicken now?” Soonyoung asks, already getting up and moving back over to the register because, honestly, he’s waited long enough for this chicken. “Seok, what do you want?”

“Hmm, just a cheeseburger, I think,” Seokmin calls from where he’s sitting, half on top of Tao, whose legs are spread over Seungkwan’s, who’s got a struggling Sehun’s thumb pinned between his fingers.

Soonyoung gasps. “What? No chicken? Ugh, you’re a loser. Well, I’ll have the classic half and four pineapple fritters, please.”

Jongin, whose finally made it around the otherside of the counter, makes a face. “Pineapple fritters? Really? You actually like those?”

“Yes, yes I do,” Soonyoung sniffs, “and just for that, I expect an extra free one.”

“And don’t forget to give us a discount because Seokmin knows Kyungie hyungie. And I want the same as Soonyoung, minus the fritters,” Seungkwan calls, still grappling with Sehun.

“Oh hell no, don’t add that to the same order, Seungkwan can pay for his own food,” Soonyoung quickly adds, jogging over to haul Seokmin up and over to the register. “Seokmin’s paying for me and him, but not your lazy ass.”

“Ew, couples,” Seungkwan grumbles, “can’t go anywhere with them.”

“I’m sorry, ‘couples’ did you say? Would you like me to take your phone and call a certain Hansollie with two heart emojis?”

“No, you rabid gallah! I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

The deep blush on Seungkwan’s cheeks says otherwise.

“Seungkwannie’s got a boyfriend!” Soonyoung starts chanting, and soon enough everyone’s joined in and Seungkwan’s blush is only getting worse.

“Excuse you, it’s a called a soulmate,” Seungkwan interrupts.

A silence settles.

Soonyoung breaks it.

“Fair enough,” he nods, subtly reaching out to hold Seokmin’s hand tightly in his own.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Arvo: Afternoon.
- Mozzies: Mosquitoes.
- Beds Are Burning: A great song by Australian band Midnight Oil
- Peter: Peter Garret lead singer of Midnight Oil and also a politician and a bit of a meme in Australia
Wonwoo lets himself into the house quietly. He’s at that stage of fatigue where even talking is too much of an effort, and while he loves them, he’s not in the mood to deal with the never-ending chattering of Bohyuk and his mother.

He’d finally submitted his last assignment today (honestly, that damn Economics essay can go fuck itself but at least it’s done), and now that it’s all finished Wonwoo isn’t really sure what to do with himself. The last month has been so full on with barely any time to breathe, and now that there’s free time, Wonwoo’s lost.

And it’s not just him. He can see it in his friends as well. The realisation that they’re on the brink of graduating combined with the lingering stress of exams has hit them all hard. He’d never seen Seokmin as quiet as he’d been at lunch today.

The last few months have honestly passed way too fast for him to be comfortable with. It seems like just yesterday they were starting Term 4, and now, they’re already one week away from the end of school. One week to the end of Year 12.

One week, and he’s finished an entire year of school in Australia.

Unbelievable.

What’s also unbelievable is the sheer amount of decisions Wonwoo has to make now that he’s leaving school, but he’s really not in the mood for that right now. He remembers the email he’d gotten that morning.

‘Wonwoo Jeon, you have an incomplete QTAC application.’

One more thing he’d have to deal with. Just one more in the long list of things that he had to do, phantom weights resting on both his shoulders and wrist.

But not today. Today is not the day for university applications and jokes of fate.

Instead, he tiptoes through his house, past his mother’s study, past Bohyuk’s room and slips into his own room. Wonwoo collapses straight onto the bed and lets himself sleep. Tomorrow is another day, a Friday free from assessment that he will happily embrace when the sun comes up.

~*~

When Wonwoo said he’d happily embrace the new day, that was when he was unaware of what was waiting for him in ESL. In true Mr. Kim fashion, there’s a ‘class bonding exercise’, and really, isn’t it a bit late in the year for that?
Mr. Kim looks far too happy from where he’s standing up the front of the room, a really ugly hat decorated with tinsel sitting on the desk next to him, Christmas songs playing merrily through the speakers.

“I thought it would be fun to do a little ESL Secret Santa! Since a few of you are graduating and most of you won’t be in ESL next year, I thought this would be a nice way to finish the year. Now, I’ve got the magic Akubra here, everyone take a name.”

Mr. Kim starts the slow journey around the classroom and each boy takes a name. Of course there’s some that make it painfully obvious who they drew (the strange French kid who sits in the corner that Wonwoo still doesn’t know the name of) and others who make terribly over exaggerated poker faces. Wonwoo kind of loves the dorkiness of it all.

But clearly not as much as Mr. Kim.

He’s practically skipping around to each desk and Wonwoo’s never seen a bigger grin on his face.

When it’s finally Wonwoo’s turn to draw he prays for a good name, because there’s really nothing worse than having to buy a gift for someone you’ve never spoken to.

“Your turn, Wonwoo,” Mr. Kim practically sang, and huh, who would have thought, he’s actually got a pretty nice voice. Wonwoo’s far too tense as he draws his name out, and when he unfolds it, he sees ‘HOSEOK’ written in nice, neat block letters.

Could be worse.

Wonwoo was the last to draw, and Mr. Kim makes his way back to the front.

“Alright guys, bring in the gifts on Wednesday when we have our last class. And have fun! Make it Australia themed! Remember this is ESL. And Secret Santa is all about fun!”

Kunpimook raises his hand, a picture of innocence, but Wonwoo knows by now not to trust those wide eyes. He’s sure Mr. Kim does too.

“Mr. Kim, don’t you mean Secret Satan?”

“We are not devil worshippers in this classroom, Kunpimook.”

~*~

Wonwoo has lunch straight after ESL, so he decides to enlist his friend’s help in his Secret Santa mission.

“Guys I need help. What the hell do I buy Hoseok from my ESL class for Secret Santa?” Wonwoo asks as he practically throws himself into a seat.

“Oh! Secret Santa, I’m great at presents I can totally help!” Jeonghan shouts, plopping himself down into the seat next to Wonwoo.

“Jeonghan, no one wants fresh milk straight from your farm once, let alone five times,” Chan calls from where he’s face down on the table.
Jeonghan pouts. “It’s good for your growing bones!”

Wonwoo doesn’t think Hoseok would want milk either, so he gently tells Jeonghan as much, earning himself a hair flip and an empty chair. So much for getting advice.

Minghao comes to his rescue. Or so he thinks.

“Wonwoo, chill, just get him chocolate or something, that’s what literally everyone does.”

There’s a loud gasp from the other side of the table.

“Chocolate?” Seungcheol exclaims. “You can’t just get chocolate for Secret Santa, that’s such a cop out. You’ve gotta get a good gift, Wonwoo.”

“Yeah… sorry Minghao, I think Seungcheol is right about this one.”

Minghao sniffs. “Well when you get chocolate and not something that someone's put as much effort into as you did with your gift, don’t come crying to me.”

(Wonwoo will never admit it, but five days later he receives a box of chocolates from none other than Secret Satan himself, Kunpimook Bhuwakul.)

~*~

When the last student finally leaves the classroom Junmyeon all but runs over to the projector and promptly hits the bright red quit button on his music window. He likes Christmas and all, but one more Mariah Carey song was going to do his head in.

Junmyeon only had morning classes in his timetable today, and the bell brings both lunchtime and his freedom. He takes his time to gather his stuff from the classroom, making sure not the forget the Akubra in all its tinseled glory.

He walks to the bus stop just as slowly, in what he’d like to call poeticism, but is really just avoiding the disgustingly unnecessary levels of sweating that come with Novembers in Australia.

The bus ride is spent basking in the feeble air conditioning and trying desperately to hide the still tinsel-ridden Akubra from the prying eyes of the judgey looking old lady over the aisle. It wouldn’t be a lie to say Junmyeon hated the hat just a little.

Which is why when he comes home to find Yifan sprawled on the couch he doesn’t hesitate to chuck it right at him, tinsel and all.

“Do not fear, I brought your precious hat back. All in one piece.”

Yifan pats the hat fondly, looking as if his child has come back from the war.

“Thanks babe. But why the fuck is there tinsel on it?”

“Secret Santa.”

Junmyeon hears Yifan groan and mutter something that sounds strangely like “here we go again”, but he decides to let it go. There are more pressing matters.
“I’m so not ready for the gift giving this year. Do you remember last year when Youngjae gave Kunpimook a goddamn lightsaber? He better not pull that shit again this year. When will someone get me a gift that good? The only Secret Santa present I ever got was those hideous socks from that weird kid back in Year 11… did I ever tell you about that, honestly those were terrible and didn’t even fit.”

“Yes, yes you mentioned it just the other day. And it’s fine, I’m sure Youngjae won’t be able to top his own gift giving skills. You need to let go of your Secret Santa hate, Myeon.”

“I know,” Junmyeon mumbles, hating how right Yifan is. “I just hope my kids don’t get such terrible gifts.”

“Myeon,” Yifan says gently, “try to remember they’re not actually your children.”

“They are my kids, Yifan, don’t fight me.”

“Sure, Myeon.”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Akubras: The Aussiest of Aussie hats.
Not All the Prizes are Academic, Bohyuk

Chapter Notes

Well folks, we've finally made it to the end of the school year! The real fun is just about to begin, so we hope you're ready for what's to come next!

13th November, 2017

Wonwoo doesn’t like academic celebrations. It stems from his childhood of watching Bohyuk sulk in a corner while Wonwoo himself receives endless praise, like as if he was inherently better for simply liking literature over sports.

It’s precisely why “Speech Day” doesn’t tickle his fancy. Float his boat. Butter his toast. Tickle his pickle. Toot his horn.

Also the fact that the school always inadvertently (or maybe not so) makes you feel like complete shit for not winning something.

He supposes this “Speech Day” is better than anything else he’s been to, when he considers that at least not all the prizes are academic, but after sitting through the announcement of awards in his weekly assembly, then having to rehearse receiving an award three times before the actual ceremony, Wonwoo’s sick of this business.

And to think, the real deal is set to last a straight four hours with no breaks excluding a mere three musical performances and two guest speakers.

Thank goodness this will be the only time he’ll have to deal with it. He can only imagine the kind of torture his fellow classmates have been through.

“The rehearsal is so that you know what order you’re in and that we can get your names right!”

His arse.

The order is on the damn free pamphlet they handed out and he’s still been called One-woo every time he’s walked up onto the stage! Excluding the first time. That time, he was Oh-joo Won, because teachers in Australia are just really fucking stupid.

At least his name doesn’t get pronounced like a Goddamn yodel like Jun’s does.

JUN-FOO-EE!

He can’t wait to graduate. Of all the things, it’s not his own laziness to study that’s bringing his grades down, it’s the sheer stupidity of the teaching staff.

~*~

When the event actually starts, Wonwoo’s ready to run far, far out of this hall and away from the heat. Everyone’s fanning themselves with programs, creating a little swooshing rhythm that persists
well after the principal has asked for silence.

As does everything in Australia, it starts with a droning rendition of the national anthem, complete with the incorrect words that everyone always sings. Wonwoo’s convinced he’s the only one in Australia that knows it’s “boundless plains” and not “bound these plains” (he may have memorised the lyrics in the second week of school after bumbling his way through a thoroughly uncomfortable assembly).

It only gets worse from there; the dreadful anthem catapults straight into a dreadful speech about the merits of not using calculators in maths exams, and Wonwoo doesn’t blame himself one bit for dozing off in his chair.

He’s woken by a frantic shaking at his shoulder, and then it’s time to go up on stage. He collects his award and graduation certificate, and it’s almost like he’s free.

But no. He still has three days of school, despite having just officially graduated.

Wonderful.

~*~

The next day isn’t much better. They have their Valedictory Dinner, which, Wonwoo is told, is just an excuse for the school to host a dinner and invite all the parents in an effort to get them to donate more money.

And what better way to get parents to depart with their cash than to make them watch a painfully out of tune song performed by none other than their precious children?

For the past few weeks they’ve been rehearsing their sentimental song (Wonwoo’s never heard of it, but from all the grunts from the other students, it seems to be a well known crying soundtrack), and honestly, Wonwoo would be happy to never hear it again, even if it was in tune.

The dinner itself is alright. Wonwoo manages to sneakily swap his strange chicken for Mingyu’s beef after he’s a victim of the alternating plate system. The seating arrangements turned out better than he’d expected; there was a bit of drama for a while, everyone wanting pretty much everyone else in the group on their table, but Wonwoo managed to swing a lovely arrangement of himself, Mingyu, Jun and Minghao. And all their parents of course.

The only one missing is Fengjun, who Jun said was almost in tears when they left him with the babysitter, but Wonwoo’s determined to smuggle some of the dessert back to him via Jun. Bohyuk gets nothing.

By the time they get up to sing however, Wonwoo’s starting to feel the fatigue of the week, hell, the fatigue of the year, set in, and he’s really not looking forward to it. They shuffle into a messy line and then all too soon, the backing track starts to play.

They start a bit shakily, unsurprisingly, but after a few seconds the grade gets it together. Their voices gain strength, and soon enough there’s actually quite a nice chorus coming from the 200 strong grade of boys.

It’s still off tune though.

Wonwoo lets himself mumble through the lyrics, still not quite having them memorised, and takes the opportunity to hide behind Mingyu. He can see his mum filming from where she’s sat nearly on the other side of the room, and this is definitely not something he’s going to want his kids to see or to
recollect himself in twenty years.

When it’s over Wonwoo has never been so happy.

He slumps against Mingyu and an arm comes around his shoulders to keep him up and guide him back to the table.

“Don’t worry hyung, it’s over, you’ll never have to sing again. Except maybe at birthday parties. Seungcheol loves that shit, you won’t be able to get away with not singing. And Christmas carols, he loves those too. But today! Today, you do not have to sing again.”

“Sounds good to me.”

~*~

The day after that, is much much better.

It’s what the school calls ‘muckup day’, and according to Jihoon, it’s just an opportunity for the entirety of Grade 12 to “behave like fools and fuck shit up”.

It’s a mess. But an entertaining mess, and Wonwoo’s really in need of some laughs.

The graduating class have the freedom to essentially prank the whole school, within reason of course, and when Wonwoo walks into school at 6:30am with the rest of his group, he isn’t prepared for the sheer volume of people already at school and how much they’ve managed to set up.

There are locks from student’s lockers chained along fences, plastic wrap between poles across walkways and garden gnomes sitting innocently on every bench.

But Wonwoo’s favourite by far is the sign attached to the huge tree out front that reads ‘School for Sale’ with an accompanying phone number, apparently that of the principal.

It’s quite liberating honestly, seeing his prison of the past year in such a state of disarray, and it’s safe to say Wonwoo is in love with muck up day.

“Guys,” Seokmin calls from where he’s struggling by the gate with a massive duffle bag, “come help me with the rubber ducks! We’ve gotta get them all the way to the pool!”

They all rush back to Seokmin, and double time it to the pool, where Wonwoo looks on in half delight and half speechlessness as his friends toss rubber ducks into the pool. The end result is quite something; ducks of all different colours and different sizes bobbing along happily, as they will until an unfortunate teacher finds them in a few hours.

They’re all standing around giggling when Seokmin’s phone buzzes, and he reaches into his pocket before promptly dropping it to the ground. Luckily, Minghao’s speedy reflexes catch it, but not before he sees the text message awaiting them all.

Seokmin all but snatches the phone from Minghao’s hands when he’s come to, and he yells into it when the person on the idea picks up.

“What do you mean ‘what happens if you get expelled right before graduating’ Soonyoung, what have you done?” he screams, alarming some passing twelve-year-olds.

“God, here we go again,” Jeonghan mutters, but he’s the first one to reach over and put Seokmin’s
phone on speaker so that they can all hear the big news.

“So you know how cows can’t walk down stairs?” Soonyoung begins. “And you know how Central Building is the oldest standing building at Paddo?”

“Don’t tell me,” Seokmin whispers back, but Soonyoung probably doesn’t hear it for Chan’s crazed screeching.

“You brought a cow onto school grounds, and not only did you do that, but you walked it up the stairs of Paddington School of Later Education’s most prized and important building, and left it there for the teachers to find and not be able to get out?”

There’s a long pause.

“Precisely. You’ve a smart younger brother, Seokmin. Do you uh, do you think they’re gonna need to call triple zero to get the cow out of there?”

Boy, does he think? In a building that’s as good as heritage-listed that is quite literally the hub of all of Paddington’s history, with no elevators or anything remotely from this century technology-wise, with four flights of stairs and narrow corridors, there is absolutely no way that any old teacher is going to be able to lead that cow out of school grounds and back to its farm. Even Wonwoo knows that.

Wonwoo especially knows that, considering how stupid he’s learnt school teachers here are.

He only hopes Soonyoung isn’t going to ask them to all chip in to bail him out of jail.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Paddo: Slang for Paddington, which is the name of Soonyoung’s school.
- Triple zero: 000, the Australian emergency number.
Schoolies: the textbook definition of chaos. A week proceeding your graduation in which you, despite being underage, get completely trashed and wild it out at party after party after party (after party, after party, after-).

Wikipedia tells Wonwoo that Schoolies is “a cultural rite of passage”, and that “the most-enduring Schoolies-week tradition is the first run down the beach and dive into the ocean after school is finished forever. That plunge of freedom is the essence of freedom which Schoolies symbolises.”

But personally? Schoolies can suck Wonwoo’s arse, because it’s about the most stupid thing he’s ever let his ears hear. Sure, a little party and letting loose is fine, but to consciously put oneself into an environment where a) everyone is somehow drunk out of their minds from alcohol that they couldn’t have possibly purchased, b) there’s some dodgy guy selling drugs around every second corner and c) it’s known for having caused deaths every once in a while, well, Wonwoo shouldn’t have to be the one to tell you.

It’s not the best of ideas.

Luckily for Wonwoo, he has friends who seem to think the same way.

Well, most of them do, but he can’t exactly blame some of them for being curious. It’s not like alcohol is inherently bad so long as you’re being cautious and responsible, and considering it is a national rite of passage he can understand that for someone who’s grown up here, it’s something they might want to participate in.

The full, traditional Aussie experience, if you will.

Their compromise is smart. Because Jisoo is a rich bitch, his family just casually owns a massive beachside mansion. This mansion, having served Wonwoo as a home during his “utterly necessary” beach initiation, reminds him of some laughable memories, and he’s kind of glad to be finishing his high school experience back there again.

That’s how Wonwoo’s Schoolies experience starts.

The thirteen of them travel down to Jisoo’s beach house in various ways. Yes, thirteen, because somehow those damn Paddington kids have weasled their way into the friendship group. Bohyuk included, which unsettles Wonwoo to no end, but the good thing about that is he’s a baby and
subsequently won’t be joining them for Schoolies celebrations.

Ha. That loser’s still in school.

He swears he’s not being mean or anything, he’d just rather not have his brother around when he’s trying to stop himself from breaking down on the floor in maniacal screams as he has to sleep with not just his crush, but three other people.

Honestly Jisoo, your beach house is a mansion, please invest in using the space more wisely and having more bedrooms for everyone.

When they arrive after being stuck in a mass of traffic, it occurs to Wonwoo that Burleigh Heads is a part of the Gold Coast. In the year he’s spent in the country, he’d kind of failed to realise that the one place they wanted to avoid (Schoolies Central, also known as the Gold Coast) is… like a 20 minute drive away from where they’re all staying.

So sue him, he’s still a foreigner.

Because of this, it’s only fair that at least one person is tempted to join in on the Schoolies “fun”.

“Just one of the nights wouldn’t hurt, right?” Seungkwan taps his cheek in thought. “A classic Schoolies experience without the mess of staying in one of those horrendous hotels. Like the one where that kid jumped out the third floor window because he was convinced he could fly. What hotel was that? Mantra?”

Before anyone can say anything, Hansol is the first one to put a stop to Seungkwan’s thoughts.

“Absolutely not!” he shrieks, the most desperate anyone’s ever seen him. Wonwoo hasn’t even seen a single exam (of which Hansol didn’t study for) shake him up this much.

“Jesus, you’re always out wanting to ruin my fun. Bet you wouldn’t be this opposed if someone else said it,” Seungkwan bites out, and everyone takes a step back, not particularly wanting to be a part of this lover’s quarrel.

“For God’s sake, Seungkwan!” Hansol says, his hands on the boy’s shoulders. “You could die! There’s nothing fun about dying!”

“I didn’t think you’d be such a tight-arse,” Seungkwan grumbles.

Everyone else continues to take small steps backwards and out of the room.

“Is it the alcohol that’s appealing to you? Or getting your feet stepped on at a rave? Or is it- is it the hook-ups?”

Soonyoung almost chokes on air when he hears Hansol stumble over those words, and with an apologetic smile he bows out of the room at the speed of light, leaving the rest of the group to watch on in fear.

The “I don’t know” response Hansol receives isn’t enough, and he continues to worriedly stare down Seungkwan.

“Is there anyone else who wants to go to the party? I mean, if you just want a bit of alcohol I can buy a little and you can all have a sip but like, it’s not that great, fam. You don’t gotta do this, we can just have fun at the beach, right? No one needs to die or anything.”
It’s at that point that things start to piece together for Wonwoo. He’s a little ashamed he took so long, but it doesn’t seem like anyone else has been much faster than him. He lets a quick burst of laughter escape his lips.

“Hansol, calm down! You know us, we’re stupid, but we’re still responsible. No one’s going to die, silly. The teachers just told us those stories to remind us to be cautious, not scare us out of our wits and tell us not to enjoy our graduation celebration.”

Hansol seems to snap out of it then, and he drops his hands from Seungkwan’s shoulders like as if he’s suddenly been doused in ice.

“I was just- worried.”

Wonwoo smiles at him.

Of course he was “just- worried”. He’s in loooove with his souuuuuulmaaaat-oh, Lord above he’s spent too much time in Australia he’s turning into his insufferable friends God help him what did he do to deserve this how can he repent, how can he make up for the sins he’s committed this sounds exactly like something that Jun would say, or maybe even Jeonghan, or actually all of them would say this why did his life become like this Wonwoo used to be a nice, normal teenager before this how-

“So anyway,” Soonyoung grins bashfully, and when did he get back in the room? “About that part where you said you wouldn’t mind buying us a little bit of alcohol?”

“I am buying one bottle of beer and you are all taking one sip of it just so you can say you’re some badass motherfucker or whatever it is you want. Kidney function is not a right, it’s a privilege. Don’t throw it away, Soonyoung.”

Hansol’s right. Kidney function is a privilege.

Wonwoo wonders if Hansol has always been this smart.

(He hasn’t, because that’s not how alcohol works, it makes you pee less, not more. But it’s the sentiment that counts, right? Thinking ahead about the fact that there’s only three toilets and a mass of thirteen people.)

~*~

For sake of ease, the room arrangements stay more or less the same. Jun and Minghao take Jisoo’s parents’ bedroom again, and Guest Bedroom 2 that Jihoon had sneakily left open last time gets taken by Soonyoung and Seokmin once more, who keep making kissy faces at each other as they retreat to their assigned room (gag). Jeonghan’s eyes light up when they get to Guest Bedroom 1, and he speedily signs Hansol and Seungkwan up for the room with the bunk bed that Jihoon and Seungcheol had taken last time.

Jeonghan’s always been one to want to kill two birds with one stone.

“Well I’ll be in Jisoo’s room like usual,” Seungcheol says casually, although Wonwoo can see there’s a strange tenseness in his shoulders that reveals he’s throwing himself under the bus for the sake of everyone else. “So that leaves Mingyu, Wonwoo, Jihoon and Chan in the living room. We good with that?”

Jeonghan’s face absolutely lights up at Seungcheol’s words, and he jumps onto the boy’s back in glee.
“I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist us for too long. Just don’t pee your pa-”

“That was your fault! I told you I was busting four hours ago but who was it that didn’t let go of me because he was “too comfortable”? Huh? Would you like to answer that question?”

Jisoo simply grins, and begins to collect his belongings to take up to his room.

~*~

It turns out to be a nice week by the beach.

On the first night they take turns sipping this bottle of apple cider that Hansol bought, until Jeonghan downs the rest of the bottle in one gulp and gets a big slap across his back.

They go out for fish and chips and regret their large stomachs when the bill comes up to over $300, especially when they can still fit more food in even after all of that. They order a couple of pizzas to fully satisfy themselves, then call it a night.

The most eventful it gets is probably when Minghao pranks Chan to catch his older brother making out with his soulmate. It’s a bit of a screaming fest, and Wonwoo hates to say his friends are really, truly rubbing off on him because he filmed the whole thing, from the way Soonyoung’s hands refuse to move from Seokmin’s thighs despite being caught, to the way Seokmin has to wipe his mouth to continue screaming at Chan. The best part of the video is probably when Chan turns around to run away from the offending scene and trips over to land on his face.

Hansol and Seungkwan also seem to patch things up, to everyone’s relief. Having them share a room could have ended in a disaster (e.g. throwing objects, screaming, initiating in-room squash battles in the middle of the night), but instead it seems to have allowed them to be comfortable around each other. Seungkwan even turns around to nuzzle into Hansol at one point, although admittedly, that was during their third horror movie of the night and the boy probably would’ve taken anyone to shield his view with.

There are other small things around Wonwoo that make him smile, like the way Jun and Minghao hold each other’s hands as they run into the waves, or the way they lean against each other like as if they were born into the world intertwined while they binge watch Brooklyn-99 for an entire day from 8 in the morning to 11 at night, with sufficient breaks to grab snacks.

What he doesn’t notice is how Mingyu pouts beside him, jealousy trying to take over his emotions as he watches Wonwoo smile at Jun. Mingyu of all people should know that Wonwoo is just an avid advocate for Minghao and Jun being together considering the antics they’ve pulled to get them closer, but like does weird things to one’s rational thoughts.

(Like. It’s not- it’s n-not love.)

As Wonwoo said before, it’s a nice week.

Until the last night when Soonyoung decides it’s time for a game of Goon of Fortune.

Wonwoo wants to die.

Chapter End Notes
Australian Dictionary:

- **Schoolies**: Other places around Australia might call it Leavers or Coasties, but it's basically just this week after you graduate where you get wild on the beach. Personally, your authors went on a trip to Japan with a friend for schoolies, so we don't actually know what the true experience is like.
- **Burleigh Heads**: It's just a nice beach y'all.
- **Gold Coast**: The wild place...? It's probably one of the more famous places in Australia because it's home to many nice beaches and like all the cool theme parks!
- **Goon**: Y'all know that wine in a bag? Yeah that.
- **Goon of Fortune**: Google it if you wanna know, man. Just know that we, too, think Australians are stupid.
Get Up Loser, We’re Going Cleaning

Chapter by jezza

Chapter Notes

In light of this being a crack fic, we've been inspired by The Great Wall (2016).

You've been warned.

7th December, 2017

Luhan wakes to a banging on his door. It’s too early for such nonsense; his eyes are fuzzy with morning sunlight, his back hurts from all the dancing he’d done yesterday, and his mind is still a mess from the wild dream he’d had involving galahs, Vegemite and three wheelie bins.

He knows it’ll be Minseok at the door, it always is. He’s the only one brave enough to venture into Luhan’s cave of an apartment, his sanctuary that he’s worked so hard to maintain over the years. It’s a perfect mess. Minseok hates it.

And Luhan loves how much Minseok hates it, but he’s not quite in the mood for company today. He’s not in the mood for being dragged for his shortcomings, and definitely not in the mood for being dragged out of his apartment.

The previous day is still weighing heavily on his mind; it had started normally enough, with a late morning and some probably too many hours in the studio with Yixing. After that, they’d decided to go to a club, not unusual for them after a day of dance. It was a habit they’d picked up after they’d found that tequila lent them the extra energy needed to go wild on the dance floor and let loose of all the tension and rigidity they’d built up over the day.

They’d danced too much, perhaps a little too provocatively, they’d had too much tequila, but Luhan hadn’t minded that at all until he’d ended up in a bathroom with a girl whose bouncy black hair had him entranced.

They’d barely been in there for five minutes when another girl had burst in and started yelling.

What he gathered from her rather slurred screams, was that she was oh so disappointed in her friend for ‘cheating on her soulmate’ that she hadn’t even met yet, and that they both should be ashamed of themselves for such behaviour.

There was probably more to it, things that Luhan’s heard before, things that he hasn’t, but it’s been lost to his hangover and he’s grateful for that.

It usually didn’t bother him. He knew who he was, he knew what he wanted in life and a soulmate was fine, nice even, but that was if they bothered to turn up. It had been long enough that he wasn’t on the edge of his seat anymore. Luhan was content to wait for love, be that with someone whose name is or isn’t printed into his skin.
But he can’t deny that it hurt, seeing the shame in that girl’s eyes, the disgust in her friend’s. He
didn’t want to be someone’s guilty pleasure, a secret pastime until Prince Charming came along.

So it was fair to say he wasn’t in the mood to see Minseok and Jongdae in their little soulmate bubble
that he usually found infuriatingly cute, but today would just be infuriating.

But Luhan can’t blame Minseok for fishing out his spare key and wading his way through the
apartment to Luhan’s bedroom.

“Get up loser, we’re going cleaning.”

“Do I have to?” Luhan grumbles, hiding his face beneath his pillow.

He hears Minseok sigh.

“Yes, sadly, you do. Jongdae’s waiting outside, now hurry up and get dressed.”

Luhan flips over and fixes Minseok with his best puppy dog look.

“Do I really have to?”

Minseok sighs again, and turns from rifling through Luhan’s closet. He takes a look, tilts his head,
and looks deeper.

“One of those days?”

Luhan nods and flops back into the pillow.

Minseok comes to sit beside him and fiddles with those hairs on top of his head that just won’t sit
flat.

It’s oddly comforting.

“Alright. Let’s go to the movies. We can see that new trashy Matt Damon one. I’ll keep Jongdae
quiet today and we’ll have some fun, yeah?”

“Sounds good. Thanks Minnie. And don’t worry about Jongdae, I actually don’t mind his whining
that much.”

“Oh, is that so? Well you can have him!”

Minseok laughs as he leaves the room, calling back “I’ll be waiting in the kitchen,” as he goes.

Luhan would be insanely lucky if his soulmate was just a fraction as brilliant as Minseok.

~*~

The movie turns out to be some run of the mill action/romance/soulmate drama film that Luhan is
sure he’ll fall asleep in. Jongdae is practically bouncing in excitement, citing a hardcore love of the
lead actress that both Luhan and Minseok roll their eyes at.
Naturally, he makes Minseok buy him the largest bucket of popcorn there is and there’s no doubt that he will guard it with his life.

And guard it he goes. Throughout the movie Jongdae makes countless stealth attacks that Luhan takes extreme pleasure in deflecting.

Minseok is stuck in the middle of them and makes his distaste for their antics well known as his eyebrows rise higher and higher.

At the end of the movie, an interview with Matt Damon pops up. Luhan tunes it out; he’s never really been one to care that much about celebrities, but the interview seems to be something about soulmates, Matt Damon sending out a call for his or something.

“I’ve been searching for a long time now, and I’ve found no trace of my soulmate. I’ve set up a hotline, so if your name is Han, and you have the name Matthew, please, call this number.”

“Han?” Jongdae snickers, “who’s his soulmate, freaking Han Solo?”

It’s only when they’re at lunch later, when Luhan draws attention to his own wrist by scratching absently at the skin that they all freeze.

“Luhan, didn’t he say...”

They all stare at the Matthew emblazoned into the pale skin of Luhan’s wrist.

Luhan’s so used to just being Luhan, that he’s become completely disconnected from straight up Han. It’s such a thing of the past that it just wouldn’t make sense for that to be written on his soulmate’s arm.

There’s no chance it's him. It can’t be him.

It couldn’t be, right?
Decision Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

15th December, 2017

Wonwoo wakes to the relentless sound of his text tone. He’d made the mistake of leaving the ringer on overnight when the next day was one that was guaranteed to cause a blow-up in the group chat.

QTAC offer day.

Honestly, Wonwoo hasn’t been paying much attention to the whole QTAC thing. Sure, he’d submitted an application, but going to university in Brisbane hadn’t been part of his plan.

So when he goes to his emails and sees an offer for early entry into a program at the most prestigious university in Brisbane, Wonwoo feels decidedly less excited than he knows he should. He can’t deny though, that the thought of staying in Brisbane has become so tempting in the past few months. It would be so simple to just stay here; to continue in the same rhythm and not change pace for the second time in a year. He could stay with his parents, stay with his friends, stay with Bohyuk, heck, stay with Mingyu.

But he misses Korea. He wants to feel winter again. He wants to be somewhere where he doesn’t occasionally stumble over the language, and he can’t deny that he’ll feel more comfortable at a Korean university.

And really, it’s useless to be contemplating anything else when just last week after getting accepted into Korea University Wonwoo bought a one-way ticket and sent an email to his grandparents telling them to expect him in January.

Wonwoo hates the little voice in the back of his mind that whispers return tickets can be bought. It sounds like Mingyu.

He tells the voice to fuck off (kindly, of course) and picks up his phone to read what’s been said in the group chat.

It seems they’ve all gotten their first preference, and his friends are smart, so it’s no surprise that they managed to get early entry. He’s proud of them. He’s proud of himself too; he got early entry into a course with high demand, and he’s sure if he sent a screenshot of his own there’d be a mass of emojis sent right back to him.

It’s that stage of December where the uncomfortable stickiness of summer is just starting to set in again, but Wonwoo crawls to the box at the end of his bed to pull out a blanket. He hugs it to his chest and watches the messages flood in. They’re all so excited, making plans to meet up when their timetables permit, bemoaning the fate of those who aren’t going to the same uni, enjoying moving into this new phase of life with their little family right there at their sides.

Wonwoo doesn’t reply to any of it. He watches, barely keeping up sometimes, the messages flooding his phone screen in an endless wave of palpable excitement.

It takes them a while to calm down, and Wonwoo smiles sadly through all of it, hating that he won’t be with the others when they go to orientation, won’t be there to gain ten kilos every week at the ‘Chicken Tuesdays’ that Hansol has just created.
Eventually it’s Seungcheol that calls Wonwoo out of his stupor. He sends one little message that makes Wonwoo smile.

Wait guys where’s wonwoo does anyone know if he got an offer

Wonwoo rubs a hand over his face, contemplating. He should reply, he really really should, but the last half hour has thrown him tumbling into a spiral of feelings.

He eventually sends back a yeah I got in!!, leaving the twice unsaid.

There’s a chorus of cheers, or rather, should Wonwoo say a cacophony, and after Seungcheol’s fifteenth celebratory warcry, Wonwoo’s messenger app crashes. He sighs, opening up the app again, waiting for it to reboot. Just as all of his messages start to load, a new one pops up from Seokmin.

anyway,,, not to ruin this party cos its great but???

Wonwoo waits with bated breath; Seokmin’s pause is abnormally long, and he fears the boy has caught on.

A BITCH HAS ALREADY GOTTEN A JOB IN THEIR FIELD BEFORE EVEN STARTING THEIR COURSE

His worries fly out the window, obviously. This time he’s the one that’s yelling through twenty texts that could have been sent as one. Seokmin explains that his great aunt used to be the head of the child care centre down the road, and that she was happy to give him some experience with the kids. Sure, Seokmin actually wanted to work at a kindergarten, but baby steps, right?

The chat dies down eventually, somewhere between Mingyu’s crisis about accepting his offer even though he literally got an early acceptance into his first preference, and Jun’s atrocious joke that effectively kills everyone’s vibes.

It takes Wonwoo an hour to remember that he’s going to be leaving this. He’s kind of just lazing around on his phone, flicking through his camera roll when he stops on a blurry selfie of Mingyu that it hits him. Mingyu is winking, with his tongue poking out to lick at his canine, and it’s obvious that he’s angled the camera so that you can see Wonwoo vaguely in the background, mouth wide open to fit the burger in his hands.

The next photo is worse, of all of them on the beach in front of Jisoo’s holiday house in the sunset, pulling ridiculous faces.

Just glancing at it makes Wonwoo’s eyes sting.

He looks away, and puts his phone down. He can’t let his emotions get the best of him, especially not at a time like this. The decision’s already been made in his head, and Wonwoo knows it’s the right one. Besides, he can come back after university. Being in Korea just means that he’s making things easier for himself because of the language. Then, once he’s got his degree, he can do whatever he wants!

He’s missed Korea.

He wants this.

He doesn’t know why it sounds like he’s trying to convince himself.

Objectively, he’s not. He does want this, and it’s what he’s wanted for a very long time. But
something that he can’t name keeps trying to sway him.

Wonwoo stares at his computer screen. There’s two windows open, one written in Hangul, the other in English. One reads *are you sure you want to accept this offer?* and the other says *are you sure you want to decline this offer?*

He clicks confirm twice.

*Welcome to Korea University.*

Chapter End Notes

**Australian Dictionary:**

- **QTAC:** To reiterate, QTAC stands for Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre. It processes all university applications for the state of Queensland. Each state has their own version, and basically you submit your preferences of what you want to do at university, and they have their own algorithms that'll pump out whether or not you can get into what you want.
Baby it’s Hot Outside

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

It's officially almost a year in the AUS universe! We hope you've had a good 2017 with bogan!seventeen! We can't thank you enough for all the love we've received, in all forms, and thank you for 500+ kudos!

(Also, PSA y'all should support SF9's comeback despite Dawon (and Youngbin's) horrendous hair thanks bye)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

24th December, 2017

It always feel like Christmas comes too soon. Of course, the holiday itself is welcomed with open arms, but it’s the feeling like the year has flown past too quickly without you being able to register that it ever happened that Junhui finds a little disconcerting.

He’s more excited than usual this year, not because he’s almost of legal age (not that he’d be drinking anyway, except maybe like… a sip of mum’s champagne here, some of dad’s cider while he’s not looking) or particularly because he’s finally graduated from high school, but because he’s hosting this year’s Christmas Eve party.

He’s been skipping around all month preparing for this, and he’ll be damned if it doesn’t go perfectly.

Well, first of all, there’s literally no reason that it wouldn’t go perfectly if he does say so himself, but.

Before anyone accuses him of being conceited, Jun means to say that, having graduated from high school, he’s momentarily free from stress, their friendship group is strong and thriving, and he literally feels like he could conquer the world.

Especially if he has all his friends beside him.

He wonders how life in university will be. All the adults always talk about how “drifting is inevitable” and how that’s “perfectly fine”, but Jun doesn’t want to think about them not being close anymore. Besides, with how they are now, is not being close even possible?

He can imagine almost getting kicked out of the state library and pretending like as if he just happened to be sitting at the same table as “those crazy people”, not a part of the noise. He can imagine making lunch for Hao when he forgets to look after himself during exam week, whacking Wonwoo on the head with a book because he fell asleep, pestering Jihoon to let him use a music rehearsal room at the Con for fun. He has a feeling next year’s going to be a good year.

Junhui is throwing the last of the streamers around the room with Fengjun when the doorbell rings, signalling the first guest.
It’s turning out to be a scorcher, like always, and when Jun opens the door it’s to an already sweating Minghao.

“Haohao!” Fengjun all but screams in a warcry, and charges himself straight into the guy’s legs.

Minghao, not quite as prepared for the attack compared to usual, stumbles backwards, but Jun is quick to run forward and catch him.

“So,” he asks casually, grip on Minghao still firm, “what’s in the container?”

“Jelly shots.”

Jun throws Minghao a sharp look.

“I thought they would be fun! It’s not like a put alcohol in them. Come on, I even went and bought Aeroplane Jelly. This is the good stuff, none of that cheap home brand business.”

Junhui gives in eventually, but it’s probably only because it was Minghao. Not that he would admit to that, but, to an outside observer, it’s quite obvious had the person at the door been, say, Mingyu, the poor guy would’ve been turned around and asked to come back with something else in his hands.

What Mingyu actually turns up with is a Christmas pavlova cascading with golden passionfruit and adorned in the bright colours of fresh fruit.

That fuckin’ show off.

Jun also has pavlova, although there’s no way he’s going to be serving that now. Comparing it to Mingyu’s, it looks so much like a disgrace that New Zealanders would probably want people to think that pavlova was an Australian treat just so that they could not be associated with Jun’s creation.

(It’s not actually that hideous, it’s just that Mingyu’s artistry is too great.)

When Soonyoung and Seokmin arrive, they barge into the house and immediately take Fengjun to play in the back yard, ignoring Jun’s desperate screams of “no hat, no play!” as they pick the little boy off his feet.

Jun subsequently spends the next 10 minutes grumbling about how Feng’ll die of skin cancer tomorrow on Christmas Day because Soonyoung and Seokmin didn’t have the basic human decency of following simple school rules.

(“But it’s not school,” Wonwoo tries to say.

“But it’s common sense, it’s fucking 34 degrees out and they don’t even have sunscreen on.”

Unfortunately, Junhui is right.)

When Seungkwan arrives, he brings meat pies and sausage rolls, as any sensible Australian does, and his chest puffs up with pride when he tells the group they’re handmade. By his mother, is what he doesn’t tell them, but you know. Everyone already knows Mrs. Boo is a great cook anyway, he’ll let them assume that he inherited those genes.

In Jun’s back yard where Soonyoung, Seokmin and Fengjun are, there’s a hills hoist decorated in copious amounts of tinsel, and he can see various faces around the group starting to turn a little green
at the sight of it.

These days it’s not quite as common to own one, and the last time about a third of their group’s seen a hills hoist is probably back at schoolies when they played goon of fortune.

Those were perhaps not the best of memories.

At some point after lunch Feng convinces everyone to watch television with him, and from between Jun and Minghao he surfs the channels with practiced ease.

“Brand Power, helping you buy better,” a forced smile grits out through pearly teeth from channel seven.

“And in an all new-” Jun immediately takes the remote control from Feng’s hand and leaves the preview of the Christmas special episode of Home and Away behind. Someone (Seungcheol, that fiend) cries in protest.

Somewhere between watching Elf and Fengjun dropping his slice of pavlova down Jeonghan’s shirt while trying to give the guy one of his strawberries, they get to belting Christmas carols while galloping around the house in reindeer antlers.

Wonwoo mumbles along with a bit of a confused smile on his face, and Junhui can’t help but giggle at the sight.

Then, because he’s a little shit, he proposes the next song they sing should be Six White Boomers.

“Early on one Christmas Day a joey kangaroo, was far from home and lost in a great big zoo!” Seungcheol belts, before Jun can even think to start the song off.

“Mummy, where's my mummy? They've taken her away!” Fengjun cries, fully in character with an adorable (Junhui is not being biased in the least) pout.

Jun can’t even begin to explain the amount of glee that excludes from him when Wonwoo flinches as the group arrives at the chorus. He’s not evil, he swears. He’s a wonderful friend who just wants to give Wonwoo the best Australian experience he can.

He puts his hands on Wonwoo’s shoulders and shakes him around to the time of the beat to try and get him to sing along for at least the last chorus. The guy’s heard it like fifteen times throughout the song already, surely he knows the lyrics by now.

“Six white boomers, snow white boomers, racing Santa Claus through the blazing sun!” he grins at Wonwoo, using his eyebrows to tell the poor boy to please join in. “Six white boomers, snow white boomers, on his Australian run!”

They continue singing carols until their throats are dry and their voices are wispy.

It really is the best Christmas Junhui’s ever had.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:
• Aeroplane Jelly: The best jelly (or jell-o, for y'all heathens out there) Australia has to offer! It's actually its 90th anniversary this year!
• Pavlova: A famous dessert of the Southern Hemisphere. It's a bit of a debate whether it's from New Zealand or Australia, but nonetheless it's loved by both of us.
• No Hat No Play: A classic slogan that all us Strayans know. If you don't have your hat, you can't play during lunch time!
• Meat pies and sausage rolls: Classic Aussie party food. More or less essentials.
• Hills Hoist: A clothing line. It rotates and typically resides in one's back yard to dry all your clothes.
• Brand Power: Honestly, what were these ads? For reference, here's handy dandy snippet of what it's like.
• Home And Away:
• Six White Boomers: An iconic Christmas carol of our own! Promise we're not shitting you. As an absolute indulgent side note, I want Stray Kids to sing this.
It begins with a rivalry. Everyone knows that. Hell, even the principal knows that. Hansol turns eighteen, and so does Seungkwan, and they get each other’s names on their wrists. Blah, blah, blah, rivalry continues, Seungkwan is friends with Seokmin’s soulmate so they start to run in the same circles. Blah, blah, Seungkwan’s an okay person when they’re not playing squash, Seungkwan invites Hansol over to his house for the first time blah, blah, blah, and…

Everything just kind of happens.

It’s late September when Seungkwan invites Hansol over again. It’s their third time doing this, whatever Hansol’s actually supposed to call it. They might be soulmates, but lying on the floor of Seungkwan’s house all sweaty from playing squash doesn’t exactly fit the description of a date.

Seungkwan’s mother grows exceedingly fond of Hansol exceedingly quickly, and, on that day in late September when Seungkwan goes for a shower after their squash game, she turns to him with a cheeky grin.

“Oh Vernon it really is wonderful to have you over again. You mustn’t tell anyone but it does sometimes get a little tiring to have Soonyoung over. There’s just an overflowing amount of energy in that boy.”

Hansol just kind of nods and smiles, not knowing what the correct response is.

“Say, Vernon,” Mrs. Boo says after a small pause, “have you ever considered having a name change?”

In response to his furrowed eyebrows, Mrs. Boo gushes about how she certainly means no offense to his parents’ naming skills and that she thinks Vernon is a beautiful name, but she’s not entirely sure that it suits him.

“What do you understand what I mean, dear?” she asks. “You know, you look like… you look like your name would start with an H, don’t you think?”

Hansol doesn’t know if she should be telling the woman his name is, well, Hansol.

Which starts with an H.

“Let me brainstorm. No, not Harry…”
The woman gets seven names into brainstorming when she arrives at Hansol, eyes alight. Hansol himself isn’t smart enough to be able to tell whether or not this is pure coincidence, or if Mrs. Boo is up to something.

At the taken-aback look on Hansol’s face, Mrs. Boo apologises, and stands to start flitting around the kitchen again. She comes back to the dining table to clear Seungkwan’s empty glass when she notices Hansol’s signature sweatband fraying and falling apart at the seams.

You see, Hansol obsessively wears sweatbands, something to do with “always being ready for a game of squash”. It’s something he’s done ever since he was a tiny speck of a boy in primary school, much to the school’s dismay regarding “correct, formal uniform attire”. The one he wears today, dampened from the late September heat activating his sweat glands, is neon pink. One that Sofia and his mother had bought for him five years ago when he got into high school.

“Oh my, would you like me to fix that for you? You won’t have anything to wipe your sweat with if it falls off your wrist, darling,” Mrs. Boo rushes forward.

She very carefully shimmies the tattered band from Hansol’s wrist before he can say anything, but stops abruptly when a name appears beneath it.

“Hi, Mrs. Boo. I’m uh, Hansol. Hansol Vernon Chwe. It’s very nice to meet you?”

Seungkwan screams right at that moment, the towel he was using to dry off his hair dropping to the ground.

And even though you just sat through a real-time replay of the event from the prime seating of inside Hansol’s mind, that was September, almost a lifetime ago.

Right now; the present now that surrounds Hansol, it’s the 31st of December, and Seungkwan is dozing off in Hansol’s bed with his arms wrapped around the massive bunny plushie that he won for Hansol on their very first date.

What?

First date?

When!?

Those are the voices Hansol can hear in his head from his friends when they finally find out.

“Life is fast,” he chuckles to imaginary-Jeonghan, whose cheeks are puffed out in a very indignant pout.

October also feels like a lifetime ago, even though it was a mere 2 months ago.

The 31st of October, when they had their very first date (not including every squash match they’ve ever had, although Seungkwan is convinced that they all count and that October was actually something like their 200th date), and went to a Halloween fair close to Hansol’s house.

The 31st of October, when Hansol kissed Seungkwan for the very first time and it was the worst idea of his life and he should’ve waited for Seungkwan to do it first because he screwed up and missed his mouth and it was really embarrassing and they didn’t talk for the rest of the night except to say bye as they parted ways.

The 31st of October, when Seungkwan closed the door to his house after Hansol dropped him off,
immediately opened the door again, and then showed Hansol what a real kiss actually was.

(God, K-Dramas love to lie, he’s never watching one of those again.)

Seungkwan stirs, drawing Hansol away from wandering around in his brain and reliving past experiences yet again. Right, it’s the 31st of December.

He wonders if it’s the fact that it’s New Year’s Eve that’s making him really think about the year that he’s had, and all that’s changed. He’d say probably, but at the same time, he’s always been a thinker.

“Stop thinking and kiss me,” Seungkwan demands, blinking his eyes as he wakes up.

Yeah, Hansol tells the imaginary-Jeonghan in his mind again, life really moves fast.

~*~

It’s 6:25 when Hansol pulls his lips away from Seungkwan’s and remembers, rather belatedly, that they were supposed to be at Seungcheol’s New Year’s party at 5:30. It’s not his proudest moment, but as they hop around the room trying to make themselves look presentable, he kind of thinks he wouldn’t have it any other way.

They burst into the scene over an hour late, and Soonyoung screeches at the way that Hansol has his hand wrapped tightly around Seungkwan’s wrist.

“That is his squash wrist you’re damaging there, Vernie! No need to be so abrasive just because of your stupid rivalry! Just can’t be friendly for one second can you.”

Hansol drops Seungkwan’s wrist like as if it suddenly grew thorns, and takes a step away from the boy.

“If he hadn’t have dragged me here I would’ve still been fast asleep in bed, so I actually want to thank him, but I appreciate your concern for my precious wrist,” Seungkwan says, making Hansol’s eyes widen.

Making everyone’s eyes widen, actually. It was always Hansol who walked around with an olive branch in his hand, not Seungkwan. To see him so mellow and defending his soulmate was something like a New Year’s miracle.

“Right! Well!” Seungcheol claps his hands. “Now that we finally have everyone here, let’s get this party started!”

Pushing down his feelings of guilt, Hansol grabs himself a cup of the definitely non-alcoholic punch and takes a seat next to Chan on the sofa, who’s chatting to Wonwoo about some Overwatch character. He thinks. He’s not actually sure. Maybe the conversation is about celebrated female singers.

Looking around, Seungcheol, Jisoo and Jeonghan are trying to do a three-way toast, and despite Jeonghan’s valiant attempts at trying to convince everyone that it’s possible, the sparkling apple juice drenching Seungcheol’s shirt says otherwise.

When Hansol looks over to the far corner of the room, he sees Mingyu backed up against the wall with his face incredibly red, Jihoon just inches (or miles, if one were to measure the distance between their faces, rather than their bodies) away from him sporting a devilish smile. Hansol has no doubt that he’s teasing the boy about Wonwoo.
Hansol finds Seungkwan chatting away to Minghao, which honestly sounds like a dangerous friendship, and he creeps his way over to steal Seungkwan away with a surprise back hug when he’s suddenly intercepted by Seokmin with a war cry.

“Stop the coward’s punch!” he screams.

Of course, it is very like Seokmin to quote strange advertising campaigns in such situations, although he’s misjudged Hansol’s actions. Yes, in other’s eyes they’re still rivals, but to think that Hansol was being viewed as someone who would take to acts of violence? Why, he could almost be offended.

Instead, Hansol merely weaves around Seokmin and jumps onto Seungkwan’s back, forcing the other boy to piggyback him.

“Is my baby Vernonie’s feet tired?” Seungkwan coos. And to everyone’s shocked faces, he flashes a grin.

“Oh, you haven’t heard?”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Stop the coward’s punch: [Here's one of the videos from the campaign](?)}
January passes quickly. Wonwoo had told everyone that he’d be leaving on the 15th at the New Year’s party, and since then, he’s spent pretty much every waking minute with at least one of his friends by his side. He appreciates it, as much as it grates on his nerves to have Jeonghan chattering away about farming techniques for different types of wool as he digs his winter socks out from the back of his cupboard.

Naturally, the idiots had decided that his departure was the perfect excuse for a group road trip, so at 8:30pm on the 15th of January Wonwoo finds himself squished into the car with his parents, Bohyuk and Mingyu, with Hansol and Seokmin driving their own full cars behind them.

“Wonwoo, are you sure you’ve got everything?” his mum asks for the fiftieth time, and Wonwoo can’t control his bouncing leg and grinding teeth as he mutters his affirmative reply.

Mingyu reaches over and rests his hand on Wonwoo’s thigh, pressing down ever so slightly, but it’s enough to stop the shaking. Wonwoo refuses to look at him when he reaches his own hand out and places it over Mingyu’s.

Before Wonwoo knows it they’re at the airport. The three carloads meet outside the car park and move in one huge, rowdy bunch towards the terminal.

His parents and Bohyuk wander off to ‘find coffee’ as soon as Wonwoo’s checked in, but he knows it’s just an excuse to let him have some final time with his friends. He’s grateful.

They all muck around for a bit, no doubt causing all of the airport staff a headache but Wonwoo can’t bring himself to care for once.

Suddenly, his dad’s beside him with Wonwoo’s carry-on bag and sad eyes.

“Wonwoo, you should go now,” he says, “time to say goodbye.”

Wonwoo looks back at his friends, all twelve of them, making a ruckus in the middle of the airport, and he doesn’t know where to start. There’s so many of them, so many memories that he’s made and suddenly, he really doesn’t want to leave.

Hansol’s the first to move. “See you soon, man,” he grins, and Wonwoo can barely keep up with the weird handshake Hansol had taught him about five months ago that he still hasn’t perfected.

Seungkwan and Soonyoung follow with pats to his arms that make Wonwoo far more emotional than they rationally should, and he thinks, not for the first time, that he’d really have liked the chance to get to know both of them better.

“Jeez, why are you so emotional,” Soonyoung grumbles when Wonwoo rests his hands over theirs.

“Oh shut up,” he mutters back and Soonyoung just chuckles.

When they walk off to join Hansol, Jeonghan rushes up to him next with a bulging plastic bag.

“Stay safe, Wonwoo. Be smart, okay?” Jeonghan raises his eyebrows and fuck, Wonwoo is sure he
knows more than he’s letting on from the way his gaze flickers over to Mingyu. Maybe it’s a good thing he’s leaving this country and its meddlesome dairy farmers.

Before he can reply, Jeonghan’s pushing the bag into his hands.

“A little something for the plane,” he says with a wink, before bustling off and leaving Jisoo in his place.

“Ah, my son’s all grown up,” he muses, hand on Wonwoo’s shoulder.

“Um, Jisoo, I’m older than you.”

Jisoo tilts his head and fixes him with one of those stares. “Are you, though?”

Seungcheol jumps on him next, and proceeds to bear hug the life out of him.

When Seungcheol finally lets go, Chan and Seokmin engulf him in a hug and Wonwoo lets himself be smothered by the Lees. Suddenly, there’s another body pressed up against them and Wonwoo looks down to see Jihoon completing their group hug.


“Couldn’t miss out on the Lee hug, could I?” Jihoon murmurs back before gently pulling Seokmin and Chan away.

Then it’s Jun. Wonwoo just laughs at the sight of him absentmindedly fixing his hair and leaning on Minghao as he waits for Wonwoo to reach him.

“Oh, come hug me, you idiot,” Jun grouches and wraps Wonwoo up in his long arms.

“Bye Junnie.”

“Bye Won.”

Wonwoo smirks and looks over to Minghao who’s watching them with the soft smile he usually reserves for puppies.

“Take care of your boyfriend, Hao.”

“Boyfriend?! What?!?”

He walks past them with a smile.

The last one is Mingyu. Of course it’s Mingyu.

Wonwoo’s never been hugged so tight.

“I’ll call you when you land okay? I’ve got your flight tracked,” Mingyu whispers, strong hands running up and down his back as if he can feel how easily Wonwoo could break apart.

Wonwoo digs his head further into Mingyu’s shoulder and forces the tears away.

“Okay. I’m going to miss you, you know.”

He can feel Mingyu’s smile against the side of his head.

“I know.”
No matter how much he’d tried, the tears start to come when he goes to say goodbye to his family. His hugs his parents and pretends he doesn’t cry even harder when his mum whispers “I’m proud of you.”

And then there’s Bohyuk.

Wonwoo just smiles at him and ruffles his hair before capturing him in his arms.

“Don’t you dare get taller than me, okay?”

“Just you wait, hyung.”

Wonwoo pulls away slowly and picks up his bag. His mum comes over and takes his hand, pulling him gently over to the departure gate.

He turns back to face them all. Everything’s been said, and now he just has to leave. Too bad he doesn’t want to.

With one last wave, Wonwoo turns and jogs down the escalator.

The line for the security check is ridiculously long and there seems to be some kind of issue that requires about five changes of staff, so Wonwoo thanks god (his mum) for making them leave for the airport so early and prepares himself for a long wait.

He spends about ten minutes messing around on Candy Crush and studying the beanie of the guy in front of him before he notices the Korean textbook hanging out of the boy’s backpack and gets an idea. It’s not something he would have done a year ago, but hey, Australia’s changed him.

He taps the boy on the shoulder.

The boy turns around and Wonwoo’s met with freckles and wide eyes.

“Uh, hi,” Wonwoo starts, “are you studying Korean?” he asks, cringing as he vaguely gestures to the textbook which is now uselessly hidden behind the guy’s back.

The guy doesn’t seem to mind his awkwardness though as his lips stretch into a grin, scrunching up his eyes and puffing out his cheeks.

“Yeah! I’m moving to Korea so I’m trying to learn as much as I can before I get there!”

“That’s cool. I’m from Korea actually, I’m moving back there.”

The guy’s eyes light up.

“Wow man, that’s so cool! What are they chances, hey? I’m Felix, by the way,” he says, reaching his hand out for Wonwoo to shake.

Wonwoo smiles, extending his own hand.

“Wonwoo.”

Perhaps the wait won’t be as long now.

~*_~

By some bizarre twist of fate, Wonwoo ends up with an empty seat next to him. He fully intends to
take advantage of it and spread his legs out, but before he can even undo his seatbelt after take-off, Felix drops right into the seat.

“Where the hell did you come from?!” Wonwoo yelps. “I mean, not that I mind, but wasn’t your seat further back?”

Felix shrugs.

“Yeah, but I saw this one was vacant, so I thought why not come chill up here? We can keep each other company!"

“Alright,” Wonwoo laughs. And he really doesn’t mind. They’d chatted all through the security check and all the way up until boarding. He’d even been a little sad that they were seated at different ends of the plane.

“Hey, you should help me with some Korean, I know barely anything, it’s terrible!” Felix exclaims, pulling his textbook out and Wonwoo smiles fondly, remembering how he struggled on his own to learn English before moving to Australia.

“Yeah, let’s do that. First though,” Wonwoo says, pulling out the bag Jeonghan gave him, “do you want some milk?”

~*~

Two hours later and Wonwoo is sure that Felix will be just fine in Korea, because damn, he was definitely lying when he’d said he didn’t know much.

They’re taking a break because they’re getting food (Wonwoo isn’t sure what meal it’s meant to be, but he’ll take it because he’d been too distracted by leaving the country to do something as trivial as eating earlier).

Felix is poring over the menu trying to figure out which option will be the least disappointing and ultimately, they end up flipping a coin to decide who will try the pasta and who’ll take a risk on the beef.

Wonwoo wins. He takes a lot of joy in telling the flight attendant his preference, but if Felix’s pout made him split their meals in half and swap them, he’ll never tell.

He’s just finishing the last of his lemonade when there’s a particularly sharp spike of turbulence, and the drink spills out of his cup and down his hand, getting in under his watch and making his whole wrist sticky.

“Damn it,” he curses, unbuckling the watch and desperately trying to clean up the mess.

“Oh shit,” Felix just laughs, leaning away from Wonwoo and doing absolutely nothing to help when the lemonade starts to drip onto his jeans. Traitor.

And, because Wonwoo is totally a functioning adult, he retorts with “well, you suck,” as he gets up to go to the bathroom.

When he makes his way back lemonade-free, Felix has dozed off with his limbs splayed out and Wonwoo has to jump over him in an attempt to make it back into his seat without waking him up.

He doesn’t quite manage it.
“Wonwoo?” Felix murmurs.

“Yeah?”

“I turned eighteen a few months ago.” He sleepily tugs at his sleeve until Wonwoo can see the Hangul written across his wrist.

“Changbin,” Wonwoo whispers.

“Yes. Changbin. He’s not the whole reason I’m going, but maybe he is the reason I’m going sooner than I’d planned. Perhaps he’ll be able to help me with my Korean.”

God, he imagines what that’d be like, going off to search for your soulmate with no idea of who they could be and no idea of how they smile.

“Is that why you’re going back to Korea? Are you trying to find Mingyu?”

“What?”

“Sorry, I saw your name when you took off your watch.”

“It’s okay. But no, I’ve already met him. He lives in Brisbane.”

Wonwoo isn’t looking at Felix anymore but he can tell the other boy’s far more awake now.

“Why are you leaving then? Don’t you want to stay with him?”

“He… he doesn’t know. He’s still seventeen. And I’ve got to go back for university. It’s complicated.”

Felix settles back down to sleep again, but this time he rests his head on Wonwoo’s shoulder.

“Remember though, it’s never too hard to uncomplicate these things.”

Wonwoo thinks about everything that he’s left behind, all the memories he has where Felix has only a name. And he could be right, Wonwoo might be making it all a hell of a lot more complicated than it needs to be, but right now, when the plane’s lights are dimmed and he’s slumped down in his seat on the verge of sleep, he’s just glad he knows what Mingyu’s smile looks like.

~*~

Wonwoo leaves the airport with his grandparents, a neck ache, and a new number in his phone. He’s replying to Felix’s mass of goodbye emojis when another number pops up in his notifications.

Mingyu.

Hey hyung you’ve landed right? Let me know when you’ll be ready for me to call!

Wonwoo sends back give me two hours and then proceeds to sneakily text Mingyu for the entire car ride back to his grandparents’ place.

He’s just finishing unpacking as a Facetime request from Mingyu pops up on his phone.

Perfect timing.

“Hey.”
He can’t control his grin at the sight of Mingyu as the video connects. He’s still in bed, hair all ruffled and Wonwoo can tell he forgot to shut his blinds again from the way the morning sun is shining across his face.

“Hey Wonwoo. How was your flight?”

“Long. But I made a friend, it was nice. But it’s too cold here though, I’ve gotten too used to Australian weather.”

Mingyu snorts.

“Don’t be so grouchy! You’re in Korea! I wish I could go, I haven’t been since I was, like, five.”

“Maybe you should come vi-”

Wonwoo stops. That’s not something that’ll help either of them at this stage.

“Hm? What were you gonna say, hyung?”

He smiles gently.

“Nevermind. How was the ride home with my family?”

“Oh, it was great,” Mingyu cackles, “your mum kept trying to convince me to come over for dinner, but I’m pretty sure it was just an attempt to get me to cook for her again.”

“You should, she’d love that,” Wonwoo says.

*I’d love that,* he thinks.

“Maybe I will,” Mingyu says softly. Wonwoo can see him take a deep breath, gaze shifting to somewhere outside of the frame before he speaks again. “Hyung, there was something I wanted to ask you. It’s actually something I’ve been wanting to ask for a while, I suppose.”

The little nervous laugh that falls out of Mingyu’s mouth seemingly by accident hits Wonwoo straight in the heart, and he wishes he wasn’t seven thousand kilometres away.

“It’s okay, Gyu, just ask me.”

“Okay. Okay. This is something for when you get home, alright?”

Wonwoo frowns.

“Home? Mingyu, I don’t know when I’m coming home. Maybe the middle of the year, but it probably won’t be until Christmas.”

There’s a pause. Wonwoo can practically *feel* the way that Mingyu’s face collapses, brows furrowing and lips turning down into a frown. He can feel the confusion pouring off of him in waves, too strong to be stopped by something as trivial as a phone screen.

“Hyung, what the hell? What do you mean you’re not coming home until Christmas?”

Wonwoo just frowns more, if that’s even possible.

“Well, I’m going to busy with uni, I don’t know when I’ll get the chance to come back.”
Mingyu sits up.

“What? You mean you’re going to uni in Korea? But what about that course you wanted to do here?”

“What do you mean? I’ve always been going to uni in Korea,” Wonwoo says, convinced his mouth is going to be permanently fixed in a frown after this.

“No, you mentioned it like once, months ago, but when you said you got into the course here, well hyung, what did you expect us to think?”

Perhaps it’s the us that gets through to Wonwoo. He remembers Soonyoung at the airport.

Why are you so emotional?

“You mean… you all thought I was just going for a holiday or something?”

“Yes! Of course we did, you never told us you’d be fucking leaving the country!”

“But I’ve always been going to leave the country! This isn’t exactly a new thing, Mingyu.”

“Not exactly a new thing?” Mingyu laughs, but it’s nothing like the laugh that Wonwoo’s grown to love over the past year. “I’m- I can’t talk to you about this right now, I’ll call you later or something.”

“Mingyu-” Wonwoo starts, but the other boy just shakes his head and dismisses him from the other side of the world.

And before Mingyu ends the call, Wonwoo swears he can see tears on his cheeks, suspended in the Australian sunlight.
Did you know that Jeonghan ate his twin in the womb?

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

The moment I finished writing this I wanted to post it so badly... But as things go, we promise you Monday updates, so Monday updates is what you get.

Good luck, pals.

15th January, 2018

“Mingyu-ah, would you like to come over for dinner?”

Mingyu’s head snaps up from where it’s leaning against the glass, and he scrubs at the mark he’s left behind on the Jeon’s car window. He has to decline the offer, as much as he’d love to treat Mrs. Jeon to another of his recipes. It’s not like he doesn’t have the time, or that his parents need him home, but something doesn’t sit right with him when he thinks about being in Wonwoo’s home without Wonwoo actually being there.

“That’s a shame. Another time, then.”

Mingyu nods, when Mrs. Jeon turns around to look at him.

It’s not exactly an exciting car ride, not with Wonwoo gone and Bohyuk playing Tap Tap Revenge like as if it hasn’t existed since 2008, but it’s a manageable one.

He can only imagine the kind of chaos he would be in if he were in a car with the rest of the gang.

He falls asleep somewhere along the way, and with it, his anxious feelings of an entire month of holidays without Wonwoo dissipates.

~*~

Mingyu sets an alarm for when Wonwoo’s plane lands, just in case. His nap in the car has done him wonders to feel well-rested (his skin clear and his crops watered too), but Mingyu isn’t one to shy away from the prospect of more sleep; not after his entire high school life has deprived him of it.

He’s just grateful that Korea only has a one-hour time difference.

Mingyu gives half an hour from the time Wonwoo’s plane is scheduled to land before shooting through a text.

Knowing that Wonwoo has arrived safely, he gets under the covers and snuggles up with his phone, turning all the lights but his bedside lamp off.

Mingyu lets Wonwoo have some quality time with his grandparents before he can’t contain himself anymore and just has to give the guy a call.

“Hey Wonwoo. How was your flight?” he asks, the moment the FaceTime call connects.
“Long. But I made a friend, it was nice. But it’s too cold here though, I’ve gotten too used to Australian weather.”

Mingyu doesn’t think he’s ever gone a day around Wonwoo without hearing the guy complain about the weather. He’s not sure if that classifies as a redeeming quality.

“Don’t be so grouchy! You’re in Korea! I wish I could go, I haven’t been since I was, like, five,” Mingyu pouts. Wonwoo goes to respond to that, but cuts himself off.

The conversation moves onto the car ride, and Mingyu tells Wonwoo about how Mrs. Jeon seemed to be super peachy keen to have him cook for them again.

There’s a lull.

Mingyu shifts slightly, trying to make himself comfortable. It’s hard, when there’s something he so desperately wants to get off his chest, but he just doesn’t know what the right timing is. Is it now? Or should he have said it right after complaining about how Bohyuk found *Tap Tap Revenge* a better companion than him?

He takes a deep breath, eventually.

If he’s thinking about it now, he might as well just say it now.

“Hyung, there was something I wanted to ask you. It’s actually something I’ve been wanting to ask for a while, I suppose.”

Wonwoo gives him a reassuring smile, and Mingyu relaxes a little, although his palms are a little sweaty and he keeps having to wipe them off on his blankets.

“Okay, okay. This is something for when you get home, alright?”

And immediately, that small feeling of warmth is gone, perfectly in time with when Wonwoo’s smile falls off his face. It’s like he’s been doused in salty water straight from the ocean, except some arsehole was doubly prepared and put it in the fridge first.

“Home?” Wonwoo frowns, “Mingyu, I don’t know when I’m coming home. Maybe the middle of the year, but it probably won’t be until Christmas.”

Everything shatters.

“Hyung, what the hell? I- What do you mean you’re not coming home until Christmas?”

Nothing makes sense. Mingyu knows Wonwoo. Mingyu *knows* Wonwoo. There’s no way he’d just leave without saying a word, and this has to be some kind of sick prank, seeing as everyone knows Wonwoo’s sense of humour is just about as shitty as Junhui’s.

“Well, I’m going to busy with uni, I don’t know when I’ll get the chance to come back. You know how it is, studies and all,” Wonwoo says, like as if Mingyu should have already been aware of this.

Maybe Mingyu doesn’t know Wonwoo at all. Not if Wonwoo is a backstabbing fucker who leaves his friends behind. Not if Wonwoo can so easily run away like this. Not if Wonwoo would abandon his *home* just to-

And Mingyu doesn’t know how to finish that sentence.

Yes, it’s clear now.
He doesn’t know Wonwoo.

“You mean… you all thought I was just going for a holiday or something?” Wonwoo’s voice comes out quietly.

“Yes! Of course we did, you never told us you’d be fucking leaving the country! And you had like no bags with you! Of course it looked like a holiday your suitcase looked like a bloody weasel!” Mingyu begins to raise his voice. Screw his family, they can deal with it.

“But I’ve always been going to leave the country! This isn’t exactly a new thing, Mingyu.”

Wonwoo says it so matter-of-factly, so emotionlessly, it hurts.

He doesn’t even answer the question about having irrationally small baggage.

Arsehole.

“Not exactly a new thing?” Mingyu’s own voice rings in his ears.

He doesn’t even realise he’s crying until he’s hung up and his phone is halfway across the room.

He’s suddenly so grateful that he never finished saying what he really wanted to.

Fuck Wonwoo.

Fuck Wonwoo.

He doesn’t wanna go on a date with a dickstick like that anyway.

Thank God he never asked.

~*~
Hey Bob,

Did you know that fuck?

Fuck.


~*~
Hi Bob, I’ve calmed down now.

I lied. I haven’t. You can probably tell because I’ve indented into like 5 pages just trying to write the word calm.

Did you know that a koala’s appendix is approximately 2 metres long?

Did you know that Marilyn Monroe was rumoured to have 6 toes?

Did you know that Wonwoo’s a motherfucking headarse dickwad?

Did you know that pissy shitties actually don’t taste that bad considering they’re a sick joke Americans like to play on the rest of the world?

Did you know that I’ve never been more relieved that I didn’t ask Wonwoo on a date?

Did you know that Jeonghan ate his twin in the womb?

Who would’ve thought, hey.

Fuck, I’m still not calm enough to be talking about this yet.

Calm.

Tranquil.

Serene.

Peaceful.

It’s not working.

It’s not working.

It’s not working.

I want him.

No I don’t, he’s a cu

Bitch u thought I’d actually write that down ha jokes on youuuuuuuuu (crank that soulja boy)

Fuck.

I still like him.

Probably.

Kinda feels like I still do, can’t exactly tell. Bit too mad for that right now lmaooooo

Catch you later I guess?
“You know you can cry if you want to.”

“Yeah. I know.”

“Fuckin’ makes sense why he looked like he was gonna cry at the airport now though,” Minghao drawls around his ice block.

That’s what Mingyu thought too. Maybe him and Minghao are soulmates.

Or just best friends.

“D’you tell Bob about it?” Minghao asks, which earns him a massive slap across the back that causes the remainder of his ice block to fall off the stick and onto the ground. Belatedly, he remembers that he was supposed to purge the existence of Bob from his mind a very long time ago, and as such has no knowledge whatsoever that Mingyu is in possession of a notebook that could possibly be regarded as a diary.

“Bob knows,” Mingyu replies in a mumble, after Minghao’s fallen ice block has melted into a red puddle.

“Yeah but here’s the thing right: I feel like Bob knows more than I do, and that’s just unacceptable at this point because I thought I was your best friend, not Bob.”

Mingyu gulps a little. Minghao is right, after all. He just doesn’t know if he’s ready to actually let feelings tumble from his mouth. So far, all he’s done is give a clinical recount of the FaceTime call he had with Wonwoo. Except maybe not so clinical, with the way Minghao’s eyebrows slowly rose with each painstakingly illustrative description Mingyu gave of Wonwoo’s features.

He hates that after everything, he’s still whipped as shit.

“Well think about it rationally,” Minghao says. “You know, disregarding the fact that we’re all deeply offended and highkey mad. Or we all will be, when the rest find out.”

Mingyu nods along, waiting for what his friend will say next.

“This would’ve been a really hard decision for Wonwoo. We know that. And he grew up in Korea! Of course he missed it. I miss China all the time too. He’s just chasing his dream, right? It’s what he’s always wanted. It’s what he’s wanted for years before he knew us. We can’t exactly blame him
“Yeah but what pisses me off is that there was no ulterior motive to not telling us! He legit just up and forgot to mention it and-”

“He’s fucking stupid.”

Mingyu cracks a smile, and Minghao continues.

“It’s true! I’d still cheat off him in a test if I hadn’t studied enough, but he’s fucking stupid.”

“You right, bro. He fuckin’ stupid.”

“See? That’s the spirit.”

“But he’s a fucking stupid that I tried to ask out. That’s probably what sucks the most.”

Minghao’s face scrunches up a little, before he bursts into a poorly-restrained outrage about how appalled he is by the fact that Mingyu never thought to consult him about the whole thing.

“I wasn’t going to mention it but now that you’ve brought it up again, why didn’t you tell me you were gonna ask him out!”

Mingyu doesn’t reply, and instead hops up from the kerb and heads back into the corner store that they’re sitting in front of. When he comes back out with a new ice block, Minghao harrumphs that it’s not sufficient payment, but he does express his gratitude that Mingyu bothered to buy an Icy Twist, and not some home-brand-horror like what he was eating before.

“Fuckin’ Wonwoo,” Minghao says, when he bites into his ice block with the wrong tooth and he gets a jolt of pain. “You know what this means though?”

“Hmm?” Mingyu hums, looking up from the bitumen to Minghao’s face.

“We need to have a bomb-arse university life that Wonwoo’s going to regret leaving behind. I’m talking signing up to join all the fun clubs, picnics on nice sunny days, crashing each other’s lectures…”

“Do any of those constitute to having a bomb-arse university life? I thought you were gonna say like, parties and clubbing.”

“Oh, those. We can do those too.”

Mingyu shakes his head.

They’re a bunch of fucking nerds.

(A bunch of fucking nerds who are all gonna join the Pokemon club, but Mingyu’s not the one who told you that. Or the fact that he’s hoping to get a shot at placing as a chaser on the official Quidditch team of his uni. Yep, he definitely did not tell you that one.)

~*~

Minghao ends up taking Mingyu to the dog park, once their wallets have significantly slimmed down from their continuous consumption of cheap foods. It’s a nice stroll, although because Mingyu trails aimlessly behind him they get lost twice.
Minghao’s not sure if Mingyu actually notices that they got lost, but either way he appreciates that the guy hasn’t said anything. He has a good excuse, anyway. He’s not from the south side like Mingyu is.

The dog park in Mingyu’s neighbourhood is starkly different to Minghao’s, the grass severely overgrown by one fence, and only one pagoda in the centre, accompanied by a couple of benches scattered in bird poop and one water tap for the dogs to drink at.

Not, of course, that he expected every dog park to have six obstacles and a little lake in it, but it’s a little more run down than he’s used to.

“Hey look, Mingus! That one looks like you!” he yells, pointing to a dog that’s bounding over towards them, long legs hindering them from running in a straight line.

The dog isn’t able to stop himself in time, and crashes face first straight into Mingyu’s legs, who falls over at the impact in surprise.

Minghao already has his phone out for an impromptu photoshoot, and he snaps away as Mingyu tries to wrestle the dog off of him just so he can sit up to play with the dog instead of being stepped all over.

(It’d be nice if he’d be able to breathe.)

Soon, almost all of the dogs are surrounding Mingyu, and it’s like nothing was ever wrong.

Well, how could things ever be wrong when dogs exist, right?

By any case, that’s what Mingyu tells Bob.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Ice block: I'm sure you could all tell, but just in case because this has so many different names around the world. An ice block is specifically a water-based ice treat. So like ice lollies, ice pops, popsicles, freezer pops, icy poles, all the same thing.
- Icy Twist: A very specific lemonade-flavoured ice block. They're more expensive, but definitely worth it. The best lemonade-flavoured ice block you will find in this country.
“Yah, are you listening to me?” Yerim kicks at Wonwoo’s shoulder.

He’s sitting on the floor of her bedroom and sucking on a Capri-Sun when he gets pushed over, some of the juice spilling onto the carpet. Yerim yells some more, before hopping off her bed and pushing Wonwoo out of her room to go and get some paper towels.

“You know, Yerim,” Wonwoo starts, when everything’s calmed down and he’s back to having his Capri-Sun in relative peace.

“Yeri,” the girl corrects sternly. “Where have you been? No one calls me Yerim anymore that’s so old.”

“Have you been listening to me?” Wonwoo retorts. “I’ve been in Australia, Aus. Tra. Li. A.”

Yeri scoffs, muttering something about the fact that SNS exists and if Wonwoo had just put in an inkling of effort to keep in touch with her, he would’ve known. Wonwoo supposes she’s right, but he didn’t exactly have the time to be keeping in contact with his old friends when everything in Australia had been so hectic when he first moved. Not to mention he feels like his English wouldn’t have improved so quickly if he bemoaned each day he experienced in an elaborate string of 68 texts in Korean to the group chat.

“Wha’eva, ‘snot like I care about you,” Yeri sniggers.

“Again, I was in Australia, not England. Why do I even bother with you.”

“Because you love me and we’re soulmates!”

Wonwoo freezes at that. There’s a chance she’s just joking because they always used to do that when they were young, but he’d hate for Yerim to actually have his name on her wrist while he-

Yerim seems to read his mind.

“We’re in love,” she states, matter-of-factly, as she shoves her wrist in Wonwoo’s face, almost knocking him out cold in the process. “No hot white chicks in Australia for you? Or bros. I dunno what your preference is.”

“How about hot yellow bro?” Wonwoo says, just to entertain Yerim.

“You went all the way to Australia and you still fell for an Asian? What’s the point??” Yeri screeches.
Wonwoo’s convinced the entire apartment complex heard it.

And he’s *not* happy about it.

~*~

As it turns out, it seems to be a national response.

“Mingyu?” Sanha squints at the English scrawled across Wonwoo’s wrist, scrutinising it. “But that’s a Korean name.”

Wonwoo rolls his eyes so hard he thinks they’ll fall off his face; an attribute he’s learnt and mastered through the guidance of Wen Junhui.

“Lay off it, Sanha,” Dongmin chuckles, pulling the boy off of Wonwoo’s arm. “Love is love.”

“Fuck off,” Wonwoo snarls back with no bite. Swearing constantly is a horrific habit he’s adopted from Australia, and one that he’s willing to drop. He only hopes having a university life in Korea will actually help him to do so.

(He hates that he already knows it probably won’t.)

Wonwoo knows Sanha’s just trying to take his mind off the fact that Bohyuk isn’t coming back — at least not for a while, but he’d still rather that the kid *didn’t* judge Wonwoo for his love life. Soulmate life. Soulmate love life.

Whatever the shit you call it.

“We did miss you, you know,” Dongmin says, after a while.

Wonwoo missed them too, although what he can’t tell them is that it’s no way near in the way that he misses his friends in Australia. In fact, Wonwoo didn’t even know he was capable of missing a bunch of people so much, irregardless of the fact of whether or not they’re shiitheads (of which his Australian friends most certainly are).

In the year that he’s been gone, Jinwoo has moved to China for some strange and unknown reason that no one is actually sure about, but has something to do with an underground of some sort. At this point, Wonwoo doesn’t want to know, although he’s sure the true answer is something as simple as underground rapping, not… not illegal Russian trade.

On the other hand Myungjun, in all his determination to make it into the big city, finds himself trapped in the country as a farm hand because of something that’s also unknown.

Perhaps Wonwoo just has terrible taste in friends, if they’re all batshit crazy, a bunch of bogans, or have a questionable future lying ahead of them.

At least with Minhyuk he *knows* why the guy is no longer around (a simple father-had-to-move-cities-for-work case, unlike *some people*). And Bin is Bin, unable to keep his eyes open for long enough to hold a conversation with Wonwoo because he’s been studying too hard.

God knows why since the guy’s already gotten into the university he wants to, but Wonwoo supposes he can admire the pure unadulterated dedication.

He doesn’t quite understand it, per se, but yes, admire it he can.

“Wait, did we tell you about how Sooyoung’s soulmate’s name is Wonwoo?”
Wonwoo freezes at that, remembering all those months ago his stupid what-if daydreams.

“Jesus, calm down, don’t make that face it’s not you-”

Wonwoo’s hands jokingly come up to Sanha’s neck to strangle him.

“You’re worse than Bohyuk! And just when I thought I could finally leave him behind!”

“Yeah so anyway,” Sanha continues, like as if Wonwoo’s hands aren’t around his neck, “His name’s Kim Wonwoo and he has 20/20 vision. So polar opposite to you. He’s in med I think. Two years older than you?”

Wonwoo swears he’s listening, but his heart skips a beat when he hears Sanha say Kim Wonwoo. It’s not his fault Mingyu’s surname is Kim.

“Well good for Sooyoung. Is she joyful about it?”

As he’s being tackled to the ground and his glasses chip, he regrets not fully appreciating having a best friend who had a sense of humour more terrible than his own. And then, exactly as he hoped it wouldn’t happen, his mind floods itself with thoughts about all the people he left behind.

“Hey do you want banana milk? I snuck a box from work,” Bin says suddenly, waking from his nap with a start.

“Moon Bin that is illeg-”

In hindsight, he should have been well aware that such a comment would only lead Sanha to further break his glasses.

Good thing Wonwoo still has the power to force the boy to pay for repairs.
“We turn eighteen this year,” Junhui mumbles.

Him and Minghao are sitting on the couch after just having put Fengjun to sleep. After finally having the time to get a free subscription to Netflix, they’re trawling through the selection of movies together when it kind of just dawns on Junhui how much his life is going to change soon.

“We gon’ be old this year,” Minghao cracks a smile over at Jun.

“Yeah, but that’s not what I’m-”

Minghao stands up briefly from the sofa, only to plonk himself directly on top of Jun, face first into the guy’s chest with his limbs sprawled out. He stays there for a while, just breathing in Jun’s scent until he deems it safe enough for the previous sentence to not finish itself.

“Junnie, I wanna watch Doraemon.”

“Feng, is that you? Did we just accidentally put Hao to bed? Oh God I think I’m going mad!”

Minghao snorts — not because Jun is funny, but more so because Jun isn’t funny. Not that Hao didn’t already know that Jun’s sense of humour was kind of atrocious.

As if on cue Fengjun actually turns up at the doorway, scrubbing at his eyes with a frown on his face. He whines about a gecko on his wall that won’t stop squawking, and settles himself straight into Junhui’s lap.

“Do geckos squawk?” Minghao mouths to Jun, who runs his fingers through Feng’s hair while trying to contain his laughter.

Eventually Fengjun falls asleep, drooling onto Minghao’s knee with his body sprawled out over the two boys sitting on the sofa who are watching Doraemon, because there’s nothing better than clinging to any semblance of your childhood the moment your adult life begins to loom in your path.

“I don’t think I’m ready for this,” Junhui says when there’s a lull in an episode. “It’s a lot scarier than I thought it’d be.”

“Jun, please, we’re all gonna be fine! It’s just uni. I’m pretty sure the only thing we need to be worried about is what happens after uni, and that’s years away.”

“But you don’t even have to worry about that,” Jun replies dejectedly.

It’s true, somewhat unfortunately. Minghao plans on making his own fashion brand with Mingyu in the future. It’s part of the reason of why they chose what they did for their courses. With both of them interested in design and fashion (and of course, being good friends), it seemed a logical, entrepreneurial pathway to follow.

Junhui is jealous of it, even though he knows that he has time.

What he hates the most though, is that university wasn’t even what he was referring to.
“This is about soulmates, isn’t it.”

Jun’s head snaps up, body tense, and his mouth goes dry. It is, but now that Minghao’s brought it up he’s not sure that he actually wants to talk about it.

The action causes Fengjun to stir, and the little boy scrubs at his eyes before rolling onto his side, causing him to fall straight onto the ground.

Jun and Minghao both can’t help but laugh, and after things have calmed down Jun picks his brother up to put him back into bed again.

When Junhui returns, Minghao has dozed off, so he supposes it’s as good a time as any to get some sleep as well.

~*~

They awake with a start to the sound of an air horn above them.

“Rise and shine, darlings!” Junhui’s father yells, literal air horn in hand. “Do you like it? It was on sale at the party goods shop next to your uncle’s restaurant!”

Junhui’s father, in his ever-chirpy demeanour, is not an appreciated being. At least, not at 11:27pm when things were getting real comfy in the living room of the Wen household.

“You’ll wake Fengjun up, honey. Don’t do that,” Junhui’s mother tuts softly as she takes the air horn off her husband and sways off to their bedroom with a small wave to the two boys curled up on the sofa.

Jun’s father only laughs, before skipping off behind her, chattering on about how fun it is to help out at the restaurant every now and again and that they should all do it together some time because working amongst home-grown spices in a kitchen is “absolutely invigorating!” or some shit like that.

Jun’s not really paying attention, he’s still groggy from having been abruptly woken up from a pretty good nap.

Beside him, Minghao lays with his eyes open and unblinking, just as he has since the air horn blared.

“You know no offense but sometimes I fucking hate your dad,” he mumbles, rolling over so that his head can rest on Jun’s thighs — the next closest pillowy thing that’s not the damn armrest (Minghao’s had plenty of experience having to massage out cricks from sleeping on that thing).

He hates to say how he notices just how muscular Jun’s thighs are just from placing his head on them, but he supposes that’s just one of the “perks” of having a crush being close friends.

“Hey,” he says, just after he notices Jun’s eyelids flutter shut again, “I have a proposition.”

“Mmm?” Jun hums, only one eye cracking open.

“Can we make a pact?”

Sure, Junhui almost says, before stopping himself, because he has no idea what kind of danger he’s getting himself into. He turns his head to face Minghao, then squints.

“What kind of pact?”

“If we’re not both married by thirty-—”
“No.”

“I’m joking! Relax. I bought these super cool bracelet things because they were on sale, and I just had a thought that like, it’s the perfect size to cover up our tattoos. So like, how about we find out who our soulmates are together? You know? We can hide them until we both have our tattoos and have the big reveal when we catch up.”

Jun snorts.

“You had the thought before buying the bracelets, didn’t you. You little scaredy cat.”

“Did not! You’re the one who-” Minghao stops himself. “Fine, sorry I had the idea, I guess.”

He’s sulking, he knows it, but he can’t help it. He knows how antsy Jun’s been about soulmates ever since they’d started getting closer and closer to graduating from high school. He knows, and even then it took him so long to gain the courage to actually buy the bracelets, and here he is.

“Hand it over. You better give me the nicer looking one,” Jun says with his hand out, the picture of nonchalance if not for the slight blush creeping up his neck.

“They’re the exact same design it was a two for one sale.”

“Well the less damaged one is mine, then.”

Forget it, Minghao wants to say, just for the sake of saying it, but he’d never be able to.

He’s had the bracelets in his pockets all day, but he hops up to pretend to get it out of his backpack that’s propped up behind the sofa.

As he’s playing around with the zip, he thinks he hears Jun murmur a thank you.
“Oh hey babe, fancy seeing you here,” Seungkwan yawns, stretching out into a starfish position, his arm smacking the wall in the process.

“Seungkwan,” Hansol squints from where he’s seated on the floor, clearly unimpressed. “You’re in my room, sleeping in my bed.”

“And you didn’t join me for cuddles.”

Hansol huffs a little, before claiming that while Seungkwan was asleep (they were meant to be watching a movie, but it didn’t happen because of someone), he went out on a Coles run and bought them heaps of snacks. Well actually, Seungkwan was asleep for so long that Hansol also ran some errands and ducked out to Bunnings and had enough time to eat lunch (without Seungkwan) too.

“I mean, would’ve gotten you a sausage sizzle from Bunnings but I thought it’d be cold by the time I-”

“You went to Bunnings, had a sausage sizzle, and didn’t think to get me one?” Seungkwan squawks.

Hansol throws his arms in the air.

“Fine! You caught me. I did get you one it’s wrapped in alfoil and sitting on the kitchen counter.”

Satisfied, Seungkwan rolls himself out of Hansol’s bed, taking the covers with him, pecks the boy on the cheek and strides down into the kitchen, only to find Sofia standing over his sausage sizzle with a knife in hand.

“First of all, you’re too young to be handling such dangerous utensils and second of all, that’s mine you thief!”

Sofia squeals, dropping the knife on the counter and running with her hands waving around above her head as Seungkwan chases her around the house. They end up collapsed on the rug on the floor of the living room when they’re too tired, sweat trickling down their faces and breaths laboured, before Seungkwan decides that maybe he doesn’t mind sharing with Sofia so much.

A sausage sizzle is, after all, a greasy ball of unhealthiness despite its nation-wide popularity.

With his stomach unsatisfied but his heart full (Seungkwan won’t admit it to anyone in the Chwe family but Sofia is his princess), Seungkwan makes it back up the stairs to Hansol that’s waiting for him with snacks splayed out across his bedroom floor.

“Is that a finger bun?” Seungkwan cries, in a voice insanely similar to that of Kylie Jenner’s when she thought her mother had bought her a pet chicken.

(It was clearly a pig, but we won’t judge her for that one.)
“You bet it is,” Hansol grins around his own finger bun, icing on his nose and on the corners of his mouth.

Seungkwan has to bodily fight the urge to do something horrifically cliche (but oh how he’d love to kiss the icing off of Hansol’s face) and plonks himself down on the ground next to the Lamington-flavoured M&Ms, before opting to grab the box of tissues on Hansol’s bedside table and chucking it at his face while telling him to clean up.

They snack in silence for a while after deciding that they’re not in the mood for continuing any of the six shows they’re watching simultaneously, before they start reminiscing about nostalgic treats that deserved better.

“Go-Gurts, Boo. I miss Go-Gurts,” Hansol pouts, his list of treats coming to an end.

“I know, darling. Go-Gurt misses you too.”

Seungkwan ruffles his soulmate’s hair, and laughs.

“You know I’m glad it’s you.”

Hansol looks up, thoroughly confused.

“Like, not to be sappy or anything but. Yeah. Never thought that I’d be able to stand liking you, but here I am in love, so.”

Seungkwan’s happily munching away on a Reese’s peanut butter cup, blissfully unaware of his wording when Hansol makes a strange noise possibly akin to that of a rabid possum. The keyword being possibly, because Hansol doesn’t really know what rabid possums sound like.

He clears his throat once, tries to make sure his voice won’t crack, and opens his mouth to respond.

“Love you too.”

“What?”

“I said, I love you too.”

“Too? You’re not supposed to know that I love you yet! When did I ever-” Seungkwan pauses for a moment, and Hansol can see the exact moment when it dawns on the guy just how many times he’s told Hansol he loves him now. “Ohhhh. I did that.”

They go back to eating, the snack pile close to being depleted, save for a box of Le Snaks and a couple of bags of chips.

Somehow, they migrate down into the living room and end up snuggled on the couch with one of Sofia’s old Barbie princess movies. Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper, to be exact.

There’s a scene in the movie that Seungkwan miraculously knows all the words to and begins reciting under his breath, and while Hansol isn’t one to like prying too much, he has many questions to ask. He doesn’t actually ask them, for fear of being skinned alive, but they’re there nonetheless.

Eventually one Barbie movie turns into three Barbie movies, and then there’s an incomprehensible segue from Barbie to Pacific Rim.

“Do you think we’re drift compatible?” Hansol asks Seungkwan some time into the movie, to which Seungkwan answer in the affirmative, and then a lowkey make-out session begins because they’ve
both seen the movie about three times each. But it’s only lowkey, because Sofia and parents and stuff like that.

As close as Hansol is to his parents, he’s not too keen on the idea of them watching him and Seungkwan do… stuff, no matter how PG it is. For God’s sake, he blushed bright red like a tomato the first time he was caught walking with his pinky linked with Seungkwan’s, he doesn’t even want to think about what would happen if his parents saw him holding hands with the boy.

It’s Hansol’s idea to build a pillow fort when they spring apart at the sound of Sofia opening the fridge. She’s not even in a position where she can see them, and she’s not likely to bother them because they’re watching “nerdy bull-carp”, but he just feels so much safer knowing that, with a fort, they have time to properly separate themselves before anyone can see what they’ve been doing.

Movies are always better when you’re inside a fort anyway.

Even if you’re not necessarily watching it.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Bunnings: A hardware store! The OG hardware store, to be exact. Masters can piss off. (Actually, Masters did piss off...)
- Sausage Sizzle: It's kind of like a hot dog. A piece of regular sandwich bread with a sausage. Depending on your preferences, you add onion, tomato sauce (ketchup), BBQ sauce.
- Finger Bun: A legendary childhood treat that I haven't had in years and writing this chapter has reminded me that I should go buy one some time soon. It's a long bun with icing on top, and the classic one is covered in 100s and 1000s sprinkles, although there are variations.
- Lamington-flavoured M&Ms: Just came out right around the time that this chapter is set in, and I haven't tried them yet but I sure hope they taste good because they sound like they will.
- Go-Gurt: They discontinued these in Australia, but I know other countries still have it. It's just yogurt in a tube. The best part of it was that you could freeze it.
- Le Snak: I'll be honest with you, personally, I still can't actually tell whether these tasted good or not. Like I ate them and I didn't hate them, but?? Hm... I'm probably gonna get murdered by some fellow Australians for saying that. Anyway, Le Snak are just little containers of crackers and cheese dip.
Chan wakes up feeling no older, which isn’t saying much. He’d never really felt that much more grown up since his tenth birthday when he’d jumped onto the kitchen table and proclaimed his newfound adulthood.

He did expect something today of all birthdays though. 18 was the big one, everyone knew that, but there was still the lingering feeling of childhood and the utter petrification of being thrust into the grown-up world. And no sign of a soulmate. Sure, there’s a whole entire day for a name to be sewn into his skin, but Chan’s never been one for patience.

He’ll just have to wait and see.

What he doesn’t have to wait very long for is Seokmin and Soonyoung bursting into his room with an air horn.

“Happy birthday Channie!” they chorus, squeaking the air horn out in a terrible rhythm that sounds vaguely like Happy Birthday.

“Thanks guys,” Chan smiles, heart full at the sight of two nearly grown men dancing around his room in matching pyjamas (featuring cute little jars of Vegemite).

“Come on, up and at ’em we gotta get the house ready for your party,” Seokmin yells, “we just need to wait for the helium to arrive, but there’s plenty else to do before then!”

Chan thinks his heart’s stopped.

“Helium?! Look, when I said I’d let you take control of my party, I wasn’t expecting helium and what, 6 hours of preparation? What the hell do you have planned?”

Soonyoung answers, his grin far too excited.

“Oh, just you wait and see, it’s gonna be great.”

~*~

Can 100 helium balloons be classified as great? Certainly not when the majority of them are forced into the Lee’s netted trampoline and Jun, Soonyoung and Jeonghan have taken to jumping around wildly in the midst of a rainbow of plastic.

Chan’s lost count of the number of pops he’s heard, but he’s gonna ignore that in favour of scooping up the remains of his melted ice cream cake.

Everyone’s spread around the yard, leaving Chan and Hansol sitting alone at the table. Chan rests his head on Hansol’s shoulder, enjoying the quiet silence that’s occasionally broken by Hansol reading jokes out of the Christmas crackers Soonyoung had apparently saved from Christmas for this specific occasion.

It’s almost perfect.
Almost.

“Guys,” Chan shouts, “come over here, I’m going to call Wonwoo.”

Mingyu falls out of the handstand he was attempting. Minghao pulls him up, brushes him off, and gently leads him over to the table. Everyone else makes their way back over to the table as well, Jun popping at least four balloons trying to get out of the trampoline.

“Wonwoo?” Mingyu asks a little too loudly. “Won’t he be like, busy or something? Didn’t he say he was really busy at the moment? Yeah, I think he did. Yeah.”

Chan just rolls his eyes.

“Oh, shut up Mingyu, I don’t care about your boy drama. I wanna call Wonwoo. Gather round, kids.”

~*~

Wonwoo’s carefully typing out a birthday message to Chan, trying to not to fall over on the train and tune out Felix’s chattering just for a minute. He’s been meaning to send the text all day, but a day out with Felix doesn’t contain time for breathing, let alone sending a heartfelt message to your friend back home.

He manages to write out a message, edit it, and is just about to hit send, one had holding his phone with a thumb poised over the button, the other hand on Felix’s face, pushing him away for just long enough to send the message off into cyberspace.

But then someone calls him.

“Are you fucking kidding me,” he mutters, ignoring Felix’s muffled call of “language!” to angrily press the pick-up button.

It’s a video call, something he’d failed to notice in his annoyance, and Wonwoo’s pleasantly surprised at the sight of his friends on the screen. Chan’s front and centre, the rest of the gang huddled in behind him, barely fitting into the screen in their usual flailing disorder.

“Hey hyung!” Chan yells, and Wonwoo can’t help but laugh at the sight of him with a child’s party hat perched precariously on his head. The others start to shout out their own greetings, but Chan yells at them to shut up and let him talk, all while dashing away from them.

“Hey Channie,” Wonwoo smiles, “I was just about to text you. Happy birthday.”

“Thanks! Everyone’s here for the party, I’m so sad you’re not here with us though.” Chan’s face flips instantly into a pout and Wonwoo’s own smile turns gloomy, missing the times when he could relentlessly baby the younger boy.

“Well thank god for FaceTime then! How’s your day been? Do you have your name yet?”

“Ah, not yet hyung, to be honest I was kinda disappointed that it wasn’t there when I woke up, but I’ve still got… three hours and thirty-seven minutes to go!”

“Yeah, that’s plenty of time, don’t stress it, Chan. Just have fun. Do you have one of those ridiculous ice cream cakes?”

“You bet! And they’re not ridiculous, hyung, I know you secretly love them!”
It’s at that moment that Felix finally manages to push past Wonwoo’s hand and bursts into the frame.

“Hey! I’m Felix!”

Chan pretty much explodes.

“OH MY GOSH, IT’S AN AUSTRALIAN,” he screeches, and of course that brings everyone else running.

“Holy crap Wonwoo, are these your Australian friends? Introduce me, oh my god.”

“Shut up, Felix,” Wonwoo mutters, because there is a reason he hasn’t mentioned any of them. He likes his ears intact, thank you very much.

“Oh you shut up, Wonwoo,” Jun pipes up, eyes glinting far too happily, “we’ve corrupted you so much the only friends you can make now are Australian!”

“What have I done,” Wonwoo moans, letting Felix take the phone from his slack hands and introduce himself to every single one of his friends, adding them all on Facebook while he’s at it.

His idiot friends all seem utterly thrilled to meet Felix, but if Wonwoo’s eyes linger on Mingyu for slightly too long after he introduced himself in a somewhat lacklustre tone, no one else notices. Except maybe Minghao, if the way he nudges Mingyu and pulls him in close is anything to go by. Wonwoo makes a note to text him later.

Wonwoo slumps against the side of the train, watching without the slightest hint of jealousy (he’s lying) as Felix effortlessly befriends his friends. Just watch Wonwoo, he’s gonna go and steal that Jisung kid that Felix met last week.

“Guys, oh my god!”

Wonwoo hears Chan’s panicked yell all too clearly through the tinny speaker and lurches over, snatching the phone away from Felix.

“Chan, what is it?” Wonwoo asks, but his voice is lost amongst the others all crying out similar concerns.

“I… I think it’s my name. Holy crap.”

Chan’s breath starts to shake and Wonwoo’s grip on the phone tightens as he sees Seokmin’s grip on Chan’s shoulder do the same. There’s an agonising few seconds where Wonwoo’s breath goes nowhere.

It’s strange to watch someone else get their name. Of course, he’s seen it in movies, but Wonwoo can definitely say now that it’s nothing like the real thing. There’s an irreplaceable look on Chan’s face, a strange kind of wonder mixed with fear and anticipation. It’s strangely beautiful.

The moment’s over rather soon, and suddenly Chan is slumped against Seokmin and lifting his wrist up in wonder.

“Emma! Cool name but, there’s like ten million of them,” Chan exclaims eyes gleaming as they trace the four simple letters again and again.

Emma. Wonwoo has an alarming flashback to an obsessive clarinet player and drops his phone right onto Felix’s foot in shock.
“Cheollie!”

Jeonghan makes grabby hands at Seungcheol as soon as he seems him, and Seungcheol dutifully leans in for a hug.

“Hey, Jeonghan.”

Jeonghan pulls back from the hug and studies Seungcheol’s face.

“You need caffeine. So do I.”

He nods, and lets himself be pulled to the nearest coffee shop.

Fifteen minutes and half a caramel macchiato later, Jeonghan watches him for a minute or so across their table. Seungcheol’s gut stirs. He can’t quite bring himself to meet Jeonghan’s gaze.

He tears his napkin in half.

“I haven’t seen you for ages Cheol,” Jeonghan finally whines, “where have you been?”

Quarters.

“I’ve been hanging out with Mingyu a lot lately. He doesn’t need to be alone right now.”

“Ah. Wonwoo.”

“Wonwoo.”

Seungcheol hates the way they know that they’re on the exact same page a split second after meeting eyes.

He loves it.

“You think they’re soulmates too?” Jeonghan is the one to put it into words, absentmindedly stirring his coffee and leaning his head onto his hand.

Seungcheol just sighs. Eighths.

“Yeah. They’ve gotta be, look at the way Wonwoo looks at Mingyu. He only got more smitten after his birthday.”

“If only we’d had the chance to tease them,” Jeonghan sighs.

“Really, Jeonghan?” Seungcheol raises his eyebrows, “they’re going through something completely life changing and you want to tease them?”

“Oh come on Cheol, of course they’re gonna live happily ever after, and it’s our job, as their friends, to make fun of them for it.”
“I don’t know, that’s just something I’ve never understood. I don’t get why people feel the need to make fun of soulmates and tease them and all that shit. It’s… it’s a big thing, you know?”

“Hmm, this isn’t about Wonwoo and Mingyu anymore, is it?”

No.

“Jeonghan-”

“No, Cheol, don’t interrupt, you’ll never talk about this on your own,” Jeonghan flips his fringe back, game face on.

“Han, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“That’s not going to help, have you seen yourself for the last year? Whatever it is about your soulmate that’s bothering you, you’ve gotta let it out.”

A year. Has it really been a year since Seungcheol’s whole world turned upside down? A year since his adult life started prematurely and then ground sliding to a halt. He used to tell Jeonghan and Jisoo everything. And now, after whole year of lying, Seungcheol can feel it. He can feel the way Jeonghan is sitting back in his chair instead of leaning forward into Seungcheol’s space, the way Jisoo now hesitates before resting his head on his shoulder.

It’s not technically lying, but omission isn’t any better. Jisoo will forgive him. Jeonghan, he’s not so sure.

“Jeonghan, just give me some more time, okay? I promise, I’ll tell you everything soon.”

He has to.

“No, Seungcheol, soon is not good enough. This has been going on for far too long already.”

And with that Jeonghan stands, pulls Seungcheol up with him and out of the coffee shop. He pulls him all the way to the empty park at the end of the block.

“Look, it’s quiet here, we can talk here, okay?”

Seungcheol hates how hopeful Jeonghan looks.

“No! I don’t wanna talk about this. Not with you.”

He knows as soon as it comes out of his mouth that that was the worst possible thing he could have said. He can see it on Jeonghan’s face, the way his eyes narrow to hide the hurt in them.

He’s been doing that ever since James Piccart insulted dairy farms back in Grade 9.

“Jeonghan, I-”

“You what, Seungcheol?” Jeonghan’s eyes are barely visible at this stage, both from the way they’re narrowed and the fringe flopping back into his face. ‘I’m trying to help you here. You need help, Cheol, can’t you see the way you’re self destructing by keeping this all inside? When was the last time you got a full night of sleep? Just talk to me.’

Seungcheol rubs his hands over his eyes, and god, when did Jeonghan get so perceptive.

“I can’t tell you, Jeonghan. Trust me, you’ll know soon enough,” he says, turning away, reading to
be done with this conversation, this day, this year.

“Nope, Cheol, I’m not putting up with this anymore.”

And with that, Jeonghan reaches out and Seungcheol’s wrist to stop him leaving, pulling up his sleeve as he does.

Seungcheol freezes. He shuts his eyes. He doesn’t want to see Jeonghan’s reaction to reading his own name off Seungcheol’s skin.

“Jeonghan-”

“Oh my god, Cheol. I… I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have pushed you.”

The hand falls off his wrist. Jeonghan’s voice… it’s scared. He sounds like he’s crying.

“You should talk to him. Talk to him, Cheol, and soon.”

_Talk to who?_

There’s silence then, and Seungcheol opens his eyes. He’s alone, but he can see Jeonghan’s figure at the edge of the park.

“Shit…” Seungcheol murmurs in disbelief. After all that, Jeonghan just… left?

Maybe he’s cursed.

Seungcheol sighs and looks angrily down at his wrist, ready to pull down his sleeve and forget all this.

He pauses.

He didn’t realise which wrist it was.

_Jisoo._

_Shit._

~*_~

His doorbell rings.

It’s Jisoo. Of course it’s freaking Jisoo.

“Josh.”

“Oh shut it with the ‘Josh’, Seungcheol,” he levels Seungcheol which such a _Jisoo_ look that it actually makes him duck his head and sigh.

“Come on,” he says over his shoulder, already turning back towards his room, trusting Jisoo will be right behind him.

He is.

He always is.

They settle on Seungcheol’s bed, pinkies linked together in the way they’ve been doing for the last
five years, feet knocking against each other where they now rest well off the end of the bed. They’ve grown and everything and nothing has changed.

The silence lasts long enough for Seungcheol to melt his inhibitions. He curls himself into Jisoo’s side; head tucked into his shoulder, arm drifting over his torso.

“I’m scared, Jisoo.”

“I know, Cheol. And that’s okay. I don’t know how you’ve managed with this whole thing for so long. Why didn’t you just tell us?”

“It’s… complicated, I suppose,” Seungcheol starts, and then pauses, because he needs to ask the most important question. “Jeonghan told you didn’t he? The name on my wrist?”

Jisoo just smiles. “No, he didn’t. He didn’t even tell me he’d seen it, he didn’t tell me anything.”

“What? How did you…”

“He didn’t have to tell me, Cheol. You really think I didn’t know? After all this time?”

Jisoo breaks their pinky link and for a moment Seungcheol is terrified beyond belief. But then Jisoo lays his fingers over his own name on Seungcheol’s wrist.

His heart stops.

Slender fingers come to rest over the matching Jeonghan.

And after managing one pathetic beat, his heart stops again.

This time, Jisoo curls into Seungcheol.

“How could I not know?”
He sets the plan fully into motion the day after Chan’s birthday (it wouldn’t do to ruin the boy’s special day, and him and Seokmin had planned the party for months beforehand too). It’ll be gradual, something that Seokmin wouldn’t notice until it was too late, and hopefully during this time Soonyoung will finally be able to free.

It starts with securing some part time jobs under his belt that means less free time. He makes an astounding resume that’s 70% bullshit and 99% cool designing to trick you into thinking it’s worth anything, and it works. (And Soonyoung’s never been that strong at maths but yes, he’s aware that adds up to 169%. Just bear with him.) He has two casual jobs, he’s gaining cash faster than pocket money’s ever been able to stack up, and because of it, he only really sees Seokmin whenever they continue to plan Chan’s birthday. With the money he’s acquired, he can buy as many friggin balloons as he wants to, and already the time he spends with Seokmin for the sake of spending time with him is starting to minimise.

Following Chan’s birthday, all he needs to do is secure himself some more shifts, then in no time at all uni will have started and in the rush of things he can just squeeze his way out of Seokmin’s life. Group events? Sure, he’ll be there, arms wrapped securely around the guy’s middle, just so that he’ll be none the wiser, (also so that Soonyoung can have one last taste of what’ll be stripped away from him too soon), but other than that Soonyoung will be Seokmin-less.

There are times when he thinks he can’t do it.

It’s hard, of course, change in general is hard, and Seokmin’s been such a big part of his life since literally forever that it feels weird doing things without him. But Soonyoung knows he can do this for the greater good of everyone. In the meantime, he's really hungry, and his taste buds could do with some good old Coco Pops.

~*~

Something is wrong. Seokmin can feel it. It’s this strange sensation in his kneecaps, like what his grandfather said he used to feel when a storm was coming.

The weather prediction is sunny all week.

He’s just loitering around at the small local shopping centre when he bumps into someone, and he’s too busy picking up the guy’s groceries to notice who it is.

“Seungcheol!” he jumps up when he realises, dropping all the packets of 2-minute noodles he’d just
been picking up. “Hey, man.”

Seungcheol gives him an abashed smile, like as if he’s a little embarrassed to be seen with so many packs of instant noodles, but Seokmin didn’t come here to judge. In fact, he totally gets it, 2-minute noodles are convenient and they taste good. They’re just probably not the best for your health. But since when has Seokmin ever been concerned for things as trivial as health?

(Health is not trivial. Please do not follow Seokmin’s way of life.)

“Where’s your other half, hey?” Seungcheol nudges him, and Seokmin clams up a little.

“Uh, working. Like he always seems to be doing these days.”

Seungcheol frowns.

“Is he saving up for something? Didn’t think he’d be the type to load like that.”

“I don’t know,” Seokmin says. He hates that he’s telling the truth. “I thought maybe he was making the most of his time while he could have two jobs. You know, once we’re in uni you never know things might get hard enough that he has to drop both jobs or something.”

“Fair enough. I’d do that too but no one wants to hire a car wash slob.”

“Don’t be like that.”

“No seriously, I can’t even get one job interview. And I’d rather blame it on the fact that I work at a car wash called Everyday Broom Broom than on the fact that I don’t have the skills for them to want to hire me.”

Seokmin laughs a little, shaking his head.

“How about you? How are you going?”

He doesn’t say ‘with Jisoo and Jeonghan’, but he knows Seungcheol will get what he means. They seemed to be getting friendlier again recently, so Seokmin’s hoping the guy will say they’ve patched up whatever rough bump they’d been having.

He’s met with a very slow chuckle instead.

“You know, I’m not really sure about that,” Seungcheol starts hesitantly. “Jeonghan’s… upset.”

“With you?” Seokmin can’t help but ask.

“Not exactly.”

Seungcheol fiddles around with his grocery bags before heaving a sigh. He looks around at their surroundings, shaking his head to himself before beginning to walk out of the shopping centre.

“You’re free, right? Wanna come over to my place?”

~*~

The car ride is silent, something Seokmin’s not really used to, but he doesn’t know what to do regarding this situation. Would acting his normal self and headbanging to every song on the radio be inappropriate considering how on edge Seungcheol seems about his question? Probably. So he sits still instead.
When they arrive, the guy looks around to check no one’s home and packs all of his noodles away in the pantry before they sit down on the sofa together, Seokmin’s hands folded strangely in his lap.

“You want a drink?” Seungcheol asks.

Seokmin’s parched, but he doesn’t say yes. Seungcheol gets him a glass of water anyway.

“Can I tell you something?”

Seokmin nods.

Then, like as if he’s rethinking his words he says, “Show you something?”

Seungcheol pauses, closes his eyes for a moment to recollect himself, then smiles at Seokmin.

“You’re gonna think this is bonkers. I mean, I did too and I’m literally the person this happened to, so. You know how uh, you know how soulmates are a thing.”

Seokmin has to fight the urge to roll his eyes. Yes, he’s aware that soulmates are a thing, their whole universe revolves around it without ever shutting up about it and he has one himself. He looks to the guy sitting across from him though, and he looks so nervous Seokmin knows something isn’t quite right.

“You know how you’re supposed to get your tattoo when you turn eighteen. And how like, you get it at the time of day your soulmate’s born.”

Supposed to. That wording sounds off.

“Well, there’s only two people in the entire world who know about this, and one of those people is me.”

Seokmin’s heart skips a beat. Seungcheol is choosing him to know about this? And who’s the other person? With the way he nervously checked that the house was empty before heading for the pantry tells Seokmin that the second person is not anyone in his family. And because of that Seokmin feels kind of… guilty, although he’s not sure that’s the right word.

“You see,” Seungcheol says, pushing up his sleeves as he talks, and Seokmin swears his head starts to swim.

Is it possible he’s just dreaming?
Hey ho lovely readers! Hope you liked yesterday's update, and before you get super mad I'm sorry about the ending but uni's been kicking my butt so I literally wrote that entire chapter yesterday and not to make excuses but that's my excuse.

Anyway, onto the actual message here. We've decided to put this fic on pause once again.

Things are super busy right now my grandad just passed away last night and again, uni loves to be a bitch, so we thought now's a good as time as any to take our momentary leave.

But anyway, yes! Don't you worry, we'll be back and kicking in no time. No time being like... a month or so? Maybe a lil more or less depending on how on top of things we are?

As always, thanks for all your love and support, y'all are crazy readers but we love you for sticking around through this cracky mess.

- musicianova

uni sucks sorry bye

- jezza
Hi guys! We're finally back! Sorry we took so long, but life just loves to get in the way!

Just wanted to put up a notice that yes, we have taken down all the EXO from the tags, because this story hasn't really taken the direction we thought it was going to when it started. I mean, to begin with, it's infinitely longer than we thought it was going to be, so you know! Don't worry, we'll still have EXO in there, but they just won't be very prominent, since we sort of realised there was so much SVT to go through that we never had time for EXO.

Anyway, for those of you who read all of that, onto the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

19th February, 2018

Wonwoo’s jittery. He can’t help it.

He’s hooked up on blurry snapchats of his friends having the time of their life at O-Week, and it’s practically setting his brain on fire. On the one hand, he’s incredibly excited. He can’t wait to start university, especially if it’s anything like the absolute riot going down in Australia. But then Wonwoo thinks about the fact that he’s not back there with his friends to experience it with them, how he’s not even going to have his own group of friends to start the year off with here, and his heart sinks.

He’s not there to get free fairy floss, free snow cones, free popcorn; he’s not there to run across campus only to burst into the wrong room dripping in sweat for an information session; he’s not there to watch as Seokmin drops his free snow cone on his shirt and immediately bumps into his new professor; he’s not there to pull Jihoon out from the crowd of basketball club kids trying to recruit new members.

Things are changing too quickly, and he’s struggling to keep up.

He got accepted into the university of his dreams not long ago, and again, he’s torn. Torn by the fact that he’s lost his last form of comfort in Korea; torn by the fact that it’s to follow some distant star that he’s been gazing up at since he was nothing but half a pint.

Every now and again, as he’s packing up the boxes to move into the university dorms, he thinks about declining his acceptance and scampering back to the warmth of staying with his grandparents and attending the local university. But each time, he shakes his head, sighs, and scolds himself until he can’t think of anything but that going to SNU is the right choice.

~*~

Now, Wonwoo’s not some hot shot Seoul City Boy™. In fact, he’s not even a City Boy™.
Well, sure, Brisbane was technically a ‘city’ but it was no Sydney or Melbourne (no offense, Brisbane), so that’s that and apple sauce.

Wonwoo’s not a City Boy™.

Which is why, when a car angrily beeps at him because he miscalculated his jaywalk by half a second, he almost trips over his feet, barely makes it onto the footpath, and the moment he does he almost causes a six-person accident.

He’s doing good.

He’s doing fine.

Stop looking at him like that, he’s doing alright!

Trying not to make eye contact with anyone in the area who could have witnessed his slip up, Wonwoo weaves his way around to a safe spot, severely regretting:

1. His decision to go to SNU
2. His decision to take a day trip to Seoul to get a feeling for the city
3. His decision to take said trip without Felix when the kid’s going to the same damn university as him
4. His decision to be born

He returns home earlier than he had planned to, deciding that exploring the depths of Seoul is a problem for another day. And by explore, he now means become acquainted with the convenience store closest to his dormitory, because he’ll never leave the general vicinity of his university.

It sounds like a solid plan.

Okay, so you’ve caught him. Technically, Wonwoo has been to Seoul before. He’s not some little country bumpkin. But Seoul is big, you know? And where he’s wandering around like some Goddamn tourist is a place he’s never been to in his life, and he doesn’t have a single person with him to share the panic with.

He grabs a banana milk from the convenience store behind the bus stop and pulls his cap down over his face before settling down for a trip home.

~*~

Wonwoo is three quarters of the way home when he gets body slammed by the feeling of loneliness again. There are probably better ways to describe it (show don’t tell, he knows, just let him live for once he’s on holidays for God’s sake), but he just gets overwhelmed by the fact that he’s so far from his friends in a way that he never felt when he’d moved from Korea to Australia.

In a fit of Satan knows what, he whips out his phone and decides to shoot Mingyu a text.

He’s too close to his house, he needs to press the buzzer now or the bus won’t stop for him where he needs to get off, but there he is, tapping away at his phone screen.

Bogguy

Hey Mingyu, how are things?

I know today’s the first day of uni for you guys, hope it’s all going okay.
He contemplates adding something about himself, before he realises that Mingyu probably doesn’t care, and he also really needs to get off the bus.

Wonwoo doesn’t look at his phone again until he’s inside the house and burrowed under his blankets, February weather still nipping at his Australia-adjusted senses.

Because he’s an absolute wuss, he decides to scroll through Instagram, then Facebook, then V Live (he missed Day6’s live by 23 minutes while he was on the bus, and he’s kind of salty), then because he’s a shit he checks YouTube, plays Goddamn Flappy Bird which he still hasn’t deleted from his phone, has a peek on SoundCloud to see if his favourite rapper/singer duo 2BASCO has released anything new, makes sure that 3RACHA hasn’t either, and then opens his messages to see if Mingyu has responded.

He should have played Flappy Bird in blissful ignorance for longer.

The read receipt burns at the back of his eyelids.

You really do reap what you sow.

If only he had actually been a decent person to Mingyu.

He laughs.

He sniffs.

“Ugh, winter,” he mumbles. Except it’s not winter that’s making his nose run. He only wishes it was.

“Goodnight, Mingyu.”

He locks his phone and sets it gently on his bedside table, as if it isn’t causing him a lot of grief right now. As if he didn’t just say goodnight to a Godforsaken read receipt like the sad slob he is.

But the thing is, iPhones are stupid. They do things you don’t particularly want them to, and you can never figure out how or even why it happened. Like when you click your home button to get out of an app but it thinks obviously you wanted to have a chat with Siri. Or like how sometimes, you’ll have sent a recording to someone over text and the person on the other side has to listen to 10 seconds of you trying to hold a fart in in front of your brother’s girlfriend as you talk about what type of cheese would be most suitable for a salad with walnuts in it (it’s feta), or half a minute of nothing but the rustling of inside your pocket, or some shit like that.

Wonwoo picks his phone up again to check the time; it’d be great if it was an acceptable hour for him to take a nap without having to worry about if he’ll be able to fall asleep again at night.

“BUBUM! WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH?”

Make it hurt less, Siri, Wonwoo wants to say.

But he doesn’t deserve that.
O-Week: I tried so hard to do research on this word but I just could not for the life of me find out if it was universal or not, so just in case for those of you unaware, o-week stands for Orientation Week and it's just the week before university starts where all the introductory stuff happens. I think Americans say Freshers' Week????
He didn’t mean to.

That’s what Mingyu keeps telling the sick feeling in his stomach.

Really.

He’s not even that mad at Wonwoo anymore. Sure it still kinda hurts, but he gets it.

But it’s probably why it was even harder to respond to Wonwoo’s texts.

It’s worse knowing that Wonwoo still cares about him, and it’s worse knowing that Wonwoo’s mature enough to try and push through it to patch things up.

Unlike him, who’s now sitting in nothing but his underwear writhing around on the living room rug and tearing his hair out.

Mingyu’s classes don’t actually start until tomorrow; he managed to get a really good timetable which means he has Mondays and Fridays off, and he’s really excited for his first lecture tomorrow. His lecturer is a renowned design guru that has her own YouTube channel that Mingyu’s been following for three years now: he literally can’t wait.

The only problem being Mingyu can’t actually bring himself to tell Wonwoo that. He’s scared, and he should probably ask how Wonwoo’s doing, because that’s what real people who care do, but he fears “how are you?” is not enough.

Mingyu wonders if it would’ve been this difficult if Wonwoo had told him he was leaving.

He contemplates calling Minghao over to ask him to help draft a response, but decides against it. The guy would probably say something useless like “write what’s in your heart” before raiding Mingyu’s fridge and waltzing out the door.

Besides, Hao’s probably sick of Mingyu’s snivelling. He thinks everyone is, and it’s fair enough, because he’s sick of himself as well.

He picks himself up and off the floor and trudges up to his room, giving a half-hearted push of his door to close it.
Mingyu’s phone lights up at that moment, and he frowns at the notification that reads “1 Audio Message - 0:13” from Wonwoo.

His eyebrows furrow and he opens it up. He’d honestly forgotten the audio thing was even a function, most of the time they just send them around by accident more than anything, and-

Yeah.

Accident.

Mingyu drops his phone when the recording passes the sound of static and what’s probably blankets shuffling.

There’s a series of snuffles, a very hollow laugh, more snuffles followed by a disgruntled “ugh, winter”, and then a hiccups that signifies the snuffles have nothing to do with the season at all. Unless, of course, Wonwoo just happens to have the hiccups right now.

It’s safe to say Mingyu’s heart drops to the ground along with his phone.

There’s the sound of one last heaving breath before a soft “goodnight, Mingyu” and it’s right at that moment that it occurs to Mingyu that maybe he’s hurt Wonwoo just as much as Wonwoo’s hurt him.

It’s five in the afternoon, but Mingyu doesn’t want the night to come.

~*~

He listens to the recording sixteen more times.

It gets to a point where Minseo bursts in and he doesn’t notice because he’s too busy squeezing the life out of a pillow and blasting the thing through his headphones.

He knew he should’ve closed his door properly.

Minseo yanks the phone from his hands, and scolds Mingyu that their mother’s been calling for him for two minutes, before she puts the headphones on herself to see “what was so damn important for you to let mum lose her voice like that”.

Six seconds in her face contorts, and at eleven seconds her fists open and close. Very slowly, she places Mingyu’s phone on the end of his bed, places the headphones on top of them, and exits the room, pulling the door shut behind her.

“I’ll wash the rice.”

Outside his door, he hears Miyeon question Minseo, and he shrinks into his bed a little more. The problem is he knows Miyeon wouldn’t hesitate to book a flight to Korea just to bitch slap Wonwoo off the planet (and not just because of her high-paying, successful job). The problem is he knows Minseo would splurge on tickets to go with Miyeon so she could also slap Wonwoo for “emotionally manipulating Mingyu like that”.

The problem is his sisters think too good of him, and they have no idea that he’s the one that caused this.

~*~

Eventually, because Mingyu is a creature of habit, he goes crawling to Minghao.
They meet up in the middle in the city, and Mingyu buys the most horrendously sweet thing he can off the Starbucks menu before settling himself down next to his best friend.

“Was it so hard to just text him back?”

Mingyu takes a very long sip of his drink before responding.

“Don’t you think I would’ve done it if I didn’t think it was hard?”

Minghao shrugs.

Mingyu feels stupid. He feels more than stupid. And now here he is, drowning his sorrows in sugar. Lots of it. His mother would be disappointed. No sweet things after 8pm? Try the sweetest thing in your life at 9:30pm.

Whatever, mum. Mingyu’s an adult now, he can do what he wants.

“Why don’t you just ignore the fact that you ever got the audio and text him?” Minghao says breezily after a while. “You know, ‘Hey hyung, uni starts tomorrow for me, sorry I took so long to respond I was walking the dog’ or whatever.”

“How many hours was I walking the dog for?”

“I don’t know, man, I’m trying to help you here! If you don’t wanna lie then be my guest and tell him you were too busy lying on the floor to shoot him a reply.”

Mingyu pouts.

“Well think about it this way instead then. Audio messages expire, right? They expire, and hours later you can’t see them anymore unless you save them. Then how about this: if you just send him a ‘goodnight, Wonwoo!’ then he’ll never know that you also heard him sobbing his heart out, and then you can kick off a conversation from there!”

Minghao’s plan sounds incredibly flawed, but Mingyu’s reached a point where he’s so exasperated with his old sulky self that he nods in agreement.

When he arrives home, he opens iMessages in the safety of his own room, and clears his throat.

“Hi hyung, it was really nice to hear your voice! Good night to you too!”

He can’t bring himself to call Wonwoo by his name just yet, and he feels like he should’ve planned out what to say first, but he thinks it’s progress.

(Unbeknownst to him, Wonwoo hides a confused but shy smile from beneath his blankets when he receives the recording.)

He goes to sleep.
You Have a Very Nice Nose

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

Ok not to be like making excuses in advance or anything but both of us are literally SWAMPED and it only gets worse from here on out so if we have to take a break like,,, please forgive us?? We're trying to write ahead so that we don't have to but things are kind of worse than we expected them to be lmfao

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

26th February, 2018

Wonwoo doesn’t know what he expected.

It’s not like he thought the move to Australia suddenly made him a loud, boisterous extrovert, but somehow, his pea-brained self had presumed that he would be able to navigate his way to his new dorm room while keeping a calm demeanour (one that’s only achievable when he knows where he’s going) without stumbling over his words or his feet.

As the story goes, Jeon Wonwoo bumps into a guy who runs past him in the corridor, almost knocks a girl down the stairs with his suitcase when she tries to help him navigate the building because he didn’t hear her footsteps, and opens his door right into someone’s face.

He likes to think that last one isn’t his fault. Woojin-ssi was the one who was standing right there on his phone with his shoes half on, the doors are very, very opaque (they’re made of wood), and the guy was supposed to have left five minutes earlier until he stopped to look at his notifications.

“Kim Woojin,” the guy smiles, sticking his hand out while pocketing his phone with the other, seemingly completely unbothered about being smacked in the face with a door. “I wouldn’t worry about my nose if I were you, it was already flat to begin with. You know how us Asians are. Not exactly blessed in this department.”

Wonwoo shakes the guy’s hand, thanking God that he’s a nice person and he’s not being torn a new one before university’s even started.

“Although,” Woojin says after a pause, “I have to say you have a very nice nose.”

“Don’t scare away my new roomie, I want him to think we’re normal!” comes a whiney voice from the depths of the dorm room, and a guy with curly hair appears, face dripping with water like he’s just tried to wake himself up.

Wonwoo doesn’t get a chance to say thank you to Woojin about complimenting his nose, because his supposed new roommate (if he’s got the right room) is pushing the guy out of the dorm with great gusto.

“Jeon Wonwoo?” the guy asks once the door is closed, hands occupying themselves by trying to flatten the curls on his head.
At Wonwoo’s nod, he breaks out into a grin.

“Sweet! I’m Bang Chan. Third year Comp. You look like fresh meat, so I’m guessing first year?”

“First year Philosophy,” Wonwoo smiles back at Chan, hoping it doesn’t look tight. Jihoon did tell him his smile was terrible when it wasn’t natural once. And that’s coming from Jihoon.

Bang Chan gives a low whistle, throwing out a joke about Wonwoo helping him to make his lyrics sound more deep and meaningful. He hates that it’s only then that his brain realises that ‘Comp’ stands for composition. Like, the music stuff.

“So you need any help setting up? I kind of cleared my schedule hoping to make a new friend.”

Wonwoo takes the offer gratefully, and he supposes he could say the rest is history.

~*~

“I’m telling you, Felix. I know what I heard. He almost dropped my suitcase because he tripped over the bean bag and he swore in English. This guy has to be Australian. No, he’s not just rural British I can tell the difference, excuse you. Not to mention he was like, suspiciously eyeing my tube of Vegemite. But maybe that’s because Bohyuk decorated it in glitter as a going away present.”

The call ends abruptly after that comment, as Wonwoo finds himself being hung up on. He spends a rough estimate of about six minutes staring at his phone screen in betrayal.

“Jeon Wonwoo let me in!”

He startles and runs for the door to find Felix on the other side, panting like mad and clutching the door jamb for dear life.

“I’m telling you, it’s literally impossible for your roommate to be Australian. That’s like, God having too much fun and God doesn’t do that. He has serious things to take care of, like-”

Felix cuts off, and Wonwoo finally looks up from where he was exasperatedly staring at the ground.

“Chris?” he all but yells, almost knocking Wonwoo to the ground with the force of his voice.

That is, until he’s actually knocked to the ground as Felix rushes forward to wrap Wonwoo’s new roommate in a tight embrace.

Honestly at this point, he just doesn’t want to know.

~*~

Because Felix tends to not be able to shut up once he’s excited, Wonwoo ends up knowing what he didn’t want to know.

‘Chris’, it turns out, is the English name of his new roommate, who happened to be Felix’s next door neighbour in Sydney when the two were children. And to make Australia infinitely smaller (and stranger), the two know Seungkwan (“Oh that’s right!” Felix yells. “I knew he looked familiar in that FaceTime.”) from going to the same damn after school care centre (things are starting to become terrifyingly coincidental for Wonwoo), and they used to yell-sing songs together on the dodgy kids karaoke machine. And on top of that, Chan is friends with Felix’s new roommate Jisung, who’s a part of a rap group with Chan and one other person? Who is a first year at uni like Wonwoo is, but they were all friends from high school. But then they didn’t actually go to the same high school. Or
something. Wonwoo doesn’t know, he’d gotten so used to speaking very strange, mangled Konglish with his friends that so much rapid-fire English is doing his head in.

“Yeah, we’re called 3RACHA. You know, like the hot sauce sriracha? But there’s three of us. We haven’t done anything spectacular yet, but I mean we have a following on Soundcloud and we have lots of fun, so.”

Wonwoo almost gives himself whiplash turning his head to face Chan at that, eyes wide. “You’re 3RACHA? My new roommate is 3RACHA?”

There’s a very long pause of silence as Chan’s eyes also grow wide, like he can’t believe of all the people to have as a roommate he has a fan of his work. He quickly composes himself though, and with a sly smirk asks if Wonwoo knows which one he is.

“CB97, of course. I should have recognised your voice sooner.”

“What are you, a groupie?” Felix snorts, as if people still actually use the word groupie.

“How did- how did you find us?” Chan asks, ignoring Felix.

Which is how Wonwoo finds himself going into great detail the expansion of his music taste thanks to Hansol, who he swears scours Soundcloud for two hours each night before going to bed to find new up and coming artists.

“Hansol is a die hard 3RACHA fan, but I have to say I’m a bit more of a 2BASCO person.”

Felix whispers a “Top 10 Anime Betrayals” under his breath which again, everyone in the room ignores, and Chan lights up at the mention of the sort-of-kind-of-rival group, saying he’s always admired their work and wondered who they were. It was quite evident in their voices that they had to be at the very most young university students, and as a rap and vocal duo they had a very different sound to a lot of the other rookie SoundCloud artists. They joke about 2BASCO also being SNU students, then the conversation drifts away.

At some point (and honestly, Wonwoo needs to stop being surprised that things like this keep happening), Wonwoo finds his dorm room cramped with people, most of whom are the same age as him and just starting university, which is a little bit of comfort in the haze of suddenly being faced with so many people.

Woojin is back again, and Felix’s roommate Jisung barges in dragging four other people (Hyungjin? Jongin? Seungmin? A mean hoe?). Wonwoo thinks he must just attract large groups of rowdy Koreans, but Chan tells him that the gathering they have isn’t even all of them.

Thankfully, before Wonwoo can drop his drink (although does he even have the right to when his group of friends back in Australia was even larger), Chan tells him they’re just missing one person, who happens to be SpearB. As Wonwoo’s favourite rapper of 3RACHA (don’t tell Chan), he’s a little disappointed, but he starts up a conversation with a fellow suffering first year named Seungmin, and as they complain the night away on the woes of the unknown, Wonwoo thinks maybe he’ll be alright in Korea.

Chapter End Notes
No Aussie Dictionary here, but just a clarification on Stray Kids' ages in this universe because we changed it up a bit:

- Bang Chan, 1997
- Kim Woojin, 1997
- Lee Minho, 1998
- Seo Changbin, 1999
- Hwang Hyunjin, 1999
- Han Jisung, 1999
- Lee Felix, 1999
- Kim Seungmin, 1999
- Yang Jeongin, 2001

(hey ho can y'all tell i'm salty about people who have real noses that they can breathe through because)
It’s raining.

Perhaps it’s not the most disastrous thing that could happen, but Wonwoo forgot his umbrella and is standing in the middle of a courtyard, rain pouring down around his ears. It’s not the end of the world, but he’s functioning on 2 hours of sleep after trying to complete the ridiculous amount of work that’s been assigned to them in the first week of semester. It’s not an absolute catastrophe, but he’s already been yelled at in his Intro to Philosophy class for not completing the assigned reading, despite the fact that the university’s internal server was down.

(He wouldn’t have read it if it was online, but don’t tell his lecturer that. Turns out philosophy is dead boring.)

And after all of that, he still has an afternoon class to go to; a first year Economics course that he’s taking for a minor, something he’s still cursing himself for. Wonwoo just really doesn’t care about opportunity cost.

So while the rain perhaps isn’t the worst thing in the world, it’s pretty shitty for Wonwoo when all he wants to do is curl up and sleep until the end of his degree.

He’s still standing in the courtyard, students rushing either side of him as the minutes count down until 2pm. He has to leave now if he wants to make it across campus in time for the Economics lecture, but he just can’t make his feet move.

A girl’s umbrella clips him in the ear, and Wonwoo stumbles a little, thrown off balance by the skid of the rain and his uneasy brain. There’s a muffled apology before the girl hurries on, and soon she’s lost in the sea of people, waves of anonymity pushing in from all directions, and Wonwoo’s slowly sinking.

He checks his phone. He’ll be late for his class, and he’s not keen to turn up as a dripping mess and get an infinitely worse side-eye from the lecturer. It’s not a hard to decision to turn back in the direction of the dorms. So Wonwoo starts slowly wandering that way, wondering whether his feet obey him now that it’s towards somewhere he actually wants to go.

Either way, Wonwoo’s not going to class but straight to his bed. He’s been having doona withdrawals. There’s nothing a good nap can’t fix, he contemplates as he looks up, finding a piece of sun shining through the gloomy clouds. He smiles. And perhaps the rain isn’t quite as abrasive on the way back.

Wonwoo doesn’t regret skipping class at all when he steps into the warmth of the dorms, sighing heavily and dripping water all over the thankfully tiled floor.

He reaches his door and is just about push it open, when someone opens it for him. Wonwoo smiles, waiting for Chan to appear, but all he can see is Felix and Jisung looking far too suspicious for their own good.

Felix doesn’t bat an eye at the circumstances, just letting out a happy yell.
“Oh Wonwoo! You’re just in time, mate. We’re about to pull off the prank of the century,” Felix shouts, all sense of stealth disappearing as he smiles enough to rival sunshine.

“What the hell were you doing in my room though?” he asks, trying hard not to let his smile show. The cons of positive reinforcement and all that.

“Oh we just needed some supplies, don’t worry; Chan let us in.”

Jisung nods solemnly from behind Felix, his floppy fringe bouncing up and down.

“Well that doesn’t sound suspicious at all,” Wonwoo teases, slightly gleeful when Felix starts to pout.

“Look, okay, this Donghyuck kid stole my Rice Bubbles! I brought a few boxes with me from Australia and I want them to last,” Felix whines, stomping his foot in anger. “This calls for revenge. Now are you in or are you out?”

Wonwoo just hums. There was a time when he would have walked through the still open door, shut it firmly and proceed to forget all about pranks and fun and anything that might make him live a little. But Wonwoo’s done with being his least favourite version of himself.

He thought he’d been done months ago, but sometimes he wonders.

“Sounds dangerous. Let’s do it,” he grins, but then takes a moment to consider. “Just let me dry off first.”

Felix shoots him a salute, and Wonwoo goes to grab some clothes. He walks into the bathroom, but leaves the door open, calling out to Felix as he does.

“So, what’s the plan, Felix?”

“Well, it’s actually my idea, and let me tell you, it is brilliant,” Jisung all but cackles, voice gleeful at the thought of all the mischief they’re going to get up to.

Wonwoo smiles as he towels his hair off, imaging the grins stretched over their faces.

“Do tell.”

“Alright, so Donghyuck is in my marketing class and he just got his hair dyed this super bright shade of red. He’s obsessed with it, said it makes him look like a fire truck or something. But the best part - he spent a tonne of money on it.”

Wonwoo knows where this is going.

“Oh god guys, really?” he asks, pulling on the dry clothes and wandering back out into the room.

“Yes, really,” Felix says, “we’re gonna fill his shampoo with bleach and bam! His hair is ruined and my Rice Bubbles have been avenged.”

The glee in his eyes is honestly terrifying, but Wonwoo would be lying if he said he didn’t love it just a little.

“You’ve got the bleach then?”

“Yep!” Jisung pulls a bottle out of his backpack, “it’s Chan’s. He’s got miles of it, he just let us take it.”
Wonwoo just laughs.

“He really shouldn’t enable you guys. But what the hell, let’s go fuck up this dude’s hair.”

And with that, Wonwoo leads the other two out of the room, before realising he actually has no clue where Donghyuck’s dorm is and stops right in the middle of the corridor. Felix runs into him, and then Jisung runs into Felix and they’re all very close to tumbling down onto the floor like very overgrown, hyper dominoes.

“Wait, where are we actually going?” he asks, reaching out to steady them all.

Felix giggles. Honest to god giggles.

“This is the best part. He lives right across the hall from you. Quick getaway.”

They decide that Wonwoo’s the best one to be lookout - he literally lives here, so no one will bat an eye at him loitering in the corridor. Jisung uses Felix’s debit card to open the lock, which, surprisingly, actually works and Wonwoo’s suddenly terrified of what else Jisung is hiding behind that squirrel smile.

The two sneak inside, careful not to slam the door, and Wonwoo sits down in the corridor, takes out his phone, and waits. He’s got a Snapchat from Jun. It’s a cute selfie of him, Minghao and Fengjun, all grinning cheesily around slices of watermelon. Wonwoo can see an ugly green fence in the background and knows it was taken in Jun’s backyard, and he’s suddenly hit by how much he misses the ageing swing set and patchy drought-ridden lawn.

He sends his own selfie back; a dodgy shot from a completely unflattering angle, but it makes Wonwoo feel just a little bit closer to home, and he knows Jun will appreciate it and screenshot it with a laugh.

He spends a few more minutes messing around on his phone, but he chucks it to the side when he realises he’s been staring at his chat log with Mingyu for way too long.

Wonwoo sighs. He waits for Felix and Jisung. He wishes Mingyu would text him.

Soon enough, the two boys creep out of Donghyuck’s room, elated and flashing thumbs up. They all pile back into Wonwoo’s room and spend the rest of the afternoon lazing around eating whatever snacks they can scrounge (an unfortunately large amount came from Donghyuck’s stash, but no one needs to know that).

It’s only when Wonwoo’s halfway through his second banana milk when he thinks to ask.

“Wait guys, how did you know that Donghyuck wouldn’t be there?”

Jisung turns red, a little from laughter, a little from embarrassment.

“That marketing class we share? That should be finishing up just about now.”

It’s all Wonwoo can do not to fall off the bed in his own fit of laughter, because him too. His heart feels lighter, lying there with two other boys, trying desperately to not spill banana milk all over Chan’s bed as they roll around in laughter.

It may not have been the best morning in the history of mornings, but the afternoon brought it well back.
And he’ll be damned if his smile isn’t back by the next day, when he sees a short, grumpy boy stomping around, red hair tainted by angry yellow patches.
I’m Emo, Don’t Talk to Me

Chapter by jezza

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

20th March, 2018

There’s only so much Starbucks Minghao can take before he shoves one of those flimsy little greens straws up Mingyu’s arse. He’s lost count of how many times they’ve come to this exact same Starbucks to sit in this exact same seat and mope around about Wonwoo being an A+ idiot but pretending that that’s not the real issue here. Mingyu seems perfectly content to blame it on a sudden frappuccino craving.

(“But the double choc-chip flavour, Minghao! You don’t understand!”)

He really doesn’t understand.

Today, Mingyu’s dressed in his ‘I’m emo, don’t talk to me’ outfit, which consists of a lovely old black t-shirt that’s sporting too many holes for Minghao’s taste, and a disgusting beanie that he’s 97% sure is Wonwoo’s. Weakling. Watch Minghao never be this pathetic about a boy.

Minghao taps the table lightly, drawing Mingyu’s attention away from scooping up the last of his whipped cream.

“How’s Wonwoo?” he asks, watching closely for the way Mingyu’s eyes have been clouding up at the mention of the other boy. Sure enough, it’s there, and while Mingyu’s learnt to look away, Minghao’s learnt to catch the heartbeat.

He’d thought things had been a little easier since Wonwoo had sent that godforsaken audio message and Mingyu had sent his own awkward one back, but something’s still not quite right. Mingyu’s tearing his napkin into smaller and smaller pieces, and Minghao lets him. He needs to let it out somehow.

“I don’t know, Hao. I thought it was gonna get better after those audio messages? Like, maybe we’d starting talking normally again and just ignore all the weirdness but now it’s a different kind of weird. Awkwardness, I suppose. Like we’re just acquaintances,” Mingyu says, moving on to fiddle with his cup. “It hurts.”

“I know,” Minghao sighs, “I guess you’ve just got to keep trying. He’ll snap out of it soon enough, just let him adjust.”

“I have been. It’s just hard, seeing him have this wild time with all his new friends. I feel like he’s decided I’m not worth it.”

“Alright. That’s enough with the moping. That’s enough with the goddamn frappuccinos. We’re going to Jun’s.”
An hour and a half later and they’re spread out on Jun’s grass, far too many Caramello Koala wrappers littered around them to be healthy. Mingyu’s still distracted; pulling blades of grass out and tearing them up onto Jun’s shoe. Maybe he’s a bit bitter from earlier, when they’d first arrived and Minghao had made the mistake of asking Jun about Wonwoo.

“Junnie, how’s Wonwoo at the moment?” He’d asked, expecting Jun to catch his glance and lay all of Mingyu’s worries to rest. But, unfortunately, Jun had decided to bury his head in the pantry (so maybe it wasn’t *that* bad of a mistake) and he’d missed Minghao’s subtle message.

“What, Wonwoo? Yeah he’s fine, having fun and all that. He met 3RACHA, how wild is that? And Felix is still around too, I think he’s getting Wonwoo to actually go outside, which is great,” Jun had said, and then turned around to find Minghao with his head on the counter and a slightly distraught Mingyu. “Ah…”

“Mingyu, don’t stress it,” Minghao had muttered, face still pressed into the counter. “He still loves you, etcetera etcetera. Just give it some time.”

“Yeah, what he said,” Jun had contributed, then finally found the Caramello Koalas and dragged them all outside.

So there they are, getting bitten by the ants they’d attracted with the sugar overload, sitting in relative silence while Mingyu destroys the lawn. Minghao doesn’t really know how to help him anymore, so he’s just hoping Mingyu goes into a sugar coma or Wonwoo comes to his senses. Whichever happens first.

Maybe it’s the sugar high, or maybe it’s just Jun, but he surprises Minghao by getting up and pulling him up with him.

“Jun, what are you doing?”

Jun giggles.

“Fun, Haohao. You should try it sometime,” he teases, dragging Minghao over to the hills hoist.

“Oh my god, I’ve done this enough to last a lifetime,” Minghao grumbles, but still reaches up to grab onto the rusting metal. “Come on Mingyu, you have to as well,” he calls, and Mingyu slowly unfolds his legs and wanders over.

Jun kicks them off the ground, and they spin around a little slowly, what with all the weight that comes from Mingyu’s ridiculously long legs, but they spin nonetheless, squealing like they did back when they were fourteen year olds on the very same hills hoist.

Mingyu falls off and rolls down the hill at one point, but he brushes himself off with a grin and gets right back to it. Minghao smiles. Hills hoists are truly magic.

They keep spinning for a while, but Mingyu eventually goes home, once he’s made himself dizzy and perhaps a little sick from the terrible combination of chocolate, caramel and clothes lines. Minghao hugs him goodbye at the door, holding on as tight as he can and booping Mingyu on the head despite the height difference.

“Text me when you get home,” he murmurs, and Mingyu nods, then he’s out the door with a wave from Jun and one last squeeze from Minghao.
Jun walks up behind Minghao and wraps his arms around him.

“They’ll sort it out,” he says, laying his head on Minghao’s shoulder. “They always do.”

“I don’t know about this time, Junnie, Mingyu’s really upset. I just want them to stop hurting each other.”

“I know, Hao. Me too.”

They end up on the sofa, Parallax playing off Youtube because Jun had decided what they needed was a nice comforting throwback binge. Minghao’s half laying on Jun, a pillow clutched in one hand, Jun’s hand in the other.

“Junnie,” he whispers, too afraid to say it any louder, “do you think they’re soulmates?”

Jun just hums. Minghao sits up straight.

“Wen Junhui do you know something I don’t? What did we say about keeping secrets?”

Jun laughs and Minghao totally doesn’t slap him with the pillow.

“Not to do such a terrible thing ever in our lives, I know. But I’m not, don’t worry. I know just as much as you,” he says, pulling the pillow from Minghao’s grip and pushing the younger boy back to lie down. “We’ll just have to wait and see, Mingyu’s birthday is soon enough. But don’t meddle Hao, let them figure it out.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Minghao grumbles, grabbing Jun’s hand again. “I hope they are soulmates, though. It’ll solve this whole thing. And I don’t know what Mingyu’s gonna do if they’re not. He’ll be heartbroken.”

Minghao closes his eyes and relaxes into Jun’s hand that’s combing through his hair.

“I just want them to be happy.”

Jun just hums again.

“They will be Hao, they will be.”

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Parallax: An absolutely brilliant old kids’ tv show about parallel worlds. The ultimate ‘only ’90s kids will remember’. 
It’s the first of April, today. All things considered (read: all friends considered), he should have realised the significance of that, but somehow, his brain doesn’t quite register it. Even when Chan gives him a good old “pinch and a punch for the first day of the month!” as he’s pouring cereal in his bowl with a “white rabbit” for good measure (as if Wonwoo would actually have the energy at this time in the morning to even try to return the favour), it isn’t until he’s in his first lecture of the day that he realises that it’s the first of April.

He just happens to be the dumbarse who chooses to sit in the one chair in the entire lecture hall that has an air horn taped right underneath it, and as he settles down into his seat, he sets off a blast of sound.

It’s a good thing, he supposes, that he’s a somewhat diligent student and is ten minutes early, but even so an entire seven people watched the events unfurl. He hears Jisung’s laughter travelling down the corridor (he’s learnt the sound of that cackle), and he concludes the only solution is revenge.

With his target identified, he shoots Seungmin a text to ask for an accomplice.

The response is immediate, and positive.

~*~

It’s not a great day.

First of all, he had a lecture on a Sunday morning, all because his professor was sick the week before and wanted to make sure everyone was “up to speed!!!!!”.

Except his professor was never sick.

And they’d all been pranked.

“Sorry, guys!” his professor winks as he waltzes in a full 25 minutes late. “I just couldn’t help myself. But I honestly do have a treat for those of you who have bothered to show up, so don’t you worry.”

Wonwoo has grounds not to believe him (the guy is suspiciously like Mr. Kim from ESL, but without the chicken-delivering boyfriend because he’s younger and engaged to a female who doesn’t deliver chicken), but he takes the bag of treats the guy offers anyway.

“Ah,” the man’s face falls. “I didn’t expect so many of you to actually come, I didn’t make enough bags. I’ll be right back!”

All in all, it could have been worse.

Wonwoo walks out with his treat bag, leaving grumbling students behind.
Anyway, onto the second of all.

Wonwoo comes to the horrific realisation, on this fine April Fool’s Day, that he in fact does not enjoy studying Philosophy, and, unfortunately without any sarcasm whatsoever, completely and utterly wishes to withdraw from the course.

There’s something about it that just doesn’t feel right inside of him, it’s like the course doesn’t click with him. And maybe Wonwoo’s just being sensitive; maybe courses aren’t always supposed to click and he’s just being idealistic, or maybe the click just takes time, but as much as he thought this was what he wanted, it feels more and more like it isn’t.

He much preferred his days of staying up until four in the morning learning about Philosophy.

Learning and studying, Wonwoo finds, are two very different things.

It sucks.

The problem is, he’s having a good time. He has new friends, one good professor, two mediocre ones and one shite one (which is a really good ratio), and on paper, Wonwoo should be having the time of his life.

But it doesn’t feel right.

He’s not having the time of his life.

Wonwoo sits down at a booth in the corner at the cafe he’s meeting Seungmin, and as he nurses a latte (there are no flat whites), he slips into a daydream.

In his little fantasy world, he’s back in Australia. He’s finished his class for the morning, and he’s having a picnic in the grass with his friends in an area of the campus where they technically shouldn’t be.

Jeonghan is picking on Jeongin and tying his hair into little pig tails, and Mingyu is being piggybacked by Changbin, who’s pretending to be a horse. Seungkwan, Felix and Chan are reminiscing their childhood, and other Chan (actually, which one is other Chan? Is Bang Chan other Chan because he came into Wonwoo’s life later, or is Lee Chan other Chan because he’s the younger Chan? Why are there always so many Chans?), is bonding with Woojin. Kris the delivery guy is there somehow, and so is PCWHY, who’s having a jam session with Jihoon and Jisung.

It’s a really nice daydream. A mess of a daydream, but a nice one. Even so, it’s a daydream that Wonwoo realises very quickly, can’t be a reality.

Belatedly he notices his childhood friends aren’t there, and he mentally apologises to them, Bin and Dongmin especially, after everything they’ve been through together. He wonders when it was that he’d become such a horrible friend to them.

With a sinking feeling, he comes to the conclusion that it was even before he ever left Korea, but he prays he can pass it off as them going their own ways.

It was true, after all, as much as he didn’t want it to be. The fact that sometimes, you’ll grow out of your childhood friendships.

“You good, dude?” Seungmin asks as he settles in across from him with a steaming mug of tea.

“Sorry I’m late, I was just-”
Wonwoo doesn’t let him finish with the look he gives him. A quick once over of the state of Seungmin’s hair and he knows what made him five minutes late.

(Plus, it’s only five minutes. Although thinking about it, Seungmin is a stickler for being a minimum of ten minutes early to everything.)

“Hyunjin.”

Seungmin flushes momentarily.

“I was just Hyunjin. Okay. Yeah.”

“He has nice handwriting,” Wonwoo says conversationally, glad to get his thoughts away from what they were on before.

“Oh?” Seungmin responds through a sip from his mug.

“Mmm, you have a nice tattoo, so.”

Wonwoo swears Seungmin almost snorts his tea out through his nostrils, and has a good chuckle over it.

Changbin had told him about the dynamics of their group a few nights before, although if Wonwoo were being honest he didn’t really need to be told.

“They’re trying to be lowkey about it,” Changbin had said. “Hyunjin has some… rabid fans, you know.”

Wonwoo found it laughable, really. He had noticed that the two were touchier when they were hanging around in the dorm, but Hyunjin was *horrific* at hiding his affection for Seungmin regardless; if any fan couldn’t see that they had to be blind. It’s probably more laughable that Seungmin thought he could hide such a thing from Wonwoo, though. They’re both known for being observant.

“My handwriting’s better,” Seungmin sneers after a pause that’s too long.

They sit there, chatting away and plotting Jisung’s untimely death, and all of Wonwoo’s worries melt away, just in that moment.

They don’t stay away, but it’s a nice moment.

A moment where he’s kind of like “white rabbit”.

Immune, if only for a fleeting second.

Chapter End Notes

Australian Dictionary:

- Pinch and a punch for the first day of the month: I totally did not realise this wasn’t totally universal until I went to Google it to double check? It’s something that comes from Britain, and it’s just a thing you grow up with, I suppose. On the
first day of the month you try and pinch and punch someone. It's a pretty harmless prank that's only effective until 12pm!

- **White Rabbit**: White rabbit is immunity against being pinched and punched back if you've attacked someone! Total bullshit, but we say it anyway. Amongst my friends, we always used to continuously say stronger animals just so we could keep punching each other...
- **Flat white**: An Aussie coffee! It's just a cap but without all the froth.
He awakes a wreck.

To be absolutely honest, Wonwoo’s more nervous than he was for his own birthday, and he knows exactly why.

He’s a coward, he supposes.

It’s not even ‘supposes’, he just straight up is.

If he thinks about it rationally, he moved back to Korea for university because it’s been what he’s always wanted, basically ever since he knew what university was. He’s just following the plan he set out for himself. It’s what he wanted, with the only problem being that maybe he should be taking the word ‘wanted’ more seriously.

Wanted.

God, it keeps niggling at the back of his mind and Wonwoo’s always been afraid of mistakes and yet here he is, making a fucking mess of everything over and over like some sort of masochistic bastard.

He regrets it, kind of. Not telling Mingyu. He doesn’t really know who he was trying to save by doing that, considering it hasn’t helped anyone. Not himself, not Mingyu, not any of his friends.

Wonwoo sucks it up, if only to be a good friend one last time before Mingyu shuts off all connection forever. Things had been going alright again, and Wonwoo can’t help but feel like it was all for nothing. One last taste of what he left behind wasn’t as comforting as he wanted it to be.

Boggyu

Happy Birthday! See you tonight.

Wonwoo had considered, for one moment, declining the Skype call invitation to Mingyu’s birthday party. An act of cowardice, as always, seeing as apparently that’s all he’s capable of. But the feeling of missing everyone back in Australia won over, and he knew he owed it to Mingyu to be there.

One last time.
Wonwoo wonders if he’ll be able to scrub hard enough that his soulmate tattoo will wash off like a stubborn permanent marker. He wonders if that’s possible, once Mingyu hates him.

He wanders out of his bedroom and plonks himself down beside his roommate a little closer than usual, where a mug of coffee on its way to turning cold sits waiting for him. Chan smiles at him, vegemite smeared across his lips (Wonwoo was never going to eat it anyway), his body radiating a warmth that inches Wonwoo’s heart rate down. He stares into the mug, letting his thoughts drift away.

“I think he loves you.”

Wonwoo had opened up to his new friends in a moment of weakness, while they were sprawled out on Felix and Jisung’s dorm room floor, drinking soju (No, he doesn’t condone underage drinking but like, come on, at least he’s legal in Australia…? Besides, Jeongin isn’t there because they know not to be bad influences on their little high schooler), uno cards scattered about with everyone too lazy to pack them up.

“You’re joking,” Wonwoo had laughed. “Even if he did, he definitely doesn’t anymore.”

“Ehh, I wouldn’t be so sure,” Felix had shrugged. And Wonwoo should have known the two-timing bitch would side with Seungmin instead of him.

Changbin was the only person he’d told about Mingyu’s birthday, in the end. It was laughable: Wonwoo, crouched next to the SpearB, somehow just drunk enough to be spilling secrets out in the hallway, away from the snores of the rest of their friends in the living room.

“There are a lot of things I could be telling you to do,” SpearB says. “Like tell him now before he finds out for himself, but I know you won’t do them.”

“Thank you for your faith,” Wonwoo rolls his eyes.

“I know you won’t because I wouldn’t either.”

It doesn’t take long for Changbin to open up. Not after the horrific amounts of soju they’d downed. He tells Wonwoo about how he’s always kept his tattoo hidden too. Only 3RACHA knows about it. And Wonwoo too, now.

“I know it’s him. He looked at me with such hopeful eyes when we first met, and I just panicked. He thinks it’s a different Changbin. See? We’re practically in the same, fucked up boat. Take a look at that.”

“You should tell him,” Wonwoo says, matter-of-factly. “He likes you a lot already. You probably do too, since your ears are on fire.”

“I’ll tell him when you tell Mr. Kim Mingyu.”

Touché.

~*~

Eventually, Chan leaves for class, leaving Wonwoo at the dining table with his cheek against the surface.

Wonwoo wonders if it’s bad motivation to confess to Mingyu just so that Felix can find his soulmate. He doesn’t know why, but the concept of doing it for Felix is less daunting than that of doing it for
Either way he doesn’t do it at all, and far too soon it’s 4:30, 5:30 over in Australia, and he’s waving to the masses over a pixelated screen, watching on as everyone dons their construction cone party hats. Wonwoo hates that he wishes he were there, even though it’s his own damn fault for moving away.

It’s a sleepover, Mingyu’s entire family cleared out of the house (they had insisted, not wanting to be present for the mess they knew was going to happen) and the floor covered in nothing but blow up mattresses and streamers that refuse to stay up on the walls.

Wonwoo sits at his desk, looking away from Jihoon spanking Soonyoung for using his head as an armrest to try and finish a question or two of his homework. A blurry Seokmin comes over to offer him a piece of cake, and Wonwoo smiles, complying by opening his mouth widely.

Time passes really quickly, even for Wonwoo who’s having second-hand fun, and it’s halfway into their second movie (God bless rabb.it because he was not in for watching a doubly pixelated rendition of *The Incredibles*) that Wonwoo realises it’s 8:20 where he is.

8:20, also known as 9:20, down in Australia.

9:20, four minutes away from the time Wonwoo was born.

9:20, four minutes away from Mingyu getting his tattoo if the universe isn’t going to play sick jokes on them.

Wonwoo almost wants it to play that sick joke, if it means he doesn’t have to watch Mingyu get hurt by him all over again.

He closes the tab of the movie, no longer comfortable enough to watch it. He stares out at all the pixelated versions of his friends, faces illuminated by the screen of the television and mouths stuffed with lollies. Mingyu shifts, reaching a hand out for a sour strap.

He licks his fingers after devouring it, then his hand stops from where it was travelling for another strap, and Mingyu looks down. In the dim light, he squints at his wrist, trying to be discreet enough that the rest of the group won’t notice.

Wonwoo doesn’t know what to do. Everything feels in slow motion, the way Mingyu looks over at him, disbelief slapped across his face, with a pixel of betrayal. Wonwoo’s crying, he knows he is, and in a fit of cowardice, he hangs up the Skype call.

The regret is instant. He frantically calls Mingyu’s phone, international fees be damned, but he barely gets past a few rings before he gets stopped. He should’ve sucked it up, he should’ve told him, should’ve stayed, should’ve been there, should have done literally anything, but Wonwoo just never learns. All these academics, and not a cell dedicated to being a decent human being.

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE MOST HANDSOME <3 <3 JUNHUI

Jun?

Jun.

Jun please
Please

Jun

Is Mingyu alright?

Check on him

Please

Jun

He

Is he

Locked door dude what happened?

What did you do

Explain

I'm sorry

Fine, well do this later

But god help me wonwoo you WILL TELL ME
Mingyu doesn’t know what to expect when he wakes up in the morning. He’d had a good night’s rest thanks to the champagne from the night before, his family celebrating his birthday a day early so that he could spend it for real surrounded by his friends.

If you’d asked him a couple months back, he would have said plain and easy that he wanted to wake up with Wonwoo’s name on his wrist. He was so completely and embarrassingly besotted that he goes red even just thinking about it.

Now, he doesn’t know what it is he wants. He knows his heart still prays for it to be Wonwoo, but his mind — Mingyu’s mind would do anything to make sure his wrist didn’t bare that name. It occurs to him only then, as he’s sitting up in his bed with his hair a mess and his wrist still blank, that he doesn’t know what Wonwoo’s wrist says.

As far as he’s aware, no one does.

It dawns on him too, that maybe part of Wonwoo’s returning back to Korea was in search of his soulmate. And amongst all of that, Mingyu just had to be that idiot who’d tried to ask him out.

At that moment, Mingyu looks to his wrist before closing his eyes in prayer. He wants a generic name, like something that’ll be hard to find but rewarding when he gets there.

He forgets to wonder if Wonwoo is a common name or not.

~*~

Mingyu is forced to sit in a corner blindfolded when his friends arrive. Without even his phone to keep him company, all he can do is twiddle his thumbs as he listen to the complete and utter chaos surrounding him.

At one point, an out of breath Seungcheol shoves a balloon in his mouth and commands him to start blowing, but other than that, for Mingyu, everything is pretty uneventful.

When the blind is finally taken off him, Mingyu is grateful that his family decided to leave the house empty for his birthday party, because he has a feeling his mother would scream at the sight. It’s festive, maybe a few too many streamers (he can bet his money it’s left overs from Chan’s party), and he can’t even see the floor he’s walking on.

It’s perfect.

~*~
It doesn’t take long for Mingyu to forget that it’s his eighteenth birthday. They’re all laughing and having too much fun, and the only thing that reminds Mingyu it’s not a normal day with his friends is Wonwoo, who’s there with them through the screen of his laptop.

Mingyu gets a pie to his face, that Seokmin actually eats, which, he has to say, is probably the most disgusting thing he’s ever experienced in his life because he could feel the spoon Seokmin was using to scoop the pie up scrape against his skin and it was just — blergh. Definitely something he’ll be doing to Seokmin at the next celebration they have as payback.

When his face is clean of pie (because he washed it, not because Seokmin licked his face clean), there’s real pie waiting for him to eat and not be smothered with, and he honestly almost cries because it’s three tiers, with apple pie at the bottom, cake in the middle and brownie at the top.

A true masterpiece that Mingyu devours far too quickly.

They settle for movies after they’ve eaten too much. They’re all tired, old hags who don’t have the energy to do anything else, and a film is a great excuse to snack even more than they should.

Mingyu ends up napping a little during the first movie, and as much as he wants to apologise to foetus Joseph Gordon-Levitt, he’s just seen 10 Things I Hate About You far too many times, Wen Junhui, if you could please for the love of God stop putting it on at every damn chance.

(Mingyu’s not salty.)

He’s a little groggy when his eyes open to see Bianca deck Joey in the face, but he heaves a sigh of relief with the knowledge that he didn’t miss his favourite scene. When the movie ends, Mingyu is adamant that they watch The Incredibles in honour of the sequel finally coming out this year, and there are many who turn to him with grateful smiles as the heathens of his friendship group pout and put Human Centipede away.

Mingyu did not come here to watch horror movies.

Anyone who thinks otherwise is welcome to leave his house.

The movie starts.

~*~

Despite his bursting stomach, Mingyu feels peckish. He feels no shame in the fact, considering Soonyoung started stuffing his face with popcorn five seconds after proclaiming that he ate so much cake he felt like he was going to throw up.

He reaches into Seungcheol’s lap where the chips are, and grabs a sufficient handful of Doritos. Seconds later, it proves not enough, and he scans the area in front of him to find where all the sour straps are. They’re sitting against Jun’s leg, barely touched. With the love of his life acquired, Mingyu happily sucks the sour powder off, munching on the strap and licking his fingers before reaching for another one.

He’s halfway to Jun again when there’s a strange tingle on his right wrist that causes him to look down. Stupidly, Mingyu wonders if it’s some sort of allergic reaction to the sour strap before he remembers what day it is today.

He squints at his wrist, but it’s too dark. Not wanting to draw anyone’s attention away from the movie, he brings his arm closer to him. So far no one has noticed, and Mingyu desperately wants to keep it that way.
The name is five letters in when Mingyu’s finally found a safe position to view his wrist in.

He doesn’t know what he was supposed to be expecting.

The last ‘o’ forms, and he looks straight to the laptop where Wonwoo’s been forgotten by the rest of their friends. He thinks he sees tears, because the light’s glinting off his pixelated face really strangely, and the expression on his face is nothing but scared.

Mingyu doesn’t have much time to analyse it though, because it disappears in seconds.

“I’m going to bed, guys,” Mingyu says, standing up.

Everything is numb.

~*~

He tries to walk as slowly as possible to his room. It’s not that he wants anyone to stop him, but he needs to keep up the act that he’s tired and ready for bed. It’s not so hard to do considering he was fast asleep for a lot of *10 Things I Hate About You*, but some of his friends are scarily perceptive, so if there’s a precaution he can take he’s going for it.

He feels his phone vibrate in his hand, but he doesn’t check it until his door is closed.

Already, there are three missed calls from Wonwoo. They keep coming, and each time, Mingyu declines as soon as his screen lights up with “Wonuwu~”.

God, he needs to change the contact name.

Faintly, he hears Chan ask where Wonwoo went, and Mingyu holds back a choked laugh. Jihoon answers that it was probably ended because of bad connection. Illegally streaming movies does use wifi, after all.

If only that were the case.

Mingyu keeps blocking Wonwoo’s calls from coming through until they stop. There’s five minutes of pure silence in his room where he feels like he can finally breathe, until he hears footsteps coming towards his door.

“Mingyu?” Jun’s voice timidly asks.

He tries to open the door.

Good thing Mingyu locked it.

“Let me sleep, Jun.”

He’s surprised with how stable his voice is.

“Alright, dude. See you tomorrow then.”

Mingyu is glad Jun has the sense to drop it, but he also regrets asking the guy to leave. It means he’s got a lot of time on his hands to dwell on what’s happened, and he doesn’t really know if that’s what he wants.

It’s certainly something that he needs, but humans have a tendency to prioritise their wants over their needs. Take for instance that time when Mingyu only had three bucks on his person and was dying
of dehydration, but his dumb arse decided to buy a finger bun from the bakery close to his primary school instead.

It’s a good thing Mingyu doesn’t know what he wants right now.

If he thinks about it, everything starts to make sense. Despite the initial annoyance from Wonwoo’s side, Wonwoo and Mingyu had become fast friends, though he has to say with some amount of jealousy that Wonwoo and Junhui were faster. Wonwoo took Mingyu’s aegyo exceedingly well when he was pleading for bubble tea (if a disapproving scrunch of his nose could count as exceedingly well); when Seungcheol had done the same, he’d been smacked up the head.

Clearly the sign of a good bond.

They’d been on dates. And they were dates, even though neither of them were able to admit it. Wonwoo let Mingyu hug him. Not always, but sometimes. That was something. But then he thinks about it, really thinks about it, and maybe it was just Mingyu all along. Maybe Wonwoo just got tired of having to push incessant, stupid little Mingyu away all the time and just… let him be.

He can hear Minghao telling him that’s not true in his head, but really, Minghao thinks everything Mingyu says isn’t true because again, he’s stupid.

Wonwoo left him. Wonwoo left him for Korea, and that honestly tells him enough. It tells him firstly, that Minghao’s wrong for once and Mingyu’s right, but it also tells him that maybe, if Wonwoo had the guts to leave, then Mingyu’s name wasn’t on his wrist. It was a one-sided soulmate-ship.

Mingyu kind of wishes that were the case. Then he remembers the tears on Wonwoo’s face, how he’d hung up the moment Mingyu looked over at him: there was no way.

They were soulmates, fair and square. And Wonwoo: selfish, stupid, cowardly Wonwoo, had run away instead of telling him.

So that’s that, really.

Mingyu officially hates Jeon Wonwoo. And it feels great.

He unlocks his door, and opens it.

“Yo, guys! Check this out. You would not believe the fucker that’s turned up on my wrist.”
Jihoon wakes up with a foot in his hair, an arm in his crotch and Soonyoung’s face way closer to his feet than he ever wanted it to be. He groans, he really doesn’t care how loud it is, and curses every single person in the room.

Mainly Hansol, considering just how many Vodka Cruisers he’d pulled out of his backpack.

Last night had spiralled quickly; after the anger had come the tears, falling disgustingly off of Mingyu’s face and into his guava Cruiser. Then bitching began in earnest, and Jihoon winces as he remembers some of the stuff they said about Wonwoo but blames it all on the alcohol.

Wonwoo may be an absolute idiot, but he’s still their friend.

They’d sat with Mingyu, patting his back and chucking in the occasional half bitchy half comforting comment and Seokmin had even cried a little bit with him. And then had come the drunken singing of The Veronicas, and then the passing out.

And that brings them to today, bodies pressed far too close to his, smelling of sweat and alcohol and the Cheezels Seungcheol had thrown up in the kitchen.

It’s late in the day; far too late for it to be acceptable for any functioning adult human being and Jihoon is pleased. A good sleep in does everyone a world of good.

Jun disagrees if his pained expression is anything to go by. Jihoon catches his eye and gets back what can only be described as a call for help, eyes wide in horror from where he’s stuck under Minghao and Jeonghan and Seokmin.

Jihoon leaves them be and shuts his eyes. It would be a terrible crime to disturb people sleeping so peacefully.

He dozes; he contemplates.

There was one thing he hadn’t dared say last night. He doesn’t begrudge Wonwoo for doing it, and he himself would probably do the same. It’s not a small thing, having one person fated to be with you for the rest of your life, let alone meeting them when you’re this young. When you can’t even decide which version of yourself you’d want them to see; when they’ve known you in whatever way you’d chosen to give them back when they were just another person, before they were a soulmate.

Jihoon doesn’t judge Wonwoo for living his own life while he can.

Because in this damn life where writing controls actions and thoughts and goddamn hearts, you live as two. Two minds, two hearts, double the thoughts, double the chromosomes, double the burden, double the stress.
Two when one is more than enough.

So, he gets it.

It’s not something so simple, to share your entire existence.

He may not know why Wonwoo did what he did, and probably never will, but he gets it enough.

So he wakes himself up properly and sends Wonwoo a message.

Nothing much, nothing too long that he might get caught by the ever peering eyes of Jeonghan who’s now sitting up, tucked into a sheet like an overgrown squirrel, but just enough for Wonwoo to know that he understands.

That someone understands.

*It’s okay to take your time.*

He sets his phone down, glancing around the room once more, and it seems that Jun’s latched onto Jeonghan and the two of them are now proceeding to wake up everyone.

Bitches.

Jihoon wanted at least another hour of napping, but what can you do. At least he’ll get food.

They make Mingyu cook for them, of course, like the great people they are, getting his mind off the problem and all that.

He makes them a great breakfast as always and Jihoon is glad the heartbreak isn’t affecting his god-given culinary skills.

“Guys,” Jisoo suddenly says, sitting bolt upright, eyes lighting up in the way everyone knew to be scared of. “We need to have another party. Party 2.0. Mingyu’s second, *proper* birthday party.”

“Oh hell no,” Seungkwan is quick to interject from where he’s collapsed onto Mingyu’s mother’s favourite fake plant, “we did enough partying last night we’ll die if we go again.”

He’s right. Looking around the kitchen, everyone is overall pretty worse for wear and Jihoon definitely does not want to illegally drive someone to the hospital.

Jisoo waves his hand dismissively, snorting gracefully in a way only he can manage to pull off.

“Don’t be stupid of course we’re not going to drink. Didn’t I tell you all that you should’ve slowed down anyway, hmm?”

“Oh shut up, I saw you and Minghao with that bottle of wine!” Chan calls, but Jisoo just smirks.

“And yet, I am miraculously the only one not hungover. Oh, and Jihoon of course.”

Jihoon inclines his head, enjoying the bitter glances sent his way from about 90% of the room.

“But that’s really not the point guys,” Jisoo continues, “we’re here to celebrate Mingyu’s birthday! And I have the perfect game - Pin the Shit in Wonwoo’s Mouth!”

Jihoon gets it immediately. The name explains it pretty damn well. Not to mention that he’s spent far too many long afternoons in the sun pinning flimsy paper onto anatomically incorrect donkeys.
It seems the others haven’t been so quick to cotton on. But then again, the others are still suffering the after-effects of the Cruisers.

“Like Pin the Tail on the Donkey. But with shit. And Wonwoo. Quite synonymous these days,” Jisoo explains, amidst snorts of reluctant laughter.

Jihoon laughs.

Whoops.

But really, if you had asked sixteen year old Jihoon where he’d be in a years time, he might’ve said studying, or making some music with Chanyeol, even hanging out with his friends, but printing out about a hundred poop emojis is definitely not what he would’ve said.

He’s rather struck with the bizarreness of the situation.

Here he is sitting in front of Mingyu’s feeble printer, watching precious, expensive ink be wasted on countless pictures of cartoon poop.

But perhaps this is the best way for Mingyu to deal with the heartbreak.

Jun is sitting next to Jihoon, waiting for his turn with the printer, where he’s going to print out a frankly terrifyingly ugly picture of Wonwoo with his mouth wide open for god knows what reason.

“Ah, I never thought that my life would come to this,” Jun sighs, leaning his weight onto Jihoon’s shoulder, fringe flopping around like the puppy he is. “I really thought they had something special. But alas, Wonwoo couldn’t pull his head out of his arse. God, Jisoo is clever, Pin the Shit in Wonwoo’s Mouth.”

Jun breaks down into giggles and yep, Jihoon’s sure he’s still feeling last night if the slight haze in his eyes is anything to go by.

“He has his moments,” Jihoon murmurs, not even sure if he’s talking about Wonwoo or Jisoo. Maybe both.

Because yeah, Mingyu and Wonwoo did have something special, after they actually figured out how to have a proper conversation with each other without the betraying blushes and runaway heartbeats getting in the way.

He really should write that down for the next time he wants to write a sappy love song.

The printing finishes before Jun can start drooling on his shoulder, so Jihoon jumps up, letting him flop onto the printer and leaving him to deal with the dangers of ink inhalation by himself.

“I have the poop,” he calls, trotting into the living room brandishing the said paper.

“Perfect!” Jisoo all but yells. “Everyone start cutting!!”

And so they cut. Mingyu has particular fun attacking the poop with his scissors, and Jihoon can’t lie and say that he doesn’t have fun skating around the perfectly rounded edges with barely masked brutality.

Eventually Jun staggers in with the huge photo of Wonwoo and everyone cheers. Perhaps everyone is still a little tipsy.

Obviously, Mingyu gets the first go.
They have great fun tying an old school tie over his eyes, spinning him around (watching that nearly made Seungcheol throw up again) and letting him at the Wonwoo with a Blu Tacked poop emoji in hand.

He misses.

The shit sadly does not get pinned in Wonwoo’s mouth, but on his hair instead, which honestly is good enough shaming because every Australian knows the horror of getting bombed by a stray piece of shit.

No one even gets close to Wonwoo’s mouth, that is until Jihoon gets up.

He was born for this.

Flexing his arms as he approaches the picture of Wonwoo, (honestly that was a terrible picture where did Jun even get it?) Jihoon is ready to completely destroy them all.

The tie is itchy over his eyes, but spinning doesn’t disrupt him much. He moves a bit slower than the rest of them did; and he can get away with it. They’ve never seen him move fast a day in his life.

He stops spinning and barely needs to wait a second.

He pins the shit, pulls of the tie, and there it is.

Right in Wonwoo’s mouth.

There’s cries of outrage and disbelief, and one heathen (it’s Soonyoung) even shouts something about cheating, but Jihoon doesn’t listen to any of it.

He just flops onto the closest chair and falls right back asleep.
Wonwoo hates this feeling in his stomach. The one that tells him he doesn’t deserve anyone’s sympathy. He hates that it’s right.

The only good thing that’s happened to him recently is that Changbin plucked up the courage to tell Felix they were soulmates, but he can’t even be happy about that because he feels like he’s ruining their honeymoon phase with his little pity party.

He feels terrible every time they’re being cute and they slowly peel themselves away from each other with guilty looks on their faces. He wants to tell them that it’s alright because he never asked for everyone else to be sad with him, but he hasn’t been able to use his voice properly for the last few days past strange grunts of affirmation when he’s asked if he wants dinner.

Chan’s been cooking himself for the two of them recently, takeaway menus stashed in the bookshelf for another time. Something to do with being healthy and body mass indexes and all that crap Wonwoo ignores for the sake of eating junk food.

He pretends not to notice that all the dishes are sad attempts at Australian food (you just can’t have a classic barbie with a frying pan, and there aren’t many Australian dishes acceptable for dinner to begin with anyway), or from his hometown.

It doesn’t taste like grandma’s, but it sure feels like it.

Woojin had spent the entire night sitting next to Wonwoo’s bed the night of the… happening. The guy had frantically ran to the living room where the only box of tissues in the house were (they’re broke, okay? Not everyone has the luxury of having tissues in every room) when Wonwoo’s eyes had started tearing up.

Wonwoo couldn’t tell him that it wasn’t the soulmate situation but the fact that someone was willing to waste their time comforting him that was making him cry.

Seungmin comes over every day, and he plonks himself down on Wonwoo’s bed just to ramble on about how much he loves W from Day6, and how he’d drop his soulmate to marry the guy in a heartbeat. And slowly, after a few days, Wonwoo in turn gives Seungmin passionate spiels about B, and the two spend their time speculating what kind of people Day6 might be, if they were to ever reveal their identities.

He’s grateful for it.

The others help in their own little ways, and Wonwoo loses himself in the gratitude he has for them; forgets to stop himself from being happy every now and again.

It’s a Wednesday today.

5 days after the happening, and far too into the university semester than Wonwoo wants to be.
He already has his entire assessment schedule planned out, a group assignment that’s due in two days (it’s only worth 10%, God bless), and with everything moving so fast it’s surprisingly easy to forget what he’s done.

Disturbingly easy.

He doesn’t forget, not really. Whether it’s fortunate or unfortunate Wonwoo isn’t sure, but it always comes back to eat at him when he doesn’t want it to.

Like when he’s already in enough pain because of how boring his lecture is, or when he’s laughing at a terrible joke his classmate’s yelled out in the middle of his tutorial.

It’s a Wednesday, today.

5 days after the happening, and enough time for Wonwoo to come to terms with what he’s done and start building a plan to fix what he’s so stupidly crushed.

He hasn’t, though.

He hasn’t even responded to Junhui’s accusing texts other than a quick “I know” when Jun had messaged him with a very apt “WHAT THE FUCK?”.

He makes quick note to do it tonight. He’s not helping anyone being the petulant baby he is, and he needs to grow up.

There’s a lull in the lecture, and Wonwoo looks up from the blank spot on the wall he was staring at to see that his professor’s opened up the question box for people to anonymously submit their queries for the next five minutes.

He stares at his phone, then concludes he's far enough in the back and his laptop is large enough to cover him.

Now or never, you know?

I don't think I can ever express how sorry I am, he starts, trying desperately to be casual about it all but failing miserably in one fell swoop.

The response is immediate.

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE MOST HANDSOME <3 <3 JUNHUI

Did y'all think he wasn't in love w you or smth bc you WRONG my dude

Idk what I was thinking

Just

Yeah

I know

Fuck man

Yeah fuck dude
You really missed out tho

We played pin the shit in wonus mouth

Me too

RIGHT!!!!!!!

It was so fun mingyu had so much fun being mad at you

Wait no

That

It’s fine

He should be

Yeah

Sorry man

Wonwoo puts his phone down in order to pay attention for one moment, watching as the professor pulls up all of the questions and scolds the students who have asked irrelevant things.

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE MOST HANDSOME <3 <3 JUNHUI

How's Felix?

Great

Found his soulmate and having a good time

Could've been you

Q U I E T

We all know I'm stupid no need to reiterate every second

There's a need until you come back

You know I can't do that

Mmm

Jun,

Gtg bounce dude class starting

At least, Wonwoo supposes, he has solace in the fact that conversation with Jun will be easy no
matter what happens. Well, not easy, but they’re both able to keep level-headed enough to reach something. Wonwoo’s only problem is he gets the feeling that Jun’s still rooting for him, which is wrong on so many levels because first of all, Mingyu would be an idiot to forgive Wonwoo after all this, and second of all…

Well, that’s mostly it, hey.

Still unwilling to pay attention in class, Wonwoo opens up Instagram.

Already he’s missed three posts and a live from @yeolstagram, where the ever-infamous PCWHY can be seen screeching at seagulls at the beach with his guitar in hand, and suddenly Wonwoo’s somehow back to reminiscing his time in Australia.

For some incredibly strange reason, he misses Mr. Kim from ESL, with his incredibly obscure jokes and distaste for most students that weren’t Wonwoo. Maybe that was why Wonwoo missed him; because Mr. Kim actually liked him. Him and Youngjae, Wonwoo’s pretty sure, were the only students Mr. Kim could fully tolerate.

But then Wonwoo’s mind stumbles across a certain memory and he takes all of his fondness for Mr. Kim back. The guy had so boldly tricked Wonwoo into thinking drop bears were real: an unacceptable sin.

It’s only until his professor clears his throat and makes a snide remark about the fifteen students on their phones (at least he wasn’t the only one, and as far as Wonwoo’s aware he doesn’t have a terribly memorable face so he shouldn’t be getting any marks deducted from his assessment in a moment of the professor’s salty unprofessionalism) that Wonwoo finally decides he should give the lecture the attention it deserves.

It lasts all of five minutes before Wonwoo caves in to opening iBooks and reading the next chapter of the book he found last night.

Chapter End Notes

hey lads not to shamelessly self-promote but to shamelessly self-promote, if you like skz please check out my new fic that I just started!! [click here for fake dating madness]
Sundays are always slow for Jun. He sleeps in for as long as Fengjun lets him, and then stumbles out into the sunlight to spend the rest of the day as he pleases. This morning’s no different.

“Junnie!” Fengjun yells, banging the door open. Jun barely stifles the urge to disappear under his pillow.

“God, what time is it?” he groans, pulling Fengjun up onto the bed and settling him against his chest.

“Nearly eleven. It’s late.”

Kids these days. Late his arse.

“I’ll get up in a minute. But before then, we’re having a nap.”

“No, Junnie, naps are boring,” Fengjun whines, undoubtedly with a pout, but Jun’s definitely not opening his eyes to check.

“Just you wait until you’re a sad old teenager, Fengjun.”

They do nap, for about five minutes until Fengjun gets bored and drags Jun out into the real world with all that childhood strength that fades once one can’t nap for long enough.

They eat breakfast, and Jun only spills his orange juice on Fengjun once. It’s an improvement. It’s only when he’s setting the plates into the dishwasher that Fengjun hits him with a curveball.

“Junnie, where’s Wonwoo? He hasn’t been here in ages,” Fengjun says, looking up at Jun with his big eyes and ah.

It’s not like he’d hidden it from Fengjun, he’d honestly just forgotten to tell him. He bursts into giggles, and Fengjun frowns, looking all too concerned.

“No, no, Feng, it’s fine, Wonwoo’s just gone home to Korea for university,” Jun explains, realising just what he’s said.

Home. He doesn’t know where Wonwoo’s home is anymore. He doesn’t think Wonwoo knows himself.

But then it hits him again. Where’s Wonwoo?

He can’t stop laughing; it’s not particularly funny per se, but after all the shit that’s gone down, it’s more than a little amusing to see that Hurricane Wonwoo hasn’t hit every facet of their peaceful Australian existence.

Jun can’t resist sending it in the group chat. That is, the new one with just twelve of them, no Wonwoo. This isn’t something he wants to send to publicly shame Wonwoo, but he may tell him about the joke later on when they’re having one of their rambling 1am calls. And besides, he thinks they all deserve a bit of laughter.
guys omfg feng just straight up looked me in the eye and asked me where’s wonwoo hahahah lolooololol can you believe

Setting down his phone, he leans over to ruffle Fengjun’s hair with a chuckle.

It’s not long before his phone blows up.

There’s a lot of caps, that’s what he sees first. But the content is far more concerning. Eyes narrowing, he scrolls through the messages, taking in the range of messages, from good question to yeah where did that motherfucker run off to.

It doesn’t take a genius to realise that Wonwoo’s ignoring them.

Sure, Jun had noticed that he hadn’t been around in the group chat, but he’d just chalked that up to not wanting to deal with the group en masse.

He didn’t think that he’d dropped off the face of the fucking earth to everyone that wasn’t one Mr. Wen Junhui.

He doesn’t reply to the group chat and lets the messages keep pinging in, but instead goes to his contacts and glares bitterly at Wonwoo’s pinned contact. They’d made vague plans to talk sometime in the evening, but fuck it, Jun thinks, stabbing the call button with as much vigour as he can summon and stalking off to his room.

It doesn’t take long for Wonwoo to pick up, perks of being BFFs 4 lyfe and having done a blood sacrifice and all that.

“Wonwoo, you absolute fucker! What’s this I hear about you ghosting literally everyone?”

There’s hesitation. Jun can hear the hitch in Wonwoo’s breath and can imagine the way his eyes are narrowing in the type of worry that can too often be misread as anger.

“Jun, I…” he starts, and Jun hears muffled questions in Korean and the shutting of a door. “I didn’t mean to."

Jun just rolls his eyes. Wonwoo’s his best friend, but there’s a limit to all things. His family is not imploding any further, not on his watch.

“You didn’t mean to? That’s really not good enough, they’re your goddamn best friends Wonwoo, ignoring them isn’t okay. Hell, fine! Take a break from your friends if you need to, but you don’t get to do that to Mingyu. Not anymore. At least try.”

“Look, I didn’t know how to talk to them… I know you’re mad at me, but you’re different, it’s still normal. But the others… they’re all so clearly on Mingyu’s side and don’t get me wrong, I don’t blame them for that, but I just… can’t. I can’t do that to myself.”

“Fuck yourself! This is getting utterly ridiculous! I can’t believe you’re doing this to Mingyu, really, I can’t even imagine being this shitty to Mingha- uh, my soulmate.”

Wonwoo ignores his slip. Jun’s grateful. But still mad as hell.

It’s at that moment that Fengjun slips into his room, eyes blown wide by the sound of raised voices. Jun gestures him over, letting him hop onto the bed and they resume their positions from earlier in the morning.
Wonwoo’s silent and Jun waits.

“Junnie…”

Shit. Wonwoo only calls him Junnie when it’s bad. The last time he’d heard it was a few days after Wonwoo’s 18th, and while he didn’t know then, he knows now what that was about.

He sighs. Perhaps the anger can be tamed. He snuggles up closer to Fengjun.

“I’m sorry, Wonwoo, just, please don’t push us away, okay? Take some more time, but you have to promise me you’ll come back to us. Don’t leave it like this.”

There’s a shaky inhale, and Jun can taste the tears. He doesn’t know if they’re Wonwoo’s or his own.

“I promise.”

They hang up after making more vague plans to chat later in the week, but Jun knows they’ll be on the phone again tomorrow, bridges good as new and laughter crossing continents as usual.

“Ah Feng, perhaps I was too mean to Uncle Wonwoo,” he muses, making tiny plaits in Fengjun’s too long hair.

“Nah, Junnie. You can’t be mean cause you’re the best. I said so.”

And perhaps it can be that simple.
Mingyu thinks, not for the first time, about how much he hates ice breakers. While it’s way past the first week of semester, they still haunt him, all because of one little question that they had to ask each other.

When’s your birthday?

Any other birthday, any other year, and Mingyu could have just accepted some congratulations with a smile. But no. The 18th year of his life is starting with the biggest fucking bang.

It’s been nearly a month since that shitty little day, but somehow people are still just realising that he had his 18th recently, and that of course, comes with his favourite question.

“Oh my god! Mingyu! Bro! Who’s your soulmate?”

This time, it’s Mingi.

He’s been skipping all their shared tutes for the last few weeks, something about a huge performance coming up, so Mingyu hasn’t had the chance to tell him all about the drama.

The insufferable question doesn’t grate on him as it usually does. It feels a bit different when it’s coming from someone he’s actually friends with. He’d thought he was completely sick of talking about Wonwoo and all the soulmate business, but when it’s not a random acquaintance, it’s alright.

“It’s a bit of a long story…” Mingyu starts, wondering the best way to phrase it. His usual ‘haven’t met them yet’ isn’t going to cut it with Mingi.

He sometimes wonders what Wonwoo would think about being so easily dismissed from his life.

“It’s a friend. He doesn’t live here anymore though,” is what he settles on, quietly clutching his coffee cup. He doesn’t shut it down though. Mingyu realises that he actually kinda wants to talk about this with someone who has doesn’t actually know Wonwoo.

And perhaps, it’s a little easier to talk about with someone who isn’t one of his more intrusive friends.

“Oh that sucks, mate,” Mingi says, taking a too loud sip from his own coffee. “Is his birthday soon at least?”

“Last year,” Mingyu says wryly, glancing up in time to catch the wince that follows.

“Ah.”
“Quite.”

They sit for a few seconds, contemplating that, until Mingi scrunches his eyebrows in thought.

“Well I suppose you can’t get too mad at him. He stayed your friend that whole time, right? He didn’t just ditch you when he turned eighteen?”

“Well, we did fight a few times, but yeah. He stayed. Just not in the country,” Mingyu grumbles, and if he sounds more than a little bitter you can take it up with one Jeon Wonwoo.

“Don’t begrudge him that! Moving countries isn’t a small thing, and I’m guessing this is that friend that’s moved twice in like a year and has gone back home. Maybe try to understand what he’s feeling.”

Perhaps Mingi has a point. But perhaps Mingyu isn’t done being petty just yet.

“Hmm,” Mingyu hums, too noncommittally, even to his own ears.

Mingi keeps on slurping.

“What’s actually bothering you? It’s not this rubbish about him leaving the country, is it? At least, not all of it,” Mingi asks, and Mingyu forgets just how damn observant he is. Mingi acts a little stupid sometimes, but really, he’s a lot more than long limbs and loud yells.

“How… how are we meant to have a relationship if he can’t trust me enough to tell me that we’re soulmates? What does that mean for us? You know, we were almost dating before any of this, and it was good, you know? I thought there might be a chance for us and maybe even that we’d get lucky and be soulmates, and like yeah, we are, but it really hasn’t gone the way I’d expected it to. He ruined it. He ruined it by not trusting me enough to tell me that I’m his fucking soulmate.”

What he doesn’t tell Mingi though, is just how much he wonders about the reason for that lack of trust. He hasn’t told anyone, not even Minghao, about how often he lies awake, replaying every minute he can remember, thinking back to all the things he’s ever said to Wonwoo, everything they’ve ever done together, wondering if there’s something, one tiny little moment that tipped the world on its head and made Wonwoo draw back.

“It might not be that he doesn’t trust you,” Mingi says slowly, tracing mindless patterns in the condensation that’s slowly drying on the table, “I don’t think he trusts himself.”

That makes Mingyu pause enough for him to stop chewing on his straw. He can’t deny that Wonwoo was always a little skittish, but he hadn’t stopped to consider that too much, why would he when the other was always so closed off, only really letting Jun get close.

“Yunho’s birthday wasn’t too long ago,” Mingi continues, and Mingyu’s never not in awe of the particular smile Mingi gets when he talks about his soulmate. “Just back in March. We had rehearsal the day after his birthday, and he could barely even look at me without blushing. It took me a few hours, but I figured it out. I cornered him at the end of the rehearsal and kinda forced it out of him. I shouldn’t have. He wasn’t ready to tell me, he was still trying to come to terms with it himself. It was a bit of a shock, this dude from his dance team who he’d known for years was suddenly his soulmate. He needed time to redefine things. But I didn’t let him have that time and I regret that so, so much. We’re fine now of course, but it took a little time for us to get there. It’s not a switch that can just be flipped.”

“I get that,” Mingyu muses, “with Wonwoo, when I first met him and got to know him, it was like I’d met everything I’d ever wanted in a soulmate. He made me realise I wanted things I hadn’t even
thought about before. And I thought he felt the same, at least a little. I didn’t get why he wasn’t as thrilled as I would have been to find out we were soulmates. But I guess he wasn’t ready for something that we hadn’t even really talked about to suddenly become his whole destiny or whatever.”

“Exactly,” Mingi yells and reaches out across the table for a high five, “progress has been made!”

Mingyu can’t help the laugh that tumbles out of his mouth and he slaps Mingi’s hand extra hard because he can’t find a better way to show his gratitude.

“Really though, Mingyu,” Mingi says, “everyone takes things at their own speed, and yeah, maybe Wonwoo could have handled it better, but I really doubt he expected to find his soulmate at the goddamn end of world in Australia of all places. You’re also very loud, so that doesn’t help you.”

“Hey!”

“I speak no lies, but wait it out for a bit. When you’re ready, let him know you’re here, but you have to wait for him to be ready.”

Mingyu wishes he hadn’t finished his coffee so he could do something, anything, to delay answering that.

“I don’t know if he’s ever gonna be ready.”
Wonwoo’s hands shake as he stands on the front porch. Beyond the door he hears happy chatter, and it scares him. It’s happy chatter that will cease, once he appears. It’s happy chatter that he can’t — or more so shouldn’t — be a part of.

The doorbell is broken. But that’s not anything new, he’s never seen it functioning before. At its best, Wonwoo heard it ringing in the house two doors down, because they had the same doorbell and the frequencies went all whacky or something. Since that time, it’s just a button for show.

There’s a tone of resignation in the way Wonwoo knocks, in the end. He doesn’t want to knock, but he has to. He owes it to everyone on the other side of the door.

“Come through the side gate! We’re all out in the backyard!” he hears a yell, and Wonwoo doesn’t know if this is better or worse than the door being opened for him.

He braves it step by step because he knows he has to, hooks a hand through the hole of the gate to unlatch the shabby thing from the inside, and feels the air gain weight like a suitcase after a trip to Hong Kong.

There’s a collective “what the fuck” kind of response of varying emotions, before Wonwoo finds himself crumpled on the grass beneath many, many bodies.

Once everyone’s climbed off, Jun pulls him off the ground and bundles him up in a tight embrace.

“I can’t believe you’re here. At my birthday party. I thought you were joking.”

The later half of his comment he whispers, aware of how it may upset some of the other guests at the party (read: the tall, gaping child who dropped the sausage roll he was eating).

He huffs out a small laugh.

Obviously owing everyone an explanation of sorts, Wonwoo clears his throat the moment Jun lets go of him. He shuffles a little, uncomfortable because of all of the attention on him, and he wrings his hands a few times before finally opening his mouth.

“So, I’m uh, I’m back,” he starts, which earns him a couple of exasperated responses. “I guess you could say I… regretted going to Korea. I thought it was what I wanted, you know? I never meant to make such great friends here. I was supposed to fly in, irritatedly do my last year of high school in a language I barely knew, stay mad at the world, then fly out. But you guys, I guess you guys made that really hard for me to do.”

He chokes a little, trying to be more succinct with his words, but (surprise) it doesn’t work.

“I didn’t think this place could become home so quickly, you know? I spent all of my childhood in Korea. I haven’t even spent two years here! And yet the moment I stepped off that plane in January,
something was wrong. I didn’t really realise it at the start, I mean I had a good time catching up with my old friends and stuff, and I thought I was just nervous about uni. I mean I was nervous about uni. I got into SNU for Philosophy, I mean of course I was nervous about that I’d been dreaming of it since I was like, eight or something, I don’t know. And then the semester started and things were fine, but they just… weren’t what I wanted them to be? My new friends were great. They are great, I know you’d love them. But they weren’t you guys. And dear God I have never hated Philosophy more in my life! I’m not studying that ever again and if I even think about it you all have to fucking stop me.”

There’s a collective laugh at that, and Wonwoo lets out a small sigh of relief.

“And?” Junhui prompts once the laughter has died down, and Wonwoo had never imagined doing this in front of a whole crowd in broad daylight under the blazing Australian sun, had always pictured doing it at night, talking through a closed door that Mingyu had just slammed in his face, but Jun is right — Jun is somehow always right, that bloody bastard.

“A-and uh, and I uh- I missed Mingyu.”

His words come out excruciatingly slowly, as opposed to the blabbering he was doing just seconds ago, and Wonwoo’s got his head down studying a bull ant crawling through the grass.

(He should probably alert Jun about that before someone gets bitten, but it’s not really his priority at present.)

“I hate that I ran away, and I’m-” Wonwoo takes a breath so he can fill his words with the emotion he needs. “I’m so fucking sorry.”

There are hot tears, Wonwoo realises, falling on his hands where they’re balled up.

“I know it’s no excuse but I just got so scared, I mean, what are you gonna do with a soulmate like me, hey? You’d become pale as a ghost because I never go outside, you’d be stuck nursing my weak arse all the time because my immune system is terrible, and, and-”

“Wonwoo.”

“And I mean what if you weren’t my soulmate, you know? I just kept thinking this was some sick joke because I never planned to stick around. You watched me leave! I wasn’t supposed to stay in Australia, but I found the love of my Goddamn life here like some Rom-Com bozo, you’re not even White you’re Korean, like what was the point of getting a soulmate in Australia when there are a million other Mingyus back where I came from? But it’s you, and I hate that because I fucking left you behind-”

“Wonwoo.”

“And how could I- how could I ever do that to you? You literally light up my life you’re like the fucking sun and I’m just a moth or Icarus or whatever, and-”

“Wonwoo.”

The force that his name is said in makes the rest of his ramble die in his throat, and he looks up. Everyone has backed away and is congregated in Jun’s living room (they’re all clearly pretending not to eavesdrop, Wonwoo can tell because the glass sliding door isn’t closed, only the fly screen is), and Wonwoo regrets lifting his face when his eyes come into contact with Mingyu’s.

“Shut up.”
“Oh, fuck I’m sorry, I know you don’t wanna be listening to apologies I shouldn’t have-”

“Jesus Christ, bud! I said _shut. up_! It’s fine, relax!”

Mingyu lets out a breathy laugh, watching Wonwoo’s bewildered expression before continuing.

“You’re here now, right?”

“No, Mingyu, that’s too _fast_ you’re supposed to be angry for longer you can’t just forgive me like that-”

“Well I’m doing it, bitch.”

Wonwoo gives a small chuckle.

“You’re here now, and you- and you uh, you l-love me, so it’s fine.”

Mingyu then opens his arms, and with a warm smile, he waits for Wonwoo to walk into his embrace.

“Yeah,” Wonwoo speaks into the crook of Mingyu’s neck once he’s safely in the guy’s arms. “I do love you.”

“You’re a fuckarse. I waited so long for this. Don’t leave me again,” comes a choked, stilted voice.

Mingyu never says the L-word back, but Wonwoo’s glad for it. He wants to earn it through hard work that will erase the things he’s done. He has time, anyway. They’re only eighteen: they literally have the rest of their lives.

“Hey,” Wonwoo whispers, “should we stop ruining Jun’s birthday and actually you know, celebrate it?”

He hears a snort from above him before he even finishes asking the question.

“Nah.”

Chapter End Notes

_Australian Dictionary:_

- Bull ant: I didn’t know that bull ants were Aussie but! Yeah they’re nasty shits that’s all I’ve got to say.
Things are good.

Wonwoo’s back, it’s like the world’s been restored, Jun’s buzzing from his birthday high (it’s not drugs, Seokmin promises) and things are good.

For everyone but Seokmin.

It’s strange, really. In moments like these there’s usually only one person he’d turn to, but the problem is that…

The problem is that person. Seokmin can’t exactly waltz up to Soonyoung and say “hey, what should I do about Soonyoung?” because he would be talking to Soonyoung, which means Soonyoung wouldn’t have any advice for Seokmin to talk to Soonyoung.

Soonyoung, Soonyoung, Soonyoung.

Not that Seokmin could even approach Soonyoung to talk about it in the first place anyway, what with the whole avoiding thing and all that.

He considers turning to Seungcheol briefly, because the guy had opened up to Seokmin, and he feels like he owes it to him, but Seungcheol has his own things to deal with. Things that’ll come swinging around in the blink of an eye, because time always goes faster when you need it to be slow.

(For instance, the way that assessment is KILLING Seokmin, he hasn’t even procrastinated that much and he’s still screwed to shit.)

It’s Kyungsoo he turns to, in the end.

Kyungsoo, like Soonyoung, has always been a constant in Seokmin’s life. While he isn’t anywhere near as close to the guy, he definitely sees him as a reliable hyung that he can confide in if he ever finds the need to.

So far, he’s only ever seeked for help with university, and the future, and all of that growing up bullshit that leaves you lightheaded, but Seokmin’s beloved Kyungie hyungie has been happily attached at the hip with his soulmate for years now: there’s no way he couldn’t help.

Seokmin sends a quick prayer to the sky that his hyung is at home and not at work (and that if he is at work, his boyfriend isn’t home alone, because he’s pretty sure Jongin-ssi is not all too fond of him), before closing the door and turning into the street.
Because the universe hates him, it’s Jongin that opens the door.

“Seok, right?” the guy smiles, and Seokmin assumes that he received a lecture in the time that they haven’t seen each other, because he’s incredibly amicable. Or maybe Seokmin’s just always met the guy when he was in a bad mood.

“Yes, sir, Jongin-ssi sir,” Seokmin replies stiltedly, nerves getting the best of him. So much for always been charming, cool, calm and collected.

He receives a bright bubble of laughter in return, and all the weight lifts off his shoulders with it.

“Jongin hyung, Seok. We’re practically family, right? You’re like an annoying little brother, always stealing Soo’s attention.”

He says it with a pout, joking tone laced throughout, but it hits Seokmin then that that’s why they got off on the wrong foot. He almost laughs, though. The thought of a fully grown man being jealous of a teenage boy. A fully grown soulmated man, jealous of a teenage boy whose soul belonged to someone else entirely. He kind of wants to scoff at how immature it seems.

“Well come in! Come in!” Jongin ushers him into the house. “Soo finishes in five so he’ll be home in less than half an hour.”

~*~

It’s not a great day.

It isn’t to say that anything particularly horrible happened, but Kyungsoo just doesn’t really enjoy his job, so any day he has a shift is automatically not a great day. It’s officially been 4 months and he’s still listening to *Freaky Friday* five times a day minimum, and he could also do with not hearing *Girls Like You* ever again in his life.

And the fact that radio stations are incapable of not overplaying songs isn’t even the worst of it, because as much as it makes Kyungsoo want to shoot himself in the face, it’s just an annoyance in his life.

But he won’t get into that.

Right now, Kyungsoo could really deal with a change in pace. Maybe when he gets home he’ll ask Jongin if he wants to go out for some ice cream. They haven’t done that in months.

Or maybe they’ll get too lazy and UberEats it.

That also sounds like a plan.

When he reaches the front door, there’s more noise than usual. There’s the sound of anime coming from the TV, sure, but there’s one more voice laughing along. Kyungsoo doesn’t recognise it immediately; it’s… younger? Than what he would have expected? Which means it can’t be Jongdae (oh, how Kyungsoo knows *that* laughter. It never shuts up.), so…

Kyungsoo’s questions are answered when he opens the door.

“Seok-ah! What are you doing here?”

He feels like he’s gained a son when Seokmin runs into his chest, never mind the other guy is taller than him. Jongin turns the TV off, the house is silent for a moment, and then Seokmin whispers a
very small “I need some help”.

Kyungsoo’s heart kind of soars, in a strange way. He gives Seokmin a tight squeeze, then lets go of him so he can look the guy in the eye.

“Of course.”

~*~

“Oh, Seokmin.”

It’s Jeongin who bundles him up in a warm embrace. Kyungsoo’s already used up his hugging quota for the day.

“I’m sure there’s a reason, Seokmin,” Kyungsoo says, ever the level-headed. He can feel a fiery pit of determination in the bottom of his belly. “And you have to keep in mind that this reason might not be related to you.”

“It’s his birthday tomorrow,” Seokmin sobs. “Tell me he hasn’t been doing this because he already knows it’s not gonna be my name on his wrist.”

“It’s not. It can’t be, look at you two.”

“Why else would he ignore me?”

“I can’t tell you that, Seok, but the possibility of it being your reason is one against an infinite number of reasons. Be rational. You love him, don’t you? And he loves you. I know it.”

It’s quite a bold statement for him to be making, considering he’s never even known Soonyoung that well, but of all the times he’s seen the hamster-looking guy, something in Kyungsoo tells him that that’s the truth.

“I miss him,” Seokmin chokes. “Maybe I went too far. I was so sure when he turned up on my wrist that I’d be on his too. I didn’t even think that- I just- I started being his boyfriend and he never said anything. He looked happy? I swear he looked happy. But now-”

“I want chicken.”

The room is stunned to silence.

“Soo, I’m hungry. I want chicken. Seokkie wants chicken too, right?”

“Yeah,” the boy sniffles with a frail smile. “I want chicken.”

Kyungsoo shakes his head.

“Let’s get you two kids fed, yeah?”

And if Seokmin’s sadness fades with the appearance of Kris the Deliveroo guy (“you again? I swear you kids are multiplying.”), tear-stained cheeks puffy with fried chicken and laughing over nothing, then Kyungsoo thinks he’s done his job alright.
Dumb and Soonyoung rhyme for a reason

Chapter by musicanova

Chapter Notes

So! It sucks to be saying this and we tried really hard to prevent this from happening, but we're going to have to take another break. Both of us are going overseas at the end of the year, and life is just ajdflhsjdfh busy but! As always, we will come back, so don't worry too much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

15th June, 2018

Dumb and Soonyoung rhyme for a reason.

While one could argue that it’s only an oblique rhyme, it’s a rhyme nonetheless, and it’s on his birthday that Soonyoung comes to realise why exactly it is that these two words rhyme with each other.

But that’s in a handful of hour’s time. Right now, Soonyoung thinks the world is dumb. And Seokmin. But Seokmin has always been dumb. That one’s not some new revelation.

He knows he shouldn’t have been ignoring his friend all this time, but Soonyoung is a weak, weak man, and sometimes he likes to be selfish. Ignoring Seokmin means ignoring the problem, and that’s something Soonyoung likes to do.

His eyes were opened at Mingyu’s birthday party, where they all had a blast pinning printed out poop emojis in Wonwoo’s mouth. He was having fun until it got to Jeonghan’s turn, and it dawned on Soonyoung that if he were in Wonwoo’s position, he would have done the exact same thing to Mingyu, although perhaps for different reasons, since Soonyoung doesn’t know how Wonwoo’s mind works. (Intellectuals are beyond him.) He’d drunkenly bad-mouthed Wonwoo all night after Mingyu had come out with his soulmate tattoo, but the realisation that Wonwoo’s actions weren’t so… absurd, perhaps was the word, was an ice cold bucket of water to the head.

And somehow, despite it all, it only drove Soonyoung to ignore Seokmin even more.

Or maybe, it was because of Wonwoo, that Soonyoung thought hey, maybe it’s okay to do this kind of thing, because it’s a normal reaction that some people have.

In any case, Soonyoung’s birthday morning is lonely. There’s no knocking at his window at ungodly hours, there isn’t even a knock at godly hours, and his parents, after having thrown streamers around, had given him looks while he was eating his waffles.

Soonyoung’s birthday is in the middle of exam block, and he’d made all of his friends promise that there would be no celebrations until the holidays because he wanted everyone at full energy for his big bash. He regrets it now because all he has to get him through the day are cute text messages, and no Seokmin.

Soonyoung thinks maybe he has dependency issues. He can’t function without Seokmin beside him.
He hasn’t been functioning this entire time without Seokmin beside him.

The house is empty once everyone leaves for work, and Soonyoung suddenly wishes that he had an exam today. It’s not a serious wish, because God, it would be terrible to have an exam on your birthday; especially your 18th birthday, but he’s desperate to have something to distract him.

He games for a while until his wrist hurts, stuffs some food in his face for a while, then decides to go on a YouTube spiral, just because he can. He’s watching nail art tutorials when the doorbell rings, and Soonyoung perks up, intrigued.

Maybe it’s that skateboard that he ordered off that really dodgy looking Chinese site. It didn’t look trustworthy, both Minghao and Junhui had advised him against the purchase, the price was far too low and it’s been five months. So naturally Soonyoung had lost all hope, but of course, it’s his birthday, and the universe has aligned to bring him his ten dollar skateboard.

In his excitement to collect his skateboard, he barely gives a notice to the sensation on his wrist: just scratches it as he speeds down the stairs, assuming it’s a bug of some sort.

When he opens the door, the guy on the other side is dressed as a delivery guy, but Soonyoung knows he’s not.

“Hello, this is a delivery of one soulmate for Kwon Soonyoung,” the guy says, bright smile plastered to his face that Soonyoung knows is a little forced.

He’s waiting for Soonyoung to respond, rocking back and forth on his heels with his hands clasped together behind his back, and it takes everything for Soonyoung to not break down right then and there.

“How are you so confident about this? How do you know you’re my soulmate?” Soonyoung manages to say without choking.

“Well I’ve always been yours, and you’ve always been mine. Right? But also, it’s 3:01, which means it’s the time I was born, so you’ll have your tattoo on you.”

Seokmin’s smile finally starts fading as he finishes the sentence.

“Do you… have my name on you?”

Soonyoung sighs.

“I don’t have my tattoo yet, dude, see look,” Soonyoung says as he brings his left arm up, pushing his sweater sleeve away to reveal his wrist.

“Bitch!” he screeches as he sees the name he’s only ever dreamed of staring up at him, and he begins waving his arm around in front of Seokmin’s face. “What the fuck? What the fuck! What the fuck?”

He’s leaping around by now, squawking as he goes like some very strange species of bird that, if it had ever existed, is definitely extinct by now, and when he’s done yelling he jumps onto Seokmin with full force, latching on like a koala.

“It’s you, it’s you, it’s you,” Soonyoung chants, breathless.

Seokmin, despite looking as thin as paper, catches Soonyoung very smoothly (one could say it’s because he’s used to Soonyoung doing this to him, although he’s been a little out of practice for the past few months), and squeezes the guy in his arms as tightly as he can.
“What, did you think it wouldn’t be?” Seokmin chuckles softly into Soonyoung’s shoulder.

“I was so scared it wouldn’t be.”

Seokmin laughs then, so hard that he almost drops Soonyoung, and the two decide to go inside where any nosey neighbours who don’t have lives can’t see them.

“This is why you were ignoring me, isn’t it. You’re so stupid.”

Soonyoung’s head drops. He’s guilty as charged, and there’s nothing he can say about it.

Now that he has what he thought he wouldn’t get, he doesn’t know what to say. He had this whole apology written out in his mind, but that was for when he turned up at Seokmin’s door step to say sorry, but you’re not my soulmate, as much as I wanted you to be.

“Well,” Soonyoung says, suddenly indignant. If you can’t argue it, own it. That’s a phrase, right? “You’re also stupid, and you knew I was stupid going into this, so I don’t know why you’re being all high and mighty.”

“Well,” Seokmin counters, feigning offense, “you’re stupider than I am, so I will be as migh and highty as I want, excuse you.”

“No, you’re stupider.”

“You’re stupider!”

“But I’m your stupider.”

“That doesn’t- that doesn’t make sense.”

“How would you know? You’re too stupid to know that.”

Maybe it’s the best birthday Soonyoung’s ever had.

Chapter End Notes

Yes dumb and Soonyoung technically don’t rhyme at all but I needed to get a point across and that point was that Soonyoung is stupid
Mingyu feels more than a little stupid as he sits on the edge of his bed, stark naked, waiting for Minghao to text him back. He’s waiting for crucial advice; he couldn’t possibly just get up and get on with his life, because Minghao needs to tell him exactly what to wear on his date.

With Wonwoo.

He can feel the uncertainty in his stomach, fluttering around with no care for his comfort, so biting his nails and aggressively spamming Minghao gives him something else to focus on. It’s not even the first date they’ve been on since Wonwoo’s been back, but nonetheless, Mingyu feels his stomach flip like a world class gymnast every time they even talk about making plans.

He’s seconds away from giving in and calling Minghao, just for something to do with his hands, with his brain, when Minghao finally texts him back.

*any of your shorts but the jorts and that cute shirt jisoo gave you that time*

Mingyu smiles. He’d been thinking the same thing himself, but a little positive reinforcement never goes amiss. He’s pulling the shirt out of his closet when his phone buzzes again.

*and don’t you dare touch your fucking boat shoes*

Mingyu glances to the end of his bed where he’d put his *fucking boat shoes*. He glances back at his phone.

With a sigh, he goes to get his Converse.

In the end, he looks good. Good enough to be someone’s boyfriend. With a smile, Mingyu leaves, feeling perhaps just a little better. He’s got a good outfit on today, there’s nothing that could mess it up.

But then his bus is late. It’s cramped, it’s hot, it’s full of people that are starting to get just as grumpy as him, and he’s restless all the way to his stop. He’s already sent Wonwoo a few overly apologetic texts that he himself cringes at, and Mingyu feels the good outfit vibes starting to fade.
He’s more than a little pissed at the public transport system by the time he gets off, but then he sees Wonwoo.

Wonwoo, who’d only answered vaguely when Mingyu had sent him an ETA, but is standing there with his head buried in his phone, earphones plugged it, volume no doubt turned all the way up. Wonwoo, who must’ve walked all the way to the opposite end of the city just to meet Mingyu at his bus stop.

Mingyu feels the gymnast come back home.

He walks over slowly, booping Wonwoo on the top of his head when he reaches him.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

Mingyu snorts. “Wow, we’re so fucking eloquent. C’mon. Let’s go eat.”

Wonwoo nods, reaching out to take Mingyu’s hand like it’s nothing, and they start walking back to the opposite end of the city, to where Wonwoo should’ve been waiting at the cafe.

It’s only once they’re sitting, once they’re settled, that Mingyu lets himself crumble. Happiness is… alarming. He absolutely detests the fact that that’s what springs to mind when he finds himself on a perfectly nice romantic date, but what can you do?

What he can do, apparently, is keep holding Wonwoo’s hand, keep exchanging adoring glances across the cafe table, keep up the act that everything is completely right with the world now that his soul has its other half back.

He hates it.

He really hadn’t expected them to become one of those gross, utterly infatuated couples (what do you mean, he’s definitely not talking about Seungkwan and Hansol) immediately, because that’s never really been their style, not even when they were going on not-dates that were very much a not-date because no one ever mentioned the word ‘date’.

“Mingyu?” Wonwoo’s hesitant call breaks him out of his contemplation, bringing his focus back to the stupid plate of cheesecake they’re sharing and the ridiculous cute mugs that are obviously part of a set.

“What, babe?” he asks, and why is that a reflex?

“You good there?”

“Just dandy.”

No. Not good. Not good at all.

The problem is, Mingyu likes these dates they’ve been going on- it’s certainly better than whatever the fuck they were doing last year. But there’s something nigging right in the middle of brain, something that tells him this is all far too good to be true, Kim Mingyu, you couldn’t possibly be getting your happy ending this easily after all that drama, right?

“Good,” Wonwoo smiles over at him, and Mingyu wants to chuck his damn heart in a freezer before it melts any further. “I’m glad you’re having a good time. I… I was still kinda worried, you know.
About it.”

Fuck. Mingyu wants to slam his face into the cheesecake, because really Wonwoo? Mentioning the fight now? Not on Mingyu’s list of top date ideas.

Because here’s the rundown:

1. Mingyu and Wonwoo have not really discussed the shit Wonwoo pulled.
2. Mingyu doubts he and Wonwoo will ever really discuss the shit Wonwoo pulled.
3. Mingyu does not know if he can accept never discussing the shit Wonwoo pulled.

So. A dilemma. And while he appreciates Wonwoo trying to make amends, hell, he accepted those amends, Mingyu’s also berating himself a little. He was the one to let it go. He let Wonwoo waltz back into his life, no consequences, no hate, nothing.

The things he does for love. Because he does love Wonwoo. And yet, Mingyu can’t deny that he let him off more than a little easy.

“Could you, like, not mention that, please?” he asks, running his hand through his hair, scowling at all the knots his fingers get caught on. And it’s suddenly a bad hair day too. Typical.

“What?”

Mingyu almost scoffs at the shock on Wonwoo’s face. “I don’t wanna talk about it right now, Wonwoo, is that so hard to believe?”

“But… but we sorted it, yeah? I apologised, you said you forgave me.”

“Yeah, but that’s not really enough, is it.” Mingyu shoots back, and he winces right along with Wonwoo. Maybe that was a little too harsh. “Look,” he sighs, “there’s no way we can just let it go. I need more than that, if we’re ever gonna do this whole thing properly.”

“We are though, right? Like, you do actually want to be with me?” Wonwoo asks slowly, fear in his eyes, heart on his sleeve.

“Of course. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t, idiot,” Mingyu laughs despite it all. “But it’s not okay. You do know that right.”

“Yeah,” Wonwoo sighs, “yeah, I know.”

“So… sort it out, okay? Once you’ve got your head around it or whatever, come find me and explain. And make damn sure you’re not gonna do it again.”

And with that, Mingyu downs the last of his coffee, pushes his chair back, and leaves.

Wonwoo doesn’t come after him.

He doesn’t care.

He really doesn’t.

Not at all.

Maybe just a little.

Maybe just a lot.
We (hopefully) back on that grind, boys!

For a pair of boys that aren’t dating, watching Jun and Minghao interact has recently become an unbearably disgusting thing to do. And this is coming from Wonwoo, who’s found himself unable to tear his eyes off Mingyu for half a second whenever he’s in the vicinity. But with watching Jun and Minghao comes a sinking feeling that’s all too familiar.


And maybe seeing happy couples together rubs it in his face just how much he’s screwed up. (“But Jun and Minghao aren’t a couple yet!” Well, yes, but just give it five seconds, alright? Wonwoo knows it’s coming soon.)

Well here’s the verdict: Wonwoo will, after much deliberation, explain his whole side of the story to Mingyu without leaving out a single speck of detail, and wrap it up in a beautiful poem that he can gift. Or not, because poems leave too much space for artistic interpretation which Wonwoo really can’t be bargaining for right now.

“Wonwoo!” Jun calls, bottom lip protruding in a pout. “Jesus, where have you been? That’s the eighth time I’ve called your name, and I’m sitting right in front of you!”

“Well it’s not my fault that it’s boring third wheeling with you guys,” Wonwoo snaps back, although there’s little to no bite. (Remember how he said give it five seconds? Yeah, make it four because he’s trying to speed things up.)


Wonwoo gives the two a tight smile. As much as he’d love to yell at his friends to pull their heads out of their arses, that’s neither how he wants to be drawing attention to himself nor how he wants his friends to get together.

“Well I’m off, guys. You know how my mum is when I spend too much time out of the house.”

He bids the two goodbye with a wave and exits the strange vegan cafe, with their hairless cat mascots and cunningly convincing counterfeit cheese. He makes no haste in plugging in his earphones as he strides over to the bus stop, but quickly regrets it as thoughts crowd his head.

Wonwoo resolutely tells himself that no thinking is to be done until he’s in the comfort of his own bedroom.
It really is the guilt that gets you in the end. Whoever was the author that wrote that in whatever book (or said that phrase for the first time in a speech or a movie or a TV show), that person is damn right, and Wonwoo wishes they weren’t.

Guilt is a very strange pain.

It’s a kind of strange that Wonwoo doesn’t really like. But he doesn’t really have the liberty to be stating likes or dislikes when it’s a pain he deserves. Maybe, he considers, coming completely clean to Mingyu will lift the pain. Maybe, he then considers, that plan is absolute shite.

The pain lifting part of it, anyway. That’s not why he’d tell Mingyu the story. He’d tell Mingyu the story so Mingyu could know the story. You know? The whole thing from start to finish, even the exact moment that he fell in love. (Even if it’s embarrassing, and even if he’ll get in trouble for not confessing earlier.)

He’ll do it one day. Probably not today, or tomorrow, but someday when he’s feeling comfortable and his lips are loose so it can all just come out in a landslide. The point here is that he will do it, he promises, just maybe not quite as soon as Mingyu would like.

Wonwoo wants the story to be perfect. So it won’t be a poem, that’s already crossed off the list, but it’ll be grand. Something people can weep over. Something Mingyu can forgive him over.

Hopefully.

He picks up his phone, hand hovering over the messaging app. Maybe talking to someone about this will help him figure out what to do. But who would he turn to? Jun and Minghao are on a date (that’s not a date because no one’s mentioned the word date) so it would be incredibly inconsiderate of him to unload his problems on them, but other than that the first person he’d turn to in a crisis is Mingyu.

Sure, maybe Jisoo would be level-headed about it, maybe Seungcheol would have some advice, maybe Chan would listen well, maybe Soonyoung would cheer him up about the whole ordeal, but here’s the problem: they won’t feel right.

Nothing they do can feel like Mingyu’s voice calming him down, Mingyu’s lips against his ear, Mingyu’s slow and steady breath, Mingyu’s warm hands against his back.

Fuck, Wonwoo is whipped.

Not that that’s particularly news.

Maybe he should talk to Yerim- sorry, Yeri. Her self-proclaimed excellence in the love department could be what Wonwoo needs. But then he remembers the last time he had opened up to Yeri (he was nine, and it was a moment of embarrassing levels of weakness) and somehow the next day his whole apartment block knew of his problems.

His other childhood friends are useless when it comes to this sort of thing, that he knows, and he doesn’t want to be burdening his university friends with Mingyu stuff again, even if taking his mind off things by fanboying over Day6 with Seungmin sounds really appealing.

So there’s no one to turn to in the end, although Wonwoo isn’t surprised about it. It’s his own damn mess, so he should be figuring out how to clean it up himself. It just sucks because he’s young, and lost, and school never prepared him for things like this.

Wonwoo sighs. This can all be tomorrow’s problem. He’s tired, he’s out of ideas, and at this point
he’s ready to tell Mingyu the story on his 40th birthday. Which isn’t ideal, because by that stage of dragging things out, Mingyu will have definitely, without a doubt, left Wonwoo for someone far better.

*Tomorrow's problem*, Wonwoo tells himself again.
Wonwoo’s never been one for clichés. And yet. Here he is, tossing and turning at two in the
goddamn morning, crying over his failure of a love life. And he has no one to blame but himself.
Because he knows he fucked up. He knows that it isn’t on Mingyu to fix this one, it all rests on his
shoulders, and nothing’s going to get better until he gets out of his blankets and his wallowing and
does something about it.

But doing has never really been his strong suit.

At the end of the day (or morning, in this case) the problem is that Wonwoo doesn’t know how to fix
it. He can’t just waltz up to Mingyu and word vomit everything at him, it’s not that simple, not after
the mess Wonwoo’s made.

But. Wonwoo sits up, eyes wide, mind racing. Because it can be that simple. Mingyu doesn’t need
anything from him but honesty at this stage. Honesty and a promise that he won’t do anything quite
so moronic again as long as he can help it.

So, he guesses, he has a plan. A really basic one, but a plan. Which is completely reliant on his
ability to get to Mingyu’s house without getting lost.

It’s pointless trying to sleep with the nerves fluttering around in his stomach, so Wonwoo sits up for
the rest of the night, countless cups of tea in his hands, waiting for a socially acceptable hour to go
knocking at the Kim’s door.

He leaves at eight, because by the time he gets anywhere close to Mingyu’s house with shitty public
transport it’ll be at least nine.

~*~

Wonwoo was really never one for clichés, but he’s getting rained on like there’s no tomorrow as he
frets in front of Mingyu’s door. It’s disgustingly poetic really, the fact that it had started to rain just as
he’d gotten off the bus, umbrella tucked safely in his backpack at home (because really, who can
predict stupid Australian weather? Sun showers will be the death of him).

Eventually, he knocks, not because he’s suddenly got a heroic wave of courage, but because he’s
getting damn wet and would like to not get sick any time soon, thank you very much.

Because life hates him, it’s not Mingyu that answers the door, but his mother.

“Oh! Wonwoo! I didn’t expect… you.”
Wonwoo winces, but yeah. He deserves that one.

“Come in out of the rain, come on,” she ushers him inside, and Wonwoo feels more than a little guilty as he drips water onto her tiles.

“Thank you. How are you?” he asks, because manners, he can hear in his own mother’s voice and because he just genuinely wants to know. He loves Mingyu’s mum.

“I’m fine. But you’d rather speak to Mingyu, I’m sure?” she smiles, kindly, if not a little wryly, and Wonwoo kinda wants to run back outside into the rain.

“Please,” Wonwoo sighs.

“Mingyu!” she shouts, wandering off. “You’ve got a guest!”

Wonwoo waits as he hears a door bang open, and then what sounds like someone falling down the stairs, and he can’t help but grin. Because yeah, Mingyu’s on his way.

When he finally skids around the corner, surfing on the tiles in his stupid sunflower socks, Mingyu lets out a little screech.

“What the hell, I thought it was Hao! Don’t scare me like that, Wonwoo!”

“Right, sorry,” he mumbles, taken aback from how not hostile Mingyu is. “Can we… can we talk?”

Mingyu just sighs. “Yeah. I’ve been waiting for you. But first, why the fuck were you out in the rain?”

“It’s not like I planned this, it just started raining.”

“Maybe I need to buy you an umbrella,” Mingyu laughs, running his hand lightly through Wonwoo’s soaked hair.

“Maybe,” Wonwoo says, leaning into Mingyu’s touch just a little.

But a little’s too much, because Mingyu catches himself and stumbles a few steps back.

“Let’s go sit down,” he mutters, leading Wonwoo outside to the back deck.

Mingyu sits him down on a chair and disappears for a minute or so, coming back with a towel that he chucks a little too forcefully at Wonwoo. It’s silent as Wonwoo dries himself off, and it’s still silent as they sit there, watching the rain pour down from under safety of the deck umbrella.

It’s up to Wonwoo to break the silence.

“Mingyu.”

“Hmm?”

“I’m sorry. For everything.”

“I know.”

Wonwoo supposes, that yeah, he does. Mingyu’s always known him best. He wouldn’t be here if he wasn’t sorry. Mingyu wouldn’t be here with him if he wasn’t sorry.
He takes a deep breath. Because tomorrow is *today*. And it’s time to start talking.

“Mingyu, I’m gonna tell you everything, okay? Right from the beginning.”

Mingyu snorts. “I don’t really need to hear anything *that* far back, do I?”

“I thought you’d always enjoyed a good love story,” Wonwoo says, dying on the inside because that’s smoother than he’s ever been in his whole life, *damn*.

“A love story? Is this what this is?”

“I would say so. Now, let me tell you what I thought the first time I saw you. I saw you, and I thought, *wow that boy looks like a hoard of rabid puppies.*”

“What about this is romantic?” Mingyu screeches, hitting Wonwoo with one of his mother’s many decorative throw pillows.

Wonwoo blinks, more than a little offended. “I’m getting there. You know I used to hate dogs, right?”

“You may have mentioned it a few times.”

“Yeah. And now, I don’t. Like, at all.”

Mingyu finally catches on, and thank god for that because Wonwoo lives for obscure metaphors that let him pretend he’s not laying his soul bare. “Ohhh. I’m the dog. Right.”

“Right,” Wonwoo smiles.

“Well you know that I’ve always loved dogs,” Mingyu says, playing along.

“Even when that Cocker Spaniel bit you?”

“Even then.”

They can’t hold in their laughter anymore, giggling together under the dying rain, as the sun begins to shine even brighter through the light clouds.

“Now fill in the gaps.”

“Of course. We’ve got all day.”

Mingyu just sighs. “I’m never gonna get used to you being all suave, what the fuck. But whatever, let’s get you some Milo.”

And with that, he’s off into the kitchen, long legs making him disappear from Wonwoo’s sight all too soon.

But that’s not an issue this time. Wonwoo just chuckles quietly to himself, before wandering off to find his soulmate, and maybe wrap him in a tight back hug when he finds him rifling through the cupboards for the Milo he swears he bought just last week.
Eyebrows

Chapter by jezza

The grass is distinctly uglier than Jisoo remembers. But then again, maybe he’s looking back with rose coloured glasses. One tends to do that when recalling lunchtimes spent under the sun and on the soccer field.

“Jisoo!”

He turns, expecting Seungcheol to beckon him back to the car so they can get the hell out of here, because yeah, they should have better things to do than hang out at their old high school on the weekend. Let’s just say Jisoo was feeling sentimental.

What he did not expect, however, was Seungcheol walking towards him with a shopping trolley in tow.

“We hit the jackpot,” Seungcheol crows, a little skip in his step. “Come on, get in.”

“It’s hardly a jackpot,” Jisoo laughs, “it’s a freaking Aldi trolley.” But nonetheless, he climbs into the trolley, leaning back and resting his feet up on the edge. Seungcheol pushes him around the oval slowly, haphazardly bumping over lumps of grass and dips in the ground.

“Take me on a tour of the school, Seungcheol,” Jisoo says, reaching around to slap Seungcheol’s arm lazily. “It’ll be fun. Just like old times.”

“Pretty sure you don’t need a tour, but okay.”

He’s right. The last thing Jisoo needs is a tour, but he’s feeling slightly sentimental these days. It would be so much simpler if things went back to the way they were when he was the only one that had ever thought of his two best friends and the word soulmate in the same sentence.

It wasn’t hard to know really. All it took was the realisation that there was no one else in the world that could ever be more important than Jeonghan or Seungcheol, and that was that. Fate had no chance at topping what they already had; so that itself must be a work of fate.

Jisoo had always thought that befriending Jeonghan on the first day of grade eight had been the best thing he’d ever done. Now, staring at the maths block that’s barely changed in the last five years, he wonders if any of it makes any difference.

Jeonghan would’ve come into his life anyway, full of adrenaline and uninhibitedly alive. It was just a matter of when. Seungcheol, on the other hand, is the steady one of the three, always sitting in his periphery, reassuring Jisoo with nothing but his presence.

But there’s something a little different about the way Seungcheol is these days. He’s still the same dependable puppy, bright amongst the dark, the best type of thorn on the most beautiful rose. And yet, there’s a bluntness that spears through that’s less playful than it used to be. It’s reckless, almost, the way Seungcheol speaks his mind these days, as if he’s got nothing left to lose.

Jeonghan really did a number on him, and Jisoo doesn’t know how easily he’ll get past it. He was always confident in the three of them. It’s always been three; arranged seating in grade eight maths cementing a friendship that’s as strong as it is predetermined. But now, there’s the unquestionable crack that’s one tap away from a shatter.
His and Seungcheol’s half of the plate is as strong as ever though, Jisoo thinks as Seungcheol wheels him past the science block, reliving classes of dissections that never should’ve been given to idiotic fourteen year olds.

Seungcheol prattles on, and Jisoo would happily let him continue until they’d made it back to the oval, but they have more pressing matters to deal with.

“Cheollie. Shut up for a second.”

“Well fine then, if you-”

“No, seriously, look.”

Because there, sitting under what was their tree, is Jeonghan.

Great minds think alike. Or at least, soulmates do.

“Right, let’s go,” Seungcheol mutters, already turning the trolley around.

“No,” Jisoo says sharply, “let’s talk to him. It’s my turn.”

Seungcheol spins the trolley back with a groan. It isn’t long before Jeonghan notices them; two grown boys and a shopping trolley isn’t an inconspicuous sight. He stands up, confident as ever, strolling towards them without a care in his step.

“What are you doing here, then?” Jeonghan asks, challenge clear in his voice. It’s a blatant fuck off, I don’t want to see you that Jisoo can’t let slide. Jeonghan’s expecting him to though, Jisoo can see it in the careless set of his shoulders and the tight way Seungcheol’s gripping the trolley.

What everyone forgets about Jisoo though, is that sometimes, when he chooses, he can be a vindictive little bitch. He climbs out of the trolley slowly, making them wait. He grabs Seungcheol, pulling him along as he closes the distance Jeonghan left between them.

“Yeah, well. We were here first. You’re more than welcome to stay, but if you’d rather leave…”

He leaves it hanging. Jisoo’s never pretended to be subtle. If there’s something to be said, he’ll hit it with a goddamn sledgehammer. He’s effectively drawn an even bigger line than Jeonghan ever did—if he chooses to stay, he’s accepting a chance to figure this all out. If he leaves, Jisoo doesn’t know what’ll be left of what’s been five years in the making.

Jeonghan raises an eyebrow and Jisoo raises one right back. Seungcheol doesn’t. He can’t raise his eyebrows.

“I would rather, thank you very much,” Jeonghan sniffs, crossing his arms. “Some things aren’t so easily forgotten.”

“No one’s asking you to forget, Jeong,” Jisoo snaps. “Just talk to us about it.”

“I don’t wanna talk though,” Seungcheol mutters. Jisoo steps on his foot.

“I think I agree with Cheollie, hmm?” Jeonghan says, brushing his fringe out of his eyes, “so I’ll be off.” He brushes past them, face set, eyes weak, and wraps a strong hand around the trolley handle. “I’m taking your trolley though.”

“Like hell you are, we still have valuable miles to get out of that.”
“I’m returning it to Aldi and using the dollar to get a Frozen Coke and you can’t stop me!”

“Let him go,” Jisoo murmurs, tugging Seungcheol back by the shirt. “He needs his Frozen Coke.”

“But those trolleys take two dollar coins! We both could’ve gotten one,” Seungcheol whines.

“We drove here, Seungcheol, where the frick were we gonna put the trolley?”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, oh.”
Wonwoo feels at home. Yes, it’s been oversaid: something something Korea was never Wonwoo’s true home something something something Mingyu is home and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But that’s not what he’s talking about right now.

Back when he was attending SNU, Wonwoo had thought Philosophy would be the love of his life. He was proved wrong in a matter of seconds (as is evident by the fact that he’s no longer studying Philosophy and isn’t even at SNU anymore), but Wonwoo feels like he’s got it right this time. He steps into his first lecture of the year and this tingling feeling settles in his bones.

Introduction to Creative Writing.

It feels like home.

~*~

Okay, so. Maybe Wonwoo was saying moments ago that his lecture for Introduction to Creative Writing felt like home. But maybe he was wrong.

No, not to worry, he’s not going to drop out and run away to Mongolia without telling anyone, it’s just that, as much as he knows he’s going to adore his new course and all, he’s not particularly fond of going through the whole First Year of University Experience all over again.

Meaning, his first lecture was great, but! He! Knows! No! One! And! It’s! Very! Lonely!

It feels like some cruel twist of fate to be enduring this once more, but at the same time he supposes it’s all in the name of karma. You treat Mingyu like shit, the world treats you like shit.

It’s a fair trade.

Speaking of Mingyu, Wonwoo is incredibly excited for the break in his schedule after his Lexicon lecture, since the two made a promise to have lunch together. Mingyu was talking about a new fried chicken place that opened up just outside of campus, but Wonwoo, in his effort to level out his shittiness with some not so shittiness, woke up at four in the morning to make Mingyu lunch.

Now, he’s well aware of the fact that Mingyu could make a sandwich consisting of all cheese and no bread and it would still taste better than anything Wonwoo could fumble up, but first of all, it’s the thought that counts, and second of all, he had his mum help him towards the end so it shouldn’t taste all that bad.
Besides, what Wonwoo lacks in flavour and overall general cooking skills, he makes up for in his keen eye for plating.

Which would be something he could display if the food he made didn’t need to be shoved into a lunchbox to take to university, so unfortunately this time Wonwoo has absolutely nothing going for him other than the fact that his mother redid the potato salad for him because there was, and he quotes “no way in the world any sane person would consume a potato salad that consisted of quadruple the shallots required and only four potatoes”.

Wonwoo considers this to be rude. He was only trying to showcase how well he can cut shallots, not to mention that he did his mother a favour, considering the shallots were just shy of going off in the next day or so.

Predictably, because Wonwoo is Wonwoo, about five minutes before Mingyu shows up he hovers before the rubbish bin wondering if he should chuck out his creation, shallots and all. It would be fairly easy to pretend the handmade lunch never existed. It would be even easier to smile and nod when Mingyu asks if they should go to the fried chicken place.

But predictably, because Mingyu is Mingyu, he turns up right as Wonwoo makes his decision and starts to tip the container into the bin.

“Wonwoo, what the fuck!” Mingyu screeches as he speeds towards the bin and scoops the lunchbox out of Wonwoo’s hands before anything can fall out of it.

“Mingyu,” Wonwoo says weakly. He should have known this would happen.

“This is perfectly good food! You can’t just chuck it in the bin because you don’t want to eat it — what a waste!”

“I wouldn’t call it perfectly good, but if you want to die then go ahead and be my guest,” Wonwoo scoffs.

Mingyu looks up at Wonwoo then, eyes boring into him. It’s like he knows — he fucking knows — and in that single moment Wonwoo wishes they weren’t soulmates.

“You made this, didn’t you.”

There’s a finality to the statement: it’s not a question. (And again, Wonwoo wishes they weren’t fucking soulmates because then maybe he could have been spared this embarrassment.)

“Is it for me?”

“Whatever,” Wonwoo flaps a hand as he turns to leave. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Mingyu.”

~*~

Somehow, when Wonwoo properly comes to, he’s sitting at a secluded table on campus and feeding Mingyu the lunch he made.

He lets out a soft “what the fuck” and almost drops the fork before it makes its way to Mingyu’s mouth, and he startles further when Mingyu catches his hand and lifts it back up to his mouth.

“It’s good, Wonwoo!” Mingyu smiles, and Wonwoo thinks he sees every single piece of shallot he cut this morning stuck in Mingyu’s teeth at once, despite distinctly remembering his mother taking out over half of them and replacing them with potatoes.
Now, Wonwoo is well aware of the fact that Mingyu is lying. Either that, or in the span of time since Wonwoo last saw Mingyu, the guy has lost all sense of his taste buds and now thinks that mediocre food is amazing.

“The flavour profile takes a little to get used to, but it’s a really interesting combination that I never would’ve thought of. I really like it!”

Okay, so Mingyu does still have his taste buds. He’s just lost his mind.

“You can tell me the truth you know. Trust me, I’m well aware that I’m not talented in the cooking department.”

Mingyu chuckles lightly, leaning forward to rest his chin in his hand.

“Fine. I’ll admit it tastes better now that you’re feeding it to me, but I promise it’s really not as bad as you think it is.”

Mingyu punctuates the sentence by opening his mouth again for some fried rice (not burnt, thankfully, so there’s one other thing Wonwoo’s good at) and Wonwoo complies, scooping up a generous amount.

He thinks he hears a far away gag that sounds suspiciously like the sound Jun made a few days ago when he caught Mingyu kissing Wonwoo, but he can’t find it in himself to care.

He stabs a piece of pork with his fork.

Mingyu grins.
Seungcheol’s getting old. As he approaches his 18th birthday, the brink of becoming an adult, opportunities of democracy sausages he actually deserves blossoming before his eyes - he just feels done. He’s already lived through the drama of getting a soulmate(s), what’s left?

So, when Jihoon comes to him with the group’s sacred party planning binder, Seungcheol firmly flips it shut and pushes it back across the table.

Jihoon raises an eyebrow. “No party?”

“No, we can have a party just… lowkey? Please? I don’t want to make a big deal of this. And besides, I think we’ve had enough raves this year.”

Wrong. They can never have enough raves, because they’re a damn good time, but Seungcheol’s not looking for a damn good time. He’s looking for a damn good nap.

“If that’s what you want,” Jihoon says, “we can just get everyone over at my house? Eat some food. Chill.”

"Your house?"

Jihoon’s house is a big deal. It’s sacred. The record holder for the most visits is Jun, with a grand total of three, purely because he’s the only one that can talk down an angry Jihoon from the point of snapping his whole The Saddle Club DVD collection.

“I think it’s about time. Besides, I think we both know you could use a safe, controlled environment.”

Seungcheol smiles. Jihoon’s someone he can always rely on, a quiet understanding born between them back in the days of Grade 9 History classes, forged in between forgotten homework and backrow banter.

“That sounds perfect.”

“Settled.” Jihoon chucks the binder back into his backpack and pushes his chair out. He hesitates before he stands up though, tilting his head as he looks Seungcheol a little too much in the eye.

“You’re good, yeah?”

No. He’s not. And they both know it.

But Jihoon wouldn’t ask otherwise, and Seungcheol knows this is just his way of showing support,
so he nods with a small smile, letting Jihoon know he appreciates it.

“Yeah. Thanks, Hoonie.”

“Shut it, Cheollie.”

~*~

Seungcheol’s been under direct orders from literally everyone in the group chat to not turn up at Jihoon’s until 6:30pm at the very earliest, so it’s with a sleepy Jisoo clutching at his sleeve that he knocks on the door at 6:31pm exactly.

“They’re not gonna hear that,” Jisoo yawns, rolling his eyes at Seungcheol’s feeble knock. “Bash the door down, I can hear the High School Musical playing from out here.”

Seungcheol cries. On the inside. “God, why did they pull out the High School Musical? I said I wanted something chill, and we all know how wild Seokmin goes to Bop to the Top.”

“Take what you can get, Seungcheol,” is all Jisoo says before pushing past Seungcheol and all but punching the door. “Take what you can get.”

It’s Mingyu that opens the door, looking the happiest Seungcheol’s seen him in a long time, and it’s probably something to do with the Wonwoo and the giddiness he can see surrounding Mingyu like a halo, but it also might just be the novelty of being in Jihoon’s house.

“Birthday boy! You’re finally here, come on, hurry up and get inside!” Mingyu shouts, pulling Seungcheol into a hug that squishes his already unsettled stomach beyond saving. But he pulls his arms tighter around Mingyu regardless, holding on as he murmurs a small happy birthday.

The house is just as Seungcheol remembers it; all white walls and photos of the life-cycle of Jihoon lining the hallways. There’s one from what Seungcheol guesses is mid primary school, a sunburnt Jihoon glowering at the camera as he pokes at a jellyfish on a packed beach. It’s his favourite. And he may or may not have kept a photo of it on his phone ever since he first saw it three years ago.

Everyone’s waiting for them in the living room, but the attention’s mainly on Seokmin who’s gone for his own makeshift karaoke with a stick of celery, belting out Sharpay’s parts with no mercy. Seungcheol can’t help but laugh a little, a smile pushing its way to his lips, and yeah, maybe he’s missed this.

“And the party has arrived,” Seokmin sings, pointing dramatically at Seungcheol and dancing his way over. Seungcheol finds himself with hands on his hips and then he’s doing a strange kind of waltz with Seokmin around the living room.

He gets dumped on the couch eventually (“sorry bro, but you’re kind of a shit dancer”), squished between Soonyoung and Seungkwon, a place no one wants to be ever.

“Many happy returns,” Seungkwon tells him, sneers really, his over the top British accent not doing him any favours.

“Cheers.”
Soonyoung settles for a sharp ruffle of Seungcheol’s hair, and he can’t help but pout a little as he flips his fringe back in place. “Really, Soonyoung?”

“Hey, I’m just spreading the love, being happy, celebrating your birth,” Soonyoung says, waving a hand dismissively. “Speaking of! Eighteen, hm?”

Seungcheol sighs. He’d thought they’d at least get to the cake before he had to field any questions about what may or may not be on his wrist. He’d also thought that after the whole Wonwoo debacle, maybe they’d learn some tact, but maybe that’s always going to be too much to hope for.

“Eighteen.”

He leaves it at that. If they want to know, they can ask, but Seungcheol’s done with baring his soul in ways that leave him torn and gasping for some sense of the sanity that he left behind all those months ago. Even so, he can’t help the way his fingers grab nervously at his sleeves, and he certainly doesn’t miss the way Soonyoung’s eyes narrow in on the movement.

He’s surprised though, when Soonyoung just leans in to ruffle his hair again, saying “next grog run’s on you, hey?”

“Course, man.”

Seungcheol flees after that, not before getting in his own hair ruffle, both of Soonyoung and Seungkwan’s hair. He ends up sitting next to Chan on the floor, and he’s reminded of that day so long ago, sitting under that old tree, and he leans in to pull Chan closer.

“Come hug me, Channie.”

“Mmkay.”

Apparently that seems to be an invitation for a cuddle pile, because soon enough Jun’s flopping himself over their laps with no restraint, limbs hitting Seungcheol’s face like there’s no tomorrow. He runs with it though, lets himself flop right alongside Jun until Chan has to deal with them squashing him.

It devolves from there. Soon enough, everyone’s collapsed onto them and Chan’s whining from the bottom of the pile, but no one’s really listening to him as they all just sort of exist. Seungcheol sighs a little, lets himself relax even further, wiggling a bit to get comfortable. Once he’s there though, he’s staring right at Jeonghan, and just his luck, Jeonghan’s staring right back at him.

They just watch each other for a second, silence creeping in from all sides, settling around the two of them. Seungcheol breaks the stare, instead burying his face in Jun’s shoulder.

But he can still feel Jeonghan gaze on him.

He eventually crawls his way out of the human pile and escapes for the kitchen for a quick break, Jeonghan’s stare getting a little to strong, the weight of everyone sitting on him a little too heavy.

It’s a lot.

Seungcheol leans up against the sink, a glass of water in his hand. He shuts his eyes and he lets himself stop. Breathe.

In, hold for four, out, hold for four.
Who would’ve thought that compulsory school mindfulness sessions would come in handy one day.

He’s interrupted on the second count of an inhale to someone’s hand on his arm. He opens his eyes to see a more than slightly tipsy Soonyoung in front of him, eyebrows knit with the kind of concern that only comes to light when there’s alcohol involved.

“Soonyoung,” he whines, “I just wanna- I wanna see if you’re happy.”

“Soonyoung, what are you-”

Seungcheol’s startled into silence when Soonyoung grabs his sleeve and starts pulling.

“Oh shit, no Soonyoung, stop, please.”

Soonyoung doesn’t hear him though, too caught up in the haze of determination and vodka.

“Holy shit.”

Seungcheol almost cries. “I know, but-”

But Soonyoung doesn’t listen. He grabs Seungcheol’s arm and drags him out of the kitchen, blabbering about what good news this is and how he’s gotta tell everyone.

“No, no, no, Soonyoung, please stop.”

“Jeonghan!” Soonyoung yells over Seungcheol’s protests. “Did you know about this?!”

He’s waving Seungcheol’s bare wrist around, and they’re too far from the others for them to see much of anything, but Jeonghan’s obviously not having it.

“Yes, Soonyoung. I’ve seen it. And I don’t fucking need to see it again. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

And with that, Jeonghan’s up and grabbing his coat, striding off down the hall and disappearing with a bang of the front door.

The room’s silent until Soonyoung speaks again.

“But- but why isn’t he happy?”

Seungcheol sighs, looking down at his bare wrist; the wrist that reads Jeonghan all too bodily.

He pulls his sleeve back down, sets his jaw and pats Soonyoung on the back.

“Don’t worry about it.”

And Seungcheol really, really hopes he doesn’t, and if they’re lucky enough, Soonyoung might even forget all about it by the time it’s morning.

Seungcheol wishes he could do the same.

End Notes
Please tell us if there's any particular Australian stuff that you need explained!

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