'wtf' (and other solid ways of saying 'you're cute')
by snapchat

Summary

Which important item did Park Woojin get stolen?

(A) His identity
(B) His heart
(C) All of the above

Notes

why can't i shut up

See the end of the work for more notes.

This is humiliating. Borderline cruel and unusual punishment.

To say that Woojin isn’t enjoying himself in the slightest would be an egregious understatement and he finds that with each passing second, the desire to pursue a life of total isolation becomes more and more appealing.
He’s looked into monasteries and desert islands quite a few times before. Tibet. Mongolia. New Zealand. Outer Space. A new potential destination for each time the world fails him colossally.

“I just,” Daehwi begins to say, cutting right through Woojin’s train of thought. The expression on Daehwi’s face is remarkably concerned, perplexed, lost even. He purses his lips, looks Woojin dead in the eye like he’s Woojin’s mother unearthing a porn magazine from beneath his mattress. “I just don’t understand how one person could be so incredibly…”

“Just spit it out,” Woojin insists.

“Wow. I mean, no offense, hyung, but, stupid,” finishes Daehwi, with feeling.

Donghyun clears his throat loudly. “I think what Daehwi means is that, uh. Um. Well, um.” The longest pause in the history of long pauses situates itself cozily in Woojin’s tiny apartment. Every single person in the room holds their breaths. Including Donghyun, who exhaled and then choked out a dainty, “Hm.”

He’s floundering, which is a terrible sign considering the fact that Donghyun is one of the kindest people on the planet and if even he can’t figure out a way to sugar-coat Park Woojin’s Greatest Fuck Up of All Time Literally of All Time like Time Didn’t Even See This Shit Coming, then Woojin has sincerely fucked up with a capital Fucked Up.

“Listen,” Woojin huffs.

Everyone is listening and he finds he doesn’t actually have anything all too convincing to say. He doesn’t even quite know what he’s trying to convince everyone of. He’s having trouble convincing himself of anything, period, and that’s probably the best place to start.

“It was right after I woke up,” he explains shakily, “and when I’m tired, I can’t think straight—”

“Or at all?” interjects Daehwi.

“—and there were so many comments and really, if this is anyone’s fault, it’s Hyungseob’s, because he’s the one who tagged me anyway. Or, you know what? Let’s blame technology. The youth. Social media’s negative impact on—”

“Woojin,” Youngmin exhales out solemnly. He folds his hands together, pressing his index fingers against his lips contemplatively. “Can we just go over everything that happened one more time? I’m just having some trouble processing it.”

It’s much too early for this sort of nonsense and Woojin can’t even tell if this is his reality or if this is an extended nightmare comparable to the one he had three nights ago where Daehwi grew four extra heads and, in the process, four extra mouths to talk from.

If there is a God, Woojin thinks he’s kind of an asshole. Consistently, too.

“You’re really going to make me repeat myself,” he deadpans. He stares blankly at the ceiling of his tiny studio apartment and closes his eyes in muted agony. His lips are pursed shut but he’d be screaming if they weren’t. “You’re really going to make me say all of this stuff out loud. Again.”

“Ugh, yeah, he’s right. Don’t make him humiliate himself so brazenly,” Daehwi says, in what Woojin thinks might be his defense. “He has his pride too, shockingly enough. We need to salvage it, Youngmin-hyung! We can’t continue to crush it into even smaller more microscopic particles of dust. That would contribute to pollution.”
Donghyun clears his throat loudly for the second time. “Identity theft is really common in the… world,” he insists frailly with a wavering smile. “The advent of technological growth makes phishing scams so much more convincing and… with time… I… Uh.”

“Don’t hurt yourself,” Youngmin says out of genuine concern.

"Breathe, hyung. You can do it,” Daehwi adds in encouragement. “Lying is easy.”

“Sometimes… it… happens,” concludes Donghyun, as ungracefully as possible. He offers another smile, stronger this time, and Woojin appreciates the solid effort.

He can’t say the smile makes him feel any better about the current state of his life, but he tries to mirror it—through gritted teeth—just to acknowledge Donghyun’s kindness.

In spite of himself, Woojin lets out a long, sharp, pained sigh moments after.

It’s too early for this. Class isn’t for another few hours, but he supposes that’s the last of his concerns. Every concern that he could possibly have is now at the very bottom of his list and he thinks that’s miserable. The fact that something could be so absolutely terrible and time-consuming to bump ‘GET UR SHIT TOGETHER JFC’ down from the number-one spot after three months is synonymous with the apocalypse or global warming or some other equally terrible catastrophe.

Honestly.

Global warming? Get fucked, planet Earth. Polar bears haven’t done shit for him anyway.

“Woojin,” Youngmin repeats and Woojin can tell that there’s another solid effort being made to sound as Not Irate as possible. He would like to appreciate it but would also like to punch himself in the mouth, and he finds that trying to decide between the two is more difficult than anticipated.

“Please.”

With much futility, Woojin rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands and then folds them daintily, placing them in his lap like the dignified person he swears he is.

“So,” he starts gruffly. He purposefully clears his throat, definitely not for the purpose of delaying self-humiliation for as long as possible. “I woke up late yesterday and was in a rush to get to class—"

“It was Sunday,” Daehwi adds. Unhelpfully. As always.

“—and in the middle of trying to get my pants on, I don’t know why but, I thought it’d be a good idea to check my phone. So. I did. Checked my email. Checked my texts. Checked my KakaoTalk. And then I checked FaceBook and saw that, amidst the many notifications that I’d been ignoring, Hyungseob tagged me in something.”

“Okay.” Youngmin closes his eyes like he’s really trying to envision Woojin crawling to his demise with one leg in his pants and one leg lost to the world. “Okay,” he says again, like he needs to remind himself that this is real and happening and not a figment of his imagination.

(Woojin can relate.)

“I just want to emphasize that it was fuck o’clock in the morning and I actually misread the time… and the date… and… just… didn’t really know what year it was or where I was or who I was.”

Donghyun frowns. "Please don’t curse."
“Okay,” Youngmin says a third time. He folds his hands together once more and presses his knuckles to his forehead in deep thought. With each passing second, Youngmin looks more and more pained by the weight of the world.

(Woojin can relate.)

“Anyway,” Woojin continues shakily, “Hyungseob tagged me in this picture that said ‘post your phone number to find out what grade you’re getting on your next test.’”

“Okay,” says Youngmin for a fourth time. His voice wavers and it sounds as though he’s aged ten years in the span of seconds. He drops his hands to his knees, palms down, and lets out a sharp breath. “See, this is where I’m beginning to lose you. This is where I’m beginning to have trouble grasping what happened.”

“Anyway,” Woojin repeats. “In my extremely fair and understandable daze, I posted my phone number because I have a test next Monday that I might literally get my ass crushed by. Hyung, you wouldn’t understand but there’s a special sort of hell reserved for my major and this fear is legitimate and my ass is precious. You know my parents. You know my mom and the ability she has to chill my blood if I get bad marks—”

“Auntie is so kind. You’re just stupid,” Daehwi says, which Woojin pointedly ignores.

“Woojin,” Youngmin sighs out.

“Right. Moving on. So. I locked my phone. Somehow got my pants on. Was reaching for a belt when I realized that it was Sunday and three in the morning and… uh, well, I went back to sleep.”

Youngmin now looks as though he’s been hit by forty high-powered migraines simultaneously.

(Woojin can relate.)

“This morning,” and Woojin feels the aggravation all over again while trying to remember every intimate detail of a few hours ago, “I woke up to a phone call from a number I didn’t recognize.”

The high-powered migraine count ups itself by the hundreds and Youngmin clamps his eyes shut tightly and appears to be in immense pain or trying to swallow an entire unpeeled lemon. Donghyun pats his shoulder gingerly and Youngmin only sinks deeper into his giant flannel.

“Who picks up calls from numbers they don’t recognize in this day and age? And at six in the evening? You don’t even pick up your mom’s calls at six in the morning. What is this double standard?” Daehwi demands, frowning.

He briefly forgets that Daehwi is technically younger than him and most definitely getting his ass kicked after this entire debacle is cleared up because Confucius did not die for this blatant disrespect.

“Who calls people in this day and age? You don’t even call your mom on her birthday. I would know because I do, and she tells me everything,” Daehwi continues.

Woojin opens his mouth to say something and promptly closes it because Daehwi is not only right but right to the point that it’s annoying and he does not want to fan the flames of sass that run amuck in Daehwi’s veins. He knows better than that.

(He makes a note to self to call his mother on her birthday.)

“It was really early and I picked up the phone without thinking.” Woojin glowers at the floor
petulantly and then lets out a sigh (the fiftieth of the morning, maybe, not counting Youngmin’s sixhundred in the past ten minutes alone). “There was this guy on the line, and he told me that I was getting a lawsuit filed against me? Because of credit card debt? And because I can’t shotgun a beer? And that he needed my social security number?”

“Even though you don’t have a credit card,” Daehwi states, not asks, but states. “A guy calls you at six in the morning outside of regular business hours on a weekend and asks for your identity. Literally asks for your identity to solve debt that cannot possibly be yours. And insults your honor while you’re at it.”

“Yes, thank you, Daehwi,” Woojin manages tersely. He mouths I hate you and Daehwi smiles sweetly in response.

Youngmin covers his face with his hands and does not speak or move for a solid forty-five seconds. Exactly forty-five seconds.

He would know because the forty-five seconds is excruciatingly long and Woojin contemplates escaping from his own home through the window exactly forty-five times within the time frame.

“So. You, you gave this guy—this absolute stranger… You… You gave this absolute total stranger your social security number.”

The air in the room chills and Woojin wonders if it’s too late to start praying. Or believing.

“I,” he begins unconvincingly, “might have.”

“Woojin.”

“Yes?” Woojin says quickly, expression as solemn and as indignant as he can manage. And then, quieter: “Andmaybemybankaccountnumber.”

“You,” Daehwi begins with a wave of his hand, “are sooooo stupid.”

He decides that death would be preferable to telling his parents the truth. Youngmin doesn’t approve and Daehwi has nothing helpful to offer except reminders of Woojin’s subpar intellect. Donghyun is too kind to really grasp what the fuck is going on and Woojin is too proud to actually break it down (again).

Essentially, no one is on his side (which is fair) (unfortunately) but Woojin is alone in his apartment now and left to his own devices without counsel and without responsible people reminding him to mind his conscience and please stop being an idiot.
“I’ll figure it out,” he announces to absolutely no one in particular. The haunting voice of Youngmin at the back of his head telling him ‘I didn’t raise you to be like this’ is loud and clear but Woojin is remarkably well-versed in the art of ignoring rationality. And Youngmin.

(Essentially synonymous.)

The wind whistles exasperatedly.

“I’ll figure it out,” Woojin says again.

There has to be an easier way to cope with the crippling and literal loss of one’s identity that doesn’t involve talking to automated customer service robots on the phone or listening to elevator music while on hold for forty-five minutes because all customer service personnel have better things to do than deal with you lol.

Anything that involves minimal interaction with people or artificial intelligence or tunes that get trapped in his head for weeks on end—anything—will do.

There has to be a simpler method and Woojin thinks that it’s okay to be late for a class he’s borderline failing if it means he’s spending lots of quality time with his brain trying to rack up ideas (escape routes) instead of succumbing to the carnal part of him that wants to kill Hyungseob for ever tagging him in anything.

(Avoiding homicide and a life in prison is much more important than being on-time for a class that might as well be in Chinese.)

It’s not Hyungseob’s fault. Technically.

“It’s not my fault,” Hyungseob affirms in lieu of a normal greeting when Woojin finally manages to get to class (obscenely late). He slides over half-written notes as a peace offering of some sort and then gestures to his phone, eyes darting to the front of the room where the professor is clicking through slides and then back to Woojin. “Daehwi told me,” he says in a stage-whisper.

Woojin scowls. “It’s been a minute.”

Hyungseob rolls his eyes. “A minute is all Daehwi needs.” He’s a bit more attentive as a student than Woojin is and his gaze flickers to the professor periodically to make sure their conversation isn’t too obtrusive. “Anyway, dude.”

“I know,” Woojin says, despite not really knowing, and despite the fact that not knowing was the ultimate cause of his crippling demise. “I know.”

“I mean, I’m kind of sorry,” mumbles Hyungseob.

“It’s oka—”

“I didn’t know you’d be that stupid.”

“—alright, fuck you.”

Hyungseob shrugs his shoulders flippantly but, in his defense, looks a tiny bit more apologetic than Daehwi has ever looked in his life. “I’m sure it’ll be fine. There are a lot of extra security measures for, uh, well, everything? These days, it’s hard to get your identity stolen if you’re smart about it.”
They exchange looks.

“Which,” Hyungseob continues, punctuated, sounding a little more forced than Woojin would personally enjoy, “you weren’t. But. That’s fine. Because you have good luck and your good luck will protect you where God might not.”

They exchange looks (again).

“Amen,” concludes Hyungseob.

“Amen,” Woojin mutter, eyes rolling upward. He clasps his hands together in prayer.

There’s a clattering at the backdoor of the classroom, near the seats they’ve situated themselves in. Understandably, every head turns to assess who the ever-loving fuck could possibly be so brazen as to cause a literal commotion with only fifteen minutes left to class.

Unsurprisingly, it’s Bae Jinyoung.

As though Jinyoung’s mere presence is enough explanation, the professor carries on with the lecture after a disapproving shake of the head.

“What are we praying about?” Jinyoung whispers in greeting.

Both Hyungseob and Woojin tame their expressions, trying in vain to refrain from snickering. They turn nondescriptly to greet a frazzled Jinyoung with nods. He looks like more of a mess than Woojin did fifteen minutes ago: hair dripping wet, t-shirt crumpled, thirty thousand disheveled papers in his arms, backpack wide open.

“Was there a hurricane outside?” Hyungseob asks instead of answering. “Or did you get your identity stolen too?”

“Too soon,” Woojin hisses.

Jinyoung, for some reason that hopefully isn’t literally identity theft, looks too empathetic—borderline uncomfortable with Hyungseob’s question. He shifts (loudly) into a seat next to Woojin and sinks back in his chair. “Hurricane Jihoon maybe,” he says with a roll of his eyes, as though that’s explanation enough.

Woojin has heard Jihoon’s name in passing more than a couple of times since his freshman year. The Korean community on campus is pretty large and Woojin, himself, is pretty socially averse—or “slow to warm up to people,” which is the nice way of saying the same thing. Combine the two conditions and it makes sense that he doesn’t know anything about Jihoon except, vaguely, a blurred out face he might have seen at a party and the fact that Jihoon knows Jinyoung’s deepest darkest secrets like Daehwi knows Woojin’s.

“What’d he do now?”

The withering look Jinyoung gives Hyungseob almost asks, what didn’t he do?

“Lectured me for like two hours straight this morning about how I’m a terrible person because I convinced him to—” Abruptly, Jinyoung shuts his mouth, gaze lingering on Woojin’s face for a brief second. He shakes his head. “Same old stuff,” Jinyoung says instead.

“Same old stuff,” echoes Woojin.
“He was freaking out about something tiny and wouldn’t let it go,” Jinyoung explains with a wave of his hand. “More importantly, how’s your identity, dude?”

Hyungseob makes an abrupt cutting motion across his neck and clears his throat indiscreetly when Woojin glowers at him.

“It doesn’t matter,” says Woojin, in spite of the fact that it definitely matters and it’s probably the only thing that actually matters in his life right now. “They can try but there’s nothing for them to steal from me anyway.”

“Your identity,” Hyungseob suggests. “All of your life savings from that summer you spent working at Walmart.”

“Aw, that was the best. Free gallons of ice cream every night.”

“They weren’t free, you dick. Those came out of my paycheck.”

The expression on Jinyoung’s face doesn’t even falter. “Free for me,” he amends. “Delicious too. Best part of my summer.”

Before Woojin has the opportunity to tell Jinyoung that his head is too tiny for his entire body (the best comeback he can manage on the spot), the professor clears his throat loudly.

Like children caught with their hands in the cookie jar, Jinyoung and Woojin dip their heads apologetically in unison and sink deep into their seats. For added flare, Woojin kicks Hyungseob’s shoe as a ‘thank you’ for the lack of warning.

“Anyway,” Jinyoung whispers, leaning closer to Woojin, “I wouldn’t worry too much.”

“About the ice cream?” Woojin replies as quietly as possible.

Jinyoung snorts. “No, dude. About the identity theft thing.” He straightens up when the professor pauses to ask for questions. “It, uh, sounds like someone was just playing a prank on you.”

“You talking from experience?” And Woojin does genuinely mean it as a joke but it’s impossible to miss the way Jinyoung stiffens like a deer caught in the headlights.

“Just trust me,” Jinyoung says after a long pause. “It’s not a big deal at all.”

Class ends semi-smoothly. Woojin pretends not to notice the professor shooting daggers at him (or Jinyoung) (mostly Jinyoung) (ideally), and Jinyoung literally does not notice.

“You guys should pay more attention,” Hyungseob comments offhandedly as they’re packing up to
“Leave. ‘Aren’t you both failing?’”

“Yeah, but once you hit rock bottom, there’s no other way but up,” replies Jinyoung. “Or deeper down if you really put your mind to it. I don’t know. We have the technology, if you think about it. I could find a new rock bottom. I guess I should be paying more attention. Or should I just be giving up? Don’t I lose either way?”

“Failure keeps us humble,” Woojin interjects in a feeble attempt to salvage what’s left of Jinyoung’s defense of their grades (or lack thereof).

“You guys should pay more attention,” repeats Hyungseob, with feeling.

Jinyoung shrugs. “I’m not going to fight the forces of nature.”

Woojin lets out a long withering sigh. “Same. You guys want to grab lunch?”

“Can’t,” says Hyungseob with a halfhearted pout. “Meeting up with Euiwoong. He said he’d help me study for Econ.”

“Just call it a date.” Jinyoung rolls his eyes. “I won’t get jealous. I’ve grown. I’ve matured. I’ve gotten three inches closer to making Daehwi realize we’re soulmates.”

“Your insoles are the only things that have grown three inches,” Hyungseob replies.

Woojin makes a noise of disapproval because there’s something incredibly taboo about one of his friends genuinely liking someone who might as well be his brother and/or rabid pet dog.

That, and because he’s the only one (minus Youngmin and Donghyun, who are more like their Adult Supervision than Actual People) who knows that Daehwi most definitely also thinks that he and Jinyoung are soulmates but to express the sentiment would be signing a formal death wish.

“How does everyone know about my insoles?”

He’s also the only one who knows that Daehwi is responsible for accidentally spreading that otherwise-dark secret.

“Don’t fight the forces of nature,” Hyungseob echoes mockingly.

Woojin tactfully stays quiet.

He’s about to try to convince Jinyoung into treating him to Chipotle in penance for the approximately fifty gallons of ice cream he Essentially Stole from Walmart (and Woojin’s wallet) when his phone begins to vibrate and an unfamiliar number blinks angrily at him from the screen.

Understandably, Woojin’s wary about picking up another call from a stranger. He’s much more conscious and aware of his surroundings now, but he can’t imagine the chill he’d feel in his blood if the call was from, say, his bank, to let him know that his entire life’s savings (thank you, Walmart and no thank you, Jinyoung) had been swallowed into a sinkhole of depravity.

“I’m gonna dip then,” Woojin says, lifting a hand to wave goodbye to his friends. “I don’t want to sit one-on-one with Jinyoung and listen to him write bad poetry about Daehwi.”

Jinyoung looks offended.

“Again,” adds Woojin, for good measure.
"They're good haikus," mumbles Jinyoung to no one in particular. “The subject is ambiguous,” he says, a little too late.

“See you later,” Hyungseob responds. “If you need anything, like a place to stay after all of your funds and your apartment and your life are seized from you, let me know.”

Woojin stares at Hyungseob, dead-eyed, before turning to leave just as his phone stills in his hand.

It’s only when he’s made it a distance away from Jinyoung and Hyungseob that he pulls open his call log, confirming his fleeting suspicion that the unknown number from ten minutes ago most certainly is the unknown number from the Morning of Hell.

He has to deliberate, has to stand in the middle of the hallway and seriously think about what else he could possibly have left to be stolen.

“My savings.” Likely, but he’s shit with managing expenses and his dad still protects his Real Savings Account with an iron fist. “My little sister? My little sister’s savings—”

His phone starts to vibrate again. The unknown number blinks insistently at him a second time.

The world slows to a stop and Woojin has to rationally consider the pros and cons of picking up this call.

Cons: Would probably get ass kicked literally or figuratively by every single one of his friends except for Jinyoung, who might just laugh. Identity thief could pull some Ursula-shit on him and steal his voice over the phone or something.

Pros: …

Woojin looks at the ground. He looks side-to-side. He looks behind his shoulder.

He looks at his phone.

And accepts the call.

“Are you calling me to steal the rest of my livelihood,” Woojin demands immediately.

All he can hear from the other line is the sound of cars—a busy street, maybe—and someone’s heavy breathing, almost panting.

For a second, Woojin has to wonder if he just got butt-dialed by his identity thief, which might be considerably worse and significantly more humiliating than getting his identity stolen in the first place.

Right as he’s about to hang up and hurl himself into incoming student traffic, someone speaks.

“Hello?” A voice, undoubtedly the voice that stole Woojin’s identity, asks, sounding out-of-breath and genuinely confused. “I, um, is this Woojin? Park Woojin?”

Woojin narrows his eyes. “Like you don’t already know?”

The voice has the nerve to sigh and if it were the slightest bit possible, Woojin thinks he would literally shove his fist through the phone to punch this dude in the face. Twice. He hasn’t committed a real act of violence since the last time he stepped on a flower in grade school and had to sit through his little sister crying in repentance on his behalf. This double-punch would be a big deal. A landmark of sorts.
“I, I—uh, I’m sorry,” the thief says after a punctuated silence. He sounds resigned, guilty, and way too awkward to be the same person from this morning, however similar their voices might be. It almost makes Woojin rethink his hypothetical double-whammy. “I know this is strange. I just didn’t know how else to contact you, and, um, I… I’m Jihoon.”

Woojin stares at the ceiling and suddenly feels extremely uncertain about what the fuck is happening.

“Nice to meet you?” he manages after floundering for words. And then, upon regaining his senses: “No, wait, what the fuck, it’s actually not nice to meet you at all. What do you want? Why are you telling me your name? What kind of evil villain are you, introducing yourself like you didn’t ruin my life?”

“I’m not a villain!”

“‘I’m not a villain!’” mocks Woojin.

“I really—okay, I understand that we might have gotten off on the wrong foot…”

“We ran a marathon on the wrong fucking foot. You tried to steal my identity.”

“I know! But I didn’t! I really honestly swear I didn’t!”

“You, a thief, in your thief voice, on your thief phone, telling me, swearing upon your thief’s honor, that you didn’t steal my identity. Okay. Convincing. Next thing I know, you’re going to try to tell me tomatoes are a fruit.” Woojin sucks in a breath. “Thief.”

“I,” ‘Jihoon’ stammers again before trailing off into radio silence. “Actually, well, tomatoes technically are a frui—okay, no. Sorry, that’s not what I wanted to say. I’m really sorry, I am. This morning was a total joke and I didn’t realize you’d take me seriously! I wanted to talk to you like a normal person, I swear. But Jinyoung said—”

“I don’t care what Jinyoung said—wait.” Jihoon’s words belatedly process in Woojin’s brain. “Bae Jinyoung?”

Blood rushes to his head and he feels the onset of either a migraine, severe caffeine withdrawal, or the fury of ten-thousand angry suns consume him whole.

Potentially all of the above.

“You had class with him just now, right?” Jihoon doesn’t wait for Woojin to respond before continuing. “And he didn’t say anything. Because he’s Bae Jinyoung. Of course. Of course.”

They both fall silent, and then, in unison: “I’m going to kill him.”
After agreeing to meet up to discuss the predicament further (read: ways to make Jinyoung suffer), Woojin finds himself hiding behind a potted plant at the designated coffee shop down the street from his apartment building.

Some might say that hiding behind foliage isn’t the best way to make one’s presence known to a complete stranger. On most days, Woojin might be inclined to agree.

It’s just, today, in particular, there happens to be a huge, glaring problem seated at a table by the window approximately twenty-feet away from him.

Woojin’s phone vibrates, and the haphazard JIHoon he’d managed to save the number as earlier blinks at him insistently.

His intention was to come out of this meeting entirely unscathed. He’d get a formal apology from Jihoon, make sure his identity really hadn’t been stolen, devise a plan to get Jinyoung back for whatever-the-fuck-it-is that he did, and he’d get back home before dinner time to have a celebratory meal of three packs of instant ramen.

“Uh,” Woojin says into the receiver of his cellphone, in lieu of a greeting. “Hello.”

“Hello?” Jihoon sounds confused. “Are you almost here? It’s kind of busy. I’m sitting at a table near the entrance where the potted plants ar—uh. I… I see you.”

Woojin closes his eyes and sighs. He slowly rises from his squatting position by his good old plant friend, ending the call at the same time. Shamefully, he lifts a hand in greeting to Jihoon.

“Did you…” Jihoon trails off when Woojin bridges the twenty-foot distance and seats himself daintily in the empty chair. “Did you drop something by the plants?”

His dignity, maybe. His pride. The last shred of respect he had for himself, if he squints.

“Yeah,” says Woojin. “Something like that.”

Some might say that hiding behind foliage and getting caught hiding behind said foliage isn’t the best way to make one’s presence known to a newly graduated stranger. On most days, Woojin might be inclined to agree.

The issue with today, however, is that there is a giant elephant in the room and the elephant’s name is Park Jihoon.

Jihoon, to Woojin’s utmost chagrin and dismay, is really fucking cute.

“Are you okay?” The concern on Jihoon’s face is well-intended and sincere. “If you’re not feeling well, we can talk about this another time… Or, I mean, um, never? If you’d prefer that? Which would be fair? Because I mean, I did play a pretty mean prank on you…”
Daehwi frequently reminds Woojin that he’s ‘at that age’ where he should stop seeing every single person in a room as an identical talking beanbag. He’d never really thought too much about it or let it concern him. Romance isn’t ever at the top or even vaguely close to the top of Woojin’s ever-growing list of priorities, and he’s never been able to understand what the big deal is about Jinyoung’s jellybean-sized face, or Jieqiong’s ‘could lead to world peace if the United Nations would just respond to my letters’ smile (according to Yoojung), or Sungwoo’s apparently finely-chiseled jawline made from marble, or anything of the sort.

He has always been a simple guy and his world, as a result, has been immensely peaceful.

Which is why he kind of wishes a car would drive through the wall and take him out of his misery because there is something exceedingly bright and not at all talking-beanbag-esque about Jihoon’s face and Jihoon’s smile and the way Jihoon is looking at Woojin as though Woojin is literally wearing a placard that says ‘I’M HAVING A TERRIFYING MOMENT OF ACUTE AWARENESS’ around his neck.

“Wow,” Woojin says after an extended moment of complete silence. So, this is what it feels like to be attracted? To? Someone? What the fuck? “What the fuck.”

It takes him a second to realize that he still hasn’t acknowledged Jihoon’s words or anything aside from the inhuman glow of sheer immortality (or something) emanating from Jihoon’s very existence.

“You’re mad,” says Jihoon. He doesn’t look nervous, so much as he does apologetic. “That’s reasonable. You should be mad. It’d make no sense if you weren’t mad. I’m really sorry. I’ve been meaning to try to say hello and maybe befriend you since our freshman year, seriously, and I don’t know, I guess the circumstances were never really in our favor. And then this morning, Jinyoung suggested we play a prank on you and he said it’d be ‘the perfect way to bridge the gap’ and god, I’m not really sure why I trusted him, but…”

Is it even legal? For people to have literal sparkles in their eyes? Like, what the fuck?

“I swear I didn’t steal your identity,” Jihoon continues, despite the fact that Woojin has heard close-to-nothing of what Jihoon’s been saying. “I mean, I can’t even remember my own social security number, let alone my bank account number. There’s no way I would remember yours. Honestly, when you started literally telling me your information, I started panicking anyway. Jinyoung and I didn’t think you’d actually do it, and really, he owes you an apology too. I’m sorry, seriously. I should have just sucked it up and talked to you like a normal person, but, uh, I’m kind of awkward around new people and I heard you were the same way so—”

“Wait, stop,” Woojin interrupts, finally tuning into the conversation that he is very much so supposed to be a part of. He drags a hand down his face miserably before letting it drop to his knee. “You really didn’t steal my information?”

Jihoon nods his head so quickly and so vigorously that he jostles the table with his knee. “I really didn’t,” he affirms.

“Okay,” says Woojin. He lets out a deep breath. “Alright. Then, well, uh, it’s settled. It’s Jinyoung’s fault anyway.”

The incredulous look Jihoon’s wearing makes Woojin shift uncomfortably.

“Uh,” Woojin continues feebly, “I forgive you.”

And almost immediately, Jihoon’s face brightens with relief and Woojin swears that the temporary
blindness he’s experiencing isn’t coverable by his medical insurance. He could sue for this.

“That’s great,” Jihoon says with a shaky smile. “Wow. I’m going to kill Jinyoung.”

“No, not if I kill him first.”

Jihoon laughs. Angels sing or something. The entire world shatters from the sheer force of the laughter alone. “Are we, uh, good then?”

Even if they weren’t good, even if Woojin wanted to cling onto bitterness and misguided contempt for a little longer, he doesn’t think it’s possible when he is having trouble meeting Jihoon’s eyes and also too preoccupied with panicking inwardly about how sweaty his palms, weak his knees are getting.

(He hasn’t had any of mom’s spaghetti, but he does feel like he’s about to hurl.)

“Sure,” Woojin manages, putting on a stunning display of false bravado. “Why not,” he adds, because he has this under control.

“Alright. Then I guess it’s nice to formally meet you, Woojin,” Jihoon says, extending a hand.

Which is normal. Handshakes are normal. But Woojin’s hands are uncharacteristically sweating up small waterfalls and he thinks it’d be too conspicuous if he tried to wipe them right now on the legs of his jeans and Jesus Christ, he should have watched more rom-coms instead of memorizing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle episodes growing up.

“I,” stammers Woojin. “Nice to meet you too. I can’t. My hands are.”

Jihoon blinks.

“I,” repeats Woojin, “am allergic to handshakes. Sorry.”

Flawless execution. Master Splinter would be proud.

He thinks about it for a little while.

After leaving the coffee shop to head back home, Woojin takes the time to really contemplate the fact that for the first time ever, outside of his eternal crush on Drake-hyungnim (and his first ever girlfriend in preschool), his heart has skipped a beat in conversation with a normal person.

This kind of stuff is a lost cause to him.

Sure, he’s seen people titter over their crushes, watched people struggle immensely and eventually
(painstakingly) get together, observed the whole push-and-pull and constant back-and-forth that comes with trying to muster up the courage to confess—

He’s seen everything there is to see. He’s just never felt it himself. As a result, he’s never really thought twice about it, never felt the need to think twice about it or the things naturally leading up to it.

That isn’t to say that this is—whatever this is—a crush. Crushes demand more information, more time, more something than whatever this split-second interest just barely has.

Woojin’s only interested, only confused because in his one-and-almost-a-half years of university, he’s genuinely never looked at someone and thought, wow, they’re really cute.

No one, literally no one, has ever looked at him with sparkles in their eyes before. Not even Daehwi when asking for a favor. And this guy, Park Jihoon, just fucking glows without even trying.

Ridiculous.

He still has fifty Safari windows pulled up on his iPhone from Google searching whether aliens can possess human bodies and how far away Area-51 is from his apartment.

It’s kind of strange.

It’s nothing to overthink, nothing to deliberate so intensely—but he can’t help it because there’s something about Jihoon, about their entire encounter, that’s too hard not to think about.

The world is shaking Woojin by the shoulders, telling him to wake up! Live a little! Have some fun! And Woojin is trying, maybe too desperately, to decline.

Dinnertime slips by and there’s nothing left to do in the day except count down the hours until it’s time to sleep.

The restless feeling in his bones, in his muscles, is hard to shake.

So.

He decides to go for a run.

Woojin has gone on a run approximately once in his entire life, dating back to kindergarten when he was forced to participate in a race against his will. There’s an incomprehensibly tight bubble of anxiety at the core of his chest, however, that won’t go away no matter how much Pepto Bismol he inhales (maybe not the right medication, now that he thinks about it).

So.

He decides to go for a run.

The entire time he spends lacing up his sneakers, walking down the stairs of his apartment building, and out the door onto the sidewalk, he compels himself not to think about anything but running.

For a little while, it’s effective. Thinking about how incredibly out-of-shape he is does wonders as a distraction (it’s hard to deliberate fickle things like infatuation and curiosities when your heart is about to cave in on itself).

About half a mile into his run, winded by the weight of the world and the crippling realization that the five cup ramens he eats everyday are inevitably catching up to him, Woojin decides to go for a
Walking, he comes to realize, does a not-as-great job at distracting him compared to hacking out his lung running.

Case in point: about ten minutes into his walk, Woojin decides to distress KakaoTalk message the only people he thinks might (emphasis on the lingering uncertainty in ‘might’) be able to decode the tangle of things he is still thinking about.

The streets are busy and there’s a lot of traffic, both of the human and automobile quality. It’s probably not the best idea to text and walk when he can barely manage to put pants on and protect his own identity at the same time, but matters of the heart are foreign to him and he’d prefer to get them resolved immediately.

cheetah bois cheetah brothas (4)

WJ Park
hpoythetical question frro u guys

Halfway into typing a follow-up, he gets replies.

iym
are u texting while walking again

Kim Donghyun
please don’t multitask you’ll get another concussion :( 

A fair point, but Woojin has more important things to talk about than potential hospital visits.

WJ Park
No
anywyd
say that
u meet this person who
uhhhh

iym
???
spit it out

david daehwi lee
oh boy

WJ Park
this prson who
tried tto steal ur
iuhh
cat.

iym
…

david daehwi lee
…

Kim Donghyun
????? who would do such a terrible thing?

Okay. So far so decent.

WJ Park
anyway thy tryto steal ur cat
btu like they were..framed? m..myaybe?
so u fidn them
2 collect damages but uhhh

david daehwi lee
oh Boy

iym
…………………

He stops walking in the middle of the sidewalk and stares at his phone. The more he tries to put into words his concerns, the more Woojin is beginning to think that this is a mistake.

WJ Park
theyre like
fuckign
cute??????

Not even a second after he’s sent the messages, Daehwi chimes in with his fair share of wisdom.

david daehwi lee
LMAOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
WHAAAAAAATTTTTT OMG LOOLL
U?????? THINK SOMEONE’S CUTE??????????

WJ Park
He forces himself to keep walking, gaze flickering from furiously tapping away at his keypad to trying to keep an eye out for incoming cars and/or pigeons that fear no god.

**iym**

woojin i swear to god

**david daehwi lee**

IS THIS REAL LIFE LOOOOLLLLLL

**Kim Donghyun**

i don’t understand… is someone trying to steal your cat? you have a cat?

**david daehwi lee**

OMFGG

**iym**

ur ass is grass park woojin

**david daehwi lee**

ICB U FELL IN LOVE WITH UR IDENTITY THIEF

Everything happens too quickly. Too many unhelpful, unsupportive responses fly in at him from all sides.

**WJ Park**

IT’S ALL HYPTOHETICALmdsme

;_;;dx,

**iym**

… woojin

**Kim Donghyun**

where is this cat?

**david daehwi lee**

did he get hit by a car again

omg lmao what kind of sandra bullock romcom

**Kim Donghyun**

is that the cat’s name?

**iym**
By the time Woojin looks up from the ground where his ass has gracelessly landed after full-on colliding with a totally immobile bike rack, he is dismayed to find that while there are very few people who saw him make a complete fool of himself, there is one person that he recognizes standing by the bike rack in muted shock.

And that person is none other than Park Jihoon himself.

“Are you—”

“I’m fine,” Woojin says quickly, looking up at Jihoon and then quickly averting his gaze out of, perhaps, shame. Truth be told, he’s not fine. His pride is hurt, but more than that, he’s almost positive that he skinned both heels of his hands and has the world’s largest bruise on his tailbone. “Doing great. Nice view from here.”

Jihoon’s lips part as though he’s about to say something before he clamps them shut not a second after.


They look at each other for a long, uninterrupted moment before Woojin feels his conscience set every inch of his brain on fire.


The sky above them is dark, as it often is in the evening. He supposes darkness can be nice.

“Yeah,” Jihoon says, stifling a laugh. “Nice seeing you again.” He extends a hand to help Woojin up, expression easing into an almost-teasing smile. “It’s not technically a handshake if you don’t think too much about it. I’m sure your allergy will understand.”

Woojin falters for a second, a scoff slipping out unintentionally as he grabs Jihoon’s hand, allowing himself to be hoisted up. “Kind of soon to be teasing me, isn’t it?” he asks, words slipping out before he has the chance to run them through the verbal filter in his mind.

Realization dawns on him that he might be treading in the shallow waters of familiarity too soon, and he parts his lips again to correct himself, but Jihoon interjects.

“I’m an opportunist,” Jihoon says with a shrug. “You might be making it too easy.”

Maybe he is making it too easy. Anyone else and Woojin would have been inclined to greet them and be well on his way to avoid any extended conversation, but he supposes there’s something about accidentally getting your identity stolen that makes talking candidly a little easier.

“I’ve been told that’s just another way of saying ‘asshole,’” Woojin replies with a raise of his brow. By Daehwi, who is one of the biggest assholes Woojin knows, so maybe the point is lost in some ridiculous paradox he’s too flustered to comprehend. But that’s not important. What’s important is the fact that he almost wants to smile, which is, frankly, terrifying.
“Pet name already?”

“Listen,” says Woojin, “I think if someone tries to steal your identity, you’re allowed to call them whatever you want.”

Jihoon winces, positively wounded. “Any chance you’ll ever let that go?”

“Did Rose let go of Jack during the Titanic?”

“Uh,” Jihoon says faintly, “yes? That was a pretty big part of the plot. Kind of like the climax of the entire film.”

The silence that follows is a little more awkward than it has to be, and Woojin flounders trying to figure out how to ease himself out of it with minimal injury.

“…Okay, forget that. I didn’t watch the movie,” he confesses. “The point is I’m never letting it go.”

“You should watch the movie.” Jihoon speaks sincerely, like this is a genuine suggestion. “It’s good.”

Woojin’s phone vibrates insistently in his pocket and he makes a note to message the group chat later to a.) school Daehwi on the concept of love and how it Should Not Be Taken Lightly and b.) assure Donghyun that his head is concussion-free and that it’s okay to not know who Sandra Bullock is.

“Do you have to get going?”

“What?”

“Your phone. It’s been vibrating, so I thought you might have to go. Am I keeping you?” Jihoon’s doing that thing again. The thing where his eyes kind of catch the light and sparkle a bit, overbearingly pretty. Extra ridiculous because it’s evening and the little light that’s available shouldn’t be devoted to making Jihoon glitter and glow and shine right in front of Woojin’s salad.

It’s annoying how eye-catching Jihoon is and Woojin wonders if it’s something he can bring to the attention of the people’s court.

“Has anyone ever told you,” Woojin begins steadily, staring dead-eyed at the bicycle rack between them, “that you’re annoying?”

Crickets might as well chirp in this comically brutal dead quiet.

Jihoon clears his throat. “Yes?” he replies. “Probably?”

Inwardly, he’s screaming. The expression he’s wearing is as neutral as could possibly be, but what matters is hardly what’s on the outside. What matters is the fact that every single thing he’s uttered in the past thirty seconds is slowly, but undoubtedly, killing him.

“That’s not what I meant,” Woojin says, maybe a little too feebly. His voice cracks toward the end of the sentence and he clears his throat abruptly to try to cover it up. “This isn’t working. I can’t talk to you without making myself sound like an idiot,” he grumbles. “I don’t care about the identity thing. I don’t doubt that Jinyoung orchestrated this whole thing because he’s an asshole. You don’t owe me anything. Cool. Great. Are we good? Officially? Is this our farewell? Sounds good. See you never —”

“Wait!”
“Please. God.”

Jihoon fidgets noticeably, gaze darting from Woojin’s face to virtually anything but Woojin’s face. “I get it.”

“No. Listen, dude. There’s nothing to get—”

“You’re still mad. That’s totally fair. You should be pissed. It’d be weird if you weren’t, right? It’s reasonable of you to still be mad!”

“I’m not, I just—I literally just said that I wasn—”

“I can make it up to you,” Jihoon insists, maybe a little too loudly, as a pair of girls walk by.

Woojin takes a step back. “What,” he stammers out. “No? You’re making this really weird. You don’t owe me anything, seriously. You don’t need to pay me back—can you, can you, just, just shut up? People are going to think I’m threatening you.”

“You’re failing that history class you’re taking with Jinyoung, right?” continues Jihoon, maybe even louder than he was before, which is fine, really, because Woojin has no remaining pride anyway.

It’s not fine.

With a muffled groan, Woojin drags a hand down his face.

“Yes,” he says slowly, tersely. “I’m failing that history class. Thank you for letting the world know. Was really wondering how to circulate that information, myself.”

He wants to be more upset but he can’t because he’s too busy thinking about how it’s kind of fucking ridiculous the way Jihoon literally lights up when he hears verbal confirmation that Woojin is indeed failing a class.

“I’ll tutor you,” Jihoon announces, looking incredibly proud of himself for reasons beyond Woojin.

Woojin closes his eyes, looks into the far-off distance to avoid being blinded. “You took the class?”

“Uh, yeah.” For the briefest second, Jihoon almost seems unsure of himself. He brightens a second later. “Yeah! Of course. I’m great at history. It’s like I was there.”

“Okay.” Woojin exhales. It’s been less than thirty minutes of talking to Jihoon and he already feels like he’s spent an eternity getting exasperated by him. “Fine. Teach me history. If I pass the class, I’ll forgive you.”

Jihoon beams.

“Even though I’m not mad.” The smile on Woojin’s face is forced. “Or bitter, or holding this against you, or even thinking about it anymore.” He looks around, and, maybe a little too brazenly, half-shouts to passersby, “Not mad! Not mad at all!” And then quiets down. “But okay. Teach me. Happy? You got what you want and I got a splitting headache.”

“Thrilled,” Jihoon says, and Woojin thinks he might actually mean it.
david daehwi lee
UR IDENTITY THIEF WAS JIHOON HYUNG????
LMAO
omg
wow at least u have good taste hyung im kind of proud <3

WJ Park
I have a favor to ask of u
My dying wish so to speak

david daehwi lee
what

WJ Park
fuck off

david daehwi lee
can u be a lil bit less of a heathen
how will u win jihoon hyung’s heart like this
or are u going to play hard to get?
can u afford to play hard to get
omg have u told ur mom yet she’s going to be SO excited

WJ Park
hey

david daehwi lee
wait can i tell her
wow u guys are going to have SUCH a cute get-together story
‘he tried to steal my identity but instead he stole my heart’

WJ Park
Hey

david daehwi lee
omg
im copyrighting this actually
im going to cast meryl streep to play u
dwayne johnson as jihoon hyung
actually maybe leonardo dicaprio what do u think

WJ Park
HEY

david daehwi lee
“Jihoon’s great, huh?” Hyungseob says out of nowhere.

Woojin looks up from where he currently has Jinyoung’s tiny head trapped in a headlock. “What?”

“Jihoon,” repeats Hyungseob. “He’s great. Don’t you think?”

Jinyoung lets out a dry wheeze as Woojin releases him from his grip. “Yeah,” he rasps, rubbing his neck. “Fan-fucking-tastic. Except for the part where he betrayed our years of friendship and threw me under the bus.”

“You kind of had it coming.”

“I paid for your ice cream for an entire summer,” Woojin grits out. “I trusted you.”

“Anyway,” Hyungseob interjects, “what are your thoughts on Jihoon, Woojin?”

A couple of days have passed since Jihoon’s bold proposal. Woojin has hardly thought about it—hasn’t really had the opportunity or reason to, honestly, considering he hasn’t heard from Jihoon since that fateful day.

Woojin purses his lips. “He’s okay,” he says. “Reminds me of, like…”

“A deer,” Jinyoung suggests.

“A manhwa protagonist?” Hyungseob offers.

“Like,” Woojin says again, pensive. “Like a firefly. A firefly mixed with a mosquito.”

“Oh, right. Yeah. That’s the one.” Jinyoung’s laughter is canned and the smile falls from his face within the next second. “No, actually, what the fuck does that even mean?”

“Imagine a firefly that just lights up and is bright and shit in your face all of the time. Buzzes in your ear. Starts flickering when you want peace and quiet. Just. All of the time. That’s what he reminds me of.” Woojin crosses his arms. “A firefly with the persistence of a mosquito during Seoul summers.”

They sit in silence in the back of their near-empty classroom.
“That kind of does make sense,” mutters Jinyoung, mostly to himself.

Hyungseob hums, looks dazedly into the distance before letting out a tiny ah! and clapping his hands together. “So, you think he’s bright?”

“Grooooss.”

Calmly and mercilessly, Hyungseob reaches across to clasp a hand over Jinyoung’s mouth.

“Catches your eye, one might say?”

Woojin sinks into his seat. “I guess? I don’t know? Why are you interrogating me about Park Jihoon?”

Indiscreetly, Jinyoung elbows Hyungseob in the side and frees himself from silence.

“You know our Hyungseob. Curious as ever! Cute as a button!” Jinyoung’s tone is saccharine sweet and quite clearly sarcastic.

“Just wondering.” Hyungseob smiles widely, as though years of friendship haven’t conditioned Woojin to be immediately suspicious of that very same smile. “It’s kind of funny that you guys haven’t met until this week. Same year, same circle of friends—honestly, I thought you guys already knew each other.”

“I’ve heard his name,” Woojin says. “Didn’t know what he looked like until this week.”

Jinyoung leans back, presses his head against the wall behind him. “I guess it kind of makes sense. Jihoon was busy failing all of his classes freshman year and you were too busy being awkward with everyone to actively seek anyone out. Now you’re busy failing all of your classes sophomore year and as you know, Jihoon’s awkward and tried to steal your identity to avoid actively seeking you out. Wow. Match made in heaven. Fate has finally pulled our two protagonists to each other.”

The progression of this conversation is baffling to Woojin. Mostly because he has no idea what brought it on and why it hasn’t ended or shifted to a different topic, like the fact that Jinyoung should be on his knees begging for forgiveness right now for trying to convince an innocent bystander to steal Woojin’s identity.

“You know what you guys should do?” Jinyoung shifts, moves closer to Woojin as though he’s about to share a conspiratorial secret. “You should date.”

Hyungseob slaps a hand over his face in exasperation.

“What.”

“Yeah,” continues Jinyoung, evidently finding no issue with his very faulty logic. “The world is trying to shove you two together. Can’t fight nature. Might as well start dating now.”

“What,” Woojin repeats, with added emphasis.

“He’s tired.” Hyungseob interposes himself, pushing Jinyoung’s face away as far as possible. “Jinyoung spent all night losing on Overwatch so he’s a little out of it right now. Aren’t you, Jinyoung?”

Jinyoung parts his lips, poised to speak, but instead lets out a yelp when Hyungseob pinches his cheek with brute force.
“I am,” Jinyoung chokes out, face scrunched up in a grimace, “very tired.”

“There’s no rush, Woojin.” The way Hyungseob is looking at him reeks of genuine concern but Woojin has no idea why nor does he have a single clue as to what is going on. “It’ll happen when it happens.”

It almost sounds like a threat.

With the start of class steadily approaching, more students begin to filter into the classroom.

Hyungseob and Jinyoung both situate themselves in their seats, leaving Woojin to his own devices, staring blankly at his desk.

A piece of his soul slips out from his agape mouth and Woojin feels as though the world has fundamentally shifted somehow in the past ten minutes of conversation, leaving him woefully behind in terms of understanding.

What’s supposed to happen when it happens?

He looks up and then looks back down.

“What,” he whispers into the abyss.

*You’re on your own lol,* the abyss whispers back.

---

The library is potentially the worst place on campus, and Woojin has been in the men’s changing room at the fitness center when it was at peak capacity.

So, while the library is significantly less sweaty, less smelly, and arguably has less naked people crammed into minimal space, it is somehow more suffocating, and the only recurring location in Woojin’s worst nightmares.

He lets out a long sigh and closes his eyes, trying, maybe in vain, to muster up the courage and the strength to go forth and take his academic career by the reins.

“We can fine you for blocking traffic,” Jieqiong announces from where she is barely visible in her seat at the front desk. “$20 if you don’t move your butt.”

“There’s literally no one in the lobby except for me,” Woojin retorts.

“$25 for talking back to an authority figure.”

“What authority figure.”
“What’s that? Ah, I can barely hear you over my sparkling library employee badge.” Jieqiong grins, teasing. She leans forward as Woojin walks further into the lobby, no longer obstructing the entryway—much to her delight. “Here to study?”

He pitifully lifts up the history textbook in his hand with a nod.

“Is that why you haven’t been at the KSA events? I haven’t seen you since the first one this semester.”

“I can’t go to events in good conscience when I’m failing a class,” grumbles Woojin. “My mom would sense it back home and kick my ass in my dreams.”

“That’s a relief,” replies Jieqiong. “Sejeong-unni said it was because you died.”

Woojin almost protests before shrugging in resignation. “She’s not wrong,” he says. “Anyone we know here?”

“I just clocked in twenty minutes ago.” Jieqiong hums, contemplative. “I’ve only seen Jihoon so far! Are you studying with him? He was holding the same textbook as you.”

He glances at his textbook again. East Asian History. Most definitely not a class that Jihoon is taking, but also most definitely the class Woojin is supposed to be getting tutored in.

Maybe Jihoon hasn’t forgotten about their agreement after all, if he’s trying to brush up on the class material.

“First floor?” asks Woojin.

“Second.” Jieqiong points up. “He’s on the silent floor. Must be a tough class!”

Woojin turns toward the stairwell, lifting a hand in farewell. “Thanks, I’ll see you around.”

“Don’t be a stranger!”

The slow climb up to the second floor is not made without dread. Woojin hasn’t been on the second floor of the library—the dreaded silent floor—since the first week of the first semester of freshman year when they were forced to take library tours against their will.

As soon as he opens the door and crosses the threshold into the ninth circle of hell, he is met with chilling silence and the undeniable sensation of misery, thick in the atmosphere. Cautious of the jingling of his keys, Woojin clamps his palm against his pocket to silence them and tiptoes down the aisles to try and find Jihoon.

Why he’s suddenly hell-bent on finding Jihoon is completely beyond Woojin. He attributes it to the fact that every second he spends in the library further compels him to find someone familiar that might save him from the clutches of academia before he, too becomes one of the miserable students sprawled out over a desk, papers scattered around them like a crime scene.

To Woojin’s chagrin, Jihoon is nearly catatonic in a crime scene of his own, staring blankly at a wide-open textbook at a table in the back corner of the entire floor.

Woojin slows his steps, suddenly feeling infinitely warier as he gets closer and closer.

He pauses, glancing over his shoulders to make sure there isn’t anyone that might shush him for breathing, before gently tapping his fingers on the surface of the table to grab Jihoon’s attention.
Jihoon looks up at breakneck speed, eyes wide and dazed, alarm suddenly bleeding into his features when he realizes who has interrupted his midday trance.

“What are you doing here?” Jihoon mouths.

Woojin wordlessly holds his textbook up and, for added emphasis, juts his chin in the direction of Jihoon’s.

As quietly as possible, he eases himself into the seat across from Jihoon’s, gently settling his books and his backpack onto the table.

From this close, Woojin can tell that Jihoon has battled a few sleepless nights since the last time they spoke. The black bags under his eyes look like bruises, and his entire body is sinking into the giant hoodie he’s wearing like a cloak.

Jihoon slides a paper over.

are u studying?

He thinks to whisper a response, but the chill of someone glaring at him from behind is not something Woojin wants to carry to the grave. So, he scribbles a yes instead and hands the paper back.

The paper comes back into his periphery in seconds flat.

here?

yea Is that ok?

kinda late for u to be asking
ur already sitting

In response, Woojin decidedly crumples the paper up into a ball and throws it at Jihoon.

They get their first shhh after Jihoon forgets to muffle his laugh.

u got me in trouble

↓ ↓ ↓

don’t be rude
we r in an institute for learning

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
For a short while, they work in silence. Woojin attempts to decode his class notes and rewrite them so they’re actually legible, and Jihoon seems busy flipping through the textbook.

Eventually, Jihoon closes the textbook and lets out a harrowing sigh. Woojin tears his attention away from his notes for the briefest second and is immediately met with Jihoon’s imploring gaze.

“What?” he mouths.

Jihoon leans closer across the table and whispers, “I’m hungry.”

“Go eat?”

“Eat with me.”

“Shh!” someone hisses from out-of-sight.

Woojin looks at Jihoon, and then behind him, as though searching for whoever it was that unfairly incriminated him for a crime belonging to Jihoon, and Jihoon alone.

“Come on,” Jihoon urges.

In the past hour or so, he’s accomplished virtually nothing, having read a grand total of three pages of notes and having spent an even grander total of forty-five minutes spamming Daehwi with KakaoTalk emoticons as revenge for bailing on him for lunch to eat with Jinyoung.

He packs his belongings up quickly and stalks after Jihoon when Jihoon cheerfully leads the way out of the Second Floor of Doom and into the stairwell.

“You’re supposed to be helping me study,” Woojin accuses. “You know what you’re doing? Not helping me study.”

At the very least, Jihoon looks 1% apologetic. “I’m hungry,” he says again, skipping steps as they descend the stairs. He pushes the door to the library lobby open with a sheepish smile. “And I don’t like eating alone. Everyone else has classes at this hour. You’re my only hope.”

“Lunch date?” Jieqiong calls out in sing-song from behind the front desk, knowing smile wide on her lips.


“Woojin’s the baby,” Jihoon adds.

“If I’m a baby, you haven’t even been born.”

“See? Baby.”

“I don’t get it,” Jieqiong declares, her smile growing more uncertain by the second. “Are you guys flirting? In my library?”


“Isn’t this flirting?” she continues, dragging her pointer finger in a zig-zag motion in front of them. “Like elementary school flirting! When you pull someone’s hair because you think they’re a cutie!”

Jihoon scoffs. “I’m out of his league.”
“What.”

“You guys are cute.” Jieqiong rests her chin atop her open palms. The scariest thing about this entire interaction, Woojin thinks, is how sincere Jieqiong is about what she’s saying. “Snap me if you guys start dating, okay? My show ended so I have emotion available to invest in other things.”

“This is giving me a headache,” Woojin announces, shaking his head as he makes the first move toward the exit, 101% done with the entire situation.

“Ah, hold on. Wait up!”

“Play nice, boys!”

The door closes behind him, Jihoon just barely managing to slip out before it has the chance to smack him in the face.

“Are you sulking?” asks Jihoon, carefully matching Woojin’s pace. There’s a teasing smile on his face, and Woojin feels grossly embarrassed all of a sudden. “It’s okay. She was just teasing. Did she hurt your feelings? Wittle baby?”

“Fuck off,” Woojin groans in between Jihoon’s exaggerated shoulder nudges.

“She won’t tell anyone. She’s really big on not spreading fake news.”

Woojin snorts. “As expected of the sophomore class president.”

“Don’t you remember her slogan? ‘More experience than POTUS.’”

Campus is bustling at this hour, people streaming in and out of the Student Union Building in hordes, sprinting past others racing out of class.

The canteen is probably chock-full of strangers, and, maybe even worse, people that Woojin actually knows. He isn’t sure if there’s a polite or socially acceptable way to ask to avoid being surrounded by people. Considering the fact that, all things considered, they’re barely even acquaintances, Woojin figures it’s probably too soon to make a shitty impression.

…

Not that he should care.

Not that… Not that he does care.

They stop walking at the very center of the quad and Woojin comes to the haunting realization that he might actually care.

“Want to go off-campus?” Jihoon asks.

Woojin looks up from the ground, quiets his mind. “You have time?”

“I don’t have class until later. If you’re pressed for time we can eat here but…”

“But?”

“Oh.” Jihoon laughs nervously, averting his gaze. “A lot of people, don’t you think?”

The relief currently flooding Woojin’s body is comparable to an ocean wave at high tide.
“There’s probably a lot of people everywhere else considering the time, but—”

“Less people we know.”

“Yeah. Wait. Not that I don’t want to be seen with you or anything! I just, there are days where small talk isn’t feasible and today is one of those days. I can’t run into someone I know and ask them how they’ve been today. I just can’t.”

“Wow.” Woojin lets out a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding. “What makes you think you aren’t going to have to do small talk with me?”

Contemplation flashes in and out of Jihoon’s eyes. “You’re kind of weird,” he says, and his tone makes it apparent that this is meant to be an explanation. “You’re different?”

It’s the same way Woojin feels about Jihoon.

Anyone else and he would have committed a crime to avoid a one-on-one meal, but the dread he typically drowns in when left to fend for himself in any social situation is nowhere to be found. It’s like he’s known Jihoon for years. Too many years.

“I think being called a criminal in our first real conversation together kind of fast-forwarded us past small talk.” Jihoon beams. “See? Identity theft isn’t all bad when you get friendship out of it.”

Woojin gives Jihoon a grade-A Look.


“Don’t push it.”

“You’re so sensitive, Woojin.”

What Jihoon’s saying might be true. There’s no other explanation for how they got to this point of ease and comfort so quickly—at least, no explanation that Woojin, himself, is aware of.

The absurdity of their entire dynamic, how they even got to this level of being able to joke around and spend time together outside of obligatory interactions in passing is something Woojin doesn’t think he’ll be able to grasp for a long, long time.

And maybe that’s ok.

As much as he’d like to care, he doesn’t really mind.

“There’s a Chipotle a twenty-minute walk away. I’ll treat you in repentance.”

“I’m getting guac.”

“Whoa. Do I look like I’m made out of money? Do you crap gold or something?”

Woojin shrugs. “Forgiveness isn’t cheap.”

Jihoon lets out a sigh. “You better be worth it.”

Their walk to Chipotle, the entirety of their meal—Woojin can hardly remember anything. It’s too easy to make mindless conversation with Jihoon, to easy to laugh over meaningless, stupid things. He has to remind himself on his way back home that they really have only known each other for upwards of a week, maybe two.
He’s reflective as he fumbles with his lanyard, juggling a vibrating phone in one hand and an unruly door lock with the other.

**Jihoon Park**
same time tmrw?
:D
:D :D :D
:DDDDDD

And Woojin doesn’t think twice when he taps back a response, pressing send just as his apartment door creaks open.

**WJ Park**
sure

Jihoon is, quite possibly, the worst tutor to ever exist on face of the planet.

Aside from the fact that everything he knows about East Asian History is regurgitated, word-for-word, from the textbook (which is simultaneously sort of impressive because Jihoon literally has the textbook memorized), Jihoon also has a remarkable penchant for getting distracted by virtually anything and everything.

“You suck at this,” Woojin notifies him during their third attempt at a tutoring session.

The library is busy at this hour. He’s not the type that can concentrate with noise, so on a good day, he might blame the hustle and bustle at least in part for how little he’s accomplished.

They haven’t budged from their corner table on the first floor in what feels like days, though. Woojin has learned approximately nothing. Jihoon has been giggling at his phone for too long.

“Hey. Have you considered that this isn’t my fault, but your fault?” Jihoon asks, glowering. His expression lightens not even a second after his backhanded accusation. “Okay, so it is my fault. I’m trying my best though.”

Woojin narrows his eyes. “You’ve been watching the same video of a dog jumping down the stairs for the past fifteen minutes.”
“It’s just—” Jihoon bites his lower lip in a feeble attempt to hold back a laugh. “It’s funny because the dog’s never seen stairs before so, it, like, it just—”

“You really suck at this.”

Jihoon clears his throat purposefully, setting his phone face-down on the table. He straightens his back and squares his shoulders, prim and proper. “Yes, okay. I’m done.” He bites his lip again, swallows a stray laugh. “I, just, were you even watching it? It was so funny.”

He’s trying not to give in but it’s growing harder by the second for Woojin to bite back a smile of his own.


“You’re not done.”

“It’s just so funny—”

Park Jihoon is much more than meets the eye.

At first glimpse, Woojin had kind of assumed that Jihoon was a ‘type’ of person—demure, timid, that guy that everyone freshman year forms a crush on at least once from afar because flowers bloom and stars sparkle behind him every single time he smiles (presumably) (not that he would know) (because he doesn’t) (and this is hypothetical).

As it turns out, Jihoon is not that ‘type’ of person.

For starters, the illusion that Woojin had attached to him—stemming from the way his eyes glittered in the light and caused serious obstructions to Woojin’s well-being back when they first met—is all but obliterated.

Jihoon is not (just) cute, not demure, not timid—

(Might be that guy everyone freshman year forms a crush on at least once from afar.)

He’s kind of, for lack of a better word, weird.

And it’s to Woojin’s relief that Jihoon is more of a jerk than expected, more of a weirdo than expected, because the underlying roughness to his personality is something that complements Woojin’s well. It’s easy joking around with Jihoon, easy to talk with him about things ranging from the absolutely mundane to the more serious, because Jihoon just kind of… gets it.

Not a day has gone by since their hang-out at Chipotle where Woojin hasn’t seen or spoken to Jihoon.

To say that this wasn’t what Woojin was expecting out of an encounter with a burgeoning identity thief would be an egregious understatement.

“Can I formally step down as your tutor?” Jihoon asks. “I’m going to take full responsibility and acknowledge that I, Park Jihoon, a surprisingly imperfect human being, probably can’t save your failing history grade.”

“Can you step down from a position you weren’t really fulfilling anyway?” Woojin muses out loud. “Isn’t that a paradox or something?”

“Isn’t that a paradox or something?” mimics Jihoon. “I’m trying to be sincere.”
“I’m trying to be sincere,” Woojin mocks back.

Jihoon lets out an offended scoff. “I don’t sound like that,” he says. “You sound like a Minion. I sound cuter. Try again.”

“You’re not going to trick me into doing aegyo.”

“Don’t be a baby.”

Maybe this is a good thing, a good direction to head in.

Without the excuse of tutoring, Jihoon’s overwhelming presence in Woojin’s life will likely diminish. Their current dynamic will reduce itself into something tamer, something more like Woojin’s friendship with everyone else in his social circle which involves text conversations that take three days to finish because Woojin sucks at replying and infrequent encounters on campus.

The idea of it is moderately disappointing for some reason. It’s kind of nice having someone around that isn’t a burdensome audience Woojin feels pressured to entertain.

He tries not to think about it.

Whatever happens, happens.

The world has been throwing curveballs, good and bad, at Woojin these days. Yesterday, he received his first ever grade above a D+ on a quiz in East Asian History, a true miracle if he’s ever known one. The day before, a gear on his bike snapped—literally, snapped—and forced him to make the twenty-minute trek to campus in the rain without an umbrella.

Park Jihoon is also a curveball.

Case in point: Despite Woojin’s realistic expectations, they’ve been spending a lot more time together than anticipated.

The worst part is Woojin hadn’t even been aware of the fact until Daehwi, of all people, approached him in the morning, hands on his hips, demanding to know, “Did you and Jihoon-hyung get married or something?”

To his knowledge, marriage wasn’t part of their Formal Agreement, and the aftermath of flusterling himself through an incoherent explanation that could have, in retrospect, been condensed to a simple ‘we’re just friends question mark’ is still present in Woojin’s blood in the form of jitters.

“I don’t mean it in a bad way,” Daehwi had said. “I mean it in a ‘I thought you were dead beneath a pile of ramen wrappers because you haven’t texted the group chat in thirty-five years only to find out
you’ve been fraternizing with your identity thief’ way.”

The cold hard truth haunts him throughout the entire day, right up until he’s sitting at a table in the Student Union Building with unsuspecting friends.

Woojin closes his eyes and folds his hands over his mouth pensively.

“Did you lose your identity again? Jinyoung whispers, too loud as always, from beside him.

Hyungseob, bless his soul, kicks Jinyoung’s shin before Woojin has the chance to.

“Ow! God! It’s been weeks. Am I still not allowed to make jokes?”

“You lost your identity, hyung?” Euiwoong asks, alarmed.

“Woojin didn’t lose his identity.” Hyungseob shakes his head and sniffles, feigning sadness. “Jinyoung lost a friendship. That’s the moral of the story.”

“The moral of the story is actually ‘don’t be foolish,’” Daehwi amends, looking up from his phone, where he currently has an Instagram draft open.

“Wait. We’re not friends anymore?” Jinyoung gapes, looking genuinely wounded. “I thought we were ride or di—”

“All of you, shut up.” Woojin pauses. “Except for Euiwoong. You’re okay.”

It has been weeks. Jinyoung is (as much as this hurts Woojin to say in any context) right.

It’s been weeks and Woojin can’t remember the last time he spent a single day without talking to Jihoon at least twice.

Making friends isn’t a bad thing, and Woojin is well-aware of that much. What scares him isn’t the amount of time he’s spent with Jihoon, it’s the fact that he hasn’t even noticed.

Honestly, what the fuck.

“Hyung,” Daehwi says. “Are you still freaking about because of what I said this morni—”


Everyone falls deathly quiet.

“Hyung,” repeats Daehwi, this time more earnestly. “You can’t. If you step into a church, God will literally set you on fire. Gunhee-hyung said so.”

“Okay.” Woojin narrows his eyes. “I think it’s fucked up that that’s what you’re focusing on when I genuinely could be an arsonist undercover. And also, Gunhee-hyung misunderstood the situation.”

Jinyoung crosses his arms against his chest. “How do you misunderstand someone writing Drake fanfiction in the pews during communion?”

“I wasn’t writing Drake fanfiction,” Woojin grits out. “I was writing out the things I would say if I were ever to meet Drake-hyungnim in person.”

“Yeah, I think the correct term is self-insert fanfiction,” Euiwoong says calmly, in what Woojin
“Woong is so smart.” Hyungseob looks touched, despite it being neither the time nor the place to be this grossly in love.

“Great. Self-insert fanfiction. The sky is blue. Water is wet. Woojin’s gay for Drake. For real, though. Can you stop calling Drake ‘hyungnim’? I don’t want to be the one to break this to you, but he doesn’t know you exi—”

“Why do you guys look so serious?”

Jinyoung stops talking and everybody directs their attention to Jihoon, standing in blissful ignorance with Starbucks in his hand. He’s inadvertently saved Woojin from the heartbreak of being reminded that he and Drake have yet to meet in person, a true hero of the youth.

“Woojin-hyung is trying to go to church,” Daehwi explains thoughtfully, despite the fact that that really isn’t the issue at all.

“Oh.” Jihoon is rightfully confused. “That’s a shame?”

The most appropriate response Woojin can muster is a frustrated sigh. Frustrated because a.) he needs new friends, b.) he might have accidentally written self-insert Drake fanfiction, and c.) it’s only been thirteen hours since the last time he talked to Jihoon and he knows this off the bat without even having to calculate it.

It’s not that he doesn’t have anyone else to hang out with, either. Considering the fact that his closest friends live down the street from him (minus Daehwi, who is a baby bird confined to freshman dorms), and the fact that he sees his other friends at least twice a week in class, Woojin hanging out with Jihoon is not something that comes out of necessity or desperation.

Which is really just a complicated way of saying that he’s been hanging out with Jihoon every single day since they met because he genuinely, seriously, for real, not even joking, literally, enjoys. Spending time. With Jihoon.

It’s not a bad thing.

It’s just… strange. He’s never had a human being sneak up on his heart like this before.

So deeply engrossed into his thoughts, Woojin barely manages to notice the concerned looks he’s getting from five sets of eyes. He almost forgets that he sighed dramatically forty seconds ago, too.

“Oh,” he says, snapping back to reality. “Nothing. I just hate you guys.”

“The sky is blue. Water is wet. Woojin hates us,” Jinyoung announces, throwing his hands into the air.

Jihoon gnaws idly on his straw. “Not me. Woojin loves me.”

“That’s illegally cute,” Daehwi says, despite looking disgusted.

Woojin’s heart does the strangest little stutter.

…What the fuck?

“What the fuck,” he whispers.
“You made him mad, Jihoon. Take it back before he spite-writes self-insert fanfiction about you.”

Jinyoung only barely manages to dodge Woojin’s following kick.

A few days pass and Woojin doesn’t think about The Incident™ regarding his heart and the traitorous way that it might-have-potentially-if-he-squints skipped a beat.

Or. That’s. Well.

That’s what Woojin would like to believe, but it’d be an unfortunate lie.

The past few days have been complicated, to say the least.

It’s not that he isn’t aware of what’s happening. He’s never really busied himself with the difficulties that come with having a crush on anyone, but that isn’t to say he doesn’t know the feeling when it smacks him in the face.

He can’t confirm it for himself. There are times when his chest feels impossibly tight around Jihoon —like when he nudges Woojin’s shoulder too naturally, or when he sidles up beside him from behind to try to scare him when Woojin’s early to their unintentional weekly lunches. Other times when his ears fill with white noise and he gets this weird sort of tunnel vision where it’s hard to focus on anything but the way that Jihoon’s smile is literally brighter than any wattage lightbulb he’s ever stupidly looked at directly.

But that doesn’t have to mean anything. He can’t confirm it for himself when it might as well be indigestion or fucking heartburn.

He doesn’t really want to confirm it for himself either. The implications of having a crush on someone that you might want to be friends with for as long as possible are too tedious, too risky, and his priorities right now aren’t receptive to the idea of ruining something good for the sake of ruining it.

“See,” Jihoon says, pointing a finger at his laptop screen and effectively dragging Woojin out of his internal screaming session. “Yoo Junsun. Living breathing proof that you can’t quit dancing.”

Like any other day where they have nothing better to do, they’re occupying the same corner table of the library, huddled over Jihoon’s laptop—currently watching choreography videos 1Million Dance Studio, Jihoon’s ‘religion.’

“How is this proof?” Woojin demands. “He’s good but I’m literally failing a class. I can’t join the KSA showcase this year when rehearsals are every other night. I have to bring my GPA up.”

“This could be you, Woojin.”
“You're ridiculous.”

Jihoon groans, clicking on another dance video under the ‘Suggested’ category. “You have to,” he says, borderline defiant. “Didn’t I tell you the only reason why I wanted to be your friend was because I saw you in last year’s showcase? You have to do it this year. I’m doing it. You have to.”

“Maybe if you were actually a good tutor—”

Before Woojin has the chance to finish what he’s saying, Jihoon’s eyes widen and he ducks his head, feebly attempting to make his body as small as possible. He grabs Woojin’s shoulder, tugging him in one direction to hide behind his back.

“What are you—”

“Shh,” Jihoon whispers. “Just stay still.”

So, he does. The urgency in Jihoon’s voice is concerning and Woojin doesn’t want to test the waters.

A few seconds later, Jihoon’s grip on Woojin’s sleeve loosens and he lets out a sigh.

“Sorry,” he apologizes, scratching his cheek. “Saw someone I know.”

Woojin blinks. “Like, a mortal enemy? Or you hate small talk that much?”

“I hate small talk that much,” Jihoon admits. “No, just, uh. I went on a really awkward Tinder date last year and the guy ended up being in one of my classes this semester. Long story short, he keeps trying to ask me out and I’m working hard to make sure he never has that opportunity. Excessive of me? I know. I just don’t want to make things awkward when I have to take a class with him.”

He feels a twinge of something unidentifiable jolt up his spine.

“I should probably just turn him down out of courtesy,” Jihoon continues and he’s rambling at this point. “But it’s hard because I don’t have any real excuses and I don’t think he’d take being rejected because I think he’s a douchebag too well.”

“You could tell him you’re taken.” The words slip past Woojin’s lips before his mind even processes them.

Jihoon snorts. “Taken by who? My textbooks? This library?” He laughs and Woojin wants to laugh too.

He falters instead, adrenaline coursing through his veins as his lips move again, speaking against his will. “I’ll… I don’t know. I’ll pretend to be your boyfriend or something. Tell him to meet me at the playground if he wants to keep bothering you.” He pauses, bites his lip. “Unless he’d take that seriously.” The more he speaks, the more it comes across as a joke—so Woojin relaxes. He feigns a frown, pretends to be contemplative. Tries to sell it as just a joke even though it might not be. “I quit taekwondo when I was eleven. I can’t hold my own in a fist fight.”

Jihoon isn’t laughing anymore. There’s an unreadable expression on his face as he asks, too softly, “You’d do that?”

“No, pay attention,” Woojin says, mouth working on autopilot now. “I wouldn’t do that.”

“Not the fist fight,” Jihoon says, and the visible tension in his features fades. He smiles, incredulous. “You’d pretend to be my boyfriend? Seriously?”
“Oh.” He shrugs his shoulders as casually as he can manage. “Yeah. If it’d make you feel better and if it’d help, then sure. I wouldn’t mind.”

“You wouldn’t mind at all?”

The answer is immediate and, to Woojin’s utmost chagrin, completely honest: “I wouldn’t.”

His first thought: He wouldn’t mind at all. He wouldn’t mind pretending to be Jihoon’s boyfriend, wouldn’t mind being Jihoon’s boyfriend.

He realizes that the sharp pain he felt just moments earlier when Jihoon explained why he hid was nothing but jealousy, the concept of someone else occupying a spot in Jihoon’s life that Woojin didn’t even know he was secretly vying for unsettling his stomach to a sickening degree.

His second thought: what the fuck is wrong with me?

Because he wouldn’t mind.

He wouldn’t mind.

But maybe he should.

“Wow,” Jihoon breathes out, effectively cutting into Woojin’s suddenly harried train of thought. “Are you trying to be the best friend of the year or something?”

“Jinyoung would do the same shit,” Woojin mutters.

“Jinyoung would probably find his house and TP it.”

He tries to laugh but it comes out dry. Jihoon doesn’t seem to notice.

“I’m kind of touched but I wouldn’t make you do that,” Jihoon continues, grinning. “Thanks for offering though. It means a lot.”

Woojin’s heartbeat has been quickening in pace steadily for the past few minutes and he thinks his heart might burst when Jihoon’s grin ebbs into something smaller, softer, like a secret shared between just the two of them.

Hours feel like days.

The state of his mind is one of utmost chaos and Woojin isn’t quite sure what he’s supposed to do with the haunting awareness of the inner workings of his heart.

He shouldn’t be surprised that he likes Jihoon as much as he does. Considering how much time
they’ve spent together, considering the kind of person that Jihoon is—this shouldn’t come to Woojin as a shock. And to be fair, it doesn’t.

“I’m going to go take a breather,” Woojin blurts out, rising slowly and purposefully from his seat. He doesn’t wait for a response from Jihoon, only turns his back and starts walking toward the library exit as quickly as he can without seeming too urgent.

He can’t stop thinking about it.

And he knows it shows, because when Woojin can’t stop thinking about things, the entire world screeches to a dramatic halt and the only human actions he can manage are half-assed ‘yeah’ ‘no’ responses and dead-eyed stares.

Despite fleeing from the library for a ‘breath of fresh air,’ Woojin finds that the chill of the late-night breeze paired with the silence of the empty campus does little to quell the overload of thoughts demanding his attention.

At the beginning of the semester, it seemed more than ridiculous for Daehwi to even joke that Woojin had feelings for Jihoon just because he thought Jihoon was vaguely cute.

Days have passed since then. Weeks. Months.

And Woojin is finding it harder and harder by the second to deny that the almost suffocating warmth he feels when Jihoon speaks, the stupid smile that always fights its way onto his lips when Jihoon laughs—that all of this is born out of friendship, and friendship alone.

“Fuck,” Woojin mutters to himself, sinking down into a bench stationed right outside of the library.

This wasn’t supposed to happen. He’s content with just being friends, just having Jihoon around in his life as a constant presence, a pillar to rely on.

The complicated whirl of feelings knotting into something unmanageable at the very core of his heart, however, screams otherwise.

He covers his face with his hands, leaning forward.

“God damn it,” he sighs out.

Steeping in a healthy mix of regret and bewilderment, he almost doesn’t notice the shuffling of footsteps slowing to a stop right in front of him.

He drags his hands down his face, dropping them to his knees. He doesn’t acknowledge the presence, doesn’t even move—only waits, holds his breath, counts to ten, as the very person causing him extreme emotional distress takes a seat beside him.

“It’s cold out,” Jihoon says in greeting, shuddering as he raises his shoulders.

“Yeah,” Woojin murmurs, voice hoarse in spite of his best efforts to sound okay.

The wind whistles, forlorn, and Woojin wordlessly slips his hands into his pockets.

“You know, when I was in preschool, I stole Jinyoung’s girlfriend from him because I was sad that she was taking up all of his attention,” Jihoon suddenly announces, stretching his legs out in front of him. “Child me was awkward and Jinyoung was my only friend.”

Woojin looks up from the ground at Jihoon, a puzzled expression on his face lingering even after a
laugh slips out of his mouth in spite of himself.

“I guess I’ve always been kind of bad at making friends. Meaningful friends. Making small talk isn’t the issue but it’s hard finding someone I can actually trust and confide in,” he says with a sigh. “Have I told you yet that I’m secretly afraid of heights?”

After a pause, Woojin shakes his head.

“Well, I’m afraid of heights.” Jihoon grins. “I don’t know what it is about looking down when I’m way up that makes me want to cry. Bugs and stuff like that don’t bother me, but heights—man. It’s a really specific sort of fear too. I don’t mind rollercoasters much but when they stop at the top of a hill and I have nowhere to look but down…”

They sit in silence on the bench and Woojin doesn’t think to ask why Jihoon is telling him all of this.

“I think I have bad luck.” He sinks back into the bench and gazes up at the night sky. “Every single time I decided I had a dream or started fixating on something I thought I really wanted, something would happen and make it impossible to accomplish whatever goal I was clinging to. Like, right when I decided I wanted to be a professional soccer player, I hurt my knee. It got better, but I grew out of wanting to be like Park Jisung, you know? Oh, yeah. And then when I thought I wanted to dance, the injury got worse out of nowhere. Other stuff too, but it’s kind of like the world keeps telling me to slow down and be patient instead of carpe diem-ing.”

“Were you good at soccer?” asks Woojin, the first thing he’s uttered since Jihoon followed him to the bench.

“I was a benchwarmer,” Jihoon confesses with a halfhearted shrug. He jams his hands into the pocket of his hoodie. “When I saw you dancing at the KSA showcase freshman year, even though I’d kind of grown out of wanting to dance, I kept thinking, ‘wow, I want to be up there too, next to him.’ It’s why I wanted to be your friend. Superficial reason at first, but it’s genuine friendship now, I promise.”

Both of them fall quiet again. Jihoon exhales softly before straightening up in his seat.

“I don’t know if I come across this way, but I’m a pretty self-conscious person,” Jihoon continues. “People always tell me that I’m a lot tougher than I look, but when it really counts, I overthink things way too much. Could probably spend hours just running through all of the possible impressions I might have made on any given person in a day.”

There’s something disarming about the way Jihoon is presenting himself right now—vulnerable, open, raw, unguarded. The complicated mess of feelings that Woojin’s been trying to coax into submission only tangles itself further into something incomprehensible (or maybe it’s scarily comprehensible, too easy to define).

“Why are you telling me all of this?” Woojin inquires, tone free of malicious intent. He’s tired, but he wants to know, genuinely, why Jihoon is laying himself bare.

Jihoon doesn’t reply immediately. He’s pensive, looks to be contemplating his answer thoroughly.

“You seem like you have a lot on your mind,” Jihoon finally says. He offers Woojin a lopsided smile, almost sheepish as he continues to explain. “I thought it’d be hard to get you to talk about whatever’s bothering you, so I figured it might be easier to distract you instead.” His smile eases into nervous laughter. “Did it... help at all? I’m bad at this kind of stuff but, I, well, I don’t know. It just sucks seeing you so wound-up.”
Honestly speaking, Jihoon’s efforts did manage to get Woojin to stop thinking about all of the
negatives in the ‘what if’ scenarios he’d been formulating in his mind.

That being said, it’s undeniable that the clenching of his heart has gotten infinitely worse since
Jihoon answered his question and Woojin finds himself wavering with the growing revelation that he
really, genuinely likes Jihoon.

“It helped,” he says as convincingly as possible. “Thanks.”

“I don’t know what’s bothering you, but I’m sure it’ll figure itself out sooner rather than later.”

Woojin looks at Jihoon and very nearly regrets it when Jihoon offers him the warmest smile he’s
seen to date.

_I like him_, he thinks, his heart racing. _I like him a lot_.

Panic crashes on him like an ocean and Woojin forgets how to swim.

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**cheetah bois cheetah brothas (4)**

**WJ Park**
I just need to get something off of my chest

**david daehwi lee**
ok

**iym**
??

**Kim Donghyun**
is everything okay?

**WJ Park**
tbh
no

**david daehwi lee**
:(
hyunnnnggggg
what’s wrong????!!? did someone bully u????? i’ll beat them up
im a brown belt
i’ll pummel their a$$
iym
daehwi please don’t
woojin what happened?

WJ Park
uh
I
think

David Daehwi Lee
yes!
ur doing gr8!

WJ Park
I think
I might
like
jihoon

David Daehwi Lee
wow no way this is so unexpected i didn’t see this coming at all whaaat
wait
is that it

Kim Donghyun
is that a bad thing?

WJ Park
yes

iym
are u home?

WJ Park
yea

David Daehwi Lee
do u want to talk about it???? :( 

WJ Park
no
The doorbell rings and Woojin doesn’t even move from his bed, just closes his eyes and waits as the sound of the spare key he’s only ever given to one person rattles in the lock.

The door swings open. He shifts in his bed and opens his eyes.

“You said you didn’t want to talk,” Youngmin says in greeting, lifting up a box of pizza as Daehwi and Donghyun peek over his shoulders in the empty doorway. “You don’t have to talk. We’ll do the talking.”

Woojin sits up, blearily blinking away the lethargy that’d been threatening to claim his attention. He doesn’t say anything, only watches as his hyungs and Daehwi situate themselves in his apartment as though they’re the ones who’ve lived here for the past year.

“I said we should get Chinese food but Youngmin-hyung said no because you eat too much MSG already,” Daehwi explains as he plops down on the floor across from the bed. “He’s honestly right. You have to stop living off of ramen, hyung.”

“Imagine how your mom would feel if she knew where your grocery money was going.” Youngmin frowns. “Think about your mother, Woojin.”

“We didn’t come to lecture Woojin on his diet, did we?” Donghyun asks, promptly bringing everyone’s attention back to the real matter at hand.

Wordlessly, they spend the next few minutes getting comfortable, passing slices of pizza on cardboard paper-like napkins around to each other and pouring coke into recycled red solo cups.

“So,” Youngmin begins.

“So what if you think you like someone? It’s not a big deal.” Daehwi hugs his legs to his chest, leaning his head on Youngmin’s shoulder. His frankness almost brings an exasperated smile to Woojin’s lips. “You’re probably overthinking this into something much worse than it actually is, hyung.”

“Daehwi’s right.” Donghyun squeezes Woojin’s knee reassuringly. “Sometimes, it happens naturally. You can’t help that.”

Woojin glances at Donghyun and only manages to nod, weakly.

“As long as this Jihoon-person isn’t a bad person, I don’t see why there’s anything to be afraid of,” says Donghyun.

He isn’t sure why it feels like the end of the world either. Donghyun’s right. Jihoon’s a great person—a great person to have as a friend and a great person to like.

And that’s exactly the issue. Jihoon is a great person and Woojin doesn’t want to lose him.

“What’s bothering you about this?” Youngmin sets his cup down on the tiny coffee table Woojin uses as a multipurpose surface. “The fact that you have a crush? Or the person you have a crush on?”

“Ugh, hyung.” Daehwi groans. “It’s Woojin-hyung. He hasn’t had human emotion for anyone since, like, kindergarten. He’s obviously bewildered by his own emotional capacity and the fact that this crush is on someone he wants to be friends with.”

Unsurprisingly, Daehwi is quite nearly right on the mark.
“I’m not a robot,” Woojin says with a roll of his eyes.

“Fine. You’re not a robot.” Daehwi looks up at Woojin. “Does that mean everything else I said is right?”

Donghyun lifts a slice of pizza to Woojin’s lips and feeds him a bite, as though in consolation.

“Falling in love with friends is tough,” Youngmin admits with a frown. “You have to make big decisions—hard choices.”

It’s imperceptible to anyone who isn’t paying attention, but Woojin doesn’t fail to notice the way Donghyun’s gaze lingers on the side of Youngmin’s face as he’s speaking before quickly looking away.

He thinks it’s kind of comforting, honestly. Despite how fundamentally he feels as though his entire worldview has shifted, it’s nice to know that some things never change.

“You sound like my dad,” complains Daehwi. “It’s not love, it’s just like. Saying it’s love makes it that much more complicated for Woojin-hyung. He’s sensitive!”

He feels younger, suddenly.

When he’s with Youngmin, Daehwi, and Donghyun, it’s easier to let his guard down. Woojin is reminded of quieter, less eventful summer days spent crowded in his bedroom back home playing video games, arguing about pointless things, occupying any space available just to pass the time—together.

His apartment feels too small whenever any one person tries to visit, but it’s always just barely big enough to hold the people he’s had the begrudging honor of growing up with.

Truth be told, he’s glad he’s not alone right now. False pretenses and forced bravado aside, Woojin’s never been in this position before. He’s listened to his friends’ stories about falling in and out of infatuation, in and out of crushes, in and out of something more—but he’s never been the one to tell the stories, only to listen.

It’s strange, feeling the very emotions he once couldn’t wrap his mind around. He isn’t sure if he prefers it this way or if it was easier back when he could only offer an ear to listen and nothing more.

He’s glad he’s not alone with his thoughts right now.

“There’s nothing wrong with having a crush,” Daehwi continues, gingerly picking up a slice of the pizza and just barely managing to get it into his mouth before it can spill onto the floor. He chews deliberately, thoughtfully. “It’s good to like people. Even better if they like you back. But also not the end of the world if they don’t.”

“Daehwi’s right. No matter what happens, no matter what you do, you’ll survive. You don’t have to do anything you aren’t comfortable with doing,” Donghyun says. “The best thing about this is that your feelings are your feelings. What you do with them is up to you, and no one can hold that against you if you’re acting out of good intentions. And I don’t think you’ve ever really acted out of ill-will.”

Woojin mulls over the advice he’s been given and tries, with much futility, to let himself accept it with an open mind.

Rationally, he knows that the things he’s feeling don’t have to be shared with the world. He could be content going on until graduation playing the role of friend; he’d be happy to.
But the idea of keeping it a secret and waiting for something much more permanent than he’s giving it credit for to fade leaves an unsettling feeling at the pit of his stomach that he just can’t define.

As though sensing that Woojin is getting lost somewhere in his mind again, Youngmin interrupts his train of thoughts to ask, “What made you realize you liked him?”

He doesn’t really want to talk about this. Doesn’t want to think about it, but the answers come to him so effortlessly—in waves, and it startles him, how easy it is for him to explain why he likes Jihoon.

It just makes sense, and maybe that’s what scares him the most.

“I…” Woojin trails off, rubbing the back of his neck in discomfort. “At first, I just thought he was cute. But then we started spending time together and it was… He was kind of annoyingly… Gratingly…”

Daehwi raises a hand. “Just to clarify, you like him, right? This is about your crush, not about your arch nemesis?”

“It’s complicated,” Woojin grumbles. “He’s different. It’s annoying and I don’t know why but it’s too easy spending time with him and the more time I spend with him, the more I realize he’s really… You know. He’s really annoyingly likeable.”

“You need to watch more rom-coms, hyung. I want to hear about fireworks and love at first sight and the stars in the sky dimming compared to Jihoon-hyung’s eyes. I don’t want to hear the first draft of your diss track.”

“Aren’t you the one that lectured me for using the l-word?” Youngmin asks, raising a brow.

Daehwi huffs. “It’s been five minutes. Things could have changed. Woojin-hyung could be in love right now for all we know.”

As much as he’d like to stay brooding and moody, Woojin stifles a laugh, maybe one of sheer disbelief, into the palm of his hand.

“Finally,” says Donghyun with a bright smile. “We’ve been trying to make you laugh since we got here.”

It’d be easier if he liked one of his hyungs or even Daehwi. There’d be less worry about ruining things, because years of unconditional friendship and support are difficult to undo even at the will of the worst calamities.

Even if he had to choose between confessing or holding it in, he wouldn’t be afraid of making a decision because in the end, he’d know: he wouldn’t lose anything, either way.

He and Jihoon aren’t like that, though—not yet. Their friendship is years too early for unconditional recovery.

He isn’t sure if it means something that how he feels about Jihoon, romantically, is correlated positively with how much Woojin genuinely wants to keep him in his life. The stakes are higher, as a result. If Woojin did manage to get this off of his chest, he might feel like the burden on his shoulders has been lightened in the short-run, but there’s no saying how fundamentally altered their dynamic would be in the long-run.

Risk-taking isn’t something he enjoys and even less so when there’s so much to lose.
“You always make things five-hundred times worse than they have to be,” Daehwi chastises. “For someone who has an awful lot to say about how ‘annoyingly great’ Jihoon-hyung is, you really aren’t giving him any credit. He isn’t the type of person that’d hold it against you if you liked him.”

“I know, I know,” Woojin replies thoughtlessly. He lets out a sigh, flopping over onto his bed and hugging his pillow to his chest. “If I told him, it’d just always… be there, like a giant wall between us. Someday, he’ll get tired of pretending things aren’t awkward, and then it’ll be back to square one.”

“What’s wrong with square one? Honestly, Woojin, if telling Jihoon how you feel really does change your relationship with him for the worse, then maybe it’s better off that way.” Youngmin holds a hand up before anyone has the opportunity to interrupt or complain that he’s being too harsh. “I know that sounds terrible, but I don’t mean it in the ‘suck it up and let the world spin’ kind of way. If this is something that your friendship can’t recover from, you can’t just pretend that there isn’t an entire campus full of people—an entire world full of people—that might be just as great to be friends with.”

“He’s right,” Daehwi says with a sympathetic frown.

“And if Jihoon is someone that you want to keep in your life no matter what,” continues Youngmin, “then going back to square one shouldn’t be something you’re afraid of. It’s another chance, isn’t it? Another opportunity to build back everything you’re worried about losing, stronger than it was before?”

“Whatever you decide to do,” Donghyun begins to say, “and whatever happens, we’ll be there for you, every step of the way. This is really huge for you and we get that, but don’t let thinking about the possibilities overwhelm you before you can even make a decision for yourself. Have more faith in yourself and in Jihoon. It doesn’t hurt to be a little optimistic.”

Youngmin drums his fingertips against his knee, levels his gaze to lock eyes with Woojin. “If this is you genuinely liking someone and not just infatuation, then you want him to be happy. I’ll tell you from experience that if you do decide not to tell him, it’ll get better with time. And if you decide to be honest about your feelings, same deal. Neither option’s going to ruin your life. You’ll bounce back, even from the worst case scenario.”

“Auntie didn’t raise a quitter,” Daehwi says with a firm nod of his head. “Anyway, no matter what happens, you’re still going to have three incredible friends! One of whom is amazingly cute! Maybe even cuter than Jihoon-hyung!”

Woojin stares at Daehwi blankly. “Who?”

The offended gasp he gets, not a second later, makes him laugh.

“I know you think I’m cute,” huffs Daehwi.

“We all do,” Donghyun assures through a laugh.

There’s something peculiar about Jihoon—something natural about him that makes it easy, too easy, for Woojin to let his guard down. This much, Woojin is willing to acknowledge.

It’s the first time in a long time that he’s felt so comfortable with someone so quickly. And it makes sense that, as a result, he’s afraid that this is too good to be true and too good to jeopardize.

But his friends are right. The world will continue to spin on its axis regardless of what he does and his endgame is something that’s in his hands.
Woojin muffles a smile behind his pillow as he watches his friends laugh amongst themselves.

The giant questions he’d been trying to grapple with just hours prior seem to shrink into grains of sand right before his eyes.

It’s nice having friends that would never leave his side no matter what, and Woojin thinks that the unspoken decision he’s already made to keep his feelings to himself seems less difficult by the second.

“Don’t be worried, hyung.” Daehwi waves the crust of his slice of pizza in the air in enthusiasm for Woojin. “You can do anything you put your mind to.”

“Daehwi’s right! Whatever you want to do!”

Woojin rolls over onto his back and lets out a sigh. “Die?”

“Um.”

“Okay, backtrack,” Youngmin suggests. “Let’s try this again—”

He wakes up feeling refreshed, which is an unexpectedly nice change of pace from waking up feeling as though he’s crawled out of Satan’s asscrack.

The therapeutic impact of last night lingers in tendrils and Woojin drinks it in, tries to make the most of it throughout the entirety of his day.

It’s going to be a good, solid day. He’s made the executive decision to not fuck things up for himself, to the best of his ability. The pink sweater he’s decided to throw on is his lucky one. He eats a real breakfast first thing in the morning because that’s what people who have good days ahead of them do. Though it takes more effort than it really should, he even matches his socks instead of throwing on the first two he can grab from the crumpled pile of clean laundry on his bed.

There’s still a lot that Woojin has yet to figure out regarding his Feelings, but it’s okay. It’s going to be okay.

All of the anxiety he’d been juggling, the confusion he’d been trying to diffuse into nothing by sheer force alone—he’s not afraid of any of that anymore. Sure, there are still questions he’s asking himself. How should he act? Should he take a step back, take a day to figure things out before diving into feigned normalcy? How long until everything reverts back to normal again?

But the answers aren’t holding him back anymore and there’s a bounce in his step that Woojin thinks might be contagious.
While the worst of his demons have been placated, he still decides to spend the day by himself. He doesn’t pay attention to his phone, doesn’t leave room for distractions or stray thoughts. Just for today, he decides to grant himself the peace and quiet he’s usually tired of.

The world seems to be on his side, too. No one pesters him through text messages, his mom doesn’t call him thirty times in the middle of class to ask him how to buy something from Amazon, and most importantly, Jihoon is surprisingly quiet throughout the entire day.

It’s almost cause for concern. By the time Woojin’s done with his last class at eight in the evening, he’s usually already had at least four disjointed conversations with Jihoon through KakaoTalk already.

In the midst of packing up his bag to head back home for the night, however, Woojin’s phone vibrates and the screen flashes the name he’d been trying not to think about.

**Jihoon Park**  
do you ever think it’s like  
so messed up  
that the institution of education  
is not satisfied with the blood, sweat, and tears of its prisoners

Woojin blinks at his phone and contemplates ignoring the message and just going home to retire early for the night.

**Jihoon Park**  
whats the point of education  
whats the point of ANYTHING

He falters before delicately formulating a response.

**WJ Park**  
wtf

He’d been planning on spending the rest of the evening studying (probably not) and rolling around on his bed reading comics (probably), but Woojin has the strangest feeling that it might be too soon to leave campus.

**Jihoon Park**  
I KNOW right

**WJ Park**
Jihoon Park
I have been working on this paper for my entire life
I don’t remember the last time I saw the sun
what year is it
am I even alive right now
is that my stomach growling or the world growling
I’m not
this world is so cold and lonely

He almost feels bad when he snickers at Jihoon’s apparent despair.

The weather was great today, and Woojin managed to get through the entirety of his classes without falling asleep a single time. For the most part, his life is going smoothly following the impromptu pow-wow thrown by his friends last night.

It just seems… unfair that while he’s coming to terms with the trajectory of his life, Jihoon is probably suffering in a library with limited breathing space.

Maybe it’s too soon to let himself pretend that being with Jihoon isn’t going to make his heart palpitate like none other.

Woojin hesitates before replying.

WJ Park
hold on

Maybe it is too soon. Maybe it’s too close for comfort.

But he’s just being a good friend.

(Maybe he’s making excuses.)

The hesitation settles in again and Woojin doubts himself for a second, has to pause and really ask himself whether this is smart, whether this is something he wants to do, knowing too well that the consequences will make it harder than it has to be for him to play the role of good friend.

And to be totally honest, it probably isn’t smart. Probably isn’t something he wants to do. Probably shouldn’t be.

To be even more honest, he’s never actively gone out of his way to make good decisions before, so there’s no real reason to start now.

Woojin doesn’t deliberate it further.

En route to Bad Decision #1 of the day, he stops by one of the campus cafes and picks up an iced
coffee and an overpriced sandwich that’s most certainly a prohibited item at the library.

The strange sense of urgency he feels when he makes it to the first floor of the library is something Woojin tactfully chooses not to acknowledge. A part of him doesn’t want to admit (again, and again, and again) that he wants to see Jihoon, and the other part of him doesn’t want to make superfluous excuses.

Today is going to be a good day and Woojin is not willing to let himself jeopardize that.

He chants it to himself like a mantra, all while heading to the back corner of the library, where Jihoon always is, regardless of what floor he’s chosen to occupy for the day.

Today is no different.

What makes Woojin do a double-take, however, is not Jihoon’s consistency, but the pink sweatshirt he’s wearing that looks exactly like the one Woojin has on.

“Are we… Are we fucking matching,” Woojin deadpans, in lieu of a greeting.

Jihoon lifts his head, eyes focusing first on the sweater that Woojin’s wearing and then on the coffee and sandwich in his hands.

“Is that for me?” he asks, face brightening in sheer, unadulterated joy.

“What?” Woojin blinks. “Oh—yeah. You haven’t eaten yet, right?”

“Wow,” Jihoon chokes out. “I’m going to cry. This is the kindest thing anyone’s ever done for me. I’ve been talking to my stomach growling because that’s how tired and hungry I am.”

“This is so embarrassing,” mutters Woojin. “We’re literally matching.”

Apparently unsympathetic to Woojin’s incredulity at the situation, Jihoon gratefully accepts the food and caffeine and wipes away a nonexistent tear from his eyes. “Who cares? Friends can wear matching sweaters if they want. Especially if they’re good Samaritans and get sandwiches for their miserable friends in need.”

“How much do you have left?” asks Woojin as he begrudgingly takes a seat across from Jihoon, busying himself with taking his laptop out of his bag.

“Six pages,” Jihoon replies with a dry, soulless laugh. “Six… six pages. Six. Three times two… Four plus six…”

“Sorry I asked.”

Jihoon drags his hands down his face in agony. “You’re keeping me company, right? Just kidd—”

“Yeah.”

“—oh.” He looks taken aback, blinking away surprise. “Wait, what.”

“Thought you could use some,” Woojin replies with a halfhearted shrug. “Want me to leave?”


“That’s what I thought.”
Jihoon wavers, evidently concerned about the current state of events. “Sorry,” he says after some time. “I didn’t mean to make you worry about me. You don’t have to keep me company—”

“Just accept it. I’m doing this out of the kindness in my heart.” He’s teasing, but the consternation on Jihoon’s face lingers. “You don’t have to overthink it.”

“Oh.” Jihoon is quiet. “Okay.” Another silence, and then, “Thanks.”

Conversation eases into nothing and Jihoon gets back to work, eyes glued to his computer screen and hands only taking a break from clacking away at the keyboard to take periodic bites of the sandwich and occasional sips of the coffee.

Woojin tries to focus on the Reddit page he’s pulled up on his own screen but it’s harder than expected when his mind’s a mess and the only thing he really wants to look at is the boy sitting across from him.

It’s kind of funny that only hours ago, he’d been determined to spend the entirety of today by himself. In the end, it had taken no effort at all on the part of Jihoon to make Woojin crack and in retrospect, Woojin supposes he should have known better than to think he could pass on an opportunity to spend time with Jihoon.

He grimaces at how disgustingly cheesy his mind is getting to be.

Minutes bleed into hours and Woojin loses count of how long he’s been sitting in the same position.

Occasionally, his eyes dart from the laptop in front of him to Jihoon, as though to monitor his condition, to make sure that he’s still there.

At the start of the semester, they were nothing more than strangers. Even after their fateful first meeting, Woojin had been convinced that they weren’t going to be the type of acquaintances to move beyond just that.

No one had warned him about Park Jihoon and how ridiculously easy it was to like him.

Woojin snorts. A warning wouldn’t have done much anyway.

He can’t help but wonder, though, if things would have progressed the same way had they met freshman year—if freshman Park Woojin would be pining like an idiot just like sophomore Park Woojin.

He wonders if freshman Park Woojin would pull the same shit, make the same decisions, keep the same secrets.

The faint thrum of heartache he feels every now and then, stemming from the knowledge that this is something he’ll keep as a secret for as long as he possibly can, is nothing. That’s what he tells himself. That the bittersweet taste lingering at the back of his throat every single time he manages to catch Jihoon smile after finishing typing another paragraph is nothing.

It’ll pass. Woojin just has to let it.

“Hey,” Woojin starts, drawing Jihoon’s attention away from his laptop screen. “I have a question.”

“What is it?”

His heart thumps traitorously against his chest and Woojin takes a moment, inhales and exhales as
discreetly as possible, in a futile effort to calm it down.

“If,” he attempts, tapering off into nothing before he tries, once more, bolder. “If you had feelings for one of your good friends but you knew that they didn’t like you back, do you think telling them would be selfish?”

Alarm floods Jihoon’s features, his eyes widening in acute shock as though he’s been caught with his hands in the cookie jar.

Woojin flutters for a second because it almost feels like he’s called Jihoon out for something. “Hypothetical situation,” he says quickly. “Or, well, uh, I’m asking out of curiosity because my friend’s in this situation.”

“Oh,” says Jihoon. “I, yeah, no. I was just surprised because I thought you were going to unload all of the issues in your love life on me out of nowhere,” he explains, sheepishly scratching his cheek. “I… I’m not really sure, honestly? I guess…”

It’s a cruel question to ask but Woojin can predict what Jihoon’s answer will be, and hearing it is what he thinks he needs to take the first step in moving on.

He’s bracing himself, though, and he doesn’t know why—because this is what he wants, to move on, but his heart’s beating erratically, as though it’s racing the world to avoid being broken.

“I guess,” Jihoon says again, slowly. “I guess, yeah. It would be selfish. Because… Because the other person probably just wants to stay friends and they’re happy with that and—if I… If I put a wedge in our friendship because I wanted closure, it’d be unfair. It’d be… selfish.”

He knew what to expect but there’s still a pang of something unfamiliar, something painful at his solar plexus, and it’s enough to make Woojin regret even asking.

“Yes,” he says, voice cracking. “I agree.”

“It’d be nice if it wasn’t,” murmurs Jihoon.

“What?”

“Oh, nothing. Just… It’d be nice if it wasn’t selfish. If people could just—if people could just take everything in stride and friendships didn’t change and… just… Never mind. I don’t even know what I’m saying anymore.”

Woojin parts his lips, poised to try and coax whatever it is that’s occupying Jihoon’s mind out of him, but Jihoon directs his attention back to his laptop, fingers gliding across the keyboard to conclusively end this conversation.

It’s better off this way. He’s too curious for his own good and Woojin doesn’t want to know, deep down, why Jihoon thinks it’s selfish—why Jihoon has to think it’s selfish.

He folds his arms on the table and rests his cheek atop them.

The furrow between Jihoon’s brows is something Woojin doesn’t ask about. The consternation emanating from Jihoon’s body is something Woojin doesn’t let himself wonder about.

“You poor friend,” Jihoon says as a final comment, not even looking up from his computer screen. “It must really suck being in his position.”
Woojin doesn’t say anything.

After some time, the atmosphere eases itself back into one of normalcy. Jihoon’s typing persists and Woojin repositions his head to peer out of the window.

This is what he wants—easy coexistence.

This is what he wants—meaningless hours spent in comfortable silence, no pretenses, no unspoken double-meanings.

If he closes his eyes and concentrates, he can convince himself that this is all he wants out of their relationship.

Jihoon’s typing slows to a halt just as Woojin drifts to sleep, mind caught between this is what I want and this is what he wants.

Something nudges his arm, jostling him awake.

It’s pitch-black outside and the library has emptied dramatically since the last time Woojin remembers looking at it, however many hours ago—before he, evidently, fell asleep.

He blinks the bleariness away from his eyes and stretches his arms over his head, levying his gaze on Jihoon, who looks half-apologetic and half-ecstatic.

“I finished my paper,” he says with a grin.

“How about time,” Woojin replies.

“Good job, Jihoon! You’re amazing! So talented! So smart!” Aw, thanks, Woojin. Glad I can count on a friend like you to hype me up.”

Woojin cracks a smile. “What time is it? You should have woken me up earlier.”

“Midnight?” Jihoon rubs the back of his neck in-between a yawn. “It’s fine. I didn’t want to make you sit and watch me cry about my paper when you were already going out of your way to keep me company.”

“Kind of creepy that you were watching me sleep.”

“I was working on my essay. The world doesn’t revolve around you, Park Woojin.”

He stretches again before slowly storing his laptop away into his backpack. “I wouldn’t have minded,” continues Woojin, rising to his feet and rubbing his eye with the heel of his hand. “I
wouldn’t have kept you company if I didn’t want to.”

Jihoon doesn’t say anything, uncharacteristically quiet, thoughtful, for a fleeting moment. He smiles halfheartedly before Woojin can call him out. “You’re so weird,” he says with a shake of his head. “It’s getting so cold outside.”

As they make their way out of the library and into the chill of fall, Woojin steals glances at Jihoon, trying to gauge his expression—to translate it into something he might better understand.

He isn’t sure if it’s something he said or something he did, but there’s a tenseness in Jihoon’s shoulders and an unmistakable exhaustion in his smile that Woojin doesn’t think can be attributed solely to burning midnight oil to write a paper.

Maybe he’s overcomplicating things again, trying to read into something that isn’t an open book, up for interpretation.

“You live in the sophomore dorms, right?” Woojin asks, interrupting the suffocating silence.


“No reason. I’ll walk you there.”

Jihoon faces forward, doesn’t look at Woojin. “Don’t you live in the opposite direction?”

“I guess?”

“You don’t have to walk with me. Isn’t it out of the way?”

He’s not wrong. And there’s no good reason for why Woojin wants to walk with Jihoon anyway—he just wants to spend that extra five minutes with Jihoon because this is as selfish as he can let himself be.

“It’s fine,” Woojin says flippantly. “I’d rather walk with you.”

The words come out too quickly and Woojin feels hyperaware of how honest they are. He tries to gauge Jihoon’s expression again, tries to figure out if he’s been too straightforward, if he’s been too obvious, but Jihoon doesn’t say a word.

Neither of them say a word.

The quiet that they occupy is usually comfortable, something natural that Woojin has no issues situating himself in. But this strange distance wedged between them now feels impossibly difficult, as though the both of them are harboring secrets too big for just one person.

He doesn’t linger on the thought. It’s late, they’re both tired, and it isn’t the time or the place for what ifs.

“You know what?” Jihoon suddenly announces, skidding to a stop in the middle of the sidewalk. He lets out a weak, empty laugh, and shakes his head. “I can’t do this anymore.”

Woojin yawns, slowing to a halt right next to Jihoon. “Can’t do what?” he asks, feeling the onset of one-in-the-morning lethargy hit him like a bullet train. He’s half-expecting Jihoon to complain about his paper, or something equally mundane.

“I can’t—ugh!” Abruptly, Jihoon turns to face Woojin, brows furrowed and seriousness unobscured by the brim of his cap. “Why did you come to the library today?”
Four hours earlier when Woojin first arrived at the library with coffee and a smuggled sandwich in his hands, Jihoon had been thrilled to see him.

Right this second, however, Jihoon looks borderline hurt.

“You said you were lonely,” Woojin says slowly, carefully. “And hungry. So, I thought you could use some food and some company.”

As though stung by acute awareness of the caution in Woojin’s tone, Jihoon’s expression flickers immediately into one of exhaustion and then one of strung-up guilt. “Sorry,” he says, quieter. “I didn’t mean to snap at you. It’s just—can I ask you something?”

The faint hint of desperation that Woojin is sensing from Jihoon sends a ripple of concern down his spine. He’d been ready to laugh it off, to take it as residual tension from barely making a deadline, but the direction in which this conversation seems to be going doesn’t leave a lot of room for peace of mind.

“Yeah, shoot.”

Jihoon lets out a sigh. “This is going to sound so stupid,” he grumbles, letting his gaze drop for a moment before looking up again, focusing pointedly on the cross-light across the street instead of on Woojin. “We’re… We’re friends, right?”

“What,” Woojin sputters. “Are you being serious right now?”

“I told you it was going to be stupid!”

To any bystander, they’d look ridiculous: identically dressed, arguing about something trivial on an empty campus sidewalk at midnight, illuminated only by the orange glow just barely falling from the streetlamp beside them.

It’s just them out here though, and maybe that’s why Woojin finds this question more absurd than he would on any other day—because the entire world is quiet, and the only thing he needs to focus on, the only thing he can focus on is Jihoon, and Park Jihoon alone.

“You’re being serious.”

“I warned you.” Jihoon huffs, indignant. “Answer the question.”

“It’s a stupid question.”

“You’re stupid. Answer the question.”

Woojin stares. “This is so dumb. Why do you need me to answer a question you should already know the answer to?”

For a second, Jihoon falters. He fidgets noticeably and tugs his hat down further onto his head, as though to hide his face. “I just need to hear it,” he explains vaguely. “For science.”

“For science,” echoes Woojin.

“Can you just—stop being difficult!”

“Yes,” Woojin says with feeling. “Unfortunately, we’re friends. Happy? Can we move on? Do you need me to tell you what your name is? How old you—”
“Just friends,” Jihoon interjects. He’s looking away again, avoiding making eye contact. He repeats himself a moment later, quieter, pleadingly: “Just friends. Tell me we’re just friends.”

Woojin narrows his eyes in confusion and tries not to pay attention to the way his heart clenches in his chest for reasons he refuses to recognize. “What are you talking about?” he asks. “Dude. Are you okay?”

“You know how you said you’d pretend to be my boyfriend to get that person off of my case?” The pace at which Jihoon is speaking grows faster with each word he utters. “I could never ask you for your help like that. I could never do that. I would never, could never make you lie about being my boyfriend.”

“…Okay. That’s fine. But did something happen? Why do you seem so high-strung?”

“I could never ask you to pretend,” Jihoon repeats, louder, and slower, shoulders tense as he lifts his gaze. “I could never ask you to pretend because it’s going to confirm my suspicions that I want it to be real and I’m not ready for that sort of realization. I can’t do this anymore because the fact that you’re never going to change and I’m never going to change is going to tear me apart, literally. I’m sorry. I know I’m being selfish. But I just spent for hours sitting across from you at a library table, thinking that even that distance was too much. I can’t—this is too much. Do you even understand what I’m saying?”

For a second, Woojin thinks the world has literally stopped spinning. The implications of what Jihoon is saying seem absurd, unlikely—impossible. He doesn’t know what questions to ask, where to even begin with formulating his response, and the only thing he can manage is a disgruntled, “What are you talking about?”

The question flies over Jihoon’s head, unacknowledged. Jihoon looks frazzled as he readjusts the cap on his head too many times to count.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re too nice?” he suddenly asks. “When you aren’t smiling, you look like you hate the world. But then you go around and you—you do this nice stuff that makes it too easy to misunderstand, too easy to make careless mistakes. God, Woojin! Why are you so easy to like? It’s so insensitive of you to just interfere with my life like this!”

“What?” Woojin pauses, and then, asks, a little louder: “What the fuck are you saying?”

Jihoon groans loudly, completely unwarranted considering Woojin is the most confused between the two of them and probably has more reason to be making noises of frustration.

“I spent a week on minimal sleep trying to memorize an entire textbook on East Asian History so I could have an excuse to spend time with you.” Jihoon sounds genuinely affronted despite looking the furthest thing from threatening in his pink sweatshirt. “Fucking Jinyoung spent an entire summer making fun of me, saying this was going to happen. All I wanted was to be your stupid friend. I didn’t think I’d literally fall on my ass and start liking you, okay? Ugh!”

Woojin, maybe equally unthreatening in his pink sweatshirt, lets out an incredulous noise. He doesn’t think twice as he replies, words streaming from his mouth, bypassing any verbal filter he might have had a long long time ago. “Whoa, okay! Well, fuck you too, man. Crushing on you isn’t all fun and games either! How the hell was I supposed to know you didn’t actually know anything about history?” He points an accusatory finger at Jihoon. “You’re the one that offered to tutor me. I didn’t ask you to. I didn’t ask you to like me.”

“If you were easier to approach as a person, I wouldn’t have had to offer to tutor you. If this is
anyone’s fault, it’s yours. Seriously? What the—”

It takes longer than it should for either of them to realize what’s just happened.

“Wait.” Jihoon is suddenly quiet, fifty times meeker than he was thirty seconds ago. “You… also… like… me?”

Woojin freezes and is instantaneously petrified into stone. He swallows thickly and manages a graceless, “Uh.”

“Uh,” Jihoon also, barely, and equally gracelessly, manages.

“That’s not what I—” Woojin tapers off. He tears his eyes away from Jihoon’s imploring gaze and stares at a dried piece of gum stuck to the pavement. “That’s. Well. I. So what if I did? Maybe?”

“Maybe?”

This wasn’t how the Big Confession™ was supposed to go. There wasn’t supposed to be a Big Confession™ period. Woojin was supposed to swallow all of the fickle feelings he’d been fighting and losing against the past however-long and move on and move forward, eventually retiring to the innermost part of the Himalayan mountains to lead a life of total solitude.

This is not the Himalayan mountains. And Woojin is most definitely not alone.

He’s shaking. Trembling. Embarrassingly enough, he thinks his face might even be red.

“Okay,” Woojin starts, slowly lifting his head to lock eyes with Jihoon. He lets out a deep breath, as though steeling himself for something revolutionary. Instead, he accusingly points a finger at Jihoon.

“You said you like me first so if anyone is getting interrogated here, it’s you!”

“I’m not interrogating you! And that’s so immature! What are you, five?”

“Hah. You’re just mad because I noticed,” Woojin says, sounding a little too proud, given the situation. “So, spit it out, Park Jihoon. What’s this nonsense about having a crush on me? Are you and Jinyoung playing a joke on me again?”

Something unreadable flickers across Jihoon’s face before settling into indignation. He purses his lips, looking awfully resolute.

“You’re such an asshole,” Jihoon says succinctly, easily closing the distance between them to grab a fistful of Woojin’s shirt. “This isn’t a joke. I like you, you idiot.”

Woojin has approximately negative five-thousand seconds to even formulate a response, let alone an appropriate one. There are a few reasons for this.

One, because he’s never been confessed to like this before.

Two, because he’s never been confessed to. Period.

Three, because he’s never felt his heart race like this to the point of literal loss of words.

And four—maybe the most important reason—because Park Jihoon is legitimately, definitively, and genuinely kissing him right now.

Holy fucking shit.
Jihoon pulls away right as Woojin begins to come to his senses, grip on Woojin’s shirt loosening as the space between them grows. He’s bashful now, ducking his head instinctively before taking a step back and clearing his throat.

“See?” he stammers out, trying his best to look assertive. “I’m serious.”

The kiss was far from graceful, the brim of Jihoon’s hat knocking against Woojin’s forehead, cap now ajar on Jihoon’s head. Their lips had met at a crooked angle, one might even say that Jihoon might as well have missed.

But the technicalities are beyond meaningless to Woojin.

What matters the most, right now, in this exact moment, is the way Park Jihoon is making his heart run a marathon against his ribcage.


They stand idly for a little too long, avoiding each other’s eyes, fidgeting, and trying in vain to Not Acknowledge that something big and something ridiculously significant has just gone down.

“I—” Woojin begins to say, right as Jihoon simultaneously utters an, “Okay, so—”

“Uh. You first.”

Jihoon laughs nervously and waves a hand. “No, it’s okay. You can go first. I insist.”

“No. You. It’s fine. I mean, I, uh, don’t. I forgot what I was going to say anyway.”

“Me too,” Jihoon says quickly. “I don’t. I don’t even know how to speak anymore. Forgot how. So. You should probably… You should probably talk first.”

This is going nowhere, and as much as Woojin would like to maintain his reputation for being the most stubborn person alive, he knows for a fact that now is neither the time nor the place.

It’s kind of gross, but he thinks he might actually owe Jihoon this much.

He clears his throat purposefully. Stifles a cough. Mutters a prayer to God and feels a wave of regret for not going to church more often.

(You’ll burn, he hears Gunhee say at the back of his mind.

Well, being set on fire probably wouldn’t do much when his entire body is already too warm for comfort.)

“Oh,” Woojin says, eloquent as always. “I…” He stammers, kicking the ground with the toe of his shoe, and then letting out a withering sigh. “This is so stupid. Look, I’ll be straight—okay, not straight straight, but like—no, that’s not the point. Listen. Are you listening? Don’t answer that. Alright. Okay. Here goes.”

Time passes exceedingly slowly, a second lasting what feels like a century.

Woojin exhales softly, lifting his head as confidently as he can to look Jihoon right in the eyes. “I like you.”

Jihoon’s eyes widen ever-so-slightly and Woojin swears they are brighter than any star he’s ever
seen before, which is, frankly, the worst and most grossly romantic thought he’s ever entertained in his twenty years of living.

“This is so stupid,” repeats Woojin. “The first time I saw you, I was kind of amazed because I’d never seen anyone so annoyingly cute before and then—I don’t know—you just kept popping up and being around and I started thinking, ’wow, this guy’s annoying in other endearing ways too. Just my fucking luck.’ This is really your fault. I, in all fairness, I just can’t take the blame for this one.”

“I’m really glad,” Jihoon says sincerely, ignoring Woojin’s rambling with ease. “I didn’t say anything because I… I guess I was worried? That if I did say something, you’d freak out, and we’d never talk to each other ever again or something.”

Woojin covers his face with his hands, mostly to hide the giant smile threatening to break out. “God.” He drags his palm down his cheek, drops his hand back to his side, and tries to sound as nonchalant as possible. “Tell that guy that has a crush on you that you have a boyfriend. A real one.”

“Are you,” comes the hesitant response, followed by a wary gaze. “Are you asking me out?”

“Yes,” Woojin says through gritted teeth. “Please don’t turn me down after I just made a fool out of myself trying to be smooth.”

“I won’t.” Jihoon smiles and Woojin tries, with much futility, to deny the way his heart skips a beat. “I’ll be sure to let him know.”

He quiets the butterflies in his stomach and takes another step closer to Jihoon, swallowing the lump in his throat as he asks, slowly, “Can I kiss you?”

“Don’t ask.”

In the time it takes for him to close the distance between them entirely, Woojin doesn’t think twice about trivial things like the fact that he might miss, the fact that he’s never kissed someone before—

When their lips meet and he feels Jihoon’s palms settles against his shoulders, all Woojin can think about is how ridiculously, stupidly, annoyingly happy he is.

Jihoon grins as soon as they part. “Hey, how cheesy do you think it is that we’re matching right now?”

———

Jihoon Park
remember when u tried to get into a fight with me after I confessed

WJ Park
Go the fuck 2 sleep
“Wow,” Daniel says in greeting, as soon as the door to the informal KSA house swings open. “First time ever that you two have been at a KSA party at the same time. Commemorative occasion, don’t you think? Let’s take a shot!”

Jisung pops up from behind and jabs Daniel in the stomach, using his back as an armrest when Daniel doubles over in pain. “Take your time, children,” he says, placating, as he pats Daniel’s back lightly. “This guy’s already drunk because he’s sad and lonely because his partner in crime isn’t here. Don’t drink as a coping mechanism.”

“Sungwoo would take a shot with me,” mumbles Daniel.

“Oh, Daniel. You’re so stupid in love,” Jisung sighs out, words barely discernible beneath Adele blaring from distant speakers (a sure sign that Jaehwan is currently occupying the playlist).

“I’m what?”

“You’re so stupid,” repeats Jisung, steering Daniel back inside the house. “Leave the youth alone
and let them take shots by themselves. You guys have fun and let loose. If you need to throw up, please go to the bathroom or, if you have to throw up on someone, please choose Taewoong.”

“Another fight?” Woojin asks cautiously.

“He told Jisung-hyung that McCree was his ideal type,” Daniel explains, words slurred as he teeters in the direction of the living room, guided by Jisung, who looks less than amused. “He likes cowboys,” he says as a parting remark.

“Cowboys, huh,” Jihoon murmurs.

It’s just the two of them after that. There are people Woojin recognizes loitering here and there but there’s no one that he feels absolutely compelled to approach of his own volition. Besides, there are more important matters that demand his interest—namely, the fact that Jihoon is existent and right beside him.

Whoa, he thinks to himself. Kind of cheesy.

“Haven’t been to a KSA party since the first one of the year,” Woojin comments with a little more force than necessary, in a futile attempt to shut his Inner Self up.

“The one that I couldn’t go to because I was sick,” Jihoon says through a smile. “No wonder it took us forever to meet.”

“I guess this is a formative step in our relationship. I’ll get to see you drunk. Peak menace Park Jihoon.”

“Jinyoung told me your drunk habit.” They bump shoulders as they make their way further into the house. “That you get really outgoing and start talking so much you tire yourself out.”

Woojin scowls, slowing to a stop. “You have to start paying to know my secrets. $10 for each word Bae Jinyoung has ever uttered to you about me behind my back.”

“We’d get along,” Jihoon continues, masterfully ignoring Woojin’s complaints. “I get really outgoing too.”

“We don’t get along now?”

“We got into a fight ten seconds after I confessed to you.”

“Uh?” Woojin musters up the most indignant expression he can manage. “Twenty seconds. And it was one of those ‘cute’ fights that make it into those weird white girl Tumblr posts about relationship goals. Hands down.”

They’re standing at the base of the stairwell, both equally unwilling to really let loose per Jisung’s instructions. Woojin can’t say he minds too much. It’s kind of nice just talking with Jihoon and taking in Jihoon’s company. The concept of enjoying a party this much without even a drop of alcohol in his system sounds ridiculous but he’s more and more convinced that it’s possible by the second.

“Should we get Jinyoung back?” Jihoon asks suddenly. “For being an asshole?”

“Oh.” He taps his chin, thoughtful, and then smiles, maybe a little too wickedly. “Absolutely. Is that even a question?” Woojin circles his fingers around Jihoon’s wrist, gently guiding him toward the bathroom. “Jinyoung’s brighter than he looks, though. We need to put together a game plan.”
“In the bathroom?”

“He’s probably sitting on the couch in the living room, pining over Daehwi and drafting shitty haikus in his head right now. We have to figure this out away from watchful eyes.”

The bathroom is, Woojin realizes in hindsight, probably the only place where they’ll actually get to see each other’s faces clearly for the duration of the night.

The light is almost blinding when Woojin manages to fumble with the switches and as the door closes behind them, he is made hyperaware of a.) just how small this bathroom is and b.) just how good Jihoon looks tonight.

“Uh,” Woojin manages, eloquent as always. Did he take a shot without even realizing? Or is being in Like with someone supposed to be this embarrassingly effective?

Jihoon presses his back to the wall, looking remarkably unfazed. “So.”

“So,” echoes Woojin, clearing his throat. “What should we do? What’ll make Jinyoung lose his shit?”

“I bet if I asked his mom, she’d give me his social security number. No joke. She trusts me with his life more than she trusts him with his life. Or life, period.”

“That’s too cliché. Identity theft is overdone now.” Woojin leans back against the door, pressing his head to the wood frame. All he wants out of this night is gratifying revenge. That, and maybe for everyone to leave the house except for him, Jihoon, and—only if Drake is on his playlist—Jaehwan. A lot to ask for, so he’ll settle for revenge and drinks that don’t involve tequila. “Should we hold hands? Be all couple-y in front of him? Would that gross him out?”

“Um.” Jihoon rubs the back of his neck. “I mean, yeah? But… is that. Uh. Is that something you’d want to do? Everyone’s going to be there, not just Jinyoung. They’re going to freak out and start asking questions.”

It’s easy to see the hesitation emanating from Jihoon’s body language.

Woojin tilts his head to the side, levies a good look at Jihoon’s expression. “What is this? Are you embarrassed? Ashamed to be dating me?” he asks, joking. “Just kidding. We can just—”

“No!” Jihoon immediately blurts out. He’s frowning, brows furrowed and indignation flashing in his eyes. “That’s not it. I just—I know you’re a private person and I don’t want to make this harder on you than it might… already be… or something….?” He trails off uncertainly, biting back any words he might have lingering on the tip of his tongue.

This probably isn’t the time or the place for a Deep Talk of any sort. The music’s too loud, the lighting is fluorescently bright, and Woojin’s already feeling withdrawal symptoms as a result of being away from his bed for too long.

There’s something unforgivably impossible to brush off about the way Jihoon is fidgeting in front of him though. He knows he’s to blame; Woojin has never been great at expressing his innermost thoughts, and truth be told, he’s honestly kind of thrilled that he isn’t the only one who’s been waffling trying to gauge whether this relationship, them dating, is reality or just the result of two over-emotional boys butting heads.

It’d be a great time to tell Jihoon just how much he likes him but Woojin isn’t the type to bother with uncharacteristic acts that might be interpreted as insincere. He doesn’t want to risk anything on a
He lets out a practiced, comically exaggerated sigh. “I’m going to count to five,” he announces, holding a hand out. “If you don’t hold my hand by the time I get to five, I’m going to kiss you in front of everybody. I think, as an almost-victim of identity theft still recovering from the trauma of falling headfirst for a criminal, I’m allowed bragging rights about my annoyingly cute boyfriend.”

The flicker of embarrassment that passes over Jihoon’s face is endearing.

“You,” he starts to stammer out, words incoherent as he tries, in vain, to form a proper response. “You said you were over it—”

“One…”

“Wait, I, wait! Stop counting for a second!”

“Two…”

“Just! I really think we should rethink this! I mean, everyone’s here—”

“Three…”

“Daniel-hyung’s already drunk and he’ll probably make a toast or something—”

“Four…”

Jihoon parts his lips and then clamps his mouth shut, eyes darting back and forth as though expecting calamity to strike any second now.

“I know I’m being annoying but I don’t want you to force yourself to do anything,” Jihoon exhales out, words streaming from his lips, rapid-fire.

“Five,” concludes Woojin, expression unperturbed as he reaches forward to grab Jihoon’s hand, lacing their fingers together effortlessly. “I’m not forcing myself. Does it look like I’m forcing myself?”

“That’s—”

“I’m not forcing myself,” he repeats. Woojin lifts their interlocked hands up in front of Jihoon’s eyes. “I don’t care if everyone makes a huge deal about it or asks me fifty-thousand questions. I’m loosening my grip right now. If you don’t want to tell anyone then we’re not going to tell anyone, and you can let go of my hand and we can walk in there and tell Jinyoung his mom gave us his social security number instead.”

Silence, save for the faint cadence of Nicki Minaj schooling everyone from the speakers outside.

“I thought you said identity theft was overdone,” Jihoon grumbles.

“It is,” Woojin replies with a shrug. “Haven’t I told you about the time some guy tried to steal my identity because he was too awkward to talk to me to my face? He was kind of cute.”

Jihoon wrinkles his nose in feigned distaste. “Kind of?” he repeats with a disapproving shake of his head. There’s a smile on his face now, though, which Woojin counts as a personal victory. Jihoon squeezes Woojin’s hand not a second after—another victory for the night. “Alright.”

“Alright?” repeats Woojin, trying in vain to bite back a grin of his own.
“Yeah. I kind of like showing off cute things. It’s why I do aegyo.”

“Cool it. I didn’t feed your ego to create a monster.”

They linger for a little while, Woojin’s free hand on the doorknob, un-budging. Jihoon beams, bashful, as he squeezes Woojin’s hand again, leaning forward to peck him on the cheek—

Right as the door flies open and none other than Bae Jinyoung shuffles into the entryway, the front of his shirt drenched with most probably soju.


“I have to wash my eyes out with soap,” Jinyoung sputters. “Dude. What? What? Wait, I knew this was coming. But what? What the fuck? Oh my god. How the fuck did this happen before I even managed to ask Daehwi out on a date? How did Park Woojin—how did Park Jihoon—how did either of you learn to coordinate your emotions? Holy shit. I don’t know if I’m thrilled for you guys or if I want to throw up. This is like watching my mom and dad get together.”

“Does Youngmin-hyung know? Does Donghyun-hyung know? Does your mom know?” Daehwi pulls out his phone at Mach speed and takes a picture in what feels like a nanosecond. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me. Both of you. I’m so disappointed in both of you.”

Jihoon lifts a hand up. “Are we not going to talk about Jinyoung indirectly asking Daehwi out on a date?”

“Be quiet,” Jinyoung and Daehwi say in unison.


There’s a bright light shining in his face now. Daehwi is armed with his phone again, most likely taking a video for Snapchat, Instagram, or somehow, both.

“This is what betrayal looks like,” Daehwi narrates, expression convincingly wounded as he (presumably) zooms in on Woojin’s face. “You think you know a guy only to be left in the dust like a forgotten childhood toy. This world is so cold and cruel.”

On the other hand, Jinyoung is silent, looking just as wounded as he shakes his head. “I saw this coming,” he says again, mostly to himself, “but I feel so blindsided. God. Seriously? Jihoon, you stole my girlfriend from me in preschool and you—you really thought you didn’t owe me this? You didn’t need to tell me? What happened to trust? What happened to morals? What happened to friendship?”

“Okay,” Woojin begins, “I don’t want to hear this from the asshole that stole ice cream from me for an entire summer and then tried to convince someone to steal my identity.”

“I’m a witness,” Jihoon chimes in supportively. “And a victim.”

Jinyoung parts his lips to protest before closing his mouth. He opens his mouth again, lifting a finger up as though prepared to make an argument—only to close it once more.
Quite unhelpfully, Daehwi turns and captures Jinyoung with his camera. “And this is Jinyoungie-hyung getting schooled. Like, comment, and subscribe for great content. Follow him @jinyoungisbae for more depressing content.”

“Congratulations,” Jinyoung finally says, clapping his hands together slowly and deliberately. The expression on his face ebbs into one of muted admiration. “I feel humbled. If Park Woojin and Park Jihoon can move forward in their sorry love lives, then…” He clenches a fist. “Daehwi—”

“Hello?” Daehwi greets into the receiver of his cellphone, plugging a finger into his other ear as he turns his back to Jinyoung and begins to walk away. “Auntie! You will not believe what your stupid son has done! I just found out that Woojin-hyung—”

He honestly should have expected this and Woojin finds himself deeply regretting not breaking Daehwi’s phone after he took the first picture.

In (hopefully) exaggerated heartbreak, Jinyoung unclenches his fist.

“Love hurts,” he whispers.

Jihoon sucks in a sharp breath and winces. “Better luck next time,” he says, patting Jinyoung on the shoulder. He tugs Woojin out of the bathroom and toward the other end of the hallway, snapping him out of his daze in the process. “Maybe you should try stealing his identity. I heard that works like a charm.”

“We’re going to have an even better get-together story,” Jinyoung huffs. “You’re going to be jealous.”

“Can’t wait to hear it thirty years from now,” Woojin replies, nodding solemnly as he claps Jinyoung on the back on his way out of the bathroom.

“You’re welcome!” Jinyoung calls out after them as they walk further away. “You owe me one more summer’s worth of ice cream, Woojin!”

They slow to a stop at the stairwell by the entryway to the living room. It’s dark, the only light coming in streaks from the distant kitchen and whatever tacky blacklights Gunhee has undoubtedly managed to steal from the gospel choir. It’s dark, but not dark enough for Woojin to miss the way Jihoon’s tiny smile grows into a wide grin.

“You’re secretly a sadist,” Woojin declares. “You like watching people suffer, don’t you?”

There isn’t any real reason for them to keep holding hands, but Woojin doesn’t move to let go and neither does Jihoon.

“Who? Me?” Jihoon asks, batting his eyes guilelessly. “I just like to see Jinyoung suffer. Besides, you’re the same.”

“Who? Me?” mimics Woojin. He leans back against the railing of the stairwell and squeezes Jihoon’s hand absently. “Man,” he sighs out. “Feels good to get two years’ worth of revenge out of my system.”

“You think he’s ever going to confess to Daehwi?”

Woojin hums. “Bets on next semester.”

“End of this semester,” Jihoon replies. “If I’m right, you owe me a summer’s worth of ice cream. I
think I’ll eat it right in front of Jinyoung.”

It’s strange standing in a house he’s been in too many times to count now, in entirely different circumstances, feeling more elated than he’s ever been since starting university. He thinks it’s ridiculous how simple it is to ease into the environment when Jihoon is with him. He thinks it’s unfair how quickly and how deeply he’s come to appreciate the mindless, seemingly insignificant moments shared between them.

“Oh, I almost forgot!”

“Forgot what?”

Jihoon leans forward and steals a kiss, smiling up at Woojin the second they part. “Because we were interrupted,” he explains. He’s trying to look indifferent, but Jihoon’s terrible at hiding his embarrassment—and it flows out in excess when he clears his throat and ducks his head to hide how red his cheeks are getting.

In spite of how hard he’s working to maintain neutrality, Woojin lets out an incredulous laugh, the grin on his face impossible to contain. He doesn’t think to say anything, doesn’t make any wry comments, doesn’t crack any jokes as Jihoon leads him toward the living room, where the heart of the party is.

“You’re ridiculous,” he manages, after a moment’s worth of things unspoken. “Ridiculous,” Woojin repeats, smile seeping into his voice.

Jihoon doesn’t skip a beat when he replies, confidently, “That’s why you like me.”

He’s not wrong.

And truth be told, if good things follow a pattern, Woojin thinks he might have to start picking up phone calls from unknown numbers more often.

Daniel climbs on top of the beer pong table and taps a fork against a red solo cup. No one hears him so he shouts, “HEY,” instead.

Once everyone is paying attention to him, he smiles, clearly inebriated. “I just want to make a toast for my boy Woojin and my boy Jihoon, who are apparently dating now—”
“Yo, so, uh, Jihoon broke the beer pong table.”

Woojin looks up from where he is attempting to fish out a can of beer that isn’t Natty Light from the icebox. “Nice,” he says. And then, after a pause. “Wait, is he okay?”

“Yeah, he’s fine.” Jinyoung waves his hand flippantly. “He went for a dive to prevent a party foul and ended up landing on the table and snapping it in half.”

“Oh. Nice.”

“Just thought you should know. His team won. He declared victory in your name and in honor of your anniversary. It was gross and I’m going to wash my eyes and ears out because you guys are disgusting,” Jinyoung explains, as casual as ever.

“Great,” Woojin says. “Can you deliver a message to him for me?”

“I guess.”

“Tell him ‘good job’ and ‘I love you’ and ‘Bae Jinyoung is jealous of us.’”

“Okay. I hate you.”

End Notes

happy late bday to elle my wife of 29348958498392832 yrs and the only person who willingly climbed onto the 2park raft with me back when jihoon first called woojin 'oppa.' i luv u.

to everyone else, sry, thanks for reading, you are real troopers.

(p.s., chronologically set before the onganiel fic in this series!)
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