we're a mess (let's finish what we started)

by niigoki

Summary

So it starts like this: five years ago they all became friends, and then they realized that the reason they were so close to each other was not just because of their undying love for music, anime, and extremely terrible TV series, but also—girls. There were feelings involved.

Then they all entered college.

Twitter tag: #TWICEWereAMess
More kpop fanfiction because why not. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So it starts like this: five years ago they all became friends, and then they realized that the reason they were so close to each other was not just because of their undying love for music, anime, and extremely terrible TV series, but also— girls.

They do say queer kids tend to gravitate towards each other.

High school sucked – especially for the younger ones who had to watch their older friends graduate first – and puberty was a bitch. There were feelings involved. Sana tripped on an ice cream cone and broke her wrist.

Then they all entered college.

Now they were all adults. Personalities changed, they met new people, someone dyed their hair, some tried to pretend they were cooler now – it was painfully obvious that they weren't. Despite being involved in different things, the nine of them were still as close as ever. No one else could truly understand them in the way they understood each other.

Consequently, the intense feelings they felt never stopped permeating their relationships. If anything, things just got more complicated. As they got older, they learned to cope better.

Some of them did, anyway.

Then Sana tripped again.

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“Are you going to Nayeon’s party? Please say yes.” Sana pretty much flung herself on her seat to catch Momo before she could leave for her next class.

“You mean the Drama Club party? The one that all the popular people are gonna go to?” Momo finished tucking her notebooks inside her bag and finally looked at Sana. “No. Why?”

“What? Why?” She was pouting now and Momo rolled her eyes.

“Too many people I don’t want to see.”

“But Mina will be there.”

“I know,” Momo flicked a finger on Sana’s forehead and smirked down at her. “She told me. We have calculus together.”
Sana whined, rubbing the sore spot. “I’m having trouble understanding why you’re not going if both Mina and Nayeon are going to be there.”

That was a really good argument, but Momo was too tired for drama – both literally and figuratively. It’s not that she hated the Drama Club – also known as the people who had stolen Nayeon from the group (from her) – it’s just that she wasn’t particularly interested in the snobby, hypocrite, know-it-all theater students that were absolutely convinced that they were going to get an Oscar as soon as they graduated.

She had tried getting along with them – Nayeon had pretty much dragged Momo backstage to meet everyone at the end of her first performance – but those people seemed more interested in sucking up to Nayeon’s ego than making Momo feel comfortable.

The Drama Club was obsessed with Im Nayeon, which was… well, understandable. Confidence and self-esteem leaked through Nayeon’s every pore, and she fed off compliments. Her acting skills were no joke either, and she sang like an angel. Musical theater was everything she had ever wanted, and everyone knew that. Getting into the club was the best thing that could’ve possibly happened in Nayeon’s college life, and Momo was happy for her, they all were. Nayeon had become a little bit more insufferable, but at the end of the day, she was still a closet nerd who had every Sailor Moon season hidden inside her dorm closet.

Momo just missed hanging out with her on a daily basis, that was all.

Okay, maybe she was jealous of the Drama Club. Big deal.

As for Mina…

“I’m just not in the mood, Sana.” Momo walked off waving a weak goodbye, and Sana sighed.

“I’ll tell Mina you bailed on her!” She yelled in a last attempt to make Momo stay, but Momo just flipped her off with a laugh.

Fine. Sana got up, off to find her next target.

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The art studio was a quiet, calm place, intended for soul-searching and inspiration. It was almost always filled with students who shared the same space, but didn’t interact with each other. It was kind of like a library, but with a lot more naked people and paint.

Son Chaeyoung pretty much lived there.

Her afternoon class had been canceled, so she headed down to the studio to get a head start on her art project; honestly, just an excuse for her to spend some time there. There was something appealing about the characteristic silence of the room. She used to go there at lunch time, too, mostly to get inspiration for a few of her poems and short stories. Her friends were starting to think she had an obsession, but she reassured them that it was simply her will to learn.
And also to run away from people. Anxiety and all that jazz.

Chaeyoung was almost done with her line art when she saw the door moving from the corner of her eye. She tried to ignore it, focusing back on the canvas, but then a bubbly girl full of personality and a broken wrist started – quite literally – bouncing towards her. Chaeyoung didn’t bat an eye.

Sana approached her from behind and stood there, hands behind her back.

She stood there for five whole minutes in silence.

Chaeyoung finally sighed loudly, putting her pencil down. “What is it.”

“Chaengie, you’re so good at what you do. Has anyone ever told you that?” Sana bent over as she complimented the tiny artist, her breath warm against Chaeyoung’s ear.

“Yes. A lot in fact. Especially when they want something from me.”

Sana giggled, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. “Come to Nayeon’s party with me.”

Chaeyoung frowned and finally turned to her. “Did you hit your head when you broke your wrist?”

Sana kneeled and Chaeyoung panicked, looking around. There were three other students in the studio and they all seemed to stare at them at that moment, which didn’t exactly do wonders for Chaeyoung’s social anxiety. “Get up, what are you doing?” She half-whispered, half-yelled.

“Son Chaeyoung. You’re my best friend. My partner in crime. My one and only.” Sana held her hand as she said that and Chaeyoung wanted to die.

“First of all, bullshit. Momo and Mina are your best friends,” She retreated her hand, blushing nervously. “Second, get up you absolute loser, you’re embarrassing me!”

“Not until you agree to come party with me.”

"I don’t do parties, Sana.” She turned her back on her stubborn friend, focusing again on her project. “You know that.”

Sana got up and hugged her from behind, earning a grunt from Chaeyoung. It was really hard being around her sometimes, but what could she do? Sana was pretty much the heart of their group; her energy was enviable, and no one could hate her even if they tried. “Just this once, please, Chaengie! It’s going to be full of artists, just like you!”

“The Drama Club is full of actors, not artists. There is a big difference.”

“But—”

“This is about Dahyun, isn’t it?” Sana froze and Chaeyoung rolled her eyes. Jackpot. “I swear, you’re hopeless.”

“It’s not like that…” Sana tried to laugh it off, but she knew it wasn’t going to cut it. Besides Mina and Momo, there were two more people who knew about her… convoluted feelings for Dahyun, Chaeyoung being one of them. She’s always been perceptive.

“She’s going to be there and you don’t want to be at this party alone with her,” Chaeyoung continued. “And you already asked Momo, but she refused. So now you came to me. Is that it?”

“Have you been stalking me, missy?”
“You’re just too easy to read,” Chaeyoung giggled, Sana’s arms now loose around her. “And Dahyun is incredibly dense, that’s the only reason you’ve been missing out on each other for so long. It’s like you two live in a bad drama or something.”

The older girl moaned, letting her go. “I don’t want to talk about that. Will you really not come?”

The way she pleaded was so pitiful, and Chaeyoung really wanted to help her out, but she was physically incapable of attending a party full of strangers. She hated crowds, and she knew that Sana was going to make friends fairly quickly in there. “I’m sorry. You know I can’t.”

They stared at each other for a while, then Sana smiled sweetly at her. “I know. I’m sorry, I didn’t want to force you.” She reached out and ruffled Chaeyoung’s hair. “Guess I’ll have to try Plan C.”

“Good luck.” Chaeyoung smiled back. She really loved Sana despite everything.

“I meant it, by the way.” Sana said, already walking away. “You’re a really great artist. Proud of you!”

She left then and Chaeyoung felt happy and warm. Her friends were hopeless when it came to their crushes.

Not like she was any different. Maybe she should call that person.

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Entering the basketball court was always intimidating. Probably because the place was filled with tall, buff, attractive athletes of all genders. They were pretty much the campus’ rock stars. Everyone wants to date an athlete in college. That was just a fact, even in art school. Sports might not be the strongest point of that particular university, but it was appreciated nonetheless.

The distinct sounds of sneakers sliding noisily on the well-polished floor hit Sana’s ears as she walked into the gym, and she smiled at the smell of sweat and rubber balls. It brought back funny memories, like the one and only time she tried being athletic and, well, broke her wrist again. It was always her wrist for some reason; she was sensing a pattern.

Sana immediately spotted the person she was looking for and waved at her. “Jeongyeon!”

The short-haired girl paused shooting hoops and waved back. “Yo, Sana-ya! Be there in a sec.”

Sana nodded and sat down at the bleachers, waiting for practice to be over. It didn’t take long, and soon Jeongyeon was making her way to her with a towel around her shoulders and a bottle of water in one hand.

“If I wasn’t painfully aware of your personality I’d probably faint right now,” Sana teased as Jeongyeon sat next to her. “Yoo Jeongyeon, all sweaty and messy, walking in my direction in slow-motion, like a dream…”

“Oh my God, shut up.” Jeongyeon pushed her with her shoulder and Sana laughed loudly. “You
say that as if people didn’t want to see your naked body all the time, too.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Sana crossed her legs, grabbing the bottle from Jeongyeon’s hand.

“Right. How many people did you kiss and never texted back last semester?”

“You make me sound like a slut.”

“We accept the titles we think we deserve.” Jeongyeon might be an athlete at heart, but her soul still belonged to the Fine Arts. Sana didn’t know a single person who had watched more movies than her, and their friends always asked her for recommendations based on their moods. Jeongyeon had the most sacred pen-drive on campus, too, making her known not only for her athletic ability, but also for the extensive pirated movie library she carried around in her pocket.

Really, everyone wanted a piece of Jeongyeon for lots of different reasons.

“So, what’s up?”

“Well…” Sana paused for a second, thinking about the best way to go about this. “As you know, our talented friend Im Nayeon has been having a few problems lately.”

“She has?” Jeongyeon’s features became serious, the playful aura vanishing into thin air. It was always like this when it came to Nayeon.

“Oh, she didn’t tell you?” Sana placed her bandaged hand on her friend’s thigh. “She probably didn’t want to worry you…”

“What happened?”

“Well, you see…” Sana looked down, bangs falling on her eyes. “She’s feeling isolated lately. It’s like the people from the Drama Club found a new toy to play with, and discarded her.”

Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow, skeptically. “That doesn’t sound like something they would do.”

“Oh, but they did! Nayeon told me off-handedly in a conversation yesterday.” She forced her eyes to become watery. “She made it seem like it was a joke, but I could feel the call for help in her voice.”

“Uh-huh.”

“So, then I remembered!” Sana shifted closer to her. “There is a party going on tonight. A Drama Club party. And Nayeon is going to be there, of course.”

“Hm.”

“And can you imagine leaving her all alone with a bunch of people who are surely going to ignore her and make her feel terrible about herself? So, as her faithful friends, I thought that we should attend——”

“You want to drag me to the Drama Club party.”

“Oh, I’m so glad Nayeon can count on you!” Sana threw her arms around Jeongyeon’s shoulders and the athlete just sighed, pushing her away.

“Not happening.”
“What!” Sana moved back, in shock. “Why not??”

“I actually have a test tomorrow that I have to study for,” Jeongyeon smirked, getting up. “And it’s not even an excuse. I’d tell you if it was because I hate those drama kids anyway.”

“Oh, come on, not you too.” She got up as well, latching herself to Jeongyeon’s arm. “Your roommate brainwashed you!”

“Momo didn’t brainwash anyone, I hated them way before she did.”

“So it was you who brainwashed her! How dare you, you know how easily influenced she can be.”

The two girls made their way out of the gym slowly, Jeongyeon shooting toothy grins and waves to some of her female fans on her way out, and Sana was still talking her ear off and trying to convince her. The athlete pretended to listen, but her mind was made about the issue.

The reason she didn’t get along with the theater students was pretty much the same as Momo’s – they had stolen Nayeon from the group. And it was fine, Nayeon was her own person anyway, it’s not like she belonged to anyone in the first place, but Jeongyeon had every right to not want to get near them for as long as she could manage. There was no way in hell she was going to attend a party filled with drama rats.

“Sana, can’t you ask someone else?” Jeongyeon interrupted her friend’s monologue when they reached the locker room, wriggling her arm away from her grasp. “You have a lot of friends who are probably going, don’t you?”

“I do, but… I want to go with you guys.” They both knew what she meant by that – the original nine. “And Momo is not going, neither is Chaeyoung, Tzuyu is sick…”

“Mina?”

Sana bit her lip, crossing her arms. “She’s going, but… it’s complicated.”

Jeongyeon hummed at this. “Interesting.”

“What does that mean?”

“Mina doesn’t like to party much, that’s all.” She then frowned. “Wait, are you guys fighting?”

“What makes you say that?”

“The fact that Mina is going and Momo isn’t. And you clearly wanting to avoid Mina at that party.”

She wasn’t exactly wrong, but there was no way Sana could explain what was going on. It was too tiring and too complex; she didn’t even understand it that well herself. “We’re not fighting, it’s just… a temporary setback.”

“If you say so,” Then a pause. “She’s okay, though, right? Mina, I mean.”

Jeongyeon’s concern for Mina was something that dated back from their high school years, and Sana thought it was the sweetest thing. She almost sighed at the whole scenario – poor Jeongyeon had no idea that she was involved in the mess as well. She’d rather not tell her right now, though; it would only make more questions pop up.

“Yeah, she’s alright.” Sana smiled sincerely, and it was all Jeongyeon needed to believe her.
Minatozaki Sana might be a vixen and mess with people a lot to get what she wants, but it was easy to know when she was being truthful. It was rare for her to be a manipulative ass to their group of friends, too.

“That’s good.” Jeongyeon turned around to get into the locker room. “I’ll see you later, okay? Good luck with the party.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Sana slapped her butt playfully. “Go shower, you stink.”

“And, uh…” Jeongyeon scratched the back of her neck. “If you or Mina need some help, don’t hesitate to tell me, okay?”

Sana looked at her sympathetically – she didn’t need to add the ‘you’ at the sentence, Sana knew exactly who she was worried about.

It’s always been like this: Jeongyeon looked after Mina all the time, and when she wasn’t with her, she was asking about her. She did this to the whole group, like a silent protector, but with Mina things were different. She was more tender, spoke softer, looked at her gently. Sana was the first to notice, but didn’t say anything.

“Will do, Romeo.” She replied teasingly, earning an eye roll from her friend. Jeongyeon finally bid her goodbye and they parted ways. Sana couldn’t help but to sigh at the whole tragedy.

“You need to stop being so caring, Jeong.” She whispered to herself, then moved to her next target. She wasn’t giving up just yet.

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The first thing Momo wanted to do once she got back to her room was shower, then eat a protein bar. Her stomach was pretty much gnawing at itself, all thanks to that stupid diet she decided to start at the beginning of the year. The results were apparent once she looked at her abs in the mirror, but that didn’t mean she got used to having the same diet as a rodent.

She had just left her last class for the day and was making her way towards the building’s exit when she bumped into someone.

“Sorr—” Then she smelled the perfume. “Nabongs?”

“Momoring!” Nayeon’s expression lit up and she side-hugged her friend despite carrying a huge book in her arms. “I was going to call you later.”

“Oh, well. I’m here now,” She looked at the way Nayeon seemed to be having trouble carrying whatever that book was and immediately reached out. “Let me carry that.”

“Huh? Oh no, it’s okay!” But of course, Momo wouldn’t take a no for an answer, and she gave her the book with a sigh. “I swear, you’re turning into Jeongyeon with this whole ‘knight in shining armor’ act you two have going on.”
“A hotter version of Jeongyeon, right?” Momo couldn’t help but to tease despite her beating heart. She didn’t want to behave differently around Nayeon, it didn’t matter what her stupid feelings told her, and she wasn’t going to. She treasured their friendship too much for that.

Nayeon’s eyes slid from her face to her apparent muscles and smirked. “Perhaps. I’ll let you know.”

Momo pushed her gently with her shoulder and the two started walking. “Where to?”

“The Drama Club faculty office. This thing you’re carrying is the list of all the party guests for tonight,” Nayeon stared back at Momo. “Which is what I was going to ask you later. Are you coming?”

Momo opened her mouth to answer but spotted someone in the distance. It wasn’t hard to recognize Sana, even in the middle of a crowd, and Momo didn’t want to go through that whole trouble again. She knew that if Sana saw them together, she would use some very convincing arguments that would make Nayeon turn against her and force her to go to the stupid party.

“Shit, come here,” Momo pulled Nayeon by the sleeve to the opposite direction and walked faster with her until she was sure they were out of sight. Sana never ran, anyway.

“Who are you running from?” Nayeon asked in between chuckles.

“No one. Never mind that,” Momo sighed and resumed their path – she unfortunately knew exactly where the Drama Club faculty office was thanks to months of keeping an eye on Nayeon’s endeavors. “About the party, I don’t think I’m going.”

“Aw, really?” It was a lot harder to remain stoic when it was Nayeon whining at her general direction. “I was hoping you’d go. Mina and Dahyun are the only ones going from what I know. Haven’t talked to the others yet, but I doubt they would.” Then she thought a bit more. “I mean, Sana’s going, but she’s at every party, so.”

“That’s true,” Momo giggled, turning right at a corridor. “I’m just not really in the mood, I guess. Jeongyeon is gonna study for an exam so I think I’ll stay with her this time. Watch a movie from her holy pen-drive, eat something healthy.”

“You’re still dieting?” Nayeon looked upset. “Momo, you’re going to vanish if you don’t eat more.”

“Just for a few more months.” She smiled, despite the harsh tone. She appreciated when Nayeon showed her concerned side; it was a rare sight. “I promise I’ll eat more starting this Fall.”

Nayeon, seemingly unconvinced, stepped in front of her, making the brunette halt. “Look at me in the eyes and promise me you’ll stop obsessing over a perfect body and eat.”

And it shouldn’t be hard to do something so simple like that, but Nayeon became incredibly attractive when she was mad and demanding, and Momo could feel her cheeks heating up. She hated that feeling in the pit of her stomach that resurfaced every time Nayeon was close to her, paying attention to her, worrying about her, because hell, isn’t this what friends are supposed to do for each other? Worry and make sure they are okay? It drove Momo insane, sometimes.

After a nervous laugh and an eye roll, Momo finally stared into Nayeon’s eyes.

God.
She’s so beautiful it hurts.

“I promise.” She was glad her voice didn’t waver as much as her heart.

Nayeon squinted, but eventually smiled, teeth and all, and Momo wanted to tell her how much she loved her smile.

“Good.” She turned around and bounced up and down the rest of the way, with Momo’s eyes following her every move.

It was hard, but at the same time, she couldn’t help but to smile dumbly at the girl in front of her. Everything about Nayeon felt alive; she had this aura that spread to others and made them absolutely infatuated with her. Sure, she was self-centered and could be extremely annoying if you didn’t know how to deal with her flamboyant personality, but Momo had been by her side long enough to admire even the ugliest parts of her.

And she loved every bit of it.

Thinking about how easily she’d fallen for this girl made something gnaw at Momo’s stomach, and it wasn’t hunger this time. She had this sudden urge to do something stupid that would end up hurting her, but—

The words left her mouth before she could stop herself.

“Actually,” She was going to regret this. “I think I might go.”

Nayeon nearly tripped and Momo was by her side in seconds, checking if she was okay. “You will?” Her gummy grin was back, and close, and beautiful.

Momo’s eyes flickered towards her lips for a split second. “Yeah,” and then, “I can’t let the drama nerds steal you from me all the time.”

Nayeon’s expression was unreadable, but Momo was okay with it; she wanted to be with her, so she was going to.

Then the actress simply grabbed the book from Momo’s hand and dropped it on the floor, giving her a pen out of nowhere. “Then sign your name, Hirai.”

The way she said that was exhilarating for some reason. It felt like signing a death sentence.

She was suddenly excited for the party.

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Sana was tired.

None of her most important friends wanted to accompany her to a simple party and now her feet were aching from running around campus the whole day because nobody knows how to use their
damn cellphones. Her broken wrist was hurting too, because it's a broken wrist, obviously.

After walking into the main building, Sana sat down with her back touching the nearest wall and sighed, burying her head on her arms. She knew no one would bother asking if she was okay, students in that same position in the middle of the hallway were a common sight, especially near finals. Maybe one or two professors might wonder, but they would probably just walk by as if nothing was wrong, and Sana appreciated that.

The evening classes were about to begin, but at that time the place was almost empty – in a limbo between shifts. Janitors cleaned the bathrooms and courtyard, students walked back to their dorms, mostly getting ready for the party, and the setting sun glowed orange against the white walls.

Sana lifted her head, pressing her cheek against her good arm and watched as the birds flew outside.

Then she felt someone sitting down next to her. The warmth was familiar and she smiled, closing her eyes.

“Hard day?” The voice was so tender and relieving. Sana felt all of her worries floating away.

“Yeah,” She mumbled in reply. “I ran around campus all day. Almost tripped again, saw some people who recognized me, but I didn’t recognize them.”

“And then?”

“Argued with my friends. None of them wanted to help me, can you believe it?”

“Oh no.”

“Then I got tired. Decided to think about my life a little bit,” Sana opened her eyes, looking forward. “Lots of people call me easy, did you know that? Fake, a show off, that girl who slept with the whole Arts Department.”

The girl next to Sana shifted closer, touching shoulders with her.

“I know that I don’t owe people anything, especially my attention. But sometimes I wonder if they’re right.” Then Sana finally turned her head to the girl. “Pathetic, huh?”

“A little bit, yes.” The girl answered and smiled. Sana smiled back and they just stared at each other for a long time, Sana’s expression softening. She straightened her back and sighed, leaning her head on the girl’s shoulder.

“Come to the party with me?”

Jihyo leaned her head on top of hers. “Will that make you stop spitting bullshit about your perfect, talented, beautiful self?”

Sana giggled, hiding her face on Jihyo’s neck. She absolutely loved her friend. “Yeah.”

“Then I’ll come.”

And just like that, she found some company, and felt less alone. Maybe there was a lesson to be learned from all of this.

Maybe she should stop chasing people and wait for them to come to her instead.
Chaeyoung knocked on the door of the room she shared with Tzuyu three times, then walked in silently. The lights were on, so that meant her 'patient' was awake. She felt a bit concerned about this; she wanted Tzuyu to get as much rest as possible – it was never easy missing three days of classes in a row. Sure, Chaeyoung brought back her homework and notes every day, but she wasn’t exactly the best at teaching.

“Tzuyu?” Chaeyoung approached the girl carefully. She was lying in bed, a bowl of soup next to her nightstand and the TV remote on her hand.

“Hey,” Tzuyu greeted her with a weak voice. She’d been getting better from her cold, but her throat was still hurting, so she tried to speak as minimally as she could. “Dahyun brought dinner.”

Turning around to face the bathroom, Chaeyoung now realized that their other roommate was the reason Tzuyu wasn’t sleeping right now. “Well, it’s the least she could do after waking you up.”

“I live here too, you ass!” Dahyun yelled from the bathroom, which made the two younger girls laugh a little. Their room was usually messy because there were three of them, but today it was especially so – all thanks to Dahyun getting ready for this crazy party.

“It feels like a hurricane passed through here.” Chaeyoung walked into the bathroom to wash her paint-stained hands and nearly choked at the sight.

“A girl needs to be pretty, and being pretty is messy.” Dahyun’s makeup was literally half finished; she had this bizarre habit of completing one eye first and leaving the other completely clean. She said that it gave her a perspective, but it honestly made Chaeyoung laugh every time. “What?”

“Your stupid makeup.”

“It’s art, Son Chaeyoung. Art takes time.” Kim Dahyun was already extremely expressive, but with one small eye and one big one, she became the pinnacle of comedy. “Stop laughing! Go take care of Tzuyu, this bathroom is too small for two people.”

“Oh, man…” Chaeyoung wiped a tear from laughing too hard, but obliged.

“How is she?” Tzuyu asked, genuinely curious.

“I’ll sketch her later, I won’t be able to take that image off my head,” Chaeyoung replied, regaining her breath. Tzuyu laughed too, but started coughing. That made every protective instinct on Chaeyoung’s body act, and she sat down by her bed, grabbing the cup of water near the shelf.

“Here, drink.”

“Thank you,” Tzuyu swallowed the liquid and sighed, relieved. “I hate this stupid cold.”

“It’ll pass soon enough.” Chaeyoung’s features softened and she reached out to pat Tzuyu’s hair gently. Then she grabbed the bowl of soup. “Eat.” It was just natural to feed her at this point, and
Tzuyu wasn’t complaining.

They chatted for a while, Chaeyoung told her about her day, and Tzuyu kept worrying about her photography project not being finished on time because she was sick. The painter assured her that she’d help her out once she was feeling better, and Tzuyu thanked her.

There was an element of softness between the youngest members of their group of friends – except for Dahyun, but that was another story completely. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu had always worked well together and gotten along better than most people. They’ve never had a real, bad fight before, because there was no reason to; they’ve always dialogued honestly and openly about their issues, so nothing had ever felt off with them.

They didn’t hide secrets from each other.

Not until now, anyways. And this particular secret was eating Chaeyoung alive.

She just couldn’t tell anyone.

After a while, the soup was finished, the TV program was fairly decent, and Dahyun was out of the bathroom – now with makeup on both sides of her face. “How do I look?”

“Like Dahyun.” Both girls answered at the same time and high-fived.

“Real helpful.”

“You look good.” Tzuyu said, honestly.

“Don’t forget to take your keys with you. You know we’ll be sleeping by the time you come back,” Chaeyoung warned her, getting up to put on her pajamas.

“Yeah, yeah, I know.” Dahyun searched for her wallet and keys and put them all inside her purse. Looking around one more time to make sure she wasn’t forgetting anything, she nodded to herself. “Well, I’m going. Behave, don’t break stuff, sleep early, don’t watch porn on my pay-per-view account.”

“As if.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes. “Don’t get too drunk, I’m not taking care of you when you come back.”

Despite the comically hostile way they spat words at each other, Chaeyoung and Dahyun hugged, and Tzuyu watched them fondly. They were still close friends, after all. “Rest well, Tzuyu.” Dahyun planted a kiss on top of her head, then jumped back, opening the door. “Goodbye, toddlers!”

It was incredible how quiet the atmosphere became once Dahyun was gone.

“She gives me a headache.” Chaeyoung complained taking off her shirt.

“She’s a lot to handle, yes.” Tzuyu agreed. “But our group wouldn’t be the same without her.”

“That’s the worst part.” There was a smile in her voice. “She’s as dense as she’s annoying.”

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing. Never mind.” Chaeyoung forgot that Tzuyu didn’t know about the whole drama with Sana and Dahyun, and bit her tongue. Once she was done changing, she grabbed the pillow from her own bed and climbed back on Tzuyu’s, getting comfortable under the sheets. Tzuyu allowed
herself a giggle.

“You’re gonna get sick if you stay near me.”

“Don’t care,” She answered sitting against the headboard. “I want to be with you.”

Tzuyu looked down shyly, but didn’t complain.

“Besides, the TV is right in front of your bed.” Chaeyoung added later, receiving lots of slaps in return. She laughed and grabbed Tzuyu’s hand. “Okay, okay, I’m kidding!”

“You also give me a headache, sometimes.” Tzuyu teased, but leaned her head on Chaeyoung’s shoulder. They stood in silence after this, enjoying each other’s company and watching a cooking show together. They were still holding hands, and Tzuyu intertwined their fingers at some point, which made Chaeyoung’s heart skip a beat. She didn’t move them, however, and pretended not to notice.

Tzuyu’s medicine was making her sleepy, and it didn’t take long for her to nod off on Chaeyoung’s shoulder. Her little snores were really cute, and that was how you knew she was deep asleep.

Carefully, Chaeyoung got up and turned off the lights. She was about to head to her own bed when she heard Tzuyu mumbling something in her sleep.

“Stay here…”

Chaeyoung’s heart constricted inside her chest and she bit her lip, sighing. Moving back to Tzuyu’s bed, she grabbed a few cushions from their sofa and tucked them under the girl’s chin. Apparently convinced that there was now a warm body next to her, Tzuyu dozed off again. Chaeyoung let out a relieved breath and climbed on her own bed.

She turned off the TV and closed her eyes, trying to ignore the pain inside her chest.

Chaeyoung had a secret that she couldn’t tell anyone.

And she refused to indulge herself in it.

--

“I’ll see you tomorrow, professor.” Jeongyeon bid her Literature teacher goodbye and finally let out a yawn she’d been holding for the sake of her reputation. She loved Miss Sunmi to bits, but her class was dense and filled with too much information. She wanted to do well on tomorrow’s test, so she had asked for an extra lesson in the evening. Now that it was done, she could finally go back to her room and relax.

But there was still something tugging at her heart, and she wanted to make this weird feeling go away before going to bed. She grabbed her phone and dialed. It rang twice, then the person picked up.
“Minari?”

“Jeongyeon,” Her voice seemed cheerful, which was good. “How are you?”

“I’m good,” Jeongyeon replied, smiling softly. “A little tired, honestly. Practice was hard, and I just left an extra Lit class.”

“Look at you, studying hard.”

“Someone’s gotta do it. You can’t be the only smart one in the group.”

Mina giggled softly like she always did and Jeongyeon felt lighter. “I’m glad you’re committed to stealing my title.”

“Yeah…” She ruffled her hair a little bit. “Listen, Sana told me you’re going to the party tonight.”

Mina stood in silence for a couple of seconds. “I am. I thought I’d try this whole ‘socializing’ thing before graduating.” She cleared her throat. “Besides, Nayeon will be there. If everything goes wrong I can always stick to her like glue.”

Jeongyeon turned left and started walking downstairs, imagining the scene. “You do know that this is the Drama Club party, right?”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning I doubt she’ll be left alone for a second.” She let out a breathless laugh. “Those theater kids worship her like some kind of goddess. Which is understandable, honestly.”

“Hmm, I suppose.” Mina sounded down all of a sudden, but it might’ve been Jeongyeon’s imagination. “Well, Dahyun will be there too, regardless. Who knows, I might make some friends.”

“Yeah, who knows.” The conversation trailed off and they stood in silence for a bit. It wasn’t uncomfortable, however; Mina and Jeongyeon could stay on the phone for hours without really talking about anything and it still felt nice. They understood each other well.

“Is that all you wanted to ask me?” Mina spoke up suddenly, snapping Jeongyeon out of her trance.

“Oh, um… Yeah. I just wanted to make sure you’d be okay.”

“As usual.” She could hear the gentle smile in Mina’s voice.

“As usual.” Jeongyeon replied. More silence followed and soon she was at the dorms. “Well… I gotta go. Call me if you need anything.”

“Will do.”

“I mean that. You can call me at four in the morning—”

“And you’ll pick up. I know.”

“Yeah. Okay,” She laughed awkwardly and climbed the last set of stairs before coming face to face with her door. “Have fun.”

“I will.” Then a few moments later. “…Thank you for calling.”
“No problem.” Jeongyeon stood in front of her door with a dumb grin plastered on her face. “See you.”

They finally hung up and the athlete sighed, looking at her phone. Despite having made sure that Mina was alright, she was still antsy for some reason. Jeongyeon shook her head pushing the thoughts away, and finally opened her door. She was going to have a study session and couldn’t be bothered by a senseless anxiety.

She took one step into the room and was greeted by a mess of clothes on Momo’s bed, with said girl applying lipstick on the mirror next to the bathroom. That was unexpected.

“Uh… Sana told me you weren’t going?” It was more of a question.

“Change of plans,” Momo answered, shrugging. Then she turned around. “Should I go with a crop top or a shirt?”

“Do you want people to see your abs?”

“Yes.”

“Crop top.”

Momo smirked and walked back into the bathroom to finish her makeup. Jeongyeon threw her bag on her chair and jumped onto her bed, staring at the ceiling for a bit, then back at the clothes. Seeing Momo getting ready for the party sparked something inside her chest, and she frowned, closing her eyes. She opened them again, rolled on her stomach and scratched her head.

‘Ah, fuck it.’ She thought.

Once Momo was done, she walked out of the bathroom and halted at the scene. “What are you doing?”

“Being dragged to this damn party.”

“…By whom?”

Jeongyeon sighed, grabbing her best outfit. “By my stupidity, apparently.”

Momo raised an eyebrow, then laughed. “That makes both of us, then.”

This was either going to be great, or suck in astronomical levels.

Honestly, Momo couldn’t wait to find out which.

Chapter End Notes

So this is gonna have more chapters. I'm invested, I think. Tell me what you think, it really helps me keep going. Thank you for reading!
The Drama Club’s building was far away from the main one and double the distance from the dorms. The theatre students had to walk the most to get to their classes, but that meant they could scream their lungs out in the middle of musical performances that no one would be bothered. Being so far from every single living thing in the campus had its perks: like being allowed to throw the loudest, most popular parties.

It also gave Momo and Jeongyeon a lot of time to think about their life choices.

“This was a bad idea.” Momo mumbled as they walked outside, following the illuminated path. It was already really dark out, the only sounds accompanying them being the steps of the other students who had decided to crash the party at the last minute. “It’s cold.”

Jeongyeon was about to take off her jacket and offer, but Momo stopped her with her hand. “I’m being dramatic, keep it.”

“You’re anxious,” Jeongyeon replied, then smirked. “It’s plastered on your whole face.”

“Like you’re one to talk.” Momo nudged her with an elbow. “Seriously, I thought you had to study.”

“I did. I do.”

“Then why are you following my terrible decisions?”

“I don’t know! Impulse, a gut feeling, the fact that I’m an idiot, choose.” Jeongyeon laughed nervously and Momo rolled her eyes.

“The last one, definitely.”

Some girls had been clearly following them from the moment they left the dorm and were now giggling like teenagers. Jeongyeon looked behind her and shot them a grin, and they nearly tripped on each other, blushing furiously. The smaller one waved, and the taller one slapped her shoulder, whispering something. Jeongyeon chuckled, facing forward again. “Dear God.”

“How does it feel to be every lesbian’s dream girl, Yoo Jeongyeon?” Momo looked up at the stars with a lazy smile.

“Pressuring,” She replied, hands behind her head. “I feel like I have to please all the time.”

“You’ve always been like this,” Momo side-eyed her, a reminiscing gleam in her eyes. “Always looking after us, always supporting everyone. Honestly, it’s no wonder everyone just falls for you like that.”
“Aww, are you falling for me, Hirai Momo?”

Momo didn’t answer and widened her smile, closing her eyes and breathing the chilly night air. Jeongyeon decided to let the question float around in the air; she didn’t really want to get into this territory. When it concerned the nine of them, things could get complicated.

The closer they got to the meeting place, he louder the muffled music became. The building was huge, and the students always had the permission to use the theater for the biggest parties, since it was the most spacious place inside. The first time Jeongyeon attended one of the Drama Club’s parties she was really intimidated, she wasn’t going to lie. There were too many people and too much alcohol going around – never a good combo.

She really didn’t know why she decided to come.

( Maybe that was the reason why).

Finally arriving at the building’s steps, Momo and Jeongyeon looked at each other and mentally challenged one another to leave. When none of them did, they just locked arms and climbed the stairs, hearts beating impulsively on their chests.

_Here we go._

---

Jihyo didn’t dislike parties. She liked being around people, and liked taking care of her friends too, so going with Sana had been truly great. The bubbly girl apparently knew half of the party’s attendees, and the ones she didn’t, at least knew who she was. She was surrounded by friends, new and old, but never once made Jihyo feel awkward or isolated.

“This is my best friend, Jihyo!” Sana pulled her and introduced her to strangers here and there, and Jihyo greeted them with her blinding smile. She was sure she’d have at least ten new stalkers by the time she came back to her dorm and logged into her social media, but that didn’t bother her.

What _did_ bother her was how much Sana was drinking, clearly to get drunk as fast as possible.

“Hey,” Jihyo tapped her shoulder to grab the girl’s attention. “How about you slow down a little bit?”

“Jihyo-ya!” Sana threw her arms around her friend, leaning almost fully against her. “I thought I lost you in the crowd!”

“And I think I’m losing you to vodka!” Jihyo replied in the same hyperactive tone and took Sana’s cup away from her.

“Noooo…” Sana reached for her cup, a playful smile on her lips. “I need that!”

Jihyo sighed, worried, and forced Sana to stand up straight again. “That’s your third cup in a row and you just got here. Let’s enjoy the music for a bit. Look! Someone’s calling you.”
Apparently distracted, Sana turned around and waved at a group of friends that Jihyo didn’t recognize. She guided the tipsy girl towards them and told her that she’d be right back, then moved to the nearest trashcan to deposit the cup. Jihyo knew that Sana wanted company for this party for a reason – she planned to get absolutely wasted and needed someone to take care of her. Jihyo didn’t really mind that, though; that was her job in the group. She was worried about the reason, however.

Park Jihyo was like everyone’s mom. While Jeongyeon was more of a princess charming, it was to Jihyo that people came with their worries. She didn’t know if she was easier to talk to than Jeongyeon, or if she had this grown up, more mature vibe, but she honestly felt glad to be the one to carry everyone’s burdens. Her life had been pretty good; no traumatic experiences so far (with the exception of her entrance exam and all that), so she felt this need to make everyone feel better about themselves. Not to say that she didn’t have any insecurities, she just dealt with them better than most.

She did share her feelings with Nayeon from time to time. That girl was a great listener despite everything.

“Found you,” Jihyo whispered to herself, finally finding a trash can, then smiled at a job well done. She turned back to the crowd, but froze. The group of friends had vanished, taking Sana with them, and Jihyo almost growled from the back of her throat. “Goddammit, Sana.”

She needed to find that girl before she did something stupid.

“Coming through!” And with her boisterous voice, she dove into the crowd.

--

It was loud.

And dark.

The songs ranged from EDM, to Pop, to Rock.

There were flashing neon lights guiding people’s paths – purple, green, red – but overall it was hard to see unless you were near the stage.

Mina didn’t really enjoy being confined in a dark space full of sweaty bodies pressing into her, so she tried to make her way through the crowd as fast as possible. She was wearing a black dress and heels, and she immediately regretted her footwear decision; it felt like her feet were about to fall off.

She had no idea what she was doing. First, she’d come to that party alone, despite knowing that Sana was going to be there too. Her own roommate and best friend offered to go with her, but Mina – in a fit of insanity, apparently – lied and told her that she already had company. Sana had eyed
her suspiciously, but didn’t ask.

Second, that was probably the third party she’s ever been to, and she could literally feel people’s gazes piercing her body. The usual party goers already had some sort of reputation – they knew each other and recognized the newbies. Mina felt like an easy target and she hated it. She was lost and suffocated, and all she wanted to do was find Sana as quickly as possible. Or Nayeon, that worked too. She just needed to see a familiar face.

It took Mina longer than she expected to reach an empty part of the theater, and when she did, she rapidly touched her back on a wall and just breathed. Eyes closed, loud music blasting in her ears, the hot atmosphere – her feet were definitely going to fall off.

Inhale… exhale.

Thoughts were swirling in her mind and she was too dizzy to dance, so she took a moment to just recompose herself.

“Focus.” She mumbled, then opened her eyes to scan the place. There was a table with snacks and drinks a few meters away, fairly reachable. The crowd was the problem, however; just the thought of going back in there made her stomach turn.

Coming alone was such a stupid idea.

Mina felt like she was on a survival show, and she needed to think about how to make it out of there alive. First, remove your shoes. She reached down and took her heels off, relief immediately spreading through her body. Okay, that’s better. What’s next?

Water. She was terribly thirsty.

There was no way she was going to walk barefooted through the theater – she didn’t want to know what kind of liquids had been spilled on the floor already. Mina threw her head back, bumping it against the wall in frustration, and sighed. She felt utterly lost and alone, and hated every second of her life at that moment.

“Don’t cry,” She bit her lip, frustrated at her weakness. “It’s okay, relax.”

A minute passed, then another, and no one approached her. She could feel them – the eyes on her, questioning, mocking, laughing, pitying. Mina absolutely hated being pitied.

She was about to let out an actual sob when she felt someone touch her arm, gently.

“Mina?”

She turned her head and gaped. That voice gave her lots of conflicted feelings, but right now, she threw her pride out of the window and blinked at her savior. “Momo…” Then she let her forehead fall against Momo’s shoulder, breathing out a broken chuckle. “Thank God.”

Momo was confused, but hugged her best friend’s hair regardless. Things might’ve been awkward between them lately, but it was impossible to distance herself from Mina when she looked this vulnerable. “Hey, it’s okay. I’m here.”

They stood there for a moment, Mina’s thoughts clearing out. She finally lifted her head and wiped her eye carefully not to smudge her makeup. “I’m sorry, I—” Then she let out a weak laugh at the whole situation. “I’m sorry.”
“Are you okay?”

“Yes. Now that you’re here.”

Momo raised her eyebrows at that, but smiled a little. “What the hell happened? You look exhausted.”

“I just… I did something dumb.” Mina bit her lip, shifting her weight to her left leg. “Before you ask, can you… Can you do me a favor?”

“Sure.”

“Can you grab me some water?”

“Are you drunk?” Momo stared at her eyes, but Mina shook her head.

“I’m not. I just got here.” Then she turned her attention to her feet. “My heels messed with my feet and I can’t walk properly. I’m really thirsty.”

Momo couldn’t help but to smile at that, and rolled her eyes. “Okay, dumb-dumb. I’ll be back soon, don’t move.”

Once she left, Mina felt her tense muscles relaxing. Now that she was allowed to think, she was really confused; Sana said that Momo wasn’t going to the party – which she honestly saw coming considering how things were between them – so why was she here? It was ironic, too, that out of all people, Momo was the first one to reach her.

_I guess I shouldn’t be too surprised_, Mina thought. The girl had a knack for knowing when she was in trouble.

Just like Jeongyeon.

A few moments later Momo was back, holding two cups of water. “Here.”

Mina thanked her and drank, taking big gulps. She wanted to postpone their conversation as much as possible, but she was too thirsty to drink slowly.

Momo waited for a while, then finally spoke. “So… care to tell me why you looked so miserable if you just got here?”

Mina didn’t answer for a while, staring down at her cup. She really didn’t want to talk about this to Momo of all people. “I… came alone. The crowd was suffocating, and I got dizzy.”

“You came alone? Why?”

“I just did.”

“Minari.”

“Don’t,” She sighed, swallowing hard. “We’re still avoiding each other, aren’t we?”

“We were,” Momo answered, suddenly tired. She hated to admit it, but she missed talking to Mina normally; they’ve never been this awkward around each other before. “Then I saw you almost crying.”

“I wasn’t crying.”
“‘Almost’ being the imperative word.”

“Impérative. Who taught you that one?” Mina grinned, a reflex of Momo’s expression.

“You did. At high school,” Momo moved to her side, touching her back on the wall as well. “Before our stupid fight.”

“We’re not… fighting.”

“Feels like we are.”

They stood in silence after that, Mina playing with her plastic cup. Momo drank from hers, feeling the beat of the slow music that was now playing, and almost laughed; this was definitely not how she planned to spend this party. She was glad that she had the chance to talk to Mina again, however.

“Why did you come alone, Minari?” Momo tried again, and this time she knew she’d get an answer.

“…I wanted to let myself go.” She closed her eyes, embarrassed of what she was about to say. “Just… I don’t know, go wild for once. Get drunk, dance, do stupid stuff without remembering it the next day. I didn’t want anyone I know to see me like this. So, I came alone.”

Momo stared at her, wide-eyed. That definitely didn’t sound like the Myoui Mina she knew.

But then again, she could sympathize.

“Oh,” Momo bumped shoulders with her, getting closer. “That is dumb.”

Mina scoffed. “Yes. Thank you for agreeing.”

“Especially because you’d bump into someone you know here eventually. It’s the biggest party of the semester, you know.”

“As I said, I wasn’t thinking. I just went with my feelings.”

“You don’t do feelings very well.” Momo teased.

“I know.” It was weird. The two of them haven’t talked like this in ages, and now everything was back to normal just like that. Mina thought that their friendship really was too strong for a petty argument. “Why are you here?”

“Because you were about to cry,” She received a weak punch in return and chuckled. “And because I lost Jeongyeon in the crowd.”

Mina’s heart skipped a beat. “Jeongyeon is here?”

“Somewhere,” Momo knew where this was going. “I really don’t know where she went.”

There was a pause in their conversation, as if Mina’s whole world was put in slow-motion, then things went back to normal. It was ridiculous, really, the effect Jeongyeon had on her.

“I didn’t think she’d come.”

“Apparently, we all came,” Momo replied. “Except for Anxiety Central numbers one and two, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu.”
“You’re standing next to Anxiety Central number three.” Mina retorted with a smirk.

Momo stared at her for a bit and smiled lazily, not really thinking about anything; it just felt nice to let her eyes roam Mina’s features. She’d been doing it forever.

“You look beautiful.” She breathed out honestly, and Mina finally let herself smile sincerely for the first time that night.

“You too.”

“We should go look for the others.”

Mina lifted the heels in her hands, as if asking her ‘how’, and Momo took off her boots. “Wear these, give me your heels.”

They wore the same shoe size, so Mina obliged without thinking much. She mouthed a ‘thank you’, and Momo grabbed her hand, pulling her away from the wall.

Everything finally felt lighter and Mina thought that going to the party hadn’t been so bad after all.

--

“God dammit, Momo.” Jeongyeon grunted as she stretched her neck, looking for her partner. She hated being left alone at parties, especially because things that made her uncomfortable tended to happen.

Like being surrounded by a crowd of women that made it impossible for her to move.

“Jeongyeon-ah, you came!”

“How’s it going, superstar?”

“Yo, Jeongyeon! Come here, my friend wants to meet you!”

“You need a drink, Jeong?”

There was one thing Jeongyeon hated about herself, and that was her inability to ignore anyone. She tried to decline everyone politely as she pushed through the wall of people, but every time she paid attention to someone for a millisecond, they thought they’d hooked her.

Then some hands started grabbing, and she felt her stomach turn.

“Guys, please—!”

“Attention, Drama Club!” A loud voice cut through the music on the theater speakers, and everyone stopped what they were doing, turning towards the stage. At the very top of some precarious stairs was no one other than Im Nayeon, with a microphone in hands. “Tequila shots will be served in approximately… Now! Run to one of the four corners of the theater to get yours!”
Then chaos ensued. The circle of people around Jeongyeon dissolved in seconds, and she could finally breathe. She moved towards the center of the place, where people were trying to get away from, just so she could move freely again. With a hand on her chest and a sigh of relief, Jeongyeon finally looked back at the stage and realized that Nayeon was staring right at her.

_Come up here_, Nayeon mouthed and Jeongyeon couldn’t help but to grin.

This girl.

She walked towards the stairs on the side, finally unbothered, and climbed up the stage; no one seemed to notice, or care. If there was anything college students paid attention to in their lives was the prospect of free booze. The only person on the stage besides Nayeon was the DJ, but he was too preoccupied with his playlist to notice anything happening behind him.

Nayeon walked up to her slowly, still smirking, and Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow. “You always need to make an entrance, don’t you?”

“Wouldn’t be me if I didn’t,” She eyed the girl from top to bottom and bit her lip. “You have no right to be this attractive, you know.”

Jeongyeon laughed. “If I tell you that your compliments are the only ones I always remember, would you believe me?”

“Smooth. As always.” Nayeon grabbed Jeongyeon’s tie and pulled her to the back for a little bit of privacy – but not much, they were still very much visible. “I still didn’t hear my thanks.”

“For?”

“Getting rid of your fangirls.”

“So you did that on purpose,” Jeongyeon almost shivered. “That’s so you.”

“And?”

The athlete rolled her eyes. “Thank you, my Holy Savior.”

“Hmm. Acceptable.” Nayeon was still looking at Jeongyeon with clouded eyes and she realized soon enough why. With a frown, she moved forward, her face inches apart from the actress’.

“Are you drunk?”

Nayeon backed up, stoic. “No.”

“Oh my God you’re _wasted._”

Nayeon finally let out a laugh, almost losing balance. Jeongyeon grabbed her by the arms and let the girl fall on her chest. “I can never fool you, can I?”

“Not me,” Jeongyeon smiled, then remembered what she was doing before this whole mess started. “Have you seen Momo?”

“Hmm, only in my dreams.” She replied giggling like an idiot.

“I’m sure she’ll have a field day with this information.” Jeongyeon mumbled, not really paying attention. She turned her neck to the dance floor and resumed her search for her lost friend, which was a lot easier to do up high in the stage, but to no avail. Then she felt a tug on her tie again,
forcing her to look down.

“Why are you looking elsewhere when I’m right here?”

“God, you’re insufferable when you drink.” Jeongyeon replied, but still with tenderness in her voice.

“And you’re insufferable when you don’t push me away.” Nayeon’s tone shifted to something more serious, making Jeongyeon blink. She felt the girl’s breath against her lips, and suddenly felt really exposed on top of the theater stage.

“We should probably—”

“Jeong,” Nayeon’s voice was low and husky and her eyes moved to the athlete’s lips. She brought one hand to the back of Jeongyeon’s neck, fingertips grazing the baby hairs there. “I’m about to do something dumb and you need to stop me.”

But she didn’t. Nayeon gave her every reason to, a second too long, a moment for her to think about this through, and she still didn’t.

The only thing going through her head once their lips touched was how familiar they felt. Jeongyeon’s eyes fluttered shut automatically and she held Nayeon’s waist, fingers curling on the fabric of her glittering dress. It was intense, like always, and their lips danced to a tune long-forgotten. When Nayeon’s tongue brushed against Jeongyeon’s lower lip, she felt helpless to deny her.

She was still a ridiculously good kisser.

--

The running crowd was a surprise to everyone, but what shocked Mina and Momo the most was the person making the sudden announcement. Of course Nayeon would show up like this. Momo turned her body to shield Mina from the stampede while chuckling, and the girl grabbed her shirt, questioning.

“What an extra hoe.” Momo simply answered, making Mina laugh with her.

“Honestly, I’m not even surprised.” She spoke, earning a nod from Momo. After everything cleared up, the two girls checked their pockets and purses to see if nothing had been stolen, then let go of each other.

“At least she made this place less claustrophobic.”

“Says you,” Momo looked back at the tequila corners. “I’m glad I despise tequila.”

“I’m glad too, after what happened last Christmas.”
“Listen, we don’t talk about that.” Momo blushed, grabbing Mina’s hand again. The girl just followed her with a giggle, but stopped suddenly.

“Wait, the bar is empty now.”

“You’re going to drink?” Momo sounded surprised.

“I never said I wasn’t,” Mina pulled her away from the stage and Momo groaned; she wanted to see Nayeon, but she couldn’t leave her best friend alone.

“Fine, but make it quick.” Momo whined.

“In a hurry?”

“…No.” Then a pause. “Yes. I want to talk to Nayeon. And find Jeongyeon while we’re at it.”

Mina’s stomach flipped and she felt like pouring a big shot of vodka into her drink all of a sudden. “They’re not leaving. Stay with me for a while.”

With nothing else to add, they reached the bar, and Momo caved as well, grabbing something sweet and alcoholic for herself. She had no idea what Mina had ordered, but she wasn’t really worried about that. Despite not drinking often, Mina had the best endurance when it came to alcohol for some reason—it was way better than Momo and Sana’s at least.

“What’s that?” Mina asked, returning with her beverage.

“A Cosmopolitan.” The ballerina’s drink was way too transparent to be good, but Momo didn’t question her about it. “Cheers?”

Mina smiled and they clinked their cups—and just like that, they made up. They weren’t even mad at each other in the first place, not really, it was just—their lack of communication regarding their feelings towards other people. Mina felt betrayed, and Momo was terrible at emotional conversations, so they had just stopped talking for a bit. The thing was that neither of them knew how to start talking to each other again.

They really were idiots.

The two friends chilled at the bar for a while, then Momo turned her attention back at the stage. What she saw in the distance, however, made her heart drop.

Jeongyeon was there, talking to Nayeon, and they were close. Really close. Nayeon was clinging to her, head hidden on the girl’s chest and swinging side to side. Momo tried to convince herself that her roommate was just taking care of a possibly drunk Nayeon, and that she shouldn’t jump to conclu—

That’s when they kissed.

It was impossible to mistake that for anything else.

Momo felt her throat close and tears prickle behind her eyes. It’d been a while since she’d felt this utterly defeated. Her drink was suddenly disgusting, and she wanted to punch something, anything, _everything_.

That’s when she remembered Mina.

Her eyes widened, and she turned to her friend in a split second—but it was too late.
Mina’s expression told her everything she needed to know.

“Oh…” Mina let out in a breathless voice. “That’s… new.”

Her knuckles were white from holding her cup too strongly, but instead of wanting to throw her drink into the nearest trashcan, she swallowed everything at once. Momo opened her mouth to scold her, but what right did she have? She knew exactly what Mina was going through at that moment.

The music sounded muffled and far away suddenly, and Momo felt exhausted. Nothing about that party attracted her anymore, and she was enraged, confused and sad all at once. She knew that Mina was too.

So she turned to her friend and did the only possible thing. Grabbing Mina’s arm, Momo tried to speak through the lump in her throat.

“Let’s get out of here.”

Mina didn’t even fight. She just let herself be dragged away.

--

Sana was dizzy. Really, really dizzy.

She had no idea who the people she was talking to were, or how she ended up there, but suddenly there was a shot of tequila in her hand, and hell, bottoms up. She drank it all at once, hearing the cheers around her. She loved the attention, and hated it at the same time – she felt loved, but empty. Those strangers weren’t the ones she was supposed to be hanging out with.

There was someone she wanted to see more than anyone.

Where was she?

“Jihyo-ah…” Sana mumbled, her head spinning. She was having a hard time distinguishing up from down, but her body moved automatically. “Have you seen my friend?”

“No… But hey, Sana-ya, this is our song!” A strange girl grabbed her by the shoulders and dragged her to the dance floor, and Sana smiled despite her confusion. She did like this song; why was it so familiar? She remembered dancing to it with someone.

Where was she?

Her legs moved to the beat, flawlessly, and she laughed and laughed, twirling around, holding people’s hands, flinging one arm around strangers’ shoulders, making friends wherever she went. Sana was a free spirit, outgoing and with a great personality, and also really smart.

She’s easy.
Her professors complimented her grades often, but that wasn’t what made her stand out in the crowd. Minatozaki Sana was beautiful, elegant, yet remained humble despite everything; every time someone new talked to her, she turned her full attention to this person, remembering every single detail from their face.

*Have you heard? She slept with five different girls in a week!*

She loved music. Sana’s hobby was to create her own choreographies for random songs she liked, and that’s why the people from the Drama Club loved her so much. Even though she wasn’t officially a member, Sana helped them with their dances for their musical performances, which meant that she spent a fair amount of time with the theater kids.

*She’s just a stupid slut who manipulates everyone to get what she wants.*

Minatozaki Sana likes to read.

*Her reputation is well known around here.*

Minatozaki Sana donates to charity every week.

*Her neck is always covered in hickeys, and she loves to flaunt them around.*

Minatozaki Sana is a good person.

*A stupid whore.*

Minatozaki Sana is—

*A bad person.*

She felt her insides turn and that’s when she spotted Dahyun, not far from her. The girl noticed her and smiled, that bright, beautiful smile that made Sana fall head over heels, and started making her way to her.

*Oh. There she was.*

Panic took over and made Sana desperate. Dahyun was close, too close to her, and she was still smiling, obviously glad to have finally found her.

*Stay away from me.*

A few more steps and they would be face to face.

*I’m bad for you.*

So Sana turned to the first person she saw, and crashed their lips together in a heated kiss. She had no idea if it was a man or a woman, and the kiss felt like absolutely nothing – emptiness; that was the word. She kissed the person desperately so, and counted the seconds. It couldn’t be too short, just long enough to do its work.

Once it was over, Sana looked around.

Dahyun was nowhere to be seen.

*Thank God.*
A wave of relief washed over her, and also something else.

“Sana.” Jihyo’s voice was comforting and right on time.

Then Sana puked.

--

They walked back to the dorm in silence, no words needed to be spoken. Momo had given Mina her jacket, even though she hadn’t asked for it, but Mina didn’t argue either. She was too drained to say anything to anyone. Their rooms were close to one another, separated by one floor, and Momo insisted on dropping Mina at her room first. She didn’t know if she just wanted the company, or if she was too tired to make it to the extra floor. Mina didn’t complain.

There were too many things going on in both their heads, and far too little time to process it all. Momo was heartbroken, and Mina was too, but at the same time they couldn’t blame either side of the story – it was impossible to hate Jeongyeon or Nayeon.

Those two had been a thing in high school. It was clear that they still had some sort of feeling for each other, and that proved to be true tonight.

The final steps were the worst, because that meant splitting up. Momo didn’t want to be alone with her thoughts, but she knew that Mina was a private person; she’d always liked loneliness when things got rough.

Finally arriving at her doorstep, Mina dropped her shoulders, making Momo’s jacket fall off and returning it to her. “Thank you.”

“No problem.”

The silence was killing Momo, but there was really nothing else for them to say.

“Will you be okay?” Momo asked, weakly.

Mina nodded. Then looked down, her lip quivering. “No.” She breathed out a laugh. “Not yet. Eventually, though.”

“Eventually is a long time.” Momo felt helpless. It was funny; she was hurting as much as Mina, but her top priority was still making sure her best friend was taken care of. Maybe Nayeon was right, Jeongyeon was rubbing off on her.

“It’s all the time I have.” Then Mina looked up, her eyes teary. “Why are you doing this?”

“Doing what?”

“Being strong for me. Your heart is breaking and you’re still trying to pick up my pieces.”

Momo gave her a ghost of a smile. “I was wired to take care of you, I guess.”
They stared at each other, then Mina tiptoed to place a kiss on the hinge of Momo’s jaw. It was soft and warm, and utterly heart-breaking. “Thank you.”

Momo nodded with a sniffle, leaning in too and placing a kiss of her own on Mina’s cheek. She didn’t pull away, and felt Mina’s lips grazing her skin again, now on her cheek, then her nose. Momo breathed out, eyes fluttering shut, the sensation of Mina being so close to her a relief to her aching heart. She pulled the ballerina closer by her dress, resting her forehead against hers, and they stood there, just breathing and trying to find solace on each other.

Mina’s hands climbed to Momo’s neck and she cupped her jaw. Momo just stared. Mina stared back.

Then she grazed her mouth on Momo’s lips.

It wasn’t exactly just a kiss. It felt like more than that – a desperate search for affection and validation, and Momo happened to be the closest person to dump all of those feelings on. But the brunette reciprocated all the same, moving her mouth against Mina’s, finally pressing them together. Her hand cupped the back of Mina’s neck and it felt comforting. Mina pulled back a bit, slid her nose against Momo’s cheek, then kissed her again.

And again.

They shared whispers of kisses for a long time in front on Mina’s room, and when they pulled back, breathless, Mina just hugged her.

“Stay tonight.” She breathed into Momo’s ear.

And right then, she’d stay forever if she asked her to.

Chapter End Notes

Ooops, did someone say angsty millenials cause I got some GOOD NEWS. Thank you all for the comments! You're all so lovely, I'm so glad you're enjoying my story! See you soon~
Her head hurt, and it felt like there was an entire desert in her mouth. Sana frowned, her eyelids as heavy as her limbs, and it took her a while to start functioning properly again. For a moment she just laid there, motionless, and breathed. The gears inside her brain slowly started moving again, but they felt rusty, like the rest of her body.

Finally opening her eyes, Sana groaned in discomfort at how bright this place was. The curtains were too thin and allowed the sunlight leak through, which consequently overwhelmed her senses. She inhaled sharply and turned around – a bad idea, as it turns out. The room spun, and she grabbed her head, grunting.

“Ouch…” Despite her condition, she recognized a few things – or rather, recognized the lack of familiarity. The scent of her pillow, the fluffiness of her bed– they were simply not present.

Wherever she was, it wasn’t her room.

A wave of panic started rising inside her chest, and Sana forced herself to look around. The room was clean and pretty, a few messy spots here and there, but overall a very organized place. There were lots of Polaroid pictures hanging from the opened wardrobe door, and some cacti were resting by the window. She knew these details somehow, but couldn’t recall where she’d seen them before.

Then someone opened the door behind her and walked into the room. Sana turned to the sound, her eyes still hurting, but slowly improving.

The sight of Jihyo was an immense relief.

“Jihyo-ah…” Sana whispered, her throat dry.

Jihyo sat next to Sana on the bed and patted her hair gently. “Morning. How are you feeling?”

“My head hurts. And thirsty.”

“Here, drink.” Jihyo grabbed some medicine from the nightstand and gave it to her along with cup of water. Every muscle in Sana’s body ached as she sat up and she couldn’t stop murmuring complaints. She’d had hangovers before, but it was rare that they were this bad; she used to have more self-control than this.

“Thank you,” Sana gave her back the cup and sighed, rubbing her sore eyes. “I really let myself go yesterday, huh?”

“I told you to slow down.”
“You did?” Sana tried remembering last night, but absolutely nothing came to mind. She recalled arriving at the party with Jihyo, talking to some people, and grabbing a few drinks. Anything else after that had been completely erased from her brain. “You probably did.”

“Yes, I did.” Jihyo’s tone was a mystery; it didn’t feel like she was angry, but she wasn’t exactly acting warmly either. It was easy to know when Jihyo was upset, but this wasn’t the case, currently. If anything, she sounded disappointed.

Disappointing Jihyo was one of the worst feelings in the world. Sana felt terrible.

“I’m really sorry,” she muttered meekly, looking down at the floor like a child who had been scolded by her mom. “I probably gave you lots of trouble.”

“You did, I’m not gonna lie.” Her sentences were straightforward and cut right through Sana’s heart.

“Did I… do something bad?” Sana didn’t want to know, but she had to. If she hurt someone, she needed to own up to it and fix it.

“…Yeah,” Jihyo’s face finally relaxed, and she sighed, returning to her usual self. Worrying about her friends and wanting to fix them – that was a familiar territory. Sana didn’t know how her friend managed to carry everyone’s burdens like that; it wasn’t healthy. But right now she couldn’t do anything about it, she wanted to know just how much she’d screwed up. “You passed out in the middle of the dance floor and I had to carry you back.”

“Oh,” That wasn’t exactly what she was expecting. “I’m sorry.”

“You were drinking like you wanted to forget everything yesterday.”

That’s not it. “Yeah, I screwed up. That was stupid of me.”

“It was,” Jihyo paused and it felt like she was withholding information from Sana – something important that would definitely hurt her. Jihyo was trying to decide if she should tell her or not, Sana realized. She reached out and touched her thigh.

“…What else did I do, Jihyo-ah?”

Jihyo averted her eyes from her friend, bit her lip, fumbled with the sheets, and Sana knew she had screwed up big time. Now that she was more awake, a thousand things started racing through her mind, and she forced herself to remember the most she could, but there was nothing. Regret filled her immediately and she was about to apologize profusely when Jihyo spoke.

“Dahyun saw you kissing someone.”

Oh.

It was like a cold sword pierced right through her soul and cut her in half.

I hurt Dahyun.

Her emotions manifested in these halves of herself, creating what seemed to be two separate entities inside her mind.

Wasn’t that what you wanted?

No. Not like this. I never wanted this.
But you did.

It wasn’t supposed to happen like this.

One second passed, then two, and Sana had to do something. She was shaking, being destroyed from the inside, but she had to pretend she was doing better than she actually was, only until she left the room.

Just for a few seconds. Hold on just a little longer.

“That’s embarrassing,” She let out in a breathless laugh, scratching the back of her head. “Was it someone pretty, at least?”

Jihyo blinked, stunned. “Sana—”

“Wait! What time is it?”

Jihyo frowned, but checked her phone. “Eleven thirty.”

“Oh, damn! I completely forgot to return a book to the library and the deadline is soon!” She sounded so forced, but Sana prayed that her hangover would serve as an excuse for that. “Jihyo-ah, I’m really sorry for everything, but I need to go.”

Sana struggled to get up, her head still hurting, but the pain in her chest was so strong that it actually dulled her other senses. She felt Jihyo’s hand on the small of her back, supporting her, and swallowed nervously. Jihyo was too close, and she would probably hear her heart pounding strongly against her chest.

“Thank you for everything,” Sana bowed slightly, grabbing her purse.

“Yeah… Of course.” Jihyo didn’t want to let her go, but at the same time she knew that Sana needed her space. She truly was an invaluable friend.

I don’t deserve her, either.

“Well, I’ll see you soon!” Sana smiled brightly, opening the door and not really caring that she was wearing Jihyo’s pajamas – it wasn’t unusual to see students walking the dorms’ corridors with said garment, or shirtless. She left in a hurry and Jihyo watched her go until she vanished from her sight.

She sighed heavily, and then closed her door.

As soon as Sana was out of view, the tears started spilling, but she didn’t stop – her steps quickened as her vision gradually blurred and she felt a lump in her throat threaten to choke her. When she reached the stairs, she walked faster, breathless, and was unable to keep in a broken sob.

Almost there.

She got to the ground floor eventually and didn’t realize that she was now running. Sana passed by two people, crashing shoulders with them, and apologizing weakly. The showers were so close, just a little longer and she would be allowed to break down in peace under the scorching water.

When she got to the communal showers, there was no one around. Sana fumbled with her clothes, throwing them carelessly on the floor, and finally got it. She turned the shower on, slamming her back against the cold tile wall, and slid down to the floor, face in hands.

Did you hear what Minatozaki Sana did?
As soon as the water was loud enough, she allowed herself to sob.

_She’s a bad person._

The tears burned, but she couldn’t stop.

_You’re a bad person._

“Stop.”

_A bad person._

“Stop it…”

_I’m a bad person._

“I know that!” Sana screamed, and it echoed loudly through the room. “I know that…” Trembling shoulders clutched, she curled into herself at the shower floor, hugging herself like that would stop her from falling apart.

Minatozaki Sana absolutely hated herself.

---

Soft sunlight flooded the dorm as the birds sang in the early morning, tiny specks of dust dancing through the air. The bed on the right side of the room was empty, but two bodies occupied the one on the left, underneath the window. Legs tangled, the two girls breathed in sync, slowly, like the whole world was at their mercy – it was one of those mornings where everything was so still, it felt the Earth had ceased to spin.

Momo and Mina were pressed together comfortably under the sheets, their heavy hearts mended for the moment. Momo watched as her best friend inhaled through her parted mouth, and gently ran her fingers through her black locks; Mina’s shampoo had always smelled nice and familiar, and Momo smiled with her eyes. They stood like this for a long time, the brunette too enchanted by the peacefulness of the situation to allow herself to break the spell.

Her hand left Mina’s hair and she slid a delicate finger around her features – first her forehead, then the hinge of her jaw, then her cheeks and nose, finishing at her bottom lip. Momo licked her mouth, remembering how kissing Mina had felt, and grinned. She poked Mina’s upper lip next, finally earning a hidden chuckle from the girl.

“Wakey, wakey…” Momo murmured, tongue pressing against her teeth. Mina didn’t move, and Momo pinched her cheek playfully. “Minari…”

Mina groaned, now a full-blown smile on her face, and curled closer to Momo. Both laughed quietly, Momo’s hand back on her hair, playing with it again. “Don’t be difficult.”

“Hmm…”
“Don’t you have classes in the morning?”

“Not today.”

“Are you lying?”

A quiet moment, then another chuckle. “Yeah.”

Momo sighed, still smiling, and pulled Mina closer to her. She pressed a kiss to the crown of her head, and then buried her nose on the girl’s hair, closing her eyes. Mina’s arms enveloped Momo’s body and she lifted her chin to gently kiss the hollow of her throat. Momo shivered.

Everything felt so surreal. They were still hurting, but being together like this made the whole situation look like a bad dream. Momo felt like she was a child again, having sleepovers back at Mina’s house in the country; for a moment, she imagined Mina’s mom walking into the room to offer them breakfast, while her brother annoyed the crap out of them. Momo chuckled at the memory.

“What?” Mina whispered, a puff of air tickling her skin.

“Remember when your brother watched a horror movie hidden from your parents, and later that night he knocked on your bedroom door, completely terrified of sleeping alone?”

Mina laughed at that. “Yeah. Mom scolded him, and he was grounded for a day.”

“How old were we? Seven?”

“Eight. It was the first time your mom let you sleep over.”

“Hmm.” Momo hummed, dreamingly.

“It’s my favorite memory,” Mina untangled herself to stare at her. “Later that day Sana came over, too. I’ve never felt happier.”

Momo’s eyes traveled her features and she smiled softly. “We’ve been together for a long time, haven’t we?”

“We have.” Reminiscing her favorite memories from her past was incredibly healing, and at that moment, she was glad to have Momo next to her. “And we’ll be together for a lot longer. The three of us.”

Momo sort of wanted to kiss her. Her gaze moved to the empty bed next to them, and she frowned. “Where is Sana, by the way?”

Mina turned her neck, looking over her shoulder. “I don’t know. It looks like she didn’t return yesterday.”

“Now I’m worried.”

Mina sighed. “Me too.”

They didn’t move for a few more minutes, gathering strength to face reality once again. It would be nice if there were no complicated feelings involving their closest group of friends, Mina thought. Everyone could just live happily and in peace, sharing stories and arguing about which season of Digimon was the best one.
The scene she was trying to erase from her mind started playing again, and she closed her eyes. Jeongyeon and Nayeon had been so far away, but it was clear that the kiss was something they both wanted – and really, Mina had been wondering if those two still had lingering feelings for each other. For a brief, happy moment in her life, she had convinced herself that they didn’t.

“We should get up.” Momo mumbled against her hair.

“Okay.” Mina sighed, and slowly sat up, pulling the other girl with her. They checked their phones briefly and Mina mumbled something about missing a class. Momo still needed to go back to her room and shower, but the prospect of seeing Jeongyeon made her upset. Then she got upset at herself for getting upset. It was a dumb, vicious cycle.

After properly getting up and grabbing her things, Momo stretched her muscles, then turned back at Mina. “I should go.” She blinked. “Will you be okay?”

“I will,” Mina walked up to her, adjusting her crop top. “Will you?”

“Yeah.”

They stared at each other for a moment, Mina’s hands still holding her top, and Momo opened her mouth to say something, but then closed it again, not unlike a fish out of water. She looked down at the boots back on her feet, and then scratched her neck. Mina just smiled at how adorable her best friend was when she wanted to ask something, but was too embarrassed to go through with it.

So, she stepped forward and kissed her.

Momo widened her eyes, but immediately closed them. It was a soft press of their lips, and it didn’t last much, but it definitely boosted her confidence for the day.

“You’re cute when you’re awkward.” Mina murmured against her mouth.

“I don’t… I jus—” Momo was blushing. “Oh, shut up.”

Mina giggled and pulled back. “I’ll see you later.”

Momo nodded, chewing on her lip. “Okay.”

When she left, her heart wasn’t hurting as much. She didn’t know what had happened between her and Mina, but she kind of loved it.

--

Im Nayeon was a great actress. Ever since she joined the Drama Club, people have been complimenting her, casting her as the main character for their performances, and asking her for tips on how to act. ‘Some people were born to stand on top of a stage’, her performing arts professor would tell the whole cast, but it was at her that he looked whenever he said those words.
Anyone could tell that Im Nayeon was a prodigy.

Creating so many personas was fun. She could pretend to be anyone or anything, and people were still captivated by her.

They applauded her for being a heroine.

They applauded her for being a villain.

Nayeon smiled and thanked everyone for coming to her show. And when the lights were off, the curtains fell, and the audience left, Nayeon could return to her original role. She liked it this way, being alone after pretending for so long – because with no one around, she could finally take off her mask.

Except, she didn’t. Not anymore.

Because there was still one member of the audience that needed to be fooled; a single person that refused to believe her lies. And she would not break character until that person was fully convinced.

Nayeon slowly opened her eyes, waking up on a bed that wasn’t hers. It was comfortable and it smelled like home, but she knew this was not a place she should be. Guilt tore through her stomach like poison, and she wanted to cry – but she wasn’t going to. She needed to put up a front and play pretend with the person sleeping on the couch next to her. It’s not like it was going to be hard; pretending to have a hangover was the easiest thing. She’d done it a thousand times.

Taking a deep breath, Nayeon finally sat up, and looked around. The first thing her eyes caught were the medals in front of Jeongyeon’s bed, aligned and organized. She allowed herself a sincere smile. Jeongyeon was her pride, and she wished she could tell her that in a way that wouldn’t mess with her head. Then she turned and stared at Jeongyeon’s back on the couch, preparing herself.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Nayeon grunted loudly, leaning her forehead on both hands. “Ugh…”

That did the trick. Jeongyeon squirmed, moving around a little. It took her a moment to wake up in the mornings, so everything happened slowly. First, she yawned, then she scratched her eyes, and finally opened them, staring at Nayeon’s miserable figure. “Hey.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Like death,” She tasted her mouth and groaned. “I need some water.”

“Right next to you.”

Nayeon moved her gaze to the nightstand and saw a cup of water waiting for her, with a note under it. Her chest felt like it could burst at the thoughtfulness of her friend. She reached out and drank it carefully, as if she was sipping from the Holy Grail. Once she was done, Nayeon almost moaned in pleasure. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” Jeongyeon sat up, stretching, and cracking her knuckles – a terrible habit that she really should work on. “So…”
“So I think I went overboard yesterday.” Nayeon finished her sentence for her.

“That’s putting it lightly,” Jeongyeon replied, still a little sleepy – it was cute and unfair. “Care to tell me what made you want to get wasted?”

“Why does this feel like my mom scolding me?”

“I was just worried,” She couldn’t hide that she was a little hurt as well. “You rarely lose control of yourself.”

“Now it feels like a compliment.”

“Nayeon.”

All right, Jeongyeon was tired of her little game. Nayeon sighed and put the cup back where it belonged, shame clearly taking over her features. “I might have let myself get influenced by my friends.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that we had a drinking contest backstage before the party,” She almost laughed at how pathetic that sounded. “Yesterday an agency contacted my professor. They had a long conversation, and by the end of it, they called me to star in a series of commercials. Paid and all.”

“What?” Jeongyeon’s eyes lit up. “This is great.”

“It is great,” Nayeon smiled a little. “The Drama Club wanted to throw a little celebration for me before the party, so I went with it. I couldn’t exactly say no, they were being really nice.”

“I see…” They stood in silence after that, absorbing everything. There was a sudden sound of footsteps above the room, but nothing alarming; just Jeongyeon’s neighbors getting ready for class. The walls were really thin. “Do you… remember anything?”

“After that? Not a single thing.” Nayeon grabbed her head again, sighing. “I’m sensing I did something stupid.”

Her heartbeat increased exponentially after that sentence, but her face remained impassive. This was it; the true test. Nayeon absolutely hated herself for doing this, manipulating one of the most important people in the world to her, but she needed to know what Jeongyeon was going to do. Her options were simple, really: either tell her the truth about the kiss, or lie and try to get things back to normal.

She felt disgusted with herself.

But then again, it wasn’t an unusual feeling.

“You could say that,” Jeongyeon said after a shaky pause, visibly nervous. She wasn’t used to lying – her entire personality was built upon layers and layers of sincerity and respect. The whole situation was entirely uncomfortable. “You grabbed the mic from the stage and yelled at everyone about tequila shots.”

“…Please tell me you’re joking.” Nayeon groaned.
“Then you called me upstage.”

“I don’t like where this is going.”

“It’s—” Jeongyeon swallowed hard. “It’s okay.”

**CLIMAX.**

“Nothing happened. I just made sure you were fine.”

*Oh.*

*That* almost made her break character.

“Thank God,” Nayeon sighed, relieved. “You know how I am on a stage. I thought I dragged you down with me.”

Jeongyeon let out a crooked laugh. “You did want to perform The Sound of Music at some point in the night.”

Nayeon laughed with her, averting her eyes.

She needed to get out of that place. No scene has ever been so hard to perform.

“Why am I in your room?” She asked, subtly.

“Well, I tried to take you to yours, but Jihyo was there with Sana. She was in a really bad shape and needed to sleep on a bed.”

“Oh, no. Is she okay?” Despite being consumed by her own lies, she did want to know Sana’s current state; the girl looked awful yesterday.

“I don’t know… you should probably ask Jihyo about it.”

Nayeon nodded, then yawned. It was becoming increasingly more difficult to stay around Jeongyeon, so she moved her legs and got up.

**ACT III. ENDING SCENE.**

“Well, I need to shower, and check my social media so I can die of embarrassment.” Nayeon spoke softly, still rubbing her head. “And get some hangover medicine, too.”

“I have some in the bathroom, if you want.”

“It’s okay, there are some back at my dorm.” She looked around slowly, trying to find her things, and gathered them humming something from La La Land. That’s when she noticed that Momo’s bed was untouched. Her heart nearly stopped.

“Momo didn’t come back yesterday?”

“No,” Jeongyeon grabbed her cellphone. “She sent me a message yesterday saying that she had a place to stay, but no details.”

Nayeon cleared her throat. “Well, at least she’s okay.” Once she was done gathering her stuff, she walked towards the door. “Thank you for taking care of me, Jeong. I’m sorry for the trouble.”
“No—” Jeongyeon choked on her saliva. “No biggie. Just… pace yourself next time.”

“I will.” Nayeon smiled at her, then opened the door. “See you.”

“Bye.”

THE END.

Drop the curtains. Turn off the lights.

Nayeon touched her back on the wall for a second, nearly fainting. That had been exhausting, both physically and emotionally. Catching her breath, she started walking again, her hands trembling and her face pale. If anyone walked past her, they would definitely notice that something was terribly wrong; Nayeon was breaking out in a cold sweat.

Everything that made her believe she was a monster came crashing down on her.

She had tricked Jeongyeon into thinking she was drunk.

She had made Jeongyeon lie to her about the kiss.

She had kissed Jeongyeon in front of Momo.

She knew that Momo was watching; she’d told her that she would be at that party, and Nayeon had grabbed a freaking microphone to turn everyone’s attention to her. Momo undoubtedly saw her every movement.

She broke Momo’s heart.

*Your lies broke the hearts of the two people you’re in love with.*

“Shut up.” Nayeon whispered to herself, leaning against the corridor walls. Turning left into a communal restroom, she came face to face with a mirror, and gazed at her reflection – and all she saw was a broken, desperate, selfish girl who was tired of lying.

But she couldn’t stop.

Five years of lies were what held her together.

“I’m not in love with them.” Nayeon said the words out loud to her own image in the mirror.

But the mirror image didn’t look convinced.

There was still one member of Nayeon’s audience that needed to be fooled; a single person that refused to believe her lies.

And she would not break character until that person was fully convinced.

--
“Are you sure you’re feeling better?” Chaeyoung asked, literally for the 5th time, as they got to class.

“Yes, Chaeng,” Despite the constant nagging, Tzuyu answered her with sweetness in her voice. “I have my medicine, and my water bottle, and I’ll call you if I need anything.”

“Well, alright then.” Finally looking convinced, Chaeyoung let go of the girl’s arm and stepped back as she dropped her off. “See you at lunch.”

“Thank you. Bye-bye.”

Tzuyu watched her leave with a gentle smile, then finally walked to her seat. It felt nice getting back to class after three days locked inside her room eating nothing but soup and drinking tea. Don’t get her wrong, she loved being the center of Chaeyoung’s attention, but she was starting to feel bored beyond limit.

She had binge watched two dramas.

Her friends greeted her warmly as she sat down and Tzuyu felt happy and comfortable; she absolutely loved photography, and missed touching her camera and sharing ideas with her group. The time she’d spent in bed proved to be helpful to new ideas – she couldn’t wait to tell her professor about them.

Tzuyu felt her pocket vibrate and grabbed her cellphone, reading the text message.

[Chaengie, 9:06am]:

guess what assignment was just given to us

hint: im getting a 10/10 on this one

Tzuyu covered her mouth to smile, then moved her fingers texting back.

[Chou Yoda, 9:06am]:

Hmm... Something artistic!! :o

[Chaengie, 9:07am]:

I mean yes but

try to guessssssssss

its not a painting

[Chou Yoda, 9:09am]:
Something you're good at that is not a painting??

Is it, maybe…

Taking care of sick people? ;)

[Chaengie, 9:10am]:

tzuyuuuuu

She could basically hear Chaeyoung’s little whine and laughed, a warm sensation settling in her chest.

[Chou Yoda, 9:11am]:

I’m thinking, I swear!

She looked upwards, trying to remember what else her little friend was good at that didn’t involve drawing, and then jumped on her seat with the realization.

[Chou Yoda, 9:13am]:

Is it writing??? A poem?

[Chaengie, 9:16am]:

din-din-ding

bingo!

and as a prize you get…… to read it first hand when im done

[Chou Yoda, 9:17am]:

I can’t wait! You’ll do great as always!

<3

[Chaengie, 9:17am]:

I know, I know
At that point, the professor walked into class, and Tzuyu sent one last goodbye message before tucking the phone in her pocket again. Her thoughts were filled with Chaeyoung’s toothy smile and incredible writing, and she honestly felt a lot better after the little message exchange. Chaeyoung’s texts always managed to lift her spirits up in a way that no one else could.

Tzuyu wondered if already missing her by her side was weird.

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With Tzuyu’s last goodbye, Chaeyoung put her phone away, sighing. One part of her beat herself up, telling her to get a grip and stop pushing the limits that she’d tested very well; another, was pleased by how cheerful Tzuyu had seemed. ‘I’m just worried about her’, she told herself. ‘Stop making up excuses’, her brain retorted. In the end, she didn’t know what she should feel.

A very familiar figure sat down in front of her without sparing her a glance, and Chaeyoung took this as an excuse to stop arguing with her goddamn thoughts. She poked Dahyun’s shoulder.

“Hey.”

Dahyun took a while, but eventually turned around. “Hi.”

Her lifeless voice took Chaeyoung by surprise. “You look terrible. Do you have a hangover?”

“I wish,” Dahyun scoffed, then turned back to face the blackboard. “I’m a little tired, Chae. Maybe later.”

The professor announced her presence, and everyone took their seats. Chaeyoung frowned, now worried about what the hell had happened to her usually hyperactive roommate, then remembered the exchange she’d had with Sana the day before. With a sigh and an eye roll, Chaeyoung let her back fall against the chair. She was absolutely sure that something went wrong with those two idiots.

Grabbing her personal diary, she let the pencil do its work, writing down her thoughts.

*Friday,*

There were two of them, floating mindlessly into space, stardust covering their trail as their journey continued. They were the same, and yet, incomplete. Darkness filled the void, but only until the timer reached zero – that was when they would meet.

It took them a while; they saw the rise and fall of civilizations and the evolution of space-time, stretching to the infinite, then curling into itself, and yet, they remained far away. Because what they needed to get closer was something too abstract, intangible, and distorted – not even the Old Gods had an answer to their enigma. The irony of creation, is that it doesn’t belong to anyone.
And it was so simple. Just a word, whispered softly into the darkness.

If only they told each other how they felt.

Her hand stopped, and then on the line under it:

Hypocrite.

--

Kim Dahyun had a curse.

In the beginning, there were just six of them. Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were the same age and ended up in the same class in middle school, therefore, they became friends fairly quickly. In high school, they met Jeongyeon: an athlete who had a hard time opening up. The girl felt pressured to keep a cool image, but all she wanted to do was share her passion for anime figures and cartoon series. Dahyun was the first one who talked to her about it, and it didn’t take long for her to be added to the group. Then Nayeon and Jihyo came, glued at the hip, a two-for-one combo. Jeongyeon fell for Nayeon, and soon they were all hanging together daily.

Dahyun was ecstatic. She finally felt loved and accepted by who she was – an energetic nerd, who loved discussing series and making others happy with her pranks and silly behavior. They paid attention to her. They liked her jokes, and she liked the sound of their laughter. It was easy being known as the silly one, the one who always smiled despite difficulties, the vitamin of the team, filled with energy and positivity – that’s the role she’d taken for herself within her group of friends.

What no one told her, was that when she was feeling down, the whole group came to a halt. It wasn’t that they didn’t allow her to be sad; her friends listened and were supportive of her, regardless of the situation. What happened was something that bothered her more than anyone else; she realized soon enough that being the sun meant illuminating everyone, all the time. As soon as it got cloudy, people felt the shift in the mood.

Dahyun didn’t want that. She wanted her friends to keep smiling, despite her tiredness. She wished someone else shared this role with her.

Then, Sana came.

The three best friends were inseparable. Sana, Mina and Momo were their names, and they were never apart. Dahyun couldn’t even remember what exactly prompted her to do it, but one day, after watching Minatozaki Sana from afar for hours, she decided to walk up to her and start a conversation.

As soon as Sana smiled in her general direction, Dahyun knew. She was the sun in her group of friends. Dahyun had finally found someone else like her.

Sana, Momo and Mina fit in like they were meant to be there. Everyone felt it – with nine of them, it just felt right. Momo and Jeongyeon became close absurdly fast, Jihyo, Sana and Nayeon
understood each other in a way that no one else did, and Mina loved watching Chaeyoung painting. They were all very similar, but also, incredibly different from one another. That’s what made them perfect.

And without noticing, Dahyun came to create expectations for Sana. She stared at her constantly, noticing her playful behavior and admiring her airheadness, the way she smiled, and the way she laughed. In a way, Dahyun wanted to be sure that Sana was playing the role of the ‘sun’ properly. They shared this role, after all.

She was shocked to realize that Sana didn’t.

Dahyun had spent so much time building a wall that blocked her sadness to the outside world because she wanted her friends to keep smiling – but Sana didn’t have this wall at all. That girl wore her feelings on her sleeve. Everyone knew when she was down, everyone knew when she was angry, and everyone knew when she was hurting. Sana was honest and completely open, and Dahyun didn’t understand.

Why tell everyone that you were feeling sad, when you could joke instead?

It didn’t take long for Dahyun to realize that the reason she admired Sana so much, was because she was everything she wasn’t: honest, and not afraid of her own emotions.

To Dahyun, Minatozaki Sana was a beautiful person.

And if someone as beautiful as her was avoiding Dahyun, then she must’ve done something terrible.

Dahyun let her head fall on her desk, the teacher’s voice far away, and only one thought going through her head.

*If I let my emotions leak through, will you give me one more chance?*

Chapter End Notes

I did not mean for this chapter to be as big as it got. Thank you for reading!
The song Nayeon is dancing to is Cruel by Foxes. I recommend listening to it as you read the scene!
Enjoy!

“If you want to heal, you need to start taking better care of yourself,” Miss Jea was a kind nurse who cared for the well-being of all students, so seeing Sana back at the Nurse’s Office so regularly made her eye the girl with a glint of concern. “It’s the third time this week, Minatozaki.”

“I know. I’m sorry, I’ll do better.” Sana replied automatically, eyes downcast. Miss Jea sighed as she finished wrapping Sana’s wrist with a new bandage – according to her, she had ‘accidentally forgotten about it as she took a bath’ and it got wet. Her wrist had started to hurt after that, so she decided to visit.

Sana seemed exhausted, and it wasn’t just because of assignments and homework, the nurse knew. She was well familiar with the dark circles under students’ eyes, but she’d learned how to differentiate a stressful college life from personal problems.

“This is not a lecture,” Miss Jea touched Sana’s shoulder, and the girl finally looked up at her. “Just a friendly advice.”

The corner of Sana’s lips turned up a little bit. “You’re all so kind.”

“And who is ‘all’?” The nurse smiled back, turning around to put the gauze back in the shelf.

“People in general, I guess.”

“I see,” She hummed. “You know, if you’re having problems, the school has professionals available to help for free, and at any time.”

“I know.”

“And you basically ignored what I just said.”

Sana blinked, and blushed a little. “N-no, I… I know. I will check it out.”

Miss Jea wasn’t convinced in the least, but let it go. “Stay here, I’ll make you some chamomile tea.”

“How?”

“It helps with the pain,” She winked, and Sana couldn’t do anything but nod. She watched as the nurse left her little room and then moved back to lie down on the bed. Sana stared at the ceiling, her eyes tired from crying earlier in the morning, and her chest heavy with guilt and other feelings. She was really conflicted – she wanted to be alone, but surrounded by people at the same time. All that she knew was that she didn’t want to be with her thoughts for long.
Miss Jea’s voice was muffled in the other room, but she’d started talking all of a sudden; someone else had probably arrived. Sana sighed softly, then closed her eyes. She heard steps approaching, then halting as soon as they got close enough.

“Sana?”

She sat up immediately, the voice shooting straight to her heart.

“Dahyunnie.”

The two stared at each other, awkwardly, then Miss Jea arrived with the tea. She looked at the scene and raised an eyebrow. “Is everything okay?”

Dahyun blushed, moving to sit on the bed next to Sana. “Y-yeah, I was just surprised to see her here.”

“Oh, you’re friends, then?” Miss Jea asked, giving Sana her cup, then shifting her attention to Dahyun. “That’s good. Stay here, I’ll get your medicine.”

“Are you sick?” Despite the intense feelings surrounding them, Sana couldn’t hide her concern.

“I just have a headache,” Dahyun answered, licking her dry lips. “How about you?”

Sana lifted her wrist. “Had to change my bandages. They got wet.”

“Did you swim with it?”

“No, silly,” Sana smiled a little, always enchanted by Dahyun’s innocence. “It got wet in the shower. It’s no big deal.”

“Oh. Right.” Dahyun returned the grin – she liked when Sana smiled. “The pool is closed, anyway.”

It didn’t make sense, the way they talked as if there wasn’t a crack in the floor threatening to swallow them both at any moment, but that was just how it was with some relationships – natural and warm. Sana’s eyes roamed Dahyun’s cute face and body, and the love she felt for the girl at that moment crawled up her throat and almost escaped to the outside world.

So she sipped her tea, averting her eyes.

“Are you missing class because of your headache?” Sana spoke after a quiet moment.

“No, they’re over for the day.”

“Oh.” Her heart started racing as her stupid feelings overruled everything else – her common sense and the walls she was trying to put up; everything disappeared whenever Dahyun was close to her. “So… you’re free for the rest of the afternoon?”

That surprised Dahyun; she thought that Sana was avoiding her. “Yes…?”

“Do you—” And her brain was screaming ‘stop, this is a bad idea, you’re destroying everything you’ve been trying to build’, but it was useless. “Do you want to hang out?”

Now Dahyun was confused. She had no idea what the hell was Sana’s deal; if she just wanted to mess with her some more, or if there was something she wanted to talk about in private, but it hurt either way. Dahyun was about to refuse, to make up some excuse to leave her, but she didn’t want
to. Whatever was going on between the two of them started after that dumb party, and she needed to get to the bottom of things.

Besides, refusing Sana was an impossible task. It’d always been.

“I’d like that.” Dahyun answered finally, a familiar little smile making its way to her features.

“Okay.” Sana sighed internally.

“Okay.” Dahyun replied.

“Okay,” Miss Jea walked in and both girls jumped in their spot. The nurse laughed. “You kids need to lighten up. Here, take this.” She gave Dahyun her medicine and a cup of water. Once she was done drinking, Miss Jea clapped her hands once. “Alright, time for you to leave. Go, go.”

Sana finished her tea and they thanked Miss Jea, chuckling despite everything, then left the office. As soon as they were alone together again, Sana felt her cheeks burn – it was really impressive, the effect Dahyun had on her. No one else in the world made her feel like that by simply existing.

It would be beautiful, if it wasn’t so tragic.

“So… where do you wanna go?” Dahyun asked, scratching the back of her head.

Sana thought for a while, then came up with an idea.

“Follow me.” She started walking, and Dahyun just obeyed. Her gaze fell on Sana’s free hand and she sighed softly.

She wanted to hold it.

--

Momo loved to dance. It helped her forget the world for a brief moment, her senses numbing as her muscles tensed, allowing her to focus on just one thing: the music. Her silhouette in the mirror always looked powerful, concentrated, engaged; the sweat and messy hair had stopped bothering her a long time ago. It was a fast beat, so she didn’t really have the time to think about what her next move was going to be – she made up things as she went, adjusting the rough parts as she saw fit.

It could be a metaphor, she thought. She wished she could just dance through life and fix things as she went, without worrying too much about the outcome.

Momo’s sneakers slid through the floor noisily, her steps in perfect sync to the beat. That choreography was something she’d been trying to come up with for a while, but she was messing up the chorus. Her leg twisted and she fell, her weight echoing through the practice room. Momo sighed and got up, playing the song from the beginning.
Stepping back, she looked at her reflection in the eyes and was about to start over, when the studio’s glass door moved. She ignored it – Momo wasn’t the only dancer in campus after all – and moved her feet, pacing herself. The numbers appeared in her head as she counted the beat, the world once again vanishing. Then she messed up the chorus again.

“Try to use your right leg instead,” The person who had entered the room spoke up suddenly and Momo almost tripped. Her stare followed the sound and suddenly the illusion broke, bringing her back to reality.

Nayeon always seemed somewhat ethereal in Momo’s eyes; now, after what happened, she looked intangible too.

Momo swallowed dry. “I’d have to invert the whole chorus.”

“Then invert the whole chorus.” Nayeon smiled, but she was tired, Momo could tell.

“It’s not that simple.” Momo was breathing hard now, like the physical extortion had finally caught up to her body. “Muscle memory.”

“Try it once.”

Momo rolled her eyes, then turned back to the mirror. She didn’t want to think about anything else right now, so she tried the suggestion; it felt weird and her movements were crooked, but it was a lot better than what she’d been doing with her left leg. She stopped and looked back at Nayeon, who was grinning smugly.

“Wipe that grin off your face,” Momo said, grabbing her towel soaked in sweat and throwing it at her general direction. Nayeon yelped and got up, and Momo laughed.

There was an awkward silence after a while, Momo’s practice coming to a halt. She moved to grab her water bottle and drank almost all of it in one go. Nayeon watched with her hands behind her back.

This was weird.

“What are you doing here?” Momo asked after swallowing, not really looking at her.

“Recovering,” Nayeon answered. “I wanted to get my mind off things. Thought I’d dance for a bit. I didn’t know you were here.”

Momo blinked. “Oh. Feel free to pick a song.” She passed Nayeon her cellphone already set to her dancing playlist. When she grabbed it, their fingers brushed, and Momo wished her heart wouldn’t race like it did.

Nayeon chose a slower song, but with enough of a beat to dance to. Momo sat back down and watched the girl stretch, the lump in her throat still there.

The emotions inside her heart at that moment were confusing and contrasting with each other, making it really hard for her to pick a feeling. She wished she could feel simply angry or simply sad, without happiness and giddiness attached to them at the same time. It exhausted her.

Momo wondered which one of them would bring up the elephant in the room; she hated that she didn’t want to be the one.

The actress finally started moving, first her hips, then her shoulders; one step forward and one
back, sliding a bit across the room. She tried to spin, but got caught in the middle, then placed her left foot back again. It was clear that she was struggling with her positions and even the timing, lost like an amateur – which she wasn’t. Her musicals were filled with choreographies, and Nayeon was used to memorizing dances for performances.

That’s when Momo realized that she wasn’t having problems with the dance in particular; she just didn’t know how to create a choreography from scratch. She never had.

Nayeon was moving so awkwardly that Momo let out a breathless laugh. She stopped. “Don’t mock me, I’m not used to this.”

“It’s apparent,” Momo smirked, getting up and walking up to her. “You need to spread your legs more, you’re losing balance like that.”

Nayeon wanted to make a joke about that sentence, but thought that it wasn’t the best time. She just followed Momo’s lead, her legs apart and her arms by her side, not knowing what to do. “Like this?”

Momo watched her, then suddenly placed a hand on her stomach. Nayeon froze, her heart shooting through her throat, but her face impassive as usual. “Straighten your back. Breathe in, hold it.”

“Yes, coach.” Nayeon replied with a tiny smile, doing what she was told. Momo stepped back, finally satisfied.

“Whenever you move, just try to place your whole foot on the ground,” She mimicked Nayeon’s posture, and moved one leg. Nayeon did the same by her side, following the slow instructions. “Yeah, like that.”

They practiced a few basic movements together, but Nayeon’s upper body was still crooked. Momo sighed playfully, now pressing a hand to the small of her back. “Stop curving your back.”

“It’s hard!”

“Practice makes perfect.”

“Fine,” Nayeon got in position again. “What do I do with my arms, then?”

Momo pondered for a bit, tilting her head to the side. She reached out and grabbed Nayeon’s arms from behind, pushing them forward.

Nayeon could feel the girl’s breath on the back of her neck and blinked repeatedly – the sweat forming on her skin definitely wasn’t because of the dance. “Never leave them swinging around. Try to create a routine with them, like pushing forward, putting them up, rotating them in some direction.”

“That’s looking more and more complicated with each passing minute.”

“I’m trying to help you not look like a fumbling preschooler, Nabongs.”

The way Momo said her nickname always got to her. She felt the weight of guilt spreading through her body once again, but tried her best to distract herself from it. Nayeon tried a few different poses for her arms, but nothing looked convincing enough. Momo laughed, still behind her, and reached for her elbows once again. Her touch sent a spark through Nayeon’s body – it was gentle and careful, like always.
Nayeon absolutely loved the way Momo touched her. She craved it, and hated herself for it.

“Up, and down,” Momo murmured lowly on her ear, guiding Nayeon’s movements. Her skin tingled and she wanted to press her back to Momo’s front, and feel the warmth of that girl who had so much love to give. “That’s good.”

Nayeon swallowed and turned around to face her. They were close, Momo finally realized. She was about to step back when, “Dance with me.”

Momo blinked. “Huh?”

“The song I was dancing to. Guide me.”

It was a terrible idea.

“All right.”

Momo couldn’t fight it; she’d been lost in Nayeon’s gravity for way too long.

The beat started again and both girls faced each other; it was really hard to pretend everything was fine, but they had to. Nayeon and Momo had danced together before, more times than they could possibly count – they loved it.

Nayeon held Momo’s arms and they moved in sync, Momo guiding her steps; Nayeon was a good follower, always had been. They weren’t looking at each other’s eyes, Nayeon using the excuse of staring at Momo’s feet to check where she would step next. They were easy, simple movements that flowed well, like they usually did; for a moment, Nayeon enjoyed the feeling of being close.

At the chorus, Momo twirled Nayeon around so her arms enveloped her from behind. Nayeon couldn’t help but to let out a laugh, Momo joining her. Their hips moved together sensually, fitting together like they belonged, and Nayeon let her head fall back and closed her eyes, her cheek grazing the other girl’s. They moved like this for a while, comfortably, and none of them wanted to let the other go. Momo almost shifted her face to plant a small kiss on Nayeon’s cheek.

It was messy.

Her heart still hurt.

Momo touched her forehead on the back of Nayeon’s shoulder.

“Hmm?”

“The party yesterday.” Was all Momo murmured; it was funny, how she wanted to be holding Nayeon when the time for this conversation finally came.

“Oh,” Nayeon bit her lip – the fact that she was still alive even after biting her lips for so long was truly a mystery. She was sure the poison would’ve killed her by now. “I didn’t see you there.”

“Yeah… I figured.”

“But then again,” She was glad Momo was holding her, or else she wouldn’t be able to keep herself up after this. “I didn’t see anyone. I can’t remember a single thing that happened yesterday.”

Momo lifted her head up, stopping the dance completely. “What?”

“I blacked out,” I hate this. “My friends at the Drama Club threw me a celebration before the party.
We had a drinking contest, and I don’t know what happened after that.” I hate this.

“So you… don’t remember anything?”

“Pathetic, right?” Nayeon chuckled, wriggling herself out of Momo’s hold. She didn’t deserve to be in her arms. “I woke up in Jeongyeon’s room. She told me she took care of me the whole night. She mentioned something about me grabbing the microphone and yelling at everyone. Honestly, I’m glad I can’t recall this part.”

Momo was stunned. If Nayeon didn’t even remember that, she surely didn’t recall the kiss. Unless Jeongyeon told her about it.

“Did… did Jeong tell you anything else?”

“Just that she looked after me,” Nayeon could basically see the gears moving inside Momo’s head; she was wondering if Jeongyeon had told her about the kiss. “But nothing more.”

“Oh, okay.” A lot of different emotions crossed Momo’s face: confusion, relief, guilt, anger. She couldn’t believe that Jeongyeon had lied to Nayeon like this, it didn’t make her style. It was something important, it was her ex-girlfriend. Momo was angry. Extremely so.

But she was also a hypocrite.

Because she wasn’t going to tell Nayeon either.

“Is everything okay?” Nayeon asked, frowning.

“Y-yeah. Yeah.” Momo needed to get out of that room. “I think I’m all danced out. I’ll go take a shower.”


I don’t deserve to call her that.

“No problem.” Momo grabbed her bag, barely looking at her. “See you.”

She left in a hurry and Nayeon finally allowed herself to breathe, touching her back on the nearest wall. Her lies were getting worse, and the way her body dealt with them too. She felt like she was about to pass out at any moment, but bit her lip until it bled; it kept her awake. Nayeon’s breathing quickened and it felt a lot like hyperventilation. She slid down to the floor and put a hand on her chest, closing her eyes.

Just breathe. Slowly.

Panic invaded her every pore, but she couldn’t afford to call for help. In a way, Nayeon felt like she deserved this.

Count to three, hold it in. Then breathe out.

It took over five minutes for her to regain her regular breathing. She opened her eyes once she was sure she wouldn’t faint, then swallowed hard. Getting up was going to be a chore. Nayeon turned her head to the big mirror, staring at her reflection.

She looked absolutely exhausted.

“You’re loving this, aren’t you?” She asked the mirror.
“Yes,” The reflection replied. “If they’re suffering, you deserve ten times that.”

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The universe didn't stop and waited for Jeongyeon to collect her thoughts and feelings after Nayeon left in the morning – she did still have an exam to do. Looking at the paper in front of her was difficult, especially because it was heavily loaded with text – of all subjects, it had to be Literature. Jeongyeon learned that it was really hard to concentrate on anything when the entire world was weighting down on her shoulders.

She should’ve mentioned the kiss. That was the only thing running through her mind the whole day.

Jeongyeon couldn’t understand why she’d even done it in the first place. There’d been nothing going on between them for years, and she thought they were past the whole drama.

They had history.

Backtrack.

In high school, Yoo Jeongyeon had always been kind of a jack of all trades: athletic, yet nerdy. She did well in sports, particularly basketball, but that didn’t mean her life revolved around it. Jeongyeon preferred to discuss movies, TV series, and occasionally, Japanese cartoons.

Unfortunately, her athletic life made it impossible for her to find people with tastes in common – for some reason, none of the girls in her team were interested in comics or Tarantino movies. So Jeongyeon had felt pretty much isolated for a good part of her high school years.

Then some girls a few grades lower showed up. Jeongyeon had heard them talking about Fullmetal Alchemist one day and couldn’t help but to join. They’d become friends immediately.

The way Nayeon fits into this whole story is a bit embarrassing now that Jeongyeon thinks about it.

The girl had showed up out of nowhere; quite literally. Jeongyeon had bumped into her in the middle of the cafeteria, then her instincts kicked in: she threw herself on the floor to break the girl’s fall.

It was poetic at the time – perhaps it’d been dumb.

The girl had gotten up quickly and asked if Jeongyeon was okay with such panic and concern in her voice, that it’d been sweet.

And maybe it was cliché, but Jeongyeon had fallen at first sight. Nayeon was beautiful.

She still is.

Nayeon and Jihyo joined their group of friends after that, perhaps with a sense of obligation at first, but soon they were having sleepovers like they’d known each other since birth. Finally getting to
know Nayeon’s true personality, Jeongyeon just fell for her more. At some point in the middle of the semester, Jeongyeon confessed.

It turned out, Nayeon was also crushing on her. Then they got together.

It didn’t really last.

When they broke up, things had ended smoothly and without sour feelings on neither side. They still loved each other, enough to know that what they had wasn’t going to work, because of a simple reason: their love was scattered.

Nayeon and Jeongyeon cared for their friends more than they cared about each other individually. If it’d kept going, one of them would get hurt, and that was the last thing they wanted.

So, they’d decided to end things on a positive note. The group was shocked at the news, but accepted that it was the couple’s choice to make. Things were a bit awkward for a while, -- maybe Jeongyeon did want to kiss her once in a while, and maybe sometimes Nayeon stared at her with an intensity that they were both familiar with – but eventually everything came back to normal.

That was what Jeongyeon had thought, anyway. An inebriated Im Nayeon apparently had other ideas.

They had history.

Shaking her head, the athlete focused once more on her exam. It was pointless to think about this now.

After a few hours, the bell rang, and it was finally over.

Jeongyeon sighed as the other students got up to turn the papers in, and eventually did the same. Miss Sunmi smiled at her, remembering their extra class.

“You think you did well?”

“Hopefully,” Jeongyeon smiled back, nervously. “Help me out?”

“I’ll think about it.” The teacher was fun to be around. She patted her shoulder, and Jeongyeon chuckled, turning around to leave. At least one of her problems was solved.

“Hey, Jeong!” Someone yelled as soon as she set foot outside the classroom and she turned around, coming face to face with a friend from her Film Production class.

“Sup, Jae.”

“Here,” The boy simply handed her a heavy camera, breathless, and then its case. “The tripod is in the bag. There are a few spare lenses too, and you can get more memory cards back at the faculty office, if you need them.”

Jeongyeon stared at him with an eyebrow raised, but no answers came. Jae blinked back, then tilted his head. “What?”

“What’s this for?”

“What do you mean what’s it for?” He frowned. “For the panoramic shots for your short film assignment. You know how much better this camera is for that kind of thing, and I’m done with mine, so… I figured you could use it to add the final touches to yours.”
She almost let the expensive equipment fall. “Shit.”

Her freaking short film.

“…What?” Jae asked slowly.

“When’s this due?”

“Next week…?”

Jeongyeon gently placed the camera on the floor, then ran her hands through her hair. “Shit, fuck.”

Jae’s face became pale. “You… You’re joking, right? You told me you were writing the script three weeks ago!”

“I did! I just didn’t—” She buried her face in her hands, grunting. “The script is done, I just need to film the goddamn thing.”

“You didn’t film anything?!” He almost yelled, catching a few people’s attention. Calming down, he lowered his voice. “Jeongyeon, this thing’s worth half your grade.”

“I know!” She was honestly about to have a mental breakdown, but she had to get a grip. Taking a deep breath, Jeongyeon straightened her back, the logistics of this assignment floating through her head at a thousand miles per hour. “I’ll… I’ll manage. I have a week, right? I can film a few scenes in a week.”

“And edit it.”

“Yes, thank you for reminding me.”

She picked up the equipment again and Jae shook his head, sighing helplessly. “Do you need any help? I just need to edit mine, it shouldn’t take more than a couple of days.”

“Nah, I got this. Really.” It felt like another brick had been added to her pile of stressful and confusing problems, but she didn’t want to drag the poor boy with her. “Thank you for the camera, you saved my butt.”

“Albeit unknowingly,” He smiled gently. “I’ll see you. Really, call me if you need anything.”

“I will. Thanks, man.” They high-fived, and Jeongyeon left, exhaustion taking over her body. How could she have forgotten completely about filming an entire short film?

Oh, right. Drama.

She was lucky past-Jeongyeon was feeling productive and had finished the script already. Concentrating, she dug out the story inside her brain, trying to remember what exactly she needed to film in seven days.

She remembered naming her movie ‘Fragile Elegance’, and the idea was quite simple: lots of contrasting scenes, using soft materials to give the viewers an impression of the main character’s personality without having her say anything – it was going to be a silent movie, entirely based on the theme of a powerful fragility.

Jeongyeon just needed an actress.

And like thunder, the perfect person illuminated her mind. She placed the equipment back on the
floor and grabbed her phone. She was going to call her, but froze, the guilt of her lie present once again. For some reason, she felt anxious about hearing her voice at that moment – she still needed some time to process everything. So, she texted.

[Jeongyeon, 11:33am]:

Hey! How are things?

I won’t bother you too much

Listen, could we meet after lunch? I need a huge favor

I promise not to force you if you don’t want to do it, I just wanted to ask

It took almost an hour, but the reply came.

[Mina Mina Minari, 12:20pm]:

Okay.

Where?

--

Walking through the campus’ courtyard was one of Sana’s favorite hobbies. The place was huge, covered in flowers and trees where students could sit under and enjoy nature. Sana considered herself free-spirited and in touch with the environment around her, so she could almost always be found outside, studying to the sound of birds and feeling the grass under her bare feet.

There was one place, however, that was her favorite. On the very back of the field, there was a fountain, always working and fresh. Sana liked to sit by it, admiring the flowers and feeling the warmth of the sun on her skin.

That was where she took Dahyun.

“Watch out, the fountain malfunctions sometimes,” Sana warned her friend nonchalantly, hands behind her back. “It might spray some water on you.”

“You should be careful with your wrist, then.” Dahyun replied, squinting her eyes at the sunlight. Sana looked back at her with a smile, but didn’t say anything.

They walked around the fountain for a little bit, and Dahyun wondered if the girl had a plan, or if
she was just breathing some fresh air. She chewed on her lip, aching to ask her about the weird mood between them lately, but too afraid to do so.

“Have you picked your major yet?” Sana asked after a while.

“Not yet,” Dahyun replied with a small sigh. She’d been undecided for a long time now, and the time to choose was approaching. “I’ll probably go to the Arts department with Chaengie, but it’s too hard to pick one thing… everything looks fun.”

Sana turned her body to her, now walking backwards. “You’re still the same as you were in high school.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’re always looking at the bright side of things,” Her smile was sincere. “Most of my friends on their first year were undecided because they thought everything was hard.”

Dahyun blinked as Sana turned around. “Well, yeah, but isn’t that what makes it fun? Having it easy would just be boring.”

That way of viewing the world – that was the first thing that made Sana fall in love with her. Then she fell for everything else, too. Her heart was screaming for her to say it out loud, with every possible word in the dictionary, just how much she admired Dahyun, but—

“You’re right.” Was all she replied, instead.

They stood in silence again and Dahyun felt the shift in the mood. Everything was so on edge. She couldn’t understand what was happening.

“Say, which flower do you like the most?” Sana spoke up suddenly.

“Uhh… roses?” Dahyun blinked. “I don’t know much about flowers, really.”

“They’re so pretty, though…” Sana looked around, searching for something, then let out a content yelp when she found it. “Look, over here! This one suits you.”

She crouched on the flower field and picked up a daisy, white and small. Then she walked back to Dahyun, placing it behind her ear, gently. Dahyun averted her eyes and blushed, not really knowing how to react to the gesture. She felt Sana’s hand lingering on her hair for a second too long, but didn’t want to meet the girl’s stare – she was afraid she’d break if she did.

“Yep. It suits you.” Sana’s voice was heavy with something, but Dahyun wasn’t able to discern. She felt her heart sink at the thought – usually reading Sana wasn’t that hard.

“What flower do you like, then?” Dahyun asked, to keep the conversation going.

“Me?” Sana looked up thoughtfully, a silly and bright aura enveloping her like it usually did, but Dahyun could tell that it wasn’t honest. “There’s a flower called anemone. I like the purple ones.”

“Do they have it here?”

She turned around and searched for a bit. “Hmm… I can’t see it. It’s not a common flower, I think.”

Dahyun nodded awkwardly and they started walking again. Sana was always two steps ahead,
never walking by her side, and Dahyun was bothered by it. Everything about this was off, and she felt like she was being crushed by an invisible pressure. Her easy and simple relationship with the person she cared for the most had suddenly turned into this hostile and unknown territory, and Dahyun had no idea what even prompted it.

She honestly wanted to cry.

A sudden wave of emotions rose up to her chest and she opened her mouth. “Sana—”

“I love this kind of weather!” Sana interrupted, stretching her arms. “No offense, but cloudy weather can bite me.”

Dahyun didn’t know how to reply.

“What have you been watching lately, Dahyunnie?” Another change of subject.

“I— Uh, I’ve not been watching anything.”

“Oh, let me add some things to your Netflix later. There’s this really good series…” Sana’s voice panned out as a flood of feelings came crashing down. Dahyun knew what Sana was doing – it was what she usually did whenever she was upset but didn’t want anyone to know about it.

Fitting the most topics you could manage in one single conversation? Sana had learned this from Dahyun.

She was tired.

“Sana, stop.”

The girl paused, turning around with a questioning look. “Yeah? Oh! We’ve been walking around for a while. Let’s sit down, there’s a bench next to the—”

“What is going on?”

Sana’s smile froze. “What do you mean?”

Dahyun stepped forward, trying to get into her personal space, but Sana took one step back. “This. This is what I mean. You’re avoiding me.”

“N-no, I’m not—”

“Then just… be still for a second!” Dahyun said louder, fists clenched by her side. “Let me get close to you, dammit!”

This time Sana’s grin dropped. She didn’t move again, and when Dahyun tried once more, she finally got her. Their bodies were close, and this was familiar, and the younger girl had missed it so much. She looked down at Sana’s broken wrist and took her bandaged hand, lifting it up gently.

“Am I hurting you?”

“…No.” They were both murmuring.

“How long does it take? To heal.”

Everything had suddenly become tender, and Sana wanted to cup Dahyun’s chubby cheeks and feel her skin under her fingertips.
“Months. Lots of months,” She smiled, but it was forced. “But I keep breaking, so... who knows how long it’ll take.” Then she stopped. “It. I keep breaking it.”

Her slip up wasn’t missed.

Dahyun looked up and the distance between them was minimal. She felt Sana’s panic immediately, like the girl wanted to pull back, but didn’t want to hurt her at the same time. Dahyun just wanted to understand what had made her so scared of physical contact all of a sudden.

More specifically, hers.

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter how long it takes.” She let go of Sana’s wrist and stepped back, a soft smile gracing her features. “I’ll wait for it to get better.”

Sana felt the tears prickling her eyes.

“And you know, even if it keeps breaking,” Dahyun could see Sana’s watery eyes. “There will always be people to change your bandages for you. Just... don’t try to do it alone.” Her smile turned playful. “You’re really clumsy.”

Sana let out a broken chuckle, but this time, it was finally sincere. She sniffed subtly, and suddenly wrapped her good arm around Dahyun, burying her face on the girl’s neck. Dahyun returned the hug, closing her eyes and smelling the familiar scent of this woman that she admired so much. Things weren’t back to normal yet, she knew, but perhaps this was a step on the right direction. Maybe Sana would be willing to open up soon.

“What do you mean you’ll wait for it to get better?” Sana whispered against her skin, her voice muffled. “What do you wanna do with my wrist, Kim Dahyunnie?”

Dahyun laughed really loudly at that, but answered anyway. “Maybe I just miss holding your hand.”

Sana pulled back. “I have another hand.”

Dahyun looked at her fondly, smiling with her eyes. “Oh, yeah. Forgot about that.”

The way Sana’s eyes were shining made every bone in Dahyun’s body melt. Without another word, Sana let her good hand slide down through Dahyun’s arm, making her skin tingle in the process, then interlocked their fingers.

Why did I want to hurt her so badly?

They walked back to the main building like this. Dahyun felt the happiest she’d been in ages.

There was a reason.

As soon as they stepped inside, Sana felt the stares of people on her back.

Oh.

People she’d slept with, people she’d made out with – she couldn’t run away from them. Everyone on campus knew her reputation.

That’s right.

And for them, Dahyun was just her prey for the week.
I'm still a filthy slut.

She let go of her hand.

If I hurt her enough, maybe she’ll finally stay away from me.

“Dahyunnie, I need to go. Thank you for hanging out with me today.” Her walls were back up. Dahyun blinked, surprised. “Oh… alright. Um, I’ll see you later?”

“And of course.” Liar. “I’ll let you know when I’m free.” Liar.

And without another word, Sana left.

Self-hatred, Sana realized, was more powerful than love.

Chapter End Notes

Angsty millenials are hard to figure out like that. Thank you so much for the comments and kudos, you guys! Hang in there, it's not over yet. See ya!
“Hera. No… Narcissus? Too obvious.” Chaeyoung muttered to herself in an odd position. She was lying down on her bed with both legs up against the wall, her head falling from the edge. Her perspective of the world was turned upside down and she held her notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other, unconsciously chewing on the eraser as she thought harder. “Atlas, maybe?”

At that point, the bedroom door opened, and Tzuyu walked in without much thought. She was about to lock it again when her eyes caught her roommate’s antics and she snorted. “What are you doing?”

“Creating.” Chaeyoung answered without batting an eye. “Poetry.”

“In… this position?” Tzuyu walked up to her, amused. “Doesn’t look very comfortable.”

“The blood rushes to my brain like this. Makes me think faster.”

“You’re red.”

“Yes, that’s what blood rushing to one’s head does.”

Tzuyu sat next to her on the bed and looked down at the other girl’s form, her eyes expressing her anticipation. Chaeyoung frowned and resumed her creative process. “Athena? Nah. Trojan. Helen?”

The photographer tilted her head to peek at what her artistic friend was trying to do, but apparently, she’d just been scribbling random words and crossing them out. Nothing consistent seemed to be taking shape, and she could feel Chaeyoung’s frustration.

“Do you need some help?” she asked.

“No.” Chaeyoung replied dryly, then stood in silence. A couple seconds later, she sighed, then finally met Tzuyu’s eyes, looking like a lost puppy. “…Yes.”

Tzuyu giggled softly and grabbed Chaeyoung by her shoulders. “First, come back to this world.” Chaeyoung tried to lean forward, but Tzuyu stopped her from sitting up straight, and instead shifted her head until it was comfortably settled on her lap. “Better?”

“Uh—” Chaeyoung blushed, but thanks to the blood-rush, it wasn’t apparent. “Yeah.”

“Now, what were you mumbling about?” Tzuyu smiled softly at her; her head was covering the ceiling light, creating a halo around her head and Chaeyoung couldn’t help but to think how fitting it was. She wanted to draw it later.

“I’m thinking about the title of my piece,” She explained. “I wanted to name it after something
from Greek mythology.”

“Hmm… Well, what’s your poem going to be about?”

“That’s…” She smiled awkwardly. “I don’t really know. I start with the title, and then go from there. If I find a word I really like, then I usually write the rest of it based on what that word means, and on how I can shape it to be something different. Does that make sense?”

“It does,” Tzuyu nodded. “So, for now let’s find a word you like.”

‘Tzuyu’ was the first thing Chaeyoung thought, but ignored it.

They spent the rest of the afternoon shooting words at each other and writing them down on Chaeyoung’s little notebook until it looked like a historian’s diary. At first it was hard to concentrate with Tzuyu’s hand occasionally landing on Chaeyoung’s hair and brushing it slowly, but eventually the small gesture helped her think better – it was soothing.

“Alright, so far we’ve got… the gods,” Tzuyu took charge in organizing their ideas. “But you didn’t really connect with them.”

“It’s too obvious.”

“Then we have demigods and monsters, but still not cool enough.”

“It doesn’t need to be cool, it needs to be poetic.”

“Sure,” Tzuyu rolled her eyes playfully. “Then we move on to… some words deriving from Greek. I thought you were going pick one of them, honestly.”

“Right? Me too!” The frustration was coming back and Chaeyoung rolled on her side, burying her face on Tzuyu’s stomach. “Words are haaaaard…”

Tzuyu laughed a little. “Cut it out, that tickles.”

Chaeyoung blinked, then smirked. “What? This?” She brought her tiny fingers to the belly in front of her and Tzuyu reached for them, laughing louder.

“Yah, Son Chaeyoung!”

But the tiny girl was faster and soon sat up to reach underneath Tzuyu’s arms. The girl yelped and fell on her back, kicking the air and trying to stop the mischievous assault on her sensitive skin. Chaeyoung knew all the places her best friend was ticklish, so she took advantage of that. Despite being a lot taller, Tzuyu became weak whenever she was laughing too hard.

“I’m n-not— Haha! I’m not helping you anymo— stop it!” Tzuyu finally thought about rolling on her side, bringing her legs close to her chest. Chaeyoung, unable to reach her anymore, fell back down laughing next to her. They were both breathless and took a moment to rest. Tzuyu didn’t move from her position.

“Alright, I’m not going to tickle you anymore.” Chaeyoung said in between giggles, to no avail. “Tzuyu…” She moved her eyes to the girl’s back, where her messy hair was sticking to her sweater, and turned around to rest her forehead there. “Please open up.”

“No.”

“Please?”
“Password.”

“Uh…” Chaeyoung laughed again, but thought about it. “Greece? Poetry? I’m sorry?”

The taller girl didn’t move for a moment, but eventually looked over her shoulder. “No.”

“Give me a hint?”

“No.”

“Come on!”

Tzuyu squished herself more, if that was even possible, but Chaeyoung could hear her muffled giggles. Without thinking, she wrapped her arms around her, hugging her from behind and smiling against her shoulder. “I’m sorry…”

Tzuyu’s muscles eventually relaxed and she returned to her normal, tall self. Chaeyoung was about to let her go when she felt Tzuyu’s hands enveloping the arms around her. Chaeyoung’s heart leaped a beat and she swallowed strongly.

“Ambrosia.”

“H-huh?”

“The password,” Tzuyu took a deep breath, then let her go, turning around. “It was ambrosia. It’s the fabled nectar of the gods. Something only the divine were allowed to have.”

They were really close, and for a second Chaeyoung wanted to give up on everything and push forward, to crash their lips together, to gently cup her best friend’s face in a kiss. Tzuyu was brilliant and she wanted to show her that.

But her anxiety was stronger – it had always been – so she just turned on her back again to look at the ceiling.

“I like that word.” Chaeyoung muttered, closing her eyes. Suddenly, an idea struck her like lightning, and she sat back up, eyes open wide. “That’s it!”

Tzuyu looked at her. “What?”

“My title,” She shot her a toothy grin. “‘Ambrosia, In Vain’.”

Tzuyu blinked, then smiled back. “I’m glad I could help.”

And just like that, Chaeyoung grabbed the notebook that had fallen on the floor and moved to the table to start working on her piece. Tzuyu stared at her back for a while, missing the warmth from the hug. She was truly happy for her friend, but something bothered her about the title.

It was vulnerable.

It was… sad.

--
Sana crashed on her bed as soon as she made it back to her dorm. She dragged her feet across the carpet, throwing her bag and coat on the floor unceremoniously, then face-planted onto the pillow, groaning in the process. Everything hurt. She still had a headache, her limbs felt like jelly that had been left under the sun for hours, and her emotional was a wreck. She didn’t want to think anymore – she just wanted to freaking sleep.

The buzz inside her head was so loud that she didn’t even realize someone was in the bathroom. Soon enough, Mina emerged from the place and halted at the scene.

“Sana?”

The girl just groaned loudly. Worried, Mina sat down next to her, putting a gentle hand on Sana’s back. She flinched at the contact, and Mina retreated her arm, frowning. “Sana, are you okay?”

Sana finally sighed and turned her head around to face her. “Hey, Minari.”

“What happened to you?” Mina had been worried sick the whole day. “You weren’t here in the morning and you weren’t picking up your phone.”

“Oh… It’s on silent mode,” Sana draped an arm across her face. “I’m okay, I slept at Jihyo’s.”

“A little warning next time would be nice.” Mina wanted to scold her, but she looked so pitiful already that she didn’t have the heart to do it. “Momo and I were worried.”

“I know. I screwed up. I’m sorry.” Sana said that in a way that made it seem like she’d been repeating it to herself the whole day. Mina wondered if her mood had anything to do with the party, and sighed. Apparently that party had started trouble for every single one of them.

“I’m not angry, you know.” Mina smiled softly at her, moving Sana’s arm away from her face. They stared at each other for a silent moment, then Sana nodded, closing her eyes.

“Okay.”

“I’ll close the curtains so you can sleep,” Mina said getting up, but Sana reached for her shirt.

“Don’t go.”

It felt awfully familiar, the way her voice shook with a tinge of despair and loneliness, and Mina bit her lip. She was supposed to meet Jeongyeon soon, but it was impossible to leave Sana in the state she was in right now – nothing would ever be more important than making sure her friends were okay. So, Mina rubbed Sana’s knuckles gently. “I’ll just close the curtains. I’m not going anywhere.”

Sana hesitantly let her go, but kept an eye on her the whole time. Mina closed the windows, pulled down the curtains, and turned off the lights, creating a dark and comfortable atmosphere. Then she grabbed her phone and texted Jeongyeon.

[Mina Mina Minari, 1:43pm]:

Something came up. Can we meet when the evening classes start?
She didn’t have classes in the afternoon, but she knew that Sana would have to get up in a few hours for her last evening class; she would meet with Jeongyeon then. Mina wanted her friend to rest as much as possible, so she set her alarm on the lowest volume.

Walking back to Sana, Mina climbed on the bed next to her, getting under the covers. “I’m here.”

Sana immediately clung to her, and Mina caressed the girl’s hair. The silence was relaxing, and Mina hummed a song silently; Sana had always liked her voice – she said that it was calming and passionate, like a reflection of her soul. Mina knew that something was definitely stressing her best friend out, but they’ve been together long enough for her to know that if Sana wanted to speak, she would. For now, Mina tried to lull her to sleep.

She felt her phone vibrate.

[Jeongyeon, 1:48pm]:

No problem

Is everything okay?

[Mina Mina Minari, 1:48pm]:

Yes. Don’t worry.

Mina sighed a little. Even though she was supposed to be hurting, Jeongyeon’s constant worry was her weakness. Her heart still did weird things when she thought about the caring girl.

But she wasn’t the top priority right now. Mina put her phone away and turned her attention back to Sana.

It was the second time that day, Mina realized, that she ended up in bed with one of her best friends snuggling her. In the morning, however, she’d been the one who needed comforting. Now, she provided it.

Mina wondered what Momo was doing. She kind of wanted to call her and ask her to join the cuddle pile.

“Do you ever feel like everyone is watching your every move?” Sana spoke suddenly; her muffled voice was so weak that Mina barely heard her.

“Yes,” Mina answered, playing with her hair. “In certain situations.”

“What about all the time?”

“Well… maybe not all the time.” Mina closed her eyes. “Only when I’m all alone and surrounded by strangers.”

“Strangers…” Sana buried her face on Mina’s neck. “I think that’s the problem.”
“What is?”

“They’re all just strangers. Everyone.”

“Even us?” She didn’t need to elaborate.

“Of course not. You’re different,” Sana sighed. “And that’s why I’m so scared.”

Mina opened her eyes and looked down, trying to make sense of what her best friend was saying. They’ve had conversations like this before—heavy, serious talks about themselves and others. Momo, Mina and Sana felt comfortable to talk about anything with each other, and they even had secrets that they hid from the other girls. They felt a little guilty, but at the end of the day, it was to protect themselves and the group.

Mina licked her lips. “What are you scared of?”

Sana didn’t answer for a while, but eventually shifted around to look back at Mina. “Of losing myself. And then losing all of you.”

Sana was usually confident and optimistic, but Mina knew that she was also extremely delicate. She was the sun—people gravitated towards her. However, popularity can have… unforeseeable consequences.

Too much attention is suffocating.

“You know that there is nothing you can do that will make us leave you.” Mina said with the utmost sincerity, hoping to soothe her worries.

“Not me. But others can.”

“Sana, who are the others you keep talking about?”

“The whole campus,” Sana curled into herself. “Everywhere I look I see a familiar face. It’s like I know everyone, Mina. And everyone knows me. They know what I—” She caught her tongue.

“What you what?” Mina reached for Sana’s face, cupping her cheek gently. “Talk to me.”

Sana saw her childhood best friend in Mina’s eyes and relaxed her shoulders for a bit, putting down her walls. Her two best friends had this effect on her. “What I do. Who I do.”

“As in… sex?” Sana nodded, and Mina frowned. “Sana, since when is your sex life a big deal?”

“So what?” Mina was baffled. “Is someone bothering you about it?”

“Not directly, but I can just… feel it. Everywhere I go, it’s like a hallway of judgmental stares.” The mental image made panic rise to her chest and Sana felt her throat close. “It didn’t bother me before, but now I can’t even… I can’t even think about it, because it makes me shake and cry, and I’m just—I hurt people. I keep hurting people, I try not to, but I can’t stop because I’m a bad person, I’m just a bad—”

“Sana. Sana, stop,” Mina hugged her, and the embrace made Sana snap out of whatever attack she was having. She finally felt the tears spilling and hugged Mina back, sniffling against her shirt as Mina shushed her and planted soft kisses on her hair. “It’s okay. You’re not a bad person. You’re okay. Everything is okay.”
Mina’s voice was gentle and soothing, as always.

It took a few minutes, but Sana eventually calmed down enough to breathe properly again. These episodes were becoming increasingly frequent, the sudden thoughts that led to shock and confusion, and Sana was terrified of them, because it made her body react in a horrible way.

Thankfully, she had Mina.

“I think I know what’s happening. Can I tell you?” Mina was always the best at dealing with stressful situations, despite her initial denial. Her very presence was calming. Sana nodded. “I think you’re having anxiety attacks.”

“Attacks…?”

“It’s totally okay, you know. I have them sometimes, too. And Chaengie, and even a few professors told me they have experienced it.” Mina’s smile was relieving. “You’ve just never had them before, so now that it’s happening, it’s terrifying.”

“Oh,” All of a sudden, things made a lot more sense. “And… how do I stop it?”

Mina chuckled lightly. “Well… there isn’t really a cure. Something might have triggered it for you. Probably seeing on a daily basis all these people that you know, and feeling as if they’re watching you. But there are ways to counter these triggering situations.”

Sana processed it slowly, coming to terms with it. Mina was probably exactly right. It sucked, but putting a name to these strange feelings made everything a little more tolerable. With a sigh, she closed her eyes again, exhaustion taking over her body. “I see. So I guess I’ll just… have to deal with it for now…” It was such a new and frightening territory, that she couldn’t help but to cling a little bit more to her friend.

Mina noticed. “Hmm?”

“I don’t know, it’s just… that’s not me.” She shifted. “Being scared of people, suddenly caring a whole lot about what they say about me behind my back. I thought I was above all of this. I feel like I’m not… myself anymore.”

They stood in silence for a bit, then Mina tried again. “Think about it like your broken wrist. It’s something that happened to you and that you can’t control, but it’s a part of you now. No one is going to think less of you because of that. No one.”

She grabbed Sana’s bad wrist gently, lifting it up to her face. “Also, that doesn’t mean it’ll be a part of you forever. It takes time to heal, we just don’t really know how long. But it’s okay, anyway.” She smiled softly. “You’re still Sana, and we’ll always be here to support you. You know that, right?”

Sana looked at Mina with watery eyes, but not because of sadness anymore. She thought about her circle of friends, and how lucky she was to have all of them.

“Yeah…” She sniffled, finally grinning a little. “I know that.”

“Good.” Mina murmured, smiling with her eyes.

“People sure are using my broken wrist as analogy a lot today.” Sana said suddenly, and Mina was confused. Then she laughed at her friend’s expression. “Dahyun said something similar earlier, that’s all.”
They both chuckled at that, then Sana pressed a soft kiss to Mina’s forehead. “Thank you, Minari.”

“Anytime.”

Getting comfortable under the covers again, Sana was about to drift off, when she noticed something. “Who were you texting earlier? Did you have somewhere to go?”

“Oh,” Mina blinked, averting her eyes. “It was just Jeongyeon. I told her we could meet later.”

“Oh…” Sana said, her cheerful and mischievous aura returning slowly. “Don’t let me keep you from her.”

“I don’t really want to see her yet.”

Sana frowned at this. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah…” Mina chewed on her cheek, not sure if it was the best time for this conversation, but realized that she would have to tell Sana everything eventually. Since they were already exposing their feelings, perhaps there wasn’t going to be a better time than that. “Not really. I don’t know, it’s complicated.”

“Well, now you need to tell me.” Sana scooted closer.

Mina sighed, turning on her back to look at the ceiling. She tried to put everything in words, organizing her ideas, but feelings and logic didn’t exactly walk hand in hand. So, she settled for being straightforward. “I kissed Momo yesterday.”

The silence was jarring.

Almost a minute passed.

“You kissed Momo??” Sana finally spoke again, subtlety flying through the window. “Wait, when? Where? At the party? Momo was there? I thought you two were fighting? Or avoiding each other, or—”

“Yes, at the party. Well, right after it, actually.” Mina needed to stop Sana from flooding her brain with more questions than she could process. “It’s not like we knew it was gonna happen.”

“This— How did this even happen?” Then, maybe because she was losing her mind at the revelation, Sana smiled. “Wait, before that. Is she a good kisser?”

“Sana!” Mina blushed, slapping her friend’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry, but I’ve always wanted to know that!”

“That’s not the point!” She hid her face in her hands. At least that meant that Sana was feeling better. Mina sighed. “…Yeah. But don’t ever tell her I said that.”

Sana made a sound that seemed like a mixture of a scream and a dying squirrel, but then made a motion with her hand, as if zipping up her lips tightly. Mina grinned despite her embarrassment and they kept quiet, until Sana’s curiosity kicked in again.

“I thought… you liked Jeongyeon.”

_That_ was the complicated part. “I… do. I do like her, still. But it’s not like something is going to happen between us.”
“Don’t give up so soon—”

“She kissed Nayeon at that party, Sana.” Mina interrupted, frustration crawling up her throat. “I saw them. Momo saw them, too.”

Sana’s heart dropped. “Oh, Momoring…”

Now everything made sense. Ever since Sana and Mina noticed that Momo had been falling for Nayeon, Mina had been acting weird. At first Sana couldn’t understand why, but after long deliberation, she put the pieces together, and realized that it had to do with trust – Momo was supposed to be their best friend, but she hid her crush from them, whereas Mina had been honest with her feelings for Jeongyeon from the start. Momo not telling them about it made her feel betrayed.

Now that both their crushes apparently were still hooked on each other, it made sense for Mina and Momo to find solace in one another.

She grabbed Mina’s hand, gently. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. It’s not their fault, either. I shouldn’t be mad at either of them, but I am. I don’t want to be, but I am.” Now it was Mina’s turn to spill a few tears, and she hated it. “I didn’t tell Jeongyeon how I felt, and she clearly still has feelings for Nayeon, so…”

“So you kissed Momo. Because you two were upset.” Sana deduced, but with no trace of judgement in her voice. Mina just nodded with a sniff. “Are you and Momo cool? I mean, after all of that… I just don’t want you to get all awkward around each other again. It’s weird.”

“We’re okay.” Mina remembered their morning together, exchanging caresses and kisses, and how nice it’d felt. “After everything was said and done, things felt… normal. I don’t know, I guess we’re too close to make it weird.”

“You two are adorable and I hate you.” Sana teased and Mina let out a broken laugh, wiping away the tears.

“Anyways, that happened. Jeongyeon texted me today to meet her after lunch, but I’d rather be here with you. I’ll talk to her later.”

Sana smiled sympathetically and suddenly felt very tired. “That’s a lot to process. Can we sleep a little? Please?”

Mina giggled and agreed. “Yeah. Thank you for listening.”

“Anytime.” Sana repeated her words from before, and closed her eyes.

It didn’t take long for them to fall asleep, hand in hand, and with hearts lighter.

Mina’s phone vibrated then, lighting up the screen, a single text message frozen in time.

[Moguri, 2:27pm]:

_Mina_

_Nayeon doesn’t remember the kiss_
She was drunk

And Jeongyeon didn’t tell her about it either

--

“And where were you when the thunder struck the Tomorrow Tree, shattering… sh-shattering it in pieces? Thousands, even millions of pieces were…! Were—” Nayeon sighed internally and looked at her script again. “Were scattered around the fields, in every dimension, for everyone to see. Now it’s a mess, and we, the Collectors… We, the Collectors will have to— to pick them up… and that’s not the line.”

A loud clap echoed against the theater walls, and Mr. Kwon got up from his chair. “Miss Nayeon. Are we having trouble with this scene?”

“No, sir. I just couldn’t memorize it in time. I deeply apologize.” Nayeon bowed, crumpling the script behind her back with a shaky hand. She was so out of it that she was absolutely enraged with herself.

Mr. Kwon just sighed dramatically and motioned with one hand. “Alright, that is all for today. Please Nayeon, we need you to get this right by tomorrow, comprend?”

“I will. I promise.”

With nothing else to add, Mr. Kwon grabbed his scripts and bag, going backstage. Nayeon bowed again when he walked past her, then dropped her shoulders, frustrated.

Exhaustion washed over her, of both physical and emotional varieties. She blamed the dance with Momo a few hours ago. It’d felt so good to be able to feel the love and warmth from the girl – one last indulgence before she ruined everything for herself, hopefully forever.

She just needed to hang on a little longer until all the pieces were in their respective places on the board. It shouldn’t take much time.

After gathering her stuff, Nayeon jumped off the stage, too ashamed to face her cast members in the dressing room. She was finally free for the rest of the day, and all she wanted to do was to go to her room.

Emotions swirled inside of her, but Nayeon tried her best to focus on more pressing matters, like memorizing her goddamn lines. It wasn’t hard, she knew; her skills came naturally. She just needed to be emotionally stable to get into character, which she was currently not. Nayeon was used to suppressing her emotions, though. She’d be fine eventually.

“Say, what do you call people who collect Collectors?” A familiar voice spoke as Nayeon walked, and she turned around.

Jihyo’s grin was truly healing.
Nayeon smiled back. “Idiots.”

Jihyo got up from her seat in the audience and swung an arm over her roommate’s shoulder. “Then I’m the biggest idiot of them all.”

“You really are.” Nayeon reached for her hand, intertwining their fingers, and they resumed their walk out of the building.

Jihyo watching her disaster of a performance meant two things, and they were both troubling: Firstly, she knew Nayeon wasn’t in top form and, eventually, would interrogate her about it, because if there’s one person who knows Nayeon better than herself, it’s Park Jihyo.

Second, Jihyo was inevitably going to try to serve as her pillar and support, and the girl was relentless when it came to that, even to the point of exhaustion.

It was impossible to run away from this. The arm around her shoulder wasn’t just a friendly gesture; it was also to stop Nayeon from running away.

They walked in silence until no one else was accompanying them on their long, tortuous path back to the dorms. The evening sky was beautifully purple, with very few clouds in the horizon, and Nayeon closed her eyes to smell the chilly air. The last birds were returning to their nests after a long day, not unlike the theater students. Jihyo looked up to the cloudless sky, then bumped heads with the girl next to her.

“How are you feeling?”

Nayeon had a split second to make a choice in that moment. She could either lie to the only person, aside from herself, who would not buy it, or she could be ambiguously sincere. Unfortunately, being completely honest was not an option for her anymore.

“Like the shattered Tomorrow Tree.” Ambiguously sincere it was.

Jihyo chuckled. “Don’t worry, the Collectors are here to pick up the pieces.”

“That’s not even the line.”

“What is the line, then?”

“I haven’t memorized it,” Nayeon was tired. “I’ll let you know.”

It was usually like this with them – Jihyo never pushed her. If Nayeon wanted to talk in stupid riddles, she let her. Jihyo knew better than to force that girl to be honest with her, and Nayeon really preferred it this way. The only reason why Jihyo was okay with this back and forth was because she didn’t need Nayeon to be straightforward with her – she was well familiar with all of her nuances.

Nayeon could pretend all she wanted, but she would never fully trick her oldest friend.

“Did you sleep well at Jeongyeon’s?”

“I did,” Nayeon became stoic. “How is Sana?”

“She’s…” Truth to be told, Jihyo was still worried about the way she’d left her room in a hurry in the morning. “Sober.”

That pretty much told Nayeon all she needed to know. “Jeongyeon told me you took care of her
after she got wasted.”

“It wasn’t a pretty sight,” Jihyo smiled sadly. “I’m worried about her. There’s something bothering her a lot and she’s not telling us.”

Nayeon could relate. “Maybe she’s scared.”

“Hmm,” Jihyo side-eyed her. “Of what?”

“This problem of hers,” Nayeon knew the territory she was getting into here; that was Jihyo’s roundabout way of trying to figure her out. For some reason, it was better to talk to her this way, without direct confrontation. “Maybe she feels like telling us would hurt us, or something.”

“Or something,” Jihyo repeated, lazily. “We’re her friends though. She knows she can trust us.”

Nayeon smiledsadly at that, then looked at the ground. “Perhaps she just can’t trust herself.”

A few students approached them from behind and the girls walked silently the rest of the way. Jihyo squeezed Nayeon’s hand almost imperceptibly and the actress felt like breaking down right there in the middle of the courtyard.

Talking to Jihyo was really draining. She forced people to face reality.

Getting to the dorms took an eternity – it’s hard to notice the passage of time when you’re trying to keep yourself together. Nayeon immediately walked into the bathroom and nearly slammed the door, opening the faucet to have some kind of noise going on. Silence was maddening.

Jihyo sat in front of the door, leaning her back on it. She sighed, knowing that Nayeon was doing the exact same thing on the other side. “Nabongs? Talk to me.”

Silence followed as the hot water pouring down started to evaporate and fog the mirror. Jihyo waited for a while, then tried again. “You and Sana are not so different, you know. She just has a harder time pretending.”

Nayeon’s head was buried on her arms and her breathing was starting to become irregular.

Oh, no. She was hyperventilating again.

She prayed for the water noise to muffle the sound.

“I’m not going to sit here and lecture you on how you shouldn’t bottle up your feelings. God knows how stubborn you can be.”

Momo and Jeongyeon’s faces flashed in succession in Nayeon’s mind and she grabbed her head, scratching the hair there and biting her lips. She needed to calm down. A distraction. She needed to breathe.

“But I will be sitting here until you answer me.” Jihyo seemed calm on the outside, but her heart was nearly bursting through her ribcage. She had no idea what Nayeon was doing in that bathroom, but she needed to keep herself together if she wanted to be helpful. “I’ll keep talking, too. I can talk for the whole night. Just answer me when you feel like it, okay?”

Nayeon was suffocating. She lifted her head up and tried to think for a freaking second.

The hot water—the bathroom was becoming a sauna. She needed to close the faucet.
“You know that reality show you really like? There’s a second season coming up, with a contestant from last season. The premier is next week, do you want to watch it together?”

Nayeon forced herself to get up, but her legs wouldn’t obey. So, she dragged her shaky body to the sink, mustering some strength from somewhere, and climbing up the porcelain to turn it off. As soon as the water stopped, Nayeon collapsed on the floor again.

Well, that was one problem solved.

“I’ll take that as a yes. I heard that there’s a musical director coming here next month. You’re going to talk to him, right? I’m sure Mr. Kwon already told him about you. Do you want me to go with you?”

Now, breathing exercises. Nayeon closed her eyes and inhaled, counting to three. She wasn’t proud of how used to it she was getting; so much that these attacks scared her, but not as much as they should. She focused on Jihyo’s voice, answering her mentally.

Yes, I do want to watch the reality show with you.

Please accompany me when I go talk to the director.

“What is your new musical going to be about?”

Otherworldly beings that need to protect a timeline. It’s complicated, and I want to explain everything to you because I’m excited for it, and I think you’ll like it.

“By the way, you know what movie I miss watching? Mamma Mia. We should watch it tonight. We can sing all the songs loudly.”

Yes, let’s watch it. It’s one of my favorite movies and there’s nothing else I want to do right now than watch it with you.

Her breathing was slowly getting back to normal. Nayeon’s chest felt heavy, sweat covered her forehead and she finally managed to open her eyes. She felt dizzy, and she wanted to get out of that cramped bathroom.

Taking a second to stabilize, Nayeon swallowed dry. She was really thirsty. She wanted a cup of water. And attention. She wanted to be held, and told that everything would eventually pass.

She wanted to not feel like a monster for one second.

Nayeon wanted to stop lying.

The tears came.

She opened the door, finally.

Jihyo was up in a flash, throwing her arms around her. “I’m here.”

“I’m sorry,” Nayeon sobbed against her shoulder, legs trembling and hands gripping Jihyo’s coat. “I’m sorry you’re stuck with me.”

They hugged and Jihyo whispered words of comfort. “Let it all go. It’s okay.”

After calming Nayeon down, Jihyo gave her a cup of water, wiped the sweat off her face, and sat with her on the edge of her bed. She rubbed small circles on Nayeon’s back as she drank, looking at
her fondly.

Nayeon eventually put the cup down, sighing. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. I’m not— okay. And I can’t ask for help.” That was the first time Nayeon said it out loud. It was still confusing, but at least it was sincere. “I’m sorry you need to deal with me. You shouldn’t have to.”

“Okay, stop.” Jihyo got up from the bed and kneeled in front of her. “I need to deal with you. Because I just don’t trust you with yourself, Nayeon. That’s the truth. You’re hurting yourself because you’d rather do this than to hurt our friends. I know you.”

Jihyo grabbed her hands, looking at her in the eyes. “And I don’t know what the hell you’re doing right now, but you need to stop sacrificing yourself like some sort of… martyr, or whatever. You need to start trusting us. Because pushing us away? That’s the worst thing you can do to us. That hurts more than anything else.”

It was Nayeon’s instinct to refuse help, but at that moment she was so tired, that she simply nodded. “Okay.”

Jihyo smiled gently and kissed the girl’s knuckles. “Now, Mamma Mia.”

Nayeon adjusted herself against the headboard as Jihyo turned on the TV, emptying her mind. She closed her eyes and felt the weight of her friend next to her after a while, then let her head fall on the crook of Jihyo’s neck. She heard the beginning of the movie, moving her lips to the song and the characters’ sentences that she’d memorized so well. The scenes were rolling inside her head, Jihyo’s scent was all around her, and everything was soothing for once.

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“So you think it’s possible to fall in love with two people at once?” Nayeon blurted out, then knocked her head back against the headboard. Dumb. That was dumb.

“I do,” Jihyo answered suddenly in a casual tone. “I fell in love with eight, after all.”

And that was such a Jihyo thing to say that it caused Nayeon’s face to explode into a smile and she started laughing. Jihyo joined her without taking her eyes off the movie, and the night crawled upon them greeted by hysterical giggles.

It was messy.

And yet, heartwarming.

--

Mina was nervous. In a few steps, she would be facing Jeongyeon, and she didn’t know how to
greet her. Obviously, her first thought was to act like she was happy for her, then treat her the same way she had before this big mess. There was absolutely no reason to act coldly—how could she, when she felt that the whole situation was her own fault? If only she’d been brave enough to confess to Jeongyeon years ago, maybe she wouldn’t be suffering the weight of regret right now. Being rejected was better than nothing, if she was being honest.

Mina sighed. She hated dealing with matters of the heart.

It was hard to smile at the person you loved, knowing she loved someone else.

‘Get a grip, Mina’ she scolded herself, then turned left to enter the cafeteria.

The place was nearly empty since the evening period had already started. Mina had accompanied Sana to her classroom, relieved that her best friend seemed a thousand times better than before. Still, she told her she’d wait for her when the class was over, just because. Sana was thankful.

She spotted Jeongyeon sitting on a table in the corner, and the athlete waved at her with a smile. Despite everything, Mina smiled back. The effect she had on her… was overwhelming.

“Hey, sorry for cancelling at the last minute.” Mina sat down taking off her coat.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s no pressing matter.” Then Jeongyeon paused, scratching her neck.

“Okay, actually it kind of is.”

She seemed anxious all of a sudden and Mina frowned. “What is it?”

Jeongyeon got right to the point. “Okay, so… I screwed up big time with an assignment. I had a short film to produce and I completely forgot about the deadline.”

“And that is…?”

“…Next week.”

That made all the other matters disappear.

“You have one week to film a movie?!?” Mina wasn’t very expressive most of the time, but her eyebrows raised as she gaped, and Jeongyeon would’ve thought it was funny, if it wasn’t so depressing.

“Yes. But here is the thing!” She fumbled with her bag, clearly shaking, and grabbed a messy pile of crumpled paper. “I already have the script and everything planned. All I need to do is film it! And edit it. In a week. Oh, boy.” Panic was clearly settling in.

Mina reached for her hands automatically to calm her down. “That’s good. So… where exactly do I fit in?”

Jeongyeon swallowed; she was nervous for this part. “Well, while I do have all the equipment and ideas, I’m missing… an actress.” She was suddenly very conscious of Mina’s hands on hers. “So… I was going to ask you. Would you be my actress, Mina? Please?”

Mina blinked a few times, bewildered. “You… want me to be your actress?”

“Yes, I really, really do.” Jeongyeon turned her palms upwards, gently enveloping Mina’s hands in her own. “My character fits you perfectly.”

“Jeongyeon, I don’t—”
“Also, it’s a silent movie! You won’t have to say a word,” She was clearly desperate. “Just follow my instructions as I guide your steps and expressions. It’s going to be a really short movie, so I’ll just need a few scenes.”

Jeongyeon’s hands were warm, and Mina wondered what holding them on a daily basis felt like. They were soft despite the rough treatment from basketball practice, and Mina allowed herself a second longer to relish in the feeling of Jeongyeon’s skin against her own before retreating her arms. “Why… didn’t you ask Nayeon?”

Being in front of a camera didn’t bother Mina as much as the fact that she was the one Jeongyeon was asking. After all, Jeongyeon had kissed a different girl yesterday.

“She’s just… not you,” Jeongyeon replied with sincerity. Deep down, maybe, she had written that script unconsciously picturing Mina as her protagonist. It just made sense that it’d be her.

But clearly, Mina was feeling uncomfortable with this whole situation, and that was the last thing Jeongyeon wanted. “Hey, but it’s okay. If you really don’t want to, I’ll ask Na—”

“I’ll do it.”

Jeongyeon blinked. “Huh?”

“I’ll be your actress.” Mina had blurted it out without thinking, a sudden sense of possessiveness taking control. “I don’t mind.”

Jeongyeon smiled widely. “You will?! Oh, thank you so much Minari!” She nearly jumped the table to hug her, but restrained herself. “I’m really in a hurry, so let me explain the details of the script. Wait, hold on.” She got up to sit next to Mina.

Their shoulders bumped, and Jeongyeon was happy, and Mina wanted to get closer to her. She felt awful, as if she was taking something from someone else, but she knew that this was ridiculous. They were just friends helping each other out, and Jeongyeon still had feelings for her ex-girlfriend. These things tended to happen. There was nothing wrong with it.

But Mina couldn’t even convince herself.

She sighed internally and paid attention to the script. Helping Jeongyeon pass this class for the semester was the most important thing right now.

It really didn’t take more than twenty minutes for her to understand the story, and she blushed at a few parts. It seemed very poetic and tender, but there was a scene at the end where she would have to undress from the waist up. Jeongyeon repeatedly reassured her that nothing would be shown, since she’d be covering her torso with a sheet at the scene.

“It’s not really that important for you to be undressed, so if you don’t want to, please tell me ok? We’ll just do it if you’re 100% okay with it.” Jeongyeon’s words were warm and considerate. Mina might have swooned if she wasn’t so composed.

With Jeongyeon… falling so hard was just so incredibly easy.

Mina was going to spend almost a week with her, privately, shooting scenes in tight spaces. That meant that she had one week to get over Yoo Jeongyeon.

This was going to be hard.
“I think I got everything,” Mina said after reading a few more scenes. “Should we start filming today?”

“If it’s okay with you, that would be great.”

“Alright. I just promised Sana I’d wait for her class to be over. It won’t take too long.” Mina got up. “It’ll be faster if we wait for her there.”

“Of course, no problem.” Jeongyeon grabbed her bag and the camera case and both girls started walking. They were silent for a while, and that thing that had happened at the party was still poking Mina’s heart. She needed to talk about it with Jeongyeon at some point, but she couldn’t find an opening.

“How is Sana?” Jeongyeon asked after a while.

“She’s alright,” Mina replied; it wasn’t exactly a lie. “She had me worried today for a bit, but we worked it out.”

“She looked awful yesterday. I saw her at Jihyo’s, but I already had my hands full with another drunk member of our group.” She laughed a bit as she said that, but it was a weird sound; almost a nervous chuckle.

“Was it… Nayeon?” Maybe that was the breach she’d been looking for.

“Yeah. I had to take her back to my room.”

Mina’s heart sunk at that information. She didn’t want to think about it. “Is—” She swallowed. “Is she okay?”

“Yes. She woke up with a hell of a hangover, though.”

Another awkward silence, and Mina opened her mouth, but closed it again. She didn’t know how to start this. Should she congratulate her? Tease her? Ask her about the kiss? How could she even pretend to react like a normal friend would, when she’d been crushing on Jeongyeon for the past three years? It was impossible.

So, she settled for checking her phone to distract herself.

That was when she saw Momo’s unread message.

Mina stopped in the middle of the hallway.

“Hm?” Jeongyeon turned back to her. “Minari?”

She read those four texts over and over again, trying to make sense of it.

Then a thousand questions flooded her brain at once.

Nayeon doesn’t remember? Jeongyeon didn’t tell her? Wait, so does that mean… that she didn’t want Nayeon to know? Why? Does she regret kissing her? So she doesn’t have feelings for her? Or did she want to tell her another day?

And the most dangerous of all.

...Do I still have a chance?
Mina felt a hand touch her shoulder and nearly dropped her phone. “Wow, it’s me. Are you okay?”

Jeongyeon was close, and worrying, and beautiful as always, but now Mina couldn’t help but be filled with wondrous hope when she looked into her eyes. Like a starry sky that stretched to the infinite with its unfathomable dimension – that was the want, the need that Mina felt for Jeongyeon, and the weight of it never truly hit her until that moment.

You never realize how much you treasure something until you think you’ve lost it, they say.

Mina shook at the mere thought, and how true it rang. She needed to calm down.

She stepped back a little, shaking her head. “I’m f-fine. Let’s keep going.”

Jeongyeon followed her with her eyes, confused, but eventually let it go.

Mina texted Momo back on the way, careful to not let the athlete see it.

**[Mina Mina Minari, 6:45pm]:**

*Why would she lie to her?*

Her phone vibrated not even a minute after it.

**[Moguri, 6:45pm]:**

*I don’t know…*

*But this is wrong*

*Don’t you think?*

**[Mina Mina Minari, 6:46pm]:**

*…is it?*

**[Moguri, 6:47pm]:**

*What do you mean??*

Mina’s fingers trembled.

**[Mina Mina Minari, 6:48pm]:**

*Maybe it was an accident.*

*Maybe she knows that neither of them actually wanted this.*
Mina what are you saying

Her heart raced at what she was about to type.

That maybe

We should pretend we didn’t see them

And leave this whole thing behind.

On the other side of the campus, Momo’s fingers froze at the screen. An irrational rage rose up to her chest and she nearly threw her phone on the ground. She could not believe what Mina was suggesting. The whole appeal of their group of friends was that they trusted each other and told each other secrets, openly relying on one another.

Then Momo scoffed at her own naiveté.

Yeah, right. No secrets my ass.

She typed back.

Fine.

Then none of it ever happened.

She threw her phone back on her bag and left for the dorms.

That was the end of that.

Or so, Momo wanted to believe. For Mina’s sake.

I'm sorry for the Angst (no i'm not really)?? I swear there'll be more shipping from now on. LOVE YOU ALL WHO LEAVE COMMENTS YOU'RE THE BEST <3
Momo was eating.

Now, this wasn’t unusual; after all, it was lunchtime, and Momo is known for her excessive eating habits. What was so weird about it was what she was ingesting.

Her plate was filled with nothing but chocolate. Bars, muffins, even a piece of chocolate cake. All around the cafeteria people were eating a balanced meal, with carbs, proteins and vegetables, but Momo sat all alone at the far corner of the place with an entire plate piled high with sweets. The sight was amusing, to say the least, but with a body like hers, there was clearly no room to judge— at least when it came to food.

Momo had just stuffed her mouth with the last of her muffins when Chaeyoung sat in front of her with her tray. Momo stopped chewing to look up and Chaeyoung stared back. Then she resumed eating as if she hadn’t even seen her.

Chaeyoung snorted. “What the hell happened to your diet?”

“Dead in a ditch.” Momo replied with her mouth full, nearly spitting everything.

“Okeydokey.” Chaeyoung said, eyes flickering towards her friend’s plate for another brief moment, and then shrugged, grabbing her knife and fork. “Don’t let me stop you.”

They ate in silence, but Chaeyoung could tell that the atmosphere was weird; this wasn’t the usual peaceful lunch they sometimes shared, but a rather hostile one. It was like Momo was enveloped in invisible thorns and rough edges – a warning to keep distance. Chaeyoung couldn’t help but wonder what had happened to change her behavior so drastically.

“I see an empty spot,” Dahyun’s cheerful voice recognizably rang out and Chaeyoung slid to the other side of the table before the obnoxious girl crashed into her. “Hey, Chaeng.” Then she eyed Momo. “Wonka.”

“Very funny.”

“Is this what all the fitness Instagram accounts are doing nowadays?”

Momo rolled her eyes and bit a chocolate bar. Chaeyoung almost laughed, but stuffed her face with more salad. Momo was being weird, but at least Dahyun was somehow back to normal. Her circle of friends had been… unpredictable, lately.

The three girls ate casually; none of them were in a hurry for once. Their tests were pretty much done, and they only had to worry about a few assignments. Chaeyoung thought about her poem as she munched on a potato chip, trying to figure out words and metaphors.
“Oh, Tzuyu was looking for you, by the way.” Dahyun mentioned after a while. “She said she needed help with her photography project.”

“Hm, she told me.” Chaeyoung replied. “We’re taking photos in a dumpster.”

“Edgy.”

“I don’t really get it either, but I’m sure it’ll come out great.”

That’s when someone else walked by, sitting beside Momo. “Hey.”

Momo just nodded in acknowledgement, not really looking up. Dahyun and Chaeyoung smiled at her. “Jihyo-ah!”

Jihyo smiled back, then turned her attention to the obviously unhealthy plate her friend was wolfing down. “Uh… are you done with your diet?”

“Oh my God, can’t a girl stuff her face with chocolate once in her life without being judged by the entire world?” Momo’s voice was a little louder than she intended and Jihyo flinched. Regret filled Momo immediately and she was about to apologize—

“Oh!” Chaeyoung interfered with a frown. “It was just a question, you don’t need to be a jerk.”

Momo knew that she was wrong, but the sudden confrontation made her feel defensive, and the apology that was on the tip of her tongue vanished into thin air. Her pride spoke louder and the anger that was already growing in the pit of her stomach suddenly awakened.

“I don’t need a babysitter, either!” She yelled, now fully aware of her voice tone.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Chaeyoung slammed her hands on the table and got up from her seat, and Momo snapped out of it.

There was one particular trait of Son Chaeyoung that no one besides the nine of them were aware of – the lengths she would go to defend the group. She usually kept quiet and didn’t interfere in conflicts because of her anxious nature, but that was when the parties involved weren’t her friends – when it was someone from the nine of them, well, that was a different story altogether.

Chaeyoung had a natural instinct to stand up for the group, it didn’t matter the situation. She acted first and thought about it later – most of her anxiety attacks happened after her outbursts, when she realized what she’d done.

And that didn’t just pertain to interactions with strangers; if someone from the group was being unnecessarily rude to another, Chaeyoung called them out in the same way. Just like Momo to Jihyo at that moment.

The table quieted down and it took a couple of seconds for Chaeyoung to realize that people were now staring. She felt her stomach drop and sat back down, face flushed and sweating. Dahyun, familiar with how much her roommate hated attention, pulled her into a side hug and stroked her hair. “There, there, let’s all calm down.”

Momo avoided the girls’ eyes and looked back to her plate, now ashamed of her erratic behavior. Just because she’d been feeling on edge lately didn’t mean she could lash out at anyone – especially her friends.

With a sigh, she mumbled. “I’m sorry.”
Jihyo scooted closer until their shoulders bumped slightly; when Momo didn’t pull back, she knew she was back in a safe territory. “It’s okay. You’re stressed, I understand.”

Momo just nodded, then slowly grabbed the strawberry on top of her chocolate cake, offering it to Jihyo. “Here.”

“You don’t have to sacrifice your favorite part of the cake just to apologize.” Jihyo was smiling now at the pouting girl who had turned back into a harmless puppy.

“But…”

“I’ll take it, then.” Dahyun reached across the table, snatching the strawberry from Momo’s hand in a flash.

“Hey!” Momo got up to try to take it back, but it was too late; Dahyun had already bitten into it. Jihyo laughed at their antics and Chaeyoung, apparently calmer, let out a soft chuckle as well.

“And for you.” Dahyun stuffed the other half of the fruit inside Chaeyoung’s mouth, and the artist coughed, hitting her roommate with several light smacks. Momo sat back down and crossed her arms, but the corners of her lips turned up slightly. The atmosphere was finally lighter again.

Jihyo laughed with them for a bit, but Momo’s behavior was now a thorn in her heart; another one of her friends was going through troubling times. It didn’t sit well with her. She knew they were all adults, but in the light of current events, she wasn’t so sure that this problem was something unique to just Sana and Nayeon anymore. Something was definitely going on and Jihyo felt her stomach tie in a knot.

It was like they didn’t trust her anymore.

“Oh, isn’t that Nayeon?” Dahyun spoke up suddenly, and Momo and Jihyo turned around at the same time.

The actress was alone, which was surprising considering her popularity. She held a lot of papers in her hands and was exiting the cafeteria in a hurry.

Jihyo was about to get up, but Momo beat her to it. She left the table in a rush, almost tripping on her way out.

Chaeyoung and Dahyun raised a questioning eyebrow at the scene, but Jihyo just shrugged, sitting back down. Whatever it is that was happening, maybe Momo and Nayeon could talk it out together.

‘Since they won’t talk to me anymore,’ Jihyo thought with a heavy heart.

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It was automatic. Momo was getting up and sprinting towards Nayeon before she could even think about it.
Something about the whole mess with Jeongyeon had lit a spark inside Momo, and that spark was steadily being fanned into a flame. She was mad, but was managing to control her temper – for now. Jeongyeon shared a room with her after all.

Yesterday the film major had come back really late for some reason that Momo didn’t want to know. This gave her an excuse to not see her during the day, since Jeongyeon was still sleeping when she woke up. Momo wondered for how long she could avoid her roommate’s face.

For now, her main concern was Nayeon. Jeongyeon had lied to her and Nayeon seemed vulnerable ever since the party; seeing her walking by so distantly had suddenly awakened this huge protective instinct on Momo and she didn’t know what to do with it.

Leaving the cafeteria, Momo stretched her neck and looked around, finally spotting the girl going down a crowded corridor. She walked as fast as she could, diving into the crowd of students and repeating ‘excuse me’ quite loudly until she finally made it through. Nayeon was now going downstairs, her head down and her hair disheveled, as if she’d just woken up. Momo frowned and started moving again.

“Nabongs!” She yelled, but the actress didn’t listen – or pretended not to. Momo clicked her tongue and went after her; she would not stop until she reached her. She didn’t even know what she was going to say.

Momo just wanted to be with her.

Nayeon was almost out of the building when she managed to catch up. “Hey!”

The actress stopped with a jump and a hand on her chest. “M-Momo.”

The brunette smiled, catching her breath slightly. “In a hurry?”

“Yeah,” Nayeon swallowed dry, her eyes frozen on Momo’s beautiful face. “I need to practice my lines.”

She didn’t expect to see Momo again so soon, – the campus was pretty big after all— but it wasn’t like Nayeon had a schedule of her classes. Maybe she should; it would make avoiding encounters like this a lot easier.

“You have a musical coming up, right?” Momo asked.

“I do,” Nayeon was touched that she knew about it, even though there were fliers all over the campus announcing this new performance. “But that’s not all I need to memorize.”

“Kinda figured, with all of this you’re holding.”

Nayeon looked at the messy scripts in her hands and sighed. “It’s a lot.”

They stood there in an awkward silence for a bit, then Nayeon turned on her heels. “I need to go, I’m already late.”

Momo nodded, then followed her.

This was not in Nayeon’s plans.

They walked side by side in silence until they were by the fountain, and Momo’s nonchalant posture was driving her nuts. Nayeon needed to find an excuse to get away from her, but at same
time, she didn’t want to. She was still emotionally compromised from crying on Jihyo the day before, and Momo was a calming presence in her life. She’d always been. Nayeon sighed at her own weakness.

“So what’s all of this, anyway?” Momo asked after a while.

“Oh, the scripts?” Nayeon fumbled with them. “It’s… for this series of commercials I’m going to star in soon.”

“Wait, what?”

Oh, that’s right, Nayeon thought. I just told Jeong about it.

“My professor received a call from an agency. They want to hire me.” Forgetting to tell Momo about it made her feel really bad all of a sudden; despite all the drama going on, this was still something Nayeon was proud of and wanted to share with her friends. She couldn’t believe that she’d been so caught up in her own shit storm that she forgot to announce it to all of them.

“So… you’ll get paid and everything?” Momo’s confusion was adorable.

“Well, I hope so, or else I’m gonna have to go to court.” Nayeon smiled a little, amused.

“This is so cool?” It came out as a question for some reason, but that just made the girl even more endearing. “I always knew you’d be the first one of us to get a real job.”

“Don’t say that,” Nayeon hated to be put in a pedestal by the people closest to her. She didn’t mind when others did it, – in fact she loved the attention and praise – but with Momo and the others it felt suffocating. “You’ll become a choreographer soon and I’ll have to beg you to teach me Beyoncé’s new dance moves or something.”

Momo laughed at this and pushed her gently with her shoulder as the walked. They were almost arriving at the theater building and Nayeon still didn’t have the heart to push Momo away.

“So, what are you endorsing?”

Nayeon let out a chortle. “Diapers.”

The laughter after this was sincere, and honestly, Momo needed this. “Ew!”

“It’s not disgusting!” Nayeon said, baffled. “There is going to be a baby on set. Do you have any idea how amazing this is? I’ll get to hold my co-star.”

“That’s so you.” Momo smiled harder. Then she moved her gaze to the scripts. “Let me help you.”

“Huh?”

“Practice. You need a partner for your scenes, don’t you?”

“Are you… implying you want to act as a baby?”

“Not the commercials, dummy.” Momo scrunched her nose. “Your musical. This way you can get it over with faster, and practice for the commercials earlier.”

Nayeon had to admit, the idea was pretty tempting; she was in a really tight schedule. Mr. Kwon expected her to have memorized at least the entirety of Act III by now, but she was still struggling with Act II.
Still, she couldn’t allow herself to do this.

“Thanks for the offer, but I’m pretty much done with the musical.” Nayeon lied, getting into character. “I’m rushing because I wanted some pointers on the commercials, and Mr. Kwon is a really busy teacher.”

“Come on,” Momo was not giving up, however. “They put up the fliers for this show two days ago, you can’t possibly have memorized the entire play by this point.”

“You don’t know how long I’ve been prac—”

“I take classes with some drama students, Nayeon.” Momo’s grin was lazy, as if she knew she caught her lying, “They don’t shut up about how huge and difficult this script is. Act III, was it? That’s what Mr. Kwon wants to see from you today, isn’t it?”

_Betrayed by my own comrades_, Nayeon sighed internally. She needed to make something up quickly, but when she realized it, they were already walking into the theater. She had been cornered, and she was too tired to fabricate an elaborate scheme.

“…Fine,” Nayeon said, quickening her steps. “You can help, but we have just an hour.”

Momo nodded, her huge puppy-like smile lighting up her features, and Nayeon felt her heart skip a beat. Then Momo grabbed her hand and ran with her backstage, making them both laugh stupidly.

_‘An hour is a long time when you count every second.’_ Momo thought.

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Mina had been Jeongyeon’s friend for years, and she liked to think that she knew all of the girl’s nuances and behavior by now.

Jeongyeon was kind and had a knack for helping others, even when they didn’t ask; the way she spoke was soft at times, but really loud when she was being playful. Her laughter was hypnotizing and silly; she paid attention to details and was always looking after others. She wore her passions on her sleeve and wasn’t afraid of chasing her dreams; she was stubborn, too. Most times, her jokes were terrible, but Mina laughed at all of them, because they were endearing nonetheless.

That was the usual Jeongyeon.

But right now, she was Yoo Jeongyeon, the professional, and she was making Mina weak.

“Can you move a bit to the right— Right there. Now stay.” Jeongyeon’s voice was stern as she looked through the camera, capturing Mina’s best angles and testing the movement in a circular motion. She was wearing her glasses – a rare sight – and looked absolutely concentrated on getting every detail right.

Jeongyeon pushed her hair back, eyebrows furrowed in thought, tongue sticking out to lick her dry lips. She adjusted her glasses every now and then and kept giving Mina directions.
This was the Jeongyeon that strived for perfection.

“How now, I want you to look to your right, eyes downcast, as if you’re thinking about someone you recently lost.”

Mina sat down on a chair in the corner of the studio, the only illumination coming from a lamp on a desk next to her. The place was cramped; that studio was meant to fit two people and a camera, and Jeongyeon had brought an entire piece of furniture to complement her scene. Mina really thought that they could have the same effect if Jeongyeon had decided to film inside her dorm, but what did she know.

Trying her best not to disappoint, Mina looked down, her head filling with thoughts of the party; she didn’t need to act much to feel sad when she replayed that scene over and over again.

“Okay, let’s do this one more time.” Jeongyeon’s voice didn’t waver.

“Was that okay?” Mina asked meekly; she worked better under clear instructions.

“It was good. I like to have backup material. One more time.” Jeongyeon replied in paused intervals, without taking her eyes off the camera. Mina nodded, swallowing hard.

She did the expression again when Jeongyeon gave her the signal and kept at it until she heard the girl say ‘cut’. Her shoulders relaxed, and Mina didn’t even realize how tense she had suddenly become.

“Okay…” Jeongyeon replayed both scenes in the camera screen, cracking her knuckles in a manner that might have been perceived as threatening to anyone else.

Mina wanted to watch the scene as well, but was afraid of moving an inch from her position.

“Alright. That’s good. Now let’s film the sixth scene, before we move to the outdoor ones.”

“Right.” Mina grabbed her script with shaky hands, blinking the sweat off her eyes. Her body was reacting in really… unexpected ways to all of this, and at first, she thought it was simply nervousness from being filmed.

It quickly became clear that something else was affecting her.

She stole a glance at Jeongyeon in front of her and wetted her lips. Watching her work so diligently, with a critical eye to how the shots should look and telling Mina what to do in a very commanding tone was—

Well. Hot.

Mina ducked her head a little, cheeks warm; she was so embarrassed at the thought, at the wave of sensation that she now realized was arousal.

“Are we good to go?” Jeongyeon finally looked at her, clearly in a hurry.

“Y-yes.” Mina stood up, hiding the script under the desk. “I just need to walk around staring at the ceiling, right?”

“Yes. Think about it as looking up at the night sky, filled with countless stars.” She moved her hands. “You’re amazed at it, and you’re amazed at your own imagination for being able to see stars in a simple roof. Then I’ll tell you to close your eyes and bring your fingers to your bottom lip… and slid them down your neck… until your you reach your collarbones.”
Watching Jeongyeon mimic the gesture was hardly fair. Mina just nodded, hoping that by doing it herself, she would get rid of the extremely attractive mental image.

“And… action.” Jeongyeon grabbed the camera, following Mina’s steps.

The ballerina walked slowly in tiny steps, tilting her head up, her gaze fixed on various spots of the ceiling as she tried to picture the universe above her head. She imagined galaxies spiraling at that very room, stars twinkling weakly, and parted her lips slightly in amazement. She blinked very few times, as if she was afraid of missing the spectacle if she closed her eyes even for a second.

“Very good…” Jeongyeon said lowly, sending a shiver through Mina’s spine. “Now close your eyes.”

She did, listening to the velvety voice right next to her.

“Bring your right hand to your lips…”

Mina’s touch was electrifying on her own skin.

“And calmly slide your hand down… to your chin… now your throat…”

Her heart was about to burst.

“…Stopping at your collarbones.”

Mina could feel how warm her skin was. She hoped that the dim illumination hid the redness of her features.

“Good job,” Jeongyeon approached her with the camera to zoom on her fingers and lingered there for a few seconds. “And… cut.” She stepped back, a smile gracing her face for the first time that day. “This was really good, Mina. I’ll stick with this one shot.”

Opening her eyes so quickly and trying to turn her head was a mistake; Mina felt dizzy and leaned on the chair next to her.

“Wow, are you okay?” Jeongyeon was by her side in seconds, holding her waist gently.

“Y-yeah. Yes. I think it’s just… a little cramped in here.” Mina balanced herself again, stuttering like an idiot. Lifting her chin up was another mistake, because Jeongyeon was right there, too close, and Mina became too self-aware. “I’m— I’m okay.”

“Let’s get out of here, it’s too hot.” Jeongyeon let her go hesitantly, then turned on the lights. They squinted their eyes at the sudden brightness, then Jeongyeon opened the studio’s door. “Fresh air!”

A rush of wind burst into the room and Mina breathed in deeply; now that the temperature was lower, she could feel how hot her whole body was.

She needed to get a grip.

“Do you want to take a break?” Jeongyeon was already putting the camera back in the case, her concern visible.

Mina was about to deny it, but there was no way she could go on in her current state. “That… sounds nice, actually.”

“Let’s go eat something, we’ve been locked in here for an hour.” Jeongyeon’s smile was sweet and
when she lifted the case all on her own without breaking a sweat, Mina swallowed. “Good thing I booked the studio for the week.”

Mina got out of the room first, her friend following. “So… this place is all yours for as long as you want to use it?” She tried to distract her very unwarranted thoughts with random questions.

“Well, just for the afternoon. I still don’t have permission to use it at night.”

“It’s like the dance studio, then.” Mina hummed. “We need to book it with weeks in advance, though. It’s really hard to have one room all for yourself.”

“How big are the dance studios?” Jeongyeon blinked. “I don’t think I’ve been there once.”

“There are a lot of different sizes,” They turned left of the hallway. “The one I usually use fits up to ten people.”

Jeongyeon whistled. “That’s a lot.” It dawned on her that she didn’t know much about Mina’s major, and this bothered her for some reason. “You’re a ballet major, right?”

“I’m a dance major, and in the ballet program, yes.” Mina smiled at that.

“It suits you,” Jeongyeon returned the smile, looking forward. “Can I confess something?”

“Sure.” Mina hated that a small part of her hoped for something that was definitely not happening.

“I think that I kept thinking of you when I wrote my script.” She let out a chuckle. “I wanted to depict a sensitivity through actions instead of words… I always thought that ballet was a perfect example of that.” She turned her soft gaze to Mina. “I remembered that recital last year and how graceful you were on the stage. It was kind of like watching a movie. I think that’s why it got stuck in my head, y’know?”

The sudden compliment and tenderness of her voice didn’t help Mina’s cheeks to return to their normal color. She blinked twice and looked down, a shy smile tucked on her lips. “Is that so?”

“Yeah, it is. Oh, and thanks again for agreeing to be my actress, Minari. You did a great job!”

Mina had always been surrounded by love and warmth, from friends and family alike, and still, it was surprising how much impact such words had on her. She really wanted to tell Jeongyeon how much she adored her, and not even necessarily in a romantic sense, either. Their friendship was something she treasured beyond measure. It was… special to her.

“This makes me really happy.” Mina declared.

“Hmm? What does?”

“You,” A little bravery didn’t hurt anyone. “You make me really happy.”

Jeongyeon stared at her as they arrived at the cafeteria with questioning eyes, but Mina just smiled and couldn’t hold back a joyful laugh. Jeongyeon felt her heart swell with affection—her chest filled with warmth she hadn’t felt in years.

Then Jeongyeon laughed with her, pulling her in for a side hug and a gentle bump of heads. The hand around Mina’s shoulder made its way up to her head, and she could feel Jeongyeon stroke her hair.

It was soft and sincere, and it made Mina feel so safe, and so taken care of.
For so very long, she had daydreamed of moments like this.

She had pined, yearned, ached—maybe, just for now, she could let herself believe that her dreams could become reality.

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“Hey, tell me a number.” Chaeyoung spoke suddenly as they walked towards their last class for the day.

“Sixty-nine.” Dahyun replied without missing a beat, receiving a slap on her arm in return. She laughed. “What? It’s a number!”

“Be serious.”

“Fine, four-twent—”

“Forget it.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes and walked faster. Dahyun caught up to her with a stupid grin.

“Okay, okay. Ninety-six.”

“That’s just sixty-nine backwards!” Chaeyoung’s arm was ready to slap her roommate again.

“No, I’m serious, I swear.”

“Ugh, okay.” She lowered her arm, then wrote it down on her notebook, without explaining anything further. Dahyun knew better than to ask – she was probably working on something artistic again.

Finally arriving at their class, Dahyun took her seat, with Chaeyoung next to her still concentrated on her notes. Dahyun yawned automatically and stretched, tiredness washing over her. It was like the past few days were just now catching up to her and she felt like taking a three-day nap. Momo’s weird behavior was still on her mind, too.

She wondered how Sana was feeling. Maybe she should give her a call later.

“Hey.” A girl sat down next to Dahyun, poking her arm. She blinked quickly, recovering from her yawn. She frowned a bit; she’d never seen the girl before in her life. Was she even in her class?

“Yes?”

“Kim Dahyun, right?”

“Uh… last time I checked, yeah.”

The girl’s smile widened, and she leaned forward. “Say, how did you get so lucky?”
Dahyun stared at the girl with dull eyes for a good five seconds, then shook her head slightly.
“Excuse me?”

“Come on, you know what I’m talking about.” Her tone was playful, and it could’ve been a friendly conversation if Dahyun had any idea what this random stranger was going on about. “I just wanted some advice. Can you give me some tips later?”

“…Um.”

“I promise I won’t tell anyone. Just between us.” She winked.

“Yeah…” Dahyun smiled awkwardly, leaning further. “I’m sorry, I really have no clue what we’re talking about right now. Do I know you?”

The girl’s mischievous aura was replaced by confusion. “Why are you hiding this? It’s not like it’s a secret.”

“Hiding what?” Dahyun was starting to become borderline desperate; she just wanted this person to explain what the hell was going on. “Please, help me out friend, I’m bad at puzzles.”

“Your thing with Minatozaki?”

Dahyun froze at Sana’s name. The way the girl said that was really shady, like something bad that people shouldn’t know about, but everyone did. Dahyun’s face might have given away whatever it is that this girl was looking for, because she smirked again. “So, you do know what I’m talking about.”

It was like time stopped for a fraction of a second, but the professor’s voice brought her back to reality.

“In your seats, all of you, class is starting.”

The girl clicked her tongue and got up from the chair. “I’ll catch up with you later. Don’t forget about those tips, I still want to know!” And with that, she left the room. Dahyun followed her with her eyes and managed to see that two other girls were waiting for her outside, as if expecting her to return with some kind of valuable information. When she didn’t, the girls sighed, annoyed, and finally left.

Everything just got even more confusing.

Dahyun had a really bad feeling about all of this.

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“And where were you when the thunder struck the Tomorrow Tree, shattering it in pieces? Thousands, even millions of pieces were scattered around the fields, in every dimension, for everyone to see. Now it’s a mess, and we, the Collectors, will have to dive into it head-first to clean it up!” Nayeon’s voice was boisterous as she said her line with confidence, moving her arms
“Why should we?” Momo read the script, sitting down with her back to the wall. “It wasn’t our fault. Humans should be held accountable for their actions for once. I say let them gather the pieces.”

“Humans are weak-minded!” Nayeon turned around and put both hands on her hips, frustrated. “None of the humans that ever came here stayed for long. You know why? Because they couldn’t handle the truth of the world. The fact that time is not a straight arrow, but twists and turns divided into thin lines… it drove them crazy.”

“Insane.”

“Huh?” Nayeon broke character, facing Momo again.

“The line is ‘it drove them insane’.”

“Fuck,” She breathed, then her expression changed again. “The fact that time is not a straight arrow, but twists and turns divided into thin lines… it drove them insane.”

Momo nodded and turned the script page. “But how will humans grow, if time is a loop, and they’re given everything on a silver platter? Isn’t the job of Collectors to make sure disasters don’t occur?”

“Your point being?”

“That disasters will only stop occurring when humans learn from past mistakes. So I repeat: Let them gather the pieces of the Tomorrow Tree.” Momo then put the script away. “And, scene.”

Nayeon’s whole posture relaxed and she made her way over to her friend, sliding down the wall and sitting next to Momo on the floor. “How was it?”

“Hmm, you sounded good to me.” She smiled lazily. “But then again, you always do.”

“Shut up,” Nayeon pushed her away, unable to contain a grin of her own. Momo fell down dramatically, but the actress just rolled her eyes. “I think I got all the lines for this part.”

“How do you even do it?” Momo looked at the pile of scripts next to Nayeon’s leg, still lying down. “This whole story is confusing as hell and this is only the third act. I already forgot half of what I said.”

“Your brain gets used to it,” Nayeon grabbed the script for her performance, rereading it. With a pen, she circled important key words to help her. “It’s like the dances you choreograph. Muscle memory, right?”

“Hm.” Momo nodded slightly, then glanced over the various notes on Nayeon’s scripts; the girl was diligent and organized. No wonder she was cast as the lead in virtually every production the school put on. Nayeon worked hard for it and deserved the recognition.

They were alone backstage, right behind the fallen curtains. Nayeon said that she liked to practice on-stage – it just helped with setting up the scene; where she should stand, how wide her movements were going to be—the details.

Momo enjoyed the atmosphere of an empty backstage, it gave her the sense of freedom that Nayeon probably felt every time she performed in front of hundreds of people. The lights were dim
since the place wasn’t being used, making the stage look cozy despite its size.

“How about me?” Momo asked suddenly.

“You?”

“How did I do?” She sat back up, letting her head fall slightly towards Nayeon, facing her.

Nayeon let out a snort. “Could use some practice.”

“Well, at least my mom thinks I’m special.”

“You’re ridiculous.” Nayeon felt giddy in her stomach with how silly Momo was being right now. Despite everything, she didn’t regret letting her help; it did make the whole process a lot easier since now she was in a better state of mind. Being with Momo was like being enveloped by a warm blanket, if only for a moment. Nayeon just needed to be careful to not let herself doze off against it.

She was the fire that would burn the fabric with her destructive nature, eventually.

“You love it.” Momo retorted, looking down with a sheepish smile.

Nayeon flickered her eyes towards her lips for a second, then knocked her head back against the wall softly.

I do.

The silence was growing heavier by the second and she didn’t want to think about it. “I should go talk to Mr. Kwon.”

Momo watched as Nayeon turned around to gather her scripts and tried to put them all neatly inside her bag. It dawned on her how familiar Nayeon’s body movements and gestures were – if she was a silhouette amongst thousands of others, Momo would immediately recognize her. Her hair, her height, the way her right shoulder was a tad lower than her left when she stood still; all of these things fit so perfectly together. Nayeon’s own existence was a performance in itself, and Momo never got tired of watching it. Seeing Nayeon getting ready to get up and leave made Momo want to hold her and never let go.

Perhaps it was too dramatic.

Perhaps it was that untamed anger still inside of her.

Some selfish, overprotective part of Momo didn’t want to let anything else happen to Nayeon. The girl didn’t remember kissing her ex-girlfriend, but that didn’t mean that it hadn’t happened; they do say that alcohol just makes people more honest.

Deep down, Nayeon still had lingering feelings for Jeongyeon, and even if it broke Momo’s heart, she just wanted Nayeon to be happy – she hated that she couldn’t do anything to make this come true.

And the only person who could have helped had lied to her.

And Momo was lying too.

Everything was wrong. She was so tired of hiding things.

“We should run away.” It was sudden, but honest. She just wanted to get away of everything.
Nayeon stopped and turned back to her slowly. “What?”

“Run away. Just leave this place. You and me, throw ourselves into the unknown.” The corner of Momo’s lips turned up. “Perform to people on the road, take baths in the lake. Bring a bunch of instant ramen and some water.”

Nayeon’s eyes softened and she turned fully towards Momo, shoulder against the wall. “Yeah? With what car?”

“We can sell our rare anime figures and buy a shitty car.”

“No, not my Sailor Saturn.” Nayeon whined. Momo laughed.

“Sacrifices are needed in the name of freedom, Nabongs.”

“Yeah… sometimes, they are.” She lowered her gaze. They were both muttering now, and it took Nayeon way too long to realize that Momo was mirroring her pose, far too close to her face. She didn’t have the strength to pull back, however, so she just stood there basking in the sensation.

“Would you come?” Momo reached out and tucked a strand of loose hair behind Nayeon’s ear, getting closer. Nayeon’s gaze was intense and she shivered at the touch.

There was something so hypnotizing about Hirai Momo, something too strong to put into words. She was completely and utterly irresistible, and it was incredibly taxing to keep denying her over and over again.

Nayeon’s eyes fluttered shut slowly and she felt herself leaning in as Momo’s fingers brushed behind her ear. She wanted to be so close to her, to allow herself to devote her whole body and soul to this girl, to be selfish for once and take what she wanted.

Indulging to this fantasy, playing pretend with an open heart, saying that there was no one else in the world she would rather have by her side right now than Momo—

That would be half a lie.

Another face flashed inside Nayeon’s mind and her heart ached.

Nayeon turned her face before she could taste the forbidden fruit, and she felt Momo’s lips grazing her cheek softly.

She did not deserve that kiss.

“Would you really leave everything behind?” Nayeon asked in a whisper, lips trembling. “Everyone?”

Momo’s lips were still sliding against her cheek gently, waiting for Nayeon to pull back – but she wasn’t. This entire moment was so delicate that she was afraid of breaking it with the wrong answer.

And Momo thought that she knew the answer, too. She was about to reply against her skin, when she froze.

Now that she was forced to truly think about it, there was one person that Momo absolutely could never leave behind. The weight of the realization hit her hard, and she finally pulled back, opening her eyes.
Nayeon looked at her, and Momo stared back. She seemed shocked.

“Momo?”

“I—” She sighed, shaking her head. “Never mind. I was just teasing.”

Nayeon blinked, then smiled sadly. “It’s okay.” With a final nod, she finally got up, taking her bag with her. “I need to go. Thank you for helping me.”

“Always.” Momo tried to smile back, but she was still processing her thoughts. Nayeon bit her lip and waved her goodbye, leaving the stage.

Momo looked at the dim lights in the ceiling with parted lips.

Suddenly everything was really confusing.

Chapter End Notes

Hey so I made a playlist for your listening pleasure, feel free to listen!

https://open.spotify.com/user/niigoki/playlist/1eSr3u8I8I5ksuSKlOhXui
(VII.) Realizations

Chapter Notes

Hello, it is I. Enjoy this chapter as well!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Movie night at the dorms was sacred. It was an unofficial weekly event that usually happened Friday after all the classes for the day were over, so all the students could attend. The head of the Film Department had come up with this idea years ago, and it was now tradition on the college grounds. The logistics weren’t great, however; the communal TV room wasn’t as big as it should be, and the room’s single sofa only fit up to seven people. If you got there late, you’d have to pile up on the floor.

As a result, there weren’t many people who actually attended movie night, so the place had become a cozy, welcoming sanctuary to those who were seeking alone time to sort things out and calm down from the week’s turmoil. No one interacted with each other on movie night, either; people waddled into the place, found somewhere to sit, and quietly watched whatever was airing with no complaints whatsoever.

It was dark, warm, and solitary—and strangely comforting.

It was 1:00 am when Sana silently walked into the TV room wearing her pajamas, a blanket draped over her shoulders. She made her way across the room and walked behind the sofa, deciding to sit on the table against the wall. The table was sturdy and old, so people really tended to use it more as a bench. It also happened to be taller than the sofa, so she had a better view of the TV.

Taking her seat, she moved back until she felt the wall against her. She adjusted her position and crossed her legs, sighing comfortably. No one batted an eye at her—Sana felt extremely relieved at the lack of scrutiny. The movie was one that Jeongyeon had recommended them already, and it wouldn’t be surprising if whoever had put it on had downloaded it from her pen-drive.

Sana found that she was particularly enjoying herself—the colors and soundtrack of the scene were very soothing. She covered her legs with the blanket, a small smile on her lips, her worries slipping away from her shoulders slowly.

After a good twenty minutes, Sana saw someone walking in from the corner of her eye. She didn’t pay any mind to it, eyes still glued to the screen, until she felt the weight of a person next to her. “Can I join you?” The lilt of that voice made her heart jump. She turned her face and Dahyun was close, smiling, and with a swollen face and messy hair, like she’d just woken up.

“Of—” Sana swallowed. “Of course.”

She turned her attention back to the movie as Dahyun soundlessly sat herself down. Sana’s newly awakened anxiety told her to leave the room, but she couldn’t bring herself to be this cruel to someone who just wanted her company. She kept stealing looks at the girl next to her—thankfully, Dahyun wasn’t paying attention. Her eyes were glazed over from the lack of sleep, and Sana worried a little bit.
“My angel,” Dahyun muttered suddenly and Sana turned to her. That’s when she realized that Dahyun was just mouthing the sentence from the scene playing. She softened her gaze.

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“Flung out of space.” Sana completed.

They both exchanged a look and smiled, sleepily, but happy.

“Jeongyeon wouldn’t stop bugging me about this movie,” Dahyun explained. “I’m glad she did. It’s really good.”

“She said the same thing to me,” Sana chuckled lightly. “She was obsessed with it.”

“Can’t blame her. I think I watched it four times already.”

Sana hummed, staring back at the screen. “I love this dialogue.” There was something more to this statement, hidden deep down.

Dahyun nodded. “It’s so gay and poetic. It’s like Chaeng wrote it.”

They laughed quietly at that. Sana adjusted her blanket. “If Chaengie wrote it, then Jeongyeon filmed it.”

“Nayeon took the main role,” Dahyun joined the silly game of appointing roles to their friends for this movie. “Jihyo-ah wrote the score.”

“Tzuyu was the director of photography.”

“Oh, that’s so her!”

They kept quiet after that, with shy smiles and soft demeanors. The two protagonists on the screen were acting out a very passionate and romantic scene and Sana’s heart swelled with emotion. For a moment, she pictured herself being enveloped in such a fulfilling love, and it felt like a dream.

She’d had sex with countless people before, but none of them made her feel anything besides physical pleasure. Millions of times Sana caught herself wondering how good it must feel, to be able to kiss and touch someone you’re actually in love with – she wished she could experience that.

“If only I wasn’t such a shallow, empty person.”

“And I’m the one who cleans the set.” Dahyun joked after a while. Sana turned back to her, staring with a frown; it felt like Dahyun was putting herself down because she still hadn’t decided on her major—she couldn’t, wouldn’t allow that.

“Don’t say things like that,” Sana spread her legs a little bit until their thighs touched. “You’re so important. No one would have the energy to even start without you.”

“What do you mean?” Dahyun faced Sana, still smiling, but confused.

Dahyun’s eyes were glowing from brightness of the TV screen, but it seemed as if the light was bursting from her features. Sana blinked slowly, absorbing how beautiful Dahyun was, inside and out. And perhaps it was the romantic song playing in the background that created a mood, but Sana reached out to brush a strand of hair out of her face.

“You’re so cute, Dahyunnie.”

She didn’t know how to tell this girl that she was the light.
Dahyun blushed at the sudden affectionate gesture and Sana felt her cheek heating under her fingertips. She moved her hand to cup Dahyun’s face gently, smiling with hooded eyes, a wave of emotion washing over her whole body. If it was anyone else, if it was someone she didn’t care about, someone she didn’t ache for—

If Dahyun was a stranger, Sana would have kissed her.

But Dahyun was someone who deserved the entire world at her feet, and Sana wasn’t worthy.

So, she pinched her cheeks suddenly, breaking the delicate mood. Dahyun let out a low yelp, then rubbed her face softly, with a pout. Sana petted her head, then turned to the TV again.

The silence was awkward and Dahyun blinked multiple times, waiting for something else to happen. She didn’t even know what she was expecting, but it felt like Sana wanted to say one more thing, touch her one more time—

She wanted that, too.

The realization hit her like a truck.

Dahyun looked down, shifted closer, and gently took Sana’s hand in hers, intertwining their fingers. Sana almost jumped out of reach, widening her eyes, but Dahyun just stared back, almost defiantly. There was a message in her glare – an unspoken challenge filled with all of her courage. Her fingers were loose around Sana’s, making it easy for her to pull back at any second.

‘If you don’t want this, you’re free to let go.’

That’s what Dahyun was trying to tell her.

Sana had a simple choice at that moment. It would make everything she’d been working towards finally bear fruit; a quick movement of her hand and she would, without doubt, hurt Dahyun enough for her to never try anything again.

It’s better this way, Dahyunnie.

Sana tugged her hand.

For the both of us.

Dahyun’s expression fell.

It’s...

She bit her lip and nodded almost imperceptibly, starting to remove her hand.

It’s better...

Then Sana’s grip on her fingers tightened absurdly, pulling Dahyun towards her.

…I can’t do this.

Dahyun fell onto the other girl’s chest, startled, and felt Sana’s arms enveloping her. The position was awkward, so she shifted a little until she could finally hug her back, her head on the crook of Sana’s neck, where she belonged. Sana’s shoulders were shaking, her face buried in Dahyun’s
shoulder, and she knew she was crying.

“Sana—”

“I don’t want this.”

“Huh?”

She just shook her head, sobbing quietly, and Dahyun saw some people in front of them looking over their shoulders with a frown. They were bothering them, and Dahyun touched Sana’s hair gently. “Hey, let’s go someplace else. Come on.”

Somehow, she managed to maneuver the girl off of the table and away from the room, walking into the hallway. They didn’t get too far before Sana collapsed on the floor with Dahyun still clinging to her; at least now they had some privacy. Dahyun let her cry on her shoulder, stroking her head gently and whispering comforting words.

“I don’t want to do this.” Sana sobbed again.

“Do what?” Dahyun’s tone was gentle and Sana felt herself melting at how good this girl was.

“Hurt you. I don’t want to hurt you. You’re the only person I don’t ever want to hurt in my entire life, Dahyun.” She sounded so vulnerable. Dahyun had no idea what was going through Sana’s head to make her say something like that.

“Sana. Look at me,” She pulled back a little, cupping the girl’s wet cheeks. “You could never hurt me. Why are you saying that?”

“But I already did, once.” She remembered Jihyo telling her about Dahyun witnessing her kissing someone else and let out a hiccup. “At the party. I know I hurt you then.”

“Oh,” Dahyun blinked, wiping away the girl’s tears. “That was… I thought you were avoiding me. I just thought… I’d done something wrong. But then we talked? And I felt like things were back to normal.”

Sana shook her head. “They weren’t. I—” It was terrifying for her, what she was about to admit. “I did that on purpose. I hurt you on purpose. I’m not okay, Dahyun. There’s something w-wrong with me, and I’m scared of all of this.”

“What? What’s wrong?”

“These… Mina said they were a-anxiety attacks? I don’t… I don’t even know how this works, I never had these things before, but now it’s a constant pain in my life and I hate it, and I just— I just want them to stop.” Sana’s breathing hitched. “I want… I want to be able to walk around campus again without feeling like the whole world is looking at me, t-talking about me behind my back, it’s suffocating…!”

“Wow, okay, breathe.” Dahyun tucked the girl’s hair behind her ears, her chest heavy with worry. Sana was clearly panicking right in front of her and she had never dealt with this before. “I’m here for you. Just… try to calm down, first. Breathe deeply. Please?”

Sana did as she was told, clinging to Dahyun for dear life, and trying to clear her mind from all the terrible thoughts crashing down on her at the same time. She remembered Mina’s voice and how gently she’d talked to her, and it helped a little. They stood there for a long time, until Sana finally felt calm enough to breathe properly.
“Are you… feeling better?” Dahyun sounded really uncertain, but did her best to be supportive.

“Y-yeah,” Sana sighed, straightening her back on the wall. “…I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I just… want you to be okay.”

“…Me too.” Sana felt exhausted. She sighed again, deeply, looking at the floor. “I need… time.” The words coming out of her mouth were selfish, but Sana was feeling so sad that she didn’t want to be alone. She lifted her head, staring at Dahyun with red eyes. “Can you… can you give me time?”

“O-of course.” Dahyun was still holding her hand, and it felt warm. “All the time in the world.” Then she stopped. “Uh… for what, exactly?”

Sana smiled tiredly – even in the middle of a crisis, she managed to be cute. “For myself. For me to learn how to… cope with this new stuff going on. I need to figure out this new normal.” A small tear fell slowly. “I need time for me to… learn how to love myself again.”

It was an incredibly heavy thing, what Sana was saying, because Dahyun had never once considered that she didn’t love every part of herself. She was always so bright, and cheerful, and supportive of everyone else—Dahyun thought that this included Sana herself. Even when she did show them her true emotions, self-contempt was never one of them.

It hit her that Sana wasn’t the sun; she was the moon – without help, without others, she couldn’t possibly shine. It was something she just could not do on her own. Dahyun had felt this way, too, and she felt a pang of guilt for expecting that of Sana, for not seeing it before. Dahyun had been putting her on a pedestal for much too long—only at that moment, in that dark hallway, Sana became someone within reach.

With watery eyes, Dahyun leaned forward, paused, and then placed a kiss on her corner of Sana’s mouth. “I told you, didn’t I? I’ll wait for it to get better,” She whispered against her skin, one hand tracing her bandaged wrist. “I’d wait forever.”

It sounded like a confession.

It felt freeing.

Sana blushed a little, touching foreheads with Dahyun, their fingers interlocked. “…Okay.” She still felt like a monster for dragging Dahyun down with her, but for now, she didn’t want to think; just feel. “Okay.”

Hopefully, this could be their beginning.

--

Jeongyeon was in an odd position inside her bathroom at two in the morning.

She was sitting on the toilet with the seat down, creating a makeshift chair of sorts. Her camera
was propped up on a leg as she removed the memory cards and inserted them on an adapter attached to her laptop, which was precariously hanging from the sink. Her hair was messy from scratching her head so much. She was still wearing her jeans and sweatshirt, and one of her feet was sockless while the other had a sock just dangling off.

All in all, Jeongyeon looked like a typical college student trying to save her final grade.

Her session had ended just a few minutes ago, and she had apologized again and again to Mina for how late in the night they had to keep filming. Mina, bless her heart, didn’t seem bothered by it at all, and this lifted a bit of the weight from Jeongyeon’s shoulders. Still, filming in a hurry sucked so much. She couldn’t keep retaking scenes as a backup plan; she had to trust what her eyes saw at that moment, and pray for her one-shots to be fairly decent.

Thankfully, Mina was perfect from start to finish.

Jeongyeon had another small concern at the moment—it felt like Momo was avoiding her. She was so busy with her schedule, however, that she didn’t have the luxury to dwell on this thought. Momo was already asleep by the time Jeongyeon got to the room—they hadn’t talked in two days, she noticed. Jeongyeon, being the considerate roommate that she is, locked herself in the bathroom to work on the files; she didn’t want to wake Momo up with unnecessary sounds and bright screens.

Finally putting the heavy equipment on the floor, Jeongyeon grabbed her laptop before it fell and destroyed every chance she had of passing the semester. Now she only had to wait until the material was safely stored on her computer so she could delete the files from the card and check how the shots had come out.

It took about ten minutes for all the shots to be transferred. Jeongyeon almost fell asleep in the process, but the small beep announcing that the transfer was complete woke her up. She allocated the files to a safe folder and finally clicked on each one to check.

The moment the first shot was visible on a big screen instead of her small camera screen, Jeongyeon held her breath. The quality was good, the camera movements were fluid, and the illumination and colors could be worked on as she edited, but overall, everything looked perfect.

Then Mina’s face came into view.

Jeongyeon blinked, rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and watched Mina’s expressions changing from distant to hopeless. It was so subtle that it rendered her speechless. The hairs on her neck stood up as she clicked on the next file. It was another close up of Mina, her eyes the focus of this shot, moving down to her nose, then her parted lips.

Jeongyeon’s heart was beating extremely fast all of a sudden.

There was no reason for her to feel as astonished as she was—she was there, she’d seen this live, she’d filmed this—and yet, it felt like a completely different experience. Watching the shots come out just as she imagined them, capturing the environment and creating a tender contrast with Mina’s gorgeous features—

Gorgeous?

Mina was absolutely **stunning**.

Jeongyeon couldn’t believe that she’d been so caught up with the deadline that she’d missed **this**. She knew that her friend was beautiful, but this was unreal, and she was not prepared for the way it made her feel.
She swallowed and tried to concentrate, checking the other files. Again and again, Mina’s simple, yet sophisticated demeanor effortlessly overwhelmed her. Jeongyeon couldn’t even pay attention to the video’s other details; Mina was absolutely flooding her senses—before she knew it, she could feel her face burning up. Jeongyeon slapped her cheeks slightly, telling herself to get a grip. This was ridiculous.

The last indoor scene was next and Jeongyeon wasn’t sure she was ready to see it. It dawned on her that she couldn’t even remember the shot clearly, but she knew it’d been good, because that was the only take of that scene that they’d filmed. She sighed, pressing play.

“Very good…” Her own voice echoed lowly in the video. “Now close your eyes. Bring your right hand to your lips… And calmly slide your hand down… to your chin…. now your throat… stopping at your collarbones.”

Jeongyeon nearly shut the laptop right then and there. She paused the video and looked away, putting the computer on the floor carefully, then burying her red face in her hands. Her heart was threatening to burst, and she felt extremely embarrassed.

That was so good.

Mina was so good.

She wasn’t just a beautiful face; everything about her was attractive in that scene. She had a natural alluring charm without even trying, the delicacy of her movements created an intricate contrast with the meaning of the scene and it just showed perfectly. It was supposed to be fragile, yes, but Mina also made it… hot.

She was kind of appalled at the thought that crossed her mind.

Myoui Mina was sexy.

“I need a shower,” she mumbled to herself, getting up.

Momo waking up was the least of worries right now.

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“Please be still for one more second!” Tzuyu yelled across the field, camera in hands, crouched like a professional who knew her angles.

“I’ve been still for an entire minute!” Chaeyoung’s position was terribly painful. She’d been holding a metal plate to reflect the sunlight on the mannequin above her as her knees touched the ground, and her shoulders were starting to tremble with the weight. The object wasn’t exactly heavy, but after a minute trying to keep it up, it was starting to hurt.

When she agreed to help Tzuyu with her project, she knew what she was getting into. The girl was
meticulous and a terrible perfectionist – Chaeyoung could relate – so she knew that they wouldn’t leave that place until sunset, when the illumination was finally too dim for Tzuyu’s taste.

“And… wait… okay!” Tzuyu finished her shot, getting up and immediately checking the file on the camera. “You can rest now.”

Chaeyoung let the metal plate fall unceremoniously with a loud bang. “Finally.”

“Now let’s put the mannequin inside the dumpster,” Tzuyu hopped on her direction excitedly, and it was so cute that Chaeyoung couldn’t possibly be mad at her. “Grab the plate again, it’s important.”

“Aren’t you supposed to use a reflector for this? Just asking.” Chaeyoung groaned as she picked the object from the floor, dragging it along.

“It’s all part of the project, Chaeng.” Tzuyu replied without looking at her. “We need to use the environment for our advantage, without the help of professional equipment. Well, besides the camera.”

“Oh. In that case, that was pretty smart,” Chaeyoung looked down at the metal plate, then back at her roommate. “You said your concept was ‘defying beauty standards’?”

“Yes,” Tzuyu lifted the mannequin, putting it carefully inside the smelly dumpster. She scrunched her nose at the smell, but forced herself to endure it until she found the perfect position for her model. “By throwing away the mannequin, I’m making a statement.”

“I can see where you’re going with this,” Chaeyoung watched as the girl struggled. She would offer to help, but she couldn’t reach the inside of the dumpster even on her tiptoes. “But isn’t your professor going to flip her shit when she sees this? You’re practicing for fashion magazines, right? Shouldn’t you be doing ‘Summer looks!’ or… ‘Winter garden’, or ‘Autumn smells!’”

Tzuyu laughed at each exaggerated expression, finally firming the mannequin where she wanted. “I suppose that’s what most of the class will be doing,” She stepped back with a grunt, hands on her hips and looking proud. “And that’s exactly why I decided to go with this instead.”

Chaeyoung blinked. Tzuyu turned to her with a devious smile. “I hate doing what’s expected of me.”

It was rare moments like these that made Chaeyoung remember just how deeply she had fallen. Tzuyu was a girl with many sides to her, and she just showed them to very specific people – In that case, Son Chaeyoung. It made her feel special, and for an artist, this was pure, raw fuel.

*If only humans could taste the Ambrosia, they would know how divine it felt.*

Chaeyoung sighed, ruffling her hair.

*But they’re only humans, and for them, the divine will always be denied.*

“Metal plate!” Tzuyu ordered, already kneeling.

“Yes, ma’am.” Chaeyoung returned to her duty, smiling softly despite everything.

Minutes passed and Chaeyoung moved from side to side by Tzuyu’s demand; the girl wanted to capture the best lightning possible, and that required a lot of different angles, both for her and her assistant. After about an hour, a lot of moving around in a dumpster, and frustrated frowns from the
photographer, Tzuyu finally seemed satisfied with the result.

“I think we’re done,” She said walking up to Chaeyoung, then stopped, fidgeting with the camera. “Wait. Let me check it one more time.”

Chaeyoung just giggled and sat on the floor, looking up at her roommate fondly through the brightness. Tzuyu looked so beautiful when she was focused and serious like that – not that she didn’t look beautiful all the time. Chaeyoung felt a bit lightheaded at the thought, her heart picking up speed.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Tzuyu’s voice suddenly cut through her thoughts and Chaeyoung jumped.

“Huh? Like what?”

“Like I’m the sun,” Tzuyu smiled with a laugh. “Your eyes are all squinty.”

Chaeyoung swallowed, getting up. “Oh, nothing. I was just… waiting for you to get ready to leave.”

“Hmm.” Tzuyu blinked. “If you say so. I think we’re free to go.”

With a nod, Chaeyoung put the metal plate back where she found it, leaning against the dumpster. She felt a bit dirty and wanted to wash her hands as fast as possible.

Both girls walked side by side, Tzuyu holding her camera for dear life, like she always did; it was quite endearing the way she thought she would lose it if she let it go for a second. Chaeyoung’s brain was busy with thoughts for her poem, which was almost done – she just needed to write it now. The overall idea was there, and she was happy with the result.

“Say,” Tzuyu spoke up after a while. “Is everything okay?”

“H-huh? What do you mean?” Chaeyoung cursed herself for stuttering; she was just surprised at the sudden question.

“I don’t know, it feels like there’s something wrong with us.” Tzuyu shrugged. “Dahyun was in a mood until a few days ago, and I didn’t even see Sana or the others this week.”

“Oh,” Chaeyoung felt relieved that she wasn’t talking about her in particular, but worried at the same time; she didn’t want Tzuyu to stress out about unnecessary drama. “Well, you were sick until recently… you didn’t leave the room for a few days.”

“I guess. I don’t know, it feels weird. Did you talk to anyone?”

Chaeyoung immediately thought about Momo and how on edge she was yesterday, and how she ran off the moment she spotted Nayeon; there was definitely something there. Also, Sana’s feelings for Dahyun, which Chaeyoung was aware of, but that was another complicated matter altogether. Jihyo had looked tired as well. Jeongyeon, Mina and Nayeon were a mystery to her.

“Only at lunch,” Chaeyoung cleared her throat, trying to sound convincing. “But they seemed okay. You’re probably just feeling like this because you haven’t seen anyone in a while.”

“Hmm… that’s probably it.” Tzuyu eyed her for a bit, then looked forward again. “We should organize a meeting. I miss all nine of us hanging out together.”
“That sounds nice.” Chaeyoung smiled, sincerely. She did miss her older friends, and maybe with all of them together, they could get over whatever was going on, so Tzuyu could stop worrying. “I’ll talk to Jihyo about it.”

“I can talk to her.”

“It’s fine,” Chaeyoung waved her hand in dismissal. “We meet sometimes for lunch, I’ll bring it up.”

“Well… alright.” Tzuyu blinked, and then they fell into silence once again. She didn’t mention it, but Chaeyoung was acting strangely as well – she could tell, they’ve been together for a long time. The tiny artist had a terrible habit that she thought she could hide from everyone, but Tzuyu was aware of all of her quirks.

Whenever something was wrong, Chaeyoung tried to hide it from her. Honestly, it felt like Tzuyu was being babied.

She absolutely hated it. She wished Chaeyoung, of all people, was honest with her.

Maybe she should talk to Jihyo herself.

--

“This story is getting more confusing by the second,” Jihyo frowned as she read Nayeon’s script again. “That’s way too many lines in one scene.”

“Yes, I know, that’s why I need all the help I can get.” Nayeon seemed stressed; her hair was messy, she was wearing the first thing she managed to get from her closet – a simple pink dress and flip flops – and the bags under her eyes were apparent. “So, please, let’s go over that scene again.”

“I can do it one more time, but I need to go after that.” Jihyo was sitting at the edge of the stage, swinging her legs back and forth. The two girls were rehearsing Nayeon’s lines at the theater; it was a Saturday and the place technically should be locked up, but Nayeon had certain privileges – like owning the key to the place. Sometimes being a prodigy paid off.

“What? Where are you going?”

“I need to help the orchestra move the instruments to the van,” Jihyo shot her a sorry look. “They have a competition tomorrow, and they need all the help they can get.”

“But… I need a partner.” Nayeon’s pout was really cute, and usually Jihyo wouldn’t be able to deny her, but this time her sense of responsibility spoke louder.

“I know. Don’t worry, I wouldn’t leave you alone like that,” She smiled, getting up. “That’s why I called someone over to help you once I’m gone.”

“…What?” Nayeon blinked. “Who did you call?”
“Momo. She should be here soon.”

Nayeon nearly let the script fall, mouth hanging open. “You did what?”

Jihyo was confused now. “Well, you mentioned she helped you yesterday, so I thought it would be okay?” Suddenly she put some pieces together, then widened her eyes. “It’s her.”

“What—” Nayeon froze, regret immediately finding its way to her core. She remembered now why she was constantly putting up a front, playing a character, lying through her teeth; because the moment she let even a fraction of her walls down, Jihyo saw right through her, and figured everything out.

“Whatever is going on, it has something to do with Momo. Doesn’t it?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” And still, she kept lying.

“Nayeon. Doesn’t it?” Jihyo pressed her, begging for the girl to trust her again, be honest with her for once. “If I’m wrong, then please tell me. I just want to figure out what mess you put yourself into.”

“Stop it! Okay? It has nothing to do with Momo.” Nayeon guarded herself, hands folded over her chest, slightly turned to the side; she didn’t want to face Jihyo, because it hurt too much to see her best friend worrying over her. It felt like everything she did, everywhere she went, she just took and took, her selfishness a weight that got heavier by the minute. “I was just surprised you called her. That’s all.”

“Nayeon—”

“That’s all.”

The silence was deafening as both girls stared at each other, each waiting for the other to break the eye contact first. Jihyo, knowing very well that it was a lost battle, sighed, and turned around. “Fine. I’m sorry I assumed.”

Nayeon nodded, looking down, slowly lowering her arms. “It’s okay. I’m sorry I yelled.”

Jihyo sat back down on the edge of the stage. “Let’s continue the play, then.”

Nayeon knew she was talking about the musical, but it just felt like a direct hit – a reminder that her lies were catching up to her, and it was a matter of time until pretense was no longer an option.

She wondered how long this play would last.

Saying that Momo was ecstatic to go and meet Nayeon again was not a lie, but not entirely true, either. If it’d been two days ago, she would be leaving her room with a smile on her face and a giddy feeling on her stomach, happy for the chance to be together – however that was not the case.
She didn’t know which of the hundreds of weird things that had happened between them lately was the one to blame, but something had changed.

Perhaps it was Nayeon and Jeongyeon’s kiss at the party.

Perhaps it was the kiss she exchanged with Mina.

Perhaps it was almost kissing Nayeon the day before.

Everything regarding the four of them had been messy and surrounded by too many walls, and Momo couldn’t even think about it – it made her blood boil. She felt the need to be with Nayeon, but at the same time, something else bugged her.

Where the hell was Mina, anyway? They hadn’t talked in ages.

Momo grabbed her cellphone as she walked downstairs, towards the theater. She dialed her best friend’s phone and waited. It took Mina a long time, but she eventually answered.

“Hello?” Mina sounded breathless and Momo’s stomach dropped suddenly.

“Are you okay?”

“Oh, Momo-yah. Yes, I’m alright!” Despite her ragged breathing, she sounded absurdly cheerful.

“I was just running around the field.”

“Jogging?” Momo calmed down at this information, and smiled, finally able to enjoy the girl’s voice. She really did miss her.

“Sort of.” She could hear the grin on her voice and wondered what happened to make her this happy. “It’s a— oh, wait a minute.” Mina distanced herself from the phone and talked with someone in the background, then returned. “I was just informed I shouldn’t tell you about it. It’s a secret project, but I think you’ll like it once we’re done.”

“You can’t do this to me, you know how curious I get, Minari,” Momo whined with a pout and Mina laughed joyfully. Whatever was going on, Momo was glad that it made her laugh this much. She felt warm all over.

“I swear it’ll be worth it. Be patient for me.”

“Fine… just for you.” Momo rolled her eyes, playfully. “And who’s ‘we’?”

“Oh,” Mina froze for a second, debating if she should tell her or keep it a secret too. Things weren’t exactly sailing smoothly with them, so she felt like the right thing to do was admit it. Lying would just cause more trouble. “It’s… Jeongyeon and I.”

Momo stopped on her tracks, the warmth vanishing. That small, steady anger resurfaced, and she dug her nails on her palm. “You’re with Jeongyeon?”

“Yeah. I know, I… shouldn’t be.”

“No, I mean—” Momo knew that what she was about to say didn’t match her feelings. “It’s… your choice, in the end.” She swallowed hard, walking again. “I just don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I know.” Mina’s voice became timid, but filled with tenderness. “I’m… I’m okay. I think that things are back to normal.”
“What does that even mean?” She hated being so transparent, but Momo has never been the most tactile person around.

“That nothing has been awkward between us,” There was something in Mina’s voice, and it sounded awfully like a plea of desperation – to herself. Momo could tell that she was trying to convince herself that she still had a chance to tell Jeongyeon about her feelings. “You’re not… mad, are you?”

Momo took a deep breath. “…No, I’m not mad.”

Not with you. Never with you.

“Oh, that’s good.” Mina sounded relieved and Momo couldn’t bring herself to destroy her happiness with her childish feelings. “Listen, I need to go. I’m sorry we haven’t seen each other much, but I really need to help Jeongyeon with this.”

“Don’t worry about it.” She bit her lip, not wanting to hang up before saying something. “Hey, Mina?”

“Yes?”

“You know that I’ll be here for you, right? Always.” Momo might have agreed to pretend for Mina’s sake, but there was one person she would never lie to, and that was her.

“I know,” Momo could picture Mina’s soft smile and she wanted to hold her for a moment. “Thank you, Momoring. And I’m here for you, too. You know, to kiss it better.”

Momo chuckled at that, a small blush covering her features. “I’ll take that as an invitation.”

“Teaser.”

“You started it.”


“Bye.”

Hanging up was hard, because at that exact moment, she saw the theater building from afar, and while her mind swirled with thoughts of Nayeon, Mina’s voice was still ringing in her ears.

Momo shook her head, trying to organize her feelings. Whatever those were.

--

Tzuyu and Chaeyoung arrived at the main campus building chatting casually and quite surprised at the number of students roaming around on the weekend. They probably had lots of assignments to do just like the two of them, and left it all for the last minute. Now that they thought about it, it was predictable.
“I need to use the computers to upload the photos, do you want to come with me?” Tzuyu asked her tiny friend, still holding on to the camera.

“Sure!” Then Chaeyoung paused, thinking. “Actually, go ahead, I’m going to grab my notebook from the room to write a few things down while you work.”

“Alright, don’t take too long.” Tzuyu shot her a smile and turned to leave. Chaeyoung stared at her back, admiring each and every subtle movement, and then shook her head laughing at how hopeless she was. What she felt for Tzuyu had stopped being a crush a long time ago; it was now something else entirely, too big for words, too complicated to think about.

So, she suppressed her thoughts and made her way to the dorms.

She was fine with her admiration being one-sided.

“Her name is Kim Dahyun,” A sudden voice made Chaeyoung stop with a frown. She slowly turned her ear to a group of girls talking in the corner, next to the building’s exit. “She’s a freshman, or something? I didn’t think she hanged around freshmen.”

“That’s a first,” Another girl spoke up. “But I mean, if she is, then there must be something special about this girl.”

“Did you realize that she, like, vanished these past few days?” A third girl butted in, apparently appalled. “I haven’t seen her around much. Do you guys think it’s because of the freshman?”

“Nah, it’s always like this,” The second girl just shrugged, counting the steps on her fingers. “First, she picks someone, then she hangs out with them for a bit, then they fuck, and that’s it. Rinse and repeat. It shouldn’t take long for her to be available again.”

“When she is, are you gonna try something?”

“Uh, fuck yes? I still didn’t get my chance with her.” She was smirking now, biting her lip. “People say it’s, like… unforgettable.”

“Oh, now I’m interested.” The first girl laughed. “I hope this Dahyun chick doesn’t take too long to finally get it.”

“Get what?” The third girl asked.

“That Minatozaki just wants to bang her? Hello?”

There was a loud sound and the group turned their heads simultaneously towards the source. There was nothing and no one to be seen, however, and they just stared at each other confused. Finally getting up, the girls left the building, passing by a very hidden Son Chaeyoung, crouching behind the door.

She held her hand close to her chest, grunting with the pain. She had hit the wall with such strength that her skin was now pulsating to the beat of her heart, but that was by far the least of her concerns.

“What the fuck was that?” Chaeyoung whispered, eyes watery with anger and confusion, disbelief overflowing all of her other senses. She felt sick to her stomach.

How dare some random girls talk shit about Sana.
Running was tiring, yes, but when Yoo Jeongyeon ran alongside you, it wasn’t so bad. The way her hair stuck to her sweaty forehead, the way her chest rose up and down with each intake of air, and the way she opened her flannel shirt to freshen up – Mina was trying very hard not to stare.

Both girls were lying on the grass after filming the same scene eight times, their legs feeling like jelly. Jeongyeon was having a really hard time with this particular shot because the camera was too heavy, and the frame kept bouncing up and down too much. She didn’t want to simulate an earthquake, she just wanted to capture her protagonist’s features as she ran freely.

After about an hour, Jeongyeon announced that she had a good shot, and Mina all but collapsed on the grass. She joined her, worried at first, but then she saw that Mina was laughing and couldn’t help but to smile too. Jeongyeon dropped herself right next to her, her face red from exhaustion, just like Mina’s.

“This scene seemed a lot easier in my head.” She said after regaining her breath and Mina laughed again.

“At least you have plenty of options to choose from.”

“I hope so,” Jeongyeon swallowed thickly, then turned her face. “Are you alright?”

Always caring. Mina liked her so, so much.

“I’m fantastic,” she answered, and maybe because of the adrenaline, she turned her whole body to face Jeongyeon, without caring that they were centimeters apart. “You know… I’m glad you asked me to be your actress.”

She was so close and Jeongyeon could see all of her features; they were shining. Mina’s eyes sparkled with such raw joy that a diamond would be jealous. Now that Jeongyeon was finally paying attention, her heart burst with the amount of fondness she felt for her friend. She smiled too. “Yeah? I thought you’d be nervous.”

“I was, at first.” Mina’s gaze softened. “But you make everything less nerve-wracking.”

“I’m glad you think so,” Her eyes landed on Mina’s lips for a brief second, then she cleared her throat. “Say… do you think I have what it takes to direct an actual movie someday?”

Jeongyeon seemed fragile suddenly and Mina wanted to tell her how amazing she was for the rest of her life. “I do. You are kind, and you care about your actors without losing your focus. You give good directions on the scenes, and you’re patient, even with a tight schedule. And the times you do have to film a scene over and over again, you’re still collected and professional. You make me feel so at ease.”

The string of compliments was a lot and incredibly unexpected. Jeongyeon hardly ever shared her insecurities with people, because she knew she was good at what she did, but it was always nice to
be reassured once in a while. She had no idea Mina was so good at this.

She almost sounded like Nayeon. A familiar warmth grew inside her chest.

“You really think so?” Jeongyeon asked, and she could feel her heart chasing that warmth with every beat.

Mina’s eyes roamed her face for a couple of seconds before she answered. “I’ve always thought so.”

For a brief moment, Jeongyeon got lost in her eyes, a tingling sensation at the very pit of her stomach. She was used to making others feel safe and confident about themselves, but truth to be told, she wanted to be at the receiving end of those compliments too; hearing it from Mina of all people was inexplicably exhilarating.

Mina was enchanting, and Jeongyeon was just now noticing that about her.

“Minari…”

“Yes?” Mina blinked.

“I—”

Then Jeongyeon’s stomach growled. They kept quiet for a moment, then both burst out in a laughing fit.

“I’m really hungry.” Jeongyeon finished after regaining her breath.

Mina calmed down, wiping a small tear from her eye. She looked once again to Jeongyeon’s beautiful face, then sighed. “Let’s eat something.”

Jeongyeon nodded, sitting up, then helping Mina up as well. She turned around, grabbed her camera case, then faced her actress again. “Let’s go.” And because she wanted to, she held Mina’s hand, guiding her to the cafeteria.

Even if it was a hopeless delusion, the small gesture made Mina happier than Jeongyeon would ever realize.

And God, she wished she realized it.

Chapter End Notes

Did you know I stalk ya'll on twitter to see if you're talking about my fic, cause I do.
Follow me if you wish! @niigoki_

Thank you for reading. See you!
3 years ago

Ragged breaths filled the room as the two bodies adjusted their positions messily on the bed. Nayeon’s forehead was covered in sweat, her hair sticking to it and all over the pillow, and her chest rose up and down with each breath as she recovered from her high. Jeongyeon climbed back up from under the sheets, plopping down next to her, giving her girlfriend room to breathe. She stole looks from time to time, afraid of having messed up their first time, but Nayeon was simply quiet.

They enjoyed the silence for a while, basking in the afterglow, then Nayeon started to laugh breathlessly.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked, a bit worried.

“That was…” She began to respond, trying to speak through the grin that was starting to hurt her cheeks. “So good. I’m offended.”

“Oh,” Jeongyeon blinked, then laughed nervously. “Really? I was afraid I messed up.”

Nayeon shook her head, still catching her breath. “I’ve never… felt like that before. That was good. Yeah.” She blushed and Jeongyeon blushed too – just two teenagers trying to figure this whole thing out.

Jeongyeon crawled up to her, nuzzling her neck. “If you say so.”

“Besides, I’m the one who accidentally kicked your chin.” Nayeon laughed, remembering a few moments ago when Jeongyeon suddenly bit her inner thigh, and although it was gentle, it still startled her. She had apologized a thousand times already, but still felt bad about it.

Jeongyeon laughed against her skin. “I told you, it’s fine.”

Nayeon just pouted, then brought her fingers gently to Jeongyeon’s face, turning it over and placing a kiss on the bruise. Jeongyeon’s heart did a somersault and she kissed her girlfriend’s cheek in return, hugging her again.
They giggled together, without a care in the world, just enjoying each other. Pillow talk was something new and exciting for both of them; Nayeon was never one to talk much about her own feelings, but with Jeongyeon the words just came naturally – she brought out the best in her.

Nayeon had no idea how the prettiest girl in school ended up falling for someone like herself, but she definitely wasn’t complaining. The fact that they’d just shared their first time together was mind blowing as well. The very recent, very sweet memories rushed through her head and she couldn’t help but feel dizzy as a result. Now that Nayeon thought about it, they were each other’s firsts for a lot of things; first real kiss, first relationship, and now they had taken each other’s extremely clumsy and extremely tender first time.

Warmth pierced her chest once more upon a realization, and Nayeon suppressed a shudder.

They were each other’s first love.

They were just teenagers who fell too hard, too fast, but things felt right with them. Being with Jeongyeon felt right.

She was sure Jeongyeon was mulling it over too. They completed each other.

“What are you thinking about?” Jeongyeon murmured, arm draped over Nayeon’s bare chest and eyes closed.

“You,” The answer was automatic. “Always you.”

“That is… so cheesy.”

“It’s the truth.” Nayeon turned her body so she could fully face her and Jeongyeon opened her eyes. Nayeon allowed herself a silent moment to gaze back at her.

“Hey, you.”

“Hi.”

Nayeon finally pushed forward, capturing her lips in a soft kiss. Jeongyeon sighed and brought one hand to the back of Nayeon’s head. Nayeon’s mouth parted, allowing the intoxicating taste of her girlfriend’s tongue to overwhelm her. Jeongyeon gripped her hair lightly as Nayeon nipped at her lips, the world outside forgotten. Right now, it was just the two of them.

When they finally pulled back, Nayeon’s eyes were glossed over. She was drunk on kissing, and felt like she was going to lose her mind.

“Jeongyeonnie.”

“Hmm?”

“You wanna get married?”

Jeongyeon kissed her nose. “One day.”

A pause.

“Oh, wait, married to you?”

Nayeon slapped her shoulder lightly and Jeongyeon giggled, pulling her closer. “Sorry, sorry, I’m just teasing.” Then she pressed kisses below her ear and down her neck. Nayeon sighed dreamily at
Jeongyeon lifted her head up to meet her girlfriend’s vulnerable gaze. She stopped for a second, eyes returning passionate sincerity. “Seriously? Yes, I would.”

At that moment, this statement felt like the only thing Nayeon needed to hear for the rest of her life. She felt so compelled to say something back, so she opened her mouth, without even thinking.

“I love you.”

They had both said it at the same time, not quite in unison, and they laughed.

They were messy. But they were forever.

--

“Wouldn’t it be nice if we all went to the same college?” Sana asked suddenly with her mouth full, eyeing the rest of the group around the table as they ate. There was a bit of a ketchup smear on her lip and Jihyo promptly reached out with a napkin, wiping it.

“You guys are gonna have to pick the college, then. We’ll have to follow.” Dahyun replied, her burger almost finished.

“Oh, right, the babies still have years left.” Jeongyeon teased.

“We’re only one year below you, grandma.” Chaeyoung replied, sticking her tongue out. “You still have a year of high school, too.”

“That’s true. Do any of you even know what career you want to follow?” Jeongyeon asked. Nayeon accidentally let her napkin fall on the floor and was about to grab it, but her girlfriend was faster. Nayeon mouthed a ‘thank you’ and kissed her cheek.

“Nothing related to numbers and equations, please,” Dahyun leaned her head in one hand, her typical exaggerated expression filled with despair. “I almost failed this year because of that.”

“We offered to help you,” Tzuyu casually remembered her, finishing her salad. “But you ignored us.”

“I didn’t ignore you!”

“Uh, yes, you did.” Chaeyoung stretched her arm across Tzuyu, asking for a sip of her juice, and the tall girl passed her the cup. “We were pestering you for a week, asking if you needed help, but
you, and I quote, ‘needed to figure out the mysteries of the world on your own’.”

Sana laughed and choked on her Coke, and Momo tapped her back so the girl could breathe again; they wouldn’t put it past her to die in a diner choking on soda. Mina on her other side passed her the napkins, asking if she was okay. Eventually Sana managed to catch her breath, only to laugh more.

“I’m pretty sure none of us want to work with numbers,” Nayeon said amongst the chaos. “We are attending a specialized arts high school, after all.”

“Chaengie wants to be a painter,” Dahyun pointed. “If her doodles indicate anything.”

“Maybe,” Chaeyoung shrugged. “I don’t know, it’s not easy to make a career out of that.”

“I think you have lots of potential,” Mina comforted her with her tender voice. “You should really go for it.”

“You’d be a great artist!” Sana nodded encouragingly, and Chaeyoung blushed at the compliments. She averted her eyes when the table’s attention turned to her, agreeing in unison, and Tzuyu rubbed her back with a giggle.

“Momoring wants to be a dancer, right?” Nayeon nudged her shoulder.

“Something along those lines,” Momo munched on her fry lazily. “I know Mina is going to be a professional ballerina.”

Everyone just nodded, and Mina smiled shyly.

“It fits you like a glove.” Jeongyeon told her softly, earning a small blush from the girl.

“I hope I can make it,” Mina grabbed her water, thoughtfully. “It’s the only reason I even came to this city.”

“You’ll do great.” Sana and Momo said at the same time, then rolled their eyes at each other. Mina laughed at them warmly, happy for the vote of confidence.

“Sana-ya, what about you?” Dahyun asked.

“I’m thinking about dance, too. I mean, that’s why I’m at this school. Or I don’t know, something that helps people?”

“So many dancers in this group,” Jihyo grinned. “I’ll make sure to compose songs to all of you.”

“Alright, is anyone else jealous that Jihyo already knows exactly what she wants to do?” Dahyun raised her hand, and the whole table did the same, except for Jihyo. “Mina, put that hand down, you’re also on this list.”

“Nayeon is on this list too!” Jeongyeon pointed at her girlfriend, baffled. “You want to be an actress!”

“That doesn’t mean I’ll succeed,” Nayeon slapped her hand away. “Jihyo is already successful.”

“Oh, please,” Jihyo scoffed at her best friend. “You’re already a drama queen, you don’t need to pretend to doubt yourself.”

The whole table let out a ‘ooooooh’ and Nayeon nearly got up to strangle her friend. Jeongyeon
restrained her, however, so Nayeon had to settle for throwing a dirty napkin across the table. Jihyo ducked with a yelp and then they all laughed loudly. Once they calmed down, the rest finished their lunches and finally ordered dessert.

“What about you, Tzuyu?” Jeongyeon asked, one arm around Nayeon as the girl let her head rest on her shoulder.

“I really like photography, but I don’t know… I want to work with fashion. There are lots of things I could try to do.”

“Have you ever thought about designing your own clothes?” Chaeyoung asked, genuinely curious. Not knowing much about her oldest friend’s career plans bothered her a bit.

“I’m not good at drawing, though. I like to read fashion magazines, I always thought that the photoshoots they do were beautiful.”

“A photographer for a magazine seems viable,” Jihyo suggested. “It’s a really hard job from what I know, so people pay photographers well.”

“If everything goes wrong you can always be a model,” Sana said, seriously. “You’re tall, and beautiful, well-proportioned…”

“Can someone call the waitress, we need all the napkins in the restaurant to dry Sana’s drool.” Momo grabbed her best friend’s shoulder, shaking her.

“What! Am I wrong? Look at Tzuyu,” Sana got up and grabbed Tzuyu’s shoulders, bending to her level. “She’s gorgeous and should be told so every day.” Then she faced her. “Tzuyu, you’re beautiful.”

“Um… thank you?”

“Yes, we get it, you can go now.” Chaeyoung mumbled, grabbing Sana’s coat and dragging her back to her seat. Sana placed a kiss on Tzuyu’s cheek and sat back down with a giggle.

“And Jeongyeon is going to be a nerd professionally.” Momo finished with a smirk.

“Excuse me?” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow. “Last time I checked, the ones who borrowed my Inuyasha DVDs were all of you.”

“I didn’t.” Jihyo defended herself.

“Yes, because you still needed to give me back my Doraemon ones.”

“That’s—” She had no arguments for that. “Fine.”

This earned another round of laughter across the table, then the desserts arrived – nine bowls of ice cream to the brim, overflowing with chocolate syrup and hazelnuts. Mina shared hers with Momo while Chaeyoung and Tzuyu did the same, but the rest ate all of it by themselves. After they were done, the group sighed contently with smiles on their faces.

“I’m going to miss this.” Sana said after a moment in a more serious tone.

“This what?” Momo asked.

“Hanging out with all of you on a daily basis.”
“You make it seem like we’ll vanish once we graduate.” Jihyo tried to cheer her up with an affectionate rub in her arm.

“Why are you worrying about this now?” Chaeyoung almost laughed. “You’re not even a senior yet. Enjoy your junior year while you can.”

“Aww, my cute little sophomores.” Sana reached out to pinch Chaeyoung’s cheeks and the tiny artist slapped her hand away lightly with a cute grunt.

Dahyun watched, worried about Sana’s sudden pessimistic view of what their future was going to be like. It was like she expected them to talk to each other a lot less, or not at all once they went to college, and Dahyun had to admit those thoughts had crossed her mind a few times. But she knew that their bond was too strong to be broken by something so silly.

Then she realized that Sana’s apprehension was probably because of what happened to her, Momo and Mina. The ballerina had left their town when she was 12 to move to the city and pursue her dream; that had probably been a terrible experience for Sana and Momo. They were finally reunited by their second year of high school, and that was why the three friends were absolutely glued to the hip.

Sana never talked much about the time they were separated, but Dahyun knew it had probably made them miserable. Mina was an introvert, and without doubts, her very first real friends came along as soon as Momo and Sana came back to her.

“We’ll be fine.” Dahyun spoke up suddenly, making Sana stop her teasing and turn to her. “We’re all here now. We’ll be fine.”

Sana’s eyes sparkled with something and she smiled. “…Yeah. Thank you, Dahyunnie.”

Then she noticed that everyone else was nodding and smiling at her as well. Sana had never felt more reassured in her life.

She loved those people so much.

--

Sana knocked on the bathroom stall lightly and waited for a response. When she was only answered with silence, she spoke gently. “Chaengie? Are you there?”

A beat followed, causing Sana to press her ear against the door. She heard a faint sniffle and her heart dropped. “Chaengie, I’m here. Let me help?” Sana turned her face and closed her eyes, touching her forehead to the door. “Please?”

After a few moments she heard the door unlock. When Sana walked in, Chaeyoung was sitting on the toilet with the seat down, head buried on her arms as she curled in on herself. Her shoulders trembled softly with each whimper and Sana locked the door again to give them some privacy.
She crouched until her face was leveled with that of her friend and gently stroked her hair, then rubbed her back. “Hey, baby. It’s okay, I’m here.”

Chaeyoung’s body continued to wrack with quiet sobs for a few minutes. Sana allowed her to let it all go, reassuring the girl with a gentle hand; she needed to make sure Chaeyoung didn’t feel alone. When she was done crying, Chaeyoung lifted her head, her eyes puffy and red.

“Hey,” Sana gave her that signature smile, the one that made people forget about their problems for a second. “Do you want to talk?”

“…No,” Chaeyoung mumbled, then took a deep breath. “Maybe. I don’t… I don’t know.”

“It’s alright. I’ll be here for you. We have the whole day.”

“We have to go back to class soon.”

“No, we don’t,” Sana tucked a strand of hair behind Chaeyoung’s ear. “I care more about your well-being. Class can wait.”

Chaeyoung sighed and rubbed her eyes; she knew that Sana was expecting her to say something. She already felt bad for taking up so much of her time—Sana would’ve scolded her for thinking that, too, she noted. “I just… I don’t know. It’s hard to explain.”

“It’s okay. Baby steps.”

Chaeyoung tried to think of a way to go about this, all the while beating herself up for being so dumb. Her anxiety was beginning to overwhelm her, so she bit her lip and forced the words out.

“I— I panicked. I think I… realized something. About myself. It’s dumb, this is dumb.”

“It’s not dumb,” She responded. Sana had this air about her that made people feel validated; out of anyone, Chaeyoung was glad that it was Sana who had seen her run out of her classroom and chased after her. “It’s okay. What happened?”

Chaeyoung wanted to tell her, she wanted to tell everyone, because it was important – and really, she should’ve seen this coming considering her group of friends. Still, she didn’t want to say the words out loud, because saying it out loud made it real, and reality scared her a lot. She didn’t even have a reason to be this afraid, but society built walls between people, and certain ideas about right or wrong were hard to deconstruct.

“I think…” Chaeyoung started, working hard to make this palatable. “I’m— You know. Like… Jeong. Kind of, I don’t know. I might be.”

“Like Jeongyeon?” Sana frowned for a bit. “You mean, a nerd?”

This made Chaeyoung actually let out a breathy laugh. “No.”

“Hmm, then… an athlete?”

“Definitely not.”

“Oh, I know!” Sana snapped her fingers. “A kind, intelligent, beautiful girl, with a heart of gold and a terrible sense of humor, but who would go to the greatest lengths for the people she loves, and makes me proud every day.”

Chaeyoung snorted again, pushing Sana away and blushing. “Yah, really…”
Sana smiled softly, balancing herself and stared at her friend fondly. She put one hand on Chaeyoung’s knee as the other cupped her cheek. “Everything I just said is true. And liking girls, or boys, or both won’t ever change that. You know that, right?”

Chaeyoung looked down, eyes watery again, and just nodded.

“Is this what has been bothering you lately?” Sana asked and Chaeyoung blinked, a bit surprised. “You’ve been a little distant. I was worried.”

“Y-yeah… It’s not even a big deal. I don’t know why I’m acting like this.”

Sana grinned, knowingly. “Trust me, even if you think you’re the most open-minded person around, it’s always going to be startling.”

It occurred to Chaeyoung that Sana had been through this earlier than anyone else. She knew what she was talking about.

“You don’t have to tell anyone right away, okay?” Sana continued. “This is your special thing. So feel free to tell us when you’re ready. Alright?”

Chaeyoung nodded again with a sniffle, then finally met Sana’s eyes. “…Thank you.”

“Everything will be okay, Chaengie.” The way she said that made Chaeyoung believe that it was true. It was like a huge weight was lifted from her shoulders, and she didn’t feel so alone anymore.

Lunchtime was finally over, and Sana got up, stretching her back – it was getting hard to stay still in that tiny stall for so long. She paused with a whine. “Ouch, I think I heard something crack.”

“You’re getting old.” Chaeyoung teased a bit, a smile finally making it’s way back on her face. She got up from her seat and sighed again, regaining her composure. “It’s too cramped in here.”

Sana unlocked the door and patiently waited for Chaeyoung to wash her face until there were no traces left that she’d been crying.

“Do you want to stay here a bit longer?” Sana asked, gently.

“No, I’m okay now.” Chaeyoung shook her head. “Really. Thank you. I’m sorry for panicking over something so—”

“If you say dumb again, I’ll be forced to pinch your cheeks.”

“…Stupid?”

Sana jumped on her and almost reached her puffy cheeks, but Chaeyoung was faster. They played tag for a couple of seconds inside the bathroom, then Sana finally caught her, hugging the girl from behind. Chaeyoung laughed with her and felt incredibly lighter.

“…Sana.”

“Hmm?”

“I don’t mean… that… this is a bad thing. You know that, right?” Chaeyoung was very aware of Sana’s own sexuality, and how proud the girl was of it. She never hid anything from them when it came to who she kissed and who she was interested in, so Chaeyoung was afraid of having offended her with her lack of confidence.
“Of course I do.” Sana’s weight against her back was comforting. “Don’t worry about others right now, Chaengie. What you feel is the most important. And if you need to talk to someone…”

“I’ll come to you.” Chaeyoung completed.

“Yes,” Sana let her go, then offered her a hand. “Now let’s go back.”

Chaeyoung took it, albeit reluctantly, and then smiled as the relief rushed through her. She was happy to have proof that she was comfortable with touching other girls in the face of her life-changing epiphany.

She allowed herself another smile.

Chaeyoung was glad to have Sana to guide her through this new world.

--

2 years ago

“Say… do you want to go to the movies tomorrow?” Jeongyeon tentatively asked as she rested on Nayeon’s bed, flipping through a random issue of The Justice League.

“Sure,” Nayeon replied, painting her nails, not really satisfied with the result. “I think Momo and Jihyo wanted to watch that new James Bond movie. I’ll call them.”

“Right…” There was an awkward pause, then Jeongyeon put her comic down. “I was actually thinking we could go just the two of us?”

“Oh,” Nayeon stopped and finally faced her girlfriend. “It’s been a while we’ve seen Jihyo, though… she asked me to call her next time we went out.”

“Well, alright then.” Jeongyeon nodded a little, then slowly returned to her position on the bed. Nayeon chewed on her lip, her heart beating fast all of a sudden. She waved her hand to dry her nails, the creeping silence a familiar presence as of late.

“Do you… want it to be just the two of us?” The question was clearly a cautious one. Very rarely did she have to be careful with her words around her girlfriend, but something about this conversation was alarming her.

“No, no, it’s okay.” Jeongyeon answered promptly. “I miss Momo and Jihyo too.”

“Oh, okay.”

The couple didn’t speak much after that, but both of them were aware of the tense atmosphere.
Things haven’t been the same lately.

They were nearing their second-year anniversary, but it felt like some of the spark had been lost along the way. At first Nayeon thought that it was normal, – dating for two years in high school was quite an achievement – but as time went by, she wondered if there was something else going on. She didn’t like this suffocating ambience.

Nayeon sighed. “Jeong. Do we need to talk?”

Jeongyeon pretended to finish her page, heart beating nervously, then put down the comic again, sitting up straight. “…I think so.”

“So you feel it too.”

“Of course I do.” Jeongyeon ran her fingers through her short auburn hair. They’ve been together for too long, and noticing even the smallest shifts in the mood was natural to them at this point. Jeongyeon was just terrified of what that meant, because she knew that they would probably end up reaching the same conclusion. “Nayeonnie, when was the last time we hung out together, just the two of us?”

“…Right now?”

“Don’t do this,” They needed to talk this out, and Jeongyeon was going to push this forward. “Please?”

Jeongyeon patted the bed and Nayeon got up with a sigh, sitting down next to her and leaning her head on her shoulder. “Okay. I’m sorry.”

They didn’t know how to start.

“What do you think is happening?” Jeongyeon asked in a low voice, her hand slowly rubbing circles on Nayeon’s thigh.

“I don’t know,” She answered, truthfully. “But it’s been happening for months.”

“Yeah…” Jeongyeon sighed, leaning her head against Nayeon’s.

“And it’s both of us. It’s like we just don’t want to go out together anymore, have a real date.”

“I do.”

“But do you?” Nayeon lifted her head, staring at Jeongyeon. “If I asked you out, then Momo, or Sana, or Dahyun, hell, anyone, suddenly asked to join. Would you say no?”

“I—” Jeongyeon stopped, licking her lips. “…No, I wouldn’t.”

“Me neither,” Nayeon blinked the water away from her eyes. “And that’s the problem.”

“That’s a weird problem.” Jeongyeon got up and started pacing, like she usually did when she became agitated. “So, what? We like hanging out with our friends. That shouldn’t… ruin our relationship.”

“That’s why this is a problem,” Nayeon got up as well, crossing her arms in a defensive posture. “It is ruining it. Why is that?”

“Fine, so we can’t manage our time right. That’s not something we should fret over.”
“Avoiding it won’t solve this, Jeongyeon.”

“Then what do you suggest we do?!” Without realizing it, Jeongyeon had raised her voice, causing Nayeon to flinch. Regret soured Jeongyeon’s face as she snapped out of her irritated state. She immediately made her way to her girlfriend’s side, hugging her. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to yell.”

Nayeon sank into her arms, which were still familiar and warm. They made her feel safe, and she knew that they always would, regardless of what the future held. She closed her eyes and didn’t say anything for a moment, just trying to put her ideas together as she listened to Jeongyeon’s heartbeat.

That girl was the world to her. She had pictured marriage with her, but somewhere along the way, Nayeon realized that the amount of love she felt for Jeongyeon was the same she felt for all of her friends. Maybe it was the fact that she didn’t know whether they would all manage to get into the same college, but Nayeon and Jeongyeon knew that they would rather spend time with all nine of them than just go out on a date by themselves.

Nayeon had been getting closer to other people as well, sharing secrets that she didn’t even tell her own girlfriend. They weren’t big, important things, but she still felt her heart constrict when she realized that Momo understood her better in some ways than Jeongyeon did. Or when Jihyo gave her better advice, or Sana made her feel better with just a smile.

The intensity of those feelings scared her.

Jeongyeon was going through the same thing. She had get-togethers with Chaeyoung and Dahyun for RPG sessions, Momo was basically her closest friend at this point, and she looked after Mina and Tzuyu with fondness. That didn’t mean that she stopped loving her girlfriend, but she was afraid that their relationship wasn’t special anymore.

She wanted Nayeon to feel special every day of her life, and the fact that she couldn’t provide this anymore caused guilt to tear through her heart.

“…We’re going to college soon.” Nayeon murmured after a while.

Jeongyeon hummed.

“We’re so young. Too young to be certain of things.”

Jeongyeon nodded against her hair.

“But there’s one thing that I’m certain of,” Nayeon detached herself from Jeongyeon’s arms. “I love you. And I always will.”

The words dripped were bittersweet on her tongue.

“I love you, too.” Jeongyeon replied. “I don’t ever want to hurt you.”

“I know you don’t,” Nayeon’s smile was sad. “That’s why we’re talking about this. Because we share the same feelings.” She touched Jeongyeon’s chest softly. “And if being together, just the two of us, started feeling like an obligation, then… maybe we should give ourselves some time.”

Somehow, she knew that this was coming. “Like a break?”

“Something like that.” Nayeon’s gaze told her that they didn’t need to put a name to it. Jeongyeon stared at her with red eyes from holding back tears that shouldn’t fall; this was a consensual
agreement between them that was bound to happen with how things have been going lately.

“Some time to grow up,” Jeongyeon concluded, after a few seconds. “And enjoy things as they come.”

“Sounds good.” Nayeon’s smile was soft and beautiful, and Jeongyeon knew that it didn’t really matter what happened from now on, Im Nayeon would always have a special place in her heart.

“Alright.” Jeongyeon blushed a little. “One last kiss?”

Nayeon pushed forward without words, and it felt like sealing their fates.

‘This won’t be a last kiss.’ It was a thought that occurred to both of them.

“I love you.” They whispered at the same time, like they usually did, then giggled against each other’s mouths.

Time would tell.

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Snow fell slowly, blurring the street lights and making it hard for the students to get out of their cars and walk the slippery path to the school’s dance hall. The night was extremely cold, but the bodies moving inside the place created a heated environment, so nothing could possibly ruin the celebration.

The last dance of the year for all seniors was the most anticipated event of the school year. It was the last hurrah of their high school lives as they entered a new phase. Of course, some students were more excited about the free food and hidden booze than what the future held, but it’s not like those reasons weren’t valid too.

The most flamboyant students, however, were only worried about one thing: the nominations for the Queen and King of Drama. The titles were exactly like prom queen and king, but with its own little twist, as this was an arts high school.

“Did Nayeon get her crown yet?” Momo walked up to Jeongyeon, taking a bite of her sandwich.

“Not yet. They need to make a big deal out of every event.” Jeongyeon replied with an amused voice, then turned to look at her friend. “That’s a nice dress.”

“Thanks. Mina’s mom bought one for each one of us.” Momo smiled. “Sana and Mina should be arriving soon.”

“And where is your date?”

“Uh,” Momo stopped chewing and looked around. “Oh no, I lost Tzuyu!”
She was about to run off when Jeongyeon grabbed her arm. “Chill, she’ll find you eventually. Stay here.”


“I’m not nervous.”

“Right. And I’m not hungry.”

“Your sarcasm hurts me,” Jeongyeon rolled her eyes, fidgeting with the hem of her dress. She was wearing a gorgeous black lace dress that really accentuated her hips and legs. The black heels gave her a very sophisticated and feminine look, and she was sure she’d been the gay awakening of half of the school’s female population. “Nayeon asked me to stay here so she could find me after the announcement and I don’t want to be alone.”

“Hmm,” Momo just hummed, biting another piece of her food. “If you say so. How are the two of you, by the way?”

“We’re good.”

“Are you still pretending to be on a break, or…”

“We’re not pretending,” Jeongyeon elbowed her slightly. “We’re not even on a break, really. I think we just… broke up for good. That doesn’t mean we’re not friends anymore.”

“You see, when you say ‘I think’ at the beginning of a sentence that ends with ‘we broke up’, it’s a bad sign.” Momo was the first person Nayeon and Jeongyeon told about the end of their relationship, and she still hadn’t bought it. Mainly because she was the closest to them aside from Jihyo, so she was still convinced that those two were a thing, albeit unknowingly.

“We still love each other, we know that much. It’s not like those two years are gonna vanish, you know?” Jeongyeon had seemed vulnerable ever since then, but she was much better than the first couple of weeks. Momo was glad to see her recovering so well, even if she thought that the fact that they broke up in the first place was weird as hell.

“Yeah… I know.” She finished her sandwich. “Feelings and all that jazz.”

They smiled at each other, then Tzuyu finally found her fake date. Momo apologized a thousand times for not paying attention when she moved to grab her food, then promised to make it up. When Tzuyu asked how, Momo just smiled dumbly and said she’d think of something.

“Am I late?” Jihyo found them after that, a little breathless, like she’d just ran the last couple of meters there. “Did Nayeon get the crown?”

“I love how sure we all are that she’ll be crowned Drama Queen.” Momo chuckled.

“They’re still monologuing,” Jeongyeon told her, with her arms crossed. “This will take a while.”

“I should call Mina and Sana.” Momo grabbed her phone from her purse, but Tzuyu stopped her.

“Chaengie sent me a message earlier, they should be here soon.”

Not a minute later, Mina and Chaeyoung walked in, arms locked and looking for their friends. Momo tiptoed and waved, and Mina smiled at her, guiding the tiny artist to their general direction.

“My house is way too far from this damn place.” Chaeyoung groaned, finally letting Mina’s arm go. “Thank you for inviting me, by the way.”

“My pleasure. Thank you for agreeing to be my date.” Mina giggled in return, with a fancy ballerina bow. They all laughed at that, and the warmth of the atmosphere melted the cold weather.

“You’re looking great, Minari.” Jeongyeon grinned at her direction, casually. She was always beautiful, but tonight her simple white dress caught Jeongyeon’s attention and she felt the need to tell her.

“T-thank you. You too.” Mina averted her eyes a bit, but smiled nonetheless. Momo eyed the two and then excused herself to grab some drinks, asking Mina if she wanted something. Tzuyu complimented Chaeyoung’s outfit too and the girl blushed, complimenting her back with a small push on her shoulder.

Jihyo pulled Jeongyeon away from the ruckus for a moment. “Did you come with Nayeon as your date?”

“Nah, we thought it’d be better to come separately.”

“I see.” Jihyo patted her shoulder. “Are you okay?”

“Why do all of you think I’m having a hard time?” Jeongyeon rolled her eyes for the tenth time that night. “Nayeon and I are fine. We’re not even awkward around each other, you know that.”

“Well, it’s just that it hasn’t been that long. Three months or so?”

Jeongyeon shrugged. “We’re fine. Can we talk about something else?”

“Alright. Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“You could never.” Jeongyeon just smiled to her, a bit guiltily, then turned her attention back to the stage. “Oh, they’re finally announcing it!”

The others stopped their chatter to pay attention.

“Where is Sana?” Chaeyoung asked, sad that she would miss the coronation.

“Momo is missing too.” Mina looked for her, but eventually had to give up. One of the teachers on the stage grabbed the microphone, clearing his throat.

“Well, without further ado, let’s get to the main event, shall we?” A voice boomed over the crowd. The hall burst into cheers and applauses. “This year’s Drama Queen, voted by the majority of the senior year, is… drumroll, please.”

The students started slapping their thighs and the loud sound echoed around the room. Tzuyu covered Chaeyoung’s ears with a laugh, knowing that her friend didn’t enjoy loud noises.

“…Miss Im Nayeon! Congratulations!”

Everyone screamed, and Jihyo and Jeongyeon jumped up and down, waving and yelling at their friend. Nayeon brought one hand to her mouth, teary-eyed, and bowed as she walked to the middle of the stage and accepted her crown. The professor tapped her shoulder slightly with a proud,
fatherly smile, and gave her the microphone so she could say a few words.

Momo arrived then, with drinks in hands and a smile on her face. She passed the cup to Mina and wrapped an arm around her best friend’s shoulders as they watched Nayeon’s special moment.

“Oh, wow… I can’t believe this is actually happening,” Nayeon started, hands shaking, and a huge grin plastered on her face. “I’d like to thank everyone who voted for me, really, I had no idea of the impact I had on this school. It makes me really proud to be a student, and I couldn’t be happier. I’m glad that I got to share it with all of you.”

Jeongyeon smiled proudly at her ex-girlfriend. She knew that other students hardly ever took the speeches seriously, but Nayeon was genuine about this. Her dream was to become an actress, and this small gesture was a step forward in the right direction, even if it was a silly school dance.

“And to all the teachers and friends I made in the last four years, this one is for you. I’m going forward with a dream in mind, and I’ll always remember how important this school was to my career. Thank you all!”

Laughter and cheers echoed across the room after the cheesy statement, and she gave the microphone back, moving down the stage.

“She was born for this.” Jihyo said with a glint in her eyes; she really was happy for Nayeon. Jeongyeon just nodded in agreement.

“We didn’t miss it!” Sana’s sudden voice made everyone turn to her, surprised. She was dragging Dahyun by her hand and had snow all over her hair. “We caught the end of her speech!”

“Where were you?” Momo asked, reaching out to take some leaves off her messy hair.

“Dahyunnie was having a hard time picking her dress.” Sana brought her date forward.

“In my defense, I knew what I was going to wear, but then Sana showed up at my house in this,” Dahyun pointed to Sana, accusingly. “So I had to pick something that wouldn’t make me look like a grade-schooler next to her.”

Sana’s dress length was dangerously short, and whenever she moved, it was like the whole galaxy sparkled – the lights reflected the small jewels there, creating a starry sky on Sana’s outfit. That was by far the most mature look of that entire party.

“Your dress was cute.” Sana pouted.

“Yes. My point exactly.”

“Didn’t you say Mina’s mom picked your dresses…?” Jeongyeon whispered to Momo.

“She did.” Was all Momo replied, with a smirk. The athlete opened her mouth, but decided that she didn’t want to ask.

The announcement of Drama King was happening in the background, but it sounded muffled against the chatter. A few moments later, the DJ resumed the song, and the party finally continued.

“I’m hungry,” Sana stared at the table filled with snacks and sandwiches in the back. “Dahyunnie, let’s get some food.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The younger girl replied with a teasing tone, but allowed Sana’s hand to interlock
fingers with hers. They moved to the table as Chaeyoung watched, shaking her head a little.

The lively beat made Jeongyeon move her head and torso a bit, joined by Momo on her side, who was definitely in a mood to show how good of a dancer she was. She winked in Jeongyeon’s direction, flowing a lot better with the song than her, stepping right and left as she body-rolled.

“Show off!” Jeongyeon yelled over the loud music and Momo just shrugged, letting her body move on its own, freely. Her eyes were closed, and she felt the beat invading her every pore, widening her smile – that was definitely her environment.

The rest of the group moved a lot less, a bit shyly, but with happy hearts. It dawned on them that this was the last time that they would all be together like this in school, dancing and joking with each other, so the whole situation was a tad bittersweet.

Momo pulled Tzuyu to the middle of the dance circle at some point, and the younger girl almost choked on her potato chip. “Come dance with me, you’re my date!”

“I don’t dance!” Tzuyu fought the pull with every fiber of her being and Momo eventually let her go, sticking her tongue out.

The group laughed, enjoying the silly argument, then the song shifted from lively to slow. It was that awkward time of the party where couples had to dance with each other, and Momo tried once again getting Tzuyu’s attention. Chaeyoung laughed at the whole scene, because it felt like Tzuyu was about to kick Momo’s insistent ass out of this world.

Jeongyeon joined the fun, then felt someone poking her shoulder. She turned around and came face to face with Nayeon wearing a shiny crown, and her heart skipped beat.

“Her Majesty demands the first slow dance.” Nayeon said simply, with one hand waiting to be held, impatiently. Jeongyeon’s face broke in a familiar smile and she rolled her eyes, taking her hand despite everything. The two left the circle of friends and moved to the dance floor, Jeongyeon holding Nayeon’s waist as the Drama Queen locked her hands behind the girl’s neck.

Momo didn’t miss the scene and immediately looked at Mina. As she expected, the girl looked disheartened all of a sudden, taking a sip of her water. Momo then sauntered over in a silly way and offered Mina her hand.

“May I have this dance?” Momo asked with a gentle smile, and Mina returned the expression, promptly accepting the invitation. The two also walked past their friends to move to the dance floor and Chaeyoung couldn’t help but to tease as she took the drink from Mina’s hand.

“You’re stealing my date, Hirai!”

“Feel free to steal mine.” Momo replied with a wink and Chaeyoung shut her mouth.

The two best friends locked hands behind each other’s necks in a way that they’ve done before. Mina had always felt safe in Momo’s embrace. “Thank you, Momoring.”

“You’re welcome.” She whispered back, guiding their steps. Mina’s heart didn’t feel as heavy now.

Dahyun waited for Sana to finish grabbing some appetizers as she tapped her foot to the slow beat, watching as the dance floor filled with awkward couples that stood way too far from each other. Just a few people were actually into the whole romantic atmosphere, and Dahyun’s eyes caught four of her friends dancing together. She let out a small surprised sound, but grinned afterwards. She kind of expected Jeongyeon and Nayeon to dance at some point in this party, but Mina and
Momo was a nice surprise.

“Wanna dance?” Sana’s voice startled her and Dahyun jumped.

“Jesus, don’t scared me like that!” The hand on her chest made her whole body language even funnier and Sana giggled.

“I’m sorry.” She bit her lip. “I mean it, though. Do you?”

“Um… with you?” Dahyun blinked, then realized that this question was probably dumb.

“Yes, with me, silly.” Sana’s smile was always such a nice sight, and Dahyun felt compelled to take the offer, but something about going out there with Minatozaki Sana made her legs feel like jelly.

Sana asking Dahyun to be her date had already been shocking enough as it was – she was sure that there were thousands of people crawling at Sana’s feet, begging her to be their partner for the night. But Sana had rejected all of them, making a beeline for Dahyun instead.

Dahyun knew the reason for that, however. Three seniors from their group had to invite the juniors as their dates for them to be able to attend the party, and Sana was probably stuck with Dahyun. It’s not like she resented her for that, but she was now asking her to dance, and that’s what she couldn’t wrap her mind about.

“I’m not really a dancer…” Dahyun tried, averting her eyes. “I thought you were hungry. Did you eat?”

“I ate enough to not be hungry anymore,” Sana looked down at Dahyun’s hands, and shifted a bit. That’s when Dahyun noticed that Sana wasn’t just clumsily stepping side to side – she was nervous about asking her to dance. “You really don’t want to?”

Her voice was so fragile and tiny, so unlike Sana, that Dahyun felt her chest compressing with a feeling that she couldn’t comprehend. So, she took a deep breath, very aware of the eyes on them, and grabbed Sana’s hand gently.

“Okay. We can dance for a bit.” Dahyun said, and the grin on Sana’s face at that moment was worth every judgmental gaze.

“Let’s go!” Sana was back to her bubbly, excited self, and Dahyun felt relieved.

“I said for a bit!” She was sure Sana ignored that part.

But Dahyun didn’t really care. She just wanted to put a smile on Sana’s face, all the time.

Jihyo was asked by many people, but rejected them all. She’d rather watch over her friends and make sure they were all okay, so she leaned her back on the wall with a tiny grin. Her eyes moved from Jeongyeon and Nayeon, who seemed to be lost in each other’s gaze, to Mina and Momo, who were having a lot of fun now hopping around in a silly way. Sana and Dahyun joined the dance floor after a bit and Jihyo’s grin widened. Then she searched for Chaeyoung and Tzuyu, only to realize that the two were just chatting beside her, with no intention of exposing themselves like the rest.

“Not in the mood to dance?” Jihyo asked the younger girls.

“I would, but Momo stole my date.” Chaeyoung replied, eating a bag of popcorn.
“You should’ve asked Mina earlier, then.”

Chaeyoung just laughed. “I guess.” Then she frowned. “Why aren’t you dancing? I saw all of those guys lining up to talk to you.”

“Did you really expect me to say yes to a guy? Besides, I’m fine right here.” Jihyo shrugged. She added after a while, with a wistful gaze. “This is nice.”

“What is?” Tzuyu asked.

“Just us, having fun like this. I think I understand what Sana meant when she said she’d miss this. It feels like an ending, for some reason.”

“You’re just going to college. We’ll be a year apart, but we plan to follow you, you know.” Chaeyoung mentioned, to Jihyo’s surprise.

“Wait, really?”

“We’ve been talking,” Tzuyu followed up. “The three of us want to try and get into the same college as you. I hope we manage.”

Jihyo widened her eyes and tackled both girls in a hug, jumping up and down with happiness. “This is the best news ever! Oh, you’ll do great, I know you will!”

Chaeyoung and Tzuyu hugged her back, but had to tap her back after a while. “Suffocating, suffocating!”

Jihyo let them go, but not without a kiss to both their cheeks. When all of them were together, that was the only time things felt right.

She wanted to treasure that friendship.

The song finally ended, and the energetic music returned to the speakers. The students finally gathered back on the dance floor, some a little drunk, but most just happy to be graduating.

Mina detached herself from Momo, but then was pulled into a hug by the girl. “You should tell her, soon.” Momo whispered in her ear.

Mina just sighed. “I know. I wish I had the courage to.”

“You’ll find the courage.” Momo pulled back, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “And she’d be stupid not to fall for you, too.”

Mina giggled, then shook her head slightly. “I think she still has feelings for Nayeon.”

“Give it time. Their break up is too recent. Jeong will move on eventually.”

“You’re right,” She was thankful for Momo’s support. It made her feel like her hopeless crush was a little less hopeless. “I’ll tell her, one day.”

Momo smiled and took Mina’s hand, kissing her knuckles. “Don’t worry, I’ll punch her gut if she rejects you.”

“Behave.” Mina rolled her eyes, but was glad at the thoughtfulness.

Nayeon and Jeongyeon took a while to stop dancing like fools in love, but eventually they had to
Jeongyeon poked her nose with a dumb grin, laughing when Nayeon whined. “I knew you’d get this crown. We all did.”

“You’re the leader, it’s me.”

“I’d say that this attitude would get you in trouble one day, but for an actress, I guess it’s really important to have a huge ego.”

“Thank you, I’ll take the compliment.”

Jeongyeon laughed harder, and Nayeon had to follow suit. She was really holding back from kissing the girl, and it just became harder when her laughter rang on her ears, familiar and soothing. Sometimes she wondered if they’d made a mistake by breaking up, but a glance at the group of friends waiting for them behind Jeongyeon made her remember why exactly they did it.

“Jihyo is calling for us.” Nayeon grabbed Jeongyeon’s hand, dragging her along.

“Nabongs.” Jeongyeon called her before they reached them.

“Yes?”

“You look beautiful.”

Nayeon stopped on her tracks, turned around to face her, and sighed, dreamily. “You too, Jeongyeonnie.” Then she tiptoed a little to place a kiss on her cheek. Jeongyeon blushed at the gesture, and they exchanged a knowing look. It was hard, but they knew that this was better for both of them.

“Come on, you two!” Jihyo yelled again, and they finally started walking again.

“What is it?” Nayeon asked, a tad breathless.

“Let’s go outside, all of us,” Jihyo announced, already walking in front of the group. They all eyed each other, but didn’t question it, following her.

Once the nine of them were outside, Jihyo grabbed her phone, holding it high above her head. “Here, the lighting is good.”

“What are we doing?” Sana asked, wrapping Mina in a hug with Momo. The three of them were shivering at the cold weather, and there was still snow falling on their heads. Tzuyu was the only one who’d brought a coat, and Chaeyoung was tucked inside of it as the taller girl hugged her from behind. Jeongyeon and Nayeon were glued to each other as well, and Dahyun held Jihyo’s frame.

“Taking a selfie,” Jihyo explained. “I want to remember tonight. I’ll print this later and give a copy to each one of us.”

Despite the cold, they all grinned at the idea; it was such a Jihyo thing to suggest that they felt their hearts melting.

“Now say cheese, my arm is freezing to death.” Jihyo smiled forcibly and made a V sign with her fingers, and the others did the same, without moving much from their spot. She took about five consecutive pictures and finally put her arm down. “Got it! Let’s go back inside.”

And they should’ve seen it coming when the three best friends tried to walk back all stuck together like that, but they didn’t. Sana stepped on something that was very much not supposed to be in the
middle of the snowy street, and slammed onto the ground wrist-first.

“Ouch!” She yelled, clutching at her arm. The shock of pain was so startling that it was making her dizzy.

“Oh, goodness,” Jihyo crouched immediately to check on her. “Oh, this doesn’t look good.”

“What happened?” Jeongyeon asked, and it didn’t take long for all of them to gather around Sana’s whimpering frame.

“I think Sana broke her wrist.” Jihyo said in a hurry. “Let’s take her back inside, I’ll call an ambulance.”

“Who the fuck dropped a fucking ice cream cone in the middle of the street? It’s Winter.” Chaeyoung kicked the thing that had made her friend fall, extremely angry. Tzuyu just tried to calm her down as all of them guided Sana back inside, with Momo and Mina checking her every step.

Once they were inside, Sana finally processed what had happened, and gradually started to smile until she broke into a fit of laughter. The group stared at her, afraid that she was mentally collapsing from the pain or something, but she just shook her head.

“That was the dumbest way of getting a broken wrist, what the hell!” Sana tried to explain, but she was laughing too hard. Slowly, one by one, the other eight girls joined her, the joyful chaos ringing out around them.

This night wasn’t exactly what it was supposed to be, but at least they were together, and when Sana thought about it, somehow it made her newly broken wrist hurt a little less.

They were a mess. But at least, they looked after each other.

Sana wondered what college would bring.

Chapter End Notes

I thought that it was important to portray their friendship before all the drama. Just so we can get a gist of how their group works (or was supposed to work). Thank you always for reading!

Find me on my social media too!
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“Fuck,” Chaeyoung grunted, letting her brush fall for the second time in less than five minutes. A few of her colleagues side-eyed her, starting to worry about the girl’s well being, but remained quiet.

The painting session at the art studio had just begun, but Chaeyoung’s hand wouldn’t stop hurting every time she swiped the brush, it didn’t matter how slowly she tried. A certain pressure was needed for the paint to work as she wanted it to, but she wasn’t managing to do it; a flash of unbearable pain ripped through her flesh each time.

“Miss Chaeyoung, is everything alright?” Her professor noticed after the fourth time it happened, and Chaeyoung felt her cheeks reddening as the class turned to her.

“Y-yes, professor. My hand is just hurting a little, I’ll b-be okay.”

“Hmmm,” he didn’t seem convinced. “An artist’s most valuable asset is his hand. I would recommend you go to the infirmary and get it checked.”

“N-no, really. I’m fine.”

“Now, please, Miss Chaeyoung.” He softened his gaze. “This assignment won’t affect your grade.”

The class started to become restless and Chaeyoung felt her throat closing. She ducked her head, grabbing her bag with her left hand and nodding on her way out, until she was sure there were no more eyes glued to her back. With a deep breath, she looked down at her hand and tried to close her fingers.

A bad idea, as it turned out – the pain rose from her knuckles to her elbow and she bent over, biting her lip to stop from screaming. All right, that was definitely a bad sign.

She knew she should’ve checked this the moment she punched that goddamn wall yesterday.

Recovering, Chaeyoung started making her way to the infirmary, only to stop midway. She looked outside to the bright sunny day gracing the campus, and decided to get some fresh air before doing anything else. Her mind had been hazy with angry thoughts lately and she needed a moment to meditate and relax before she did something stupid.

Chaeyoung stepped out of the building and walked calmly through the courtyard, until she reached the fountain. There were students chatting and fooling around the water as usual, but the benches were empty, so Chaeyoung picked one to sit. What she didn’t expect, was to spot a familiar face
napping under the shadow of a tree.

Her chest constricted and the faces of those girls badmouthing one of the sweetest people she’s ever met suddenly popped up in her head. Without a second thought, Chaeyoung turned around and walked towards Sana.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty,” Chaeyoung spoke softly, to not startle her.

Sana opened her eyes slowly, blinking and squinting before smiling. “Chaengie.”

She sat up, rubbing her eyes with a yawn, and Chaeyoung sat beside her on the grass. “Didn’t sleep well yesterday?”

“I— haven’t been sleeping very well.” Sana confessed with another yawn. “But I like taking naps outside. It’s quiet, and no one bothers you.”

“I can see the appeal in that.” The artist grinned, and her expression was so affectionate that Sana tilted her head to the side.

“What?”

“Hm?”

“You look happy,” Sana couldn’t help but to smile back. “Did something nice happen?”

“Oh,” Chaeyoung blushed at that, suddenly self-conscious. “No, I… I’m just happy I found you.”

“Did you want to talk to me?”

“No particularly. But it’s always nice talking to you.”

Sana giggled at that softly, looking down. She picked at the grass and sighed a little, letting her head fall on Chaeyoung’s shoulder. “It’s nice talking to you too.”

The two stayed like that, backs against the tree trunk, enjoying the breeze. Chaeyoung closed her eyes, distracting herself from the pain on her hand, glad that Sana was leaning against her left side.

The serenity of the moment brought back memories of their high school days, when Chaeyoung was still nervous about her discoveries and used to hang around Sana a lot more. The older girl always gave her valuable advice, soothing her worries, and being supportive in a way that didn’t feel suffocating. She respected Chaeyoung’s boundaries, never touching her more than necessary – and it was funny, how much of Sana’s touch Chaeyoung started to crave after a while. She didn’t feel anxious with her friend around; in fact, she was sure that Sana’s hold was a miracle. It was like all of her troubles vanished, if only for a moment.

How could those girls say such horrible things about someone they didn’t even know? For those shallow, awful people, Sana was just a sex toy. The thought made tears sting Chaeyoung’s eyes. She buried her face on Sana’s hair.

“Hmm?” Sana hummed, eyes still closed.

“…I really love you, Sana-ya.” It was almost a whisper, a sentence only meant for the two of them to hear, and no one else.

Sana opened her eyes at this, turning a bit to face her friend. “Chaeng?”
Chaeyoung pushed forward, shaking her head and touching her forehead on Sana’s neck. “Nothing. Just… reminding you.”

Sana didn’t know if it was because of the absolute sincerity in Chaeyoung’s words or because she’d been a lot more sensitive lately, but the reminder that she was loved this much by her friends made her heart fill with an affection that she’d almost forgotten. Carefully, Sana wrapped an arm around Chaeyoung’s small frame, placing a kiss to her hairline. “Thank you, Chaengie… I love you, too.”

The artist nodded, pressing closer, and Sana felt incredibly lighter. She remembered something from years ago, when Chaeyoung first came out to her, and smiled against her hair. “You remember, right?”

“What?”

“If you need to talk to someone…”

Chaeyoung chuckled, moving back to look at her. “I’ll come to you. I’ve never forgotten.”

“Good.” Sana’s gaze was filled with fondness and Chaeyoung wanted to scream, to tell her everyday how incredible she was, and how much she’d helped her overcome a lot of fears and insecurities. She couldn’t imagine her group of friends without Sana in it, and she didn’t want to. The world didn’t deserve Minatozaki Sana if the only thing it did was hurt her in stupid ways.

“We should hang out together again with the whole group.” Chaeyoung looked up at the sky, feeling tired suddenly.

“We should.” It was a simple answer, and Chaeyoung noticed that her friend hadn’t been really talkative. She nudged Sana a little.

“Are you okay or just sleepy?”

Sana hummed a bit. “Sleepy.” Then she grinned, tiredly. “Not really okay.”

“Huh?” This made Chaeyoung worry; was Sana aware of the horrible rumors about her? “What’s wrong?”

“I’ve…” Sana didn’t like talking about it, but after opening up to Dahyun and Mina, she felt more comfortable relying on her friends. “I’ve been having a few problems lately.”

“Like what?” Chaeyoung placed her hand on Sana’s in a comforting manner. “Did… someone hurt you?”

She shook her head. “Not exactly. It’s more like… I’m hurting myself.” When Chaeyoung was about to speak, Sana completed. “Not physically, but… emotionally.”

Sana explained to her what she’d told her other two friends, not in much detail, but enough for Chaeyoung to grasp it all. When she was done, she saw Chaeyoung’s look soften, as if she understood exactly what she was going through. The hold on her hand felt tighter.

“And that’s why I don’t really want to be around people. Well, you guys are an exception.” Sana’s little grin made Chaeyoung’s heart hurt.

“It sucks, doesn’t it?” The question was rhetorical and filled with empathy, and Sana looked down, playing a little with Chaeyoung’s fingers.
“So much. How do you do it?” She let out a breathy laugh, making the tiny artist do the same.

“I don’t, really. You actually helped me a lot, you know.”

“Oh.” Sana gazed back at her. “I did?”

Chaeyoung sighed, intertwining their fingers. “Back in high school, when I came out. In my senior year, when you were busy with a college life but still made time to see me when I was feeling lonely without you guys. You just—” She swallowed thickly. “You help me all the time. I wish I could do the same for you.”

“Chaengie… you are helping me.” Sana pinched her cheeks slightly, the way she did when she wanted the girl to stop worrying and just enjoy the moments they had together. “I’m really glad you came to talk to me today. Really. And we should definitely gather everyone. It would make —” She paused, biting her lip.

“What?”

Sana wasn’t used to being selfish, to think about herself before others, but she felt like this was an important part of her healing process. So, she let the words out, a bit awkwardly. “It would make me feel much better.”

That was the only sentence Chaeyoung needed to hear. “I’ll talk to Jihyo. We’ll make this happen, I promise.”

Sana smiled, ruffling her bangs. “My hero.”

They laughed together and enjoyed each other for a few more minutes. Then, Chaeyoung decided that she should probably get her hand checked out. “I need to go. Will you be okay?”

“I will.”

“Promise?”

“Pinky-promise.” Sana raised her little finger, and on reflex, Chaeyoung tried to interlace her right finger with hers. This made pain jolt through her bones again, and she grunted, bending over and holding her wrist against her chest. Sana blinked, grasping her friend’s shoulder.

“Chaengie?”

“I’m okay,” Her voice came out strained and quickly, and she got up in a hurry. “Cramps. I’ll be going now. See you soon, Sana-ya.”

Chaeyoung stumbled away from her and Sana frowned, worried.

There was not way Chaeyoung could tell her about those rumors now, not when Sana was clearly struggling to get better; that would only push her back to square one. Chaeyoung knew from personal experience.

She would have to keep this to herself for now.

And make sure no one else ruined Sana’s reputation, either.
Jeongyeon scribbled on her notebook as the teacher’s voice mumbled something about angles and narratives in a far away dimension; the class was really interesting, but passing her semester was more important at the moment. She drew a rough schedule of the past days, thinking about how to go about this.

Mina and Jeongyeon had been filming for three days now, and later after class they would start their fourth session. On her fifth day, she had to start editing, so she could apply the final touches on the sixth, and deliver the completed project on the seventh. That sounded reasonable enough, and a tinge of relief spread through her body.

At the same time, Jeongyeon felt sad for some reason. She was really glad for Mina’s assistance, and the fact that she’d been an incredible actress helped speed things up, but when she realized that today would be their last session together, Jeongyeon couldn’t help but miss her already.

Something about spending alone time with Mina was incredibly relaxing, despite them being in a hurry. She made the whole stressful process a lot less stressful with her gentle demeanor and calming voice, which Jeongyeon appreciated. The fact that Mina had been smiling a lot also helped her feel like the project was fun for her, which was what Jeongyeon was the most concerned about; she didn’t want her shy friend to feel uncomfortable, ever.

Jeongyeon caught herself smiling, then blinked, surprised. Mina’s always been a special presence, and Jeongyeon’s been thinking a lot about her lately.

She moved the pencil to the corner of her page and doodled a tiny, crooked little stick ballerina, then laughed a bit. When she thought about erasing it, she stopped, deciding to leave it there.

Jeongyeon looked at the clock, then sighed – time didn’t seem to pass. She wanted to meet Mina soon.

After what seemed like an eternity, the bell rang and Jeongyeon pretty much bolted out of the classroom. She had her camera with her at all times, and the weight was barely noticeable anymore – maybe she was getting used to it, maybe it was just the thought of filming Mina again distracting her from it.

She went upstairs, nodding and smiling to a few of her fangirls on the way there, and stopping for a second to chat with her friends from production class.

“How’s the project going?” Jae asked, worried.

“It’s going great,” Her smile was blinding. “I’m gonna make it.”

“You’re looking happy.” Jae raised his eyebrows, quite in shock at the lack of desperation in Jeongyeon’s voice. “I was expecting a few tears, honestly.”

“Only tears of happiness from this girl,” Jeongyeon replied playfully, already walking away. “This movie is going to be awesome, Jae, you’ll see!”

“Can’t wait!” He replied, but the athlete was already out of his sight. Jae huffed with a smile. “I wonder who put that dumbass grin on her face.”
By the time she arrived at the studio, Mina was already there, reading the script with a focused gaze. She looked up at Jeongyeon and her face broke in a smile. “Hey, I was wait—”

Before she could finish, arms enveloped her, and Mina almost fell backwards on the mattress. It took her a while to process the hug, but she returned it, heart pounding in her chest. “Jeongyeon?”

Jeongyeon just laughed, filled with an unprecedented giddiness, and spoke against Mina’s shoulder. “I’m going to make it. And it’s all thanks to you. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Minari.”

Mina’s legs almost gave out as she melted at the honest gratitude. She swallowed, thoughts of getting to hold Jeongyeon like this every day swirling in her mind, and she felt heavy words crawling their way up her throat. Momo’s voice rang at the back of her head.

“You should tell her, soon.”

She wanted to. So much. She felt like she was drowning.

Mina opened her mouth, “Jeongyeon, I…”

Jeongyeon pulled back, her glasses crooked on her face, her smile blinding. “Yes?”

Mina took a deep breath.

Do it. Say it, before you lose her again. Stop being a coward.

Her eyes landed on Jeongyeon’s camera and she bit the inside of her cheek. Reaching up, she adjusted Jeongyeon’s glasses, the fingers grazing her ears lingering a bit longer than necessary. “…I’m having trouble with this one scene, can you help me?”

She felt her chest constricting, but got a hold of herself.

After we’re done filming. I’ll tell her then.

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“Nayeon, may I talk to you for a second?” Mr. Kwon called her from behind the door to the dressing room.

“Of course.” The actress paused her rehearsal, walking up to him. She grabbed her bottle of water on the way, thirsty from talking so much; that was a really long scene, heavy with dialogue. Upon arriving, she noticed that the professor looked distressed; it was easy to read his exaggerated facial features. Sometimes, he reminded her of Dahyun. Nayeon almost giggled at the thought.

“I’m afraid we have a problem.” He spoke slowly and gently, and Nayeon knew she was in big trouble. Professor Kwon was known for being straightforward, with no patience whatsoever for uncertainties and awkward conversations. He told the students as it was, and his feedbacks were harsh, but very much appreciated. Nayeon knew she couldn’t have gotten far without his pushes.
“Is it about the musical?” She asked, already bracing herself for the blow.

“Not exactly. Well, it has to do with it.” He took a deep breath. “Alright, I’ll just get to the point. The agency called, they have your commercials scheduled already.”

“Oh.” With all the chaos of the musical, she’d almost forgotten that her commercials weren’t tied to the college, but to an actual professional agency. “When do they want me to be there?”

Professor Kwon sighed. “On the 25th.”

Nayeon almost dropped her bottle. “That’s… the day after the musical.”

“It is.” He crossed his arms, and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I couldn’t get them to change their mind about this. I already managed to make them push the recordings to the 25th, they wanted you there at the day of the musical. I’m really sorry about this mess.”

“N-no, no, it’s… not your fault.” Nayeon shook her head. “Thank you for talking to them, I’m sure it was probably hard to convince them.”

“Tell me about it.” The teacher made a gesture with his wrist, angry. “Those… marketing pigs, always worried about themselves, never about who they hire. Never mind that.” He touched her shoulder, gently. “What I want to know is… can you do it? Can you memorize your lines for the performance on top of five commercials, in ten days?”

Nayeon opened her mouth, ready to answer confidently as she always did, but hesitated for a moment. The weight of being hired for a serious job for the first time in her life pressed down on her suddenly; it was like she realized that this was an incredible opportunity for her dream career, and there was no way she could mess it up. Of course, the musical was important as well, but both Nayeon and her professor knew that if she had to choose between the two of them, she should take the commercials.

She realized that, if she couldn’t handle it, Professor Kwon was asking her to pick one. This hit a dangerous part of Nayeon’s personality: her pride.

“With all due respect, Mr. Kwon,” Nayeon lifter her head, and there was a fire in her gaze. “If I can’t do at least that, then you shouldn’t cast me as your protagonist anymore.”

He stared at her, wide-eyed, then shook his head. “You’re so dramatic, Miss Nayeon. Who did you get this from?”

Nayeon couldn’t suppress a tiny smile. “I believe I’m looking at him right now.”

Mr. Kwon smirked as well, throwing his head back with a loud laugh. “Oh, my Lord… That spirit is what gets you casted, darling. Never forget that.”

“Someone told me long ago that a huge ego is important for actors.” Jeongyeon’s words seemed distant, but still made her heart heavy with memories.

“They were very right,” He patted her shoulder. “Very well. I’ll call the agency and confirm your presence.”

“Thank you.” She nodded, and turned around to get back to practicing.

“And Nayeon.”
She looked over her shoulder. “Yes?”

“A huge ego is important, but knowing your limits is essential.”

It felt like a direct confrontation, like Nayeon’s inner voice was the one telling her that. She simply nodded and waited for the teacher to leave the room.

Nayeon walked back to the center of the stage and grabbed her script, then looked up at the single spotlight on her. She felt exposed suddenly, shy, as if the world was watching her every move, knowingly, judging. It was like an invisible audience was applauding her in a sarcastic manner, just a capricious act to make her feel less sorry for herself. Nothing about her was worthy of cheers, and yet, she’d been receiving support from people who believed and trusted her. It was like a punishment.

Nayeon had done nothing but toy with her friends’ feelings to fulfill an egoistical desire, and the more she thought about it, the more she wanted to disappear. Why couldn’t she be honest? Why did she have to be a liar? When had this mask fused with her flesh, refusing to budge?

Why did people have to believe in her?

*Because you manipulated them.*

“Shut up.” The voice was back and Nayeon didn’t have time for this. She needed to focus on her musical.

*Mr. Kwon is rooting for you, doing everything he can so you can become a successful actress and achieve your dream.*

“I am a Collector, and you should know about us by now.” Nayeon spoke louder, trying to muffle the voice.

*Jihyo is proud of you. She saw you grow up, and you’re going so far now.*

“Foolish humans, who know nothing about the universe. You think you’re the center of it, don’t you?”

*Momo loves helping you rehearse, watching your every move, admiring your beautiful performances. She’ll be by your side the moment you call for her.*

“But you’re not,” Her hands started to tremble. “The universe does not revolve around you, nor does time.

*All of your friends are there for you.*

“The only reason you’re allowed to live comfortably like this, is because we watch over you.” Her vision blurred with tears. “A little—gratitude would be welcomed.”

*Jeongyeon’s eyes will sparkle when she sees you onstage.*

“Shut. *Up!*” Nayeon threw her script on the ground, crouching with her head in hands. She felt like she was going crazy with each passing minute. “Leave me alone.”

The voice was gone, and the silence was absolute. The only sounds were her quiet sobs, that didn’t waver. She cried for what seemed like an eternity.

With a swallow and a shaky hand, she reached for her stupid script again, getting up with weak
legs. She could barely breathe, and yet, she tried to memorize her lines. She read them again, and again, forcing her brain to absorb the sentences.

Nayeon’s only driving force at that point was her pride.
She wondered if she could live purely of that.

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“…Broken?”

“Two knuckles, yes.” Miss Jea finished wrapping Chaeyoung’s hand in a bandage, which hurt a lot, but the medicine for pain would start working soon. The nurse took off her gloves and threw them on the table next to the bed Chaeyoung was sitting on. “Your hand is in a really terrible shape. You should’ve come here immediately after your… accident.”

Chaeyoung’s mouth hung open as she processed the information that she’d actually broken her knuckles after punching a wall. A week before her final assignment, too. Her poem was supposed to be handwritten, and now Chaeyoung was utterly screwed. “How long will it take to heal?”

“Six weeks?” She almost yelled.

“As I said,” Miss Jea was unfazed. “Should’ve come to me the moment you felt pain. I can’t help you more than that.”

“But…”

“Son Chaeyoung, right?” The nurse asked suddenly, looking at her records. “You’re a freshman, correct?”

“…Yes.”

“You’ve never stepped into my office, not even once. No headaches, cramps, colds… your record’s been perfect so far.” She looked back at Chaeyoung, a tiny smirk tucked in her lips. “And you told me you fell down and that’s how you think you broke it?”

“Yes…?” Chaeyoung eyed her suspiciously, not understanding where she was trying to get at.

“Well, if you had fallen fist-first on a hard surface, I don’t think your knuckles would’ve been the only affected area.” She reached for something in her cabinet. “The weight of the impact would’ve probably caused pain in your wrist as well. That’s probably what you would’ve broken instead, actually.”

“Uh…”

Miss Jea walked up to her, taking her arm suddenly and moving her wrist to the side with her
thumb, careful not to touch Chaeyoung’s hand. “And apparently, no pain here.”

Chaeyoung didn’t appreciate how close the nurse was, and avoided eye contact. Miss Jea let her go with a soft chuckle, then moved to the other room; Chaeyoung heard a small beep and something that sounded awfully like a microwave, and frowned. A few seconds later, the nurse returned with a cup in hands. “Drink.”

“I don’t—”

“It’s chamomile tea. It helps with the pain.”

Chaeyoung hesitantly grabbed it, bowing slightly. She blew the hot liquid and watched as Miss Jea sat on a chair in front of her, with her hands on her knees. They stared at each other for a second, the silence awkward at this point.

“How is it?” The nurse asked after Chaeyoung sipped it.

“It’s good. Thank you.”

“Is your hand going to hinder you somehow?”

“Yeah, actually.” Chaeyoung drank a bit more. “I have a final assignment, it’s a handwritten poem. I was going to start it today.”

“Can any of your friends write it for you?”

She thought about it and Tzuyu would definitely be willing to do it. She hated bothering her with this, though. “My roommate probably can. I’ll manage.”

“That’s good,” Miss Jea smiled gently, and Chaeyoung thought that maybe she wasn’t that scary after all. “Now, are you ready to tell me what you actually did to that hand?”

Chaeyoung almost choked on her tea. She coughed for a bit, then looked sideways. “I told you, I fell.”

“You students seem to mistake me for one of you,” She rolled her eyes, still smiling despite everything. “I’m not going to scold you, give you a life lesson, tattle on you to your parents, or whatever your biggest fear is. I’m a professional, and while I do take my job as a nurse seriously, I also worry about your well-being, physical and mental. So, what do you say?”

Chaeyoung blinked a few times, reconsidering it. She knew why she was so guarded about this, especially with this woman who she’d never interacted with before – her anxiety was to blame, and it was just an instinctive way to protect herself. But Miss Jea was quite right; she was just a professional, with no personal relationship to her, and Chaeyoung could tell her the truth.

Maybe she should learn to open up, like Sana was.

“…Okay. Alright,” Chaeyoung sipped her tea once more, and sighed. “I didn’t fall. I… punched a wall.”

She waited for the laughter, but it never came. “I see. Any particular reason?”

“I was… angry. I…” She wasn’t used to talk about this, so it was hard. “I have eight friends that I consider my family. We’ve known each other for a long time, ever since high school years, and we’re all attending this university together.”
“That sounds nice.”

“It is. I’m really glad we are,” Chaeyoung shifted on her spot. “Yesterday, on my way to the dorms, I heard some girls saying some horrible things about one of my friends. I got angry, and just… punched the wall next to me.”

“Do you usually have fits of rage like this?”

“Um… sometimes.” The cup in her hand felt heavy. “Only when it concerns people I care about a lot. I usually try not to call attention for myself. I hate it.”

“So, if someone hurts your friends in any way, you would do anything to defend them?”

“I think so. I don’t really… control myself very well in these situations.” Chaeyoung finished her tea, feeling oddly relaxed. Chamomile truly had an effect on people – or perhaps it was saying all of these things out loud for the first time in her life. “I just hate it when people assume shit they don’t know anything about.” She caught her tongue and blushed. “Sorry, I didn’t… mean to say that word.”

“Don’t worry about it. Honestly, I think you need to say those words more often. Let it all out.” Miss Jea got up from her chair, and walked towards her, taking the empty cup from her hands. “I’m not a psychologist of any kind, Miss Chaeyoung, but from what I noticed, your introversion makes you bottle a lot of things up. Now you have this huge amount of pent up anger, and you don’t know what to do with it. So, when the right moments come, you let it out without meaning to.”

“T-that’s…” Chaeyoung avoided her gaze again.

“You’re lucky it was a wall that you punched this time.” She continued, on a serious tone. “I’m just afraid of what could happen if the next thing close to you is a person instead. Especially if it’s someone who talked shit about your friend.”

Chaeyoung blinked, swallowing thickly. The nurse was extremely perceptive; that was one of Chaeyoung’s biggest secrets, one that she’d never shared with anyone, and Miss Jea had just cracked her open like that. She wished that the effects of the tea lasted longer than a few seconds, because she could feel her heart picking up speed again.

“There is an actual psychologist in campus, and she’s free. I would advise you to see her. But that’s up to you.” Miss Jea suggested, with a sympathetic look.

“R-right.”

“Well, you’re free to go, now.” Miss Jea walked away from the room with one last grin, but the artist stood there for a few more seconds, biting her lip. The whole conversation made her remember a huge fear of hers.

Chaeyoung was extremely terrified of her own anger. She had no idea how to control it, and she dreamed about violent scenarios constantly.

She was afraid of snapping at some point, and seriously hurting someone.

She was afraid that this moment might actually happen soon.
Slim fingers slid through piano keys as the setting sun graced the white walls one last time for the day. Inside the desolated music room, Jihyo played, paused, and wrote down musical notes and different arrangements as she saw fit.

Composing had always been part of her, ever since she could remember; growing up musically gifted, her parents sent her to the city to study music with her grandmother at an early age. At first, Jihyo feared her new environment – there were too many cars and loud noises in the city streets for a five-year-old who was used to the calmness of the country – but eventually, she came to admire even the roughest of melodies. Everywhere she went, every new place her grandma took her, was an experience, and she paid attention to the ugliest of details.

Jihyo had a need to polish rough edges, fix what was broken, create the perfect song out of twisted and mismatched notes.

She pushed herself to her limits just to hear a beautiful melody coming to fruition.

It’s unsurprising that this applied to her relationships with people as well.

With one last sigh, Jihyo finished her piece, and put the pen down. The sunlight was now gone, darkening the room, much like Jihyo’s own mood. Her chest had been heavy lately with worries and feelings unspoken, and she wished this uneasiness would go away soon. There was an inner conflict going on between respecting her friends’ boundaries, and pushing through their walls so she could help them. Unfortunately, the former always ended up winning.

Lowering her gaze, Jihyo reached out for the picture leaning next to her music sheet. The corners of her lips turned upwards a little as she caressed the photo with her thumb, reminiscing days that seemed incredibly far away now. She’d taken that picture at their last day of school, a few seconds before Sana tripped and broke her wrist for the first time, and the sound of their laughter inside the school’s dance hall still rang clearly in her ears. Things seemed so much simpler then.

There was a low noise suddenly, and someone made their way into the music room with the utmost carefulness. Jihyo’s trained ears heard it, however, so she turned around on her seat. She was pleasantly surprised at the visitor. “Oh, Tzuyu-ah.”

Tzuyu paused, getting caught. “No one will ever be able to surprise you, huh?”

Jihyo smiled for the first time that day. “You just need to polish your ninja skills.”

Tzuyu laughed and Jihyo slid a little to make space for the younger girl to sit next to her. They stood there for a few seconds, staring at the piano, and enjoying the dim illumination of the room – it was a peaceful atmosphere. Tzuyu’s eyes caught the picture near the music sheet and she smiled.

“It seems like we took this a thousand years ago.”

“Doesn’t it?” Jihyo’s tone was wistful, a soft gaze falling upon the image. “So much’s changed.”

“Hm.”

“What are you doing here so late?” Jihyo asked eventually. “Evening classes?”
Tzuyu shook her head. “I wanted to talk to you. I asked around and Miss Yubin told me you’d be here.”

“Oh. Is everything okay?” The first thing that crossed Jihyo’s mind was more problems and her protective instincts kicked in.

“I don’t think it is,” Tzuyu slid a careful finger on a piano key. “I was sick up until a few days ago, so I haven’t spoken with you guys a lot, but… Lately it feels like things are weird.”

Tzuyu had always been very perceptive, so it wasn’t surprising when she brought this up. Jihyo softened her gaze, and felt oddly relieved to have someone to talk to about all of this; lately it seemed like everyone had been shutting her out. “You feel it too, huh?”

“Yeah…” Tzuyu looked back up to her friend. “I know that because Chaeng has been acting weird, too. It’s like she’s keeping something from me. Do you know anything?”

Tzuyu was just like Jihyo in many regards – she worried a lot and wanted to be useful, to help her friends however she could. But Jihyo knew that, being the youngest, the group tended to hide things from her to refrain her from worrying. With Jihyo, they were usually honest with their problems, so the fact that everyone was so guarded even with her was what worried her the most at this point.

“Well…” Jihyo hesitated for a split second, then decided that Tzuyu deserved to know; too many secrets had been surrounding them the past few days. “I know of a few things. Sana’s not so good. Neither is Nayeon, for that matter.”

“What happened to them?”

“I feel like… everything started going downhill after that Drama Club party. I was there accompanying Sana, but she got extremely wasted. It was like she was drinking to forget.”

“Forget what?”

“I wish I knew,” Jihyo dropped her shoulders. “She ended up passing out in the middle of the party, so I had to carry her to my room. Then Jeongyeon knocked on my door with Nayeon basically in the same state. There’s something going on with those two.”

Tzuyu kept quiet, urging her to continue.

“Momo was antsy at lunch time, too. The moment she spotted Nayeon, it was like nothing else mattered. They’ve been practicing Nayeon’s lines for her musical together, but yesterday when I mentioned that I’d called Momo to help her when I couldn’t, she became white as a sheet.”

“So, Momo, Nayeon and Sana… that’s worrying.”

“Very.”

“Do you think Momo has something to do with Nayeon’s problem?”

“I think so,” Jihyo sighed internally; she remembered when she used to be the one Nayeon shared secrets with, but now it was like Momo had taken that spot. Still, it didn’t make sense for her to want to avoid Momo like that. “It’s like Nayeon wants to be with her, but doesn’t at the same—”

That’s when it struck her. A sentence that Nayeon had mumbled out loud after her breakdown in the bathroom.
“Do you think it’s possible to fall in love with two people at once?”

Jihyo widened her eyes slowly, the realization piercing her very core. Back then, Jihyo had played it off as dismissal so Nayeon could rest after crying, but that confession had been at the back of her mind ever since. She’d been trying to figure out who was the second person Nayeon was falling for, because the first one was as clear as day.

How could she have been so dumb? She’d hit jackpot yesterday and didn’t even realize.

“It’s Momo.” Jihyo spoke slowly, then leaned her forehead on both hands. “Oh, Nabongs…”

“What is?” Tzuyu frowned a bit, confused.

She didn’t answer her right away, processing the whole drama. Now everything made sense to her. Jihyo straightened her back, then looked at the youngest of their group for a long moment, debating whether she should tell her, or respect Nayeon’s privacy on the matter. It was clear that this secret was eating her from the inside, but it only made her condition worse. Now that Jihyo understood, she had a choice: either keep it a secret from everyone else, too, or open the Pandora Box.

She decided that secrets didn’t help anyone. Her best friend needed help, so she would start slowly.

“Tzuyu,” Jihyo turned fully to her, grabbing both her hands. “What I’m about to tell you needs to be kept a secret from the others, at least until I can get Nayeon to open up on her own. Can you do that?”

A small part of Tzuyu didn’t like this at all; being secretive with each other only hurt, and destroyed friendships.

But another part, a bigger one that was still frustrated with Chaeyoung hiding things from her all the time because she thought she couldn’t handle it, spoke louder.

“I can do that.” Her answer had a conviction that surprised even herself. Jihyo nodded, bringing her mouth close to the girl’s ear.

Once she was done, Tzuyu gaped.

“That’s… complicated.”

“Yeah,” Jihyo grabbed her music sheets and her picture, tucking them inside her purse. “We need to find a way to uncomplicate it. Can you help me?”

“Of course.” Tzuyu got up, touching the piano. “But… what about Sana? How can we help her too?”

“I… don’t know what’s going on with Sana. I’ll try to ask Mina, maybe she’ll know something.”

“Right.” She nodded. “And I’ll see what I can do, too.” Jihyo was about to speak, but Tzuyu smiled. “Don’t worry, I won’t say anything to anyone. Not yet.”

“Thank you.”

“Oh, that’s right!” Tzuyu clapped her hands cutely. “I was going to ask you to help me organize a get-together. I miss all nine of us hanging out.”

Jihyo paused on her tracks, then grinned. “That sounds like a great idea, actually. I’ll check when everyone will be available.”
“Good! Maybe we can solve a few things if we’re all in the same room.”

Jihyo thought that this might complicate the whole situation, but it was impossible to solve anything if people just avoided each other like the plague. “Yeah. Hopefully, we can.”

And so, Jihyo and Tzuyu set their plan into motion: get their friends to communicate with each other.

Like the good old days.

The picture in Jihyo’s purse felt heavy.

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Sana put down the hairdryer after making sure there was no more dampness in her locks and sighed, contently. She looked at her reflection and tried to smile, once, then twice. Not really enjoying how forced the expression was coming out lately, she gave up with an eye roll, and walked back to her bed.

Mina was absent like always; Sana kept forgetting to ask her what she’d been doing lately, because the girl always returned when she was already asleep. It was probably important, so Sana didn’t fret.

She put up her pillows against the head board, creating a comfortable backrest, and adjusted her position on the bed until she was leaning pleasantly against it. With the TV turned on for noise and a book in hands, Sana started to read, getting ready for bed.

That’s when she heard a knock on her door.

Sana frowned, annoyed for having to get up after her relaxation ritual had just begun, and pressed her ear to the door.

“Yes?”

“It’s me, Dahyun!”

Sana widened her eyes and finally unlocked the door, surprised. “Dahyunnie, hey.”

The younger girl was beaming, and offered her a hand. “Come with me.”

“Huh?”

Dahyun didn’t answer, looking at her expectantly with an unwavering smile. Sana realized that there were very few people that could make her willingly throw everything out of the window and follow them into the night, but Dahyun had her unconditional trust.

With a spark of curiosity and devotion, Sana grabbed the girl’s hand. Dahyun’s fingers curled on her palm softly and her grin widened. She pulled Sana out of her room with a chuckle, and the
older girl yelped, following.

They ran together hand in hand until they were out of the dorms, and in the field. Sana was wearing her slippers, but one of them got loose on the way. She thought about asking Dahyun to slow down so she could go back and get it, but this whole sudden arrangement made adrenaline run in her veins, and she just wanted to get lost in the world with this girl she adored so much.

“Almost there!” Dahyun said over her shoulder. Sana laughed, squeezing her hand tighter.

The two finally stopped by the fountain, but Dahyun pulled Sana to hide along the trees. The full moon made the courtyard look like a beautiful silver dream, reflecting its light on the water and shining against the marble. The fountain and lights were turned off, so the place felt frozen in time. Sana’s never been there this late into the night, so seeing the place completely devoid of people and sounds was remarkably relaxing.

“We’d probably get in trouble if someone caught us here at this hour, especially wearing our pajamas.” Dahyun muttered with a giggle.

“That’s true,” Sana returned the smile. “So… what are we doing here?”

Dahyun just pointed to the sky. “Look up.”

She did, and what she saw took her breath away. Shooting stars fell in succession, not even two seconds apart from each other. Their trails were clearly visible, crossing the darkness with gleaming beauty. Sana gaped, then looked back to Dahyun, who was now lying down on the grass with her stomach up.

She patted the spot next to her. “Come here.”

Sana smiled, doing the same. Their arms brushed as she shifted to position her head next to Dahyun’s, and they watched in silence as the stars kept falling, one by one.

Suddenly Sana heard a faint piano sound coming from her side and turned her head. Dahyun simply lifted her cellphone with a grin, placing it above their heads.

With the soothing music now playing for them, Sana closed her eyes and just felt – the grass under her body, the melody from the piano, the gentle breeze on her skin, Dahyun’s arm against hers, Dahyun’s familiar shampoo smell, Dahyun’s heartbeat, Dahyun, Dahyun, Dahyun. Dahyun’s sudden fingers shyly intertwining with hers.

Sana’s chest felt like it was going to burst. No one should be allowed to love this intensely.

She opened her eyes, stealing a glance to the girl next to her. Dahyun had closed her eyes as well, a gracious smile still plastered on her face. Sana gazed at her side profile, memorizing every detail, every beautiful curve and slope, from Dahyun’s nose to her eyebrows, her eyelashes, and lips. She was so beautiful.

Sana was so tired of hating herself, of feeling like she was undeserving of love because of what others perceived her as. She didn’t want to feel like her body was dirty because she sought pleasure in different ways, in different people. It used to make her feel good, but now she just felt empty.

She didn’t want to push people away because of that, either. Her entire plan was to make Dahyun see how horrible she was, so she could finally stay away from her for good; this way, Sana wouldn’t be able to ever hurt her again. Because that’s what the voices of invisible people in her
head kept telling her—

*Minatozaki Sana is a bad person.*

But she *wasn’t*. How could she be, when Chaeyoung reminded her how much she loved her, and how much she’d helped her? How could she be, when Mina cuddled with her in bed to soothe her worries, telling her that her anxiety attacks were okay, and there was absolutely nothing wrong with her?

How could she be a bad person, when Kim Dahyun existed in this world to run away with her in the middle of the night and show her shooting stars, and hold her hand to the sound of piano melodies?

Having sex with multiple people didn’t make Sana a bad person, and if people wanted to believe that, then that was their problem.

Besides, she didn’t want to sleep with anyone anymore.

The only person she wanted to look at right now, was right beside her.

Sana lifted her torso. “Dahyunnie.”

Dahyun opened her eyes. “Hmm?” She gazed back at the girl now hovering on top of her, without blushing, without running, without stuttering.

Sana inched closer. “Thank you.”

Then she closed their distance.

The kiss was tentative, experimental, just a gentle press of lips. Sana was so afraid of breaking – not only Dahyun, but herself as well. She didn’t know if this was okay, if she had gone too far, if the girl even felt the same—

When Dahyun’s lips started moving against hers and she felt fingers reaching up to her hair, Sana almost gasped into the kiss. Dahyun pushed forward a bit, lifting her back from the grass, and Sana let a small tear run down her cheek. She tried to angle her jaw better, and ended up pecking Dahyun’s lips again. Their mouths danced together for a while, without taking it any further, and the younger girl only stopped threading her fingers on Sana’s hair when she had to pull back a little to breathe.

Sana flickered her eyes open, dazed. Her cheeks were red, as well as Dahyun’s, and she didn’t know what to say. She chuckled nervously, moving away. “I— I’m sorry, I didn’t—”

Dahyun sat up, still looking at Sana with hypnotized eyes, then blinked. “Don’t. I m-mean, don’t apologize.” As if finally realizing what had happened, Dahyun averted her eyes and smiled crookedly. “That was… my first, actually. Um… I probably messed it up. Sorry. Was it okay? I don’t… really know what to do. Should we do it again?” She slapped her face then. “N-never mind, forget I said that!”

Sana just watched as her friend spiraled on a sudden embarrassed breakdown, then started laughing. She grabbed her stomach, bending forward and resting her forehead on Dahyun’s shoulder.

“You’re laughing,” Dahyun cleverly stated. “That’s… probably a bad sign.”
Sana shook her head, catching her breath. “You’re…” She lifted her head again to stare at her. “You’re worried because that was your first?”

“Uh… yes? Should I not be?”

“You’re not worried at all that I was the one kissing you?”

“Oh,” Dahyun blinked, her face reddening even more if that was even possible. “That’s a good point.” Then she licked her lips. “But… I mean, if anyone was going to take my first kiss, I’m… glad it was you.”

Sana softened her gaze and brushed a strand of hair from Dahyun’s face; this girl had absolutely no idea how much she was loved. It was sad, and yet, incredibly endearing.

“Can I kiss you again?” Was all Sana asked.

“…I would like that.” Dahyun replied.

They stared at each other, then chuckled together. This time, Dahyun was the one who leaned first. Sana met her halfway.

She was sure that no other kiss would be as perfect. Sana cupped Dahyun’s face with both hands, like she was the most fragile thing in the world, and sighed against her mouth, the pads of her thumbs brushing against her cheeks. Dahyun didn’t know what to do with her hands, so she settled for grasping the hem of Sana’s shirt.

They kissed and nipped at each other’s lips for minutes, until Dahyun pulled back again. The two giggled breathlessly, the piano melody looping continuously in the background.

“Sana-ya.”

“Yes?”

Dahyun touched the girl’s knees, rubbing circles there. “…Do you like me?”

Sana caressed her cheeks again, then touched foreheads with her. “…I don’t think I’ve ever liked someone this much.” She breathed out.

It didn’t come close to what she felt for Dahyun, but for now, she wished it would suffice.

“Oh,” Dahyun bit her lip, unable to stop smiling. “Okay.”

Sana smiled back. “Okay.”

Okay.

--
Mina was sprawled on the mattress, a pretty mess of sheets covering half of her legs. The red fabric matched the red lipstick she was wearing, and it made Mina look simply irresistible under the candlelight. That scene was approaching—the one that made her stomach twist with contrasting reactions. The prevailing emotion, however, was nervousness.

The script simply read: “The protagonist finally lets herself rest and be consumed, the burden no longer hers.” Mina couldn’t grasp the meaning of it for the life of her, but hopefully—with Jeongyeon’s precise directions—she would finally understand how exactly she was supposed to behave to convey… whatever this was.

“Move a bit to the right, please,” Jeongyeon spoke, her gaze shifting from the camera she had been adjusting to the girl in front of her. She was proud of how this scene had been set up. It was exactly as she imagined it in her head.

Jeongyeon began to note a sense of discomfort within her. She didn’t like the idea of showing this to the whole class later. At first, she thought that it was because she didn’t want to expose Mina like that to strangers. Yes, she was used to being onstage as a dancer, but she was not accustomed to being the center of attention like Nayeon was. But as the recording went on, she realized that there was something more to the pressure in her gut.

Jeongyeon refused to acknowledge the feeling as jealousy.

“Like this?” Mina’s shoulder was almost bare, the crop top a bit too large for her petit frame.

“Yeah, like that.” Jeongyeon couldn’t afford to think about this now. “That’s good, I’ll move now.”

She started filming, and walked around the cramped space, capturing her best angles; she liked to have plenty of options to choose from, even though it was pretty late at this point and they’d already been filming the whole afternoon.

Mina gazed down, looking trapped, afraid, burdened; all of those feelings would vanish as soon as the protagonist freed herself from her shackles— which, in that case, meant her clothes.

It made sense in the context of her story, but Jeongyeon was incredibly self-conscious now that they were actually doing this.

“And… cut,” she put the camera down, and Mina sat up. The candlelight flickered with the movement, making shadows dance across the ballerina’s features and Jeongyeon cleared her throat. “That was great. Now we can finally move to the last scene.”

“Right,” a faint blush covered Mina’s cheeks and she tried to undo the knots at the back of her top that held the garment in place. The knots were tighter than anticipated, however, and she couldn’t help but brace herself for the anxiety she was about to feel.

Taking a breath, Mina turned to Jeongyeon. “Um, can you help me?”

Jeongyeon blinked.

“Oh. Y-yeah,” she responded as she scratched the back of her neck and kneeled to Mina’s level. When she was about to touch the knots, Jeongyeon stopped. “…You know, I was thinking, maybe you don’t have to take off the top after all.”

“Hm?” Mina looked over her shoulder, and didn’t expect Jeongyeon to be this close to her face. She faced forward again. “But… wouldn’t that defeat the purpose of the scene?”
“Not really,” Jeongyeon was good at many things, but making excuses was not one of them. “I could… just use the sheet, and it would make the whole idea of ‘taking off the clothes’ a subjective theme. We could just, you know… imply it. Cult movies are all subjective, anyway.”

She was clearly nervous and Mina couldn’t help but to grin at how cute she was being.

“Jeong, I don’t mind.”

“Huh?”

“If you’re doing this because you don’t want me to be uncomfortable, I promise I’m okay.” With a surge of bravery, she turned to her again, and smiled through hooded eyes. “Now can you untie it for me?”

Jeongyeon took a deep breath, amazed at how gorgeous Mina looked under simple candlelight, and nodded. “…Alright. Um, excuse me.”

She got closer, touching the knots, but her fingers weren’t nearly as dexterous as she thought, and they inevitably ended up grazing Mina’s porcelain skin. With each knot untied, more of Mina’s back was exposed, and Jeongyeon’s heartbeat became increasingly rapid.

Mina felt Jeongyeon’s fingers touching her sensitive skin and shivered, but tried to remain as composed as she could. She didn’t want to think about confessing to the girl right at that moment, she didn’t want to think about the breath on the back of her neck, and she definitely didn’t want to think about those hands touching other parts of her body.

Unfortunately, she was thinking about all of those things as Jeongyeon took a tortuous amount of time untying her outfit.

“There. All done,” Jeongyeon jumped back up quickly, glad that the darkness of the room was hiding her blush. She grabbed the camera again, trying to go back to the professional mindset. “Are you really sure?”

Mina closed her eyes for an instant, then nodded. “I’m sure.”

“Alright.” She wasn’t going to change her mind, so Jeongyeon had to go along with it. She walked behind Mina and crouched again, clearing her head. “So, for this scene, all you’ll need to do is remove the top, cover your chest with the sheet, and turn around slowly with your eyes closed. As soon as I give you the signal, you’ll open them, and face the camera lens.”

“As if I’m staring at the viewer, right?”

“That’s it,” Jeongyeon propped the camera up on her knee. “It might be tricky to get the right expression at first, but try to look… powerful. Defiant. As if you’re remembering all those moments of fragility throughout the movie, and are now throwing them away. That will be the first time the viewer will see a new side of the protagonist, and ironically, the last.”

Mina couldn’t help but to think how appropriate it was that this was being asked of her. It almost felt like a metaphor for what she was about to do as soon as Jeongyeon said ‘cut’ for the last time. She would finally allow her guarded heart to be exposed, and confess to one of her best friends—someone she’d been crushing on since her high school days. It was terrifying, but Mina’s mind was made up about this. If she was rejected, she couldn’t really complain that she didn’t see it coming.

Especially after that kiss at the party.
She ignored that last thought, and got into character.

“Alright, ready?” Jeongyeon asked in a low, unintentionally sultry voice – and Mina had to tell herself to snap out of it once more.

Mina let a shaky breath out of her parted lips. “Ready.”

“Action.”

She reached for the hem of her top, lifting up the garment slowly. It was like all her senses were heightened, and she was painfully aware of the fabric rubbing on her chest, over her arms, and finally off her body. All of her hairs stood up, but she couldn’t stop the scene.

With a delicate movement, she grabbed the sheet near her knees and brought it up, covering her exposed chest. She knew that the sides of her breasts would probably end up being revealed in the frame, but a part of her ignored the viewers, and thought about Jeongyeon instead.

Mina thought about Jeongyeon, who was still crouched in front of her, a yard away from her at most, her camera capturing Mina’s transformation like some sort of voyeuristic fantasy.

But it was okay, because Mina wanted her to see it.

This wicked side of her was starting to be unmasked, all thanks to those marvelously mesmerizing eyes looking at her from behind the lens.

Another beat, and Mina turned her torso, eyes closed, facing the camera, and lips parted as she breathed through her mouth.

She waited for Jeongyeon’s sign.

Jeongyeon almost forgot the reason she was even there.

“…Open your eyes.” Her voice sounded strained, but it was probably just Mina’s imagination. She had to look defiant and confident. She had to bring out a new side of the protagonist, one that had never been seen before—one that would make the audience want another taste.

One that would make Jeongyeon want another taste.

Mina stared piercingly at the camera, but the equipment was nothing but a prop; Jeongyeon was her true target. They looked at each other—Jeongyeon through the camera lens, Mina through that desperate plea.

If there was a God, she prayed that her message got through.

“…Cut,” Jeongyeon said after a strenuous moment.

Mina blinked, pulling the sheet closer to her chin. Her first instinct was to avert her eyes, but she was going to fight against it. This time she would take the risk. She kept her stare glued to Jeongyeon until the girl put the camera down, and to her surprise, Jeongyeon was also staring right back at her, with an undecipherable emotion clouding her eyes.

“How was it?” Mina asked, tentatively. Her shoulders were moving up and down with each intake of air, her skin still sensitive.

“…Amazing,” Jeongyeon said, gently setting down the equipment beside the mattress. She let out a breathy sound. “You’re amazing.”
The moment was so delicate that Mina was afraid to move. She let the corners of her lips turn upwards, slightly. ‘I’m glad.’

There was a pause, heavy with meaning, too long to be considered normal. There was something happening. Something had to happen.

“Well,” Jeongyeon’s voice was stiff. “I guess this is it, then.”

Mina’s heart dropped. She forced a smile. “…So, are we done?”

“We’re—” She swallowed. “We’re done.”

“I see.”

“Yeah.”

But Jeongyeon stayed put. So did Mina. They stood there, facing one another, but there was more. They wanted to tell each other more, but no one was doing anything.

It was agonizing.

Mina was sick of being a coward.

“Jeong.”

“Yeah.” It wasn’t a question; it didn’t bear any uncertainty — just anticipation.

So, Mina did the only thing she could possibly do to get through Jeongyeon’s thick skull, and dropped the sheet, giving the girl a full view of her bare chest. The air felt incredibly chilly, and Mina was visibly trembling, but her gaze was still glued to the girl in front of her.

Jeongyeon parted her lips, mouth hanging open at the sudden action.

“Please.” Mina whimpered.

That was the last straw. Something snapped inside of Jeongyeon and she crawled up to Mina, grabbing the back of her neck, and crashing their lips together. Mina groaned as she took a fistful of Jeongyeon’s hair and pulled her closer. They lost balance and fell onto the mattress, lips locked, and limbs tangled.

Mina was the first to open her mouth, licking Jeongyeon’s bottom lip and finally — after daydreaming about it for years — tasted her tongue. Her kiss was nothing like Mina had imagined it to be, but this was mainly because in every scenario, things happened as they did in fairytales.

She wasn’t expecting this amount of urgency and desperation.

Jeongyeon learned that Mina was bolder than she realized. She felt teeth sinking into her bottom lip and groaned, then groaned again when Mina’s tongue swept over the bite. There were many things Jeongyeon didn’t know about her. She likely would’ve noticed these things if she had only been paying attention.

For example, the fact that, by the way this kiss was going, Mina had probably wanted to do this for a long time. Jeongyeon wasn’t thinking clearly enough to dwell on it right now, her mind clouded with desire.

They parted for air, and Jeongyeon sat up a little bit to look at her. “Mina—”
The ballerina shook her head. “No, please. Don’t talk.” She pulled her back down, fingers threading in her hair, mouth against hers. “I want you.”

The words sent a bolt of electricity through Jeongyeon’s spine. They kissed again, and Jeongyeon decided to empty her head of every single thought for the time being.

She moved her mouth down Mina’s neck, and the girl moaned slightly, throwing her head back. Her legs spread unconsciously, and she soon realized that Jeongyeon’s thigh was in between them, causing an unexpected amount of friction. Mina closed her legs, trapping Jeongyeon’s thigh, and grabbed the girl’s shoulder. Then, slowly, she rolled up her hips.

The sensation was immediate, and Mina let out a louder moan. Jeongyeon stopped for a second, trying to figure out what caused that sound, because God, she needed to hear it again. She looked down and noticed their position, then swallowed. Tentatively, she pushed her thigh higher, and Mina pulled her hair roughly again, a moan emitting from those perfect, kiss-swollen lips.

Jeongyeon kissed her way back up her neck, around her jawline, and nibbled on her earlobe. “Mina… do you…?”

Mina nodded desperately, and the tone of her voice was full of need when she spoke. “Yes… Please…”

Jeongyeon’s heart shot straight to the roof. She couldn’t believe this was happening, and if she took just a second to think about this, she would’ve realized that there were a number of consequences that would come as a result of this.

But when Mina was grinding on her thigh, it was hard to think.

Carefully, Jeongyeon kissed her again, moving one hand to her chest. She cupped one of Mina’s breasts, massaging it a little. She had no idea how sensitive she was, and despite being high on adrenaline and arousal, the fear of potentially hurting the girl underneath her was still very much present. So, Jeongyeon went slowly, testing the waters, and trying different things. Mina breathed harder at the action, moving her hips faster.

Jeongyeon pulled back and kissed down her chest, then took one nipple into her mouth. Her hands gripped shifting hips, keeping them unbearably steady for the time being. Mina was absolutely red with embarrassment, but unable to think about anything else. It felt so good. Jeongyeon’s tongue circled one nipple, then moved to the other one. Everywhere she touched elicited a small sound, and Jeongyeon knew that Mina wasn’t a very vocal person; so, when she did let out a louder sound, that meant she was doing something right.

“Jeongyeon…” Mina whimpered, pulling the girl back up, draping her arms over Jeongyeon’s shoulders. “I need…”

“What?”

She breathed out, and then buried her head in Jeongyeon’s neck. “…You know. Please.”

“…Oh.” Jeongyeon wasn’t asking to tease her, she was genuinely confused, because it’d been a long time since she last did this, and Mina wasn’t just a random girl—she was Mina.

It was apparent that Jeongyeon wasn’t very good at reading Mina, as the last few of days – years – proved. “…Okay. You sure?”
Mina nodded; she was too shy and worked up to speak. Jeongyeon bit her lip, and slid one hand slowly down her chest, then her stomach, reaching her shorts. “Can I?”

The ballerina just nodded again. Jeongyeon opened her zipper and Mina lifted her hips so she could push down her shorts. She felt the chilly air hit her panties — which were soaked by this point — and groaned, pulling Jeongyeon for another kiss. She didn’t want to look, she didn’t want to think about what was happening, because it didn’t feel real.

Ever so gently, Jeongyeon’s fingers found their way to the outside of her panties. She rubbed there once, and Mina groaned against her mouth. Jeongyeon felt dizzy. She moved her hand again, this time into Mina’s underwear, around her clit, then rubbed her outer lips, feeling her, hearing her sounds.

Mina pushed into Jeongyeon’s hand, whining. They weren’t even kissing anymore; their mouths were just pressed against each other, but it felt nice.

“I’m going to try something now, okay?” Jeongyeon warned her, tenderly. Mina nodded, and if she wasn’t desperate for relief, she would’ve giggled, too. Even in a situation like this, Jeongyeon was overbearingly concerned.

Slowly, Jeongyeon pushed a finger into her. Mina held her shoulders tightly, grunting. “Tell me if it hurts,” Jeongyeon whispered in her ear.

“…T—that’s enough,” Mina said after a moment, then Jeongyeon stilled her hand. She moved the finger back out, then in again, beginning to create a rhythm. Mina opened her mouth, shut her eyes, and let out a soundless gasp. What Jeongyeon was doing to her felt better than anything she’d ever done by herself.

She met Jeongyeon’s movements with her hips, first slowly, and eventually they picked up the pace. Mina’s hands moved from Jeongyeon’s shoulders, wildly gripping at anything they could find—her hair, her neck, the fabric of Jeongyeon’s shirt.

That’s when Jeongyeon noticed her clit, begging for her attention the way Mina had been moments earlier. She couldn’t help herself — she began to rub at it with her thumb, on which she had gathered some of Mina’s wetness.

The reaction was explosive as Mina let out a loud, needy whine, and Jeongyeon could feel the light sting of fingernails through her shirt.

Mina’s incoherent thoughts sung with euphoria. The harder Jeongyeon pressed with her thumb, the more her hips twitched, trying to find stronger stimulation.

This is good.

This is good.

Her moans got even louder. She was close.

“J-Jeongyeon…” Mina grunted, moving desperately against her hand. “Ah—” Then she buried her head on the girl’s shoulder, grasping at her hair, and stilled her hips. Pleasurable sobs fell from her lips as small tears flowed down her cheeks. Jeongyeon left her fingers inside her, moving slowly until Mina’s high ended. After a while, Mina trembled a bit, grabbing Jeongyeon’s wrist. “E-enough.”
With her hand now free again, Jeongyeon lifted her torso from Mina’s frame so the girl could properly breathe. She grabbed the silk sheet to cover Mina’s shivering body, then watched her, sweaty and messy; an incredible amount of affection swelled inside her chest.

Her mind was finally clear, and nothing that happened felt believable. If anyone asked, Jeongyeon would tell them that it was only a fever dream.

But it wasn’t. Mina was there, lying down next to her, catching her breath after they just had sex in the studio. Nothing about that sentence could possibly be real, and yet, there they were. Jeongyeon’s face broke in a smile and she let her body fall, then she started laughing.

Mina finally opened her eyes to look at her. “What?”

Jeongyeon turned her head, the stupid grin on her face a welcoming sight. “What do you mean what?” She gestured to the whole room. “This. You and me. The college studio. A shitty mattress? You. And me. You and me.”

Mina blinked, still hazy from the afterglow, but smiled too. “Yeah. You and me.”

They just… looked at each other for a long time, letting it sink in. Jeongyeon reached out to remove Mina’s hair from her face, and Mina turned to place a kiss on the girl’s hand. Jeongyeon laughed at that. “…You and me.”

“You… never thought about it, did you?” Mina asked.

“…No. Never.” Jeongyeon replied, honestly.

“Was it… terrible?”

“I should be asking you that.”

“Of course it wasn’t,” Mina whispered out, and then shifted closer. “I’ve wanted this for so long… There was no way it would be anything but perfect.”

Jeongyeon looked at her lips, then back to her eyes. “How long?”

Mina’s heart leapt, and she sighed. “…Three years.”

“What?” Jeongyeon raised her eyebrows. “All this time?”

Mina just nodded.

“…Wow, I’m an idiot.”

“You’re not,” she searched for Jeongyeon’s hand, holding it. “You were dating back then. And even after you broke up, I knew I had no chance. I was waiting for a good moment to tell you. I just… couldn’t find it. I guess I was just a coward.”

Jeongyeon rubbed her knuckles affectionately. “No, I am an idiot. We’ve been friends for years and I’ve never once realized how… incredible you are. I mean, I always knew you were pretty, and talented, but… wait, no, that’s not what I mean to say…”

Jeongyeon stumbled on her words, and Mina just chuckled, wrapping her arms around that girl she adored so much. “I understand. It’s okay.”

Jeongyeon stopped talking and returned the hug, pressing a kiss to the top of Mina’s head. They
stayed there, motionless for a couple of minutes, enjoying each other and thinking about numerous things. Then it occurred to Jeongyeon that they were very much still in the studio, and it was incredibly late in the night.

“We should probably leave,” Jeongyeon suggested with a heavy heart. She didn’t want to go, but she was afraid of getting caught by someone. “I mean, we’re breaking the rules by even filming here at night. Someone could walk in to check.”

Mina sighed against her neck. “Alright.”

When none of them moved, both girls laughed. Mina detached herself from Jeongyeon, faces close, hearts closer. “Can I kiss you one more time?” She asked, shyly.

Jeongyeon leaned in. “More than once.” And closed their distance. That sentence alone made Mina’s heart soar, and she was sure nothing would ever make her happier.

Before they got up, she still wanted to say one more thing – the one thing she’d been wanting to say before everything else happened. “Jeongyeonnie.”

“Hmm?” She looked at Mina like she was the only person in the world.

“I really, really like you.”

Jeongyeon’s eyes roamed her face, and she smiled back. “I think I really, really like you too.”

Chapter End Notes

Things had to move forward at some point, right? Don't worry, there's a lot more to come. Thank you always for reading! See you~
(X.) Readjustment

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Thank you for reading, always.

For the dancing scene, I recommend listening to this: /watch?v=-NK9zdPj-os

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Charles Darwin himself came to Im Nayeon with scientific proof that being awake for 24 hours relying on pure caffeine was unhealthy for your body and could cause numerous illnesses that would hinder the path for humanity’s evolution, she would look at him in the eyes, and call bullshit.

Nayeon was positive that coffee had been invented by a miracle-worker, and their sole purpose on this Earth was to give young adults the key to surviving increasingly difficult lives. The beverage was bitter, yes, and maybe it was making her entire body shake with the strength of a small-scale earthquake, but when she thought about the positive aspects of not having to sleep anymore, it didn’t feel so bad.

Nayeon had nine days to practice her singing, dancing, and memorize the dialogue for her musical and her commercials – those tasks became much less stressful when she had 8 extra hours her day to do so.

Who needs sleep, anyway?

“No, I mean you’re literally biting a piece of your goddamn script.” Jennie removed what Nayeon thought was a leaf of lettuce out of her mouth, making her snap out of her dissociating state. Looking down, she saw the tip of paper wet and crumbled.

“Oh.” Nayeon blinked slowly, paused, then used her fork to get an actual leaf of lettuce. “I see.”

“Girl, are you okay?”

“I’m wonderful. Thank you for asking.”

“Yeah, that’s a no, then.”

Jennie was a sweet girl, and one of the first friends Nayeon made when she got into the Drama Club. She was pretty, dedicated, and the best dancer in the cast, everybody knew it. When their first play was announced, Nayeon and Jennie fought over the main role with blood, sweat and tears, but in the end, no one could really measure up to Nayeon’s talent. Jennie didn’t resent her for
that, however, and only tried to get closer to her, to get some tips on acting. Nayeon felt incredibly relieved by that – other girls had eyed her with envy the first time Mr. Kwon had complimented her, but not Jennie. The two were close friends now, and supported each other on a daily basis.

However, Jennie was not part of the group of nine from high school, so she didn’t know Nayeon nearly well enough to realize when the girl was truly troubled; the fact that she did notice something was wrong was telling.

“I’m just focused on the task at hand,” Nayeon replied in a monotone, finishing her late lunch. It was three in the afternoon, and she had ordered delivery – eating backstage was prohibited, but everyone did it anyway.

“I could put my groceries in the bags under your eyes, honey,” Jennie said, sass dripping from her voice. “Are you resting properly?”

“Yes, I’m sleeping fine,” Nayeon lied, putting her utensils down. Eating while reading her lines had become a habit, so she didn’t lift her gaze. “Don’t worry about it.”

“You know that overexerting yourself won’t help, right?”

“Jennie,” she finally looked up, one hand curled into a fist on the table. “I can do this.”

The way the words had come out was strange, forced, as if Nayeon was talking to that awful voice inside her head. As usual, she needed to convince herself before she could convince anyone else.

And, as usual, she was failing at the task. But that was okay, because Nayeon was good at pretending.

“I never said you couldn’t.” Jennie was calm despite the outburst. “We all know you can. Hell, you’re good enough that we all collectively agreed that the main role should’ve gone to you, do you know how hard that is to accomplish?” Her impish smirk was a welcome sight in the middle of the chaos.

Nayeon chuckled a bit at that. “I know.”

The girl reached to rub her shoulder. “Don’t overdo it, okay?”

The more people worried about her, the more undeserving of their worries Nayeon felt. She grinned with her teeth, but it was a soulless expression. “I’ll do my best.”

After wiping her mouth and throwing away the plastic container and utensils, Nayeon got up and grabbed her bag, making her way towards the exit.

“Where are you going?” Jennie asked. “I thought you were going to rehearse.”

“I am,” Nayeon had one foot out of the door by the time she processed the question. “I need to practice the dance moves.”

It was a musical, after all.

Jennie waved her goodbye and told her to be careful, and Nayeon left the theater building. Her legs felt heavy, and the scorching sun on the way to the main building burned the back of her head with ridiculous intensity. It felt like she was walking on molten lava, and she was sure that she was seeing mirages in the distance. Nayeon blinked quickly, rubbed her eyes, and kept pressing on.
Entering the building was a relief; as soon as people stepped in, they could feel the comfortable chilliness of the air-conditioner. Nayeon paused for a second, a sudden dizziness attacking her sense of balance, and she leaned on a wall. She held her head, wiping the sweat out of her forehead with a groan.


She urged her legs to walk again, but there was a delay in her thoughts. Where was she going again?

Oh, right, the dance studio.

Nayeon frowned, trying to remember where it was located. She would have to go downstairs; her main concern right now was not falling face-first on the floor.

“Move.” She gritted her teeth, and finally, with much effort, started walking again, still touching her hand on the wall.

Her fingers slid on the surface, and it was a nice, raspy texture. The building was old, and everything in there was worn out; Nayeon worried that one day the place would just fall apart. The equipment used in the classrooms got heavier by the year, and she wasn’t sure that the wooden floors could take the weight.

She didn’t know why she was suddenly concerned about such trivial problems. Maybe it was to distract herself from her other, more pressing matters.

Was this her way of protecting herself from the thousands of turbulent thoughts going on in her brain? If so, Nayeon thought, then I’m good at not self-destructing.

“Either that, or I’m going crazy.” She paused. “I’m talking to myself. Wonderful.”

Nayeon finally reached the corridor and was about to turn, when someone bumped into her. With her legs already weakened and her body pretty much in another plane of existence by that point, Nayeon couldn’t hold on, and fell backwards. She closed her eyes and waited for the impact, but a strong arm wrapped around her torso, stopping her demise.

“I’m sorry!” That voice was familiar.

Nayeon opened her eyes, then rolled them. “Oh, great.”

Sleep-deprived Nayeon, as it turns out, had no filter.

Jeongyeon stared at her, blinking, then straightened both of them up, letting her go. “Good morning to you, too.” And because they’ve known each other for too long, Jeongyeon immediately frowned when she noticed her ex-girlfriend’s pale face. “Wow, are you okay?”

“Creative.”

“Huh?”

“Nothing, just—” Nayeon pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. “Everyone’s been asking me that lately. You, Jennie, Jihyo, Mr. Kwon. I’m fine. Can we move past this?”

They stared at each other for a few seconds, and the atmosphere was awkward. Jeongyeon ruffled her blonde locks. “Fine, sorry I asked.”
“Ok, great.” She didn’t want to face the her right now, because looking at Jeongyeon’s loose shirt and eyes reminded her of how beautiful she was at the party, which reminded her of the kiss, which reminded her of her lies, which reminded her of the reason she was lying, which reminded her of her feelings for—

“I don’t have time for this,” Nayeon shook her head and walked past the girl. “I need to go.”

“Nayeon.” Jeongyeon grabbed her wrist gently, but Nayeon broke free with a violent tug.

“Don’t touch me.”

It was hostile. It was wrong. Saying that to Jeongyeon felt wrong, and Nayeon regretted the words as soon as they left her mouth.

But instead of feeling hurt and afraid, Jeongyeon just put both her hands up calmly. “Okay. I’m sorry.”

“No, I didn’t—” Nayeon’s heart was beating out of her ribcage. “I didn’t mean that. Not in that way.”

“I know.” A small smile made its way to Jeongyeon’s face. “You’re stressed. I get it.”

“Yeah,” Nayeon looked down, ashamed, then closed her eyes with a sigh. “I’m sorry, either way.” She opened them again, and allowed herself to stare at the girl for a second.

Jeongyeon’s shirt was too big for her, which was a cute look, but it kept exposing one shoulder; looking at it, Nayeon noticed something. Her gaze fell on slight crescent marks on her bare skin – four of them, lined up in a row. She frowned. “What’s that?”

“Huh?” Jeongyeon tilted her head to the side and when Nayeon pointed with her head, she looked down, then froze, pulling her collar back up. “Oh. That.”

There was no explanation for a moment, and Jeongyeon was averting her eyes, and that’s how Nayeon just knew. She was well familiar with that body language; the fidgety stance, the diminutive posture, as if she’d been caught committing a crime, the way Jeongyeon tensed almost imperceptibly – but Nayeon noticed it.

She noticed everything about Jeongyeon.

“…Oh.” Was all Nayeon said in return.

“That’s… something I need to talk to you about.”

“No. Just—” Exhaustion washed over her, and she couldn’t afford that right now. “I have a musical in nine days, followed by a day-long recording of five commercials that will really boost my chances for a profession in the area, and I can’t—” She stopped to breathe; it was like her lung capacity had been cut in half. “I can’t deal with… this, right now, on top of everything.”

“Nayeon…”

“Jeong, please. I can’t have my career falling apart, too.”

‘It’s all I have,’ crossed her mind.

She didn’t wait for Jeongyeon to reply, and finally left the corridor. The stairs felt wobbly under her feet, but she held on with all she had to the handrail, running downstairs in auto-pilot. The
lower level of the building felt colder than usual, and it echoed with each step as she finally got to the studios.

Nayeon reached for the door handle, but it was like her hand passed right through it – a ghost filled with regret and pain. That’s when she realized that everything was blurry. Was she going to faint?

No, that wasn’t it. Nayeon felt wetness on her cheek and forcefully rubbed her eyes, slapping her face in the process. “Don’t cry. Stop crying. I’m not crying.”

*Can you blame her for finding happiness somewhere else? With someone else?*

“Go away. I’m not dealing with you, either.” She was glad that no one was around to hear her monologues. Maybe she was losing her mind.

*You want to know, don’t you?*

“No, I don’t.”

*Lying to others might work, but lying to yourself just makes you look pathetic.*

With another push, Nayeon finally touched the door, and snorted. “Fuck off.”

She rather liked scoffing at her inner voice.

She didn’t like thinking about Jeongyeon fucking someone else.

She was such a hypocrite.

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Momo dragged her feet across the classroom, not in the slightest mood for her History of Dance class.

She’d been grumpy. Her roommate was passively pissing her off, one of her best friends was breaking her own heart, and her crush was acting strangely. Not to mention her own convoluted feelings that she’d been trying to avoid lately.

Momo was a wreck. She had wolfed down an entire plate of chocolate.

She couldn’t bail on class, however, seeing as she’d always had a hard time with the subject and her grades had been dangerously low throughout the semester. Fortunately for her, there was something about this snooze-fest of a course that made her whole day worthwhile.

When she spotted her target, Momo smiled, and approached her from behind.

“Guess who,” she whispered in Mina’s ear, covering her eyes with one hand. Mina jumped,
startled, but soon relaxed, pressing her back against her best friend’s front.

“Momoring.” Mina had this way of calling her name that made Momo smile; perhaps it was the childhood memories attached.

“You’re no fun,” Momo teased, letting her go.

Mina turned to her with the brightest smile. “You’re too obvious.”

“Am I?” That’s when Momo noticed her expression. “You’re looking happy.”

“…I am,” Mina said, biting her lip and looking down. “Actually, I need to talk to you. Sana, too.”

The sudden shift in the mood was heavy, and Momo felt like something was either terribly wrong, or terribly right. She had a hunch, but the prospect of her being right made her stomach turn.

“What is it?”

Mina shook her head. “Later.”

At that point, the teacher walked in, yelling for everyone to sit down. Momo huffed, annoyed, but followed Mina to their seats.

The way they positioned themselves was the same ever since they could remember – Mina sat in front, and Momo sat behind her. Momo joked that she liked this arrangement, because this way she could always have her back; Mina would only roll her eyes, but smiled nonetheless.

It was cheesy, but when it came to the girl in front of her, Momo couldn’t help herself.

Mina loved the feeling of being protected. She grew up with a loving, wealthy family, but she’d always been introverted by nature. Speaking up was hard, so she hardly ever initiated a conversation with strangers; everyone else was always too loud. It was rare for her to feel welcomed anywhere.

Fortunately, as fate would have it, Momo and Sana walked into her life when she was very young. The two girls were also noisy like the other kids, but when they noticed Mina playing all alone, they decided that they would never allow her to feel left out again.

The two had kept their promise – they made Mina feel so safe. And, even though both had their own way of accomplishing that, Momo had always stood out.

They knew that Sana was more perceptive than she let on, but she also needed guidance for the most part. Momo, on the other hand, was always there, paying attention, making sure that Sana wouldn’t get lost on their way to the new school when they moved to the city, or holding Mina’s arm when it snowed so she wouldn’t trip. All these little gestures made Momo incredibly endearing in Mina’s eyes. She was glad to have someone like her by her side for so long.

When Mina first confessed that she was crushing on Jeongyeon, Momo made sure to be there for her every time she felt heartbroken. She would crash at Mina’s house suddenly with funny movies and candy in hands; she would ask her out on ‘friend dates’ when Jeongyeon and Nayeon were too busy to hang out with them; she danced with her at prom to distract her from the sadness of a hopeless crush. Momo had always been there, one way or another.

The thought made Momo’s heart skip a beat, apprehension taking its place inside her.
She leaned across her desk, reaching for Mina’s shoulders in front of her, and wrapping her arms around her loosely as the teacher spoke. Mina turned her head slightly, questioning, but Momo just traced her fingers on the girl’s collarbones softly. “Nothing. I just missed you, is all.”

She felt Mina’s fingers lacing with hers. “I missed you too.”

“Are you okay?”

“I am.”

Momo took a deep breath. “…Can’t you tell me your thing now?”

“Not now,” Mina rubbed Momo’s knuckles with her thumb. “Things are okay, though. Promise.”

Suddenly Mina’s cellphone vibrated, and she let go of Momo’s hands to check. The brunette couldn’t see who was texting her, but by the way Mina’s lips curled in an affectionate smile, she could guess.

Momo removed her hands and buried her head on her arms, closing her eyes.

She wanted to be wrong about this.

Class went by as smoothly as possible with Momo stealing glances at Mina’s constant lack of attention – it was like her phone was her lifeline, and whoever was talking to her had the answers to the mysteries of the universe. Mina wouldn’t drop the thing for one second, and the teacher actually scolded her for it at some point.

When the bell finally rang, the two got up. Mina put her phone in her bag, finally, and Momo eyed her. “Let’s go?”

“Yes.”

They left the building side by side, the sun hot in their heads. Momo wanted to hold her hand a little, but she didn’t. “Are we getting Sana?”

“She’s at the dorm already.”

“Oh, good.”

Silence followed, then Momo spoke again. “So… how’s your secret project going?”

“Oh, it’s— it’s almost finished.” There was stutter in her voice, and that didn’t go by unnoticed. “You’ll see it soon.”

“Right,” Momo blinked, a bit nervously. She put her hands on her pockets. “It’s hot today.”

“Very.”

The moment she had to start small talk to keep chatting with her best friend, Momo sighed. Something told her that what Mina was going to tell them was going to be life-changing.

Arriving at her room, Mina knocked on the door slightly, then opened it. Sana was sitting on their desk reading, and lifted her head at the sound. When she spotted her two best friends, she smiled, jumping out of the chair, and throwing her arms around Momo’s shoulders. “You didn’t drop out of college!”
Momo held her in place, laughing. “Excuse me?”

“I haven’t seen you in what, a week?” The girl placed a loud, sloppy kiss on Momo’s cheek, prompting her to drop Sana and wipe her face with the back of her hand.

“Ew, Sana!”

“Just one more!”

The two struggled for a while, with Sana tiptoeing to try and kiss every reachable part of Momo’s face, and Mina laughed. For a second, everything reminded her of their childhood days, with no problems and no complex feelings involved. She wished things weren’t so complicated.

Sana detached herself from Momo after several failed attempts, and the three girls finally sat on Mina’s bed, facing each other. Momo took off her shoes so she could be more comfortable, and prepared herself for whatever was coming. “Alright, we’re all here. What is it?”

Mina looked at the two girls for a moment, thinking long and hard about her words. She had no idea what Sana’s reaction was going to be, but she was sure that Momo would be shocked – especially after everything they had witnessed. However, Mina hoped that after mulling it over, Momo would understand, and be happy for her.

“…Okay,” Mina would go straight to the point, then. “Yesterday, something happened. Between… Jeongyeon and I.”

The two girls were quiet, processing that simple sentence. Mina saw Momo slowly clenching the sheet underneath them, then asking. “Something?”

“Yeah. We…” She would start slowly. “We kissed.”

“What?!” Sana was fast, eyes wide and mouth hanging open. “You… you finally… how?!?”

Momo was unusually quiet, and that scared Mina the most. But she did her best to answer Sana first. “My secret project… I was actually spending time with her, helping her with a short movie. Jeongyeon asked me to be her actress.”

“Nayeon is an actress.” Momo spit. That hurt Mina absurdly.

One fact about Hirai Momo: she didn’t have the best handle on her inhibitions when her temper was triggered—it was painfully apparent when something angered her. Words left her mouth without a second thought, and her honest feelings radiated through her every pore. She was unable to put up a front, and that could make her incredibly intimidating at times. Mina and Sana were used to it – and yet, at this moment, Mina felt like she had been struck right in the chest.

“Well, she asked me, instead,” Mina replied, trying to keep calm. She sort of expected a startled reaction.

“Interesting.”

“Momo?” Sana frowned at her.

“Go on.” Momo leaned back, crossing her arms.

“…Well, anyway,” Mina breathed out. “We’ve been spending time together, and I was tired of not doing anything, so… I finally did something.” She looked at Momo. “You always told me I should
tell her soon, right?”

Momo threw her head back with a scoff. “You can’t be serious.”

“I am serious.” Mina was starting to feel defensive. “Why are you acting like this?”

“Why am I—” Momo couldn’t believe her ears. “No, you know what, go on. You two kissed, and then what?”

Sana kept moving her gaze from Mina to Momo, a bit anxious about all this.

“Well, she kissed me back. And then we…”

“You what?”

That was the hardest part, and Momo’s behavior wasn’t helping.

On second thought, however, maybe she was helping, because her childish actions compelled Mina to just throw it out there. “Then we slept together.”

The silence was jarring. Mina felt a blush crawling up her neck, but didn’t avert her eyes from Momo’s stare. A thousand emotions seemed to cross her face at that moment; shock, confusion, anger.

Pain.

“You did wha—”

“Hold the fuck on,” Sana interrupted, concerned about other things – and when she became curious, nothing in the world could stop her from getting her answer. “Where?! It wasn’t here,” She pointed at Momo. “It wasn’t in her room, either… Myou Mi, where did you lose your virginity??”

It would’ve been funny if both girls weren’t towering over her threateningly. “Um… at the recording studio…”

“Holy shit.”

“Fuck that, you lost your virginity to Jeongyeon?!” Momo leaned forward, almost grabbing Mina’s shoulders. “How— That’s—”

“That’s what?” Mina challenged.

“I’m gonna kill her.”

“What, why?” This ticked Mina off. “It was great, for your information.”

Momo winced. The mood was hostile, but Sana couldn’t keep a snort in. She needed to know so many things at the same time, that her mouth wasn’t keeping up with her brain. “The studio— So you did it standing up? Or was it on a chair, or… no, wait, did she go down on you or was it just fingers?”

“Sana!” Momo and Mina interrupted their little war to scold their other friend.

“Excuse me, Mina just had her first time, I need details.”
“No, you don’t.” Mina’s face was beet red. “That’s not even the point!”

“I told you everything when I lost mine!”

“Because you wanted to, literally no one asked.” Momo groaned, rolling her eyes.

“Oh, don’t tell me you don’t want to know.”

“I really don’t.” There was truth in her words, and hurt in it as well. So Momo was right about her hunch, and it stung like a bitch. She had no idea how she would be able to face Jeongyeon from now on knowing that she did… things with her best friend.

Right after kissing her ex-girlfriend, too. The anger inside her was growing rapidly, beginning to burst at the seams.

“Anyway, that was the thing I needed to tell you.” Mina tried to finish this awkward conversation, but she knew that this topic wasn’t going to go away for a long time. Or at least until she answered all of Sana’s inquiries.

 “…Fine. So, what are you now? You and Jeongyeon.” Momo asked, forcing the question out of her throat. She didn’t want to hear anything else about this, but she couldn’t leave the room without knowing all the details. This was her best friend, and even though she was mad, making sure Mina wasn’t hurt came first.

“I don’t… I don’t know.” Mina answered, looking down.

“Oh, you don’t know?” Momo became hostile again.

“Why are you yelling at me? I thought you’d be—”

“What? Happy for you? Mina, she lied.”

“We all lied, Momo.”

“Oh, and that somehow makes it better?!” Momo was fuming.

“Momo, please, just calm down for a second.” Sana intervened, having snapped out of her giddy state.

She hated to see the two of them fighting, but she understood the reason. Mina had told her that Jeongyeon and Nayeon had kissed at the party, so it really didn’t make sense for that to have happened. She also knew how overprotective Momo was, so the explosive reaction wasn’t a surprise either. Now, adding Momo’s feelings for Nayeon in the mix, things got a lot more complicated. Sana didn’t want to take sides.

“No, don’t tell me to calm down!” Momo got up from the bed, and paced around the room. She looked back at Mina. “Have you considered Nayeon’s feelings about this? At all?”

“Nayeon’s feelings? Momo, they broke up years ago!”

“They kissed last week.”

“If it had meant anything, Jeongyeon wouldn’t have lied!”

“If Nayeon meant anything to either of you, you wouldn’t be lying to her either!”
That implication was heavy, and Mina stopped, feeling extremely hurt. Sana got up as well, placing one hand on Momo’s shoulder to ease her, and another on Mina’s arm. “Guys, please. Yelling won’t solve anything.”

Mina was also angry, but unlike Momo, she would never direct it at her. It felt like Momo had something against her happiness suddenly, and Mina didn’t understand why she couldn’t accept that maybe Jeongyeon had moved on. She’s wanted this for so long, and Momo had always been supportive of her, so why was she attacking her like this now?

“I thought you, out of everyone, would be happy for me,” Mina said in a low voice, breaking the silence.

“Don’t do this,” Momo said, her emotional exhaustion finally catching up with her.

“You’ve always told me to keep trying, to confess to her soon, to… to stop running away from this. I finally did, and now you’re angry? I don’t understand.”

“I do want you to be happy, but not if…!” Momo stopped, catching her tongue before she said something that she wouldn’t be able to take back. Unfortunately for her, Mina knew her too well.

“…Not if it gets in the way of Nayeon’s happiness. Is that it?”

The pain in her tone was clear, and to think that Momo had caused this – it was killing her. Yes, she did want Mina to be happy with the girl she loved, but that was before Nayeon exposed her still-lingering feelings for her ex-girlfriend. Things were too fresh, everything was surrounded by lies; Jeongyeon might’ve moved on, but Nayeon clearly hasn’t.

Picturing Nayeon’s reaction to the news created a crevice inside Momo’s heart.

Hearing Mina’s broken-hearted pleas punctured her soul.

Momo wanted to protect both of them, equally.

She was going crazy.

“I can’t be here right now,” Momo said, finally, grabbing her shoes.

“Momo, wait.” Sana was still nervous; she flickered her eyes towards Mina. “Let’s talk about this.”

“Just let her go,” Mina mumbled, hugging her legs against her chest and looking to the opposite direction.

Momo pretended not to hear. Once she finally put on her shoes, she grabbed her bag and stormed off the room, slamming the door on her way out.

Mina’s eyes started stinging with unshed tears, and she rubbed them strongly. To think that her best friend, the person who grew up with her, and who knew every single thing about her life, cared more about Nayeon than her – that was worse than being rejected by Jeongyeon. Mina felt utterly betrayed.

Momo needed to cool down. She walked fast, making her way to the main building again.

Dancing always helped her let off steam.
“Ouch, ouch, ouch, careful, please…!” Chaeyoung whined, the coldness of the ice pack surrounding her broken knuckles and hurting like hell.

“If you would just stay still,” Tzuyu uttered, holding her friend’s hand carefully. She’d been helping with Chaeyoung’s healing process as soon as the girl walked into their dorm yesterday and confessed to her roommates what she’d done. Dahyun got worried at first, but it didn’t take long for her to make a joke out of the situation – Chaeyoung appreciated it. Tzuyu, however, was taking this a lot more seriously than people realized.

“Sorry,” Chaeyoung replied, relaxing now that the pack was in effect. “It’s hard to get used to this.”

“You should be more careful, then.”

“Yeah… I will.”

They kept in silence and Chaeyoung sighed internally. Tzuyu had been acting a bit cold towards her, and she didn’t know why; it was like they were treading on thin ice around each other, and it made Chaeyoung’s chest feel tight. It was triggering her anxiety.

She needed to ask her what was going on.

“Tzuyu, is there—”

The TV suddenly made an unbearably loud noise and all the three girls in the room jumped out of their beds. Dahyun immediately turned down the volume, a hand on her chest. “Who left the volume up?”

“Oh, that was me. Sorry.” Tzuyu raised one hand, embarrassed. “I was watching a live stream on ocean creatures. Aquatic organisms are pretty quiet.”

“…Tzuyu, these live streams have no sound.” Dahyun said, an eyebrow raised.

“Yes, I figured that out after pressing my ear to the TV for about five minutes.”

Chaeyoung crouched to grab the ice pack that had fallen on the floor, but took her sweet time getting up. She buried her face on her good hand, trying her hardest not to laugh, shoulders shaking with the effort. Tzuyu was so absurdly cute – Chaeyoung’s heart couldn’t handle it. It was like tiny fireworks exploded inside of her.

“Chaengie?” Tzuyu finally realized that her tiny friend was still on the floor.

“Yes, I’m okay.” Chaeyoung replied, getting up in a flash. She breathed in, sat back down, and placed the pack back on her hand.

The three girls rested their backs against the headboard as Dahyun skipped through the channels, and eventually decided to pull out the Netflix. Chaeyoung looked at her hand and tried to move her fingers slightly. She didn’t get so far, a harsh sting pulsating through her skin every time she moved the broken knuckles, so she sighed.
She side-eyed Tzuyu, then moved her gaze down to the girl’s hand. She wanted to hold it, like she usually did when they watched movies, but she couldn’t right now because Tzuyu was on her right side. That was the worst part of her injury so far.

“That’s a lot of romantic comedies on your queue,” Tzuyu said suddenly, looking at Dahyun.

“Huh?” The girl couldn’t keep a straight face for the life of her, and blushed nervously. “Oh, yes. I’ve been into them lately. You know. Just… silly stuff. To laugh about.”

Chaeyoung caught on the stuttering tone immediately and exchanged a look with Tzuyu. “Oh, really?”

“Yes.”

“So sci-fi and trashy horror movies don’t work anymore? You know, to make you laugh.” Chaeyoung smirked.

“I never said that.”

“Look, she even has dramas lined up!” Tzuyu joined in the teasing.

“Yeah, I do.”

“When was the last time Dahyun watched a cheesy drama?”

“Hmm… let me think. Was it back in middle school, when she thought she was crushing on that boy who gave her a carrot from his lunch box?”

“I think it was.”

“Listen,” Dahyun interrupted. “I’m just in a mood, okay?”

“Oh, we know,” Chaeyoung poked her tongue out through her smile. “A mood, alright.”

“Ugh, you’re unbelievable.” Dahyun was about to go back to the task at hand when her cellphone vibrated. She took it out of her pocket and read it, a huge smile plastered on her face. “And now you’re unbelievably alone.” Dahyun got up, putting on her shoes.

“Oh, go ahead, ditch us for your girlfriend,” Chaeyoung was still in a joking mood, but when she realized what that implied, she stopped completely – she absolutely forgot about Sana’s feelings for her stupid roommate. What if Dahyun was seeing someone else? That would definitely crush Sana’s spirit even more.

“She’s not my—” Dahyun threw her hands in the air. “I mean, it’s not what you’re thinking.”

Chaeyoung sat back up. “Wait, you’re actually seeing someone?”

“I’m just gonna go see Sana, alright?”

“Oh.” That was new. “Wait. As in… just hang out, or…”

Dahyun groaned loudly, letting go of her ties. “Chaeng. Just… let me figure this out on my own, okay?”

That sentence was weird, and it could mean a thousand different things. Chaeyoung was still overbearingly protective of Sana, so she just wanted to make sure that Dahyun’s dense ass
wouldn’t end up hurting the girl. “Just tell me if—”

Tzuyu placed a hand on Chaeyoung’s shoulder. “Have fun, Dahyun.”

The artist turned to her, but had to give up when Tzuyu’s stare told her ‘stop it’. Dahyun nodded and finally finished tying her shoes, getting up.

“See you.” She left the room with happy little jumps.

Once the door closed, Tzuyu grabbed the remote, flipping through the list of movies. Chaeyoung stared at her, waiting.

“I wish you would stop doing this.” Tzuyu finally said, without sparing her a glance.

“Doing what?”

“Getting into everyone’s business.”

“What? I don’t—”

“And leaving me out of everything.”

Chaeyoung froze, the weight of the girl next to her suddenly heavy. She blinked, trying to process that, but just got ultimately confused. “Tzuyu, what are you talking about?”

“Why are you so worked up over Dahyun’s love life?”

“I just… I was just curious.” Chaeyoung didn’t know why she was keeping this a secret. Maybe it was to keep Sana’s feelings safe; leaking it out to everyone might make the rumors spread faster, and her condition might get worse.

“What made you so angry you had to punch a wall?”

“That’s…” While she did tell them the truth about her hand, she omitted the reason – again, another way to protect Sana.

Tzuyu dropped the remote and finally faced Chaeyoung with a frustrated stare. “You’re lying to me. Why are you keeping things a secret? You know something, and you’re not telling me, Son Chaeyoung.” It was rare for Tzuyu to call her by her full name, so that indicated how serious she was.

“I’m not lying, I’m just…”

“You don’t trust me anymore?”

That hurt more than Chaeyoung anticipated, and she was sure Tzuyu was about to cry. In a desperate gesture, the tiny girl grabbed Tzuyu’s hand with her left, shaking her head hastily. “No, no, that’s not it! Of course I trust you, God—” She choked up. “Tzuyu, you’re the person I trust the most in the world.”

They looked into each other’s eyes, both trying to find what had been lost along the way. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were best friends; they’ve always been, and they always would be. Nothing else mattered as long as they were together, and they didn’t keep secrets from each other. That was their motto, that was their whole life.

Tzuyu turned her palm upwards, lacing their fingers together, and that was all it took for
Chaeyoung to remember that.

The girl in front of her wasn’t some stranger that would ruin Sana’s reputation – she was Chou Tzuyu. This was Chaeyoung’s best friend.

This was the girl Chaeyoung loved.

She felt incredibly stupid.

“…I’m an idiot.” Chaeyoung breathed out. “You’re right. You’re always right. I’m sorry.”

Tzuyu tugged at the girl, making her fall on her lap. That was a familiar and comfortable spot, and Chaeyoung allowed herself to relax despite her racing heart. She just stared at her friend from below, and sighed when Tzuyu started running her fingers through her hair, massaging her scalp slightly. “You’re not an idiot.”

Chaeyoung closed her eyes, and just listened.

“You’re stubborn, yes. And I know you just want to protect everyone.” Her voice was calm and delicate, much like herself. “But you can’t carry everyone’s burdens on your shoulders.” She paused with a soft giggle. “They’re not even broad enough for that.”

Chaeyoung allowed herself a chuckle at that. “Hey…”

Tzuyu smiled, bringing one finger to the girl’s forehead, tracing all the way down her nose and cheeks. “So I wish you would let me help you, too. No more secrets, at least from me. Please, Chaengie.” Her voice broke. “…I don’t want to lose you.”

Chaeyoung allowed herself a chuckle at that. “Hey…”

Tzuyu smiled, bringing one finger to the girl’s forehead, tracing all the way down her nose and cheeks. “So I wish you would let me help you, too. No more secrets, at least from me. Please, Chaengie.” Her voice broke. “…I don’t want to lose you.”

Chaeyoung’s eyes flew open and Tzuyu let a tiny tear fall. She sat up, cupping Tzuyu’s cheek and rubbing her thumb there gently to wipe the wetness. “Okay. No more secrets, I promise.” She smiled weakly. “Just… don’t cry. You know I can’t handle it when you cry.”

The tall girl sniffed, nodding. She placed a hand on top of Chaeyoung’s. “I hate crying, anyway. My face gets all ugly and gross.”

“You could never be ugly, nor gross.”

Tzuyu rolled her eyes and smiled, with a faint blush. “Please.”

“I mean it,” Chaeyoung wouldn’t stand for this. “You’re the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen.”

The sentence wasn’t met with an amused comeback, and Chaeyoung noticed that she’d been more serious than she realized. She cleared her throat, finally letting go of the girl’s cheek. “Anyway. The things I need to tell you.”

“R-right.” Tzuyu blinked, snapping out of it. The compliment had made something gnaw at her stomach, but she ignored it.

Chaeyoung told her everything; about Sana’s feelings for Dahyun, Momo’s weird behavior at the cafeteria, Sana’s anxiety attacks, and the reason she smashed her hand into a wall. Tzuyu gritted her teeth when she heard about the rumors, disbelief washing over her face.

“That is so awful. Sana never did anything wrong.”

“I know,” Chaeyoung hated remembering those girls faces, but she saw them every time she closed her eyes. “I couldn’t hold myself back.”
Tzuyu looked back at Chaeyoung’s hand, and took it on a gentle hold. “I wish you wouldn’t hurt yourself like this.”

“…That’s something else I need to tell you.” Now that she got to her secrets, Chaeyoung was hesitating.

“What?”

She took a deep breath. “I talked to the nurse. She told me… to go see the psychologist about these angry outbursts. She was afraid I might direct it at a person, at some point.” Chaeyoung swallowed hard. “I’m scared, Tzuyu. I don't wanna hurt people.”

Tzuyu watched her with affection, without a single drop of judgement. “Well, I’m not scared of you. Because I know you.” She touched their knees together. “And, to be honest, I noticed that your outbursts were getting more… worrying? I just couldn’t find a good time to talk to you about it. I’m sorry, I should have.”

“Oh… wait, you knew?” Chaeyoung thought that this was her most well-hidden secret.

“Chaengie, I’m your best friend. Of course I knew.”

She suddenly felt like Tzuyu knew a lot more about her than she let on, and her heart started beating a little faster. What else was she aware of? Chaeyoung promised no more secrets, but that didn’t mean that she would just unlock her perfectly hidden vault of anxiety-induced fears.

She could never tell Tzuyu about her feelings for her.

That was the one thing she would never reveal.

“I have things to tell you, too,” Tzuyu interrupted her flow of thoughts, turning serious again. “I talked to Jihyo. And there’s… a very complicated thing happening.”

“Complicated?” Chaeyoung calmed down, thankful for the distraction.

“Yes. I’m going to tell you, because we promised no more secrets between us. But this can’t get out, not yet.”

Chaeyoung frowned, confused. Tzuyu just approached her, and whispered in her ear.

As soon as she was done, Chaeyoung leaned back. Then, slowly, she mouthed, “Oh, no.”

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Nayeon froze in the middle of her routine as soon as she saw Momo walking in. She slouched her shoulders and turned to the girl, who was also rooted into place. And, because of her lack of sleep, the words came out harsher than she intended. “What are you doing here?”

“Dancing?” Momo frowned. “Why, did you make a reservation for this room?”
It really was a dumb question and Nayeon just shook her head. “No. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to shun you.”

“I can go to another one, if you want.”

“No,” She didn’t have the energy to think, so her emotions spoke for her. “You can stay.”

“Are you sure?” Momo didn’t know if that was a good idea, but all her doubts vanished when Nayeon motioned her to come in and close the door.

“I want you to stay.”

It was hard to refuse.

Momo looked around to make sure no one else would bother them, and closed the door. She walked up to Nayeon, and started stretching, looking at her reflection in the mirror. Nayeon stared at her friend’s gorgeous body for a second before rubbing her tired eyes and going back to her rehearsal.

It didn’t take long for Momo to notice that Nayeon was slipping, making mistakes on her steps that didn’t make sense, and just plain irritated with how everything was coming out. She grunted and muttered under her breath out loud, and at some point, she nearly kicked the mirror from being too close. Momo touched her forearm.

“You’re not focused.”

“I’m the embodiment of focus, Hirai Momo.”

For some reason this made an amused smile grace Momo’s lips. “Yes, you are, but right now you’re just stumbling around like an amateur.”

Nayeon turned to her with a livid expression, but just let her mouth hang open without a sound. Momo laughed a little, pushing her chin back, closing it. “Boop.”

“Don’t boop me.” Nayeon stepped back, huffing. “I need to get this soon. What am I doing wrong, then? Teach me.”

“I don’t know your dance routine.” Momo replied with a neutral expression.

“I’ll teach you, then you can teach me back.”

“That… sounds incredibly hard.”

“Well, then what am I supposed to do!?” Nayeon yelled and Momo jumped, startled. Nayeon felt guilt wash over her. “I’m… I’m sorry.”

Momo didn’t say anything; that’s when she really took a good look at her friend’s face and noticed the terrible condition she was in – the dark circles under her eyes, the thin lines on her cheeks, her pale, almost sickly skin, her pupils dilated. Looking down at her hands, she noticed the faint shaking as well.

Momo approached her and took her hand, talking in a gentle tone. “Have you been sleeping?”

“I don’t have time to sleep,” Nayeon replied with a shudder; she was going to try to pull away, but she didn’t want to.
She wanted to rest, and she wanted to rest against Momo, and she didn’t want to think about Jeongyeon and the marks on her shoulder, and the way she looked at her when she’d been caught, because she wasn’t even hers to begin with, not anymore, they broke up, and the regret was too much to bear, and Momo was right there, and she just—

Momo let her go suddenly and pulled up her phone, plugging it on the speakers. Nayeon just followed her with her gaze, unmoving. As soon as Momo found the song she wanted, she pressed play, and returned to Nayeon’s side.

The soothing, romantic voice echoed through the room, accompanied by a violin and a gentle tambourine in the back. Momo was close. They exchanged looks, then Momo let her fingertips slide softly up Nayeon’s arms, until her elbow. She urged the girl to wrap her arms around her shoulders, then touched her waist.

“Dance with me,” Momo breathed against Nayeon’s lips.

Nayeon swallowed, and let herself be taken – for one moment, she stopped fighting.

They started with slow steps, swaying side to side to the tender beat. It was their thing, dancing – they danced when they were happy, they danced when they were worried, and they danced when they were tired and wanted to forget their problems. It’s always been like this, and Nayeon had a feeling that she was in love with this habit.

Her cheeks reddened with each movement of their bodies, so she looked down, away from Momo’s loving gaze. With a big sigh, she closed her eyes and felt the environment around her; her fingers grazed Momo’s hair a little, and she smelt her perfume. It was familiar and nice, like everything Momo did.

Her heartbeat finally slowed down after a long day of caffeine-induced palpitations, and her muscles relaxed under Momo’s touch. Nayeon let her head fall on the crook of the girl’s neck at some point, unable to resist.

Momo exhaled against her hair, pulling her closer, until their chests touched. Having Nayeon on her arms like this made her feel a little less angry at the world, and she let her hands roam the girl’s back, tracing circles there. She felt Nayeon’s eyelashes fluttering against her neck and smiled on her hair. Their dance had turned into a simple, but profound hug.

Momo didn’t want to tell her about Mina and Jeongyeon. She didn’t want to think about it, because it just made her heart ache and her head dizzy with conflicting thoughts that she wouldn’t be able to resolve.

Nayeon deserved the whole world, and Momo wanted to give her that – but she couldn’t. Jeongyeon was the only one who would ever make Nayeon happy, and Momo had somewhat accepted that after that party. For a brief moment, she’d let herself believe that Nayeon had moved on, but that was okay. As long as Nayeon was happy, Momo was happy too.

So why couldn’t she do the same for Mina? She felt the same for her best friend – everything she wanted was her happiness.

“…Not if it gets in the way of Nayeon’s happiness. Is that it?”

Momo sighed at the words. That was true – partially. But something else ached in her chest.

The taste of Mina’s tongue was still fresh in her mouth. Everything was so confusing.
“I don’t know what’s going on,” Momo confessed on a breathy whisper. She expected a question to follow, but Nayeon’s weight suddenly got a lot heavier, and Momo had to hold her up.

“Nabongs?”

The girl just snored slightly against her shoulder. Momo blinked, trying to wrap her head around the fact that Nayeon had literally slept on her as they danced. With a grin, she dragged her, so they could sit against the studio’s wall.

Momo adjusted Nayeon’s position until she was finally comfortably leaning on her shoulder. Nayeon unconsciously moved her arm, settling it across Momo’s waist, and pulling her close like a giant teddy bear; Momo chuckled, tangling her fingers on her hair slowly.

She looked down at the girl who was now drooling on her shirt, and let out a breathy laugh. Nayeon was probably exhausted, but she was still stubborn to the end; she kept refusing help, but Momo knew she needed it. Right then and there, Momo promised to stay by her side, no matter what.

Her feelings were all over the place, and new emotions might’ve been growing inside her heart, but there was one thing Momo was absolutely certain about.

Carefully, she traced one finger into Nayeon’s back, writing a silent confession.

‘I love you.’

Then she pressed a kiss to the crown of her head.

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“One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three,” Sana counted as she held Dahyun by her arms, guiding her steps to match the numbers. The younger girl wasn’t as good or coordinated, but she did her best, and Sana appreciated her for it. “That’s good! You’re doing well.”

“Am I? I feel like this is supposed to be easy, but I’m struggling.” The feeling of Sana’s hold on her was soothing despite her insecurities.

“It’s supposed to help with your blood circulation,” Sana explained, letting her go. “There’s no right or wrong way to do it. Now lie down with your legs turned to me.”

Dahyun obeyed, and Sana mirrored her position. The younger girl stretched her neck to see Sana’s feet touching hers.

“Now I’m going to push my feet against yours, and you have to push back, okay? When we find a balance, we’re gonna lift our legs up slowly, then bring them back down.” Sana instructed, and Dahyun gave her a thumbs-up.

They took their time finding a good position for their legs, but eventually managed; with Sana’s
expert counting, they kept exercising. The activities were relaxing and simple, and felt more like a stretching routine than anything else. Sana was good at guiding people and teaching them what to do and how to move, and she’d called Dahyun to spend some time with her as she practiced this new routine.

She needed to take her mind off her two best friends fighting, and the whole drama they put themselves into. Sana didn’t know if she should mention anything to the rest of the group, but she decided that this problem was Mina’s to solve. Right now, she wanted to spend time with the person she adored.

“One last time…” Sana spoke from the other side. “And, done.”

She got up after that, wiping her shorts and shirt. When she turned around, Dahyun was still on the floor, breathing a bit heavily. Sana smiled, walking towards her. “You alive?”

“Why does this hurt?” Dahyun struggled, her legs heavy all of a sudden.

“Wow, you’re in a pretty bad shape, huh?” Sana laughed, offering her hands. “Grab on.”

Dahyun missed the first time, but eventually grabbed her hands. Sana pulled her up with a startling strength, and Dahyun stumbled on her way to the surface, falling on top of the girl. Fortunately, Sana hugged her in place, her strong legs rooted to the ground. “Wow!”

“Sorry!” Dahyun blushed, the full contact making her head spin. When she was about to step back, she felt Sana’s arms wrapping tightly against her.

“Stay a little bit,” Sana murmured in her ear. Dahyun slowly relaxed her shoulders, returning the soft hug. She let out a breath, then smiled, feeling warm all over.

“Are you okay?” Dahyun asked after a long silent moment.

Sana nodded. “Hmhmm.”

“That’s good,” her shampoo smelled amazing, and Dahyun could feel her heart beating against their pressed chests. “So, this is what you’re majoring in?”

“It is.”

“Dance therapy, huh…” She couldn’t help but to think how fitting it was for this girl to want to help people through her passion. “How exactly does it work?”

“Well… I want to assist people through dance, be it emotionally, or physically. I think it’s such a wonderful activity,” Sana finally unwrapped herself from Dahyun and moved to sit on the studio’s floor. She patted the spot next to her, and the younger girl plopped down immediately. “For example, if someone got into an accident, and damaged their muscles, physiotherapy might work for a while, but wouldn’t it be too boring eventually?”

“I guess so.”

“I want to show people how fun dancing can be, and how they can get better by doing silly stuff to the rhythm of a song,” Sana smiled softly as she spoke, looking up to the ceiling. “It helps the body and mind.”

Dahyun eyed her, then sighed with a grin. “That’s so you.”
“Hmm? What?”

“You’re struggling with issues yourself, and yet you want to dedicate your life to helping others. I don’t know… it’s just something you’d do.” She closed her eyes, bumping her head lightly on the wall behind her. “You make me proud, Sana-ya.”

Sana’s eyes lingered on Dahyun’s beautiful profile for a moment, speechless. Without a second thought, she turned her torso, and gently placed a kiss to her chubby cheek. Dahyun’s eyes shot open and she faced her, surprised, one hand touching the attacked spot. “What was that for?”

“Just reminding you how much I like you.” The answer was simple, and yet, it made Dahyun melt completely.

With a surge of bravery, Dahyun leaned forward too, awkwardly pressing her mouth against Sana’s upper lip. She pulled back and hid her hot face in hands. “I’m bad at this.”

Sana chuckled, but her chest exploded with affection. She leaned her head on the younger girl’s shoulder, nuzzling her neck. “We can be bad at this together.”

They chatted a lot, and cuddled even more, and when the afternoon turned into evening, both girls left the dance studio with arms locked. Sana still felt nervous about walking through the main hallway, but with Dahyun by her side making silly jokes and rubbing her knuckles, things were much more bearable.

In the distance, a group of five girls stopped their conversation to stare at the couple. They were rigid, and almost doll-like as they held their unblinking gaze. One of them, a blonde that looked like she could be pushing thirty, smirked as she locked eyes with her target. Dahyun frowned at her.

The blonde lifted one hand and made a crude gesture, flapping her tongue in between her two fingers. Then she mouthed ‘slut.’

Dahyun widened her eyes and turned back to Sana; fortunately, she hadn’t seen it. With a heavy feeling in her heart, Dahyun walked faster, urging Sana to do the same.

When she checked one last time to see if the group of girls were there, they had vanished.

It felt like a target had been placed on her back.

--

Mina waited by the fountain, observing the birds and students in their natural habitat. The afternoon grew burdensome, like the feelings in her chest; she hated fighting with Momo, of all people. That girl was her pillar, and it felt like things were falling apart lately. However, new, exciting things were happening; Mina didn’t want to bring herself down when one of her dreams had come true just last night.
Too absorbed in her own thoughts, Mina didn’t even realize when the person she’d been waiting for finally arrived. So, Jeongyeon tapped her shoulder lightly, making her finally lift her gaze.

“Hey, you.” she said with a smile.

Mina’s heart immediately jumped out of her chest, and it felt like a thousand butterflies went loose on her stomach. She mirrored her expression, biting her lip to stop her smile from growing too much – an impossible task, as it turns out. “Hey yourself.”

Jeongyeon sat next to her, arms behind her back. “I found something on the way that I think would suit you.”

“Oh?”

Jeongyeon lifted her arm then, revealing a tiny flower. “May I?”

Mina was sure that this girl didn’t exist. She couldn’t possibly be real.

She just nodded, shyly, and Jeongyeon placed the flower behind her ear with delicate fingers. She smiled then, admiring her work. “I was right. It suits you.”

Mina looked back up with red cheeks and touched the tiny blossom perched in her hair. “You’re so charming.”

Jeongyeon shrugged, sliding a bit closer. “You make it easy.”

They just stared at each other, their new feelings overwhelming their senses. Mina wanted to pull her close, kiss her deeply, hold her for the rest of her life – was that what being in love felt like? It was such a new, amazing feeling; the rawness of it all made her dizzy.

“I thought you’d be rushing to edit your movie,” Mina finally said, breaking the spell.

“I will. I just wanted to see you first,” Jeongyeon replied, scratching her neck. “Before, you know… spending the whole afternoon watching your face on a screen.”

Mina giggled at that. “You’ll get tired of my face.”

“There’s no way I could,” Jeongyeon’s words were filled with sincerity, and her eyes were positively shining – maybe it was the sun, but Mina liked to believe that they had a light of their own.

Suddenly Momo’s words rang on her mind, and Mina hesitated before asking. “Jeong… what are we now?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what is… this?” She pointed at herself, then at girl in front of her. “I told you how I feel about you, we kissed, and then we… went beyond that.” Mina hid her face in embarrassment. “A lot beyond that.”

Jeongyeon’s laughter was nervous as well. “I mean, technically you only told me what you felt after we—”

“T-the point being,” Mina interrupted. “I was just wondering. If we’re… dating now, or…”

The words were heavy, perhaps with a weight that Jeongyeon didn’t know how to carry anymore
after spending so much time in love with a girl whom she thought she would marry. It scared her to no end, because Mina deserved an answer and something concrete in her life, but Jeongyeon was incredibly afraid of ending up in the same situation as before.

Remembering the kiss from a week ago didn’t help calm the turbulent waters inside her heart. Jeongyeon was still lying about something important, and she didn’t want to start a relationship with such a secret weighting down on them. She needed time to tell Nayeon about Mina, and to tell Mina about Nayeon.

Jeongyeon took a deep breath and held Mina’s hands. “I’ll probably sound very selfish right now. I hope you can forgive me.” Mina nodded, urging her to continue. “But… can you give me time? At least until I’m done with this assignment. There are… some things I need to tell you, Mina. And I want to do this right.” She sighed. “You’re too important to me for me to mess this up.”

It wasn’t quite the answer Mina was expecting, but she reckoned it would be better for both of them. She also needed some time to confront Momo again and make her see her side of this story. Having Momo’s approval was everything to her at the moment.

Mina also knew what things Jeongyeon was referring to – the kiss at the party. She couldn’t give away that she knew about this, or else she was sure Jeongyeon would feel betrayed, and more complications would result from this.

So, Jeongyeon and Momo. Mina paused, feeling like she was forgetting something.

“Have you considered Nayeon’s feelings about this? At all?”

Nayeon.

Even after Momo’s outburst in her face, it was only at that moment that it finally hit her.

How would Nayeon feel about all this?

Mina felt terribly self-centered all of a sudden.

“Minari?” Jeongyeon’s voice brought her back to reality, and she shook her head.

“Alright,” She answered. “We don’t have to rush this. I understand.”

Relief washed over Jeongyeon’s face and she felt so happy that she simply leaned forward and kissed the corner of her mouth. “Thank you.”

The gesture sent Mina’s heart flying. With Jeongyeon still close, Mina tugged slightly, shyly chasing after her. Jeongyeon blinked for a second, confused, then realized what she wanted – she had no idea why she was so bad at reading Mina.

Their mouths touched again tentatively, and Mina sighed against those lips, heart soaring and cheeks red. Jeongyeon brought one hand to the back of her neck, parting Mina’s lips with a swipe of her tongue. They kissed slowly, much differently from what they’d done yesterday, enjoying the feeling of having each other close like this. Jeongyeon pulled back for a second, only to deepen the kiss a bit more. Mina let out a tiny groan from the back of her throat, making all the hairs on Jeongyeon’s neck stand up. There was something addictive about kissing Myoui Mina.

Unfortunately, they had to part after a few moments. ‘The way Mina looks after kissing should be immortalized on the silver screen’, was a thought that occurred Jeongyeon for a brief second.
“I need to go,” Jeongyeon chuckled sadly.

“R-right!” Mina felt a bit self-conscious – they were pretty exposed outside. “I’m sorry. Go on, you have an entire movie to edit.”

“Yeah,” Jeongyeon didn’t move for a second, then saw Mina’s little flower crooked on her hair. She adjusted it with a dumb grin, then cupped the girl’s cheek. “I kinda don’t want to leave.”

Mina was sure she was going to die from the amount of affection she felt. “You have to.” She shot her a gummy smile. “I promise I’m not going anywhere.”

Jeongyeon sighed, helplessly. “Okay, then.”

With one last peck to Mina’s lips, she got up, moving away with a wave. Mina laughed, covering her mouth, then licking her lips as she watched the girl’s figure get more and more distant. She felt so giddy that she fell backwards, legs up kicking slightly.

A sudden buzz on her phone made her sit back up. She grabbed it and opened the message in their group chat.

[GodJihyo, 4:49pm]:

Attention, we’re all gathering this Saturday. Tzuyu’s family will be traveling, so get ready for a house party

IMPORTANT: No one else can come but us

Also you have no choice in the matter

See you there!

Mina didn’t know what to type back, fingers frozen on the screen; it was impossible to defy Jihyo when she became this excited about an event. She sighed, afraid of what was going to happen if everyone gathered for the day.

A sudden wind blew, making Mina’s tiny flower fly away.

It felt like a warning.

Chapter End Notes

This might be the last chapter for the year. I'll be fairly busy on the next few days, so I hope you understand. But don't worry, I'll come back as fast as I can. Have a great 2018, and for those who celebrate it, a Merry Christmas!

Thank you for your lovely comments!!
Find me on my social media too:
Twitter: @niigoki_
Tumbler: niigoki
Chapter Notes

Long time no see! Are you ready for this monstrosity of a chapter, cause it's the biggest chapter i've ever wrote in a story. I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jeongyeon rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and leaned back on the chair until her back was properly stretched. She then returned to her position with a heavy sigh. She looked over at the digital clock on the wall; it was nearly 1:00am. Usually the lab would close at 11:00, but as a result of finals, students were granted two extra hours complete their work—and Jeongyeon was still cutting it close, despite her best efforts.

She sighed, turned back to the screen, and then pressed play.

The scene moved with intentional fluidity, and she slid the mouse to add color, brightness, and contrast to Mina’s features. The girl’s silver tooth shone a bit against the light and Jeongyeon couldn’t suppress a soft smile; she wondered when she came to pay so much attention to the details.

In a sleepy, almost unconscious act, she brought her thumb to the screen, tracing a pattern over Mina’s moles. They looked like a constellation that was yet to be discovered. She’s never been very good with far out things—she preferred what was right in front of her. The sigh leaving her lungs was a reflective one.

“Pretty…” Jeongyeon muttered under her breath.

With a yawn, she came back to editing.

--

Working up the courage to ask Tzuyu to write a rather long poem for her was a hard task, but Chaeyoung eventually managed. Their latest conversation had strengthened their bond in a way, and Tzuyu was always happy to help – well, happy to help her, anyways. The two sat side-by-side facing the dorm’s desk, and Tzuyu’s pretty handwriting adorned Chaeyoung’s little notebook.

As the words flowed out of the artist’s mouth, the pen ran beautifully on paper. Chaeyoung was a bit embarrassed of it at first, but with her friend’s encouraging nod, her nervousness dissolved into a proud chant.

“It starts like this…”
The gods have always done what they wanted
And indulged in the greatest pleasures.
I have never had reason to seek such things,
Until Ambrosia became my treasure.

I was returning home after one long day,
My body heavy and my mind weary.
And then I saw Her down the road,
Glowing bright and shining clearly.

I refused to believe my own luck,
As I began to gape in awe.
I took one step right towards her—
Her beauty was all I saw.

But realization struck me,
Along with the stories I remembered.
When I was young I was always told this—
Women and temptation should be severed.

I was held hostage by my honor,
A prisoner of my own desire.
Divine Ambrosia remained in my way,
The burning source of my sweetest fire.

I am a mortal and I am weak,
And I know this all too well.
My Lady finally beckoned,
This piece of Heaven is my Hell.

I know that I'm not worthy,
And I know I never will be.

But if Ambrosia seeks this lowly creature,
Then She will surely have me.

I will myself to approach Her,
The enticement growing stronger.

Sweet aroma distorts all sense,
I refuse to wait any longer.

I cross the threshold into sin,
And I find my vision soaked in nectar.

She’s soft and gold and honeyed,
It’s impossible to reject her.

I don’t deserve what’s beyond my grasp,
But my thoughts are brittle against her power.

Her lips still drip all over mine,
And that flavor never sours.

I was a fool to ever think,
That I was someone pure.

I’m not a god, I’m not a king,
But goodness, She’s my cure.

Ambrosia, Ambrosia, Ambrosia—
The woman I want, that I adore.

I’ll never believe I’m worth your love,

But I’ll never stop wanting more.

“…The end.”

Tzuyu put her pen down with one last stroke, and gazed upon the work. It was neatly organized, the words didn’t stray from the writing space, and the rhymes had been beautifully crafted – and yet, her heart felt heavy.

Something compelled her to turn and face Chaeyoung. The two gazed at each other.

“…You are worthy, you know,” Tzuyu said softly. Chaeyoung’s silence was met with a light rub on her good hand. “We should sleep.”

Tzuyu moved away then, ready to put on her pajamas. Chaeyoung just stared at her as a familiar pain pulsated inside her chest.

She watched the back of beautiful goddess against the low light.

Ambrosia, Ambrosia, Ambrosia.

--

Dahyun laid awake as her roommates slept. Tzuyu had insisted in putting glow-in-the-dark stars on their dorm ceiling, so the place wouldn’t be entirely dark if she woke up in the middle of the night – Dahyun had laughed at her then, but now she was thankful. Thoughts filled her mind and emotions filled her heart, and she put one hand up, reaching for the stars.

‘What if it’d been me?’ Was one thought that occurred her. She twirled her wrist freely, much like a conductor. ‘If I had been the one who broke my wrist, how different would things have been?’

It was a meaningless thought, really. It wasn’t like a broken wrist was the catalyst for Sana’s anxiety and the rumors that were starting to spread – if the hushed whispers in corridors told her anything. Dahyun was being targeted as well, by those five girls. The blonde one was apparently the leader, and Dahyun noticed how they seemed to follow her now in between classes. She wanted to know their names, but at the same time, she didn’t want to get involved in something so stupid.

Dahyun couldn’t stop thinking about it – it was like she was trying to find a reason for this chain of events, something to blame. Parties, people, friends, strangers; they all played a role in creating this judgmental atmosphere, even though they all indulged in it as well.

The only reason Sana slept with a lot of people was because a lot of people wanted to sleep with her.
“Hypocrites,” Dahyun breathed lowly, letting her arm fall on her eyes. She’d always thought that people were supposed to mature once they entered college, but she felt surrounded by jealous teenagers all over again. Tiredly, she turned her face to the colder side of her pillow and tried to sleep once more with a sigh. None of those people mattered, Dahyun decided.

She would stay by Sana’s side until she was able to hold her favorite hand again. And if the whole school wanted to come after her, then so be it.

Dahyun had never fought in her life, but she would fight for Sana.

Eventually sleep caught up to Nayeon. After waking up in Momo’s arms in the middle of the dance studio, she decided that maybe she was letting things get out of hand. When she got back to her room, Jihyo was in her bed reading, like she always did before sleeping.

Her best friend promptly but gently scolded her for being out so late when she had so much to do — unfortunately, the concern seemed to land on deaf ears, as Nayeon seemed to be running fumes. Instead, she sluggishly removed her clothes and threw on a raggedy old shirt that was two sizes too big for her.

Jihyo sighed and removed her glasses, putting her book down. “Now that you’re home, is it ok if I turn the lights out?” she asked. With a nod, the lamp went out, and the room was enveloped in darkness.

Nayeon flopped on her bed and pulled the covers over herself, and with that, she was lulled into an exhaustion-induced sleep.

Finally diving deep into the world of dreams, Nayeon curled in on herself, eyes moving behind her closed lids with the very realistic images of her fantasies. She could feel everything – from Jeongyeon’s mouth on hers to the tight grip on her waist; from the familiar taste of her ex-girlfriend’s tongue to the sudden, yet comforting pressure of a second body behind her.

Another pair of lips started kissing down the back of Nayeon’s neck, and she sighed against Jeongyeon’s mouth. She felt four hands traveling her body, and the entire situation was overwhelming – and yet, everything she ever wanted.

Pulling back, Nayeon turned her neck to capture Momo’s lips, as Jeongyeon continued to press soft pecks behind her ear. Nayeon brought one hand to the long, brown locks of the dancer and massaged her scalp, thinking about her beautiful body and soul; she’s never ached for something more than this in her entire life. When Jeongyeon licked down her neck, Nayeon shifted her attention to her again, pulling her back in. Momo’s hands found the hem of Nayeon’s shirt, and the tips of her fingers started roaming.

It was too much, and too good, and Nayeon wanted to drown in the sensation of it all. She wanted to feel loved, and she never wanted to wake up from this dream – but she was very much aware of that. It was just a dream.
She would never allow herself to give in to her deepest desires in real life.

From the corner of her eye, Nayeon spotted her; the shadow of herself, a perfect clone, watching all of that happening with a knowing look. She sat on a throne made of bones and broken clocks, ripped pieces of scripts fallen unceremoniously on the floor as she clapped slowly, enjoying the spectacle. With one last sigh, Nayeon closed her eyes, and waited for what was next – soon, she felt the weight of the velvet curtains falling on top of her, crushing her body with the impact.

That’s when she woke up, heaving. With one hand on her chest, Nayeon tried to control her breathing, afraid of waking up Jihyo.

Despite not being anything new, that recurring dream was starting to bother her beyond measure. The ending was always the worst – she could feel her lungs being crushed, and sometimes, her clone would laugh and cheer in the distance as soon as it happened.

Nayeon really wished to be the one to witness her demise, for once.

With a trembling hand, she wiped her mouth, as if the kisses were still lingering, then laid back down, praying to whatever entity to allow her to have one good night of sleep, once in her life.

Unfortunately, the greed inside her was too big, and consumed her once again.

--

“…Minari,” Sana whispered, staring at the darkness of the room. “Are you awake?”

There was no answer for a while. And then, “Yes.”

“Are you going to the house party?”

Sana heard the rustle of sheets and a thoughtful sigh. “I don’t know. I don’t think I should.” Mina scratched the mattress slightly. “Are you going?”

“I am,” Sana replied, her voice soft. “Being with everyone always makes me happy. I think we deserve that, you know? A little happiness. Sometimes.”

Mina smiled slightly at the thought. “…Yeah. I think we do.”

The two girls could hear the customary steps of students returning to their rooms late at night after finally finishing their assignments, and it was calming, somehow. It made them feel less alone in this large foreign city.

“Sana-ya.”

“Hm?”

“…I don’t want Momo to hate me.”
The sentence was met with more silence, followed by gentle sounds of a few birds who apparently hadn’t gotten the memo that it was two in the morning. Mina sounded so fragile suddenly, like her happiness depended on Momo’s approval; Sana knew that, for as much as Mina wanted to be with Jeongyeon, she wouldn’t be able to handle it if Momo avoided her because of that. Mina would always put Momo first, just like she did with Sana.

Her voice dripped with sadness at the thought that Momo wasn’t doing the same for her.

“She could never hate you.” Sana tried to reassure her the best she could.

“How do you know?”

“Momo loves you, Minari.” She sighed, her chest heavy. “She just needs time to process all of this. You know how she is.”

“Yeah… I suppose so.”

Mina felt something sliding across her mattress and realized that it was Sana’s hand making its way under her covers – the first thing they’d done when they noticed that they would be roommates was push their beds close together. Mina giggled a little, and held it, gripping tightly.

“Come to the house party with me,” Sana said, feeling some sort of déjà-vu; she hoped that this party ended up better than the last one they’d been to.

Mina took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and brought Sana’s hand to her lips. “Okay.”

They fell asleep hand in hand, their hearts a little lighter.

--

“Move over.”

“Huh?” Nayeon blinked, waking up for the second time that night. Jihyo pushed her slightly, and she had no choice but to make some space for her. Then, she felt arms encircling her waist, and suddenly she was being spooned. “What?”

“You were having nightmares,” Jihyo muttered. “Sleep.”

“Oh,” Nayeon didn’t know how to react at the gesture. “I’m okay, you didn’t have to—”

“Stop saying that,” Jihyo rubbed small circles on Nayeon’s stomach, which always calmed her down when they were younger. “I know you’re not okay. And that’s all right. Just let me do this.”

There was love and so much understanding in Jihyo’s words that Nayeon felt her eyes watering. Once again, people tried their best to help her – and once again, she felt like a monster for being loved so much.

But accepting help from Jihyo was slightly better than accepting help from anyone else, for some
“...Thank you,” Nayeon whispered, hoping that she wouldn’t be heard, but knowing that she would.

Jihyo just nodded, and when she felt Nayeon’s breathing slowing down again, she pressed a kiss to the back of her head. “I’ll wait.”

--

The empty bed beside her was a relieving sight, even if for a while. When she thought about it, Momo was sure that Jeongyeon had been avoiding her as well; it was impossible for their schedules to be this uncoordinated with each other.

What the hell was Jeongyeon afraid of? Confronting Momo about Mina? Accidentally mentioning the kiss at the party? Being truthful and ruining her chances with Mina? Did she even like Mina, at all? This was so sudden, and Momo couldn’t believe that she didn’t see it coming. It made no sense.

But then again, falling in love with Mina was so easy.

Absurdly easy.

Momo felt like something inside her was on its tipping point, unbalanced and dangling precariously off the edge – whatever it was, Momo knew that it wouldn’t take long for it to fall.

And when it did, it would fall hard. That’s what her heart kept telling her.

But at the same time, it was like there was already something at the bottom; a familiar warmth that ignited inside her chest every time she thought about a certain somebody else.

It made falling so much more palatable to her, enticing, even — and that possibility was scary.

Was it even possible to accommodate two things at the bottom of her heart?

Momo suddenly heard the door unlocking and pulled the covers above her head. She heard Jeongyeon walking in, putting her bag on the chair, then quietly making her way to the bathroom to wash up. Momo opened her eyes and stared at the door, pondering if she should confront the girl now, or if she should wait for a better opportunity. Something told her that their conversation wouldn’t be pleasant.

She was too tired for an argument right now.

Despite being angry at the girl, deep down, Momo wished for Jeongyeon to see how much she was fucking up on her own; lying to Nayeon about the kiss and then getting together with Mina was not something Jeongyeon would do. Momo knew her – they were close, after all – and because of that, she also knew that Jeongyeon would end up hurting herself more than anything if she kept this secret.
She wasn’t a liar.

But she was a savior.

And she couldn’t turn her back to people who needed her.

The thought that Jeongyeon was blinding herself because she couldn’t refuse Mina’s plea just made Momo more upset. She gripped her sheets tightly, and bit her lip.

*What a fucking dumbass.*

At that moment, Nayeon’s voice resonated inside her head.

“I swear, you’re turning into Jeongyeon with this whole ‘knight in shining armor’ act you two have going on.”

For a single second, Momo wondered if she was right; but then she realized that there was a big difference between the two of them.

Jeongyeon didn’t want to hurt people, so she tried to find solutions in different ways, without ever taking a side.

Momo, on the other hand, knew that people needed to be hurt sometimes. It was impossible to solve everything, and she was willing to deal with the consequences of her acts.

While Momo believed in karma, Jeongyeon believed in second chances.

She wondered who would end up being the better hero.

She wondered why the world needed heroes in the first place.

---

Jeongyeon considered herself a relatively chill individual. It was rare for her to find herself in situations of distress, and even when she did, she felt like she could handle things with composure and a calm exterior. This cool façade was probably one of the things that made her a valuable asset on the school’s club basketball team — these games didn’t count for anything, per se, but it still put her in an unexpected leadership position.

Her composure, her talent, her kindness, and her beauty — they all built up her popularity until it exploded after the club team won their final game of the season. Her social media in particular was booming with invitations to parties and photos of that match. And she took all this attention in stride as well — she was, after all, a collected person.

But that was on the court, when adrenaline was rushing through her veins and everything else looked blurred.
Right now, looking at a big screen in a dark classroom, with thirty people watching as Mina undressed, Jeongyeon was an absolute mess.

She could feel sweat pooling on her forehead and dripping down, and she really wanted to bury her face somewhere and never look at anyone, ever again. She knew that filming that was a bad idea, and what had happened afterwards off-camera made her even more embarrassed of the whole thing.

Jeongyeon could hear a few low gasps here and there, but most of the class just watched attentively. Others, slept through the whole thing as they waited for their turn to show their movies – Jeongyeon could relate. Despite her nervousness, she was incredibly tired from sleeping so late everyday for the past week.

Mina finally faced the camera, eyes closed and her beautiful features zoomed in. In a pavlovian reaction, Jeongyeon felt her body heat up, and when Mina opened her eyes, she caught her breath. The character on the screen stared for such a long time at the viewers, that Jeongyeon cursed herself for not cutting the take shorter. She eyed a few people, and they all looked mesmerized at Mina’s powerful gaze.

With one final blink, the movie ended. As soon as the credits started rolling, Jeongyeon let out the breath she was holding, and let her forehead hit the table with a loud noise.

Slowly, people started clapping, and Jeongyeon felt someone tapping her back. She looked over her shoulder and saw Jae giving her a thumbs-up with an encouraging smile, which brought her a little bit of relief.

“Alright,” Her teacher turned on the lights after that, making everyone wince at the sudden brightness. “That was a beautiful example of a silent movie, Miss Jeongyeon. Thank you for sharing it with the class.”

“Thank you, professor.” She felt a tinge of pride at his words.

“Would you maybe like to explain the main theme in a few words? For the ones who were confused,” He stared at two boys drooling on their desks. “Or sleeping.”

After a round of chuckles, Jeongyeon got up with a sigh. She felt nervous, but swallowed her embarrassment and thought about her project with a director’s eye. “Well… as the name suggests, I wanted to portray the word ‘fragility’ in a different way. The protagonist is shown as a dreamer with a very soft demeanor throughout the whole movie, but she seems insecure with herself. As soon as she finds something worth fighting for, she becomes defiant, without losing her essence.”

“And what did she find?”

“Her own fragility,” Jeongyeon smiled, reminiscing her creative process. “She’s fighting for it, and she’s fighting to show the viewers who she is. She wanted to expose her soul, for everyone to see.”

“I see,” The teacher touched his chin, thoughtfully. “So, by removing her clothing in a bold act, she was challenging the viewers, in a way.”

“Yes, exactly!” It felt nice to talk about her idea with someone who understood. “It was something unexpected, but at the same time, very in character. It wasn’t forced, it was just… her. Purely, and simply her.”

“That’s very intriguing. Although… I have another take on that last scene. Can I share?”
“Of course.”

“It didn’t feel like she was looking at the audience,” His words were slow, as if he was pondering. “But at the person behind the camera.”

Jeongyeon swallowed hard. “I… guess that’s another way to see it.”

“It would make for a very interesting plot twist, I think. If, in the end, she found her strength in the person who had been watching her all along…” He chuckled. “But I guess that would just turn the movie into a love story, and that wasn’t the intention at all.”

Time seemed to slow down after that, and the silence was heavy. Jeongyeon’s thoughts were starting to become dangerously overwhelming, but she snapped out of it when the professor hit his thighs and got up from his chair. “Well, that was an insightful discussion. Now, who’s next?”

Jeongyeon bowed, and sat back down as the next student got up, but everything else sounded muffled around her. The professor’s words had hit her in a way that she didn’t expect, and her head was spinning.

She didn’t mean for the movie to be a love story at all, but the fact that it could be interpreted as one made her feel dizzy. It hit her – was Jeongyeon filming a movie, or was she just filming Mina? It felt like the line between the character and the actress was suddenly very blurred, and Jeongyeon started to question her feelings.

When did she start liking Mina so much? Was it after she related her to a character she conceived? Jeongyeon was suddenly terrified of having fallen in love with her creation instead of a person. Pygmalion, she thought, and hated everything about it.

Not many people traversed all the way up to the main building’s roof, mainly because students would rather go to the courtyard for their daily intake of fresh air. Because of that, the place was usually lonely, but comforting; there was something appealing about watching people from above. Jihyo liked the sensation – observing from afar, like a silent guardian. She wondered if the title even suited her anymore.

Leaning with her elbows on the railing, Jihyo looked down at the courtyard. The students looked like ants, moving quickly, each with their own problems, goals, and lives. She instinctively directed her gaze towards the ones who ran, rather than the ones who simply walked, because trouble always seemed to be shaped by haste. Jihyo let out a tiny laugh at the poetic thought. Chaeyoung would be proud.

Movement caught her peripheral vision, and she felt the presence of someone joining her after a hesitant moment. Jihyo side-eyed the person, then smiled to herself. “Taking a break?”
The older woman bit her apple. “Lunch break.”

“An apple is your lunch?”

“It’s healthier than a snack.”

“You should take care of your health, Miss. You’re not giving the students a good example.”

The woman smirked at that, taking another bite, then turning around with her back on the rail and her eyes to the sky. “It’s just the two of us here and I’ve known you since you couldn’t even reach the keys on the piano, Jihyo-ah. No need for formalities.”

Jihyo chuckled, mirroring her position with her arms crossed. “Fine. What should I call you, then?”

“I think you know just Sunmi is fine.”

“Okay, Just Sunmi.”

Sunmi chuckled, putting a warm hand on top of Jihyo’s head, ruffling her hair. “You’re still such a brat,” She said, fondness lacing through her tone. “Somethings never change.”

“And somethings really do,” Jihyo replied, secretly preening at the familiar affection. The two remained in silence after that, just enjoying each other’s company under a gentle breeze.

It was only at that moment that it struck Jihyo – she’d been feeling extremely lonely lately. With the whole drama happening between her friends, and all the walls Nayeon had been putting up, Jihyo felt helpless. There was no worse feeling.

Talking to Sunmi was refreshing. It’s been a while since they last chatted, but not for the lack of trying – at least not from Jihyo’s part. The professor was just too busy now that she had an ‘adult’ job. Jihyo laughed at the thought, making Sunmi turn to her with an inquiring look.

“Did you have to become my teacher?” Jihyo asked, amused. “It’s so weird watching you be all professional and grown up.”

Sunmi raised a perfectly trimmed eyebrow. “I’m six years older than all of you, I have an image to maintain.”

“We traded Pokémon cards when we were kids, Sunmi.”

This made the teacher laugh. “I hope you’re taking care of them, by the way. Those things are rare.”

“Of course I am. They’re special to me.”

“Oh?”

Jihyo blinked, averting her eyes, and turning back around to touch her arms on the rail. “They were gifts from you, after all.”

She wondered if that was appropriate, but then she decided that she didn’t care. Jihyo and Sunmi were neighbors who grew up together, and Jihyo really appreciated that the older woman treated her as an equal to this day, without ever diminishing her feelings. The admiration she felt for Sunmi was something that tugged at her heart. It’s been this way for a long time.

Sunmi just shoved the apple in front of Jihyo’s face suddenly. Jihyo blinked, then smiled, turning
down the offer. That was the woman’s way of trying to cheer her up – offering food.

“When are you coming over for dinner, by the way? Grandma’s been wondering.” Jihyo broke the silence after a while.

“When you invite me.”

“This is an invitation.”

“Oh. Well, then,” Sunmi finished her fruit, throwing the rest in the closest garbage can. “How does next Friday sound?”

“Perfect.” Jihyo’s heart leaped a beat.

“Good. I’ll bring wine.” Sunmi winked and reached out to ruffle Jihyo’s hair again. “I have to go. Don’t stay here for too long, you have classes.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jihyo teased and Sunmi left with an eye-roll. Once she was alone again, Jihyo groaned. She didn’t want to think about the house party. All she wanted to think about was dinner with Sunmi and nostalgic conversations late in the night as they drank wine in the yard, looking at the stars in the sky.

But she didn’t have that luxury. Her friends needed her.

Jihyo lightly slapped both her cheeks, then jumped off the tiny stall. Back to work.

--

“Miss Tzuyu, can we talk?” The professor called for her right after the bell rang, and Tzuyu held her breath, knowing very well that she was in trouble. Her photography project had turned out great in her opinion, but it’d been an incredibly risky move; now, she would face judgement.

She waited for the class to clear out, then walked up to her teacher’s desk with the fake confidence she had honed excellently over the years. Tzuyu had rehearsed her speech a few times, memorizing the reasons and explanations she would give if her professor decided to give her a terrible grade and, consequentially, make her fail this class. However, now that she was there, all those arguments suddenly vanished from her mind.

“Sit down, please,” the professor’s tone was mysterious but Tzuyu obeyed, slowly. She waited for her to finish organizing some papers, fidgeting a bit. Once she was done, she looked at Tzuyu right in the eyes. “So, about your project.”

“Yes…?”

The professor sighed. “I don’t know how to say this, so I’ll be straightforward.”

There was a pause and Tzuyu blinked, nervously. Miss Fei was a very unpredictable teacher, with both her words and actions. In some aspects, that created an interesting teaching environment, but
in others, it just made the students anxious.

After shooting Tzuyu a piercing gaze, Miss Fei opened a smile. “It was brilliant. Congratulations.”

Tzuyu nearly fell from the chair, her shoulders relaxing as she breathed out, letting go of all the apprehension. “Thank you.”

The teacher just laughed, leaning back on the chair. “You were the only one this semester who didn’t photograph any type of clothing, you know that?”

“I figured.” Now that they were talking casually with each other, Tzuyu allowed her pride to resurface a little. “I had plenty of ideas for magazine photoshoots, but it wouldn’t be me if I went through with them.”

“You remind me of myself when I had to do this assignment,” Her expression was that of a proud parent, albeit a bit eccentric. “I did a nude photoshoot. Good times.”

Tzuyu blushed at that, covering her mouth with one hand. “Seriously?”

“Yeah, then I failed. But hey, now I’m a professor, so how about that.” She kicked the air with an amused grin, then gave Tzuyu a paper with her grade. A big, round A adorned the page, and Tzuyu couldn’t stop smiling. “Good job, kid.”

“Thank you so much!” She hugged the paper close to her heart and bowed slightly. Miss Fei dismissed her and Tzuyu bowed once more, before leaving the classroom. Grabbing her phone, she was about to type the exciting news on the group chat, but someone else had already sent her a private message.

[Chaengie, 9:10am]:

congrats on your A!!!!!!

and if you got less than that, I already called a lawyer

im ready to sue

Tzuyu blinked, confused.

[Chou Yoda, 9:53am]:

How did you know I got an A?

[Chaengie, 9:55am]:

!!!! you did

I knew it because you’re amazing
She didn’t want to smile this hard at her silly friend, but Chaeyoung always made her feel so special and warm all over, that her cheeks were pulling harder than she could control them. With a dreamy sigh, Tzuyu sent an audio, wanting to hear her voice in a reply.

“Thank you, Chaengie… It means a lot to me.”

The answer came immediately.

“It means a lot to me, too.”

A pause, and another audio.

“Also, I’m presenting my poem in five minutes, but since you’re the one who wrote it, I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

Tzuyu laughed and sent her heart emojis. She felt a desperate urge to hug Chaeyoung suddenly.

Two hours later, another message from Chaeyoung popped up on the group chat.

[Chaengie, 11:52am]:

call me shakespeare

with an A

cause that’s what I got on my poem assignment

Three audios from Momo, Dahyun and Jeongyeon appeared quickly, and Tzuyu laughed because they were all 3 seconds of groans.

It was a welcoming sight in the middle of so many complications. For a moment, she wondered if the house party wouldn’t be as tense as she was anticipating.

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Then, Saturday came.
Saying that Tzuyu was hosting a house party was an oversimplification, mainly because she did not live in a house.

Chou Tzuyu’s home was a mansion.

Her family was wealthy, and the first time the girls visited her place, they were speechless for a good two hours. Then, they moved to the living room to watch Ghibli movies and completely ignored that her TV took up the entire wall. Tzuyu had been self-conscious back then, but her friends made sure to be casual with her parents and maids, so in the end, the environment turned cozy and nice.

Now that they were used to it, they walked into her kitchen nonchalantly to grab the hidden snacks in the familiar spots. It felt like home already.

At the moment, only Tzuyu, Chaeyoung, Jeongyeon, Dahyun and Jihyo were present; the other girls were late for the party, but Sana had sent them a message saying that she would leave home soon. Momo and Nayeon were dead in the group chat, and Mina was apparently coming with Sana.

In the meantime, to keep people entertained, Jihyo took on the role of a DM for an RPG session she had planned a long time ago. The dungeon was incredibly complex, and it would take hours for the whole campaign to evolve, but the puzzles were so fun that nobody cared.

“Alright, Dahyun, it’s your turn.” Jihyo sat on the sofa with her Rules book in hands and her Monsters book resting on her lap as the others accommodated themselves on the carpet. “You find yourself face to face with a huge door, adorned with jewels. You realize that there is a hole on the handle, and it looks like something is supposed to go in there.”

Jeongyeon, a strong paladin of justice, put her hands on her hips. “Great, another puzzle.”

Chaeyoung, an archer elf with a bad attitude and quick feet, shot her a toothy smirk. “I thought you were enjoying the puzzles in the dungeon.”

Dahyun, the lamest wizard in that side of the country, with the worst possible status for a mage, smiled too. “Alright door, show me what you got.”

Tzuyu just watched lying across the couch, occasionally playing with Jihyo’s hair.

“You realize that you’ve seen this shape before… Yes, it’s from an ancient artifact, so old that only a few renowned mages knew of its existence.”

“How come Dahyun The Lame knows about it?” Chaeyoung raised an eyebrow.

“Excuse me, I’m a mage. It comes with the job description.”

“It’s the skill she chose for her class on her character sheet,” Jihyo explained, off-handedly. “Anyway, let’s see if you can precisely recognize the artifact. Roll for initiative.”

“We’re screwed,” Chaeyoung sighed.

“A little faith, please. Dahyun The Lame is focusing.” She rolled the die, and it landed on 11.
“Uh.”

“You manage to recognize the artifact,” Jihyo continued and Jeongyeon and Chaeyoung groaned in relief. “But, you have no idea where it could possibly be inside this huge dungeon.”

“Good, now what?” Jeongyeon ruffled her hair.

“Wait! I have an idea.” Dahyun interrupted, raising her hand.

“Alright, shoot.” Jihyo allowed.

“I’ll use the Time Portal.”

“No, you won’t!” Both Jeongyeon and Chaeyoung yelled in unison, making Tzuyu jump.

“Why not?”

“Because this thing consumes all of your mana,” Jeongyeon explained. “If you fail, we’ll be all on our own for the rest of this labyrinth.”

“Yeah, you might be a lame wizard, but you’re the only wizard we have.” Chaeyoung completed.

“Wait up,” Jihyo smirked, leaning forward with intrigued eyes. “Let her talk, I want to know where she’s going with this.”

Dahyun put her chin up, smugly. “Thank you. I was just thinking… If I open the Portal, I’ll manage to see where the artifact was buried all those years ago. Then I’ll cross the Portal, grab the artifact, and bring it back to the present time. No puzzles, no monsters in the way. Fast, and painless.”

There was a silent beat as everyone stared at Dahyun like she was a lunatic, then Jihyo leaned back on the couch, grunting.

 “…Fine. I’ll allow that, but only if you roll a 20.”

“Sounds goo—”

“Absolutely not.” Chaeyoung put her hand on Dahyun’s shoulder.

“Wait, let’s discuss this before you decide to throw your character in the garbage.” Jeongyeon tried for a friendlier approach, but not too friendly. “How many times did you roll something above twelve throughout this whole game?”

“That’s just luck!”

“Exactly! You have very, very bad luck.”

“But what if I manage to do it? Wouldn’t that be legendary?” Dahyun got up, moving her arm above her head. “Dahyun The Lame is no more! I’ll be known as Dahyun The Badass. Started from the bottom, and now we’re here.”

“Oh my god.”

“Listen, do you guys really want to go through all those goddamn puzzles?” Dahyun sat back down, and unfortunately, it was a very compelling argument. Jihyo just bit her lip trying not to laugh as she watched the discussion.
“…Don’t do it, man, it’s not worth it,” Chaeyoung tried one last time.

“I’ll make this sacrifice for you, my friends.” Her mind was apparently made up, so she grabbed the die. Chaeyoung sighed and got up.

“I’ll grab you another character sheet.”

Dahyun ignored her, kissed the die twice, and closed her eyes. “Come on, baby. Just this once, let me be a legend.”

Then she threw it on the carpet. It rolled for a second, and finally, it landed.

20.

“You have got to be kidding me.” Jihyo let her two books fall and threw her head back. Chaeyoung and Jeongyeon froze in place, speechless, then threw themselves on top of the mage at the same time with loud taps on her back.

“I knew you could do it!”

“Our savior!”

“Get off me, you two-faced gremlins!” Dahyun tried to push them, but the commemoration was intense. Tzuyu watched the scene, giggling, and helped Jihyo grab the books from the floor.

“Alright, okay,” Jihyo eventually went on with the story, annoyed. “Dahyun The Lame—”


“Not yet,” Jihyo’s grin told her that this task wouldn’t be that easy. “Dahyun The Lame has an idea. A brilliant idea, actually. She positions herself in front of the door and touches the handle, absorbing the ancient artifact’s essence. She closes her eyes then, steps back, and stretches her hands in front of her, rooted in place.”

Tzuyu sat up straight; now even her was curious about how this scene would play out.

“Small blue rays of electricity start flickering at the tip of Dahyun’s fingers. She focuses all of her power on this one spell… This is it, all or nothing. Her teammates wait, anticipation rising up their throats as the wizard finishes her preparations for the hardest trick she’s ever done. It takes one minute… then two… they were starting to give up hope, but on the third, a blinding flash of light shoots from the mage’s hands and twirl on thin air!”

“Awesome.” The three players whisper together.

“A portal starts to form in front of them, big enough for one person to walk through. On the other side, they can see the dungeon they were in, but five thousand years in the past. Dahyun did it. She opened the Time Portal.”

“A true legend.” Chaeyoung nodded, pretending to wipe a tear.

“The artifact is right on the other side, waiting to be retrieved. But there is a catch.”

“Of course.” Jeongyeon groaned.

“Only the person who opened the Portal can go through it. Dahyun would have to go alone, and face whatever consequences on her way. And since this spell drained all of her mana, she would
have no powers to fight any of the creatures she might meet. For her to be successful, she would have to rely simply on dodging. Will Dahyun still do it?"

The trio paused, looking at each other; it was like the fate of the world was in their hands, and that single decision would affect millions around the globe. They had to think carefully, and take full responsibility for the decision.

“Fuck yes, she will,” Dahyun announced without missing a beat.

“I can’t look,” Chaeyoung buried her face on Jeongyeon’s shoulder, and the paladin patted her hair with a sorrowful look.

Jihyo’s smirk widened. “Very well. Dahyun The Lame steps into the Time Portal. She looks around her, carefully, but there is nothing in sight. Now relaxed, she moves to the pile of treasure, and reaches for the artifact. It’s a shiny crown with a beautiful blue jewel in the middle, fit for a king. Thankfully, the owner of the crown has been dead for a long time.”

“See. I knew I could do it.”

“On the present day, that is.”

Jeongyeon facepalmed.

“Oh.” Dahyun swallowed.

“Five thousand years ago, The Lich King was very much alive.” Jihyo’s words sent a shiver through their spine, and Chaeyoung lifted her head, gaping.

“Oh, no.”

“A sudden tremor makes the ground shake, and the pile of treasure breaks down. Dahyun manages to avoid that, but what’s inside the pile makes her weak on her knees. There, staring right through her soul with empty sockets and its putrid blue beard, stands The Lich King.”

Jihyo grabbed her Monster book, showing her the picture of the creature she was about to face.

“That doesn’t look good.” Dahyun brought her knees to her chest, beckoning until she touched the sofa.

“That’s the strongest boss in the whole game,” Chaeyoung explained in a hopeless tone.

“Oh.”

“The King moves one finger, and a horde of undead rise from the ground,” Jihyo continued, smiling wickedly. “He’s not happy that you stole his crown. The army starts making its way towards you.”

“Fuck, uh… I cast Fire Tempest!”

“You have no mana!” Chaeyoung grabbed her shoulders again, shaking her friend. “You can only dodge!”

“Shit, you’re right. Then— wait, I need to think!”

“The army approaches. They are slow, but they are many.” The soundtrack Jihyo chose for this one particular scene was ghastly; different sounds of zombie moans mixed with the yells of lost
spirits echoed through the living room, and the three players were sweating.

“Run towards the portal, you idiot!” Jeongyeon leaned on her other side, desperation taking place inside her.

“I turn around and do that!” Dahyun grabbed the die, praying for a good roll.

19.

“There is a God!” Chaeyoung jumped up and down.

“Not so fast,” Jihyo interrupted. “Five ghouls launch themselves on Dahyun’s direction. She has five chances to dodge their attacks.” She pushed the die towards her, and grinned. “Your statuses are not so good, so you’ll have to roll five times, above fifteen. If you do this, you’ll cross the Portal safe and sound, with the artifact in hands. Let’s see if you’re quick on your feet, legend.”

“What!” Jeongyeon ran her hands through her hair. “You can’t do that!”

“Yes, I can, I’m the DM.” Jihyo deadpanned.

Dahyun sighed, crawling back up to the board. She reached for the die with trembling hands and enveloped the tiny object with passion. “Okay. I can do this.”

Chaeyoung put her hand on top of Dahyun’s and nodded encouragingly. Jeongyeon did the same, and even Tzuyu got down from the couch, wrapping her fingers around the three girls’ joined hands.

With one last deep inhale, Dahyun rolled her first move.

16.

“Yes!”

“The first ghoul is too sloppy, so Dahyun manages to duck, avoiding its punch.” Jihyo mumbled, and Dahyun rolled the die again.

19.

“Holy shit.” Chaeyoung’s mouth started curling up in a smile.

“The second ghoul holds a sword, but Dahyun twirls away from the sharp object, avoiding contact.”

Another roll.

At this point, Jeongyeon was already laughing too hard on Tzuyu’s shoulder.

“A third one, bigger than the others, tries to hit her with a mace. His big size hinders him, however, and the wizard dodges easily.” Jihyo was starting to fume.

The die rolled again.

16.

“Make it stop, my sides hurt…!” Jeongyeon barely let out, laughing too hard to speak coherently. Tzuyu gaped and Chaeyoung was hugging Dahyun from behind with a huge smile on her face.
“The fourth ghoul has claws, but Dahyun steps behind a wall, and the creature punctures the wood, getting stuck,” Jihyo crossed her arms, visibly angry. “This last ghoul is faster than the others, so you’ll have to roll above seventeen.”

“Oh, come on!” The three players complained, and even Tzuyu looked upset.

“If you don’t,” Jihyo continued. “The horde of ghouls will follow you across the portal, and The Lich King will cross space-time. You’ll basically revive the most powerful creature the world has ever seen.”

“That’s bullshit!” Chaeyoung exchanged looks with her teammates.

“Take it or leave it, mage.”

Dahyun took a deep breath, grabbed the die, and got up. The four girls stared at her, hearts beating fast. The fate of the world was on her shoulders.

“They call me…” Dahyun raised her hand above her head. “…Dahyun The Badass!” Then she dropped it. The height made the die bounce on the carpet, and everyone’s eyes were glued on its movement. As soon as it stopped, Dahyun sat back down, trying to make out the number.

20.

Jeongyeon’s explosive laughter boomed across the room, Chaeyoung threw herself on top of Dahyun, and Tzuyu fell backwards, tearing up from laughing.

Jihyo threw her books on the sofa and got up, hands in the air. “Are you serious?! I spent an entire month creating this goddamn dungeon, detailing all the final puzzles, and building up an awesome final boss, just so you can beat it like that?!”

Dahyun couldn’t speak; she just threw her hands in the air and closed her eyes, thanking the Gods of RPG.

That’s when Sana and Mina walked in, stopping on their tracks when they spotted the chaos.

“Uh… did we come in a bad time?” Sana asked, meekly.

The girls calmed down, Jeongyeon’s eyes landing on Mina and her heart leaping a beat. Mina smiled at her direction, and Tzuyu motioned for them to sit. Chaeyoung hugged Sana, then explained the whole story. At the end of it, Sana turned to Dahyun with wide eyes.

“I can’t believe you’re a time traveler.”

They decided to start the party without Nayeon and Momo; if the two wanted to show up, they would. Since they were familiar with the place, the girls didn’t take long to pile up on the big couch as Tzuyu pulled out Mario Kart 8. She offered the controllers, but no one was really in a
mood to play yet – they were happy to watch, however. So, Tzuyu and Dahyun kept racing against each other, which led to Dahyun’s inevitable victory almost every time. She was thankful that Jeongyeon seemed too busy with other things to beat her ass on every track.

Jihyo eyed her friends, and she could immediately feel that something was different. Mina sat beside Chaeyoung, but it was clear that she wanted to be next to Jeongyeon, if her gaze told her anything; the film major was fidgety too. Dahyun and Sana were a lot more cuddly than usual, and Jihyo raised an eyebrow at that. She took it as a good sign.

Sana laid her head on Chaeyoung’s shoulder at some point as she watched the other girls race, and the tiny artist smiled. “Comfortable?”

“Very,” Sana returned the smile, then poked Dahyun. “You’re so good at this game.”

“Years of practice.” The reply was immediate.

“And yet, you still can’t beat Jeongyeon.” Chaeyoung teased.

“I’m sorry, Dahyun The Badass can’t hear you.” Dahyun focused back on the TV, grinning as she crossed the finish line. Jeongyeon giggled, distracted.

“That’s not fair, you know all the shortcuts,” Tzuyu pouted, and Chaeyoung felt her chest compress; pouty Tzuyu looked like an adorably disgruntled puppy.

“I can show you where they are, if you want.” Chaeyoung tried to cheer her up, and Tzuyu’s smiled told her that it’d been the right answer.

After Chaeyoung was done explaining how to cheat on the tracks, Sana reached for her wrist, smiling softly. “You’re wearing it today.”

The bracelet was a gift from Sana. It was the first thing she bought Chaeyoung after she came out, and Sana told her that she could wear it whenever she wanted, without the need to feel pressured.

It was a simple rainbow bracelet, with the words ‘be proud’ written in black by Sana. Chaeyoung didn’t really like to call attention to herself by wearing it, but when it was just the nine of them, she felt comfortable to display the gift for everyone to see. Her biggest wish was to one day be confident enough to never take it off. She treasured that gift too much.

“I missed wearing it,” she said, looking at it. “Tzuyu helped me put it on, since my hand’s busted.”

“Does it hurt?” Sana was worried about the injury.

“Not as much anymore.”

“Did you get used to the pain?”

“Not really. Tzuyu and Dahyun are helping me take care of it. The pain is going away, little by little.”

Sana smiled at her, warmly.

“You’re welcome, by the way,” Dahyun said as she won yet another race.

“Yeah, yeah.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes, and Sana laughed.

“She almost gave me a heart attack when she showed up with her hand like this today,” Jihyo
mentioned. Jeongyeon agreed, and Chaeyoung apologized with a light blush. She didn’t explain in
detail, but she did mention that she’d punched a wall to the other girls. Thankfully, Jihyo never
pushed anyone for explanations, and Jeongyeon was understanding as well. She did want to tell
them, eventually. But she wouldn’t tell Sana about the rumors.

She’d take this matter into her own hands.

On the other side of the sofa, Mina was texting someone, and Jihyo placed her chin on her
shoulder to take a peek. “Texting Momo?”

The girl snapped out of focus and took a second to reply as she clicked the lock on her phone. “No,
just my mom. She was wondering how college was going.”

“And how is college going?”

Mina chuckled. “It’s definitely… going. With a few surprises.”

Jihyo hummed, and Mina placed her head on top of hers. “Do you know if Momo is coming?”

“I couldn’t reach her. Nayeon’s kinda missing, too.”

Mina sighed, feeling her stomach drop. She wanted to talk to Nayeon, too; this whole mess also
involved her, in a way. But first she needed to face Momo, and make sure that she didn’t hate her –
even after Sana’s reassurance, she couldn’t take the thought off her mind.

She stole another glance at Jeongyeon. She couldn’t bear feeling so far away from her when she
was right in front of her. Mina didn’t want to put their new relationship on the spot so suddenly, so
she tried to restrain her actions.

Besides, they weren’t even in a relationship yet. Jeongyeon had finished her assignment this week,
but they hadn’t had the chance to talk face-to-face after that. Maybe they could sort things out
today.

As if she could read her mind, Jeongyeon suddenly got up. “Bathroom.” She shot Mina a not-so-
subtle glance, and Mina bit her lip.

The girls seemed too distracted by the game to pay attention; even Jihyo had decided to join them.
With no one else by her side, Mina got up slowly, following Jeongyeon into the corridors.

Jihyo stared from the corner of her eye, and hummed internally; then she returned to the game, as if
nothing had happened.

Moving with the careful steps of a ballerina, as to not give away her position to the others, Mina
walked towards the bathroom. The door was closed, and she wondered if she should knock, or
simply wait – Jeongyeon could really be using the bathroom. She decided to stay rooted in place
until the door opened.

It didn’t take long for the familiar sound of the door unlocking, and Mina found herself being
pulled inside. She yelped at the sudden action, but Jeongyeon’s hold wasn’t rough – it never was.

“Sorry! Did I hurt you?” Concern was the first thing out of her mouth, and it made Mina swoon
internally.

“N-no, no! I was just startled,” she replied, then chuckled. “I thought you actually busy.”
Jeongyeon grinned, scratching her neck like she usually did when she was nervous. “I considered it, but then I saw your feet under the door.”

She finally closed the door, and both girls found themselves alone.

It was quite ridiculous, the urge Mina had every time they had a little bit of privacy. She wanted to pull Jeongyeon close, kiss her, hug her, be close to her all the time, but she knew that right now, she wasn’t in a position to do that. So, she let out a puff of air, and touched her back to the door, hands behind her. “So…”

“I promised I’d give you an answer after I was done with my assignment,” Jeongyeon started, slowly. She was playing with the hem of her jacket, visibly nervous. “And I know you’ve been waiting.”

Mina nodded.

Jeongyeon sighed. “Well… the truth is… I’m scared.” She let out a shaky laugh. “I’m really, really scared.”

Mina nearly launched herself from the wall to throw her arms around the girl, but she forced herself to stay still. “What are you scared of?”

“I’m scared of ruining this. I’m scared of my feelings. If… they’re even real, or not. I don’t know what I feel.” She ran her fingers through her hair. “You deserve an answer, Mina, and I don’t want to—” Jeongyeon caught her tongue.

“To?”

“I don’t want to lie to you.” The party flashed back to her mind, and the terrible lie she was keeping resurfaced, making Jeongyeon shake. She wasn’t a liar, at least not by nature. It was tearing her apart. Her thoughts regarding the movie also popped up in her head, and Jeongyeon was incredibly conflicted about the image she had of Mina. She didn’t want to love an illusion she created, but she didn’t know what was real anymore. She was so confused.

“Then be honest with me.” Mina hugged herself; she knew she was a hypocrite, because she was keeping a secret, too.

“I… I feel something for you. That much I know. It’s sudden, and new, but it’s so strong. I’m not going to stand here and pretend I don’t want to kiss you, you know?”

Mina blushed with a faint smile despite the tense atmosphere. “That’s good to know.”

“I’m just afraid of… time. Of things not working out after a while.”

“…Like how things didn’t work out with Nayeon?”

Jeongyeon held her breath, and finally looked into Mina’s eyes. “…Yeah.”

Mina knew that this was coming. Jeongyeon and Nayeon were the couple. Everyone thought they would definitely stay together, get married, and have kids. Her hesitation was well justified, and Mina wondered if she should be afraid of it, too.

But she didn’t want that possibility to get in the way of happiness; that would only mean that she would be running away, like she always did.
She took a step forward. “Jeongyeon… even if you’re afraid, I don’t think we should let… fear to keep us from trying. I’ve been afraid for three years, and nothing good ever came from that.”

Jeongyeon let out a weak chuckle. “That’s longer than I dated.”

“It was a really long time.” She tentatively held Jeongyeon’s hands. “If… if things end up not working out, then it’s okay. I just want to be with you, if you’ll let me.”

“That’s not how I do things, Mina.” Jeongyeon sighed, rubbing her thumb on Mina’s knuckles. “I don’t want to get into a relationship thinking that it might end someday. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You don’t want to hurt anybody,” Mina knew this girl so well, and her selflessness was one of the things that made her fall so hard. “But sometimes… it’s okay to be hurt. If it’ll allow me to be with you, then hurt me a thousand times over.”

It was poetic, and maybe too much, but those words lit a fire inside Jeongyeon that she wasn’t expecting. At that moment, she realized – Mina wasn’t the protagonist of a lame college movie, or a creation from her dreams. That was the girl Jeongyeon’s known for five years, and one of the purest souls she’s ever come across.

It was Mina in her rawest form, and she was beautiful. Jeongyeon didn’t want to search for a reason to like her, but if that’s what it took for her to realize her feelings, then she would take it. Mina was the reason itself.

She leaned forward, brushing her lips against Mina’s.

It felt right. It felt good.

She wanted to be with her.

They kissed slowly, lips dancing against each other. Jeongyeon didn’t want to let her go – the addicting taste of Mina’s mouth made her head spin, and she forgot all her insecurities. With one last peck, she cupped Mina’s cheek, brushing the pads of her thumbs there slightly. Mina couldn’t hold back a smile.

“You’re always so smiley after we kiss,” Jeongyeon pointed out, grinning too.

“I can’t help it.”

“I kinda love it,” she kissed the tip of Mina’s nose, and then they hugged. The sound of Mina’s heartbeat pressed against her did things to her head; she felt giddy, and impossibly happy, and she wanted this feeling to last for a long, long time. It was like being in love all over again, but also different. Nayeon’s words rang inside her head.

“We’re so young. Too young to be certain of things.”

Jeongyeon wondered if she was an adult now.

With one last big sigh, she held Mina a bit tighter. “…Okay.”

“Hm?”

“I want to be with you,” she buried her head in Mina’s neck, and she sounded fragile. “I really do.” Mina’s heart was soaring. “Then be with me.”
They pulled back, and Mina took her lips in another kiss. It tasted like a whole new world.

Time would tell.

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“Someone’s ringing the bell,” Dahyun commented, and Tzuyu got up to open the door. She checked through the security camera and was pleasantly surprised when she saw the two girls waiting outside.

“You came!” Tzuyu said through the intercom, and Momo smiled at the camera, waving. Tzuyu opened the door then, and the dancer gave her a one-armed hug.

“Hey, you.”

“We thought you weren’t coming.”

“It would be rude not to,” Nayeon mumbled, holding plastic bags in hand. “Can I use your fridge? These are better cold.”

Tzuyu blinked, only now noticing the bags. “Oh, of course. What is it?”

“Beer,” Nayeon walked past Tzuyu after awkwardly hugging her, then put the heavy bottles on the counter. “What’s a party without a little booze, right?”

Jihyo recognized that voice and looked over her shoulder, making her character fall off the map on the game. “Look who decided to show up.”

Nayeon smiled at her. “We had to make a pit-stop.”

“We?”

“Howdy,” Momo appeared from behind Nayeon, and Jihyo’s grin was blinding.

“You came, too!”

“The gang’s all here,” Dahyun said, fist-pumping the air as soon as she won the tenth race in a row. “Alright, enough Mario Kart for me.”

“Hey, I wanna play!” Momo jumped on the couch, and landed on Sana’s lap. She looked up at her best friend with a goofy grin. “Hey.”

Sana stared at her seriously for a bit, but her face broke in a smile eventually. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Yeah,” Momo looked around, immediately noticing the absence of a certain someone. “Where’s —”
“Talking to Jeongyeon somewhere.” Sana was perceptive despite everything. Momo’s face remained neutral at that, and she just hummed. “You wanted to talk to her?”

“Nah,” Momo got up, crawling on top of Chaeyoung, who hit her head slightly, and positioning herself in front of the TV. “Who’s ready to get their ass kicked?”

Sana frowned at how weirdly she was acting, but decided to let it go – this drama didn’t involve her in anyway. Jihyo motioned for Nayeon to join them in the couch as she grabbed one controller, and the actress did, after putting the beers in the fridge, and grabbing one for herself. She threw herself unceremoniously beside Jihyo, offering her a sip.

Jihyo looked at the beer, then back to Nayeon, but the girl didn’t flinch – a challenge.

“Not yet,” Jihyo declined after a moment, turning back to the TV to choose her character. “Wanna play?”

“I’m bad at this game. Go ahead.” Nayeon said, drinking her alcohol.

“You’re just afraid I’ll destroy you.” Momo teased without taking her eyes off the TV, and Nayeon smirked.

“I know you will, so I’m not even bothering.”

Sana eyed them, but shrugged. Dahyun sat back down, and Sana pulled her into her lap with a soft smile. Dahyun laid with her head comfortably on Sana’s thighs as she sprawled her legs over Nayeon and Momo’s laps, and the older girl ran her fingers through her hair, happily. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu watched the scene with curiosity, and smiled at each other.

Jeongyeon and Mina finally stepped out of the bathroom, and upon hearing the commotion, stopped on their tracks. Momo’s voice was loud on the living room, like it usually was when she was competitive on a game, and Mina’s heart shot through the roof.

“Momo came,” She mumbled, more to herself than anything.

Jeongyeon nodded. “I wonder if Nayeon came, too.”

She tiptoed and poked her head out of the corridor, and saw everyone sitting on the couch. Her eyes landed on Nayeon’s frame automatically, then she stepped back. The sight of her sitting there made Jeongyeon recall innumerous things – Nayeon’s reaction when she noticed the bruises on her shoulders, her sickly face, the angry demeanor. Jeongyeon hated that the last time they talked, things ended up on a bad note.

Also, there was something else, now. Jeongyeon turned back to Mina, and bit her lip. “I know we agreed to not tell everyone right away today, but… I need to talk to Nayeon. Is that okay?”

“Oh,” Mina hesitated, but then remembered that she also wanted to talk to Nayeon about it. She thought that Jeongyeon would be a better choice for this conversation, however, and just nodded. “Of course. No problem.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Jeongyeon stepped out then, and Mina was about to follow, but she froze. Her hands started shaking at the prospect of seeing Momo again after their argument, and her throat felt dry. Why was she anxious all of a sudden? It was Momo, her best friend, and the person who couldn’t hold a grudge for the life of her. Sana had told her that Momo loved her and would never hold that against...
her, but for some reason, Mina couldn’t believe it.

She was terrified.

But she’d promised to stop running away from things. Mina would face whatever came her way, even if it was a disappointed Momo.

With one big inhale, she moved back to the living room.

“Hey,” Chaeyoung was the first to notice her, and Momo averted her eyes from the TV for a split second, before focusing on the game again. Mina nodded with a forced smile, and sat back down, away from Jeongyeon, who was next to Nayeon at the moment.

Nayeon, however, seemed to be ignoring her, too.

Momo hadn’t even acknowledged Jeongyeon’s presence.

Jihyo observed the whole situation with an eagle eye, and immediately realized that there was something happening between those four. With this information, she got up, after losing the race again. “Time for a beer.”

“Can you get me another one?” Nayeon asked, passing her the empty bottle. Jihyo hesitated for a moment, but complied.

The silence was awkward after that, save from the videogame music. Momo put the controller down and stretched her arms, then threw her head back. She looked at Nayeon across the couch, and smiled lazily. “You sure you don’t want to play?”

“I’m sure.”

Then, to Mina. “How about you?”

“Huh?” Mina took a while to understand, heart beating on her chest. “Ah, n-no, thank you.”

“You’re all no fun.”

“I wish I could play,” Chaeyoung sighed, truly upset. She loved Mario Kart.

Momo frowned for a second, then looked down, finally noticing the injury. “Chaeng! What happened to your hand?”

Nayeon snapped out of her cellphone-induced dissociation and turned to her friend, too. “Chaengie, oh my god.”

“Oh, yeah. I forgot to mention it.” Chaeyoung blushed.

While she explained, Jihyo grabbed four bottles of beer. She closed the fridge and paused for a second, sighing. With a small thud, she let her forehead hit the fridge slightly, and closed her eyes, tiredly.

She was right, after all; things weren’t going smoothly within the group. Jihyo was surprised that Nayeon had showed up at all, especially with Momo of all people, but when she spotted the beer, she knew that Nayeon wasn’t there to have a good time.

One thing that only Jihyo knew about Im Nayeon: she despised beer. Nayeon was drowning her problems on the cheapest alcohol possible.
It was going to be a rough night.

Jihyo’s cellphone vibrated, and she put the bottles down, checking the text message.

[Just Sunmi, 6:52pm]:

Red wine? White wine?

The message came in such a random moment, that Jihyo couldn’t hold back a laugh. She typed back.

[GodJihyo, 6:53pm]:

As long as you come, any wine is fine

She put the cellphone away, hoping that it wasn’t much of a dumb answer.

“Who wants some?” Jihyo asked, back to the living room, and three people raised their hands.

She passed a bottle to Momo, Sana, and Nayeon, and sat back down on the couch, opening hers.

No one was playing anymore, and people seemed to be on their own little worlds, separated from each other.

Sana, Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were chatting about a recent Netflix series they were all watching; Jeongyeon was trying to make small talk with Nayeon, but Momo kept butting in, and Nayeon was paying much more attention to the dancer than her ex; Mina just watched everything unfold with a shy demeanor.

Jihyo decided to cut the crap, and moved to the carpet. “We should play a game, all of us, come on.”

Everyone turned to her, and slowly started moving to sit on a circle on the comfortable floor.

Tzuyu’s house had plenty of space, but they liked to huddle together for drinking games and whatnot; this time, however, the circle looked bigger in some areas, as if some people didn’t want to touch each other’s knees.

“What are we playing?” Dahyun asked.

“I can go get some cards,” Tzuyu offered, already getting up. Jihyo thanked her, and they chatted casually as they waited.

Jeongyeon thought that this was a good time. “Nayeon, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Nayeon lifted her gaze to the girl on the opposite side of her and was about to answer, when Momo put a hand on her shoulder. “Actually, I wanted to talk to you first.”

Mina frowned, and Jeongyeon did too. It was like the room had turned chilly for a second, everyone’s eyes moving back and forth.
“It’s so hard being popular,” Nayeon broke the tense atmosphere with a lazy smile, and got up with one last big gulp of her beverage. Jihyo stared at her, amazed at her ability to not cringe at the taste of the bitter liquid burning through her throat – she was, indeed, an amazing actress.

Momo and Nayeon left the circle and walked into another room, but the group didn’t bother questioning. Jeongyeon sighed.

The two girls moved to the bathroom, and Momo locked the door. Nayeon raised an eyebrow, arms crossed and back against the sink. “Yes?”

Momo didn’t look at her. “…I’m sorry.”

There was a silent beat, then another question. “Excuse me?”

Momo sighed, and the grip on the door handle tightened so much that her knuckles went white. “I wanted to be the one to tell you. I’m gonna hurt you, and I’m sorry.”

“Momo, what are you talking about?”

It was the hardest situation Momo’s ever been in. She came to this party with Nayeon, completely aware that it was going to suck for everyone; but at least, if she was there, she could make it suck a little less.

Momo didn’t trust Jeongyeon. Not with this, not when it came to confessing something that she knew would end up hurting the girl. The situation was a delicate one, and there wasn’t an easy way out; someone would end up broken, and Momo had accepted it. Jeongyeon, however, would try to twist the situation to make things better for everyone – because she was a different kind of hero. She had a need to please every side of the story, but when it came to this mess they were all in, there was no way to accomplish that.

So Momo would take the blow instead. For all of them, but mainly for Nayeon.

“Mina and Jeongyeon slept together.” Quickly, like tearing off a band-aid.

Nayeon’s mind went blank.

She usually had fast answers, witty comebacks, fake smiles to share, but at that moment, she had nothing. Her eyelids fluttered, and she felt something compressing her throat – an invisible hand, followed by the sound of familiar chuckles at the back of head.

_Didn’t predict that move, did you?_

She gripped the sink behind her.

“You’re not the one who’s supposed to be telling me this,” was the first thing out of her mouth.

“I know.” Momo braced herself. She would take it.

“I didn’t _want_ you to be the want telling me this.”

“I know.”

“If you know, why did you do it?”

“Because you deserved to know.”
“Is that what Jeongyeon was going to tell me?” She blinked, eyes stinging with tears that weren’t falling.

“Yes.”

“Then why didn’t you let her?!” Nayeon hit the sink with one hand, but there was no pain. She felt numbed.

Momo swallowed, still gripping the handle. “You know why.”

Nayeon did. It dawned on her that she knew exactly how Jeongyeon would try to go about this, and she almost laughed at how obvious it was. Jeongyeon wouldn’t be straightforward – she would try to ease the pain, she would look at her with those kind eyes, and ultimately, she would try to comfort her.

With Momo, Nayeon was allowed to feel the pain, with no suffocating restraints.

And in the end, wasn’t that what she wanted all along?

*You deserve to suffer for what you’re doing.*

She did, and she knew it.

That didn’t mean it was easy to accept it.

“…Was that all?”

Momo hesitated. There was one more thing she needed to tell Nayeon, but talking about the kiss would only complicate things for Mina. Sighing, Momo swallowed her pride, and shook her head. “Yes. I’m sorry.”

Nayeon exhaled, massaging her hand. “Don’t apologize.”

She walked past Momo, unlocking the door and leaving without another glance.

Momo’s nails digging on her palms were nearly breaking skin.

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Old Maid was the game everyone went for, but it was just a distraction while they waited for Nayeon and Momo to finish whatever conversation they were having. Tzuyu and Jihyo eyed each other constantly, worried about the outcome of their discussion, because of what they knew about the situation. Jihyo still needed to get everyone to talk to each other, but so far, this party was being a disaster; everyone seemed to be distant. They were all together, but it didn’t feel like it.

As soon as Nayeon stepped back in the living room, she went straight for the kitchen, grabbed more beer, and passed a bottle to each member of the group.

“Um… I wasn’t thinking about drinking today,” Jeongyeon said with the bottle in hands, hesitantly.
“You don’t have to,” Nayeon brushed her off, and Jeongyeon could tell she was hostile. The girl had her walls up, and they were enveloped by barbed wire, land mines, and Tzuyu’s house alarm. “But I thought about a game that would be funnier if we all let a little loose.”

Momo returned at that point too, plopping down on the carpet and immediately taking a huge gulp of her drink. Tzuyu looked worried, just like Mina. The atmosphere was incredibly uncomfortable.

Jihyo’s heart was pounding in her chest. “What game?”

“Some good old Paranoia.” Nayeon interrupted, and everyone turned to her suddenly, surprised. Jeongyeon and Momo froze, both thinking the same thing. This was a really bad idea.

I must keep the audience entertained, after all. ‘Shut up,’ Nayeon retorted to her inner voice, then turned to the circle with a crooked smile. “We all know how to play right? Come on.”

“Nayeon—” Jeongyeon still needed to talk to her, before anything else happened, and definitely before they started playing this hell game.

“We can talk later, Jeongyeonnie.” The nickname dripped from her tongue sarcastically. Everyone was suddenly on edge.

“Are you sure…?” Dahyun didn’t know if this was a good idea, mainly because of Sana’s current issues. The game was simple, but it could lead to stressful situations.

The rules were easy: The group had a set of pre-selected questions saved on their phones that would be chosen randomly by the app. No one but the player would know which question was sorted out, and the player would have to answer it out loud for the whole group. Then, they would pick a card. If it was an even number, the player would have reveal the question; if the number was odd, the question would remain a secret, and everyone would be left wondering. Some questions were harmless and meant to confuse the players, while others were serious, and a lot more intimate.

It was called Paranoia for a reason.

“No one’s forcing you to play,” Nayeon looked at the circle of friends. “But I thought it would be a nice change of pace. We haven’t been together much, lately. Things might have happened that we’re not even aware about. Isn’t this a fun way to find out?”

Momo was sure that Nayeon was losing her mind.

“Alright, let’s play.” Sana’s voice by Nayeon’s side was a surprise, and they looked at each other.

“Sana-ya…” Chaeyoung didn’t like it.

“Some people have done nothing but whisper behind others’ backs since we got here,” Sana eyed Mina, Jeongyeon, Momo and Nayeon, in that order, with serious eyes. “And I really don’t care, but we’re supposed to be hanging out as friends, and it doesn’t feel like it. So, let’s play. If you don’t want to talk to us, maybe the game will help.”

It was rare to see Sana get upset, but when it happened, she was incredibly intimidating. With one last hesitant pause, the group grabbed their phones, readying the game.

Jeongyeon opened her bottle. If that’s how things were going to end up, then she might as well
join. She heard Mina opening hers as well, and both girls stared at each other with an anxious look.

“I’ll start, then.” Nayeon clicked on the button, and a random question popped up. She smiled, putting her phone down after reading it. “Hmmm… my answer is four times in a row.”

Some people let out a snort, and then Nayeon picked a card. Even.

She read the question out loud. “How many times in a row have you watched your favorite movie?”

Sana couldn’t help but to laugh. “I love this game.”

“You definitely thought about something dirty,” Chaeyoung teased.

“Just me?” Sana replied with a teasing smirk.

Nayeon drank her beverage. “Don’t forget, if you had to read your question, you have to drink. If you didn’t, everyone else has to drink.”

“Did you have to buy beer? You know I hate this stuff.” Chaeyoung eyed her unopened bottle with disgust, and Tzuyu nodded in agreement.

“You can drink water, Chaeng. It’s just a dumb game,” Jihyo reminded her.

Chaeyoung looked at Sana, and for some reason, decided to suck it up and drink for once. She didn’t want to leave her alone in this. “Nah, I can take it.” Then she turned to Tzuyu. “Want me to get you some water, though?”

“If you’re drinking, I’m drinking,” Tzuyu said, and the game resumed.

Sana tapped her phone, and then smiled a bit at the question. “Alright, then. My answer is yes, and Momoring.”

Momo smirked softly at her direction. “Oh, I’m flattered.”

Sana picked a card. Odd.

“Oops, I guess I’ll keep it to myself.” Sana did a little dance as the group took a sip. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu groaned with disgust at the taste of the liquid, and everyone laughed.

It was Dahyun’s turn. Pressing the button, her eyes went wide, and she fell backwards. “Why do these questions only happen to me?”

“You’re too obvious,” Momo chuckled.

Blushing, Dahyun answered with her face buried in hands. “…It was really nice. There, next.”

“You have to pick a card.” Sana poked her, biting her lip in anticipation.

Dahyun got up, praying that her luck as Dahyun The Badass was still lingering.

Even.

“Oh, come on!”

“Say it, Kim Dahyun. Out loud!” Chaeyoung leaned forward, now finally entertained.
With one last loud grunt, Dahyun spoke quickly. “…Describe your last kiss.” Then she took a big sip of her beer. Sana’s heart shot through the roof.

“Wait, when did that happen?!” Her roommates wouldn’t let her off the hook so easily. “You had your first kiss and didn’t tell us?”

“Wait, Dahyun hadn’t had her first kiss yet?” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow. For a second, the weird Cold War happening ceased, and they all came together to look at Dahyun, in shock. Apparently only Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were aware of that.

“Oops.” Tzuyu muttered.

“Now I’m having fun,” Momo was still worried about the whole game, but harmless things like these were fun to watch.

“That’s not the point of the game, please move on!” Dahyun was desperate to hide her red face, so she hugged Sana, who was still floating over the clouds with her answer. She wanted to kiss her again, right there, but she knew that Dahyun wasn’t comfortable with being put on the spotlight like this.

Jihyo, bless her soul, finally spoke up. “Alright, my turn. And my answer… is Mina.”

Mina looked at her with curiosity. “Oh?”

Jihyo grabbed a card. Even. She laughed. “Out of everyone, who would be the best mother?”

“Aw, that’s cute!” Sana clapped her hands as Jihyo sipped her drink.

Despite everything, Momo couldn’t hold back a smile. She remembered the times they would play house when they were little, and Momo would always take the role of the father, while Mina was the mother. Sana, for some reason, liked being the house pet, but that was another story entirely. Then Momo’s eyes fell on Jeongyeon, and the way the girl smiled softly at Mina ticked her off.

“I’m offended,” Nayeon interrupted her thoughts. “I love children, how dare you not give this title to me?”

“Mina has a motherly vibe to her,” Jihyo’s eyes were glued to Nayeon’s. “She’s a lot more composed and responsible.”

“Excuse me? I’d be a great mother!”

“I’m not saying you wouldn’t. But the game asked me to pick the best mom, and that’s my opinion.”

“Jeong, tell—” Nayeon caught her tongue, hatred crawling its way up her throat. It was so automatic to refer to Jeongyeon when such subjects came up, because they had talked about marriage and a life together. It’s been two years, but certain fantasies never left. Nayeon hated to expose herself like this – she blamed the alcohol. “Never mind. It’s your turn.”

Mina wanted to say something, but she didn’t want to make things worse. Jeongyeon sighed, and tapped her phone. Her heart started beating as the question was sorted, and she felt extremely exposed suddenly. There were things she wanted to tell Nayeon, but nobody was letting her, and it was starting to make her anxious.

The lie at the back of her head was unbearable.
The question popped up.

She almost dropped her phone. She couldn’t answer that without feeling terrible. “Can I skip?”

“No.” Nayeon’s answer was immediate.

Jeongyeon swallowed thickly. “This is dumb.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Don’t do this, Nabongs.”

“Answer, then.”

“Fine!” Jeongyeon dealt well with pressure normally, but right now she was stressed. “My answer is yes.”

Reaching for the cards felt more like a death sentence.

Odd.

She exhaled, and everyone drank.

“Was that so hard?” Nayeon knew she was getting tipsy when the taste of beer didn’t bother her anymore.

“Yeah,” Jeongyeon answered, honestly. “Seriously, can we talk?”

“No talking,” Sana butted in. “Let’s keep playing, you can talk later.”

Mina eyed Jeongyeon and Nayeon, nervously. She wanted Nayeon to know – it felt like they were hiding in plain sight. Mina wondered what Momo talked about with her, but Momo’s gaze wasn’t giving away anything. She felt the weight of the world on her shoulders.

“Your turn, Mina.” Nayeon addressed her, and it dawned on Mina that it was the first time they talked in a long while. She couldn’t make out her tone, so she simply played the game.

The question was harmless, and the rounds went on for a long time. Jihyo eventually ordered a pizza, and they stopped playing for a bit when the food arrived. Throughout the whole night, things didn’t feel quite right, but the line between awkward mess and total chaos started to blur as soon as two bottles of beer turned into five, then six.

Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu weren’t exactly drinkers, so they stopped at an early hour. The rest of the girls, however, seemed to be enjoying their inebriated state. There was music playing on the speakers now, and Momo and Sana laughed at stupid things together. Mina found herself leaning against Jeongyeon without a care in the world as they answered dumb questions, and Nayeon ended up on Momo’s lap at some point.

“Momoring, it’s your turn,” Nayeon said with a smile.

“Hmm?” Momo had her head buried on Nayeon’s neck, breathing against her skin. “Oh, right. Games.”

“Cut it out, you know I’m ticklish there.” Nayeon tried to get off her lap, but Momo’s embrace was tight.
“No, stay,” She grabbed her cellphone, having difficulties to read the question that was spiraling in front of her. “Ah, okay. My answer is fingers.”

Sana burst out in a laugh, falling on top of Dahyun, who just held her in place. “Oh my god!”

Momo reached for a card. Even. “Well, you’re all a bunch of dirty bitches, because my question was ‘when you play the piano, which part of your body do you use?’”

“Who even came up with these?” Jihyo couldn’t hold back a giggling fit.

“Someone who knew what they were doing,” Nayeon reached for her phone then. “Don’t look, Momo-ya.”

“Kay,” She gladly obliged, sinking her face on Nayeon’s neck again.

Mina watched the scene with a tug on her stomach, but too drunk to make out the feeling. All that she knew was that if Nayeon and Momo could be disgustingly affectionate with each other, then so could she. So, she laid her head on Jeongyeon’s lap, and smiled to the girl above her. “Hey.”

Jeongyeon was drunk, but still alert, so she flinched for a moment. “Doesn’t lying down make you dizzier?”

“A little, but I’ll live.” She reached for her face and caressed her for a second, then closed her eyes.

“Hey, don’t sleep yet,” Jeongyeon chuckled, playing with Mina’s hair. The two were suddenly in their own world.

Jihyo’s sense of responsibility didn’t allow her to get wasted, so she was very much alert of her surroundings. She observed, taking mental notes, trying to put the pieces of this puzzle together.

Sana was all over Dahyun; there was definitely a shift in Mina and Jeongyeon’s relationship; Nayeon and Momo were a lot touchier than usual; Chaeyoung and Tzuyu had fallen asleep on top of each other. Jihyo smiled softly at how cute they were in the middle of this whole mess.

Nayeon’s question popped up, and she laughed loudly. “Easy. Jeongyeon and Momo, obviously.”

The noise died down, and everyone turned to her. Even Mina opened her eyes, sitting back up, and only then Nayeon realized what she’d just said. The beer in her veins had clouded her mind, and one of her deepest secrets had slipped out, just like that. She had to think of a way out, an improvisation, something, but everything was happening in slow motion, and she started to panic.

“So, grab a card.” Jeongyeon challenged, and Momo shifted her stare to her, angrily.

“She will, chill the fuck out,” Momo retorted, hugging Nayeon tighter. They faced each other for a moment, and Jihyo noticed the sudden hostile mood.

“You don’t have to be rude,” alcohol always made Mina braver than she was, so the words directed at Momo came out easier than she expected.

“Oh, now you’re talking.”

“Momo,” Sana interrupted, because she was also drunk and tired. “Stop it.”

“So now I’m guilty?”

“Guys, come on.” Jihyo couldn’t stand by and watch this; she was well aware when things were
about to get out of hand.

“I’ll take the card,” Nayeon interrupted, putting her phone down, and reaching for the deck.

‘If there is a God, then right now is the moment You’ll prove Your existence to me.’ Nayeon thought.

Even.

So, there’s none. Figures.

No one made a single funny joke, or laughed. Everyone but Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were focused on Nayeon at that moment, and she felt exactly like she did whenever she forgot a line in the middle of a performance – only harder, because she was drunk, and on the edge of a breakdown. That wasn’t the best working environment.

Want me to take over for you? The voice echoed in her mind, and Nayeon shook her head, biting her lip strongly to feel something.

The longer she took to reveal her question, the worse things got. So, she did the only thing she knew how to do.

She lied.

“My question was simple. Who in this group would probably end up fighting each other?” She forced an amused grin. “And apparently I was right.”

She could feel everyone’s shoulders relaxing, and Momo’s grip on her dissolved into a loose embrace. No one said anything after that, clearly not in the mood to continue. Jihyo sighed heavily and got up, walking up to Chaeyoung and Tzuyu to wake them up. “Guess the game’s over.”

The group started moving slowly, getting up to put their dirty plates away and to clean the room. It took longer than usual because of their drunken bodies, but eventually the living room was organized again. The party ended with everyone moving to a respective guest room, ready to crash into bed.

Nayeon felt sick, so she ran to the bathroom.

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“Nabongs?” Jeongyeon’s voice on the other side of the door made her roll her eyes.

“I’m fine. Go to sleep.”

“I really need to talk to you. Please.”

Nayeon sighed, spitting in the toilet one last time, then flushing it. She washed her face before opening the door, allowing Jeongyeon to walk in. It was her second time inside that bathroom, and
she was about to have another heavy conversation; this time, however, she knew it wouldn’t end up with a kiss.

“Are you alright?” Jeongyeon asked, concerned about her health first.

“Yes. I didn’t puke,” Nayeon felt exhausted suddenly. “Look, can you just say it? I want to sleep.”

Jeongyeon ruffled her hair, looking down. “Okay. I just wanted you to know that… things happened between Mina and I.”

Nayeon thought that she would be fine since she already knew, but hearing it from Jeongyeon’s mouth hit her, and it hit her hard. She crossed her arms, avoiding the fond gaze of her ex-girlfriend. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Do whatever you want, Jeong. You don’t own me anything, no explanations, nothing. We’re not dating anymore. We haven’t been for years,” Nayeon almost chuckled at her own deceit. “I don’t know why you’re even telling me this like you need my approval.”

“That’s not it,” Jeongyeon was frustrated, because Nayeon was right, but they knew each other too well for this conversation to be taking place. “I just wanted to tell you first, before telling the rest.”

“Why?”

“Because—” Nayeon could be so incredibly difficult to deal with sometimes. “I just thought you’d like to know, okay? I’m sorry if I’m bothering you, geez.”

Nayeon felt bad at the outburst, because for as much as she was angry at the world and at Jeongyeon, she was angrier with herself for acting like this. She still loved Jeongyeon too much, and the thought of going to sleep after an argument would never sit well with her.

And because she loved Jeongyeon, she needed her to be happy. “Tell me just one thing, then.”

“What?”

“Do you love her?”

Jeongyeon didn’t answer right away, and Nayeon sighed. She knew it.

Jeongyeon’s protective nature made her hesitate in the face of choice, and that was her biggest flaw. Because they had history, it was impossible for Jeongyeon to make a decision that would hurt Nayeon in any way, so she knew that Jeongyeon was still dancing around this issue.

The difference between Nayeon and Mina is that Jeongyeon has said ‘I love you’ to one of them.

Nayeon walked up to her, closing their distance, and put one hand on Jeongyeon’s arm. “Don’t get into a relationship if you’re not sure that that’s what you want, Jeong. Mina deserves better than that. You do, too.”

She was about to leave, when Jeongyeon’s voice stopped her. “I’m learning to.”

Nayeon turned to her. “Huh?”

“I’m not there yet, because it happened too suddenly. But I’m learning to love her. And I know I will,” She shot her a sad smile. “…I’m sorry.”
This girl. Always with her insufferable need to apologize for her own happiness.

“Good night, Jeong.” Nayeon simply answered, and left the bathroom.

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Tzuyu had many guest rooms, each with two beds in it, so the group had split into couples. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were already fast asleep when Momo helped Jihyo carry them to their beds, and Sana and Dahyun bid them goodbye, walking into a room of their own. With Jeongyeon and Mina also sleeping together, Jihyo was left with Nayeon’s drunken grumpy ass.

Momo wanted to be left alone, so she waved them goodbye before getting into her private room, and putting her pajamas. She stared at her reflection in the mirror, analyzing her features. Her face looked terrible, like she’d aged ten years in a week. It certainly had felt like it.

She moved to the balcony to get some fresh air, and gazed up at the sky. The moon was shining bright white, illuminating the black canvas of the night. The sound of the garden fountain made the atmosphere feel serene. This was the part of the city where you could actually see the billions of stars shining in the darkness, and Momo was sure that she would never tire of the view.

She saw movement from far away in the balcony of another room, and noticed Mina and Jeongyeon in the distance. Their faces were clearly shining, but they never tore their eyes away from each other; Momo didn’t bother to move, since they wouldn’t notice her.

The two were talking, the smiles never leaving their faces for a second. Jeongyeon touched her back on the balcony, looking up, and Mina did the same, leaning against her. Jeongyeon brought one hand to the top of her head then, caressing Mina with such care, that it made Momo’s heart twist inside her chest. She heard Mina’s characteristic laugh echoing through the night, and it was the most beautiful sound in the world.

Momo didn’t want to think about Mina and Jeongyeon sharing a room, but she was. She thought about Mina all the time, every day, every second, ever since that Drama Club party, and she thought about their kiss, and how much she missed being the one who made Mina laugh like that, and she couldn’t get that out of her head—

And it was at that moment, that Momo felt it. That thing tipping from the edge finally fell, and Momo felt a tear rolling down her cheek.

Her mother used to say that you only realize how you truly feel about someone at night. Especially when there’s a full moon, with the whole galaxy at your disposal—but even in the face of all that, you can only look at one person.

“Momo?”

Momo turned around at Nayeon’s voice, and she was bathed in silver light, more beautiful than any constellation.
And that’s when Momo realized.

She was in love with two people.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you always for your comments and kudos, they make my whole day!

Also, the poem was written by my poetic beta.

And if you read my stories on Asianfanfics, the cover for the story and the covers for the chapter (still a work in progress!) were all drawn by @homusatan, also known as my lovely gf <3 Follow her too!

Thank you, see you next time!

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
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Hello, welcome back!

Before anything, I'd like to call attention for the official fic hashtag we have going on on twitter! If you’d like, post your reactions/comments/anything related to the fic with the hashtag #TWICEWereAMess

This way it's easier for me to find it and see all your great reactions <3

Without further ado, let's roll.

“Dahyunionie,” Sana’s voice was low in the darkness of their room.

“Yeah?”

“Can I sleep with you?”

The question was filled with innocence and hesitation, and Dahyun felt her heart pressing on her chest at her tone. The usual Sana would simply crawl under her covers with a silly giggle, but this new Sana was a lot more fragile—visibly so.

“Sure,” Dahyun lifted her covers and heard the rustle of Sana’s sheets next to her. Then, there was a dip in the mattress, and soon the two girls were comfortably lying against each other.

“Can I hug you?” There was something about Sana’s hoarse voice so close to her that made Dahyun lightheaded. She nodded, then realized that it was too dark for Sana to see, so she just wrapped her arms around the girl. Sana sighed contently, nestling her head under Dahyun’s chin.

“You don’t have to ask,” Dahyun whispered after a moment, fingers moving up and down slowly against her back.

“I always ask,” Sana replied. “Asking is important.”

It hit Dahyun that Sana was talking about consent, and her mind wandered. For the first time since Sana talked about her anxiety, Dahyun started to think about the girl’s current life. Was she still sleeping with other people? Did someone bother her in class? How did she fare when Dahyun wasn’t there to protect her? But then again, it’s not like Dahyun was her savior; this title didn’t fit her image in the slightest.

She wasn’t a shield – not like Jihyo, Momo or Jeongyeon. They knew what they were doing; they were the ones who didn’t think twice before jumping in and helping others. Dahyun wasn’t that. She was just Dahyun The Lame.

Her persona made her chuckle. Perhaps she was destined to be a hero only in games.

“Hmm?” Sana groaned, almost asleep.
“Just thought of something dumb. Sleep,” Dahyun closed her eyes, almost pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

“I don’t want to sleep yet,” Sana’s tired voice didn’t really match what she was saying, but Dahyun would stay awake with her if that was what she wanted.

“Oh,” She caressed Sana’s back again. “Are you feeling okay? Not dizzy, or anything?”

“I’m a bit dizzy,” Sana confessed with a smile. “But I’ll be fine.”

“Want me to get you some water?”

“No, don’t leave.”

Dahyun grinned softly. “I won’t.”

The silence was comforting, and even though Dahyun wouldn’t mind if the others joined them on a big cuddle pile, she rather liked having Sana all to herself like this. The times they’ve been spending together were so nice, and the girl was so endearing and amazing in a variety of aspects – Dahyun couldn’t believe that Sana didn’t love herself as much as Dahyun loved her.

Oh.

Maybe that was the word she’d been searching for.

Dahyun felt heat crawling up to her neck and cheeks.

“I’m worried about Momo and Mina,” Sana admitted in a whisper, interrupting her mind-blowing realization.

“Oh, y-yeah,” Dahyun stuttered, trying to focus again. “I was going to ask you about that.” She did notice the hostile behavior on the living room, but it wasn’t her place to butt in. Something about the whole game told her that Jeongyeon and Nayeon were also involved in whatever feud was going on. “Are they fighting?”

“Yeah…” Sana sighed. She paused for a moment, pondering if she should say something more, but decided to just go for it after her head started to hurt too much to think. “Mina and Momo… they argue a lot. Did you know that?”

“No, I didn’t,” It was a surprising confession. Every time they’ve hung out together, the two seemed as close as ever.

“They don’t show it, at least not to you guys. But I have to deal with their fights a lot,” Sana sighed. “I’ve always been some kind of mediator between the two of them. They don’t even realize they need one.”

Dahyun kept rubbing Sana’s shoulders, urging her to continue.

“Mina doesn’t look like it, but she’s incredibly stubborn. She never shows it, though, and usually complies to what the situation requires, but with Momo it’s different. It’s like Momo’s words are a challenge to her.” She recalled a few stressful moments, and for some weird reason, smiled at the memories. “And like Mina is always wanting to prove her wrong, somehow.”

“That does sound tiring.”

“It was, until I realized the reason why.”
The air conditioner in the room sounded louder with the pause, and Dahyun almost asked, but she waited.

“Mina grew up with many expectations placed on her. She’s always been smart; the smartest out of all of us, and it weighed so much on her. Mina always felt the need to be the good girl, so she had to be perfect at everything on the first try.”

Dahyun nodded; she could see that.

“But she felt so comfortable with Momo that she started to let herself go with her, you know?” She sounded amused, if anything. “The first time she got drunk was because Momo told her to slow down. Her first kiss was with a boy Momo hated. Small things like that, that she knew bugged Momo a lot.”

It never occurred to Dahyun that Mina had this bratty side to her, much less towards her best friend. “Why, though?”

“Because she knew Momo would forgive her,” Sana’s heart felt heavy again. “Momo always forgives her. So, Mina keeps poking at her. I think that, secretly, it’s her idea of a thrill.”

“A thrill?”

“It’s her only opportunity to be disobedient for once in her life. Mina would never go against her parents, but Momo gives her something she never had,” It was almost like Sana was talking to herself, realizing a few things about her best friends. “The freedom to mess up.”

The conversation was a heavy one, Dahyun noticed, but Sana needed to vent. She’s always been stuck in the middle of their arguments, and it was starting to weight on her a lot; and now, with this whole situation with Jeongyeon, Sana was sure things would get more complicated than ever.

The reason Mina was terrified of Momo hating her, was because unconsciously, maybe, she knew she had crossed a line. The scariest thing to her was that she didn’t even know what line that was. Sana had no idea either, but she could feel it – the three of them were in the same wavelength.

“I… can’t be the mediator now,” Sana continued after a moment, hugging Dahyun closer. “I’m not in my best shape. I don’t know what to do.”

Dahyun let the words sink while they hugged, and realized that she was incredibly incompetent in moments like these. Sana needed advice, a solid one, but Dahyun couldn’t think of absolutely anything to say. It was so incredibly frustrating that she felt like crying.

But she didn’t have this luxury. Right now, she wasn’t the one hurting. Sana was.

“You don’t have to do anything right now,” Dahyun tried, nuzzling Sana’s hair. “Take care of yourself, first. I think… that’s the most important thing. They’ll understand.”

The words sounded awkward, but Dahyun hoped that the meaning wasn’t lost. She felt Sana’s hands going down her back, then gentle fingers sprawled on her skin under her pajama shirt. Her heart picked up speed, but Sana didn’t do anything more than that. She didn’t know why she was nervous suddenly, but Dahyun chased away the thoughts, and closed her eyes. Sana’s heavy breathing told her that she had fallen asleep, and Dahyun smiled.

They slept like that, and for the first time in a long while, Sana dreamed happy dreams.
None of them were smokers, but sometimes, very rarely, a cigarette was what the situation required. Jiyo would kill them if they ever got any of the younger ones addicted, so they never smoked around the kids; but when they were alone and miserable, it felt freeing.

Nayeon puffed the smoke out of her lungs and passed the cigarette to Momo, who took a drag. The two sat side by side on the balcony of Momo’s room, leaving room for distance – a small one, but they weren’t touching each other. Momo made sure not to brush her fingers against Nayeon’s as they shared the cigarette.

They felt stuck in a limbo. It was one of those moments where there was no room for thought or complications; just two girls enjoying each other’s silent company, away from the rest of the world. It wasn’t the first time they did this, and it wouldn’t be the last – it was, however, one of the most memorable ones. At least that’s what Momo felt.

Nayeon kind of wanted more beer.

“I’m sorry,” Momo spoke first, breathing out. The smoke floated mindlessly through the night, and she watched with unfocused eyes. Nayeon waited for her to elaborate. “For being the one to tell you. And for being an idiot back there.”

Nayeon inhaled. “It’s fine.” She sighed, the nicotine deep in her lungs. “I know why you did it. It’s fine.”

It sounded like she was trying to convince herself that things were okay, when they were clearly not. Momo felt a tug in her heart and touched her forehead on the rail. Nayeon was so broken, and she couldn’t patch her up. Not this time.

“Who made the first move?” Nayeon asked suddenly.

Momo lifted her head. “Mina.”

Nayeon let out a weak chuckle. “I didn’t even know she liked Jeongyeon that way.”

“She’s liked her for three years.”

“Ouch.”

“Does it hurt?”

“It probably hurt for her,” Nayeon brought the cigarette back up to her lips.

“I’m talking about you.”

Nayeon didn’t answer, and exhaled. She moved her gaze to the balcony of Mina and Jeongyeon’s room, where the two of them were chatting up until a few moments ago. They were now inside, and she knew they were probably doing something on those beds. It was weird – how her brain focused on Mina suddenly. She smiled lazily, because she had no control of her own expressions at that point in the night. “Mina, huh.”
Momo looked at her sideways. “What about Mina?”

Nayeon shrugged. “Just… processing all of this. Jeongyeon didn’t mention anything to me, at all. Did she talk to you?”

“I was avoiding her,” Momo admitted, taking the cigarette. “She was busy with Mina, doing a movie project. They spent a week together. I guess that’s all it took.”

Nayeon almost laughed; Jeongyeon falling for Mina in a week. That was powerful. “Why didn’t Mina do anything when Jeongyeon and I broke up?”

The taste of smoke was numbing Momo’s tongue and she felt like eating something to get rid of it. At the same time, she didn’t want to feel anything. Being there with Nayeon, talking about this whole thing – that was the closest she would get to venting, and she knew it.

“Because it would be a dick move,” she said, like it was obvious. “You were two of her best friends. She couldn’t possibly try something so soon.”

“Why not? We weren’t tied to each other anymore. I wouldn’t give a shit.”

Momo let out a hoarse chuckle at this, smoke going up. “You’re giving a shit now, two years after your break up. Stop trying to sound tough.”

“No, I’m not.”

Momo groaned, and faced her. “Why do you do this? All the time, all the fucking time.”

“Do what?”

“Lie.” She was exhausted, and she was still tipsy, and she was Momo; there were no careful words. “You lie to yourself, and to protect those lies, you lie to others. You’re an actress Nabongs, but you’re still a person. Break character for once in your goddamn life.”

Nayeon should’ve been taken aback by the outburst, but instead, she felt relieved. There were many things that made her fall in love with Hirai Momo in the first place, but her unabashed honestly and harsh words were the catalysts of it all. She had wrapped herself in shackles, and Momo did everything to break them, without even realizing it.

“I can’t,” She smiled as she said that, but it was a crooked one. “Not yet.”

It sounded like a warning for something important. Momo wasn’t in the mood to think about it now. She passed the last of her cigarette to Nayeon, who inhaled all of it. Then, she smashed it against the tile floor. “I should go back to Jihyo.”

“Don’t you want to stay?” Momo tried, because she could.

Nayeon looked at her, and her eyes told her everything she needed to know. “Jihyo’s waiting for me. She always is.”

“Ohay,” The word came out strained. “She’s not the only one, though. I hope you know that.”

There was something about the way Momo was looking at her, closer than before, that hit Nayeon hard. Getting up and leaving without another word to this girl who loved her would be the cruelest thing she could possibly do. So, she tried to force her legs to work, because ultimately, that was her goal. What she was aiming for was within reach.
But she faltered.

She’s had so many chances, so many good opportunities, but she always retreated, and fucked up. That was all she did. It was only building to her castle of cards – Nayeon wondered how big the fall would be when she finally pulled the one card holding all of this together.

Nayeon lifted one hand suddenly and cupped Momo’s jaw, pressing her thumb on her lower lip. Momo’s gaze was piercing her very core, unwavering, and a bit confused; when Nayeon pressured a bit more, she opened her mouth. Momo’s heart was beating at the sudden gesture, and it beat faster when Nayeon closed their distance. Their lips almost touched, and Nayeon simply puffed the rest of the cigarette smoke inside Momo’s mouth, and into her lungs; slowly, but steadily, Momo was filled completely.

Nayeon leaned back again, and finally got up. Momo stared with her mouth still hanging open.

“Good night, Momoring.”

She left the room with one last longing look, and Momo stood rooted in place for minutes, trying to understand what was the meaning behind that – because Nayeon had a reason for everything she did. What she couldn’t convey in words, was always conveyed through action.

That’s when Momo realized it.

Toxicity.

“Well, too bad,” Momo muttered, looking up at the moon. “I’m already addicted.”

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Jeongyeon thought that this time, she wouldn’t have to go through the awkward first steps of a relationship, but she was incredibly wrong. Despite admitting that she liked Mina very much and wanted to kiss her on an hourly basis, she still couldn’t bring herself to be actively straightforward with what she wanted. She was starting to feel like a teenager all over again – and while it was silly, it made her giddy all the same.

It wasn’t to say that Jeongyeon didn’t try to move on after her breakup. There were some flings here and there, but nothing serious; she didn’t feel a connection with anyone. Every girl she’s ever kissed after Nayeon were passersby in a crowd – Jeongyeon remembered their faces, but not what she’d felt. For a long time, she thought that nothing would ever be as familiar and warm as it’d been with Nayeon. Then Mina showed up.

No, that wasn’t the right way to put it. Mina’s always been there.

They walked back in after flirting in the balcony, hand in hand.

“So… should we go to bed?” Mina was also incredibly awkward, mainly because she’s never
dated anyone before, but she was forcing herself to remember that this wasn’t a random stranger. This was Yoo Jeongyeon.

“Are you good? Not sick or anything?” Jeongyeon sat on the bed, pulling Mina with her.

“I’m sobered up. I get drunk fast, but I get sober even faster,” She smiled, sitting on Jeongyeon’s lap. Her girlfriend—wow, girlfriend—wrapped her arms around her and nuzzled her neck.

“Hmm, that’s a good trait to have.”

Mina laughed, flinching slightly. “I’m ticklish there.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jeongyeon smiled against her skin, placing a kiss on her nape. “I’ll be careful, then.”

Jeongyeon pressed light kisses down her neck, and Mina sighed, moving her hair to give her more access. She was floating on cloud nine, and everything felt surreal, even though she should’ve been already getting used to how loving Jeongyeon could be.

Mina turned on her lap, unable to hold back, and straddled the girl. She put her hands around Jeongyeon’s shoulders and the two of them just stared at each other, lost in the other’s eyes for a long time.

“Can I confess something?” Mina whispered.

“Sure.”

She bit her lip, and the sight was so sexy that Jeongyeon could barely hold back from kissing her numb. “That time back at the studio… that was my first.”

Jeongyeon froze, mouth slowly hanging open. “Your first—” When it hit her, she blushed, hiding her face on Mina’s shoulder. “Oh my god, did I… take your first time?”

“Yeah,” Mina laughed, redness spreading to her face too. “It was amazing, for what is worth.”

They both giggled, shyly, and Mina just hugged Jeongyeon out of embarrassment. For some reason this just made Mina look more endearing in her eyes, and Jeongyeon felt tiny fireworks exploding inside her chest. She wanted to hold this girl forever, and protect her from everything; she would, too. Jeongyeon was her princess charming, after all.

Mina’s hands moved up to her hair as she pulled back a bit, looking with fondness to the girl beneath her. Jeongyeon licked her lips, and kissed the hinge of her jaw. “Well, that was just the first time…”

Mina felt the tips of her ears burning. “It feels like you’re saying there’ll be more than one.”

“Only if you’ll let me,” Always caring. Her kisses moved to Mina’s chin, then her cheek, and she couldn’t hold back anymore. Mina turned her head to capture Jeongyeon’s lips, pressing closer than before. Jeongyeon let her back hit the mattress as they kissed, hands roaming along Mina’s pajamas, then into her shirt. She licked Mina’s lips, and tasted her tongue; it was driving her crazy.

Mina’s kisses were shy at first, but fierce as soon as the mood shifted. Right now, on top of Jeongyeon, she felt her head spin. She wanted everything the girl had to offer, and she’d take, and take, and take, and she’d savor it. She still had no idea what she was doing, but her body moved automatically, and she allowed Jeongyeon to guide her where she was needed.
With one last nip, Jeongyeon pulled away for a moment, then shifted their positions, pining Mina to the bed. It was rougher than she expected, and she paused. “Sorry!”

Mina just pulled her shirt. “I definitely didn’t hate it.”

It lit a fire inside Jeongyeon, and she kissed her again.

There were many things about sex that Jeongyeon liked, but when she thought about them, the first image that popped in her head was Nayeon. When they were dating, Nayeon was very vocal with her desires and the things she liked to experiment, so Jeongyeon got used to certain behaviors. With Mina, she had to remind herself to go slow – especially now that she knew how unexperienced she was.

Thinking about Nayeon in the middle of a really good make-out session with Mina bothered Jeongyeon profoundly, so she tried to focus on the beautiful girl beneath her. When she heard Mina’s soft whimper in her ear, everything else was blurred out.

She hoped Tzuyu’s walls weren’t too thin.

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School went by as usual.

Mina and Jeongyeon told about their new relationship to their friends one by one, in between intervals, and whenever they managed to bump into them in the school corridors. Everyone was rather surprised, except for Jihyo, who had an idea of what was going on. Tzuyu acted a bit strangely, too, but Mina didn’t dwell much on it.

Talking to Nayeon after the house party was impossible. She came back with her mindset completely focused on rehearsals, and no one could get a hold of her anywhere. Jihyo always waited for her roommate to come back to the dorm before going to sleep, but Nayeon had been arriving later and later each day. At some point, Jihyo realized that Nayeon didn’t want her to be awake when she returned, so she gave up and went to sleep whenever she felt tired.

As for Momo, she’d been avoiding both Jeongyeon and Mina. It was clear, too, because Momo wasn’t good at hiding her emotions when it came to things that bothered her. Jeongyeon had tried to talk to her, but even when they were alone in their room it was an impossible task.

One day, Jeongyeon decided that this was getting out of hand, and forced her way through Momo’s defenses.

“I’m dating Mina.” Was the first thing she said upon walking into their room after practice. Momo’s hand froze for a second, then she resumed writing her assignment for tomorrow.

“Good for you.”
“She told me you two haven’t talked since the party, so I’m telling you now.”

“I already knew, but thanks.”

“Yeah, so— Wait. You knew?” Jeongyeon finally closed the door, frowning.

Momo sighed, and turned to look at her for the first time in almost two weeks. “You have no idea how popular you are, do you?”

“Huh?”

“Yoo Jeongyeon is dating, of course I knew. The whole school probably does at this point,” Momo rolled her eyes, and shifted back to her paper. “I mean, it’s not like you’re hiding it, holding hands and all.”

There was venom dripping from Momo’s tongue, and Jeongyeon didn’t know if she should be more concerned about her reaction to the news, or about this brand new information. She was aware of her growing popularity, but not to this extent. “Wait, so… people are talking about it?”

“Yeah.”

“Bad things? Good things?”

“I don’t know, Jeongyeon,” Momo put her pencil down, annoyed. She wasn’t yelling, but her voice tone clearly told her that she was about to. “I’m not your public relations guy. Find out for yourself, it’s not my business.”

“What’s up with you?” It felt like they’ve been having confrontations as their sole interactions with each other ever since the Paranoia game, and Jeongyeon had no idea where Momo’s rage was coming from. She was trying to have a civil conversation, but Momo’s immature disposition was starting to stress her out, too. “You’ve avoided me for a week, then when we finally get to talk you act like a total jerk. I’m just trying to understand here.”

Momo clenched her teeth, the anger inside her fueling an argument that she’d been trying to avoid, but she was strong enough to calm the flames before she truly exploded. She really had to finish this assignment today, so this talk would have to wait. “Alright, I’m sorry.”

There was silence, then – the only sound came from the pencil flowing on Momo’s paper. Jeongyeon took it as a sign. This argument would have to wait, but at some point, they’d have to face each other.

“Well, at least I know there are no bad rumors about us,” Jeongyeon said with a final sigh, moving to the bathroom. “If there were, you’d be out there defending Mina.”

She locked the bathroom and Momo snapped her pencil in half.
The theater was complete chaos. With the day of the musical arriving, the drama students needed all the help they could get to finish the preparations for the play’s scenarios, music, and lightwork.

Mr. Kwon paced back and forth, making sure the illumination was correct, listening to the final touches of the songs, and helping students who hadn’t memorized all the lines yet – all of that while holding a brush to retouch the background props with the necessary paint. A few other students from different departments were walking around backstage too, aiding them however they could. This kind of solidarity towards the drama kids was rare, so Mr. Kwon was glad someone had convinced half the music majors to help them out.

Nayeon was just glad Jihyo hadn’t given up on her yet, despite her many flaws.

“Where should this go?” Jihyo asked, holding a colorful metal plate.

“Just place it with the others, right there,” Jennie pointed to a corner, walking past her. “Sohye, how are things?”

“I’m almost done pinning the brochures to the outfits!” A tiny girl replied, with three pins in her mouth.

“Good. Daisy, help Sohye out. I got this,” Jennie patted her cast member on the shoulder, and grabbed the brush from her hand. She applied the final touches on the wooden ship carefully, and then moved her gaze to the far right corner, where five people rehearsed the final scene. They seemed to be doing all right, so Jennie looked for other things to fix.

Her gaze eventually fell on Nayeon, who was practicing alone. She sighed a little, then walked up to her.

“And where were you when the thunder struck the Tomorrow Tree, shattering it in pieces? Thousands, even millions of pieces were scattered around the fields, in every dimension, for everyone to see. Now it’s a mess, and we, the Collectors, will have to dive into it head-first to clean it up.” Nayeon’s voice was low, and she spoke fast. “Humans are weak-minded. None of the humans that ever came here stayed for long. You know why? Because they couldn’t handle the truth of the world. The fact that time is not a straight arrow, but twists and turns divided into thin lines, it drove them insane.”

“You got it,” Jennie interrupted, making Nayeon turn to her.

“Yeah, I think so,” She flipped her script, moving to the final scene. “I just need to memorize this last bit.”

“Need help?”

“No, don’t worry. Help Mr. Kwon out, he was looking for someone to help him clean the stage.”

Jennie hesitated a little, but eventually nodded, leaving her alone. Nayeon watched until she disappeared, then resumed her speech.

“Allright, let’s keep going.”

_How come you want my help now, but you absolutely despise me two seconds later?_

“You’re the only one who knows all the lines. I had to find some use for you,” Nayeon rolled her
eyes, thinking that she was pretty damn clever.

Ordering her inner voice around was a good way to shut her up and memorize her lines as well, so there wasn’t exactly a downside to this besides looking like a lunatic talking to herself. She was an actress, though, so it’s not like someone was going to realize she was actually replying to some invisible entity. She needed the distraction, because her thoughts had been dangerous lately.

Nayeon was sure that she would spend the next days thinking about Jeongyeon, and reminiscing the good moments they had together – it was a thing she did when she felt like drowning in self-pity. That, however, wasn’t the case.

All Nayeon had been thinking about was Mina.

Nayeon and Mina weren’t the closest people within the group, but they were still friends who shared concerns and dreams of their own. The moments they spent alone together were few and far in between, but they’d always been nice. There was something about Mina that was alluring; she was soft and subtle, but not too sweet – a private person with nothing to hide.

It really didn’t take much to find Myoui Mina completely charming. She was shy and introverted, however, and pretty much everything that Nayeon wasn’t – and that was what bugged her so much about Jeongyeon’s sudden affection.

How could she fall so quickly for someone who didn’t have a single drop of Nayeon’s personality in her? Jeongyeon had told her that she loved her, and that she still did, despite their break up. Nayeon wanted to believe that it was true, but was it really? If she truly loved her, then she wouldn’t have fallen for someone who was the exact opposite of her.

Maybe Jeongyeon was just tired of her.

That’s when her thoughts turned dangerous. She didn’t – wouldn’t – admit what that feeling was; at least not out loud. In the deep confines of her horrible, selfish soul, she was well aware of what she felt.

Besides being greedy, Nayeon was also envious. She thought she couldn’t hate herself more, but fate proved her wrong, yet again.

So, she locked away the thoughts about Mina, and carried on with the show. That’s how she usually dealt with everything, anyway. Nayeon could feel the pile of unsolved problems and self-hatred starting to wobble, dangerously. She knew it would all fall eventually, and soon.

She couldn’t wait.

“Hey, did you see who’s off the market?” Two girls were passing by, carrying some props that needed fixing, and Nayeon overheard the conversation.

“No, who?”

“Yoo Jeongyeon. Apparently, she got a girlfriend.”

“Oh, right. She’s dating that prude, right? The stuck up ballet girl.”

Nayeon froze.

“Yeah, it’s so weird. I have no idea how she tolerates that stick up her ass. I bet it’ll be over soon, so relax.”
Without missing a beat, Nayeon turned on her heels and stepped in front of them, almost making them crash and drop the props. Their eyes widened at the sight of their respected senior, and they smiled, about to greet her. “Hey—!”

“You talk badly about her in front of me again, I’ll make sure you’re never even casted as an understudy for the chorus.”

Her tone was stone-cold, and the girls’ smiles dropped absurdly fast. They gaped, looked at each other, then one of them stuttered. “N-no, I didn’t mean— I would never talk badly of Jeongyeon —”

“No. I’m talking about Mina,” Nayeon’s gaze pierced both of them, simultaneously. “You talk badly about Mina again, we’ll have trouble.”

With nothing else to add to the conversation, she walked past them, roughly bumping her shoulders against the two. The girls were left speechless, and decided to carry on with their tasks before something else ruined their school life.

Nayeon walked past Jihyo in a hurry. “Nabongs, I think I’m done—”

She didn’t stop, and left the backstage without looking back. Jihyo frowned, heart tightening. She wanted to go after her, but someone called for help, and she had no choice. She knew that Nayeon would rather have her worrying about the musical, right now.

Nayeon ran straight to the bathroom, hands shaking and eyes watering. She slammed the stall’s door, hyperventilation catching up to her again. With one back pressed to the wall, she slid down to the floor, hugging herself tight and trying to regain her breathing. The tears blurred her vision and her head was pounding, and she just wanted everything to *stop*. She didn’t even know why she was acting like this now.

*You know, I have a theory.*

“Please… leave me alone…” She could barely speak.

*Maybe, just maybe. You’re not the monster you’re trying to make yourself to be.*

Her breathing got worse.

*And that possibility scares you the most.*

Nayeon wondered if she was broken beyond repair.

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“One of her classmates managed to catch her leaving class and Sana flinched at the proximity. She gave her a forced smile.

“Hey, Joy. What’s up?”
The tall girl threw an arm around Sana’s shoulder and she felt locked in place, unable to escape. Usually this wouldn’t bother her, but with her recent anxiety, this simple gesture was threatening. “You’ve been missing lately. I couldn’t find you anywhere, not in the courtyard, not in the dancing rooms…”

“Oh, yeah. I’m just… a bit tired. End of semester, and all.”

“I get it,” Joy was a nice girl despite her many overwhelming characteristics; she was a party girl through and through, and one of Sana’s first friends in college. “And that’s fine and all, but you know what end of semesters bring to this beautiful learning environment?”

“Bad grades?”

“Aside from that,” She shot her a toothy grin. “Parties. And I’m not talking about the big parties everyone knows about. I’m talking about… She looked around, then took a shady ticket from her pocket. “The parties only certain people are invited. And you’re one of them, of course. Who wouldn’t invite Minatozaki Sana, right?”

Sana hesitantly grabbed the ticket, sighing internally. “Who’s throwing this one?”

“Oh, you know her. Your pal, Chungha,” Joy chuckled. “I mean, you’re more than just pals, but you get what I mean.”

The name just made things get worse. Sana and Chungha had been a thing on their first semester, but that was before Sana realized that she wasn’t ready for any type of relationship. She wanted to enjoy college at its fullest, and kiss people without commitment, so after roughly dating for two weeks, they split. Chungha hadn’t taken their breakup well back then, but she came around after a few months, understanding Sana’s point of view.

Also, Chungha needed help seducing Hirai Momo from dance class, so she forgave Sana fairly quickly. When she thought about it, the drama was quite funny.

Sana didn’t want to disappoint Joy right away, so she asked. “Is it going to be at the last day of school?”

“Yep!”

“I’ll think about it,” This way, no one got hurt. Sana doubted she’d be well enough until then to actually attend the party, but maybe things would change.

“Oh, come on,” Joy wasn’t satisfied, however. “You’ve been missing all the great parties and hang outs. Have you even checked your Facebook at all?”

“I’m trying to stay away from that,” One thing that really tired Sana, even before her attacks, were the relentless friendship invitations and random messages from people she’s never even seen before. If it wasn’t an important tool to get class information, she would’ve deleted her account a long time ago.

“Yeah, we noticed.”

“We?”

Joy sighed, then pulled Sana to a private corner of the corridor. “You know that people love to talk out of their asses, right?”
Sana didn’t like where this was going. She started to sweat. “What about it?”

“Well… how do I put this,” Joy wasn’t one to hold back information, so the fact that she was thinking carefully about her words was concerning. “There’s been some talk. About you.”

“Talk…?”

“Yeah, you know, bitches will be bitches,” She rolled her eyes, annoyed. “I just don’t want you to take anything seriously, if you ever come across any of that.”

“Joy, what talk?” Sana’s heart was beating fast.

“Just some shit about how you’re dating a freshman,” Her tone was nonchalant. “They’re stalking this girl and everything. I hope they don’t bother her too much.”


Joy paused, hesitating for a bit. “…Chanmi and her army of skanks. You know how they are.”

Sana’s face went pale. “Oh, no.”

This was bad.

Sana knew she had a reputation, but it was nothing compared to Heo Chanmi’s. The woman was in her last year, and there were rumors that she’d been failing classes over and over just to stick around campus. Her family was incredibly influential, so it wouldn’t be surprising if they actually had enough power to let Chanmi keep repeating her grade. It was like college was her private playground.

The girl was poison; she’d caused serious trouble in the past, and even managed to get a girl expelled for her pure entertainment. She was powerful, and in the twisted and dumb school hierarchy, Chanmi had the upper hand.

No one actively liked her, but when it came down to it, no one wanted to get on her bad side, either. So, she thrived on pure fear and false devotion – she knew it, too. Getting involved with Chanmi was a double-edged sword: she could give you unimaginable things, but you’d never be able to leave.

Chanmi’s followers were just desperate girls who were too afraid of getting out of her clique because they’ve dived in too deep. Chanmi knew secrets, and she could easily ruin anyone’s life if she was feeling like it.

Sana knew that Chanmi could ruin hers, but she didn’t care about that. What she did care, was Dahyun getting involved in all of this. God, Dahyun didn’t even know who Chanmi was. None of the freshmen did, because Chanmi didn’t care enough about them to expose herself.

She was like an urban legend, one you only met on your second year, when you were enough of an adult to face her head on.

“Joy, you can’t let this happen,” Sana grabbed onto her shoulders, and Joy blinked.

“Huh? Me? What am I gonna do against her?” She scoffed. “You think I’m going against that mess? I have parties to attend, thank you.”

“But…”
“Besides, it’s not like you’re actually dating this girl, are you?” Joy’s tone was careful. “She’s just another one-time deal, right?”

It felt like Joy needed to hear it directly from Sana’s mouth, because the walls had ears. Her eyes blinked quickly, like a sign, and Sana knew Joy well enough to know when she wanted to help her, so this triggered her paranoia absurdly. She felt eyes on her back, following her every movement, and whatever she said right now could affect Dahyun as well.

“…Yeah. She’s just another one in the crowd.” Sana had to force the words out of her mouth. Nothing else had ever been so hard to say.

“Good,” Joy looked relieved, but saddened at the same time. Sana could almost hear the apology on the other girl’s eyes. “So, Chungha. Don’t forget to come, all right? We’ll wait for you.”


She left, without sparing Joy another glance, and felt her throat closing. The voices inside her head were back, and she could barely make out any other sound.


Sana ran, tears in her eyes.

She should’ve stayed away from her.

--

Dahyun knew something was wrong when the days went by and Sana stopped calling her to meet. She tried reaching her, too, but to no avail. One part of her brain told her that Sana was probably busy with her final classes, but another just buzzed a big red alert on her heart, alarming her that something bad happened. She was worried.

Decided, Dahyun would find her across the campus once her class was over. She nodded to herself, and kept checking the time on her cellphone regularly, leg bumping up and down in nervousness. As soon as the bell rang, Dahyun bolted out of the classroom.

Only to be stopped by Jihyo on her way out. “Woah! Easy, there.”

“Jihyo-ah,” She nearly lost balance. “Hey. Did you… need anything?”

“Yes, actually. Are you busy?”

Dahyun wanted to say that she was, but faltered. Something inside her was doing its best to convince her that Sana was fine, and that she should listen to Jihyo’s request before doing anything hastily.
“N-no, I’m good. What’s up?” Dahyun stuttered, then hated herself for it. She felt like a coward, finding excuses to run away from Sana’s struggles.

“Okay, good. Listen, Nayeon needs all the help she can get. The musical is happening in two days, and they’re short on staff to help backstage. I helped all I could today, but I had to leave. Do you think you have time to be with her for a little while?”

For some reason it sounded more like Nayeon was in trouble, rather than the performance. Jihyo looked tired – the emotional kind. Dahyun couldn’t hesitate this time; Nayeon was clearly in trouble. “Sure, okay.”

“Thank you,” Jihyo sighed, relieved. “I’m gonna go find the others, if you see someone around please ask them to help, too, okay?”

“Yeah, alright,” Then, before Jihyo could leave, Dahyun asked. “Hey! Have you seen Sana, by the way?”

Jihyo stopped, looking back. “No, why?”

Dahyun didn’t want to put more weight on her shoulders, so she just smiled playfully. “Oh, nothing. She just owes me a massage. I’ll meet her at the dorms later.”

It was clear that Jihyo wasn’t buying it, but she didn’t have time to dig deeper. With one last wave of her hand, she left. Dahyun sighed, moving to the theater building. Sana was still on her mind, so she sent her a message.

[DubuDab, 11:45am]:

Miss you. Is everything okay? I’m going to help Nayeon with her musical, so…

Call me if you want later?

It’s okay if you’re not okay

Okay?

She paused, fingers frozen on air as she thought if she should send one last message. With nothing to lose, she wrote a simple sentence, and pressed ‘send’.

[DubuDab, 11:46am]:

Love you
“Ladies, and gentlemen!” Mr. Kwon’s voice boomed through the theater, and there were immediate applauses. “Thank you so much for coming! On behalf of the Drama Department, I’d like to welcome all of you who took some time from your very busy lives to honor us with your presence. The performance you’re about to see is a collective effort from myself, and all the students who worked hard day and night to put up an incredible show! I hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed creating such a story. So, without further ado, it’s… showtime!”

There was another round of applause, and on the very front row, seven girls hollered louder than the rest. Momo and Jihyo nearly stood up, and Chaeyoung just laughed at their antics. Mina and Jeongyeon cheered as well, and Tzuyu and Sana just clapped politely.

“I can’t believe Dahyun got the best seat of all,” Chaeyoung teased. “I’ve always wanted to watch a performance backstage.”

“I doubt she’s getting to watch, though,” Tzuyu pitied the poor girl, whose job had been so excellent at helping out, that Mr. Kwon casted her as a permanent member of the staff – at least until the musical was over. “She must be busy back there.”

“That’s true,” Chaeyoung eyed Sana with a bit of worry, and gently placed her good hand on top of hers. “You okay?”

“Huh?” Sana snapped out of some kind of trance. “Oh, yeah. I’m fine.” Then she added, as if things finally hit her. “I hope Dahyun gets to see the performance.”

Chaeyoung knew Sana, and it was clear that there was something heavy weighting on her. She couldn’t do much to help at the moment, with the lights already dimming and the curtains opening, so she just turned her palm upwards and intertwined their fingers. Sana squeezed her hand a little, giving her a tiny smile.

The first song started playing, and secondary characters entered the scene, dancing in the background. The audience, impressed with the fun beat, started clapping to the rhythm.

There were many people spread throughout the big stage, and the girls searched for Nayeon in the crowd. They soon realized that, being the protagonist, Nayeon would probably make a big entrance of her own.

Not a minute later, Nayeon rose from the ground, sparkling like the whole galaxy had showered her features. The makeup was impeccable, and the glittering silver dress reflected the yellow illumination beautifully. Nayeon’s entrance stopped the music, and everyone clapped again, amazed.

Momo took her time, hypnotized by the gorgeous woman in front of her, and only clapped after a moment of delay.

Mina stole one glance at Jeongyeon by her side, and for a second, wondered if her girlfriend’s huge smile should concern her. Then she beat herself up for this thought; Nayeon did look absolutely stunning. She should be proud of her friend.

Then, Nayeon started singing.

Mina was a good dancer. She was almost a professional ballerina, and incredibly smart. She knew her good points, and did her best to improve the things she lacked. The road to her dream career was harsh, and full of obstacles, but Mina’s always been focused and composed. The things that
unbalanced her were rare, but she always got over them quickly; there was no time to waste by comparing herself to others, because she knew her limits, and worked hard to surpass them every day.

But this?

Watching Nayeon’s first musical hit her harder than anything else ever had.

She was familiar with Nayeon’s voice, because she used to sing a lot when they hung out, and Mina’s attended school plays when they were younger. But nothing – nothing – had ever been this grand and glamorous. Mr. Kwon had clearly put a lot of effort into this play, and Nayeon brought everything to life. It was the first time Mina saw her truly in action, and her heart simultaneously dropped and soared.

Nayeon was incredible.

Mina felt absolutely intimidated.

She blinked, tearing her eyes from the stage for a second, and looked at Jeongyeon again. She caught the girl’s stunned gaze, and swallowed hard. Then, she looked at Momo, and that was the moment she noticed.

Jeongyeon and Momo’s expressions were the same.

For a split second, one thought struck her.

*I wish they looked at me like this, too.*

Mina gripped her seat, forcing these thoughts away.

The play went by beautifully, with upbeat songs and funny interactions with the audience. Nayeon spoke clearly and loudly, her beautiful voice catching everyone’s attention every time; Jihyo couldn’t stop smiling. She was so proud and happy for her. Nayeon looked genuinely happy for once – the stage was truly where she belonged.

Tzuyu occasionally leaned sideways to ask Chaeyoung about a few plot points, because the story was fun, but a little confusing. Chaeyoung explained to the best of her abilities, and when Tzuyu let out an understanding little yelp, her heart skipped a beat. Chaeyoung wished her other hand was good enough to hold hers.

Multiple songs played, and Mina was so enchanted by the atmosphere of the play that her troubling feelings vanished throughout the musical. When the interval came, a part of the audience got up to stretch their legs. Mina felt Jeongyeon poking her ribs.

“Want to step outside for a bit?”

“Sounds good,” Mina smiled despite everything, and the two left. Momo followed them with her eyes, then got up after a moment, leaving for the bathroom.

“I’m gonna get some water. Do you want some?” Chaeyoung asked Sana, who accepted. She left with a tiny rub on Sana’s shoulder, and Tzuyu followed.

Jihyo and Sana were the only ones who stayed behind, so Jihyo moved to sit next to her.

“Hey, you.”
Sana’s smile wasn’t as shining as Jihyo expected. “Hello.”

“Enjoying the play?”

“It’s sure something,” She chuckled a bit. “I’ll be honest, I got lost towards the end. But I’m only here to see Nayeonnie, anyway.”

“Trust me, I helped her practice some lines and couldn’t understand anything either,” They both laughed, then kept in silence. Jihyo looked at Sana’s broken wrist, then back up to her face. “You look a bit down.”

“I’m just a little tired.” Sana replied, which wasn’t a lie.

“If you say so,” She didn’t want to push her, but they hadn’t talked in a while, so Jihyo took the opportunity. “How’s Mina and Momo?”

Sana sighed; it was like the question took years off her life. “Ignoring each other and pretending they’re not.”

“That bad, huh?”

“I don’t get it, really.” She huffed, wondering if she really wanted to get into this whole thing. For some reason, Jihyo made it easy for her to vent. “I mean, I get some of it, but this has been going on for too long. They usually get over things faster than this.”

Jihyo nodded, but Sana wasn’t done.

“Mina’s liked Jeongyeon for three years, you know? Momo’s always encouraged her to confess her feelings. And I get that maybe the circumstances weren’t right, but this grudge Momo’s holding is not like her. I thought she needed time to mule it over, but eventually she’d be happy for Mina.”

One specific sentence caught her attention, and Jihyo frowned. “The circumstances weren’t right?”

“I mean, considering Momo’s into—” She froze, biting her tongue. That was top secret best friend information, and Sana almost leaked it like that. She really was losing it. “Nothing, never mind.”

Jihyo wasn’t dumb, however, and managed to fit the piece into this mess of a puzzle. She widened her eyes slowly, but then shifted on her seat, so Sana wouldn’t notice. “Maybe something happened between them in those past few days?”

Sana hummed, the gears inside her brain working quickly, trying to recall something. She’d been so caught up on her own problems that Mina and Momo’s issues felt entirely blurred. But then, something clicked suddenly, and she finally remembered a crucial detail. Taking a deep breath, Sana gaped. “Oh. Oh!” She turned to Jihyo, like a kid who just found her Christmas gift, but didn’t say anything.

“Oh?”

There was a pause, and Sana felt conflicted. Was she allowed to say it, or was this another top secret best friend information? Mina had whispered it to her in a moment of confessions and vulnerabilities, so in theory, it was meant to be kept a secret. But she couldn’t hold her friends’ problems all on her own, not in the condition she was in. So, Sana decided to tell Jihyo one part of it.

She leaned forward, and Jihyo did the same, until they were close enough to whisper.
“Mina kissed Momo after the Drama Club party.”

Jihyo sat up straight again, blinking in shock. “…Oh.”

“Do you think…?”

The question was left hanging, but it was clear what she was meaning to ask. Jihyo felt an incoming headache.

Before she could answer her, however, she saw the other girls returning. Jihyo mouthed ‘later’, and got back to her seat. Sana just nodded, looking over her shoulder at her friends.

“Here’s your water,” Chaeyoung handed Sana a bottle, and Sana thanked her.

When everyone was settled once again, Jihyo allowed herself a deep internal sigh. Things just got harder by the second.

The strings around her heart tightened more, and more. Her friends’ self-destructive tendencies were taking a huge toll on her.

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“Three waters, please.” Chaeyoung ordered at the kiosk outside, and Tzuyu grabbed the bottles for her once they arrived. “Thank you!”

The two moved to lean against the building’s wall without a care in the world as they waited for time to pass. Tzuyu opened two bottles, and they let out a ‘cheers’, bumping the plastic together and taking a sip. The air outside was refreshing, and Tzuyu sighed, contently.

“What’s on your mind?” Chaeyoung asked with a smile, because Tzuyu looked beautiful.

“Nayeon,” She replied, mirroring her expression, and looking at the sunset in the horizon. “She loves what she does, huh?”

“She’s good at it,” Chaeyoung agreed. “I think it’s easier to like what you do when you’re good at what you do.”

“Like writing poems and painting renaissance pictures?”

“Excuse me, the term is baroque.”

They stared at each other with serious faces, then Tzuyu pushed Chaeyoung gently with her shoulder, making the tiny girl laugh. It was peaceful on the outside, and Tzuyu felt like she could finally breathe – perhaps this could be a metaphor for what was happening inside the group. It was like the waters were stormy, and everybody noticed, but no one said a thing to not disturb the peacefulness of others. This wasn’t how friends should treat each other.
Mina and Jeongyeon walked by them at some point, too lost in each other’s eyes to notice, and Chaeyoung and Tzuyu observed the new couple.

“Those two were a surprise,” Chaeyoung commented, drinking more of her water.

“Yes…” She sighed. “They look so happy. I get why Jihyo doesn’t want them to know.”

Chaeyoung nodded. “It doesn’t really help, though. Nayeon was definitely on edge at your house. Keeping this in is not helping anyone.”

“I hope she opens up soon,” It was a hopeless wish, Tzuyu knew, but she promised Jihyo that she wouldn’t interfere. If anything, she would be ready to help her at any given moment. “I’m happy I told you about it.”

“I’m happy you did, too.” Chaeyoung felt a lot lighter sharing things with Tzuyu. “I’m sorry I kept so much from you. I’m still feeling bad about it.” She said that with a knot in her throat, because she was still keeping something from her, but that was another issue entirely.

“Don’t worry,” Tzuyu smiled at her, and it was blinding, and gorgeous as always. “It’s hard for you, I know.” She looked at her hand. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there to stop you from hitting that wall.”

“Please, that’s not your fault.” Chaeyoung wouldn’t let her friend take the blame for something out of her control. “I’m too impulsive. I need to work on that.”

“Let me help you.”

Chaeyoung laughed a little, because she knew that Tzuyu had no clue where to even start, but she was going to do everything in her power, anyway. “Of course. Thanks, Tzuyu-ah.”

The look on Tzuyu’s eyes was deep and thoughtful, and Chaeyoung felt her cheeks burning at the exposure. She was so stunning from every single angle, and the illumination from the sunset just made her look even more like a masterpiece. Chaeyoung would be lying if she said she didn’t think about capturing Tzuyu’s beauty in a portrait constantly, but she also knew that this was above her capacities. No painting could compare to the real deal.

“You’re doing it again,” Tzuyu said in a lower voice.

“Doing what?”

“Looking at me like I’m the sun,” she looked down; differently from the previous time she’s said that, now it didn’t feel like she was being playful. “You do that a lot, you know? I don’t think you even realize it.”

Chaeyoung was sure that her heart would jump right out of her chest. Tzuyu noticed way too many things that Chaeyoung thought were well hidden, and it made her head spin and her hands shake. She needed to say something, anything to cover up her feelings, but she’s never been good working under pressure.

So, the sentence that came out of her mouth was, “It’s hard not to when you’re so dazzling.”

She felt like punching another wall.

Tzuyu followed her cheesy phrase with an imperceptible smile, averting her eyes. Chaeyoung was about to say something to fix her dumb mistake, but Tzuyu was faster.
“Like Ambrosia?”

Chaeyoung had no words to reply.

“We should head back,” Tzuyu said after a pause, and took Chaeyoung’s hand, guiding her wobbly legs towards the theater again. Chaeyoung hardly processed where they were going until she saw the line of people taking their seats, and forced herself to snap out of it. Seeing Sana was a relief, and she gave her the bottle of water.

The rest of the play was a complete blur. All she could think about was Tzuyu.

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The play eventually came to an end, successfully and without visible mistakes. Mr. Kwon was called to the center of the stage as the ending song played cheerfully, and Nayeon was the one holding his hand as they bowed. The professor cried, and the cast laughed, also emotional at his outburst. The applause and screams were incredibly loud, and Nayeon absolutely loved the noise. It was the only thing able to muffle out her inner voice.

Nayeon looked up after her long bow, and searched for her friends in the crowd. Her eyes fell on Jihyo, first, who was waving wildly like a proud mother, then the rest followed. Her chest felt lighter at the sight of everyone gathered together with smiles on their faces, all because of her; for a moment, she could pretend that everything was fine, and absolutely no complications surrounded the nine of them.

When her eyes fell on Jeongyeon, something exploded inside her, and the tears finally fell. She couldn’t hold back, and sent her a kiss. Out of pure muscle memory, Jeongyeon sent one back. Nayeon sent kisses to everyone after that, one by one, because she didn’t want her mask to fall, and apparently everyone bought it.

When she got to Momo, her heartbeat nearly stopped. Momo’s expression was so affectionate, and she looked so proud of her, that Nayeon almost jumped out of the stage to run into her arms. She wanted to hug her. She wanted to hug all of them, but she could literally feel Momo’s strong arms around her body, not wanting to let her go – it made her sob in a smile.

The actors and actresses finally started to exit the stage, and Nayeon had to follow. She knew the girls would move backstage to meet with her at some point, so she wasn’t worried about missing them.

The first thing Nayeon felt when she finally walked into the dressing room, was Dahyun’s body slamming against hers in a hug. “You were so good! So, so good!”

Nayeon laughed, returning the gesture by lifting the girl up and twirling her on the air. “Thank you, Dahyunnie. For everything. I’m sorry you were forced to stay here.”

“Are you kidding?” Dahyun let her go, still high on adrenaline. “Watching you from here was the coolest experience of my life! Ten out of ten, would do it again.”
She was glad that her junior enjoyed it so much, and ruffled her hair with affection. She felt good. Nayeon felt really, really good, for the first time in a long, stressful semester.

When Mr. Kwon walked in, there was another round of applauses, this time from the cast and crew. He cried again, and cursed everyone for making him emotional, but they just buried him in a big group hug. At some point they had to let the poor man go, and he laughed, wiping his tears.

“You all did wonderfully well. I’m so proud of you, thank you so, so much for making my dream come true with this original play. From the cast to the hidden staff, thank you, truly.” More cheers followed, and people slowly started moving to their respective mirrors to take care of the makeup and outfits.

Nayeon couldn’t move yet, because there was a line of people ready to congratulate her on the main role. The line consisted of familiar faces and people she’s never seen before, and Nayeon made sure to remember each and every one of them. She was on top of the world.

Jennie was the last one who came up to her and delivered a tight hug, and Nayeon buried her head on the girl’s shoulder. Jennie laughed. “You did it, girlie.”

“Thank you, Jennie.”

“Proud of you.”

Mr. Kwon waited as the two hugged, allowing them some privacy, and then finally was able to catch Nayeon alone. “My superstar.”

Nayeon nearly cried again at the endearing term. “I’m your character. You’re the star here, professor.”

“What happened to your big ego?” He smiled, and Nayeon crashed into his arms.

Mr. Kwon was the closest to a father Nayeon’s ever had, and she treasured all the moments of banter they had. He was dramatic, loud, and over-the-top, and Nayeon was sure she would never meet someone as similar as her in her whole life. Mr. Kwon might be her teacher, but to Nayeon, he would always be a lot more than that. She wished she could tell him that one day.

“You should rest, you have a long day tomorrow.” He said after letting her go, and Nayeon’s brain started to finally slow down.

“Yes. I will.”

“I’ll meet you at the entrance tomorrow, eight in the morning, alright?”

“Wait. You’re coming with me?”

Mr. Kwon blinked, putting his hands on his hips. “Of course I am, dear. Who do you think is taking you there? I’m not about to leave you to fend for yourself at a publicity agency. Those people are evil.”

Nayeon felt relief washing over her and really wanted to hug her teacher again, but restrained herself. She needed to take off her outfit, and makeup, and meet up with her friends. This would take a while. With one last bow of appreciation, she turned around to finally rest her tired body and soul.

Her moment of peace didn’t last much, however; soon, she heard loud voices trying to get
backstage, and smiled to herself. With a happy sigh, she moved to the entrance of the place, and waved for them to come in.

Jihyo’s hug was the first thing. “You did it, you did it, you did it!”

Nayeon hugged her back, allowing her shoulders to relax. She’s received endless compliments already, but something about Jihyo’s made it a lot more special. Nayeon felt like she owned her an apology for being an absolute pain to deal with for the past few days.

“Sorry,” Was all she muttered, and Jihyo patted her hair.

“It’s ok.”

They parted, and Chaeyoung was the next one to hug her, with a pat on her butt. Then, Tzuyu, who lifted her up for a few seconds – everyone laughed and mocked her height. Jeongyeon was next, and the hug was warm; they parted way too soon, though, and Jeongyeon stepped aside with an awkward giggle.

Nayeon hugged Mina then, and she felt both unworthy of her praise, and suddenly protective. The words of those two girls rang in her ears, and Nayeon squeezed Mina for a bit longer. Mina didn’t know where it came from, but she felt weirdly comfortable and safe.

Then, Sana gave her a one-armed hug, but it wasn’t as energetic as Nayeon was expecting. She detached herself from the girl and looked at her face; she looked exhausted. Something about Sana’s weak smile resonated within her – she looked like a carbon copy of herself. Nayeon wanted to ask her what was going on, but not right now.

Momo was the last person in line, and she wasn’t just smiling. Her eyes encompassed an affection that was beyond Nayeon’s grasp, and it was too overwhelming to look at her directly, so she just dived into her embrace. It was healing.

“You’re amazing,” Momo whispered against her hair, and Nayeon clutched at her shirt with all she had. She could hear Momo’s heartbeat and all she wanted to do was drown in it, without a care in the world. The two of them were tired. It hit Nayeon that she still didn’t know the source of Momo’s anger, but she wanted to fix it, anyway. She scoffed at herself. Nayeon was in no position to fix anyone.

Mina noticed that their hug lingered for a lot longer, and reached for Jeongyeon’s hand instinctively. When Nayeon and Momo were done, she kept holding on. Jeongyeon tangled their fingers together.

“So, dinner is on you?” Chaeyoung teased, and Nayeon rolled her eyes.

“You wish,” She grinned despite everything. “I can’t hang out with you today.”

“What? Why?” Jihyo nearly pouted. “It’s your special night, we were going to treat you.”

“The commercials are tomorrow. I still need to undress, and take off all this goddamn glitter of my face, and shower… I’m pretty tired, honestly. I was going to head back to bed early.”

There was a collective whine, but after a short argument, the girls understood. No one wanted Nayeon to sleep on her first paid job, so they agreed to pay her dinner another time.

“Where’s Dahyun, anyway?” Jeongyeon looked around, noticing their friend was missing.
“She should be back there helping clean the stage,” Nayeon looked over her shoulder. “She’s a treasure, really.”

Sana gazed at the stage, wanting to get over there, but with not enough strength to do it. Chaeyoung noticed her unfocused eyes and decided to help her out. “I’ll tell her to meet with us outside.”

They chatted for a little while, and eventually Nayeon couldn’t help but to stare at Jeongyeon and Mina holding hands. She averted her eyes quickly, refusing to be caught in such a stupid act, and her eyes landed on Momo. But Momo wasn’t looking at her.

She was looking at Jeongyeon and Mina, too.

It was like everything stopped for a moment. The playful banter, the soft giggles, the friendly aura; none of that was being processed. It didn’t take long for Nayeon to recognize the expression Momo was wearing on her face.

It was the exact same look Nayeon gave Jeongyeon from time to time.

Oh.

Momo was looking at Mina like she’s lost her.

What rose up to Nayeon’s her chest was a mixture of shock, absolute sadness, and terrifying relief. Nayeon grinned, unable to control herself.

“What?” Jihyo asked her, and when she came to, everyone was staring.

“Nothing,” Nayeon replied. “Just reminiscing the play. You guys should go. I’ll be the last one to leave, anyway.”

“Do you need help?” Jeongyeon asked.

“No, I’m good.” She was still grinning. “I have the key to the building, I’ll lock it up once everyone’s gone. Have fun.”

Chaeyoung returned with Dahyun and everyone bid her goodbye with one last hug. Nayeon smiled all the time, and when Momo lingered for longer, she told her goodbye again. Momo turned around with an incomprehensible look, and Nayeon was finally left alone with her thoughts.

She sat on her dressing room, and started removing the makeup. She washed her face, then wiped out everything; foundation, mascara, glitter, eyeliner, lipstick – slowly, everything was coming off.

People kept leaving one by one, until the backstage was finally emptied out. Mr. Kwon was the last person to be there, along with Nayeon, and he walked up to her.

“Still taking off your makeup?”

“It’s a lot.”

“Well, I’m going, then. Don’t forget to lock up. And rest. No Netflix when you get back to your room, you hear me?”

“Yes, sir.” She replied with a smile. Mr. Kwon finally left, and there was absolute silence. Nayeon kept rubbing the moistened wipes on her cheeks, forehead, neck, everywhere. There was nothing
else left on her features that needed cleaning, but Nayeon didn’t stop; in an impulse, she kept rubbing, and rubbing, and rubbing.

It was like she was trying to take off her mask, but it just wouldn’t come off. So she kept trying, until it started to hurt. Her cheeks were already red, but she didn’t stop.

*I lost Momo. She loves Mina. And all it took was someone taking her away.*

She was still grinning at the mirror.

*What am I saying? Momo was never mine. She loved me, and I played with her feelings. And now, I’m alone again.*

She took another wipe, and rubbed.

*Isn’t this what you wanted in the first place? To be alone?*

Her forehead, and neck.

*Yes. That’s what I wanted.*

Her other cheek.

*Then why the fuck are you crying?*

It took her a terribly long time to realize that the wipes weren’t moistened, and that her cheeks were wet because of her tears. Nayeon finally stopped rubbing, and let her arm fall limply against her thigh. She didn’t feel like getting up ever again.

She just wanted to quietly drown.

That’s when she felt a gentle touch on her shoulders. Nayeon looked up, and Momo was there. Always, all the time, Momo found her when she needed her the most. Why couldn’t she leave her alone? Why couldn’t she see how horrible of a human being Nayeon was? Why did she have to—

“Dance with me,” Momo muttered, offering her one hand.

Nayeon stared for a moment. Momo looked blurry through her tears and Nayeon hiccupped, but eventually – *inevitably* – she lifted an arm, holding on.

Momo would never let her drown, and Nayeon would always allow herself to be saved, if only by her hands.

It was their *thing*, dancing – they danced when they were happy, they danced when they were worried, and they danced when they were tired and wanted to forget their problems. It’s always been like this, and Nayeon had a feeling that she was in love with this habit.

Momo’s arms on her waist, Nayeon’s hands on her shoulders, they moved in sync to a familiar soundless rhythm. They danced around the dressing room in circles, pretty much how they’ve been doing their whole lives – dancing around each other, like a familiar Tango of tangled webs.

And they wouldn’t take their eyes off each other.

The dance eventually ended as they slowed down, and before they knew it, Momo had her hands on Nayeon’s hips as she was pushed against the wall. They were heaving despite the lack of exertion, and they could feel each other’s breaths against their lips.
Momo leaned in, inch by inch, but before she could get somewhere, Nayeon turned her face—much like she’d done when Momo first offered to help her practice. Back then, she’d asked Nayeon if she would like to run away with her. Nayeon wasn’t sure her answer would still be the same, considering everything.

“Why do you do this?” Momo asked, in a husky whisper.

“Momo…”

“It’s like you won’t allow yourself to be loved.” Her words were the sincerest Nayeon’s ever heard, and she could feel how much Momo was willing to expose herself. There wasn’t room for lies at that moment in time—what was in front of her was Momo on her rawest form.

They were two broken souls, with nothing but sorrow and regret holding them together. If Momo wanted to take out her sadness on her, Nayeon would accept it.

She raised her head, and suddenly brought her hands to Momo’s scalp, tangling her fingers in dark auburn locks.

“Fuck me like you love me, then.”

Even if you don’t.

The crash of their lips was hard, and very much anticipated. Nayeon closed her eyes, and Momo immediately opened her mouth, tongues touching, hearts beating. Nayeon sighed against her, but didn’t let go. She could feel Momo pushing harder, and the kiss felt so good that Nayeon couldn’t breathe. She didn’t want to breathe. She wanted Momo.

Momo was a giver; she would give, and give, and give.

Nayeon? She was a taker, and she knew it, and she hated it, but she loved it.

She let her hands roam the entirety of Momo’s body, from her hair to her neck, her shoulders, her back, her butt, her abs, her ribs. Momo groaned against her mouth, but for as much as she was clearly in the same mind space as Nayeon, she wasn’t touching her desperately like Nayeon wanted.

Nayeon needed Momo’s hands to torn her apart, and patch her back up at the same time.

They broke the kiss for a split second, and Momo looked at her, almost if asking for permission to continue. Nayeon simply reached for the hem of her dress and took it off, ridding herself completely of any restraint.

Momo took a moment to look at her beautiful body. Nayeon kissed her again.

When Momo felt Nayeon’s leg wrapping awkwardly around her, she paused to look around. Then, she lifted Nayeon up, placing her on top of a desk in the corner. Props fell on the ground loudly, but they didn’t care. Momo shifted her mouth to Nayeon’s pulse point and bit slightly, but with not enough strength to break the skin. Nayeon still had to look presentable for her commercials tomorrow.

“Momo,” Nayeon groaned as the dancer licked her neck, placing chaste kisses on her shoulder. More tears flowed down her cheeks for some reason, and Nayeon whimpered with each and every affectionate gesture. She didn’t deserve her, but everything felt so good.
“I’ve got you,” Momo spoke against her chest, moving back up to give her a slower, more passionate kiss. “Whatever you want. You’ll have it.”

Nayeon opened her mouth, but she couldn’t say what she wanted to say.

_I want you._

But that was okay, because she had a feeling Momo knew.

Momo peppered Nayeon with kisses in every possible place of her body, worshipping her wrecked self like she was a goddess. She asked for permission to take off Nayeon’s bra, and the girl simply nodded. Immediately after it fell on the floor, Momo kissed her breasts, sucking on one nipple, then the other. Nayeon was still crying, but this time from how good it felt. It was healing, and it was everything she’s ever wanted for a long time.

Momo’s tongue worked down her stomach and dangerously low, prompting Nayeon to grab a fistful of her hair. Momo kneeled in between her legs, and without warning, bit her inner thigh, then licked at her wetness over her panties. She did it countless times on either side of her center, and finally, with Nayeon’s guidance, she gave her a broad lick on where she needed her the most.

“Oh,” was all Nayeon could say, and Momo obliged immediately. Without her underwear, Nayeon felt free. Momo looked up at her with another soft question in her eyes, and Nayeon nodded, biting one knuckle. With nothing else to say, Momo licked her core.

Nayeon was loud. That was something Momo’s always wondered, and now she knew. The girl scratched Momo’s scalp, and whimpered, moaned, all while biting down her finger to try to keep quiet. It was hot, and it was cute.

Momo circled her tongue, licking every spot with care, and pressing kisses to Nayeon’s nub, only to gently take it in her mouth. Nayeon was practically grinding against her face at this point, and Momo groaned at the action. She could feel herself getting wet as well, but didn’t give any thought to it. All she cared about was Nayeon.

And maybe it was the utmost arousal Nayeon felt at the prospect of finally realizing one of her fantasies, but she felt herself getting closer embarrassingly fast.

“M-Momo… wait, I’m—”

Momo got up in a flash, and kissed her roughly. Nayeon tasted herself on her lips and hugged Momo close as she replaced her mouth with fingers. It was incredibly hot, and Nayeon couldn’t take it anymore. She came with a loud groan, contracting against Momo’s fingers, scratching her back against the fabric of her shirt. Momo moaned in her ear at the sound – she’s wanted to hear that for so long.

After a few more spasms, Nayeon finally came down from her height. Her ragged breaths against Momo’s chest were filled with more tears, and Momo simply hugged her close, kissing the crown of her head with the utmost care. Momo retrieved her hand and was about to wipe it on her shorts, when Nayeon stopped her, grabbing her wrist.

She leaned back for a moment, looking at Momo, then took the wet fingers in her mouth. Momo just watched as she licked them clean, biting her lower lip.

“That’s hot,” Momo managed to say after she was done. Nayeon let out a chuckle, and buried herself into Momo’s arms again.
Time stood still, with nothing nor no one around to bother them about anything. Momo kept kissing Nayeon’s hairline, and after a long moment, Nayeon stopped crying. The effect Hirai Momo had on her was quite frankly absurd. She showered her with promises, and kept them all the same, and Nayeon loved her for it.

“Be with me.” Momo’s sentence caught her by surprise. Nayeon swallowed the bump in her throat.

“I can’t.”

Momo then shifted their faces, and kissed Nayeon again, slowly, and deeply. Nayeon couldn’t help but to clutch at her clothes, pulling her closer. When they parted, Momo nuzzled her neck. “Then let me be with you.”

With no more strength to deny her after that, Nayeon kept quiet.

Nayeon needed someone who would break her and patch her up at the same time, and Momo was the only one in the world who managed to do it.

Chapter End Notes

You've been bugging me for Na[M]o this whole week jesus CHRIST. It was coming. Like Nayeon. Love you all <3 Tomorrow I'm removing my wisdom teeth so I might die a little. I'm terrified. Anyway. Thank you for reading and don't forget to use the hashtag!

#TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
Tumblr: niigoki
CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/niigoki
The place smelled of cigarettes and alcohol, which wasn’t surprising, considering it was the backroom of a bar. Smoke floated through the air, obfuscating the view of the room, but it wasn’t like there was much to see. The wooden walls looked unpolished and dirtied, and a big painting of a bottle of absinthe towered over a chair in the back.

Sitting on said chair was a blonde woman, taking a drag of something that was definitely not a cigarette, and puffing the smoke upwards. She looked completely unbothered, a lazy smile adorning her features as two men and another woman sat by her side playing poker on a precarious-looking table.

“Come on, place your bet,” One of the men said with a smirk.

“Can you shut the fuck up, for two seconds?” The woman replied, sweating from the pressure.

“Language, Hyoyoung,” The second man, visibly more collected than the first, scolded her.

“Oh, bite me, Taewoon.”

“You wish.”

“He might not, but if you insist…” The first man approached slowly, only to receive a hit to the back of his head.

“You get close to me with this mouth, I’m gonna break your fucking teeth.”

Taewoon let out a scoff at that, and rolled his eyes. “Are you two done?”

Hyoyoung eyed the man again, the pushed her coins forward. “200. Your turn, Noori.”

The first man licked his lips, and pushed more coins to the table. “Raise. 250. Tae?”

“Call,” He answered simply, matching his coins, then the three revealed their cards.

Noori clapped his hands and laughed loudly at his Flush, taking all the coins from the table. “I win again! And that… makes it what, four turns in a row? Thank you for your patronage, appreciate it.”

“Bullshit,” Hyoyoung kicked the table, making some coins fall, and Taewoon eyed her, dangerously.

“Go get it.”

“Or what?”

Taewoon simply got up, and Hyoyoung did the same, facing him nearly nose to nose. The mood
was hostile, and Noori just pretended to eat some popcorn as he eyed the two angry friends.

“Hey,” Chanmi’s loud voice made all three of them stop and turn to her, breaking the tense mood immediately. She put out her blunt on the wall next to her chair, and slowly let her head fall to the side, staring at the three with a less-than-amused face. “Don’t make a mess.”

Hyoyoung, Noori and Taewoon just nodded, scattering across the tiny room to grab the coins in a haste. Chanmi rolled her eyes. Boring.

There was a knock at the door then, and Chanmi just yelled for the person to come in. Silently, the doorknob turned, and Joy walked in, meekly. Chanmi perked up on her seat and smiled again upon seeing her face. “Oh, look who’s here.”

“Chanmi,” Joy greeted her with a small head bow, then closed the door. She looked briefly at the three on the corner, then at the absinthe painting – it was hard to miss it. Finally, she walked up slowly to where Chanmi was sitting on her makeshift throne. Joy coughed at the smell, waving her hand in front of her nose to get rid of it.

“Not a fan?” Chanmi asked, almost in a laugh.

“Not… really.” Joy hesitated.

“Funny. Considering you’ve done much worse things. But hey, who am I to judge?”

Joy flinched, then took her phone out of her pocket. “Okay, look, can we get this over with? I’m not supposed to even be here.”

“Why do you all say that?” Chanmi frowned, looking up, like she was talking to the hundreds of students who always started conversations with her in the same way. “You walk into this place willingly, then say you don’t want to be here.”

Joy didn’t miss the analogy, but she wasn’t in the mood to think about it. All she wanted right now was to clean her name. “I have your goddamn recording. I could’ve sent it to your phone, I don’t know why I had to come all the way over here.”

“Because,” Chanmi got up, and approached her. With one swift move, she grabbed the phone, and smirked. “I wanted to see your face.”

Joy gulped, and averted her eyes from Chanmi’s piercing ones. She hated feeling so vulnerable. Chanmi laughed in her face and turned her back to her, climbing up again to her chair. Plopping down, she searched for the audio, and finally pressed play, pumping up the volume so everyone could hear.

“Well… how do I put this. There’s been some talk. About you.”

“Talk...?”

“Yeah, you know, bitches will be bitches. I just don’t want you to take anything seriously, if you ever come across any of that.”

“Joy, what talk?”

“Just some shit about how you’re dating a freshman. They’re stalking this girl and everything. I hope they don’t bother her too much.”
“They? Who’s stalking Dahyun?”

“…Chanmi and her army of skanks. You know how they are.”

“Oh, no. Joy, you can’t let this happen.”

“Huh? Me? What am I gonna do against her? You think I’m going against that mess? I have parties to attend, thank you.”

“But…”

“Besides, it’s not like you’re actually dating this girl, are you? She’s just another one-time deal, right?”

“…Yeah. She’s just another one in the crowd.”

Joy grit her teeth.

“Good. So, Chungha. Don’t forget to come, all right? We’ll wait for you.”

“Sure. Yeah. I need to go.”

The audio cut then, and Chanmi’s smile looked positively devilish. She threw her head back on a booming laughter, then wiped away a fake tear from laughing so hard. “Oh, my lord… army of skanks? That’s bold.”

Joy’s hands were clutched tightly into fists, and she was biting the inside of her cheek from disgust at herself. She couldn’t believe she’d just betrayed Sana’s trust like this, after everything they’ve been through together. She knew the girl believed in her, and had only said that about her freshman because she thought Joy was protecting her from something. But instead, she was luring her right into the dragon’s den.

And it smelled bad.

“Now, keep your part of the bargain.” Was all Joy managed to say without stuttering.

Chanmi sent the audio to her own phone, then threw Joy’s phone back to her. After that, she shuffled through her pictures, and finally found what she was looking for. Chanmi then turned her screen to Joy, so she could see all the photos she had of her. “Here, you see? I have five pictures, in total.”

Joy trembled. That was more than she anticipated. “Okay, erase them.”

With a few movements of her fingers, Chanmi erased all the pictures, making sure to show her the procedure so that it wouldn’t be any doubts about her promise. “And… done. Check for yourself, if you want.”

Joy stepped forward and grabbed Chanmi’s phone, a bit taken aback at how willing she was to just give up her stash of blackmail. There were too many pictures of students in there, and Joy felt sick to her stomach. After going through each and single photo, Joy finally returned the phone. “…Okay.”

Chanmi smiled, looking sincere. “Alright, you’re free to go.”

Joy eyed the three goons by her side, and pointed at them with her head. “What about them? How will I know if you didn’t just send my photos to their phones? You might have a backup.”
“Because, if I didn’t truly keep my promises,” Chanmi replied, with an eye roll. “I wouldn’t be sitting here, with this whole school wrapped around my finger. Trust is a two-way road, Joy-yah.”

Joy swallowed hard; she had to admit that a part of her believed Chanmi, despite everything. And that was the weirdest thing of all.

“But, feel free to check their phones, if you want,” Chanmi continued with a shrug, leaning back on her chair and lighting up another blunt. Joy stared at them, considering if it was even worth it, but decided that she didn’t want to waste more time in that place.

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Then, we’re settled.”

Joy was about to turn around, but felt compelled to ask. “…What are you going to do with that audio?”

Chanmi puffed the smoke upwards, throwing her head back. “Nothing that concerns you.”

“It does concern me. She’s my friend.”

“Are you really worried about Sana?” Chanmi almost laughed. “Or you just don’t want her to hate you if she finds out you’re the one who recorded that?”

Joy hated being analyzed so easily; Chanmi had this gift of tearing someone open, piece by piece, and digging deep into their fears. She felt absolutely exposed at that moment, and didn’t want to be there for another second. With one last sigh, Joy turned around.

“Never fucking mind.”

“It would be wise not to play with heavy drugs in the future, Joy-yah.” Chanmi allowed her to leave with a final piece of advice, and Joy nearly broke the door handle. She slammed the door on her way out, absolutely enraged.

“Drugs you gave me, you piece of shit,” Joy muttered to herself as she left the bar; one part of her relieved at the erased evidence, another heavy with guilt. She didn’t expect Sana to forgive her, if she ever found out.

For some twisted reason, Joy trusted Chanmi to keep that secret.

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One of the amazing things about setting a foot on an actual filming studio was watching directors, producers, and photographers pacing back and forth, giving out orders and setting the scenario accordingly. The place itself was huge, with more than one background allocated, and Nayeon had to walk past quite a few of them to get to hers. She witnessed various houses, one park, two beaches, and even a jungle – this last one made her really curious.
“Probably a commercial against animal cruelty,” Mr. Kwon rolled his eyes as he whispered, and Nayeon had to hold back a laugh.

She was really glad the teacher had decided to tag along, because she was starting to feel pretty intimidated. The events from last night were also weighting on her mind, and her body was tired from the lack of sleep. Momo didn’t leave any external bruises despite everything, which she was thankful for – the only damage was the emotional kind.

But, for some reason, it was a good kind of pain this time.

“Oh, here we go. Alright, chin up, shoulders back, confident expression—not arrogant—and a shiny smile.” Mr. Kwon barely finished his instructions before cheerfully waving to a man in his way. “Mr. Park, hello!”

Nayeon shut down every single thought at that point and got into character.

The director looked friendly and took Nayeon’s hand on a firm handshake; she had a good feeling about him. He seemed to know Mr. Kwon from a while back, and the two men chatted away like old friends. Nayeon could tell that her professor was just putting up a front though, like she did all the time.

It’s not that he didn’t trust Mr. Park; he just wanted to get things over with quickly for some reason. It didn’t take long for Nayeon to realize that if they didn’t speed things up, Mr. Park could spend the entire day talking about his life.

“I’ll be getting ready, then,” Nayeon interrupted their conversation, and she could practically see the tears of relief falling down Mr. Kwon’s face.

“Oh, right! The makeup artists are waiting for you in that room, dear. Please, make yourself comfortable.” The director finally pointed to where she was needed, and Nayeon eyed the professor with one last sympathetic look. Mr. Kwon nodded slightly.

‘I’ll make the sacrifice.’ Was what his eyes told her. Nayeon almost laughed, but it would be cruel.

Arriving at the designated location, she shyly knocked, and was met with a turn of heads and smiles. There were gorgeous women apparently just waiting for her arrival, and they immediately gestured to a fancy chair. Nayeon sat and left everything else in their hands.

Nayeon thought that she knew about makeup and outfits, but being professionally taken care of made her reconsider everything else. Whatever she thought she knew was not even the basics of this art form. The team rubbed her face with products that she’s never even heard of, and some of them burned. She trusted them with her life, though, and was really curious to see her absolute transformation.

She asked them for a few tips on skin care and what were their favorite brands of eyeshadow, and the women were happy to tell her everything. Nayeon felt comfortable soon enough to joke around, and one of the artists even complimented her hair, which increased her self-confidence absurdly – if anyone knew what they were talking about, it’s these people.

“Alright, we’re done,” One of the women turned her chair around to face the mirror eventually. “What do you think?”

Nayeon opened her eyes, and what she saw turned her world upside down. She considered herself a rather narcissistic person, so her reflection was always a welcome sight;
the person staring back, however, looked like an absolute goddess. The makeup didn’t look heavy, mainly because Nayeon would play the role of a normal big sister taking care of her baby sibling, but somehow, this fake-natural beauty made her look a thousand times prettier than she already was.

“Are you guys magicians?” Nayeon asked unconsciously, and the women chuckled.

After that, she moved to the dressing room. Her outfit for the scene was a casual pink sweater and jeans, nothing fancy. She was about to remove her pants, but felt something vibrate in her pocket. Grabbing her phone, she opened the group chat, where two people had left her messages.

[GodJihyo, 8:32am]

Good luck today with the commercials, Nabongs!

Proud of you!!

[Jeong, 8:33am]

you'll nail it as always, don't worry about it

<3

Nayeon felt her mouth curling up in a smile involuntarily, and sighed. It was too early to be awake when they didn’t have classes, but they were anyway. The others were probably sleeping like they should, but Nayeon was sure they would each leave a motivational message upon waking up. She felt loved, and she hated it, but she couldn’t dwell on it right now.

Before she could put the phone away, someone sent her another message, privately.

[Moguri, 8:34am]

hey..

sorry for yesterday

I mean, I'm sorry we did that the day before your commercials

not for what happened

Nayeon swallowed, hands sweating. She typed back.

[Nabongs, 8:34am]

Are you? Sorry for what happened?
absolutely not

It should’ve upset her, but for some reason, Nayeon felt relieved. She breathed out a tiny laugh.

are you upset?

you can be honest with me

I’m not gonna break

She couldn’t answer her, because she had to think about it – not about the answer, that was already crystal clear in her mind, but about the consequences of being truthful. She decided to have this conversation properly when they met again.

I have to go, Momoring

Alrighty

you can do it!!

She finally put the phone away and dressed up properly. Once she was done, Nayeon thanked the makeup artists with a polite smile, then stepped out.

Mr. Kwon was rooted in the same place, arms crossed and nodding mindlessly at whatever Mr. Park was telling him, and when he spotted Nayeon, he brought both hands to his mouth, in shock. “Oh my god!”

“I’ll take that compliment,” Nayeon smiled at him, and Mr. Park tapped her shoulder playfully.

“You look amazing, darling,” Turning around at the cameras and the rest of the staff, he let out an excited sigh. “Well then! I’m afraid we’ll have to catch up later, Kwonnie.”

“Oh, don’t mind me.” Mr. Kwon waved him off with a happy grin.
It was getting increasingly difficult to keep her composure around her teacher.

“Shall we start the first round?”

“Of course,” Nayeon nodded, remembering that there were five commercials to be filmed that day. It would be tiring, but it was an amazing opportunity; in all honesty, she could not wait.

She walked towards the scenario and looked around the place, getting a feel of her stage; it was a casual baby room, with a crib on one side, pastel pink walls filled with clouds, and carpeted. Nayeon wondered where her co-star could be.

“Nayeon-ah,” Mr. Park approached her with another woman. “Meet your co-star’s mother!”

The first thing she was supposed to pay attention to was, obviously, the adult woman bowing politely in front of her, but Nayeon’s eyes immediately fell on the baby in her arms, and she let out a tiny yelp. Only then she remembered to greet the mom, and blushed. “N-nice to meet you! I’m Im Nayeon.”

“You like babies, don’t you?” The mother said first thing, with a gentle smile. “Nice to meet you, I’m Min Sunye. And this is Hajin.”

Nayeon seemed hypnotized by the little girl who just looked at her and sneezed. “Oh, goodness, is she sick? Is the air-conditioner too strong? Wait, let me ask them to turn it off.”

Sunye giggled. “No, no, she does that all the time. It means she likes you.”

Nayeon’s eyes widened, and Mr. Kwon crossed his arms, eyeing the scene with fondness. He would never admit it for the life of him, but he had a soft spot for Nayeon; watching her interacting with a baby and stuttering like a fool was dumb and endearing. He wished nothing but success and happiness for his star, and he hoped she could have that in the future, with a beautiful family of her own.

“Want to hold her?” Sunye asked, and Nayeon was sure she would faint.

“A-are you certain? Won’t she cry?”

“We’ll have to see,” And with that, she carefully lifted her arms, and placed little Hajin into Nayeon’s waiting embrace.

When the baby girl was settled comfortably, she moved a little bit, whined, then looked up right into Nayeon’s eyes. She made a tiny sound and reached for her face, softly touching Nayeon’s nose.

Then she sneezed.

“Oh, she likes you, alright.” Sunye smiled, observing the two.

And at that exact moment, something hit Nayeon hard. All the dreams of her teenage self, the ones involving getting married, having a family of her own, and taking care of children suddenly resurfaced, and she could still picture all of that, even after years. Jeongyeon’s warm smile flashed before her eyes, and she could feel everything – her gentle embrace, the way she laughed into her hair when she was shy, the movie marathons, the dorky dates, the promises they’d made under the sheets.

The feeling she had tried her hardest to avoid ever since they entered college was now back,
stronger than ever.

If regret could kill her in that moment, it surely would have.

She wished, from the bottom of her heart, that the world was simpler, and that loving two people didn’t have to mean abandoning one of them.

Little Hajin looked blurred all of a sudden, and Nayeon realized that her eyes were filled with tears.

“Are you okay, dear?” Sunye asked, concerned.

Nayeon rubbed her eyes softly. “Y-yes. Yes, I’m okay. I just… really like children,” She looked up at the mother, then smiled sincerely. “She’s beautiful.”

Sunye returned the smile and put a comforting hand on her forearm. “So are you.”

_No._

Nayeon thanked her.

_I’m not._

--

“Does this look good? Wait, should I wear a dress instead? Or is it too much?” Mina’s relentless questions were too endearing for Sana to actually be bothered by it, so she just stared with a ghost of a smile as Mina shuffled through her wardrobe. “This jacket, or this jacket?”

“Minari,” Sana said, sitting on her bed. “It’s Jeongyeon. You could show up in crocs and she’d still say you look beautiful.”

For some stupid reason this made Mina blush. “You’re right, she _would_. Is that why I fell for her?”

“You fell for her because you love her, that’s all there is to it.” Sana adjusted her position on the bed, and grabbed the remote, turning on the TV. “This outfit looks good for a first date. Just go with it.”

“Okay,” Mina took a deep breath, and looked at the clock. “It’s almost time. Is she punctual? I think she is.”

“Did you suddenly forget who you’re dating?”

The word made her heart leap a beat. “No, I just… I’m overwhelmed. It’s my first date, ever. Girls get nervous on their first dates, right?”

“That’s why Jeongyeon is just as nervous as you,” Sana rolled her eyes, but still smiled a little. “She’s a dummy, and so are you. Just enjoy the day together, it’s not like you don’t know that your conversations will turn into an anime discussion at some point.”
Somehow the words calmed Mina down. They’ve been together for a few days now, but Mina still couldn’t shake the feeling that everything was new and exciting – maybe because it hasn’t even been a week, and Jeongyeon’s latest relationship was the definition of perfection.

Mina wouldn’t admit it out loud, but ever since the musical, she’d been comparing herself to Nayeon a lot. She couldn’t shake the feeling that nothing she ever did would reach her level, and that scared her, because Jeongyeon would most likely realize that Mina wasn’t worth the effort after all. Then, she felt like hitting her head on a wall to get rid of such foolish thoughts.

Sana was right in a way; fantasizing about this relationship for three years may have created an illusion that was now hard to break. Jeongyeon was Jeongyeon when she wasn’t aware of Mina’s feelings – now, for some reason, she became some sort of ideal within reach. Mina didn’t know what to do with herself now that she had her undivided attention.

Maybe she was dwelling too much on stupid things.

Someone knocked on the door then, and Mina’s heart leaped a beat. “She’s here.”

“She certainly is.” Sana mumbled, shifting through channels.

Mina took a deep breath, checked herself in the mirror one more time, and opened the door with a smile. “Hey!”

“Hey,” Jeongyeon’s goofy grin was plastered on her face. “Oh, good, so I didn’t pick the wrong outfit.”

“Huh?”

“I spent a few hours stressing over what I should wear,” Jeongyeon explained with a small blush. “I figured casual chic was the way to go.”

“Does my outfit look casual chic to you?” Mina laughed.

“Everything kinda looks chic on you, to be honest. Must be the ballerina vibe.” Jeongyeon winked playfully, and Mina actually swooned at this. “Is Sana there?”

“Oh, yes,” Mina stepped away and Jeongyeon poked her head into the room with a wave.

“Hey Jeongyeonnie,” Sana replied with a weak smile.

“Wow, are you okay?”

Mina frowned at that, then looked at Sana, realizing for the first time that she looked exhausted. How come she didn’t notice it before?

Was she too absorbed with her date preparation to pay attention to her best friend? The thought hit her hard, because it reminded her of Momo all of a sudden, too. Something gnawed at her stomach.

“Oh, don’t worry about me,” Sana dismissed them with a tiny giggle. “You look great, by the way.”

“Thanks…” Jeongyeon looked concerned, despite her reassurance. “Make sure to rest, okay?”

“I will. Thank you.” Sana smiled softly, and Mina felt terrible for not being the one telling her that.
She should’ve noticed earlier that Sana wasn’t as ecstatic as she normally would be, or that she was in the dorm, in the first place. She usually hung out with her friends from dance class on her free time, but lately she’d been cooped up in their room. Mina was sure her anxiety was what caused it, and felt her heart tightening at her lack of attention.

She made her way to Sana and hugged her suddenly, squeezing the girl tight. “Do you want me to stay with you?”

“No, no, no,” Sana hugged her back. “I mean it. Enjoy your date, I’ll be okay.”

“...I’m sorry, I think I’m being too selfish nowadays.” Mina murmured lowly, away from Jeongyeon’s ears.

Sana sighed in her hair. “You have a girlfriend. You have every right to be selfish,” Then she paused, adding with a teasing tone. “Well, for now, anyway.”

Mina let her go, pressing a kiss to the side of her head. “Take care, okay? And don’t hesitate to call me if you need anything.”

“Promise.”

With one last goodbye, Jeongyeon and Mina left the room, and Sana allowed her shoulders to relax. She didn’t want to ruin Mina’s first date, but she felt incredibly alone. Self-hatred had been crawling its way up her heart ever since her conversation with Joy, and she was too afraid of talking to Dahyun, because she felt like her presence would make things worse. If she was being targeted, the least time Sana spent with her, the better. She wouldn’t put Dahyun in harms way because of her filthy reputation.

Feeling tears pooling up in her eyes, Sana rubbed her face strongly, and grabbed her phone. She wouldn’t call Mina, but there was someone else around that she could talk to. It rang two times, then the person answered. “Momoring? Are you around campus? Can you come over?”

Ten minutes later, there was a knock on the door, and Sana rushed to answer. Momo’s sight was welcoming and Sana immediately crashed into her arms. Momo ruffled her hair. “I’m here.”

Momo never questioned; if Sana or Mina needed her, she’d be there in a flash. It was her first instinct, and even though things had been messy, she knew she’d keep doing it regardless. Momo was strong and kept them safe in a way, and right now it was everything Sana needed.

Without warning, Momo lifted her in her arms, carrying her bridal-style, and Sana let out a yelp. Then she threw her on the bed, lying down with her with a laugh.

“Ya, tell me when you’re gonna do that!” Sana slapped her arm, a strained laughter leaving her lungs as well. It felt nice to be silly for a moment.

“But then you wouldn’t let me,” Momo replied, facing the girl with a dumb grin. Sana loved seeing her smiling – it did wonders to her broken heart. Perhaps it was the nostalgia factor.

“Maybe I would’ve.” Sana replied, hugging her again. She’s always been touchy, specially so when she was feeling down, and Momo was worried.

“Wanna tell me what’s wrong?”

Sana shook her head. “I just didn’t want to be alone.”
“Okay,” Momo didn’t push her. Then, they cuddled for a while.

Everything felt so still; the warmth of the room was comforting and pacifying the turbulent thoughts inside both their heads. Momo stared at the wall as she listened to Sana’s breathing and the low volume of the TV in the back, and caressed her hair. Many things had been happening, and this silent moment felt like a rift in time; like an island floating mindlessly in a limbo, with no direction to go, and no responsibilities to take. Momo kinda wished she could stay there forever.

She looked down after a while and was sure that Sana had fallen asleep. It wouldn’t be the first time she did that with her head buried on Momo’s chest, but she didn’t mind.

“Were you busy?” Sana murmured suddenly.

“Nah, just walking around. Didn’t want to be in the room.”

“Are you and Jeongyeon still fighting?”

Momo paused, pondering. “Kinda. It’s mostly just me.”

“Why are you so mad at her?” Sana asked, and before Momo could answer, she added. “Because Jeongyeon kissed Nayeon at that party and didn’t tell her?”

“That’s… part of it.”

“And the other part?”

Momo sighed. She thought long and hard about this, about exposing herself so easily – it was terrifying, and she suddenly understood why Nayeon did it. For a moment, Momo could see herself building a wall of lies to protect herself from being vulnerable. It was so much easier to keep things in than to let them out.

But if she did that, she’d be a hypocrite.

All she ever wanted was for Nayeon to stop lying and open up to her, and if she didn’t do the same right now, she’d be failing both Nayeon, and her best friend.

So, Momo decided to close her eyes, and let herself fall.

“I’m mad at her for dating Mina.” She confessed, hands sweating.

Sana frowned. “Why?”

“Because,” Momo faltered, and felt her throat closing. Being honest was so hard. But she had to, for Nayeon. “Because, Sana… I like Mina.”

Sana untangled herself from her in a flash and stared at her best friend. Momo felt a single tear running down her face, and just stared back. Sana reached for her cheek, wiping the wetness with a shocked face. “You… like Mina? As in, you like Mina?”

Momo nodded, sniffling.

“But…” There were so many things Sana needed to ask at that moment that she didn’t know where to start. “Since when?”

“I don’t know,” Momo looked away. “I have no idea how it started. It was probably after that stupid party. We… we kissed, you know?”
“Yeah… Mina told me.”

This didn’t surprise Momo. “Yeah. And at first it was because we were both sad, since we thought Jeongyeon and Nayeon still had feelings for each other, but I couldn’t get that kiss out of my head. I’ve thought about it every day. I still do.”

She caught her breath, running her fingers through her locks. “T-then… Nayeon didn’t even remember the goddamn kiss, and Jeongyeon hid it from her, and suddenly fell for Mina, and I… I was so confused, because I wanted her to be happy, so why was I feeling jealous of them together?”

“You’re jealous of them?”

“I am,” Momo let out a strained chuckle, another tear falling. “Seeing them together… It makes my blood boil. Jeongyeon lied to her ex-girlfriend, who still has feelings for her. And now she’s dating Mina without being a hundred percent honest, and I just…” She sniffled. “I guess I never knew how much I’d miss her if I suddenly lost her. All I know is that it hit me hard at the house party.”

The information was a lot, and Sana kept wiping the tears that fell. “Wait, so… you got over Nayeon?”

Momo looked up, trying to stop another flood of tears, but failing. She shook her head, biting her bottom lip. “No. I didn’t.” When Sana frowned again, Momo just sighed. “I love her, Sana. I love Nayeon, and I love Mina, and I can’t… You can’t love two people, right? I don’t know what is going on. I don’t want to lose either of them, but I am.”

She hugged Sana close. “I’m angry at Jeongyeon because I can’t save the two people I’m in love with, but she can.”

Sana let her cry, rubbing her back comfortably as she did so. It was the second time she found herself clinging to one of her best friends as they cried on her, and she felt the urge to protect them from everything. It was funny, how even in her worst shape, Sana managed to love her best friends more than anything. Maybe all she needed was someone to fix, after all.

“I’m sorry,” Momo eventually stopped crying, and let her go, cleaning her face. “I got snot all over your shirt.”

“It’s an old shirt, anyway,” Sana smiled softly. “Don’t be sorry. It’s better to let it out.”

Momo shook her head. “You called me over because you were sad, and I’m the one who cries.”

“You’ve always been a crybaby,” Sana turned around to grab some tissues. “Not as much as Mina, though.”

Momo let out a breathless laugh at that. “Yeah, she’s the worst.”

Sana waited for Momo to blow her nose and recompose herself, while gears turned in her head. What she’d been trying to tell Jihyo at the theater was true, then. Momo was avoiding Mina because it hurt too much to see her being happy with someone else, now that she was aware of her feelings. Her behavior made sense now, and Sana was sure that hiding this from both Mina and Jeongyeon was weighting on her absurdly.

“Why do you think Jeongyeon lied about that kiss?” Sana asked.
“I don’t know… maybe she thought it was a mistake,” Momo sighed, rolling on her back. “She’s an idiot. Nayeon’s never been a mistake.”

Sana looked at her with soft eyes. “You want Nayeon’s happiness above everything else, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And Mina’s.”

“Yes.”

Sana looked at the ceiling, too. “If… their happiness didn’t include you, would you still fight for it?”

“With everything I’ve got.”

Sana closed her eyes, thinking about Dahyun. If her happiness meant Sana not being in her life, she wouldn’t think twice about disappearing from the world. “…You really do love both of them.”

They stood quiet after that, listening to the sounds of steps outside in the corridor and birds in the yard. Momo stretched her hand to touch Sana’s, interlacing their fingers.

“I banged Nayeon backstage.”

There wasn’t a sound for about five seconds, then Sana snorted. Her laughter increased, and her body shook, and small tears flowed down her cheeks, and Momo joined on the laughing fit. Both girls kept laughing for a long, long time, and it sounded a bit like desperation, and relief at the same time.

Maybe they just needed to laugh away the absurdity of everything.

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“Grandma, where are the candles?” Jihyo yelled from the living room, as she looked for them in the cupboard, but to no avail. She was sure they had bought some a few weeks ago.

“Up here, dear,” Mrs. Park yelled back, taking the roasted chicken off the oven. “Careful, coming through, it’s hot.”

Jihyo immediately got up, helping her out. “Give me that, it’s heavy!”

“I’ve got it, go get the candles. We can’t have dinner without candles.”

“Grandma, stop being stubborn,” Jihyo chuckled, managing to grab the tray and place it on the dining table. The old woman just huffed, and returned to the kitchen, and Jihyo followed, still smiling.
She would be lying if she said that she wasn’t looking forward to this dinner, mostly because Sunmi said she would bring wine, and well, Jihyo was really fond of wine and good company. Her grandmother was fond of the drink as well, but that was an exuberant story for another time. Two glasses in and the old lady passed out on the couch with the TV on; Jihyo knew how this dinner would play out. She was excited for a bit of private time with her childhood neighbor, anyway.

Finally, with candles on the table, and chicken and pasta warm and ready, the doorbell rang. Mrs. Park was about to answer it, but Jihyo ran past her, making her grandma mutter something about ‘youth’ and ‘wasting no time’.

“Yes?” Jihyo asked, before opening.

“It’s the mailman,” Sunmi’s voice replied, muffled on the other side.

Jihyo bit her lip, and tried not to laugh. “It’s pretty late for a delivery, don’t you think?”

“We can only deliver alcohol past seven.”

That’s when Jihyo opened the door. “Oh, you didn’t tell me it was alcohol. Now I’m interested.”

Sunmi smiled back, and she had this way of smiling that was both sexy and playful at the same time. “Kids nowadays, only care about booze.”

“Oh, shut up grandma.”

“What was that?” Mrs. Park yelled from the living room.

“Not you, grandma!” Jihyo had to explain, and Sunmi finally broke in a laugh. “Come in, before the food gets cold.”

“Here,” Sunmi gave her the big bottle of wine, and Jihyo thanked her with a jab on the teacher’s ribs. She liked this, when they fooled around like they used to. It was comforting.

Mrs. Park’s face shone with nostalgia and happiness when she saw the woman who used to be the little girl that played with her granddaughter, and they hugged for a long time. Then, she made both girls sit on the table facing each other, and grabbed the pretty wine glasses, absolutely thrilled at the gift. Sunmi poured the three of them a glass, and they cheered with a gulp. Then, they dug in.

The food was delicious as usual, and Sunmi groaned at the familiar taste of Mrs. Park’s spaghetti. They chatted like they hadn’t seen each other in years – which was partially true – and Jihyo couldn’t help but to keep smiling at her grandmother’s face whenever Sunmi told her the smallest details of her now busy adult life.

The old lady yelped in surprise when Sunmi revealed that she was now Jihyo’s professor in college, and smacked her granddaughter’s arm playfully, appalled that she had kept this information from her.

“You never tell me anything about school,” Mrs. Park complained, biting more chicken.

“I do! You’re just always busy with your dramas and reality shows. You never pay attention to me,” Jihyo retorted, and the banter went on for quite some time. Sunmi laughed at the two, fondly. She’d missed this.

Dessert was ice cream, and Sunmi mentioned how much she loved Jihyo’s grandma for the fifth time that night. “I haven’t had ice cream for dessert in what, five years?”
“Is this what living alone does to a person?” Jihyo asked with a smirk. Sunmi just pushed a spoonful of ice cream into the girl’s mouth, and Jihyo pretended to choke.

“It’s like you two haven’t grown up a bit,” Mrs. Park commented casually, eating her way through her second bowl. “I remember how much you used to argue, and push each other around, and cry,” She paused, licking the spoon. “No, wait that was just Jihyo.”

“I didn’t cry,” Jihyo defended herself.

“Yes, you did. You were a crybaby,” Sunmi teased. “You cried until I was forced to lend you my video games. You never returned them, either, I had to walk all the way here to get them.”

“You lived five steps from here.”

“It was at least thirty when I was a kid.”

Jihyo rolled her eyes with an exasperate sigh, and finished her bowl of ice cream. Sunmi took another sip of her wine, smiling with her eyes towards the girl in front of her, and that was when Mrs. Park decided to move to the couch.

Jihyo and Sunmi took the plates back to the kitchen, and Jihyo asked the professor to indulge her grandmother in the living room until she started to snore – it wouldn’t take long, according to her. Sunmi nodded and left with a shake of hips that didn’t pass by unnoticed; Jihyo wondered if she just walked like that everywhere. Probably not, she would have noticed.

With the dishes now clean, Jihyo walked towards the living room again, bottle in hand, and Sunmi eyed her with a grin. The old woman was already sleeping with her mouth open, and Jihyo pointed with her head towards the yard. Sunmi placed a kiss on Mrs. Park’s forehead, and got up, taking her glass of wine with her.

The yard was comfortably warm. A gentle breeze ran through their locks, and Jihyo gestured towards two chairs in the back. They sat down, glasses in hands and cozy sighs. The starry sky above their heads created the perfect atmosphere, and Jihyo allowed herself to completely relax for the first time in weeks. She didn’t even realize how tense she was.

“This is nice,” Jihyo spoke first, a silly grin plastered on her face.

“I think your grandma loves me.”

“She does. Wanna be part of the family?”

“Like that? What happened to romance?” Sunmi took a sip of wine. “The years of flirting, the casual banter, then finally, under the full moon, the confession…”

“I’m gonna actually barf.” Jihyo couldn’t believe this woman. She tried to shove her with her foot, but Sunmi retracted her legs. Jihyo almost fell down her chair trying to reach her, but gave up eventually. Sunmi stuck her tongue out at her, and Jihyo felt like she was ten all over again.

The silence never lasted for long, with Sunmi asking about Jihyo’s life constantly. The student was glad to tell her everything, and it felt freeing to be completely honest with someone. She’s been keeping too many secrets from people lately, because people were closing their hearts to her. Jihyo wasn’t used to walk amongst so many walls.

“And how are your friends?” Sunmi eventually got to the complicated part.
Jihyo paused, then drank more wine. “Terrible. Everything sucks.”

“Oh,” Sunmi leaned back. “I’m listening.”

Sunmi always listened. It was one of the things that attracted Jihyo to her so much.

“Ok,” Jihyo blinked, then took a deep breath. “You know when you leave high school, then you finally think you’ll become an adult, but you don’t become an adult right away? You’re in the first year of college, and you’re in that weird… *transition* between stupid teenager and almost a grown-up. Then you realize that everyone around you is living that transition, so everything is amplified by a million, because you want to talk to actual adults, but there are none.”

Sunmi just nodded, without saying anything.

“Then your second year comes around, and you’re suddenly twenty, and you can finally relax because you’ve matured. Except that only some have, while others are still holding on to that piece of infantility that allowed them to get away with anything.”

Jihyo poured them more wine, and drank.

“And this is the part where things get complicated, because nobody *talks* to anyone. Communication? Overrated. Let’s just… hide our feelings, and get drunk, because no one cares about the shit we do when we’re wasted. Or in love. Which I’m beginning to realize, are very similar concepts.”

“That’s poetic.”

“It’s *dumb.*”

“Your friends are in love and wasted?”

“My friends are *fucking up.* Because they’re in love,” Jihyo finished her cup. “And I wish I was wasted.”

The monologue ended with Sunmi chuckling at the absolute drama, then putting down her glass to formulate a reply. “So, your friends are in love… with each other?”

Jihyo sighed, tired and somewhat relaxed at the same time. “Four of them are caught up in a mess that I’ve been trying to decipher. It’s so exhausting.”

“Have you asked them about it?”

“That’s not how this works.”

“Why not?”

“Because,” Jihyo let her head fall to the side, and stared at the woman. “Pushing them just makes them go farther away. I’ve been trying to get closer, I can’t make my efforts go to waste.”

Sunmi looked at Jihyo for a long moment, then raised an eyebrow, looking absolutely unconvinced. “That’s… incredibly overcomplicated.”

“Yeah,” She chuckled. “It is.”

“You know what’s even dumber?” Sunmi brought her chair closer to Jihyo. “That you’re taking part in all of this.”
It was a fair statement, and Jihyo could see where she was coming from, but there was no way to untangle herself from the whole situation. Nayeon was her best friend, and her feelings for two of her other best friends were tearing her apart in a terrifying way. Nayeon would never admit that she needed help, and Jihyo would never leave her alone, so she felt trapped in a battle of selfish desires from both parts.

“I can’t help it.” Jihyo admitted.

“Hm.” Sunmi eyed her for a second, analyzing. “Did you ever stop to consider that maybe they act like that because you’ve been babying them too much?”

There was a pause, a heavy one, and Jihyo frowned at her, as if that was the most ridiculous thing she’s ever heard. “I don’t baby them.”

“Don’t you?” Sunmi leaned back on her chair. “I’ll be annoying for a second. In my experience as a teacher, students only grow with the right amount of incentive and distance. You compliment them when they do well, you help them when they ask, but that’s the extent of your relationship. You don’t get involved more than necessary, because one: it takes a toll on you, and two: you’re not their mom.”

“I’m not their mom, I’m their friend.”

“Then stop acting like a mom!” Sunmi grinned empathetically, touching Jihyo’s knee gently. “It’s stressing you out. I can tell.”

Jihyo felt her heart doing a little jump at the honest concern, but sighed, averting her gaze. “I can’t leave them alone.”

“You’re not leaving them, Jihyo-yah. But would you really be helping them by damaging yourself because of it?”

The advice was a solid one, and Jihyo knew that she was ultimately right. It felt good to have a mature conversation for once, and she was glad that the wine didn’t have that much of an effect, because she wanted to be sober for this. Talking to an adult was refreshing.

She looked at the hand still touching her knee and bounced her leg up and down, teasingly. Sunmi rolled her eyes, removing herself, but Jihyo’s stare told her to stay, despite the bratty attitude. So Sunmi got up, waving one hand. “Scoot.”

Jihyo slid on the chair, giving the woman a really small space to sit next to her. It wasn’t exactly comfortable, but the warmth of another body willingly pressed against hers made a dam of emotions explode inside of her for some reason. Perhaps it was the absolute lack of affection and love she’d been feeling, but Jihyo blinked hard to stop the tears prickling her eyes from falling.

Sunmi wrapped an arm around her shoulder, and Jihyo allowed herself to be held. “Don’t carry everything by yourself, Jihyo-yah.”

Jihyo sniffled for a minute, closing her eyes and turning around to hug her properly. She buried her face on the crook of Sunmi’s neck, letting go of every thought.

Maybe she just wanted someone to hold her together, too.

“I’m feeling like a toddler,” Jihyo muttered.
Sunmi chuckled, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. “Adults need hugs sometimes, too.”

Jihyo kind of loved how Sunmi still treated her like an equal.

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“This… is harder than I thought,” Tzuyu had been staring at an empty canvas for five minutes now, trying to think of something to draw. She wasn’t good with it, that much she’d made clear already, but Chaeyoung assured her that she didn’t need to paint a masterpiece for this class.

It was an open study session for all students from every course – one of the nice things about being on the first year of their college was that students were encouraged to try a bit of everything, if they were still undecided about which major they’d be taking next year. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu were already sure of their respective paths, but sometimes, they dipped their fingers in other areas. It was important for an artist to have a feel of everything, as the teachers used to say.

“Tzuyu, you can paint a stickman if you want, no one is going to judge you. I brought you here to relax,” Chaeyoung smiled amusedly as she wiped the brush on her own canvas, using her left hand. The task wasn’t as hard as she thought, even if she did miss the accuracy her right hand provided her.

“How do you do this every day?” Tzuyu was genuinely impressed. “Taking photos is easy, the picture is already right there in front of you. But creating something from scratch? There are so many things I could paint.”

“That’s what you’re worried about?” Chaeyoung stopped and blinked.

“Of course! Do I want to paint a flower? Or a person? Or an animal?” Her arm went limp as she faced her friend. “Do you know how many species of animals there are in the whole world, Chaeyoung?”

“Uh… a bunch?”

“Yes! And those are only the aquatic ones!” Chaeyoung was sure Tzuyu was about to lose her mind. “That’s why I didn’t want to be a fashion designer. I can’t even create a stickman; how would I create beautiful clothes?”

“Wow, okay,” Chaeyoung put her brush down and hopped to the side. “Don’t stress over it, okay? I’ll help you. Let’s do this together, how about it?”

Tzuyu almost sniffled, then nodded with a pout. “Okay…”

Chaeyoung sighed. She loved her so much.

“Well, first things first, what do you want to draw? Let’s go for something simple.”

“Alright… simple,” Tzuyu kept in silence for a moment, then groaned. “I don’t know, pick something.”
“Hmm…” Chaeyoung always thought that art should come entirely from within, but she wouldn’t tell Tzuyu that today. “Okay, how about… a field! With some grass, the sky, maybe the sun in the corner there. Some birds?”

Tzuyu straightened her back, lifting her arm again. “A field. I like it.”

Chaeyoung smiled, rubbing her arm gently. “I’ll be finishing up mine, call me if you need some help.”

With a final nod, Tzuyu finally dipped her brush in some green paint, and started swiping it left and right to make grass. Chaeyoung watched for a while with soft eyes; the sight of Tzuyu painting did things to her heart.

She allowed her mind to wander for a moment, imagining the two of them living together and constantly creating things that made them happy; she was sure this dream would forever remain within her.

Chaeyoung’s always been terrified of life. New experiences frightened her to the bone and amplified her anxiety, which she knew wasn’t healthy, but she couldn’t help it – it was how she felt every day. But that didn’t mean she never tried things. Going to college to pursue an art career was one of the bravest things she’s ever done. Coming to terms with her sexuality in high school had also been difficult, but manageable. Each and every trial made Chaeyoung’s heart race, but eventually, she’d pull through.

It didn’t take long for her to realize that the only reason she was able to endure all of life’s challenges was because of the people closest to her. Sana’s guidance throughout her teenage years, Jihyo’s comforting hug when the younger ones told her that they would attend the same college, and especially Tzuyu’s presence in her life were things that Chaeyoung cherished beyond measure. That was why she was willing to go through hell and back for all of her friends – they lifted her burden simply by existing.

And that was also why she would never do anything that could compromise her relationship with them. Chaeyoung would rather keep things to herself than hurt any of them. She liked where they were now; the staleness of their relationship was comfortable, and nobody hated her. She was safe with them, because they felt safe with her.

If Chaeyoung ever confessed to Tzuyu her feelings, there would be a change, and that was why she would take this secret to the grave.

Maybe, deep down, Chaeyoung just didn’t want her existence to bother anyone.

“Chaengie,” Tzuyu’s voice snapped her out of it. “Should the sky be orange? I want to make a sunset.”

“Oh, you can mix the paint and create a nice effect. Here, let me show you.” Chaeyoung took Tzuyu’s brush and their fingers touched for a moment, and she shouldn’t be so conscious of it, but she was. With a light shake of her head, she started painting. “Slowly like this, see?”

“Oh, I got it.”

“Here,” Chaeyoung moved away from the canvas to return the brush, but Tzuyu’s hand enveloped hers, bringing their joined hands back to the painting. Chaeyoung blushed. “Uh—”

“Let’s paint together,” Tzuyu’s voice was low in her ear.
“O-okay. Yeah, sounds good.” Chaeyoung swallowed, trying her best to focus on the art.

Their movement was fluid, slow-paced, and familiar, like their relationship in a way. Despite Tzuyu’s hand being on top of hers, Chaeyoung was the one guiding them; Tzuyu gave her weak hand the much-needed stability. Soon enough, the sky was tinged orange, and the two girls stepped back a little to admire it.

“It’s beautiful.” Tzuyu smiled.

“It turned out well.” Chaeyoung agreed.

She waited for Tzuyu to let her hand go after this, but the taller girl just stood there, still touching her hand, front pressed against Chaeyoung’s back. She didn’t know if she should move or wait for Tzuyu to finish admiring her work, but suddenly she felt her hand being pulled again to the canvas.

“One more thing,” Tzuyu said, cleaning the brush in the water and dipping it in black paint. Then swiftly, with two strokes, she drew two sticks side by side in the middle of the field. “Now it’s done.”

“What are these?” Chaeyoung asked.

“Two people,” Tzuyu put the brush down and wrapped her arms around Chaeyoung’s shoulders, pointing at the picture. “See this tall one? That’s me. The short one is you.”

Chaeyoung felt butterflies in her stomach, and nearly broke right there. She let her weight fall completely against the woman behind her, who would certainly catch her, and closed her eyes; Chaeyoung allowed herself to indulge in this, for a brief moment – she was only human, after all.

“I think that’s my favorite painting yet.”

Tzuyu smiled, looked down, and after pondering for a second, placed a soft kiss to her hair. Her heart was beating fast, and she liked holding Chaeyoung – she’d always loved it. Lately, though, it was like something new was growing inside her, and she felt compelled to be near her longer, and touching her at all times. Tzuyu associated it with the fact that their group had been arguing lately – the thought of losing Chaeyoung scared her to no end. She wanted to be with her, and she didn’t want to let her get hurt again.

It was a new feeling, but it felt familiar at the same time.

“…Chaengie—”

There was a sudden commotion in the room, and Chaeyoung opened her eyes when she heard the rustle. The spell was broken, and Tzuyu let her go too, turning her head at a circle of people who seemed to be growing. The two eyed each other but didn’t move; whatever was going on didn’t concern them.

“What’s happening?” One of the girls in the circle asked.

“Yo, check your Instagram, Chanmi posted something juicy!” Another answered.

Half the room was suddenly on their phones, and Tzuyu raised an eyebrow, looking at Chaeyoung. “Chanmi?”

“No idea.” Chaeyoung replied.
Tzuyu then scanned the place and realized something. “Apparently none of the first years know her, either.”

The study session was opened for everyone despite being intended for first year students, so there were students from all semesters attending it; some wanted to vent by painting, while others just liked to hang around the place after class. Nonetheless, the freshmen looked lost, while the older ones apparently knew exactly what was going on.


“Do you think someone recorded her secretly?”

“I mean, that’s gotta be it.”

“Chanmi didn’t write anything about it?”

“No, she just… posted the audio and tagged her.”

“That’s some bullshit,” Another girl butted in, angry. “She invaded her privacy.”

“I don’t know who’s worse, Chanmi, or whoever recorded this.”

“I hope she takes it down.”

“It’s Chanmi, she won’t take it down until she gets what she wants.”

“And does she want?”

“How should I know? She just messes with people because she can.”

“That’s fucked up.”

Tzuyu’s eyes moved back and forth, trying to understand all of that. She didn’t know why, but her instincts told her that whatever was happening wasn’t good. She would ask Jihyo later about this Chanmi girl.

“Alright, everyone, go back to your paintings, this isn’t time to gossip.” The teacher finally spoke up, and the students slowly returned to their positions. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu exchanged concerned looks, but didn’t talk about it.

The air felt heavy suddenly.

Like the beginning of a huge storm.

Tzuyu grabbed Chaeyoung’s hand.

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens. Thank you for all the support, always, you guys make my day better everyday, seriously <3

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess
Find me on my social media:
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CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/niigoki
It was a beautiful afternoon, with the sun high in the sky kissing both girls’ skins, and the sounds of people and cars now familiar to the girl who grew up in the country. Jeongyeon still refused to tell her girlfriend where she was taking them for their first date, but Mina trusted her with anything. She was sure that they’d have a good time even if they ended up eating at a food truck and chatting for hours.

Mina squinted her eyes at the clarity – she should’ve brought her sunglasses. Not a second after she put her hand up to block the sun, she felt something on her head. Jeongyeon smiled, admiring how her cap looked on her girlfriend. “Wow, it actually matches your outfit pretty nicely.”

Mina giggled, walking closer to her. “But then your eyes will hurt.”

“It doesn’t bother me,” Jeongyeon shrugged. “We’re almost there, anyway.”

“Really…” Mina couldn’t even pretend to be mad at her stubbornness; it was just too charming. She looked down at their joined hands with soft eyes. “So… how did you come to know this mysterious place? Is it somewhere we can do something together, or are we going to walk around? Not that walking around is a bad thing!”

Jeongyeon answered with a laugh. “Calm down, we’ll be there in a minute!” She couldn’t help but think that this eager and curious side of Mina was incredibly cute.

“I’m just asking because I need to learn how to pick places for dates in the future,” she replied casually, as if she wasn’t dying to know, but Jeongyeon just reached for the cap and pushed it down, blocking Mina’s view. She laughed, adjusting it back up. “Hey!”

“We’re here.”

Mina blinked and faced forward, widening her eyes at the building she knew so well. The museum was close to the campus, and every student was aware of its current exhibits. It was a place the professors took all first-year students to visit, and always told them to make sure to come frequently – not because it was famous, but because the founder of the school had also founded the museum. Students of that particular college could always enter for free.

“How did you know I hadn’t visited this exhibit yet?” Mina asked, suspiciously.

“I asked Sana,” Jeongyeon tried to hide a blush. “She told me she was almost sure you hadn’t? I took the chance because it’s such a nice place. Guess I was lucky.”

The fact that Jeongyeon had asked her best friend for a tip on where to take her for a date made Mina’s heart soar, and she tiptoed to kiss her cheek. “I love it, Jeong.”

Jeongyeon’s pulse quickened at the gesture, and she rubbed the girl’s knuckles. “Come on, I want
to show you something.”

They walked in, hand in hand and with happy hearts.

The museum wasn’t big – it had three floors and no elevators, being an old building with not many funds to begin with. The wallpapers looked worn out and dusty, and you could see the markings on the wall where older paintings used to hang. To the usual visitors of the place, this just added to the charm of it all; each and every imperfection was part of the museum’s identity, and the students cherished them.

Jeongyeon guided Mina through corridors and stairs until the top floor, making sure to shield her from the crowd. Mina wondered if she was even aware of her protective nature towards others. Probably not – it made her happy, either way.

Finally arriving at the top floor, Jeongyeon walked slowly through the art pieces, checking each one as if she was searching for something. Mina just followed her, looking around, but without stopping to admire anything in a deeper sense.

Distracted, she ended up bumping into Jeongyeon when she stopped.

“Here he is!” Jeongyeon exclaimed, excitedly.

Mina’s eyes fell on a black and white picture of a man, and underneath him, there was a pair of glasses. She read his name on the wall next to the portrait. “Wim Wenders?”

“Ever heard of him?”

“Can’t say that I have,” She smiled a little. “Let me guess, he’s an underrated European movie director of some sort.”

Jeongyeon turned and looked at her for a silent moment. “Okay, you know what?” She tried really hard to hold back a laugh, but failed terribly. “Yes, he is!”

Mina put one hand in front of her mouth to stop herself from laughing so hard and eventually buried herself on her girlfriend’s shoulder. Jeongyeon rolled her eyes, trying to look upset, but it was impossible with someone like Mina clinging to her for dear life. She waited for the giggle session to be over, then crossed her arms playfully. “You done?”

“Yes,” Mina took a deep breath, and then leaned her head on her shoulder, looking up at her like a puppy—adorable and insistent. “Tell me about him?”

“I don’t know if you deserve it,” she nudged her once, but eventually her film major spirit couldn’t hold back. “But I’ll tell you anyway. Not because you asked, though.”

“Of course.” Mina poked her tongue out in between her teeth and Jeongyeon sort of wanted to kiss her silly girlfriend.

“He’s a German director, and one of my favorites. His movies are... well, very European, for t lack of a better word,” Jeongyeon beamed at the portrait, a passionate look in her eyes. “They’re artsy and maybe kind of boring if you’re not in the mood, but what I like the most about him is the way he sees the world.”

Mina knew she was in for a ride when Jeongyeon spoke without looking at people; it was like something possessed her, and she became incredibly attractive in Mina’s eyes. It’s been like this since high school, and it would remain so in the future. Jeongyeon absolutely loved what she did,
and Mina wished to see her grow into an amazing director one day.

“Before he became a director, he was a painter,” Jeongyeon continued. “But he realized that cameras could depict something that paintings could not.”

“Movement?” Mina tried.

“Time,” She smiled back at her. “He wanted to convey some feelings through film that were not possible through paintings alone, so he started making movies.”

“Wow,” Mina analyzed the picture, checking each and every frown on the old man’s skin. She was always fond of the details. “Chaengie would like him.”

“I think she would disagree with him,” Jeongyeon chuckled. “But that’s not the coolest thing about him. Wenders always says that the frame is the defining factor for everything he does. It’s the starting point. If something is not in the frame, then it’s out, and we won’t see it.”

Jeongyeon pointed to the glasses under the portrait. “And that’s why these are here. It symbolizes him,” She smiled softly. “He likes wearing glasses, because it gives him a frame to look at. I think that, in a way, it makes him feel safe… what’s outside doesn’t really concern him. If he can’t see it, he won’t worry about it.”

The words made Mina think, and she looked at the round glasses in front of them with seriousness. There was something more to all of this; it was like Jeongyeon was exposing her own way of seeing the world, too. Mina knew her, but perhaps not as deeply as she thought – Jeongyeon wore her passions on her sleeve, but locked away the heavy stuff, because she didn’t want people to worry. At least, that’s what it had always seemed to her.

With this monologue, however, Mina was starting to think that this wasn’t quite it. Maybe Jeongyeon was more selfish than she let on – maybe, she didn’t want to burden herself with conflict. This thought didn’t sit very well with Mina.

The feeling of running away and turning a blind eye – Mina was familiar with it.

“Is that why you wear your glasses when you’re filming?” She tried to joke around to get her mind off this for now.

Jeongyeon laughed a little. “…Okay, fine, you got me.” Looking at the photo one more time, she lost herself in thought. “What I wanted to tell you the most, though, is that one of his most famous movies is about a ballerina. It’s a documentary, and maybe… you’d like to watch it together?”

Mina felt incredibly warm all over. “I would love to!”

“Oh, all right then,” Jeongyeon shifted side by side on her feet after a silent moment, a little awkwardly. “That’s really all I had to say about him. I probably let myself get carried away.”

With a calm movement, Mina put a hand on her shoulder to steady the nervous girl, then smiled gently. “I thought it was really interesting. I mean it.”

“Really?” Jeongyeon’s features lit up.

“Really. You know… I’ve always loved how happy you look when you talk about something you love.” The portrait looked more alive now that Mina knew this man’s story, and she gazed down at the glasses with a faint blush. “Even in high school, I was always drawn to this side of you. I thought you should know.”
Mina’s soft-spoken voice got to her; back when they were younger, too. There was something about the way she spoke, with few words but lots of meaning, that made Jeongyeon pay absolute attention to what she had to say. Right now, it was no different, and somehow noticing that made her feel relieved – there’s always been something about Mina that made her stand out in Jeongyeon’s eyes.

She wanted to keep digging deeper, peeling every layer, and accompanying her on whatever journey she decided to take. The extent of those feelings made her giddy, so she pulled Mina into a sudden hug.

Mina giggled a bit, then melted into the embrace, inhaling the familiar perfume she was so accustomed to. She closed her eyes, heart beating rapidly, then almost stopping when she felt a kiss to the side of her neck.

“I adore you, you know that?” Jeongyeon’s muffled voice made Mina dizzy. She could cry.

“Me too,” she replied, and when they pulled back, she had the most beautiful smile plastered on her face. “I adore you, too.”

They paused for a second, and Jeongyeon opened her mouth to say something else, but closed it again. She scratched her neck, averting her eyes a little, and that body language stroke Mina as familiar for some reason. Almost instinctively, Mina simply closed their distance, placing a chaste kiss to Jeongyeon’s lips. Jeongyeon sighed at the gesture, cupping her cheek.

When they parted, she grinned dumbly with soft eyes, then grabbed Mina’s hand. “Shall we continue the tour?”

“Let’s go,” Mina replied, but something was still nudging her gut. Why was Jeongyeon’s body language so familiar at that moment?

She looked down at their joined hands, with Jeongyeon in front guiding her, and that’s when it hit her.

“You’re cute when you’re awkward.”

When she had kissed Momo for the last time in her room – it’d felt like the exact same situation. All of a sudden, a lot of Jeongyeon’s gestures that had always seemed familiar and comfortable, suddenly made sense in her head.

Mina never asked herself when or why exactly she had fallen for Yoo Jeongyeon. She’d always reckoned that feelings didn’t need an explanation, and that the brain could not restrain the heart’s actions – because otherwise, Mina wouldn’t have fallen in love with her friend’s girlfriend in the first place. She’s always been fond of Jeongyeon, but one day this fondness crossed the line into something else, and Mina didn’t have the strength to stop it. That’s how it started, and Mina had always thought that it was pointless to question it.

But now, it was like she found a puzzle piece that she wasn’t even looking for. The guidance, the attention, the carefulness – if Mina had to pick, she’d say that these were the qualities of a person that captivated her so much. And now, she knew why.

Momo’s protectiveness towards her for her whole life made Mina automatically gravitate and feel attracted to this type of behavior.

The weight of the realization was quite jarring.
“Minari?” Jeongyeon’s voice made her look up. “You okay?”

“Y-yeah. Yes. Oh, who’s that guy?” She turned to another portrait, and Jeongyeon smiled again, and began to explain promptly. Mina let out a relieved sigh. There were too many complicated things already going on in her life, and she didn’t need to dwell on the roots of her love for this girl, on top of everything. She just loved her, and that was it.

Still, Mina hated how much of a toll Momo’s absence from her life was taking on her.

They walked around the museum for about an hour, stopping at each and every new portrait. Jeongyeon was always happy to tell her about most of the directors – getting embarrassed when she had to admit she didn’t know much about some of them – and eventually, they got hungry.

Jeongyeon suggested for them to eat lunch at the cafeteria in front of the museum, and Mina happily agreed. They left, throwing a few coins in the fountain by the exit, customary to all students who visited.

Upon walking into the cafeteria, the smell of grilled pork invaded their lungs, and Jeongyeon’s stomach growled. “Okay, definitely ordering some meat today.”

They sat on a table by the window and ordered the same dishes. Jeongyeon teased Mina about copying her, and Mina retaliated saying that it was her fault for having good taste in everything. That struck her ego, and Jeongyeon allowed her to get away with it.

They waited for their orders to arrive, playing footsie under the table and laughing like dumb teens in love. At some point, Jeongyeon stopped to admire the girl in front of her, with a dreamy expression. Mina smiled shyly. “What?”

“Are you enjoying the date?”

“Very much,” Mina tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Are you?”

“As long as you’re happy, I’m happy too.” She knew it was cheesy, and she was sort of expecting an eyeroll or a playful slap, but Mina seemed to genuinely love all of her silly attempts at being a romantic. It was a nice change of pace from the sarcastic back and forth she usually had with her teammates and most of her closest friends.

“You really know how to make a girl feel special, don’t you?” Mina’s tone was gentle.

“I get that a lot,” She wasn’t going to lie. “I just… like to treat people nicely.”

“There’s nice, then there’s you.”

“I guess that was a compliment?”

“It was,” Mina giggled. She paused for a moment, a bit hesitant about her next question, but she figured that knowing more about Jeongyeon was an important step in their relationship. “Can I… ask you something?”

“Shoot.”

“Did you date anyone else after Nayeonnie?”

That took Jeongyeon by surprise. Just by mentioning her name her heart leaped a beat, and Jeongyeon noticed soon enough that she’d been trying to avoid thinking about Nayeon during this
date. Her face brought memories, and a whole lot of baggage from the latest week, and Jeongyeon didn’t want to deal with it while spending time with Mina.

She sighed, playing with the straw of her juice. “I didn’t. I went out with a few girls here and there, but we were mostly just fooling around. Nothing serious.”

“Oh,” Mina didn’t know what exactly she was expecting. “Okay.”

“Does it bother you?”

“No, of course not,” She waved her hands, a faint blush covering her cheeks. For a second, a thought crossed her mind. ‘I wonder if it bothered Nayeon.’ “I just realized that I didn’t know much about your relationships. But it’s okay if you don’t want to talk about it, it is kind of a personal subject.”

“I don’t really mind. It’s not like I have something to hi—” Before she could end the sentence, Nayeon’s drunk kiss flashed in front of her eyes, and Jeongyeon felt her stomach drop. She had almost forgotten about that. “…Hide.” She finished, after an awkward pause.

Mina tilted her head curiously at that, but their dishes arrived at that moment, saving Jeongyeon from a terribly timed conversation.

She planned to tell her, eventually. Not right now, at the very beginning of their relationship; she wanted to enjoy these moments, because she knew they were the best. Everything felt new, and they could fool around in silly ways, and make up with kisses and cuddles. Jeongyeon loved this feeling, and bringing up such an awkward topic to the table right now would ruin that for Mina.

At least, that’s what she was trying to tell herself.

Deep down, Jeongyeon knew that she was running away from this not because she was afraid of hurting Mina, but because she didn’t want to face her own feelings about that kiss.

She’d been ignoring it for weeks.

“This is so delicious,” Jeongyeon munched on her food, once again locking away the dangerous thoughts. “How’s your plate?”

“Amazing. I didn’t know they served such nice dishes here,” Mina politely finished chewing before answering, covering her mouth with a napkin.

They ate in silence after this, and Jeongyeon could feel a shift in the mood. Mina wasn’t dumb – in fact she was the smartest girl Jeongyeon’s probably ever met – so she was starting to feel nervous. The lack of dialogue didn’t sit well with her, and she was about to start a conversation, when she looked at Mina.

She was staring at her plate, really focused on poking the meat with her fork.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Jeongyeon tried.

Mina blinked, facing her again. “I was just… remembering what you said earlier. About Wim Wenders.”

“Oh,” That made her smile. “Did I actually manage to make you interested in an underrated European director?”
“You did,” Mina smiled back. “Good job.”

“I’ve waited my whole life for this one moment…”

Mina just rolled her eyes affectionately, and shifted her attention back to the plate, turning serious again. “What you said… about the way he sees the world. It made me think a little bit.”

Jeongyeon took a sip of her juice. “Yeah?”

“What’s outside the frame doesn’t concern him because he can’t see it, right? And I guess that, from an artistic point of view, it makes sense. But…” Mina didn’t even know why she was so hung up on this, still. She had a need to share it. “Just because you can’t see it, it doesn’t mean it’s not there.”

She kept nudging the meat, rolling small chunks left and right, a tiny frown present. “A framed shot is pretty, but I don’t think he should blind himself to his surroundings.”

The way she said that told Jeongyeon that she wasn’t talking about the director at all. It was almost as if Mina was speaking to herself, in a way – and by proxy, to her.

Jeongyeon let out a nervous chuckle, and that finally made Mina lift her gaze.

“Funny,” Jeongyeon looked out of the window by their side, a melancholic look clouding her eyes. “Nayeon said the same thing.”

She didn’t need to elaborate.

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“Alright, let’s take a break,” Jihyo’s voice boomed through the room, and the sound of people putting their instruments down on the wooden floor echoed around the place, familiar and nice. “Go out and drink some water, we’ll be back to practice in twenty minutes.”

She left the piano after scribbling a few things on her music sheet and stretched, waiting for the rest of the students to leave so she could hydrate herself, too. The orchestra was filled with new students, and Jihyo appreciated the interest on something she loved so much; her expertise when it came to composing granted her the position of Music Club president, as well as conductor in training. Usually, the official conductor guided her through practice sessions, but today they were simply rehearsing for a short period of time; he trusted Jihyo to do the work on her own.

Jihyo moved to sit on the floor with her back to the wall, grabbing her phone with a relaxed sigh. There were no messages on the group chat, but her eyes caught an abnormal amount of notifications coming from her social media. Jihyo usually ignored those – she was quite popular amongst the music majors, and teachers usually sent her new music sheets virtually, so she didn’t feel like something was out of the ordinary.

What did bug her was the Instagram notifications. She hardly ever used the thing, and didn’t have
many people added to her friends list, but she did follow the campus’ main accounts – they usually posted interesting events and schedules in there, not to mention party photos as well. Jihyo was fond of seeing her friends tagged in some of them.

She tapped the screen opening the app, and creased her brow when she saw that lots of people had sent her the same message over and over again.

*Check Chanmi’s post.*

Jihyo rolled her eyes at first, not in the mood for whatever cheap drama was going on at the moment, but searched for her account either way. She didn’t pride herself in following Chanmi; it had been kind of a rite of passage as soon as she reached the second year. Her seniors pretty much stole her phone just so they could hit that follow button, and Jihyo never unfollowed because it was part of school life – do your homework, prepare your assignments, get good grades, follow Chanmi’s weekly drama.

Her most recent post finally loaded, and it was an audio with Sana’s username tagged above it.

Jihyo felt her heart dropping immediately. “Oh, no.”

She hastily reached for her bag to grab her earphones. Once in position, she pressed play.

It seemed to be a discussion between Sana and someone else, clearly recorded secretly, and whoever was talking to Sana had their voice altered so no one would recognize it. It was an elaborate job, and Jihyo griped her phone tightly, enraged at the amount of trouble this woman went through to make others feel like shit.

“There’s been some talk. About you.”

“Talk…? What talk?”

“Just some shit about how you’re dating a freshman. They’re stalking this girl and everything.”

“They? Who’s stalking Dahyun?”

“It’s not like you’re actually dating this girl, are you? She’s just another one-time deal, right?”

“…Yeah. She’s just another one in the crowd.”

That was the end of it. No explanation, nothing. Jihyo stood frozen for a few seconds, heart beating, head spinning, sweat pooling on her collarbones. She tried to make sense of everything that had been revealed on that short audio file.

Dahyun’s name had been mentioned.

Sana’s voice was easy to recognize, and it sounded shaky and filled with worries.

How many people have heard the audio? How many people followed Chanmi?

The entire school probably. She knew how fast things spread.

She was suddenly reminded of the conversation they had right before the Drama Club party, weeks ago.

“Lots of people call me easy, did you know that? Fake, a show off, that girl who slept with the whole Arts Department. I know that I don’t owe people anything, especially my attention. But
“Sometimes I wonder if they’re right. Pathetic, huh?”

Something snapped inside Jihyo. She hardly heard the voice next to her.

“Jihyo-ah, I have a question about this part of the song, can you help me out?” It was one of the freshmen, and usually Jihyo would be glad to help, but right now there was only one thing going through her head.

She grabbed her bag, getting up and running past the boy without sparing him another glance, bolting right out of the classroom with an unrecognizable speed.

Responsibilities be damned.

She had to make sure Sana was okay.

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“Knock, knock?” The door opened slightly, and Momo’s voice was low not to startle the girl inside the dance studio.

“Come in.” Nayeon replied in the same tone, already sitting down.

“Did you kick everyone else from the room, or are we just that lucky?” Momo joked a little, making her way to the middle of the place where Nayeon was waiting for her to join her. She positioned herself in front of the actress, with a respectable distance between their knees.

“I guess no one dances nowadays.” Nayeon replied with a ghost of a smile.

“You’d be surprised.”

They chuckled weakly, then averted their eyes. Nayeon had sent her a text message earlier, asking to meet in the studio, because apparently it was their favorite place to talk things through. Momo had agreed, but now that she was here, Nayeon was starting to regret her decision.

Her heart ached so much whenever she saw Momo’s face – a mixture of absolute love and exhausting pain. She was the one who needed to start this much needed dialogue, but her head was a mess and she couldn’t organize her ideas right.

“Did you eat?” Momo intervened.

“Not yet.”

She turned around and grabbed a granola bar, handing it over. Nayeon took it, thanking her, glad to have something to distract them for a few more seconds. “This is good,” She paused. “Are you dieting again?”

“Maybe,” Momo grinned, guiltily.
“I swear…” Nayeon rolled her eyes, but wasn’t really mad. The banter was nice for a moment, and they could pretend that there wasn’t a huge elephant in the room, but this false sense of security had to end at some point. “We need to talk.”

“I guess we do.”

More silence. For some reason, they ended up laughing breathlessly again, and Nayeon bit her snack. “We’re so bad at this.”

“It’s scary, isn’t it?”

Nayeon just nodded, still refusing to look at the girl in front of her. She scratched the floor for a second, biting her lip. “I’m not upset,” She figured that she could start by answering Momo’s last message. “About what happened.”

“That’s good.”

“But…” She swallowed. “It’s not something that should happen again.”

Momo tried her best to pretend that this sentence didn’t feel like a freezing sword piercing her very heart. “Can I… ask why?”

It sounded so much like a plea, and denying this girl the amount of times Nayeon has denied her was quite frankly unbearable. Nayeon liked to think that she was strong for it, but really, she was just a terrible person. Like a fire in arson – Nayeon destroyed everything on her path, and no one could do a thing to stop it. Not even herself.

She forced the words out. “Because… we don’t feel the same way about each other.”

For a moment, she really wanted to disappear from the world. Nayeon closed her eyes, swallowing hard and waiting for Momo’s broken heart to speak up.

“I know that,” Momo replied. “You’re still in love with Jeongyeon. I understand that.”

Nayeon instantly lifted her head, a confused look on her face. “Wait… what?”

That’s when Momo frowned. “What? Aren’t you?”

“I’m— that’s not what I meant,” Nayeon felt like something was off. “I was talking about you.”

“Me?”

“You like Mina, don’t you?”

This time, Momo was the one taken aback. How could she possibly know that? “How did you— wait, if you were talking about me, then… you think I don’t like you?”

This conversation was taking an unexpected turn, and for once Nayeon couldn’t see where this whole thing was going. When she called Momo, she had a script in her head, rehearsed lines and predictions of what would happen, but suddenly everything had derailed from the main plot, and her first instinct was to try to get it back on track.

“Momo…” She didn’t want to, but she had to ask. They’ve been dancing around the issue for too long. “What do you feel about me?”

And Momo had her doubts about life and school, but if there was one thing she was certain about,
was this.

She stared into Nayeon’s eyes, sitting closer so their knees could finally touch, and let out the one
confession she wanted to say aloud for so long. “…I love you, Nabongs.” She breathed out a
desperate laugh. “I’m so in love with you, I don’t know what to do.”

Nayeon didn’t know why, but her body’s immediate reaction upon hearing that was swell her eyes
with tears. She could feel the water sliding down her cheeks, but she was too stunned to speak, or
even wipe them. She just looked at the woman in front of her, mesmerized, with her mouth slightly
opened.

Momo allowed her to process it for a bit, then reached out to wipe the wetness with her thumb.
Their legs were now pressed against each other, and Momo let her hand rest there, slightly tracing
her fingers against Nayeon’s jaw. She whispered again. “I love you.”

Nayeon hiccupped once; she could feel a weight being lifted from her shoulders, but not entirely.
There were so many questions, so many feelings crashing down on her at the same time, that she
couldn’t fight them all.

Finally blinking, she rubbed her eyes strongly, shaking her head. “You… no. You love Mina. I
saw… I saw the way you looked at her. With— with Jeongyeon.”

This time it was Momo’s turn to get emotional; she blinked multiple times to try and stop her own
influx of tears. “That’s… the complicated part.”

“Complicated…?”

That was really not how Momo planned to confess to Nayeon.

“I’m not—” Before she could even start, Momo felt a sob climbing up her throat. Her lips quivered,
and she looked up, failing to hold back her tears. “I don’t want to lie to you. Because I… I don’t
want you to lie t-to me. N-not anymore.”

Nayeon touched Momo’s thigh, rubbing gentle circles there. Momo sighed heavily. “Can you… be
honest with me, if I’m honest with you?”

Nayeon wanted to keep this promise, and she hated how hard it was for her to accept this simple
request. After struggling for a moment, she nodded.

Momo sobbed again, nodding back, and opened her mouth. It was so hard, harder than anything
she’s ever been through. So, she leaned forward, burying her head on Nayeon’s shoulder. Nayeon
wrapped her arms around her instinctively and they lost balance, falling backwards on the floor.
She dropped her snack, and before Nayeon could ask Momo if she was okay, Momo spoke up with
a muffled voice.

“I love Mina.”

Nayeon froze.

“But at the same t-time,” Momo continued, holding to her tightly. “I love you, too. Somehow, in
some… bizarre, t-twisted way, I just… fell in love with the both of you. Please, please believe me,
Nabongs. Please…”

It was like galaxies crashed in front of Nayeon’s very eyes, and she couldn’t speak. Momo kept
crying on her, her shoulders trembling with each sob, and Nayeon’s only reaction was to look at the
ceiling, completely and absolutely in shock. The dried tears created a trail on her cheeks that seemed to extend to infinity, and this very moment was so fragile that the wrong sentence could ruin everything she fought so hard to build.

But, despite what Nayeon thought of herself, she was still just a girl.

“So… it’s not just me…?”

Momo took her time to calm down, but eventually lifted her torso to look at her with questioning eyes. Nayeon stared back, faces close, and touched Momo’s eyelashes with her index finger, wiping the wetness there.

“I’m not the only one… who’s able to love two people at once…?”

Delicate. Im Nayeon was delicate.

Perhaps it was the tone those words had been muttered, or the absolute bewilderment Momo felt upon realizing that this was Nayeon confessing that she loved her too, but she couldn’t help but to lean in for a soft kiss.

Nayeon closed her eyes, tasting the salt on Momo’s lips – their tears were mingled at this point – and allowed her heart to take what it wanted. It was healing. Momo’s touch, open and vulnerable, managed to ease her pain in a way that she never thought something could.

Her own hand sneaked into Momo’s hair, and she pulled her closer. They kissed slowly, and when Momo licked her bottom lip, Nayeon deepened the kiss with a sigh.

They kissed languidly and with a passion unbeknownst to either of them, and when Momo finally pulled back to lie her head on Nayeon’s chest, she could hear the girl’s heartbeat. It was soothing, and it reminded her that they were alive, despite everything.

Nayeon hugged her tighter, and kissed Momo’s hair without another word.

*And the lonely monster found a friend, just as terrible as her.*

---

Dahyun considered herself a tad oblivious, most of the time. She paid attention to her surroundings as much as the next person, but she wasn’t as perceptive as Mina or Tzuyu when it came to harder, more complex situations.

And it was fine, really. She never considered this a bad trait; it was just how things were. Besides, Sana was clumsy too, and everybody liked Sana, so Dahyun didn’t mind being called slow sometimes. She had her friends, and the people who knew her loved her for who she was. Dahyun The Lame was a title that she’d placed on herself, because it was silly and non-threatening, just like her.

But even though she was oblivious, Dahyun definitely wasn’t dumb. That’s why when she walked
into her next class and saw the scribbles on her usual table, she knew something was wrong.

'Reserved for Kim Dahyun only’

And a lot of obscene drawings accompanying the writings.

Dahyun felt a lump in her throat, and sat down, wiping out the scribbles with an eraser. She heard faint giggles and turned her head quickly to the classroom door, managing to catch two girls running away. Dahyun frowned with a sigh, and scratched her head.

This was bad.

Throughout the whole day, things just got worse.

Walking along the corridors, she could feel eyes on her back, whispers on every corner, laughs, judgements. Dahyun tried to ignore all of that, because really, she couldn’t believe she was being bullied in college. This couldn’t be happening, especially not to her, who didn’t stand out.

Besides, this whole ordeal only made her think about one person, and how fucked up this situation was. If Dahyun was feeling uncomfortable with little things like that, what was it like for Sana, who developed anxiety because of it? She was incredibly popular, so this probably happened to her on a much bigger scale.

Was this why she was avoiding her? Was Sana being bullied?

The thought was too much for her to bear, and Dahyun grabbed her phone. She dialed Sana’s number, first, not really expecting her to pick up. She then tried Momo, to no avail. Mina was last, and finally, an answer.

“Mina-ya?”

“Dahyunnie, hey.”

“Do you know where Sana is?”

“She doesn’t have classes in the morning, today. Try checking our room,” A pause. “Is everything okay?”

“I don’t think it is,” Was all she answered before hanging up, and running towards the building exit. She turned around the corridors, then downstairs, but before she could reach the door, two things happened in quick succession.

First, she saw Chaeyoung and Tzuyu entering the building. The two waved at her, but stopped when they realized that she was in a hurry.

Then, from the corner of her eye, she saw a girl sticking her leg out, right in front of her path. Dahyun wasn’t quick enough to dodge, and ended up tripping, falling on her shoulder with a loud thud. She almost knocked her head on the hard floor, and the pain pulsating along her arm made her feel dizzy.

“Hey!” Chaeyoung’s voice was loud, but Dahyun couldn’t lift her head to see her. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

She sounded angry. The buzzing in Dahyun’s head subdued after a moment, and she struggled to get up with someone’s help. She realized it was Tzuyu by her side, who was both trying to help her
up, and restrain Chaeyoung by her hoodie from jumping the girl who made her trip, who apparently was long gone now. “Chaeng, don’t.”

“She did that on purpose!” Her yells were powerful, and people were stopping on the way to see what the commotion was all about.

“She’s gone, Chaeng,” Tzuyu shifted her gaze from her to Dahyun. “Are you okay?”

“Y-yeah. I’m alright,” Suddenly remembering where she was going, Dahyun started walking again. “I need to find Sana.”

“Dahyun, you should go see the nurse.” Tzuyu tried, but Dahyun was already out of the door. “Dahyun!”

Chaeyoung was still pulling, trying to break free from her grip. “Did you see the girl’s face? Do you remember what she was like? Because I swear, if I see her again—”

Tzuyu suddenly got up, throwing her arms around the tiny girl’s frame, making her snap out of her angry tantrum. Chaeyoung blinked, and her first instinct was to push her away, but when she inhaled the familiar perfume of her roommate, her whole body melted.

“It’s okay, Chaengie. I’m here, you’re okay.” Tzuyu muttered.

The scariest thing was that Chaeyoung couldn’t exactly recall what she was doing for a split second. Slowly, the memories of a girl tripping Dahyun came back, along with the murmurs of the crowd around them. Chaeyoung could feel her hands start to sweat. “Tzuyu—”

“Let’s get out of here.” She let her go and grabbed her hand, turning around and dragging both of them out of the building and into the courtyard.

Chaeyoung was breathing heavily the whole way, ashamed of what she’d done and incredibly anxious at the sudden attention. She wanted to apologize, she wanted to hide, she wanted to disappear, but most of all, she wanted this anger to go away. She was so terrified.

Once they reached a very isolated place away from prying eyes and whispers, Chaeyoung tugged on Tzuyu’s hand. “Tzuyu, I’m— I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean—”

She felt gentle fingers cradling her face then, forcing her to look up into Tzuyu’s loving eyes. She didn’t look disappointed, or scared, or angry at her; she just smiled, closing their distance, and pulling Chaeyoung’s head to her chest in an affectionate gesture. “Shh… It’s all right. You’re all right.”

Her voice was so tender and reassuring that Chaeyoung gripped on her coat strongly, holding onto this girl with everything she had. She was scared. “I’m sorry…”

“It’s okay.”

“I’m so sorry…”

“We’re okay.”

She kept apologizing until the tears came, and Tzuyu kept caressing her hair and comforting her until the tears stopped.

If Chaeyoung needed someone to be her impulse control, then that’s what Tzuyu would become.
Dahyun didn’t realize she was limping until she had to walk upstairs inside the dorm building. Her arm was really hurting now, with the rush of adrenaline gone from her system, but she couldn’t stop. Her mind was clouded with Sana, Sana, Sana.

Arriving at the door, Dahyun lifted her good arm to knock, but faltered. What was she even going to tell Sana? Was she even in a position to comfort her if the girl really was being bullied? If she wanted to be left alone, then wouldn’t Dahyun be bothering her with her insistent advances? She had no idea if trying to force her way into her problems would make her anxiety worse. Maybe Sana should talk to a professional, instead. Should Dahyun give her this suggestion, or should she ask someone to reach out for her? How did Sana’s anxiety attacks even work?

It was so much. Dahyun didn’t know how to deal with all of this; she just wanted things to be okay.

Life was so much easier when all of her friends were smiling at the dumb jokes she made.

“Dahyun?” The voice startled her, and she turned around, gripping her injured arm.

“Jihyo-ah.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I was—” She pointed at the door, then back at Jihyo. “Um. I wanted to see if Sana was okay.”

Jihyo approached her, seriously. “Why? Dahyun-ah, did you overhear something?”

“Huh?” The question was a strange one. “Something like… what?”

This apparently was the answer itself. Jihyo slumped her shoulders, sighing, and wiped her forehead. “Nothing. Never mind,” Swallowing thickly, she put one hand on Dahyun’s shoulder. “Dahyun-ah, can I… talk to Sana, first? Just the two of us.”

It was only at that moment that Dahyun noticed that Jihyo’s breath was uneven and heavy, as if she had run all the way there too. So her instincts weren’t wrong – there was something going on with Sana. “Can’t I join?”

“It would be better if it was just us,” Jihyo smiled sympathetically, and the expression hit Dahyun hard.

She knew that Jihyo didn’t mean to hurt her, but her voice tone made it seem like she was talking to a child, someone unable to help, because the matter was a serious one. Dahyun felt utterly worthless at that moment – so everything she thought about herself was true, then. Her only positive aspect was making people laugh with dumb jokes and stupid face expressions. Dahyun couldn’t help Sana, even though Sana had reached out for her.

Dahyun was no hero; not in this story, and not ever.
“Sure. Okay,” She shot Jihyo a small grin. “I’ll just go. Make sure to help her out, okay?” With that, she turned around, hands in her pockets, whistling a happy song.

She should probably get that arm checked, then.

She didn’t want to burden the others with more problems, after all.

--

“Sana-ya? Open up, please?” Jihyo knocked a few times, waited, and eventually heard the lock turning.

“Hey,” Sana looked the same kind of tired as usual, so that instantly made Jihyo feel a knot in her gut. That could only mean that Sana wasn’t aware of the audio, and Jihyo hated to be the one to tell her about it.

It felt like all Jihyo’s been doing lately was planning, strategizing, observing, and trying to help through complicated meanings. She didn’t want Dahyun and the other two freshmen to know about Chanmi, because it would only pile to their already stressful first year of college. She tried to prioritize her friends’ well-being, so she didn’t do anything hastily.

With Nayeon, she tried to break down her walls gently, but didn’t push her over the edge because she had a musical and commercials to think about first.

With Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu, she had to talk carefully, making sure to not get them involved in matters that would end up distracting them from their school life.

Momo was a free-spirit, so there wasn’t much she could do about her.

Jeongyeon and Mina’s new relationship was refreshing, but not for Nayeon, who still had feelings for her ex-girlfriend. Jihyo didn’t know how to go about that yet.

And Sana was fragile these days, so she had to think of a proper way to tell her about the trouble she was currently in.

Taking care of eight people was incredibly taxing, but someone needed to do it.

“Hey, can I come in?”

“Sure,” Sana let her in, then closed the door, moving back to the bed. “I was watching this new series,” She grabbed her bag of chips. “Want some?”

“No, thank you,” Jihyo sat on the edge of the mattress, rubbing the tiredness away from her eyes. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” Sana munched on her snack. “If you’re worried because I’m in my room and not out there socializing, don’t be. I just decided to have some time for myself these last few days.”
“Right…” Jihyo looked around the room, searching for something, but didn’t find it. “I’m guessing you’re staying away from your phone, then.”

“Yeah, too many notifications. I’m not checking any social media for the time being.”

That was harder than Jihyo anticipated. She fidgeted with her shirt for a while, then sighed, turning around and crawling up to where Sana was leaning against the headboard. They watched whatever was on TV in silence for a bit; the longer Jihyo put this off, the worse it became. So, she decided to be honest, and do it quickly.

“Sana-ya… there’s something you need to see.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s… it’s stupid, but it’s… not good.”

This certainly didn’t help with her anxiety. Sana felt her heart beating out of control from this simple sentence, and gripped the sheets. “W-what? What is it?”

Jihyo grabbed her phone from her pocket and opened her Instagram. “It’s Chanmi. She tagged you in audio post.”

“Audio?”

Jihyo typed in Chanmi’s username, then frowned, fingers freezing over the screen. “…It’s gone. She deleted it.” So that woman just left it up long enough so it could spread and cause some damage; what an absolute bitch.

“What did the audio say?” Sana touched Jihyo’s arm, nervously. “Jihyo-ah, what did it say?”

Jihyo started to worry, so she placed her hand gently on top of Sana’s grip, rubbing her knuckles. “It was a conversation, between you and someone else. They… said there were some rumors about you, and then they asked you if you were dating Dahyun. You said she was…”

“…Just another one in the crowd,” Sana’s arms went limp by her side, and she stared at nothing. “She recorded me. She made me say that, just so she could give that audio to Chanmi.”

“Who?”

It didn’t matter; it was funny, really, how Sana didn’t blame Joy in the least. She knew Chanmi, and she knew the amount of dirt she had on other students. If Joy betrayed her trust like that, then Chanmi must’ve be holding something terrible against her.

But that wasn’t important, right now. All that mattered to her was Dahyun’s name being revealed. People would know – they always found a way to know.

Right then, Sana realized that she had two options. One of them would be the easiest path, and quite honestly it was what she wanted to do the most – she could break down in front of Jihyo and never get out of her room again, failing her classes and just sulking in self-pity for the rest of her life.

The other, much harder, but would save Dahyun from the hell that she went through on a daily basis – Sana would go back to being party girl Minatozaki, kiss the people who wanted to kiss her, and be active on social media and hang outs. She would stop holding hands with Dahyun, hugging Dahyun, kissing Dahyun—
If Sana wanted to spare Dahyun from the entire school ganging up on her, she would have to stop loving her.

Ultimately, she understood what Chanmi did.

She wanted to reassure the campus that Minatozaki Sana wasn’t a person.

She was still a commodity.

“Thank you for warning me, Jihyo-ah.” Sana said after a long pause, getting up. “I need a shower.”

“Sana…”

“I need to be alone for a little bit. Can you please leave?” She forced a smile. “I’ll call you later.”

Jihyo didn’t like this. “What are you going to do about this? Let me help you.”

“You can’t.” Her tone was neutral, lacking any true emotion. “I’ve been dealing with this for a long time. I know my enemies. But thank you for your concern.”

“Sana, you don’t have to—”

“If you see Dahyunnie,” Sana interrupted her. “Can you tell her that I’ll be visiting her dorm later?”

Jihyo was pretty much being forced out of the room, and she couldn’t do anything but comply, despite every bone in her body sounding loud alarms. “…Yeah, sure.”

“Thank you.” Sana pressed a kiss to her cheek then, and it felt weird. “See you later.”

She closed the door, pressed her back to it, and sank to the floor, shoulders trembling with tears, one hand over her mouth to stop any sounds from crossing to the outside. She would allow herself to cry everything she could for now, because once this was done, Sana wouldn’t be allowed to show weakness in front of anyone anymore.

She’d rather give up her liberty than see Dahyun suffer, and she would take every single blow aimed at her.

After all—

Minatozaki Sana is a bad person.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t hate me too much. Just a little, maybe. I’ll be traveling this next week, so no chapter next week! I’ll work hard to deliver as soon as possible. Feel free to send me asks and theories, and all the amazing things you alwasy send me in the mean time!

See you next time!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
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1 year ago

“I can’t believe I got stuck in a room with you,” Momo’s first words upon entering her new room and home for the next years of her life were playful. She smiled lazily, throwing one of her heavy bags on the bed closest to the door, then jumping right beside it with a sigh. “Dibs on this one.”

“You chose me as your roommate, dumbass.” Jeongyeon dragged her luggage across the carpet, laughing.

“Oh, right,” Momo sat up, eyeing her friend. “Because I’m the greatest friend anyone could ever hope for and saved you from the terrible situation of rooming with your ex-girlfriend. You’re welcome, by the way.”

Jeongyeon rolled her eyes at this, pretending not to care for her childish behavior, but deep down, she was extremely grateful. “Whatever.”

She wasn’t going to lie; one part of her, a twisted one maybe, was sort of hoping for the room arrangements to be completely at random – this way, she could have a shot of rooming with Nayeon without being given a choice. Jeongyeon had no idea why on Earth this thought even crossed her mind in the first place, but now things were settled for the better.

“Are you really okay with this, though?” Jeongyeon had to ask, because for as much as she was grateful, she was still aware that Momo would much rather like to have roomed with Sana and Mina on the triple bedrooms available.

The question was met with a pillow being thrown in her direction, and she ducked, her reflexes still good despite being inactive from basketball practice for a few months. “Stop doing this, I hate it.”

“What?”

“Worrying about others all the time. Worry about yourself, for once.” The words were harsh, but Momo said them because she cared. “I told you I’m fine. Besides, with you at least I know this room is gonna be organized.”

“I’m not cleaning up your mess, if that’s what you’re implying.”

Momo shot her a wicked smirk. “We’ll see.”

They ceased their feud to start the arduous task of making the room feel like home. Since Momo had claimed the bed by the door, Jeongyeon put all her clothes on the one by the window near the bathroom. They took a long time discussing which parts of the closet each one would use, how the
bathroom supplies would be organized, and Momo almost knocked Jeongyeon’s dumb anime figures off the shelf.

“We barely have any space, I’m not sharing this tiny desk with Edward goddamn Elric.”

“It’s the only one I was allowed to bring!”

“Jeongyeon take the goddamn figure off the shelf or I swear to God.”

“No, he inspires me.”

After a lengthy discussion that almost ended up in a physical fight, Momo allowed Edward to be placed on the very top of the shelf, where none of them would be able to reach without having to step on a chair, anyway. Momo still couldn’t believe this nerd.

An hour went by, and they were nowhere near finished. Momo put her hands on her hips, looking at her mess, then gazing over at Jeongyeon’s side of the room. Even though both beds were still covered in clothes and shoes, Jeongyeon’s side had a clear pattern. Momo almost felt bad.

Then her phone vibrated, and she ignored everything else, smiling to the screen and typing back.

[Nabongs, 10:11am]

So, I might have brought more clothes than I anticipated

Help

[Momoring, 10:11am]

I’d say I’m surprised but

It’s you so

[Nabongs, 10:11am]

What does that even mean!

[Momoring, 10:12am]

That I know you and I know you brought your entire wardrobe to school

I even told you not to but do you ever listen to me

[Nabongs, 10:12am]

Of course I do!

...sometimes

[Momoring, 10:12am]

<3
Momo couldn’t suppress a chuckle and bit her lip. Nayeon was insufferably stubborn – much like someone she knew – but it added to her charm, somehow. They talked for a long while, and Jeongyeon didn’t bother her about the mess because things got easier to organize without Momo walking around the room like a lost puppy, anyway. In the end, Jeongyeon ended up cleaning some of Momo’s stuff (not that she’d tell her, though).

[Nabongs, 10:36am]

Gotta go, Jihyo is scolding me

Good luck with your roommate

[Momoring, 10:36am]

I got her under control, you worry about yours

[Nabongs, 10:37am]

Yeah…

Thank you Momoring

TTYL, love ya <3

[Momoring, 10:37am]

Love u too ~

Momo sighed, putting the phone away again. She looked at the wall for a bit, replaying the conversation in her head like she’s been doing recently, and feeling happy and weird at the same time. She was glad that Nayeon seemed to be feeling better from the break up – ever since she and Jeongyeon tried to stop talking to each other on a daily basis, Nayeon had been relying on Momo a lot for attention and conversations.

Momo wasn’t one to play games, so she asked Nayeon what was up with that – Nayeon had laughed weakly then, saying that she didn’t want to burden Jihyo too much with her petty problems.

“So you came to me with your petty problems?” She’d asked, with a playful grin. All Nayeon told her was that she felt comfortable talking to Momo about anything. They became incredibly close after that. Now, they texted every day.

It was weird, Momo admitted, seeing Nayeon without Jeongyeon. The two had always been a two-for-one pack, and everyone had to get used to watching them going through their business as two individual people – at first, it was unnerving. Now, however, Momo thought it was for the best. She would be there for Nayeon regardless, and if staying away from Jeongyeon made her feel better, who was Momo to interfere?

“Hey, are you done spacing out?” Jeongyeon’s voice sounded quite distant. “Finish unpacking, I’m getting hungry.”
“Oh. Yeah, right.” Momo blinked, shaking her head slightly, and got back to work.

She had been spacing out a lot lately.

She wondered why that was.

--


“Yeah, just wondering how they were doing.”

“They?” She grinned smugly, and Nayeon rolled her eyes.

“Yes, I’m fully aware that Jeongyeon is her roommate. It’s not like we’re suddenly not allowed to talk about each other, you know.”

“I know, just teasing you,” Jihyo passed her some creams and lotions that had to go in her bag because they just didn’t fit inside Nayeon’s, and the aspiring actress moved to the bathroom to organize them. “Is Jeongyeon already driving her insane?”

“A little bit,” Nayeon smiled fondly. “She brought her Edward figure.”

Jihyo stayed silent for a second, then let out a loud laugh. “You’re kidding me.”

“She’s hopeless,” Nayeon frowned; there was less space on the sink than she first thought, and not all of her creams were going to fit. “Hey, can I leave some of these on the shelf back there?”

“Give me,” Jihyo opened her palm and Nayeon passed her the two remaining pots. “I’ll put them up here.”

“Thanks.” She walked back to the room and eyed her luggage with quite a bit of despair. “What am I going to do? I really can’t fit all of these in the wardrobe without taking all of your space.”

Jihyo chuckled, putting her sockets in a drawer. “Momo warned you about it, too.”

“I know, but…” That’s when Nayeon pouted, and Jihyo stopped what she was doing to let out an exasperate sigh and an eyeroll. She then moved to Nayeon’s side of the room, grabbed the remaining outfits, and hung them on her side of the wardrobe. “What are you doing?”

“Finding a solution.”

“No, this is your space!”

“I have plenty of space left,” Jihyo smiled back at her. “Let’s just leave it like this until you realize that you’re not gonna be needing all of these clothes any time soon, okay?”

It was a simple gesture, but it made something turn inside Nayeon’s stomach – a feeling, buried so
deeply within her that was barely even acknowledged, but sometimes she could feel it growing little by little. It made her feel terrible, even though it was something so small.

“Hey, text the others, let’s all meet up for lunch after this.” Jihyo kept talking, and Nayeon swallowed, deciding to ignore the feeling.

She sent the message to the group chat and sat on the bed, staring at the wardrobe. All of her clothes took up the space, and Jihyo had to pile up hers in an ugly and uncomfortable manner just so Nayeon could be satisfied.

It made Nayeon feel utterly selfish. Greedy, even, for asking that of her, even though she didn’t, and Jihyo was the one who came up with this solution all on her own.

Still, it didn’t change the fact that none of that would’ve happened if Nayeon had spoken up.

It was a heavy thought.

Jihyo is too kind for her own good.

Nayeon blinked, frowning.

“What’s with the face?” Jihyo asked.

“Oh, nothing.” Nayeon answered, feigning a smile. ‘Just thought I’d heard something.’ She thought. After finishing up, they left the room and met with the others.

Sana complained the whole way about how much she missed Dahyun and the other two babies of the group, and Jihyo tried to calm her down by reminding her that they too would try to pass the college’s exams. Jeongyeon asked Mina how she was feeling now that she had once again moved out of the comfort of her house, and Mina shyly replied that it was scary, but exciting in its own way. Momo and Nayeon walked behind the group, chatting by themselves about pointless things, with Nayeon’s arm looped around Momo’s – an unconscious gesture that made her feel calm.

Momo was the last one in line to get food, and she kept watching Nayeon’s back; her familiar movements, the way she stuffed her plate with salad and not much protein, her nervous chuckle when she had to ask someone about where the condiments were because she was a freshman and everything was new. Momo smiled softly at everything she did.

It was like she was a whole new person. It was weird seeing Nayeon without Jeongyeon.

No, that wasn’t quite it.

It was weird seeing Nayeon without someone by her side.

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There wasn’t a big moment, or anything like that. It was just there.
It was after Momo started noticing the little things with an intensity unfamiliar to her – the way Nayeon’s hair fell prettily on her shoulders; her eyes and how well she could express emotions through them; her lips. Especially her lips.

The way Nayeon got extremely popular with the other students from the Drama Club, and how Momo absolutely hated the attention from day one – at the time, she couldn’t place her finger on why.

Then, she understood.

There really wasn’t a big moment, or anything like that. It just made sense in her head, one day.

Momo thought that she hated seeing Nayeon without someone by her side, but she realized that this wasn’t quite it, either.

It was just that she wanted to be that someone.

After that, the feelings just grew out of her control.

She didn’t try to fight them.

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**Present day**

She was in love with her. Momo was utterly, and completely in love with Nayeon, so much that she thought she was going to explode at some point. Now that she had confessed, things seemed a little better – not much, because Nayeon still refused to indulge on her own feelings, but Momo would be by her side, because that’s what she’s always done.

That’s why she was currently waiting for Nayeon to return to their table in the cafeteria, gazing at her fondly in the distance. She’d been stopped by Mr. Kwon on her way back – he probably wanted to talk to her about the commercials – and the way Nayeon smiled made Momo mirror the expression with butterflies loose in her stomach.

She really thought that Nayeon would try to avoid her again after their confession yesterday, but curiously enough, it was like their relationship returned to what it was before. Momo asked if it was okay to hang out with her, and Nayeon agreed, without much fuss. They weren’t dating, and they didn’t kiss again after that, but it was nice to know that Momo’s presence wasn’t a burden like she thought. It was weirdly comforting.

Nayeon bowed to Mr. Kwon after a few moments and walked back to the table, tray in hand. Momo didn’t tear her eyes off her.

“That looked like a good conversation,” Momo tried. Starting conversations recently wasn’t as easy as before.
“It was,” Nayeon replied, sitting down. “He received some feedback from the director.”

“What did he say?”

“They liked my performance. Mr. Kwon said that I might be casted again in the future.” Nayeon smiled a little as she said that, looking down at her salad.

Momo smiled too. “This is so great. I’m so proud of you.”

Nayeon faintly blushed. “Thank you.”

Momo wanted to touch her, but she didn’t. That was the weird line that she didn’t quite know if she was allowed to cross, so they ate in silence. Nayeon complained about the lack of salt in her greens and Momo offered to go grab some, but was stopped before she could even get up.

Momo was very much aware that Nayeon thought she was a monster for being in the same predicament as her – both girls loved two people at once, and while Momo had long accepted it, Nayeon refused to. She was battling against herself, and Momo could only imagine how hard it was for her. So, Momo promised to do absolutely everything in her power to make life easier for her. If Nayeon wanted salt, she would go get it – unless she asked Momo not to do it. Then Momo would obey.

Nayeon could ask her anything at this point, and Momo would do it without a second thought. She was the enchanted rose, fragile and wilting – and Momo was the Beast, ready to protect her from the world.

Even if what she was protecting was the object of her demise.

The nice and quiet lunch was interrupted by a few loud mumbles here and there, and Momo lifted her head up to see what the commotion was all about. She noticed that the majority of people were looking in the same direction, and her heart leaped a beat when she saw the target of their attention. Jeongyeon and Mina had just entered the cafeteria, hand in hand as usual, all smiles and loving eyes at each other. Momo knew them, and she was painfully aware of how dense they usually were, even before dating. Now that apparently nothing but each other mattered, things just got worse. People gossiped, and Momo was afraid of what their reaction would be if they ever caught wind of the envious words others shot them.

“No one can mind their goddamn business.” Nayeon’s voice made Momo turn back to her. She had also noticed the stares and ill-intentioned whispers and was fuming.

“Pathetic lives for pathetic people.” Was all Momo answered, trying to get back to her lunch.

“They’re so oblivious to it, too.” Nayeon sounded sad. “Jeongyeon and Mina.”

“They’re just… too happy to care, I guess.”

“They don’t deserve any of this.” The way Nayeon trailed off made Momo believe that she wanted to say something else. She waited, and soon enough Nayeon lowered her voice. “I’m worried.”

“Jeongyeon is stronger than she looks.”

“Not about her.” She didn’t have to elaborate, because the terrible feeling in Momo’s gut was definitely not related to Jeongyeon at all. She looked back at the food line and saw Mina’s smile, and her chest tightened.
Mina was frail, never stood out, and would not be able to handle the attention she was slowly garnering by dating Yoo Jeongyeon if things got out of hand. Momo wanted to believe that she would be okay, that Jeongyeon would protect her, but her instincts spoke louder, and she was constantly alarmed whenever Mina was in the vicinity.

Much like when she first realized she’d fallen for Nayeon, Momo wanted to be the one by Mina’s side at that moment. She hated the thought and forced herself to get her mind off it, poking angrily at her food. “They’ll be fine.”

Nayeon took the hint and stopped talking about this issue.

What happened next was a blur.

Mina and Jeongyeon had grabbed their trays, but Jeongyeon had forgotten her napkin, and asked Mina to wait for a moment as she returned to the line. Mina stood there in the middle of the cafeteria, waiting for her girlfriend with a soft smile. Jeongyeon soon enough walked towards her again.

For some reason, for a split second, the three of them had their eyes on Mina at the same time; Nayeon because of her worries, Momo because she was unable to keep her gaze off of her for too long, and Jeongyeon because she was returning to her side.

And that’s when it happened. It could’ve been an accident, but putting the whole situation together, it was clear that it was not.

Mina was about to turn around when one girl roughly bumped into her – Mina had strong legs, but the girl clearly had the intention of making her fall, so it was less of a bump and more of a really strong push.

Trying not to fall face-first on the floor, Mina let go of her tray, sticking her hands forward to break the fall. The contents of her plate were dumped all over her, together with her drink. She fell in a crooked manner, scratching her palms and knees quite harshly.

The girl also stumbled over her, making her tray fall on top of Mina as well, hurting her shoulder and dumping even more food on her hair and clothes. Mina yelled at the shock, and the sound of two trays hitting the ground was so loud that the cafeteria went dead silent.

The reactions were incredibly different from one another.

Jeongyeon’s first concern was, of course, checking if Mina was all right, but at the same time she felt anger rising up her chest at the one who made her fall. So, while she crouched to help her girlfriend, she was also ready for confrontation. “Hey—!”

She couldn’t even finish her sentence before someone yanked the girl by her shirt, turning her away from Jeongyeon and dragging her to the corner, slamming her back into a wall. The whole cafeteria gasped in unison.

Momo’s grip on her collar was so strong that the girl had to tiptoe not to lose balance.

“Momo.” Another voice came from behind her. The girl was shaking at this point, but whoever had called for this insane girl holding her had saved her life. She could feel the grip on her shirt loosening, and looked over Momo’s shoulder, only to come face to face with Im Nayeon.

Nayeon knew her. Kim Dahee. She was part of the Drama Club.
“Apologize.” That was the only word to leave Nayeon’s mouth.

Her tone was so cold that it cut through the girl’s very soul. Momo finally let her go, and Dahee slowly walked towards Mina, who was shaking in Jeongyeon’s arms. Her legs were wobbly like jelly, and she really thought that she was going to die for a moment. “I-I’m sorry.”

Jeongyeon stared at her with angry eyes as well, and Dahee waited rooted in place until Mina said something. She was sure that Momo and Nayeon were watching her every move, as well as the entire place.

Mina sniffled, the tears in her eyes still fresh, and just nodded slightly without looking at her. Dahee then looked back at Nayeon, asking for permission to leave.

“Go. And don’t bother coming back to the theater building. I’ll sign your expulsion from the club myself.”

Momo was behind her, much like a guard dog, and the way her shoulders moved up and down with her heavy breathing told her that she better get out of there quickly. Without much else to do, Dahee ran away.

Momo and Nayeon only snapped out of their aggravated state when they saw Mina shivering. They were by her side in seconds, helping clean her up, removing each and every piece of food from her hair together with Jeongyeon. Mina cried quietly meanwhile, mostly from the attention she was receiving, not really noticing her bloody palms. Momo was the first one who saw it.

“Minari, your hands…”

Mina looked at them, and it stung. She didn’t know what to do – everything was so much. People were still looking and all she wanted to do was get out of there. Momo knew that, too.

“Let’s go see the nurse,” She told them, and they all agreed. Jeongyeon put her hands around Mina’s shoulders, and another arm under her legs.

“Hold on, okay?”

Mina nodded, and Jeongyeon lifted her up in her arms, bridal style. Then, they left the cafeteria in a hurry. Nayeon hesitated for a second, but followed them eventually, leaving the audience behind.

Miss Jea didn’t ask many questions – she took care of Mina’s scratches first, applying some medicine and giving her some spare clothes so she could stay there comfortably without having to be wet and cold. Of course, she still needed a bath, but Mina didn’t want to leave the place yet. She was still quite in shock and wasn’t talking to anyone, but being away from the crowd was already a huge relief.

“I’ll leave you be for a moment,” Miss Jea said after bringing Mina her trademark chamomile tea, and Jeongyeon, Momo and Nayeon thanked the nurse in her behalf. Mina drank the warm beverage, allowing her body to calm down and feel the gentle atmosphere.

Jeongyeon kept caressing her arm gently, touching her leg and just generally making sure to be there for her whenever she’d feel like talking. Momo sat close to the bed as well, rubbing Mina’s back, and Nayeon sat on the chair by the door, worried, but relieved at the same time. At least they got out of that situation.

“Is the tea good?” Jeongyeon asked in a soothing and low voice. Mina nodded, and the athlete smiled. “That’s nice. Chamomile, was it?”
Mina nodded again, taking another sip.

“I don’t think I’ve ever drank chamomile tea. I should make some for us, some other time.”

The conversation was mostly to calm Mina down, and Momo kept smiling and nodding at whatever Jeongyeon said. Nayeon looked at the peaceful scene and felt warmth in her chest, remembering the times Jeongyeon comforted her when she was feeling sad. They were nice memories, and for once, watching Jeongyeon being this loving with someone else didn’t hurt Nayeon’s heart. In fact, seeing her caring this much for Mina in a state of emergency made Nayeon feel something that she never thought she’d feel in a situation like this – happy.

Nayeon was genuinely happy for them.

“I would like that,” Mina finally spoke up after a silent moment.

“Yeah? Okay,” Jeongyeon traced the back of her free hand with a finger, slowly. “I’ll buy some tea tomorrow.”

Mina turned her palm upwards; it was covered with gauze, but Jeongyeon took her hand and placed an incredibly gentle kiss on top of it. The corner of Mina’s mouth turned upwards slightly at the gesture. It was romantic, and very much Jeongyeon, and she felt her heart skip a beat or two.

Then, Mina turned to Momo, who was still rubbing her back, but without saying much. “Thank you for standing up to me.”

Momo smiled softly. “I told you. I was wired to take care of you.”

Mina felt a rush of absolute fondness for her best friend, and tears swelled up in her eyes again. She put the cup down, shifted on the bed, and threw her arms carefully around Momo’s shoulders, breathing in the familiar scent. Momo hugged her back, burying her head on Mina’s neck. Mina felt so safe.

Momo loved her so, so much.

“I’m sorry.” Mina whispered against her in between a sob.

“For what?”

“I don’t… I don’t know. For everything, I guess.”

Momo sighed, and pulled back, but not too much – just enough to cup Mina’s cheek. At that moment she ignored Jeongyeon’s presence in the room and everything else that had transpired during the last weeks, and just leaned forward, placing a chaste kiss on her cheek, almost in the corner of Mina’s mouth.

The kiss lingered more than necessary, but she didn’t care. She pulled back again. “It’s okay. I just want you to be okay.” She looked at Jeongyeon over Mina’s shoulder. “We all do.”

Jeongyeon nodded. She didn’t know if she should feel some type of way about Momo’s affection now that she was dating Mina, but it just didn’t make sense in her head for her to do so. Momo’s been her best friend for years, of course she would be the best option to rely on in times like this. If anything, Jeongyeon would find it strange if Mina didn’t hug Momo after that.

“You were pretty badass yourself,” Jeongyeon directed her attention to Nayeon in the back of the room. “Did you know that girl?”
“Yes. She’s from the Drama Club.” Nayeon paused. “Or, was.”

Jeongyeon let out a breathless chuckle. “I love how powerful you are.”

And it was silly really, how much of an effect the words ‘love’ and ‘you’ in the same sentence had on Nayeon. It struck her with enough strength to make her feel dizzy. She just smiled back weakly.

“Thank you, Nayeonnie.” Mina said after Momo helped her wipe her tears. “I didn’t process what you did back then, but… thank you for protecting me, too.”

Nayeon didn’t have words for that. She looked at Mina, and Mina looked back at her, and they faced each other for about five seconds, but it seemed like a lifetime. And right then and there, she understood what made people fall for Mina so easily, and something inside of her broke, because there was not a single thing about Myoui Mina that was ugly.

She could not blame Momo and Jeongyeon in the slightest.

Momo’s eyes widened when she saw Nayeon smiling at Mina, too.

“You’re welcome.” Nayeon said at least, then got up. “I need to go. Mr. Kwon called me after lunch was over. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Mina said.

Momo got up as well, hesitantly letting go of her best friend. “I’ll accompany you.”

“No, you should stay.”

“I’m sure the two of them want some private time,” Momo said smiling faintly at Jeongyeon and Mina, then grabbing her bag.

“You don’t… have to go.” Mina spoke slowly. Some part of her, perhaps the memories attached to her childhood, felt completely lost without Momo around to catch her pieces when she broke. It’s always been her, and Mina wanted it to be her, even now. This fact made her feel bad, because she had a girlfriend now – a loving, incredible one.

“I’ll swing by your dorm later, okay?” Momo said, bending over to press a kiss to the crown of her head. “See you, Minari.” Then she shifted her gaze to Jeongyeon. “You take care of her, you hear me?”

“With my life.”

Momo sighed, because she meant it, too.

Nayeon was already outside by the time Momo reached her, and she grabbed her hand to stop the girl from slipping away. There was only one thing Momo wanted to tell Nayeon before leaving. “You don’t hate her.”

Nayeon flinched, her back still turned.

“…You wanted to. But you don’t.”

She hated it. Nayeon hated how much the truths hurt, and how easily Momo could read her – maybe that’s what love did to people, after all.

Nayeon broke free of her grasp, and ran away.
She ran across the field, away from everything, until she was free to speak loudly, tears running down her cheeks. “How could I hate her?”

And for the first time, the voice inside her head belonged to someone else.

*You don’t hate her. You wanted to. But you don’t.*

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To say that Jihyo’s stress was starting to show on the outside was putting it lightly. She was irritable, to the point where she couldn’t even blame it on her period because that’s been over for five days now. All she could do was try not to snap at the students who kept coming to her with questions and doubts about the orchestra – a task harder than expected.

“No, we’ve been through this already,” Jihyo yanked the piano sheet from one of the freshmen’s hands. “It’s a C major. That’s why this part sounds off-key.”

“R-right. I’m sorry, I forgot to write it down…”

“You’ve been forgetting for three *days,*” She slammed the paper down on a table, grabbed a pen and shoved it on the boy’s hand. “Write it down. Now.”

He did so in a hurry, and Jihyo watched with her arms crossed, towering over him threateningly. “In every single page. Go ahead, I’ll wait.”

And she did. She waited until the boy’s unskilled eyes finally corrected all of the notes in all four pages, which took a lot longer than necessary. She had to press her nails against her arms to stop herself from doing it herself; it would just hinder his learning process, and Jihyo was still a responsible senior despite all her problems.

“Is this correc—” He didn’t even manage to finish the sentence before Jihyo grabbed the sheets and checked, eyes scanning the contents rapidly.

“Missed one. Here.” He wrote the note down, hands shaking, then Jihyo nodded. “Good. Now keep practicing, your fingers will eventually correct this note automatically.”

“Right! T-thank you, Miss Park.”

“Jihyo is fine. What am I, an old lady?”

“N-no, that’s not…!”

“It was a joke.” She could see why he thought she was being serious – her eyes looked numbed to the world, and every word coming out of her mouth sounded angry. “Go ahead. Who’s next?”

Then the next freshman walked up to her with his tuba, and Jihyo sighed. She talked to seven other people before one of the teachers interrupted the extra class, telling them to leave the room for the day. Jihyo thanked all existing gods at that moment, and exited the classroom before anyone else,
without sparing her students another glance.

She was so tired.

Her friends were making her tired.

First, there was Sana and her horrible habit of wanting to fix everything by herself by forcing a positive attitude. It seemed that all Jihyo’s friends were trying to fix their problems without anyone’s help. Sana in particular was making her problem worse, however. Jihyo was extremely worried about Sana and what dumb decisions she was about make, but she had no way of forcing her way in. Sometimes she wished she could.

Then there was Nayeon, her best friend and the resident drama-queen. She was the one who was still in love with Jeongyeon, but also apparently loved Momo at the same time. But she refused to accept it, shutting Jihyo out as well. That was a whole other problem that she didn’t know how to solve, because Nayeon was a complicated person despite pretending to wear her emotions on her sleeve. She was an incredibly good liar, and Jihyo quite frankly wanted to cry when she thought about this.

She didn’t want to lose Nayeon. Not her.

But she still felt her slipping away. She wasn’t strong enough to break this well-fortified wall Nayeon had so carefully constructed throughout the years. Jihyo felt like the worst friend in the world.

She swallowed down the lump in her throat and didn’t hear her name being called in the distance at first.

“Jihyo-yah!”

Only after the third time she snapped out of it, and turned around, only to see Tzuyu making her way towards her. Jihyo bit the inside of her cheek; she had to be nice to Tzuyu. She wouldn’t allow her stress to control her like this.

“Hey, Tzuyu-yah. What’s up?”

“I was looking for you,” She stopped on her tracks once she reached her friend in the middle of the corridor. “Are you busy?”

“I was about to eat something and go back to the dorms.”

“Oh. Can I join you?”

Jihyo wanted to deny the company because she was a pile of nerves, but she didn’t have the heart to do so; not to Tzuyu. “Sure.”

They made their way together to the cafeteria to grab a snack, and Tzuyu’s conversation seemed harmless enough. She talked about her photography project and about how excited she was for the new semester, and Jihyo forced weak smiles and nodded, without pressing for more details. Maybe Tzuyu just wanted some company now that Chaeyoung and Dahyun were taking their last class for the day.

If only things were that simple.

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something.”
“Here we go.” Jihyo breathed out without meaning to sound annoyed, but sounding annoyed anyway. She caught her tongue instantly, regretting her decisions. Tzuyu blinked for a moment, taken aback at her tone.

“Oh, if… if you’re tired, we can just talk another time.”

“No, no, Tzuyu-yah—” She felt terrible. “I’m sorry. I’m just… out of it lately.”

“It’s okay.” Tzuyu pondered for a moment. “Do you… want to talk about it?”

“Yes and no.”

Tzuyu stopped walking and Jihyo turned around, confused. Then the youngest grabbed Jihyo’s hand, pulling her into an empty classroom, and sat down on one of the chairs. The setting sun glowed against the walls, creating a nice atmosphere inside the room, and they didn’t turn on the lights because they didn’t need the attention.

“Does it involve Nayeon and the rest?” Tzuyu asked in a low voice despite no one being around.

Jihyo sighed, rubbing her eyes. The way she’d said it was funny and Jihyo nearly giggled. Nayeon and the rest.

“Yeah,” She answered at last, leaning her forehead on her hands. “Everyone’s messed up. Everything is messed up.”

Her voice was shaking and Tzuyu frowned, worried. She placed a gentle hand on Jihyo’s knee.

“What happened?”

And for a moment Jihyo debated if she should tell Tzuyu about Sana and Chanmi’s whole ordeal. She didn’t want her younger friends to get involved in all of this, but they would, eventually. Once their second year arrived, Chanmi would show up in their lives like a plague, and Jihyo thought that maybe she should warn them about it beforehand.

Sunmi’s voice rang in her head, and she almost laughed and cried at the same time.

“That’s… incredibly overcomplicated.”

It really was.

“A lot. I can’t process everything right now, I’m sorry.” Jihyo was too exhausted for this right now.

“It’s okay…” Tzuyu quieted down for a moment, but soon spoke up again, slowly. “I just think that… you should know something.”

Jihyo didn’t like where this was going; she lifted her head up carefully. “…What?”

Tzuyu sighed, looking out the window as if pondering, then turned her attention back to Jihyo. “Yesterday… someone tripped Dahyun. It was this girl I’ve never seen before, and she did it on purpose. Chaeyoung and I saw everything.”

Tzuyu’s blood boiled at the memory, but she kept her composure. “At first, I thought it was just this random girl being an ass, but I had classes with Dahyun today, and there were scribbles all over her table. I saw people laughing, and whispering, too.” She hated having to say the words out loud, because it sounded absurd. “I think… I think Dahyunnie is being bullied, Jihyo-yah.”
And maybe adding Dahyun to the pile was what did it, but Jihyo’s brain flashed all the images of everything that was going wrong at once, and it was too much. Nayeon, Sana, Momo, Jeongyeon, Mina, Chaeyoung, Dahyun; all the people that Jihyo loved the most in the world were in pain.

And she felt utterly helpless.

The weight of it all crashed down on her, and she couldn’t control her emotions.

“Look, I’m trying, okay?!” The words burst out of her and her eyes were brimming with tears. Her voice was naturally loud, and Tzuyu jumped on her seat at the sudden outburst, one hand on her chest. She looked at Jihyo with scared eyes, and Jihyo immediately regretted yelling at the only one who was trying to solve this whole issue with her. “I’m sorry… I’m s—”

She didn’t want to cry in front of her friends.

She didn’t want to look weak, because she had to be the strong one.

Jihyo got up and bolted out of the classroom. She hated what she’d done, but she didn’t want to think about it. Not now. She would apologize properly later.

Her legs didn’t carry her far; in the middle of the corridor, she bumped into someone, who held her by the shoulders.

“Whoa, there!” Sunmi’s voice was familiar and calm. Jihyo looked up, and because she was tired of thinking, she just dove into her childhood friend’s arms without considering the consequences.

She just wanted to be held.

Sunmi didn’t think twice and pulled her into the closest classroom, closing the door. She sat on a chair, pulling Jihyo closer on her lap, and allowed the girl to cry on her without even asking what was wrong.

“It’s okay. Go ahead, let it all out.”

She allowed Jihyo to feel. And that’s what Jihyo did. With her loud voice, she cried, and cried, and cried a little more, holding onto Sunmi’s shirt with everything she had. It felt liberating – crying for the first time on someone who didn’t mind seeing her weak side. Encouraged it, even.

“I’m here, darling. I’m here.” Sunmi pressed a kiss to her forehead and kept hugging her.

Adults needed hugs sometimes, too.

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Sana didn’t know what she was doing, but she knew that she had to do it. She didn’t want to. She absolutely did not want to, but when she thought about Dahyun, Sana discarded everything else, and pressed on.
Sana knew where to find her, too, because she’d been there a few times. The place wasn’t a very well-known spot, but to the likes of Minatozaki Sana, it was open for business 24/7. It was a pretty hidden place in the campus’ courtyard, and the people who wanted to get there had to push away bushes and tree branches and get a flashlight working, because the branches were so thick that they blocked all the light. Eventually, Sana arrived at the location.

Of course, there were students there already partaking on the drugs. Most of them were too high to notice Sana’s presence anyway, so she walked in a straight line with her head held high, and only one objective in mind. Her heart was beating out of control, and her hands were shaking, but she didn’t stop. She couldn’t stop.

And as expected, Chanmi was sitting in the middle of a circle of people. She lifted her head at the sound of steps and smiled upon seeing Sana’s familiar face. “Wow, look who’s alive.”

Sana almost scoffed at this. ‘Alive’ was a compliment. “I am.”

Chanmi got up slowly, rubbed her thighs and stretched her tired muscles, placing the joint she’d just finished rolling on the floor. “If you touch that, you’re dead.” She threatened, then walked up to Sana. “And how can I help you today?”

And because Sana didn’t want to be there at all, she went straight to the point. “Leave Dahyun alone.”

There was silence, and Chanmi raised an eyebrow. Then, she laughed in her face. “I’m sorry, are you making demands at me?”

The smell of weed was disgusting, and some other people in the circle laughed too, even though they had no idea what they were even laughing about. Sana could try to be brave and intimidating, because she knew Chanmi, and she wasn’t scared of what she could pull. They’ve been on the same level of popularity, but for entirely different reasons – Chanmi had the drugs, and Sana had the body. Two things that were in high demand when you were young.

But at that point, Sana was so emotionally drained and incapable of putting up a front, that she simply slouched her shoulders, ducked her head, and muttered, “…Please. Just please, leave Dahyun alone.”

That shocked Chanmi.

Despite every shitty thing she’s done aimed at Minatozaki Sana, Chanmi actually respected her a little bit. She was her one and only rival in that place, and that’s what made things so interesting for her. She toyed with Sana to make her life a little difficult, because she liked the reactions of other people, mostly. And even after all that, Sana still used one of the strongest defenses against Chanmi – she just never cared.

Chanmi was attracted to Sana’s lack of interest, if she was honest. It riled her up in a delicious way, and she thrived on it.

But now there she was, completely submissive right in front of her, and it took all the fun away. “Did you just… say ‘please’?”

Sana nodded, the nails of her good hand digging on her palms nervously. Now Chanmi was angry. “Wow. Out of everyone, I never thought that you would become boring.”

This made Sana’s heart leap a beat, because if Chanmi was angry at her, then she wouldn’t listen to her request. “Just… What do you want me to do? Just tell me, and I’ll do it.”
“What happened to you? You used to be interesting.”

That’s all it took for Sana to understand what Chanmi wanted from her.

She wanted her to go back to being interesting. This way, Chanmi could have her toy back and forget about Dahyun completely.

“Nothing happened to me,” Sana lied. “I was taking a break from all the chaos of the parties. Then you pulled that shit, and now people are looking at me weirdly. Do you have any idea how many girls have been avoiding me because of that?”

Chanmi squinted her eyes a bit, searching for some kind of hint that would give away Sana’s true intentions, but then smiled, apparently convinced. “Oh, was that it? You were just on a break?”

“Yes. Freshmen don’t know about me, so I fooled around for a bit. But now Dahyun obviously knows of my reputation, and I lost her. I’m trying to get back in business here, and you’re making it incredibly difficult for me,” Sana was sure some part of her brain had shut down, because those words were coming out of her mouth automatically. She stepped forward, coming nose to nose with Chanmi. “So, cut. It. Out.”

Each word was met with a jab to Chanmi’s chest, and she looked down at the finger touching her, then back into Sana’s eyes. They stared at each other for a moment, then Chanmi let out a booming laugh again. “Welcome back, Minatozaki.”

This sentence made Sana sick to her stomach, and the sounds of the circle of people applauding didn’t make it any better.

Minatozaki Sana was officially back, and she made sure to announce it to everyone who mattered. She had willingly walked into hell, and she would remain there, if only to keep Dahyun safe up in heaven.

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3 years ago

“Close your eyes.”

Chaeyoung looked up from her sketchbook, then smiled carefully. “…Why?”

“Just do it!”

“I’m afraid.”

“You don’t trust me?” Sana looked at her that way, and Chaeyoung rolled her eyes.
“Don’t you dare give me the puppy eyes, Minatozaki.” She closed her eyes anyway, and Sana giggled, sitting down next to her, and holding her hand.

“Open your palm.”

“You’re not gonna give me a bug, are you?”

“What— ew! No, of course not!”

Chaeyoung laughed then, and did as she was told. She felt something soft being placed on her palm, and Sana’s affectionate chuckle next to her ear.

“Okay, you can open them now.”

She did, and when she saw the bracelet, she frowned, a bit confused. Chaeyoung analyzed it, reading the words in black. “Be proud?”

“It’s a reminder,” Sana explained, softening her gaze. “To always be proud of who you are, and never let anyone tell you differently, or make you feel bad about yourself.”

Chaeyoung felt her eyes watering a bit, and sniffed, rubbing the tears away. Sana teased her about crying, and the tiny artist just shoved her to the side with her shoulder, playfully. They laughed together at this, and Chaeyoung put the sketchbook down on the grass, lifting the bracelet up. “Can you put it on me?”

Sana smiled fondly at her. “It would be my pleasure.”

The rainbow bracelet called for attention, and even though Chaeyoung thought it was pretty, she was a bit hesitant to wear it on a daily basis. She had just come out to her friends, and she was still a bit sensitive about the subject.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to be sad if you don’t wear it,” Sana reassured her. “I just wanted you to have it.”

Chaeyoung nodded, blushing a little. “Thank you, Sana-ya.”

They hugged tightly, and Chaeyoung felt a lot lighter. She was lucky to have someone like Sana by her side, who could guide her so well through this difficult part of her life.

Chaeyoung wanted to be proud for Sana.

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**Present time**

Sana wished she could follow her own advice.
The build up continues. Thank you everyone who comments and gives me kudos! I love you all, thank you for all the love and understanding.

See you next time!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

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Chapter Notes

Here we go. Buckle up, lads, we’re going in.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sana’s avoiding me.” Chaeyoung said that with such a disheartened tone that Tzuyu felt the impact.

The artist had been observing the older girl throughout the day since their classes were close to each other, and out of nowhere, Sana had started to hang out with some old faces that Chaeyoung remembered from days long gone.

They weren’t exactly bad people, but they had their share of popularity, and from what Chaeyoung knew of Sana’s anxiety, she was sure that the last thing she wanted to do was to interact with people who did nothing but call attention to themselves. It was a really weird behavior, and Chaeyoung was incredibly worried.

So, she’d tried to wave from afar to grab Sana’s attention – it had worked, but the moment Sana’s eyes landed on Chaeyoung’s face, she’d averted her gaze, pretending not to have seen her. Sana wasn’t the best person when it came to lying to people she loved, so it was obvious that she was avoiding her presence.

“Are you sure?” Tzuyu asked anyway, because a part of her was tired of more problems. “Did you see something happening?”

“Nothing bad from what I can tell, but… I just know. She’s been so sensitive lately, and now she’s back to being all flirty and chatty? I’m concerned.”

“I see…” Tzuyu poked her food, without an appetite. “I was going to suggest we talked to her, but… I don’t think it would do any good, anyway.”

She sounded especially tired suddenly, and the hopeless affirmation made Chaeyoung frown and shift all her attention to her. “Hey, don’t say that. Let’s just… wait for the classes to be over today and visit her room.”

“I guess.”

Chaeyoung could literally feel the usual glint in Tzuyu’s eyes fading slowly, and she hated it. The girl usually shone with brightness, but now she looked empty, like she was curling into her own insecurities.

She knew that the group had been drifting apart lately, and with Dahyun’s whole ordeal, the situation was getting even heavier. Chaeyoung wondered if her anger management issues were also piling up on Tzuyu’s worries, and for a moment, she hated to be one of the things that made Tzuyu feel this anguished. She wanted to help relieve this burden, somehow.

At that moment, Dahyun returned to their table too, and her demeanor told Chaeyoung that she was also spent. The usually silly trio was a mess of emotions.
“Dahyunnie,” Tzuyu spoke up after the girl sat down. “How are things?”

“Actually, things seemed to have stopped,” Was all she said without looking at them. She munched on her spaghetti, lifelessly. “I guess I’m not interesting enough to be bullied.”

Dahyun was trying to be funny, but she was too exhausted to say that with a playful tone, so it just sounded sad. Chaeyoung clenched her good fist and sighed at the heavy atmosphere.

“And how is your arm?” She asked, before dwelling too much on her helplessness.

“It’s fine.”

“That’s a relief.”

“Yeah,” Dahyun chuckled lowly. “Wouldn’t want to be one more broken bone in the group.”

The three sort of laughed, sort of felt the meaning of the words hitting too close to home, and ate in silence after that.

It didn’t take too long for Dahyun to finally lift her head with a small sigh. Her eyes roamed the room searching for someone, as she been doing lately, and at that exact moment she saw Sana walking into the cafeteria, followed by a crowd of people and laughing with them at whatever gossip they were sharing.

Dahyun’s heart leaped in her chest, because she recognized one or two girls from the group as the ones who had laughed at her after scribbling on her table. She wondered if she should’ve felt angry at this, or even betrayed, but none of these feelings made their way into her heart.

Instead, all she could think about was Sana’s forced smile. Dahyun knew when she was faking something, and even from afar, it was clear that all she wanted to do was get away from there.

“What is she doing…” Dahyun muttered under her breath, so no one could hear her.

A sudden urge made her almost get up from her seat, walk right in the middle of that crowd, and hold Sana’s hand, dragging her away from those parasites, and back into the safety of their group of friends – her home. Sana didn’t belong with those kinds of people anymore. Dahyun wanted to make it all stop.

But she didn’t. She couldn’t. If Jihyo couldn’t help her, then Dahyun certainly would fail, too.

She looked back at her food and ate.

In that moment, Dahyun was sure that she was ready to fight the entire school for Sana, but who was she kidding? Dahyun the Lame wasn’t strong enough to retrieve the ancient artifact from the army of undead. The thought made her shiver – despite everything, she was still turning everything into a joke.

Even if that was one of the qualities that made Sana like her so much.

The corners of her lips turned upwards slightly at the memories. She could feel everything from a few weeks back, when she’d asked Sana to run away with her to the courtyard in the middle of the night, just to show her shooting starts. Things could’ve gone so wrong for both of them, but everything turned out fine. It was the first time Dahyun risked herself like this, and doing crazy things with Sana made her heart race in ways that she wished could last forever. They had enjoyed a nice moment, away from everything, surrounded only by each other and a soft piano melody that
soothed their worries.

If Dahyun closed her eyes, she could feel Sana’s lips on hers, moving gently, the fear of breaking her forever present. Dahyun wished she could’ve told her she was Sana’s to break. There were so many things that Dahyun wanted to tell Sana at that moment but didn’t – the way Sana made her feel, how she thought she had always loved her, but couldn’t distinguish the feeling because for her it just made sense that Sana would be the one by her side, how much she was afraid of losing her. How much she wanted to help her.

If Dahyun could go back to that moment, she would’ve confessed everything. But now, it was too late. She was no time traveler.

“Dahyunnie?” Tzuyu’s voice sounded distant, and Dahyun lifted her eyes, only to frown. Her friends looked blurry.

“How?”

“Why are you crying?”

Dahyun touched her cheeks and felt the wetness there. She let out a breathless laugh. “Huh, that’s weird… I was just thinking about some things.”

She wiped the tears, but they wouldn’t stop coming, and she started laughing hysterically as Chaeyoung rubbed her back and Tzuyu held her hand. “You know, friends… love hurts like a bitch!”

The sound echoed through the place, tears still flowing.

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“Yo, Jeongyeon!” Jae’s voice was recognizable from afar, and Jeongyeon turned around, giving him her best smile.

“Hey.”

“Hey, sorry we haven’t been speaking much,” Jae apologized after catching up to her, and both friends made their way to their next class. “Brian came up with this crazy project and dragged me into being his supervisor, but I’m sure it’ll end up in the trash like most things he does.”

“Maybe he called you because you actually push things forward,” Jeongyeon suggested, and this made the boy think for a moment. After coming to the conclusion that she was most likely right, Jae felt a surge of pride, and smiled smugly the rest of the way. Jeongyeon rolled her eyes playfully, poking his ribs with her elbow.

“So… I heard you found a special someone,” Jae spoke up after a moment of pointless chatter, and Jeongyeon flinched a little, already putting up some walls. After what happened to Mina in the cafeteria, she was wary of everyone who approached her with this topic.
“Yeah… I did.”

“That’s so unfair,” He continued with a sigh. “When will I find a beautiful girlfriend who is willing to star in my lame short movies?”

The question was meant to lighten up the mood, and Jeongyeon relaxed her posture, allowing herself to laugh. She reminded herself that this was Jae, a harmless guy who just wanted to direct some indie movies in the future, like her. He had no intention of harming Mina or herself, and the film major wondered – why was her body tensed? Why did she perceive him as a threat? They knew each other, and she felt terrible for assuming he had bad intentions, even for a moment.

Her conversation with Momo a few days back – when they still talked to each other – resurfaced, and things made sense now.

“You have no idea how popular you are, do you?”

Popularity drew attention, and for the first time Jeongyeon realized how damaging this could be to those she was involved with. Was she being a burden to Mina? But then, what could she do to avoid more problems? Her non-confrontational nature made her want to find a solution that would please both sides, but it was impossible in a situation like this.

She wondered if Mina found this trait of hers annoying; Jeongyeon was certainly starting to hate it.

“…So, are you coming?” Jae asked, and his tone sounded muffled; Jeongyeon blinked, shaking her head.

“Sorry?”

“You didn’t hear a thing I said, did you?”

“Uh… something about class…?” She tried, and Jae rolled his eyes.

“Please focus, I’ll repeat it once,” He pushed a small piece of paper into her hands and Jeongyeon frowned, confused. “Some of us movie majors are throwing a party on Friday for everyone. It’s not gonna be as big as the Drama Club’s, mainly because we’re broke and not as popular, but hey, free booze.”

“I see…” Jeongyeon hesitated for a moment; that party had already caused trouble enough for her. She wasn’t sure she was in the mood for another one.

“Wonpil is borrowing a projector so we can show all of our short movies on a wall! Yours will be there too, of course. Just, you know, for aesthetic purposes,” Jae smiled happily as he revealed the details. “Also, it’s a costume party. The film majors will have to dress up as their favorite directors, and everyone else will come as their favorite movie characters. Just so we can feel more important for one night.”

Jeongyeon laughed at this, truly enjoying the idea. “That’s actually clever.”

“Right? Really, it’s mostly a nerd gathering, I doubt all the ‘cool kids’ are gonna come,” He mimicked air quotes with his fingers. “But I thought it would be nice to unwind from the hardships of having to make a short movie all on our own. So, are you coming?”

There was a moment of silence as the gears inside Jeongyeon’s head turned. She had so much to think about these days, and everything was weighting on her suddenly. Mina, Nayeon, Momo, her friends, her relationship; she wanted to go, but she had to think about the consequences, and
ultimately decide for the best.

“I’ll let you know,” She finally said, because it was a safe answer.

“Please, please come,” Jae pleaded with the worst puppy eyes Jeongyeon’s ever witnessed. “It’s the only film major party we had this semester, and if you’re there we might have more people interested.”

“What am I, an exhibit?” Jeongyeon didn’t like to be categorized like this and snapped at the boy. “I’ll go if I feel like it, Jae.”

“No, that’s not what I meant!” Jae tried to fix it, but Jeongyeon stopped on her tracks.

“As I said,” She walked into class, without sparing him another glance. “I’ll let you know.”

With that, she moved to her chair, sitting down and sighing. Her popularity never bothered her, but now that people she cared about were involved, she was starting to feel the pressure. Jeongyeon buried her head on her arms and closed her eyes, tiredly.

She was still keeping a secret.

A lie.

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“Who’s that?” The girl startled her so much that Chaeyoung jumped on her chair, trying to cover her sketchbook simultaneously, which only caused it to fall on the ground. There was a scurry, but the girl was faster, grabbing the sketchbook quicker than the artist.

“Yeri, give it back.” Chaeyoung tried to reach for it, but her friend was taller.

“Why are you hiding your beautiful art?” Yeri huffed, ultimately returning the object. “I keep telling you not to be ashamed of what you draw.”

“It’s personal.” Chaeyoung whined, putting the sketchbook away, and leaning on her desk again, looking away.

“Every piece of art is personal, Chaengie,” Yeri smiled lazily, leaning on the headrest so she could be leveled with her friend. “It comes from within, therefore, it’s always personal.”

“Nice quote, tell your therapist I loved it.”

Yeri laughed loudly at this. “I will, she’ll be thankful.”

The two girls exchanged a friendly glare, and Chaeyoung sighed. Yeri reached out to play with her hair for a bit, and Chaeyoung closed her eyes, relaxing under her touch.

Yeri was a good girl, and one of her best friends in college; Chaeyoung was glad that most of their
classes were the same. She had this mature vibe despite being a prankster, and Chaeyoung felt comfortable enough around her to talk about her fears and insecurities. Yeri had her share of issues, but that didn’t stop her from being helpful and understanding. Perhaps the fact that she did suffer a lot made her wiser than most.

“Wanna tell me what’s on your mind?” Yeri asked in a low voice while they waited for the professor to arrive.

“A lot,” Chaeyoung replied, humming when Yeri scratched her scalp gently. “People are hard to understand.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I don’t make it easier, either.”

“Hmm, because you’re afraid of what they’ll think about you once you open up.” It wasn’t a question, just a fact. Yeri was good at reading people, because she’d been through most things Chaeyoung’s been through – or was currently going through.

“Yeah,” Chaeyoung nodded, ignoring completely how easy it was to let things like this slip when she was talking to the blonde. She smiled. “I still can’t believe some people thought your poem was better than mine.”

Yeri giggled. “I’m a great writer, okay?”

“I know you are, but I didn’t know you were on that level. I’m still mad.”

“Do you feel betrayed?”

“My partner in crime… betraying me like this…” Chaeyoung murmured, then yawned. The stressful events of the week were taking a toll on her physically, and she felt tired most of the time. Yeri just made things worse by playing with her hair; the girl had magic healing fingers, or something.

“I had to be better than you at something.” Yeri replied.

“You’re better than me in many things.”

“Like?”

“Uh… Dadaism.”

Yeri laughed so hard that she almost choked and Chaeyoung couldn’t help but to join. That particular moment was so silly that Chaeyoung felt tears in her eyes. She wanted to be able to stop worrying about the world and enjoy dumb things like this again without feeling guilty.

“Who was that person you were drawing?” Yeri asked again, once they caught their breaths. This time, Chaeyoung didn’t feel as guarded.

“Someone,” She paused, then stared at her broken knuckles. “Someone I really like.”

“Like her enough to draw her with your left hand?”

“It’s not like I’d be able to capture her perfection with my right hand, either.”

“Ugh, cheesy.” Yeri removed her hand from her scalp, pretending to be disgusted. “I’ll find this
“Girl and warn her about how greasy you are.”

“She doesn’t care,” Chaeyoung smiled as she said that. “She likes me for who I am.”

“Oh, so she likes you back?”

“No, not like that.” Time seemed to slow down every time Tzuyu clouded her mind. “I mean, she likes me, but not like that because she doesn’t know I like her like that. Does that make sense?”

“I know what you mean.”

Silence settled in between the two friends once more, and Yeri cupped Chaeyoung’s cheek, fondly.

“What’s keeping you from telling her?”

She didn’t know what it was, but something happened at that moment. The gentle touch made Chaeyoung feel vulnerable, and a sudden rush of emotions washed over her, making her lower lip tremble. She felt trapped and free at the same time, and the contrast was too much to bear; she needed a constant in her life, something that grounded her and stopped her from being all over the place, and Tzuyu was exactly that. Chaeyoung could feel ropes around her heart, constricting like vines, compressing her chest and making it hard to breathe, because it was so much.

She was much too small for the amount of love inside her.

“…She’s my best friend,” Chaeyoung finally let it out with a raspy voice, because there was only so much Chaeyoung could keep inside for so long. Too long. Since middle school. “I’m in love with my best friend, Yerimmie…”

Yeri brushed her thumb against the small tear there, looking at her with an understanding expression. “It sucks, doesn’t it?”

Chaeyoung nodded, sniffling. Yeri turned around to grab some tissues and handed them over so Chaeyoung could wipe her face. After recomposing herself, Chaeyoung sighed. “Sorry for that.”

“It’s better to let it out,” Yeri smiled. “Can I tell you something from my experience, though?”

“Sure.”

“You should tell her, at some point,” Yeri smiled poking Chaeyoung’s nose. “Because sometimes, all we need is someone brave enough to confess first.”

She let the words sink in deep into her bones, slowly and steadily. Once she realized what Yeri meant, the professor walked into the class, interrupting her realization.

Chaeyoung has never once indulged on this thought, but somehow, the idea that Tzuyu could also be in love with her didn’t seem so farfetched all of a sudden.
It was hot inside the room, and Momo flicked through the channels on the TV for a moment with a numbed expression before sighing and letting go of the remote. Bending slightly to remove her constricting shirt, she didn’t pay much attention to the door opening. Jeongyeon paused on her tracks for a split second at the scene before closing the door behind her.

“Hey.”

Now rid of her garment, Momo turned around to face her roommate. “Hi.”

They stared at each other for a silent beat, and it was impossible not to check Momo’s abs glistening under her sports bra. Jeongyeon averted her eyes walking to her own bed and throwing her bag unceremoniously on the floor. She grunted, burying her head on the comfy pillows, trying to relax for the first time that day.

It sucked, coming back to her room and feeling like a stranger. Jeongyeon liked it better when Momo confronted her about the shit that was pissing her off than when she hid stuff and made the atmosphere so heavy. She wanted to come to her room and share bits and pieces of her day with the friend she liked so much, not feel the weight of unreasonable anger pressing down on her shoulders.

“How’s Mina?” Momo spoke up for the first time in a while, and Jeongyeon widened her eyes, sitting up slowly.

“She’s better,” She replied, carefully. Maybe this was the dialogue they needed so much. “I was going to see her a bit later today.”

Momo just hummed at this, still shirtless and looking at the wall. She wanted to say something more, finally open up about her feelings, but there were so many things to consider, that anything she could possibly say would end up backfiring, somehow.

How could she possibly tell Jeongyeon that she’d had sex with Nayeon backstage? But then again, Jeongyeon and Mina fucked in the studio.

How could Momo confess that she was in love with Jeongyeon’s ex and current girlfriend? But then again, Nayeon was still pining for her, too.

There wasn’t an easy way to start this conversation, and Momo’s head hurt when she thought about it.

“The movie majors are throwing a party,” Jeongyeon remembered the invitation in her pocket and stretched her arm to give the piece of paper to her roommate. “It’s this Friday, if you want to come.”

Momo grabbed it, hesitantly. “I’m not sure if I’m in the mood for parties.” She paused. “Are you going?”

“They kind of need me there,” Jeongyeon confessed. She understood the reluctance, but she really wanted to go. Maybe Jae was right – a smaller gathering with her friends could help her unwind. “I need to ask Mina, though.”

There was a slight rustle in the sheets as Momo got into a defensive position. “After what happened at the cafeteria you want to drag Mina to a party?”

“I’m not dragging anyone,” There it was again, the confrontational behavior. Jeongyeon was getting sick of it. “I’m just going to ask her.”
“If she says she’s not going, will you not go either?”

The question caught Jeongyeon off guard, and she moved to sit properly so she could fully face Momo this time. “I don’t know, probably? Why?”

And it got to her – the way Jeongyeon was never sure of anything when it came to Mina. That’s what made Momo grit her teeth, curl her hands in fists; this goddamn hesitation.

Mina needed someone who constantly reassured her, but that didn’t mean doing everything she wanted, all the time. The type of guidance Mina craved was the one that pushed her limits, challenged her fears and insecurities, because it was only then that she felt in control of herself, and ultimately battled against her demons, in her own way. Momo knew that too well – they argued a lot because of it, but she was sure Mina was a much stronger person thanks to their constant fights.

Jeongyeon wasn’t doing that; she was wavering and afraid of making mistakes, and Momo would’ve laughed if she wasn’t so furious. Mina has already waited enough, and she’d wait longer if she had to. All for Jeongyeon, always for Jeongyeon.

And the most frustrating thing in the world was that Momo simply didn’t know how to control her emotions well enough to explain, in a diplomatic manner, what exactly bothered her about their relationship. There were so many things, and while some were unfair, others were absolutely valid.

She was jealous of them, because she wanted to be the one by Mina’s side – unfair.

She was angry at Jeongyeon’s dishonesty – a valid point.

Momo couldn’t keep holding this lie back. She wasn’t a liar, and Jeongyeon wasn’t one either, so why were they able to look at each other like this while pretending none of them knew anything? Was it all for Mina?

Was it all for Nayeon?

Jeongyeon was supposed to be a good person, not this pile of cowardice. If that’d been the case, at least Momo would trust Mina with her.

“So, you’ll just do everything she tells you to do,” Momo continued, getting gradually more upset.

Their eyes finally met, and there was a blazing fire inside Momo’s, while Jeongyeon’s swirled with an icy storm; they could clash at any minute, and that moment was approaching little by little, every time they decided to exchange words.

“What’s it to you?” Jeongyeon was tired. “I think I know how to talk to my girlfriend, Momo.”

The word spread the flames to the inside of Momo’s stomach, feeding the explosive force that threatened to burst. “Oh, your girlfriend. For how long have you known her? What do you even know about Mina at all?!?”

Jeongyeon automatically got up from the bed, quaking with fury. She didn’t like to be pried open, to have people poking at her insecurities like this. No, she didn’t know much about Mina, but hell, she was trying to. They were in this together to figure out how each other worked – wasn’t this the whole point of a new relationship? To find bits and pieces of your partner that made you fall more and more in love with them each day?

*Or are you doing this to forget about her, Yoo Jeongyeon?* The thought made a cold shiver run down her spine, and she raised her voice.
“I know that I love her,” It was like she wanted it to desperately be true. “And she loves me back, and that’s what matters!”

Momo was on her feet in seconds, too. “You don’t know how to love her, Jeongyeon!”

The sentence struck a nerve, and Jeongyeon yelled back automatically.

“Oh, and you do?!”

Everything stopped. The world stopped, and reality stop, and for a moment, Momo forgot how to breathe. Her face fell, and she was suddenly very aware of how fast her heart was beating. There was adrenaline running wild in her veins, and she almost answered her.

With a dry swallow, Momo didn’t dare to say anything else. She kept staring at the girl who was inches from her and nobody moved for a couple of seconds, the sound of hard breathing taking the room hostage as the two calmed down.

The soundless reaction made Jeongyeon’s gut twist. The kiss Momo had placed on Mina’s cheek back at the infirmary suddenly didn’t seem all that friendly.

Breaking eye contact, Jeongyeon turned around to grab her backpack again, and walked towards the door. “I’m going to see Mina.”

She slammed it on her way out, and Momo bit her lip with enough strength to break skin. The taste of copper invaded her tongue, and she clenched her fists.

It felt like the cocking of a gun.

--

Making her way towards the dance studios was an automatic response to whenever Nayeon was fidgety. It reminded her of Momo, and even if she wasn’t there, the atmosphere was enough to calm her down, even a little bit. Nayeon enjoyed dancing and singing even in the worst moments, and she’d brought her playlist of musicals along to let off some steam. It was better than arguing with her own head – the discussions had become too burdensome lately, and Nayeon felt trapped into her personal hell.

What she didn’t expect to find upon entering one of the empty studios, however, was someone sitting in a curled position against the furthest wall. The girl had her head buried in her arms, with shaky shoulders and wearing the usual dancing uniform.

Nayeon’s eyes landed on her wrist, enveloped in bandages, and her heart nearly jumped right off her chest. “Sana?”

It startled her, and Sana jumped on her seat, lifting her head up. “N-Nayeonnie.”

She quickly wiped her face, which was clearly wet from the tears she’d been shedding; Nayeon plopped down next to her, stopping Sana’s hands from scratching her face raw. “Stop this. It’s
okay, I don’t mind.”

“S-sorry, I’m sorry, I’m—”

“Sana-ya. It’s me.”

This seemed to finally snap her out of it, and Sana finally let her gaze process her person next to her. Nayeon frowned, worried. It was like Sana’s senses were heightened, and she was painfully aware of her surroundings. Whatever was making her alert like this was certainly taking a toll on her.

“Nayeonnie…” The way Sana said her name this time was familiar and fragile, like she could come undone at any minute now. Nayeon brought one hand to her scalp, scratching lightly.

“I’m here, it’s okay.”

Sana let her head fall on Nayeon’s shoulder, sighing. The actress embraced her, and somehow this calmed her down, too. Sana’s always been a ray of sunshine, but now something was clouding her happiness and it just made Nayeon want to fight whoever did this. She almost chuckled – it was like every time her friends were in trouble, Nayeon’s own problems seemed infinitely small. A small part of her still tried to convince her that she wasn’t as selfish as she thought. Nayeon always shut this idea down immediately.

Sana caught her breath again after a while and sat up straight, running her fingers through her hair to tidy up. “Thank you for the hug.”

“You’re very huggable.”

They smiled weakly at each other, and Nayeon couldn’t help but to think how similar they looked. Digging into her memories, she remembered thinking the same thing when Sana congratulated her backstage after her performance. She was already looking beat back then, but now it seemed like things were ten times worse.

Nayeon slid her fingertips along Sana’s thigh until her hand was resting on her knee, comforting and gentle. “What happened?”

Sana laughed breathlessly. “So, you didn’t hear the recording…”

“Recording?”

“I wonder how many of our friends know. Jihyo did,” She kept talking, mostly to herself than anything. “Mina didn’t say anything, but she doesn’t use her social media much. Jeongyeon probably didn’t, or else she would’ve told her. Momo didn’t, either… Chanmi would’ve been beaten to a pulp if she had.”

“Chanmi?”

Despite being the one who brought it up, the name still made Sana flinch. She couldn’t help it; she was never good at keeping her problems in, no matter how hard she tried. She was willing to put up a face around others, but she needed to be alone once a day to cry. Maybe that wasn’t healthy.

Sana didn’t really care. Dahyun was safe.

“Sana-ya, what did Chanmi do?” Nayeon sounded serious, and for a split-second Sana tried to think about her life, and the path she’d chosen for herself, and everything sounded so stupid. None of this
was worth it, those people weren’t worth a single tear, a single frustrated scream from her, and 

yet—

And yet Sana was a hostage of love.

“Nayeonnie,” She talked over the lump in her throat. “Do you ever wish someone would save you from yourself?”

Nayeon didn’t answer her. She shifted her look towards the bandages enveloping Sana’s wrist and touched them slightly, caressing them with the outmost care.

It was rather fitting, Nayeon thought, the way her wound was exposed to the world. It encompassed everything Minatozaki Sana was – open, honest, vulnerable, and yet held together by those who loved her. She’d broken that wrist twice, but both times she’d smiled afterwards. The pain was probably unbearable, and she let everyone know that without pretending, but after crying and screaming, she would laugh and joke about how unfortunate that situation was.

Sometimes, Nayeon wished that others could see her wound, too. She didn’t want to call for help – she wanted to be noticed without saying a word.

Momo has always been good at it.

So good, that she couldn’t help falling in love with her as a result.

“Yes,” Nayeon answered finally. “But I would never let them.”

There was a ghost of a frown in Sana’s features, but Nayeon just pulled her back into another hug, and they stayed like that, hearts beating in sync. Sana returned the embrace, burying herself on Nayeon’s shoulder.

Sana was a clingy person by nature, and Nayeon regretted every single moment in high school that she wouldn’t allow her to be overly-touchy with her. She couldn’t even remember the reason she pushed her away – maybe it had something to do with Jeongyeon. Perhaps younger Nayeon thought that she couldn’t show too much affection to others because that would be cheating, or something.

The thought was enough to make her smile at her stupidity. She’d been missing out on this all her life because of a relationship that would eventually end.

“I’m sorry, I brought the mood down.” Sana mumbled against Nayeon’s neck, and the actress just shook her head.

“I like doing this better than dancing.”

“Liar.”

Nayeon breathed out a laugh. “Yeah. I am a liar.” She could’ve let the sentence float in the air, but something compelled her to continue. “And I don’t know how to stop.”

It was heavy and uncomfortable, but Sana didn’t move an inch. Instead, she kept her head where Nayeon couldn’t see, and their conversation flowed naturally like this. “Do you also feel like a burden to everyone around you?”

“Yes.”
“Even though you’re not,” Sana sighed. “Something… your head keeps telling you that you’re this… bad, terrible person. And at some point, you start to believe it.”

“…Yes.” Nayeon didn’t know who Sana was referring to, at this point.

“I think we need to see a therapist, Nayeonnie.” Sana laughed then, and Nayeon laughed with her too, because it was so damn real, but they both knew they wouldn’t do anything about it. After a long, deep sigh, Sana let her friend go, finally looking into her eyes.

There was an unexplainable rawness in both of them at that moment, and Sana remembered Chaeyoung’s words from a few days back, when she found her all alone in the courtyard. With a soft gaze, Sana smiled despite the redness in her eyes, and decided to do the same for Nayeon now. “I love you, you know?”

It hit Nayeon hard, and she finally broke down, lips trembling with emotion. “…I love you, too.”

The mirrors in the room reflected the two girls, surrounding them with nothing but each other and their demons.

They wouldn’t allow themselves to be loved, but they wanted to. Desperately so.

Sana hope that this simple gesture could keep them moving forward.

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“And don’t forget your homework, you rascals.” The teacher finished the class with a threatening statement before gathering his stuff together with the other students. Mina stretched her arms with a tiny grunt, relieved of the burden of having classes tomorrow, and looked up at the ceiling for a moment.

She always waited for the class to empty out before getting up from her seat; it just made it that much easier to avoid unwanted interactions. She had a few acquaintances in class here and there, but none of them could be called close friends. Two girls bid her goodbye with a nod, and after a few seconds, Mina got up as well.

She barely made it past the door before catching sight of her girlfriend waiting for her, leaning on the wall with arms crossed. Upon seeing her face, Jeongyeon smiled warmly. “Hey, you.”

“Jeongyeon,” Mina approached her, heartbeat speeding up automatically. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, I didn’t have practice today, so I thought I could come and see you.” She stopped, fidgeting with the hem of her shirt for a bit. “…Is it too much?”

“No, of course not!” Mina reassured her, placing a gentle hand on her forearm. “I was just surprised. It was a nice surprise, though.”

Jeongyeon’s features lit up at the reception, and the two started walking down the corridor.
“Oh, also,” Jeongyeon grabbed something from her pocket, handing it over to Mina. “I thought you’d probably be hungry.”

It was a protein bar, and Mina smiled widely at it. “I’m starving.” With one bite, she moaned in pleasure, and Jeongyeon hated to admit that the sound made her shiver a little. “Thank you, Jeong.”

“I got you.”

The walk outside was silent, and it took Jeongyeon a while to realize that Mina hadn’t latched herself to her arm like she usually did. They weren’t even holding hands, and suddenly the thoughts about how the attention might’ve been hurting Mina resurfaced. Jeongyeon bit her lower lip, hesitated for a moment, then asked. “Hey… is everything okay?”

Mina didn’t answer right away, munching on her snack, before swallowing slowly – it was like she was buying time. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m okay.”

“You sure?” Jeongyeon stepped a bit to the side so their fingers could brush a little. “Say… if anyone is bothering you, you know you can tell me, right?”

“No, that’s not—” Mina caught her tongue, then sighed a little. “That’s not it. I don’t know, I guess the events from yesterday are still fresh in my head.”

Jeongyeon licked her lips that were suddenly dry and nodded in frustration. So, that was the problem. Mina was still feeling bad about the whole thing, and Jeongyeon had caused this simply by being the one dating her. She felt angry and helpless, but not at the people who had done this to Mina – but at herself. She should’ve been able to protect her, but she’s done nothing but stall this whole time.

“You don’t know how to love her, Jeongyeon!”

The sentence echoed in her mind, gluing to every nook and cranny of her brain and enveloping her heart with doubt. She hated this. She hated—

“If there’s something I can do to help, tell me.” Was what Jeongyeon ended up saying ultimately, because she always followed the safest route around Mina.

“You already helped me a lot,” Mina didn’t seem to catch the uncertainty of her voice. She nudged her with a chuckle. “I still can’t believe you carried me bridal style in front of everyone.”

Jeongyeon smiled shyly at the memory, and Mina finally leaned fully against her arm. She exhaled softly at the feeling, and reached for her hand, then. Mina intertwined their fingers, and everything seemed to be back to normal.

Maybe Jeongyeon was going crazy for nothing.

They talked about a few more things on the way to the dorms, and eventually Jeongyeon’s thumb brushed against Mina’s in a nervous gesture. “So… I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Yes?”

“My friend Jae approached me today and told me about this party that the movie majors are throwing,” Approaching this subject was harder than she expected. “And, well… since I’m one of them, he wanted me to go.”

“Oh,” Mina looked down. “I see.”
“It’s going to be a small gathering, really. Just movie nerds talking about boring stuff,” Jeongyeon chuckled nervously. “Anyway, I was just wondering if… you’d like to come?”

There wasn’t an immediate answer. Mina mulled over the lack of conviction in Jeongyeon’s voice, finding it unnerving. It was like something had shaken her in some way, and the usual confidence was nowhere to be seen.

Jeongyeon has always been the lead in Mina’s fantasies. She was her ‘princess charming’, the hero, the warrior, and Mina was someone waiting to be saved. Once she grew up, she realized how silly these ideals were. Jeongyeon was just a girl like her, and even though Mina thought she was amazing in every aspect of the word, they were still figuring things out as two people who knew nothing of the world.

Despite this ground-breaking epiphany, Mina still expected to be protected, in a way. She couldn’t help herself – it was what she gravitated towards. And after the turbulent events of yesterday, Mina felt strange, stranger than she’s ever felt.

Having Jeongyeon by her side in a moment of fragility was of course relieving, but something inside of her felt empty. Mina had only realized that this hole in her existed after Momo and Nayeon left the room – at first, Mina associated this with her friends’ absence from her life for the past weeks, but digging deeper, she found something else.

Something much too confusing for her to comprehend, so she ignored it.

“Do you want to go?” Mina answered with a question, taking Jeongyeon aback.

“Well, I don’t have to. It’s not like they’ll kick me outta class if I don’t—”

“That’s… not what I asked,” Mina was still avoiding eye-contact, her pace slowing down as she spoke. “You know you can go and… do things without me, right?”

Jeongyeon stopped walking completely. “Yeah, but… I like doing things with you.” She could feel Mina’s eyes searching for something in her that she wasn’t sure she had anymore, and flashbacks of a failed relationship clouded her mind. “It was probably a dumb question, huh. Let’s just forget about it.”

Mina sighed, and it showed. She was really out of it, and she didn’t want to start an argument over something so superficial. “No, it’s not dumb. We can go.”

“Nah, you’re not comfortable with it.”

“Jeong,” Mina pressed on. “I’m good. You said it’s a small party, right? I wouldn’t mind that. It would be a nice change of pace.”

Jeongyeon got caught in between denying the idea again and just accepting defeat. She decided to go with the latter, walking up to her girlfriend and gently holding her hand again. “You sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Okay, then.” Jeongyeon smiled to break the tension. “It’s going to be a costume party, by the way. The movie majors will go as directors, and you normal people can dress up as movie characters.”

“Normal people, huh.” Mina chuckled a little, too. “I’m not sure I have a costume, though…”

“You can improvise. I can help you out.”
“Okay,” The two started walking again. “Who are you going as?”

“Hmm… I was thinking of someone.”

“Is it, perhaps, the German glasses guy?”

“Wim Wenders!” Jeongyeon pretended to be offended. “And yes, for your information, it’s him.”

Mina laughed louder at this, and it warmed Jeongyeon’s chest. She had her doubts and insecurities, and Momo might’ve pissed her off tremendously, but at the end of the day, Mina managed to soothe her anxieties in ways that made her feel less of a pathetic coward – maybe Mina could be her savior, instead.

“You mentioned that he directed a movie about a ballerina, right?”

“Yeah,” Jeongyeon eyed her suspiciously. “Why?”

“Because I think I have the perfect matching outfit.” Mina poked her tongue through her teeth and it was all it took for Jeongyeon to want to kiss her in the dorms’ hallway.

So, she did, filled with curiosity and lightness.

She was looking forward to the party, now.

--

“Dahyun,” One of her classmates approached her with a piece of paper in hands, all smiles and bright eyes. “Party Friday! Do you wanna come with us?”

“Oh,” Dahyun took the invitation and smiled politely. “Film majors, huh?”

“Yeah, so you just know it’ll be a weird party,” The girl laughed a little. “Anyway, it’s a costume party, so improvise an outfit until then! We’re dressing up as movie characters.”

Dahyun’s first instinct was to refuse since her mood had been shit lately, but her brain made rapid connections and suddenly she realized – if Sana was hanging out with the party kids again, then she would most likely be there, too. This could be the perfect chance for them to talk about all of this without distractions.

If there was one thing those people cared about more than Sana was the alcohol, anyway.

“Okay,” Dahyun stored the invitation safely in her pocket. “I’ll come.”

This was it. Her last shot.

She was rolling that 20-sided die.

‘Here’s hoping for a natural 20,’ she thought.
“Let’s go to the party.”

Momo blinked, stunned, then spoke. “What?”

“You heard me,” Nayeon’s voice sounded determined on the other side of the phone call. “Do you have a costume?”

“It’s Jeongyeon’s party, Nabongs.”

“That’s why I need you there with me.”

‘Why, to kiss her in front of me again?’ was a dangerous thought that crossed Momo’s mind out of childish spite, and she shook her head to get rid of it. She was still human, and her feelings had been all over the place, specially since her argument with Jeongyeon a few hours back – but none of this justified being an asshole to Nayeon. She didn’t even know about the stupid kiss.

“If all you wanna do is get drunk then we can buy some vodka, you know.” Momo tried to talk her out of it, because this idea still sounded pretty dumb.

“That’s not it.”

“Then why?”

Nayeon kept silent, then sighed, creating static through the phone. “…I don’t know. I just have to.”

And Momo would’ve pressured her for details if Nayeon didn’t sound extremely sincere at that moment. It sounded like she had to face her demons one more time – maybe to be able to say goodbye. Being in love with Jeongyeon was hard, but it became a thousand times harder once Mina walked into the picture. Perhaps this party was what Nayeon needed to see the two of them together, and finally accept that she had to move on for good.

And she was asking Momo to be there with her when the time came. She couldn’t possibly refuse that.

“Okay, then.”

“Thank you, Momoring,” She paused. “Bring some cigarettes, though.”

Momo laughed weakly. “Yes, ma’am.”

They hung up, and Momo leaned back on the grass, looking at the setting sun. The breeze flowed through her brown locks and she closed her eyes, allowing herself to feel the air around her. Her limbs felt heavy, like blocks upon blocks of cement had been placed on top of her. Maybe it was the guilt.

She thought about asking Mina if she was going, but decided to let fate work it out. Momo wanted
to let go of the steering wheel for once.

Sunmi threw the remaining pieces of paper in the trash and leaned back on her chair with a loud sigh. Being a teacher was fun and all, until she had to deal with bureaucracies — she’s never been the most organized person on the planet. Being the newest professor at the university, the office cut her some slack when it came to the dealing with the hundreds of e-mails from Human Resources. Sunmi was thankful, but exhausted.

“Working hard today?” Yubin walked up to her with a cup of coffee, and Sunmi smiled thankfully.

“Everyday,” The mug warmed her palms and the smell already made her feel less stressed. “Every time I think I’m getting the hang of this…”

“No one ever gets the hang of paperwork,” Fei chuckled in the back. She had a cup of ramen in one hand and tried to hide behind a pile of books; the professors weren’t allowed to eat in the Teacher’s Room, but they all did anyway. No one ever complained about the smell, and there’s never been one instance where the principal bothered to check.

“You’re doing well enough, though.” Yubin stared at the trash can next to Sunmi’s leg. “The less paper you have on your table by the end of the day, the better.”

“Tell that to Jea! There’s so many sheets of paper on that woman’s table that the trees are gonna beat her ass in the parking lot one day,” Fei replied with a mouthful and everyone laughed.

“She’s a nurse, though,” Sunmi tried to defend her co-worker. “She’s gotta have a file of every student.”

Fei dismissed the thought. “Thank god I decided to take pics for a living.”

“Jea’s been concerned lately, too.” Yubin commented offhandedly.

“Why?” Sunmi frowned.

“She’s worried about the mental health of some students. Said that they’re having problems at school, but refuse to look for help.”

Sunmi’s heart leaped a beat when she remembered the conversation she’d had with Jihyo back at her house, and the way the girl had crashed into her arms yesterday. She wondered if Jea was referring to Jihyo and her friends, or if something else was happening at school that was creating this hostile environment.

“Should we take this to Dean Park?” Sunmi asked, because it made sense in her head for the principal to be notified of the circumstances.

Yubin and Fei both shook their heads in unison. “Nah, it’s probably just that girl acting up again.”
“That girl?”

“Heo Chanmi,” Fei took a sip of her juice before continuing. “A troublemaker. Been around for a while.”

Sunmi found the lack of concern in the other teacher’s voice a tad upsetting. “And… Why hasn’t anyone done anything about it?”

The two older women shared a look, then a sad laugh, and Sunmi felt like she was being looked down upon. She was new at her job, and that probably meant that she didn’t exactly know how the real system worked – she wasn’t sure she wanted to.

“Politics.” Was all Yubin said.

“Politics doesn’t explain why my students have to suffer,” Sunmi thought about Jihyo in her arms, and a protective instinct arose within her. “I’ll need a little more than that.”

“Drop it, Sunmi-ah. It’s really not worth it.” Fei turned her attention back to her ramen, eyes downcast in shame.

“I’m sorry, but this is wrong—”

“Money and drugs,” Yubin interrupted, and the room went dead quiet. “Her parents make generous donations to the school every year. She’s the only reason we have the fancy equipment in the classrooms today.”

Fei eyed the two, waiting for Sunmi’s reaction. The youngest teacher stood still, too shocked to speak. Before she could act on impulse, she gestured for Yubin to continue – she needed to hear the rest of the story.

“And the drugs, well… Let’s not pretend we don’t know what the students do at those parties.”

“And you all think this is right?”

“None of us think it’s right. But it’s not about that,” Yubin sighed, returning to her chair. “It’s about the greater good. If that girl goes down, the school does too. Simple as that.”

Fei nodded slightly, finishing her food with a bitter taste in her mouth. She knew they would have to tell her about Chanmi at some point, but she didn’t expect it to be this soon. Sunmi looked at her defeated silhouette against the low light of the evening, then back at Yubin, and finally let out an incredulous scoff.

Slamming both hands on her desk, Sunmi got up, grabbing her purse and walking past the teachers in haste. Yubin and Fei were startled by the sound, but when they were about to reach out for her, Sunmi was already gone.

She needed to calm down, so she walked fast through the corridors, hoping to not bump into any student who might ask why her face was red. Finally outside, Sunmi inhaled deeply, trying to let it all go. Fei and Yubin’s words hammered against her skull painfully, and she couldn’t believe what she’d just heard.

She loved that school – it was one of the reasons she became a teacher there – and she wanted to defend its reputation with everything she’s got. Now, she wasn’t sure she would be able to anymore, knowing that the principal was practically bribed every year by a family of thugs.
That wasn’t all, either.

Just the thought that someone so toxic was hurting Jihyo and her friends made Sunmi’s chest compress tightly.

Jihyo deserved the world, not this. Never this.

She reached for her phone, but stopped in midair. Sunmi could get in trouble for calling a student in school, even if it was past her shift already. Maybe she should wait until she was sure that no one would be able to hear their conversation.

It was hard. She really wanted to see Jihyo right now, and reassure her that everything would be okay, even if it was a lie.

Jihyo’s smile was such a beautiful sight; Sunmi wished she could protect it, like old times.

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Friday came faster than Mina expected, and she was starting to feel queasy. She’s never had good experiences with parties, as the latest ones so kindly reminded her. She tried to remember that Jeongyeon would be there with her, but that hole inside her kept expanding, somehow.

Mina didn’t want to think about it.

Sana wasn’t in the room when Mina arrived, but there was a note on the desk saying that she was getting ready in one of her friends’ room, and asking for them to meet at the party. Mina felt lonely without Sana around; they used to chat as they got ready to go out, usually arriving late because the conversation was so good that they lost track of time. Now that Mina thought about it, Sana hasn’t been cheerful in a long, long time.

Another thing to add to Mina’s pile of anxiety.

Upon finishing her elaborate make up, Mina heard a knock on the door. She exited the bathroom, checked herself out on the mirror again, then opened the door with a soft grin.

Seeing Jeongyeon’s outfit made her heart jump. “Woah.”

“Woah?” Jeongyeon asked, a blush visible on her cheeks. “I should be saying that.”

Jeongyeon was wearing a black turtle neck, gray baggy pants and her glasses. Her hair was ruffled and messy, and she looked like she’d just woken up. Her make up was light, but complemented the look incredibly well; there really was an indie director vibe to this whole outfit.

Mina, on the other hand was—


“The ballerina outfit is the only costume I have,” Mina replied, pulling Jeongyeon inside the room
and closing the door again. She smiled, licking her red-stained lips. “I told you we could match.”
“I could’ve dressed up as Aronofsky, instead.”

“Who?”

Jeongyeon rolled her eyes, playfully. “The director of Black Swan, dumb-dumb.”
Mina chuckled. “I know, I’m teasing you.”

Mina’s knowledge was an incredible turn-on, if Jeongyeon was to be honest with herself.

“Although, I do admit I don’t know what he looks like,” Mina couldn’t help leaning closer, and finished her sentence in a whisper. “I like you as German glasses guy way better, anyway.”
Their lips brushed, and Jeongyeon could feel the blood rushing to her face.

“Wim Wenders,” She had to whisper before claiming Mina’s mouth in a deep, sensual kiss. Mina melted against the girl, pulling on her turtleneck slightly. For a moment she stopped thinking, and just enjoyed this, as it was meant to be. The doubts clouding her mind floated away as she tasted Jeongyeon’s tongue, and it felt right.

The kiss finished with both a little breathless, and Jeongyeon laughed at the smeared lipstick.

“You’re way worse than me,” Mina replied, brushing her thumb on the corner of her mouth. “Let me tidy up, and we can go.”

Jeongyeon wiped the excess lipstick from her own lips, and soon enough they were ready to go. Hand in hand, the two enjoyed the walk outside, with giddy hearts.

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The small gathering turned out to be a lot bigger than any of them thought it would be. Sure, the number of people didn’t even compare to the Drama Club’s party, but it was rather crowded nonetheless. Momo had no idea what even prompted all these people to go; most of them weren’t even dressed properly.

“I’m Tom Hanks in that one movie,” Seemed to be the majority of costumes. The excuses got worse as Momo greeted more and more people, and she couldn’t help but to roll her eyes shamelessly to most of them. None of these people mattered, anyway.

She needed to find Nayeon.

They were supposed to go together, but Nayeon had messaged her to go first – Mr. Kwon had apparently requested her assistance for something. So, Momo had decided to walk into the place and grab some drinks. If there was one thing she didn’t want to be tonight, was sober.

Now, Nayeon was waiting outside, and Momo was making her way through the crowd to meet her.
After almost dropping her cup twice, she finally made it outside and smiled immediately at the sight of her friend.

“Hey, sweetie. Come here often?” Momo slid into her view and Nayeon eyed her from top to bottom before smirking back.

“Hell no,” She reached for Momo’s cup, stealing it from her hand and gulping all of it down. Her face constricted in disgust at the unexpected taste. “Ugh, what the hell is this?”

“I have no idea,” Momo laughed. “Vodka, maybe?”

“Whatever it is, I need more. Come on.” Nayeon grabbed Momo’s hand, and they dived into the party once again.

The song was loud, and people danced anywhere they wanted. Momo sort of liked this environment; it stopped her from thinking. All she wanted to focus on today was Nayeon and her issues – Momo was absolutely ready to back her up in any decision, and feeling her sweaty hand dragging her along the corridors and dark corners was cathartic.

A part of her really hoped that Jeongyeon had chickened out and stayed home with Mina.

“What are you dressed as?” Momo yelled to overcome the noise, and Nayeon looked over her shoulder.

“Sophie,” When Momo shot her a blank stare, she had to elaborate. “Mamma Mia.”

“Oh. Of course,” She tried to remember the movie’s plot, but failed. “And you’re holding flowers because… There’s a funeral?”

“I’m getting married.”

Momo’s heart jumped. “Right.”

“The character, I mean.”

“Right. I know that.” She repeated, then softened her gaze, because picturing Nayeon in a wedding dress was easy.

Nayeon smiled, her grip tightening. Momo stared at her like she was the only one in the room.

They finally arrived at the makeshift bar, and Nayeon didn’t waste time with the alcohol. She filled an entire cup with whatever mysterious drink was available and sipped it with a groan of pleasure. “This is terrible.”

It was Momo’s turn to steal the cup from her. “The worst.”

They found the emptiest spot possible and Nayeon rested her back against a wall, while Momo shielded her from the people passing by. They looked at each other for a long time, moving along the rhythm of the music, hearts beating in unison.

“And what are you?” Nayeon questioned, one skeptical eyebrow raised.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Momo turned around to show off her dancing uniform. “I’m Step Up.”

“As in… the whole movie?”

“The whole movie. It’s me.”

Nayeon was trying her best to hold off a laugh, but that made it. The sound out of her mouth was muffled by the music, but Momo absorbed all of it with a dumb smile. She took the cup from her hand again, and their fingers brushed this time. Nayeon welcomed the touch.

There were messages in their eyes, too difficult to convey through words, but they understood nonetheless. All they did for a while was share the drink with soft gazes and complain about the shitty music.

The silence was loud between them, and it was all they needed.

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“Kiki.”

“Kiki?” Jieqiong asked and Dahyun nodded, appalled.

“Kiki’s Delivery Service. The Ghibli movie?” When her friend didn’t react, she threw her hands in the air. “How can you not know this movie!”

“It’s an anime.” Nayoung explained beside her, and that’s when Jieqiong understood.

“Oh, it’s a cartoon. That’s why I didn’t know.”

Dahyun rolled her eyes. “What, too good for cartoons?”

“They’re just not my style,” She poked Dahyun’s nose with a silly grin. “Your outfit is adorable, though.”

“Damn right,” She crossed her arms, and that’s when Jieqiong and Nayoung decided to head for the bar to grab some drinks. Dahyun followed them, because she didn’t want to be alone, but she wasn’t planning on drinking anything.

She was completely alert, scanning her surroundings like a hawk, but so far, no sign of Sana. Dahyun wasn’t uncomfortable, per se – she adapted well to parties, even if the bullying situation had scarred her more than she would like to admit. Maybe she was just feeling braver than usual because her sole objective that night was get Sana to talk to her again.

And to say some things to Sana in return. Things she should’ve said a long time ago.

Dahyun looked around and searched for a cluster of people; that would probably be her best shot. The place didn’t help with her view, though, and Dahyun sighed at the unfamiliar faces. She was starting to feel hopeless.

Until a distinct laugh caught her attention.

She turned her head so fast that her neck nearly broke. Right there, a few meters away, was Sana laughing as she clung to some girl. Her nose was buried on said girl’s neck and she had her eyes closed, while the girl’s arm wrapped around her waist. Dahyun felt her stomach drop at the sight,
but didn’t let that discourage her from her goal.

She hesitated for a moment. Maybe she should wait for Sana to leave the group before making her presence known. She was sure that Sana didn’t expect her to be there at all, and this could startle her too much for a decent conversation. Or maybe she should talk to her at the end of the party.

Dahyun was stalling. She cursed herself for it, because that’s all she ever did.

But she just didn’t know the exact moment to—

The girl holding Sana suddenly turned her face to kiss her, but Sana’s reaction was immediate. She straightened herself up, dodging the kiss with an absurd speed, and twirling around from the girl’s grasp. Sana bit her lip, then apologized in a joking manner, returning to the girl’s side. When she tried to kiss her again, Sana refused one more time.

Sana didn’t want to kiss her.

That’s all it took for Dahyun’s hesitation to completely disappear.

She made her way towards the crowd, ignoring everything in her way.

--

Mina was lucky to have found a place to sit, because Jeongyeon’s attention was being constantly required. She was unable to step forward without someone calling for her, asking for her help, grabbing her attention in some way or another. At first, Mina didn’t mind, but now she was starting to feel lonely in the sea of people.

The song was too loud, and no one was by her side.

Jeongyeon’s biggest weakness was that she was kind to everyone.

Mina felt the walls closing in on her, and the ask for help bubbling deep within her throat. She closed her eyes, waiting for the terrible feeling to go away, but nothing was happening.

She felt lost, and no one was there to find her.

--

Momo saw Mina first, then Jeongyeon far from her, chatting away with random people, a smile
plastered on her face. She nearly tore the cup apart.

“Momo?” Nayeon touched her shoulder, and Momo looked at her apologetically.

“I’ll be right back.”

She passed the cup back to Nayeon, and squeezed her way through.

--

“Hey.”

Mina couldn’t help but believe in guardian angels, because Momo couldn’t possibly be anything but hers.

“You came…” Mina said, leaning against her touch. She got up then, and hugged Momo out of pure reflex. Momo sighed against her shoulder.

“I’m here.”

Letting go, they shared a meaningful look, before Mina noticed her costume. “Really, Momo? Your dancing uniform?”

“Says the ballerina.”

“At least I’m recognizable!” Mina laughed, feeling lighter already. “And what are you, Generic Dancer Number Two?”

“I’m Step Up!”

“That’s a movie.”

“I’m the whole movie.”

Mina loved her when they weren’t arguing.

They chatted for a long moment, and they would’ve kept at it if Jeongyeon hadn’t showed up then, sliding one arm around Mina’s waist as she approached. “I’m so, so sorry for that. They needed me to—”

“It’s alright.” Mina interrupted, because she saw the look in Momo’s face, and it wasn’t good. Jeongyeon was deliberately ignoring Momo’s presence, and the shift in the mood was noticeable.

“So, you’ve finally got some time for her.” Momo’s expression went from angry to smug out of nowhere, and her voice carried a hostility that made Mina shiver. She didn’t like where this was going.

Jeongyeon finally looked at her in the eyes, clenching her jaw. Momo’s pupils were dilated and her
gaze was unfocused, and Jeongyeon couldn’t believe her right now. “You’re drunk, Momo, go sober up.”

“No,” Momo said strongly, her anger back. It was too much, and she felt the word vomit climbing up her throat – she tried, but she couldn’t stop it. Not anymore. “No, you don’t get to dismiss me like that. You don’t get to avoid your responsibilities and your faults. I’m sick of you, Jeongyeon. I’m sick of you being a coward, and I’m sick of you hurting Mina because of that!”

It was coming down; everything that had been bottled inside for a month was finally exploding. Jeongyeon couldn’t stand this anymore, either.

“Momo—” Mina tried, but she felt Jeongyeon letting go of her and stepping forward.

“I’m not hurting her! What the hell is your problem?! That’s all you keep saying, but when it comes down to it you’re all bark and no bite!”

Nayeon, seeing the commotion, approached the two girls who were almost nose to nose. Jeongyeon saw her behind Momo and her stomach dropped; the effect she had on her was absurd. It was like all strength left her spirit suddenly, and none of this made any sense anymore.

But Momo was not finished.

“You made her come here, then you ignore her?? Tell your fucking friends to leave you alone, for once in your life. Stop being nice to everyone and grow some tits.”

“She said she wanted to come with me! Stop assuming, Momo, holy shit.”

“I’ll stop assuming when you stop lying!” Her voice grew louder.

“What the hell are you talking about?!”

“You’re hiding the goddamn kiss, Jeongyeon!”

Nayeon felt her blood freeze, and Jeongyeon became speechless.

Mina needed to do something, anything to stop this madness, but she couldn’t move. And the reason sickened her.

A part of her liked this. She wanted the show of dominance. She wanted Momo to face Jeongyeon for her, because Momo’s always solved the difficult problems in her life. And she wanted Jeongyeon to fight back, because Jeongyeon was still the lead in her fantasies.

Mina liked the feeling of being wanted.

That thought was what made her snap out of it. “Momo, stop!”

But Momo didn’t. She shoved Jeongyeon roughly. “So take responsibility for your fucking actions, and face the fucking consequences!”

The push awakened something in Jeongyeon, because she rooted herself in place, and shoved Momo back with double the strength. “Don’t fucking touch me!”

“You can’t have them BOTH!”

“Well, neither can YOU!”
The cocking of a gun turned into the bursting of a cannon. It happened in slow motion.

Momo grabbed Jeongyeon by her collar and reared her arm back, the smack of her fist making contact with her sharp jawline. Jeongyeon’s glasses were knocked out, the strength of the fall cracking the fragile glass. She lost her balance at the punch, and Momo’s inebriated state made her fall over on the floor with her.

All hell broke loose. The confusion made people yell over the music, chaos spreading. The two kept wrestling on the floor, and no one wanted to break them apart because they were all either drunk, or too afraid of getting hurt in the process. Mina started crying, unable to react to what was happening right in front of her eyes; all she could do was scream for them to stop. Neither of them listened to her.

So, Nayeon had to intervene.

“I wasn’t drunk!”

Her shout was loud enough for the entire party to hear. The DJ stopped the music, creating a deafening silence that spread like a virus, making every single person in the room stop moving.

Momo and Jeongyeon halted, looking at her from below. At first, they didn’t understand what that meant, but then Jeongyeon slowly realized.

“...What?”

“I wasn’t drunk,” Nayeon repeated, forcing the words through her tears. “At the Drama Club party. I remember the kiss. I was fully sober. I was the one who kissed you.”

It hurt worse than her jaw. The weight of the confession hit not only Jeongyeon, but Momo and Mina as well. The three pairs of eyes were all glued on Nayeon, and she felt sick to her stomach.

She wasn’t done; at this point, all she could do was confess everything, in front of everyone. It was the perfect stage. “I kissed you on purpose in front of Momo. I knew she was watching. I knew she liked me, and I wanted her to see it.” She could collapse at any moment. “I lied to all of you, and I made you all lie to each other.”

If Hell existed, it would be this silent moment after her confession. Momo was the first one to try, finally getting off the girl beneath her. “Nayeon—why would you—”

But Jeongyeon interrupted her. “How could you?”

Nayeon didn’t know that answer.

--

“Sana, can we talk?” Dahyun felt her chest beating so hard, that she was sure her ribcage was going to burst at any second. She had walked into a crowd of people who eyed her like she was less than dirt. It was hard to ignore that, but Sana’s face was all she needed to see.
“Dahyunnie?” She sounded desperate. “W-what are you doing here?”

“Please. Can we just—”

“Who are you?” The people started to voice their unwanted opinions.

“Sana-ya, do you know her?”

“Isn’t that Kim Dahyun?”

“Oh, you mean… that Dahyun?”

“Wow, talk about thirsty!”

“Come on, Sana-ya, ignore her.”

Sana was being bombarded with words and sentences and orders, and every bad word directed at Dahyun made her want to scream. This wasn’t supposed to be happening, she wasn’t supposed to be at that party, she was supposed to hate Sana—

Then the screaming started, and every other problem was interrupted by a fight on the other side of the room. When Sana and Dahyun saw their friends in the middle of it, they immediately dropped everything, and ran towards them.

--

At that point, they had a problem. The four involved in the mess didn’t want to – couldn’t – see each other. Mina, Momo, Nayeon and Jeongyeon were simply unable to look at each other’s faces, much less be in the same environment together.

Sana and Dahyun, being the only ones there able to help, suggested the room exchange.

Sana and Mina would still be together, but Dahyun would trade rooms with Jeongyeon. Momo would have a new roommate for the night, and Nayeon would go back to her room with Jihyo; they agreed to it without saying a word.

The party was over.

Chapter End Notes

Well this took a long time to write. Thank you always for being patient with the chapters, the next chapters might take a while to write as well, so I appreciate you all who send me nice messages here, on twitter, and on my curious cat :’)

I always aim to please, but i’m an insecure mess as usual, so it would be nice if you
could tell me your thoughts and feelings! I'd love to hear them.

See you on the next chapter!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
Tumblr: niigoki
CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/niigoki
(XVII.) Reliance

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the delay. Here we go, enjoy!

Listen to this when you reach a certain part. You'll know which one when you get there:

/watch?v=DBp-qMcSZP8

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Jeongyeon?” Chaeyoung squinted her eyes, turning the lights back on when she realized that her friend was walking into the wrong room. She yawned, raspy voice heavy with sleep. “What are you doing here?”

Dahyun came into view from behind her, looking as defeated as she was. “Hey, Chaeng. We’ll be exchanging rooms for the night.”

“Huh?”

Tzuyu groaned on her bed, rolling to the side to cover her head from the illumination. She’s never been good at dealing with situations while sleepy.

“Just… for today.”

Jeongyeon wasn’t saying anything, no explanations, nothing. She just walked slowly towards Dahyun’s bed, eyes downcast and red, as if she’d been crying. Chaeyoung felt her stomach twisting; this was definitely not a good sign. With a thud, Jeongyeon let her body fall into the cushions, back turned to the others. Dahyun sighed, grabbed some spare clothes and her toothbrush, and walked back to the door.

“Give her some time,” Was all she said before leaving. “Goodnight.”

A million questions raced through Chaeyoung’s head, but Dahyun closed the door then, and there was nothing she could do. Eyeing Jeongyeon for one last moment, Chaeyoung felt a lump in her throat. She had no idea what happened, but she’d never seen the usually humorous girl acting like this before. It was scary, and she wanted to tell her that everything would be all right, embrace her, anything.

“…Goodnight, Jeong.” Was all Chaeyoung muttered helplessly instead, turning the lights back off.

Her head hit the pillow, but she knew she wasn’t going to be able to sleep. Tzuyu was snoring, which was good – one less thing for her to worry about.

A few minutes later, she heard Jeongyeon’s quiet sobs.

Chaeyoung clutched at her chest. The sounds struck her heart with such strength that it shook her to her core.
Now she felt like crying, too.

--

Nayeon couldn’t hear. Every sound—her steps, the voices of students inside the rooms as she walked down the corridor, the buzzing of the weak lights over her head, the crickets—everything was muffled. Nayeon touched the wall with a hand, steadying herself — she felt like she was walking underwater. She was dizzy, tired from crying, but most of all, she couldn’t hear.

The voices in her head had multiplied, overlapping each other.

She felt lost in an invisible crowd.

_Congratulations! You did it! Congratulations! You did it!_


_So, let’s think about this for a minute… what did you just do?_

_What is love? Do you even know what love is? Do you even know what pain is?_

_Don’t forget your commercials! Your career is skyrocketing!_

_You can’t be forgiven. There’s no forgiveness for you._

_Congratulations! You did it!_

_Monster. Abomination. Sick._

_…and you managed to make Momo actually PUNCH Jeongyeon! Wow, that was really the cherry on top!_

_You can’t be loved. Not with this filthy heart._

_Mr. Kwon is so proud of you… you’re his star, and you’re doing so well!_

_Do you even know who you are? You’re not a person anymore. People don’t do the things you do._

_Congratulations! You did it!_

_Sick. Disgusting. Monster._

_Jihyo is proud of you too! Your musical was beautiful. You’re so talented and amazing._

_…an entire relationship. That’s what you destroyed. Mina and Jeongyeon were doing so well… Jeongyeon was finally moving on, being happy, like she always wanted. You could’ve stayed with Momo. That would have solved everything. She loved you._

_Monster. Abomination. Sick._
You destroy everything you touch.

Accept yourself! Your career is doing great!

Everyone is so proud of you.

Nayeon-ah.

“Nayeon-ah?” There was a voice. In the middle of the chaos, there was a voice calling for her, a real voice. Nayeon lifted her unfocused eyes, realizing that she had arrived in her room. She didn’t remember opening the door, or taking off her shoes, or putting on her pajamas. It had just happened.

“Nayeon-ah, what’s wrong?” Who was saying that?

A hand on her shoulder, and the muffled voices quieted down.

Jihyo.

Nayeon jumped out of her reach, desperately. “Don’t touch me.”

“What? Nayeon, what’s going on?” Jihyo looked tired and Nayeon’s heart was beating out of control. She tried to remember – she had walked into the room, changed into her pajamas and turned on the light suddenly. Jihyo had woken up then and was now looking at her with concern.

“…I fucked up,” Nayeon wasn’t looking at her, but to the wall behind her. “Jihyo, I fucked up.”

“Hey… it’s— it’s okay. Let’s talk about this.” Jihyo tried to approach her once more, but Nayeon stumbled backwards, nearly crashing into the wardrobe.

“Please, don’t touch me,” Toxic to everything around her – poisonous, covered in spikes and burning oil, that’s how Nayeon felt. “Not you.”

She destroyed everything she touched. She would not allow herself to destroy Jihyo.

“Nayeon-ah, please… If you don’t tell me what’s wrong, I can’t— I can’t help you. I can’t see you like this. It’s killing me,” Jihyo was brutally honest, and she could feel the tears overflowing her eyes again. She was so exhausted. “Please, let me help you… please.”

Jihyo’s teary face reminded Nayeon of their childhood, and how happy they were back then. Jihyo was always by her side, yelling at bullies, helping her practice her lines, helping her study math even though she wasn’t good at it either, accompanying her to buy her very first Sailor Moon figure, hugging her when her first boyfriend cheated on her in middle school, calling in the middle of the night just to cheer her up because somehow she knew Nayeon was sad.

If there was one person in this life that grounded her, was Jihyo. Nayeon would always return to her embrace when things were too hard.

But now, she couldn’t even do that.

The voices were returning, and Nayeon was powerless to stop them. She hated this. She hated everything. She hated the whole world.

But most of all, she hated herself.

Everything was overwhelming.
Congratulations! You did it! Congratulations! You did it!


Her body was unable to keep going, and Nayeon shut down, fainting on the carpet. She thought she heard someone’s hitched breath before blacking out. It was probably Jihyo.

--

Dahyun took a moment to go back to Momo’s room, despite it being located in the same hallway. She leaned against the wall and stopped to just breathe. Everything was chaotic – she wasn’t able to talk to Sana, now her best friends had gotten into a physical fight, and Dahyun couldn’t help them; it was just too much.

She hoped that things were better by the morning.

It was just wishful thinking, she knew.

Turning her face to the outside, Dahyun could see some stars. There were not many; they were mostly clouded by the bad weather, but still, a few were shining. Dahyun counted nine of them and let out a breathless sound. She wanted to be positive, like she usually was, but when she tried to search for one thing that could give her even the tiniest bit of hope, she found nothing. It was terrible and made her want to cry. Dahyun never thought that she would lose herself, as well.

The stars soon disappeared as a cloud passed by, and Dahyun sighed, moving away from the wall. She knocked on the door before walking in, and Momo was lying on her bed, with her back turned to her.

“I’m back,” Dahyun tried, weakly, but Momo didn’t budge. The atmosphere was crushing her, and her heart was beating heavily. “I’ll wash my face and go to sleep. You try to sleep too, okay?”

There wasn’t an answer, and Dahyun walked past Momo to lock herself in the bathroom. She touched her back on the door and closed her eyes, bumping her head slightly on the wood behind her.

Dahyun eventually moved to the sink. The mirror was dirty and there were notes sticking to every corner. They were mostly Jeongyeon’s handwriting, giving Momo instructions and reminders. One of them said ‘Don’t forget to brush your teeth!’ and another one ‘Stop leaving your dirty socks on the sink!!’. A few of them had Momo’s scribbles on it as well, like ‘Yes, mom’ with a cute heart on top.

The notes made Dahyun smile softly for a brief second. She remembered all the moment Jeongyeon and Momo bickered playfully, got on each other’s nerves, but never once argued that badly. If what Sana had told Dahyun was true, then Momo fought with Mina a lot more than she’d ever fought with Jeongyeon. Her chest tightened at the memories; whatever happened to make it
come to this wasn’t right.

Dahyun removed her makeup and washed her face, the cold water waking her up; it was like she’d been sleep-walking. She changed into her pajamas, looked in the mirror one more time, mustering courage to go out, then finally unlocked the door.

The sound of Momo’s snifflies was the first thing that hit her ears. The girl was shaking with each sob, trying to keep quiet, but failing. Dahyun stood frozen for a second, pondering about what she should do in this situation, but ultimately decided that she was tired of her own cowardice. She didn’t want to think about the consequences of her actions. She wanted to fucking act.

Dahyun was tired of failing as a friend.

She sat on the bed next to Momo. “Hey, I’m here. I’m here, Momoring."

The words did something, because Momo cried harder. She let her voice come out, and Dahyun rubbed her back, her shoulders, circling her tense muscles gently with her fingers. She would stay there for as long as Momo needed her, or at least until she fell asleep.

Dahyun started to write sentences on Momo’s back, not really expecting her to understand. It was just something her mother used to do when she was upset.

‘You did good today.’

‘I’m proud of you.’

‘You deserve to rest.’

‘I love you.’

She kept at it until Momo’s sobs lessened considerably. Momo finally stopped and let out a big sigh, catching her breath again. Dahyun didn’t remove her hand for a few more minutes, then leaned in a bit to check if Momo was sleeping.

Momo suddenly turned to her, burying her head on Dahyun’s lap, and embracing her waist. Dahyun’s hand moved to her scalp, scratching it lightly.

“Thank you, Dahyunnie.” Momo said with a raspy voice after a pause.


The stillness of the room calmed both girls down and Momo took a deep breath, closing her eyes. “I’m sorry you had to change rooms.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Dahyun shook her head. “I can room with you for as long as you like. We’re in the same hallway, my things aren’t that far.”

Momo tried to hold back a yawn but failed. “…Okay. Thank you.”

There were things Momo wanted to say but the storm in her mind prevented her from forming coherent thoughts. She could feel it physically destroying her from the inside. It hurt so badly that she couldn’t bear it. She guessed that the sudden sleepiness came from her body’s overload. “Dahyunnie.”

“Yes?”
“I think… I’m going to sleep.” Momo lifted her head from the girl’s lap, placing it back on the cold pillow.

“Sure. You should rest.” Dahyun agreed.


“Oh… are you sure? It’s okay, you can talk to me.” Dahyun tried, but she saw the tears coming back to Momo’s eyes and decided to give her space. “Well, call me if you need anything. I’ll wake up in a heartbeat.”

Momo sniffled. “Liar. You’re terrible at waking up.” She couldn’t even fake a laugh at her own joke, so she turned around. “Night.”

“Night, Momo-ya.” Dahyun thought for a bit, then leaned in to place a soft kiss to her hair, moving to the other bed afterwards. She turned off the light on the nightstand and buried herself under the covers.

Momo was sobbing again. At that moment, she was going to ask Dahyun if she could sleep with her, but the sudden memories of the times she shared a bed with Mina resurfaced, and Momo couldn’t take it. She didn’t want to think about Mina, because it reminded her of Jeongyeon, and the fact that she had punched one of her best friends in the face. Momo would never forgive herself for this. She hurt two of the most important people in the world to her.

And in return, she had been hurt.

Just thinking about Nayeon made everything inside her break.

Momo had no idea how she would recover from this. Or if she would recover from this.

She cried until exhaustion.

--

Sana was good at many things, but there was one specific trait of hers that stood out: her ability to forget about her problems entirely when someone else she cared about was crying in front of her.

She’d been embracing Mina ever since they left the party, only letting go to help her change into her pajamas and clean up. Mina’s face was tear-stained, and she barely reacted to Sana’s words. All she did was cling to her and cry – something that had happened other times, too, so Sana more or less knew how to deal with this situation.

Sana had thanked Dahyun for helping her with the others, and almost kissed the girl at the doorstep. She had pulled back because she knew that this wasn’t the right time, but the fact this it’d been so instinctive made her heart ache. She wanted to make sure Dahyun was okay too, but she had to focus on one person at a time. She trusted Dahyun with Momo.

Now, cuddled in the same bed together, all Sana could do was try to hush Mina with soft caresses.
and kisses to her knuckles.

Mina, despite not looking like it, was a touchy-feely person when she felt upset. She would always cling to Momo or Sana to cry, and the best way to make sure that she wouldn’t get worse was to whisper sweet things to her as they touched her back. Maybe it had to do with Mina’s cold upbringing, but she craved the physical intimacy — Sana didn’t care to look deep into it.

“You’re safe now, Minari,” Sana muttered with each kiss and each caress. Protecting her from the world was second-nature. “It’s okay to cry. I’m here with you.”

And so she did, until she was too spent to continue. Mina crawled closer, tangling their legs together, and Sana hugged her tightly against her chest. They could very well sleep just like this.

Sana’s eyelids were getting heavy and almost closing when Mina’s muffled voice reverberated against her ribcage.

“…I did this.”

“Hm?” Sana woke up and hummed, equally quiet. “What do you mean?”

“I told Momo to lie. I knew she wouldn’t deny me. Momo always does everything I ask.” Mina seemed to be talking mostly to herself, but Sana encouraged her to continue at her own pace.

“Momo is not a liar but I made her into one,” Mina sounded so heartbroken that Sana had to swallow hard to control her emotions. “All for my own selfish reasons. I’m so, so selfish.”

“Minari,” Sana broke their embrace for a moment to lean back and look at her in the eyes. “What happened back there?”

A part of Mina didn’t want to talk, because the memory of Momo’s fist against Jeongyeon’s jaw was too vivid, and too much. She couldn’t believe things had come to this, but she couldn’t deny that a part of this was all her fault. So, instead of closing her eyes to the world like she’d been doing, Mina decided to face her own flaws for once.

And she was slowly realizing that she was very, very flawed.

“Nayeon confessed that she remembered kissing Jeongyeon at the Drama Club party,” She hiccupped, but forced the words out. “But before that, Momo— Momo punched Jeongyeon.”

“What?” Sana frowned. That didn’t sound like something Momo would do.

“The lies were too much... Momo isn’t a liar,” Mina repeated, angry at herself. “I forced her to lie to her best friend and the girl she loved because I wanted a comfortable relationship with the girl I loved. How could I—”

The tears came back, and Sana was about to hug her again, but Mina shook her head, stopping her with a hand on her chest. “No. I deserve this. I need to— I need to accept that this is my punishment.” One particular thought made her face twist in a broken expression. “Even if... M-Momo never speaks to me again. I deserve t-this.”

“Mina, stop this!” Sana was starting to panic, sadness spreading. “Stop saying things like that, you’re not a terrible person who deserves to be alone, you’re not—!”

Sana froze.
For the first time, the weight of the words really sank deeply into her.

What were they doing?

“…You’re not a monster.” Sana finished in a weak voice. Her own eyes started stinging with tears, and she looked down. “…We’re not monsters. None of us… not you… not Nayeonnie… not Momo… we’re just…” The wetness hit her cheeks and Sana pulled Mina into a hug, but because she needed one this time. “We’re just girls trying to grow up…”

It was cathartic, in a way, to cry their hearts out with someone who was suffering from the same things. Mina was glad that it was Sana by her side at that moment – even with her thoughts all over the place, she felt relieved knowing that it seemed to be helping her, as well. Another thing to add to Mina’s mess was how careless she was being with Sana lately.

And after the tears had dried up and their hearts were a little lighter, Mina and Sana fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

They had a lot to think about, and the next days were going to be decisive for the rest of their friendship.

--

As expected, the group ended up splitting up.

Mina, Momo, Nayeon, and Jeongyeon avoided each other for the next two entire weeks, and there was nothing the rest of the girls could do to solve this problem. The four of them had to decide if they wanted to remain friends, or never talk about it again. Seeing how things were going, the latter seemed to be the option.

Sana tried to talk to Momo and Mina every day, but separately – it was hard, though. She was still hostage of her party life, and Chanmi’s grip on her seemed to have tightened. When the blonde found out that Sana was involved in the fight at the party, her interest in her increased exponentially. Now, Sana was personally being watched by Chanmi herself; she couldn’t do anything without being spied on. It was driving her crazy.

Jeongyeon was quiet most of the time, but she hung out around Chaeyoung and Tzuyu. The two younger girls tried to cheer her up with anime marathons every now and then, but when Chaeyoung tried to approach the subject of Mina, or anyone else, Jeongyeon just shut down. They had no idea what was going on inside her head.

Nayeon barely left her room, and Jihyo brought her dinner every day because the girl would just forget to eat. Mr. Kwon told her not to worry about rehearsals since the end of the semester was nearing, and to take care of herself; it was clear that he was worried about her. Jennie tried to ask, but Nayeon didn’t even look at her in the eyes anymore. She stopped going to the theater building after a week, and just attended classes like a robot.

Momo was glued to Dahyun. The two hung out a lot now, and the girls who had started the
bullying simply scattered – perhaps Momo’s physique scared them away, even though she was clearly not in the mood to fight anyone. Momo always asked Dahyun if she wanted to accompany her to her dance classes, and the younger girl complied, because she promised to stick by her. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu missed their roommate a lot, but Dahyun told them to look after Jeongyeon with everything they’ve got.

Tzuyu noticed that Dahyun had changed, somehow. She seemed more alert, giving people directions, and looking after Momo fondly. Her aura was different – there was a glimpse of leadership in her.

She was starting to resemble Jihyo.

Mina, on the other hand, spent most of her time alone. She talked to Sana back at the dorm a lot, and the two of them spilled their guts to each other constantly now – they needed to vent, and they did it with each other. Sana cried most of the time. Mina knew now that it was because of Dahyun. Mina cried sometimes too – Sana knew that it was because of herself.

It was like Mina was waiting for something. She attended classes, practiced ballet, then took long walks outside. She begun to write, too – with Chaeyoung’s help, Mina started a small diary. She put her feelings and thoughts in there, unfiltered, and resolute. Even though they looked messy at first, she gradually got the hang of it. Soon, the pages were filled with completely honest emotions that had been swirling in her head for quite some time. The diary helped her figure some things out, and there were scary things in there. Mina almost ripped those pages apart more than once, but encouraged herself to calm down, and read them over and over again.

Mina forced herself to face the truth on a daily basis. That was her beginning.

And whenever she felt like things were too much, she closed her eyes, and remembered Sana’s words from before.

“You’re not a monster. We’re not monsters. None of us… not you… not Nayeonnie… not Momo… We’re just girls trying to grow up.”

“We’re not monsters…” Mina would whisper to herself until she could feel her breathing getting regular again. It was a hard task, but Mina needed to do this, because there was one thing she wanted to accomplish.

She just needed a little more time.

--

“Well, good news, it seems to be healing a lot faster than usual,” Miss Jea smiled as she finished wrapping Chaeyoung’s knuckles in a new, fresh bandage. “Be sure to take care of it these next few days, because any damage could ruin the entire healing process, you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Chaeyoung replied with a soft grin. Even though the nurse had just told her to take it easy, she tried to bend her fingers a little to check. A sharp pain shot through her arm instantly,
and Chaeyoung grunted, biting her lip – okay, it still hurt a lot.

“What did I just tell you?” Miss Jea put both hands on her hips, frustrated.

“Sorry,” Chaeyoung smiled apologetically, which only earned an eyeroll from the woman. “I’ll be careful, I promise.”

“You better,” Miss Jea sat back down on her desk to fill in some papers, still shaking her head. “You girls, always testing your limits doing stupid things…”

Chaeyoung couldn’t help but to agree. She’d been going to the nurse’s office quite frequently because of her hand, and it felt like a second home to her already. Sometimes Miss Jea would ask her questions about school life and other problems, but Chaeyoung dismissed her with shrugs and false reassurances. It was clear that the nurse didn’t buy it, but Chaeyoung didn’t want to expose the drama to her.

This time, however, Chaeyoung felt compelled to say something, mostly because the pain in her chest was starting to become unbearable.

“Miss?”

“Yes?”

“Do you… uh,” Chaeyoung waved her feet back and forth like a child – she was sitting on top of the bed and couldn’t reach the floor. “Could I have some chamomile tea?”

Miss Jea stopped writing and looked up, a pleased smile making its way to her features. “I think you’re the first person to actually ask for it.”

“Sorry, I didn’t want to bother—”

“No, darling,” She got up in a hurry, almost hopping giddily. “I’d be happy to make it. Stay here.”

Chaeyoung nodded and let out a small chuckle as the woman left the room. She wondered if there was a story behind the famous tea; it just made the nurse incredibly happy.

Now alone, Chaeyoung looked back at her hand, bending her fingers again. She inhaled sharply at the pain, then let the air out, frustrated. She could feel herself getting antsy, and the pain distracted her from dangerous emotions. Chaeyoung knew that she shouldn’t be doing this. She hoped that the tea could help calm her down.

Truthfully, the stress of these two weeks was piling up on her, and Chaeyoung was starting to become irritable. She did everything she could to prevent an outburst, but it was hard when Jeongyeon refused to acknowledge that she needed to open up, or when Dahyun walked in and out of their room to grab her stuff without even greeting them anymore, or when Jihyo was nowhere to be seen, or when she saw Sana flinching every time someone touched her body without ever apologizing—

Or when she looked at Tzuyu’s beautiful face and noticed the prominent bags under her eyes.

When was the last time Tzuyu smiled?

Chaeyoung couldn’t even remember that.

The thought made her fist the sheets beneath her until her knuckles went white.
“Here we go,” Miss Jea’s cheerful voice made her snap out of it and look back up. “Careful, it’s hot.”

“Thank you,” Chaeyoung took the cup gently with her good hand, blowing the steam. It was nice to hold something so delicate – it made her feel in control of her strength, and in turn, of her emotions.

Miss Jea sat back down on her desk but didn’t return to her previous task. Instead, she stared at the girl in front of her, analyzing her body language and posture. Chaeyoung looked incredibly fragile, but about to burst at the same time. Her hand was shaking a little as she brought the cup of tea to her lips.

“How is it?” Miss Jea asked.

“It’s good,” the reply was honest. “Very good.”

“And how does it feel?”

The question caught her off guard, but Chaeyoung licked her lips. “…Warm.”

“And?”

“Sweet. Sweeter than I thought it would be.”

“That’s good,” The nurse smiled at her for a moment before speaking again. “You know what my favorite thing about tea is?” Chaeyoung shook her head. “How dangerous it is.”

“Dangerous…?”

“It’s an incredibly hot beverage that could very well burn you if you spilled it on your skin, so you have to be careful while handling it. At the same time, you can’t wait to taste it, so you drink it slowly, testing its temperature. Then you burn your tongue. Well, I always do.”

Chaeyoung chuckled a little at that, because she has burned her tongue once or twice during the course of this conversation.

“But it’s so sweet that you can’t stop wanting more,” Miss Jea continued. “Even though it’s dangerous. Even though it has hurt you before. You know it will cool down at some point, and you are kind of just waiting for that right temperature, so you can appreciate your tea fully.”

Chaeyoung was no stranger to analogies and metaphors, and this one hit her harder than she expected. She looked down at the beverage, which was still steamy, then brought it back to her lips. She did it three times before feeling her eyes watering and her hand shaking, then put the cup down on the bed so she could bury her face on her hands, letting out a soft sob.

Miss Jea seemed to be expecting that, because she was by her side in seconds, rubbing her shoulders with affection. Chaeyoung allowed herself to cry on the nurse. She was the only person within reach right now that wasn’t in a rush to destroy herself.

“It’s alright, sweetheart. Let it out.”

And Chaeyoung did.

“I miss my friends…” She was choked up and struggling. “I m-miss laughing with them, and hugging them, and— and I can feel myself sinking deeper in my own rage… I’m scared. I’m j-
just… I’m just scared.”

Miss Jea caressed her hair and for the first time Chaeyoung wasn’t embarrassed of crying in public like this.

She was reaching her limit.

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“There you are!” Jieqiong’s voice made Dahyun freeze on the hall and turn on her heels to greet her briefly, but the girl wasn’t having a quick dismissal. “No, don’t even think about it.”

“Huh?”

“Running away again,” She grabbed Dahyun’s wrist loosely enough so that she could escape if she so desired. “We’ve been trying to talk to you for days, but you’re always in a hurry. What gives, Dahyun-ah?”

Nayoung suddenly showed up behind Jieqiong carrying two bags, and Dahyun almost smiled when she realized that Jieqiong had probably bolted out of the classroom to get to her, leaving her stuff behind. It wouldn’t be the first time Nayoung took care of her like this, and if Dahyun wasn’t so worried about other things, she would joke about those two being married without even realizing it.

“I’m sorry, I know I’ve been busy.” It was all she could say without having to get into detail.

“That’s putting it lightly! We even invited you out yesterday, but you didn’t even bother to reply on the group chat.”

Jieqiong looked genuinely hurt and it made Dahyun feel bad, but each second that went by was a reminder that Momo was waiting for her at the dorm, and her heart beat faster with anxiety.

Momo’s sobs that night had been replaying inside Dahyun’s head since the party, and she had promised then that she would devote her entire self to make Momo feel better. She would do anything for the girl, and not just because she was her roommate now, but because she knew that this way, she could help lessen Sana’s burden as well – and Jihyo’s, and Chaeyoung’s and Tzuyu’s. The group needed to help each other, and if Dahyun’s company could potentially make Momo realize that she needed to talk to the others again, then she would stick by her for as long as she needed.

Dahyun was being useful for once, and she didn’t want to blow it. “I know, it’s just… one of my friends has been going through a tough time, and I need to be there for her.”

“Friend, huh.” Jieqiong didn’t look convinced. “Want to put a ‘girl’ in front of the word?”

“What?” The implication was so absurd that it made Dahyun laugh. “No, we’re not dating. She really is just a friend.”
“Don’t hide the truth from us, Kim Dahyun!”

“Okay, that’s enough shenanigans from you.” Nayoung stepped in, wrapping a long arm around Jieqiong’s throat, pretending to choke her. “Leave the poor girl alone.”

“But I miss her!” Jieqiong tried to break free, but to no avail. Dahyun looked at both of them apologetically, and Nayoung smiled softly back.

“Go be with your friend, I’ll deal with her clinginess.”

“Thanks, guys. For worrying. I mean it.” Dahyun sounded sincere and Jieqiong stopped fake-struggling to sigh and nod back, rolling her eyes.

“Fine. But once all of this is over be sure to meet us, okay? I really do miss you.”

“I will,” The prospect of this mess one day getting solved seemed too good to be true, but Dahyun wouldn’t admit it out loud. “I promise.”

She waved the two girls goodbye and resumed her way back to the dorm. Dahyun never really noticed how much of a toll the absence of her other friends was taking on her, but when she thought about Momo waiting for her with a pout, the pain became bearable. She really wanted to be there for her.

Dahyun barely made it downstairs when a very familiar voice caught her attention. She stopped, a frown blurring her features, and turned her ear towards the sound.

“There’s been some talk. About you.”

“Talk…? What talk?”

“Just some shit about how you’re dating a freshman. They’re stalking this girl and everything.”

“They? Who’s stalking Dahyun?”

“It’s not like you’re actually dating this girl, are you? She’s just another one-time deal, right?”

“…Yeah. She’s just another one in the crowd.”

Dahyun’s heart dropped. That was Sana’s voice.

“Dude, where did you get this? I thought Chanmi erased the audio.” One boy asked after the recording stopped playing, and Dahyun crouched, hiding herself from his sight. He was talking to two other guys, and they seemed to be having some sort of secret meeting.

“I downloaded it before she could take it down.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, to keep it? One day Chanmi will be gone and this audio will be a relic. You know, college history.”

“You’re so dumb, erase that shit.” The third boy seemed annoyed. “Chanmi is gonna find out and you’ll be gone. Seriously, don’t mess with her.”

“Also, Minatozaki is back, isn’t that what she wanted in the first place? Carrying this audio around will just cause more trouble for her.” The second boy agreed; they seemed to be taking this
incredibly seriously.

“Ugh, fine, whatever. I hate how Chanmi has all of you wrapped around her crusty finger.” The boy with the audio relented. “She needs to go, seriously. No one can stand that bitch anymore.”

“Feel free to get rid of her,” The third boy mocked him. “You can’t even get near her. She gets people hooked on drugs, that’s powerful shit, man. Try to fight those addicts, they’ll kick your ass. She has this whole place right where she wants it.”

“And now she has her jester back.”

“Huh? Who?”

“Minatozaki, who else?”

“Nah, Minatozaki is her queen or whatever.”

Dahyun inhaled sharply.

The first boy laughed. “That’s what she wants you to believe. She would never let someone else be as powerful as her. Minatozaki is just a puppet and Chanmi is pulling her strings, because she can attract more people like this. More people, more drugs, more money, etc.”

“That’s fucked up.”

“Whatever. Honestly, it was a matter of time until Minatozaki joined forces with Chanmi. Now she can get laid three times faster.”

The two other boys laughed and Dahyun’s hands clenched in fists.

The conversation ended there, and the rest of their talk was about sports. Dahyun took it as a cue to leave and moved slowly away.

Once she was outside, she could finally breathe properly. With a hand on her chest, Dahyun processed everything she’d heard, trying to put the pieces together. Suddenly Sana’s avoidance made sense to her; she was bound to this Chanmi person, someone who apparently dealt with things much too heavy for a freshman to get involved with. The thought made her stomach turn, because whatever Sana had gotten herself into looked dangerous.

Dahyun closed her eyes, and a sudden feeling erupted from within her. Everything clicked at once, and she stopped shaking. That audio was clearly intended to hurt her personally, but it didn’t. Dahyun knew Sana, and she suddenly understood that Sana had lied to that person on the recording because she was trying to protect Dahyun from something huge.

Right then, she had an absurd idea, but if it meant doing something important for the first time in her life, Dahyun would take the shot.

She put her hand in her pocket, where she kept her dice for kicks and giggles, and rubbed them slowly.

“I open the Time Portal…” She muttered under her breath.

Maybe she wasn’t meant to leave the game just yet.
It sounded bad. Jihyo bit her lower lip and tried again, her fingers shakily sliding through the piano keys as she tried to compose something new, but failing each time. The notes weren’t matching, the sound was distorted, and Jihyo knew what she needed to do to fix it, but something was hindering her progress. It’s been like this ever since Nayeon decided to shut her out.

Jihyo was about to cry. She had already lost the most important person in the world to her; she couldn’t lose music, too. It was all she had.

Taking a deep breath, she tried again, erasing the notes on the piano sheet and replacing them with better ones.

The door to the music room opened slightly, and Jihyo saw the reflection through the window. She turned her head around and was surprised at the visit.

“Su— Miss Sunmi. What brings you here?”

The professor closed the door behind her, checking the corridor one more time to make sure they were alone, and walked up to Jihyo with a soft smile. “I wanted to see you before leaving. You haven’t been around much, lately.”

“Didn’t know you paid that much attention to my daily activities.”

“Teaching means knowing some of my students’ schedules,” Sunmi was soft-spoken and careful; she knew Jihyo, and it took her two sentences to know when the girl was on edge. “I’m sorry, are you busy? I can go.”

Jihyo hesitated, but eventually made some space on the chair for her friend. “No. Stay a little.”

Their relationship had always been comfortable and serene, and this time was no different. Sunmi’s thighs touched Jihyo’s and they were warm; it made Jihyo shiver a little, because it felt like she hadn’t been touched in a long, long time. She shot Sunmi a weak smile and tried to get back to work.

The song she was composing sounded heavy – Sunmi could tell it was filled with her current emotions. Jihyo had always been painfully honest in her music, and Sunmi felt a twinge inside. The notes made her want to reach out and hold this incredibly fragile girl, but she didn’t want to get in her way of venting.

Jihyo’s fingers stopped pressing the keys after a few minutes, and she slowly folded her hands on her lap, looking down. “…How does it sound?”

“Burdened.” Sunmi was honest, because Jihyo didn’t need more lies.

She let out a breathless chuckle. “Then I’m on the right track.”

The setting sun’s illumination hit the wall and Jihyo couldn’t help but to notice that most of the good conversations she’d had the past month had happened in that same room, surrounded by the
same orange glow. One part of her brain immediately wondered if dragging Nayeon to this place would help her open up. Jihyo internally scoffed at her desperation.

She heard sudden notes, and blinked out of her trance, her gaze falling on Sunmi’s hands skillfully playing a soft song. It was something she’d taught Jihyo a long time ago, when the girl was still too young to read the notes properly; back then, Jihyo learned the entire song by ear in a week, because she loved it so much.

The memories brought tears to her eyes, and she rubbed them strongly, closing them afterwards. She lifted her head and just listened. It was an easy thing to do, to listen.

Jihyo was bad at it. She wanted to correct the notes, suggest on how to improve, play it herself.

She was terrible at letting things be. She wanted to be in control, because if she could hold things tightly, she wouldn’t lose them.

Sometimes, she wondered if she was a bad composer because of this. She liked to pretend she was an amazing musician, but the truth was – she’d never been able to let the music guide her. She’d always guided it, instead.

“It’s okay if you’re out of breath,” Sunmi’s soft voice sang along with the piano. “No one will blame you. It’s okay to make mistakes once in a while. Everyone does that. To say it’s okay, even though it’s only words of comfort.”

“How could I possibly understand your sigh? Although I won’t be able to understand that depth, it’s okay… I’ll hold you…”

Her voice trailed off and she let her head fall on Sunmi’s shoulder, quietly sobbing. Sunmi flinched for a moment, aware of her surroundings, and stopped playing. She let the girl cry on her, and slowly embraced her, with one eye glued to the door.

“You should’ve become my music teacher,” Jihyo mumbled quietly. She was never good at staying still, even in the middle of tears.

“So I could teach you more songs?” Sunmi asked, caressing her hair.

“So I could see you more often.”

Sunmi let the confession float in the air without replying.

Jihyo swallowed thickly and finally lifted her head again. Their faces were incredibly close, and Sunmi got lost in her glazed eyes temporarily. She felt herself leaning in unconsciously, being pulled by an invisible force much too strong to fight, and Jihyo let her. When Sunmi’s face became blurred, Jihyo put one hand on the professor’s chest, stopping her.

“You should go,” Jihyo muttered, still close to her. “Before I do something that will get you in trouble.”

Only then Sunmi realized what she was doing, and pulled back, a faint blush in her cheeks. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Don’t apologize.” Jihyo smiled at her despite her red eyes. “Not for this.”

Sunmi was suddenly very conscious of Jihyo’s thighs against hers, so she got up from the chair,
getting a grip. With one last concerned look, Sunmi got back to her role as a teacher. “I’m leaving, then. Don’t hesitate to talk to me if you’re in trouble, all right?”

Jihyo nodded. “Yes, ma’am.”

They exchanged smiles, and Sunmi had to fight every impulse in her body telling her to bend over and place a comforting kiss on Jihyo’s hair. She finally turned around to leave, and when the door closed, Jihyo felt the silence around her. Not even the piano keys would be able to fill the void in her heart.

She almost laughed at the realization that hit her with a moment’s delay.

Sunmi’s warmth lingered, and Jihyo cursed her heart for beating for someone so unreachable.

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Nayeon blinked, then frowned, wiping the sweat off her forehead even though it wasn’t that warm in her room. She rubbed her eyes, trying to focus back on her homework, the pencil that had been easily sliding through the paper suddenly heavy. A small, almost inaudible static sound caught her attention, and she huffed, putting the pencil down. Nayeon leaned back on her chair, grabbed the sides of her head, and waited for impact.

*You idiot, that’s not the answer to the question. Try again.*

*Can you chill? She’s trying her best.*

*Oh, shut up, she’s stupid and she knows it.*

*That’s her best subject!*

*No, it’s not. Her best subject is L-Y-I-N-G.*

“Shut the fuck up,” Nayeon spoke up, and the voices laughed, echoing loudly. She waited for their banter to be over – after a few more insults thrown at her by some, and others coming to her defense – and finally, there was silence again.

With a big sigh, Nayeon grabbed her pencil again, and resumed her activity.

The voices had multiplied after she revealed the lie two weeks ago, but Nayeon accepted them, despite the annoyance. She would take every punishment the universe saw fit, and she wouldn’t complain about anything.

It was hell, and she relished in it.

Going crazy while sober was a wild experience.

She tried to make things easier for Jihyo after her breakdown, because the girl didn’t deserve any of that. Nayeon would’ve push her away too, if she could, but Jihyo’s stubbornness made her
rethink her actions. If Jihyo wanted to stay by the side of an abomination, the least she could do was try to be less of one. It seemed to be working, but sometimes the voices made her say stuff out loud that Jihyo thought were directed at her. Nayeon hated herself for how many times she accidentally told Jihyo to shut her mouth.

Mr. Kwon came over to her room twice after she stopped attending the theater classes, but Nayeon couldn’t face him. They talked from behind the door, and he kept reassuring her, and telling her to rest until vacations started. He tried to make small talk, too – asking her if she would travel during her break, if she’d been eating well, what were her plans for next month. Nayeon answered him with guilt pressing down on her chest, and eventually, she had to tell him to go, because hearing people caring about her so much was worse than the voices.

Most nights, Nayeon wanted to disappear.

She thought about Momo and Jeongyeon constantly, and more than once, she almost left her room to run to them in a fit, ready to beg for their forgiveness over and over again. She was good at controlling this impulse, because there was nothing she did better than sabotaging herself.

Except, maybe, hurting others needlessly.

Nayeon looked at the mirror sometimes, wondering what had happened to her. She destroyed everything because she was greedy, and wanted everything the world had to offer. She still dreamed about Momo and Jeongyeon kissing her at the same time, but these dreams ended up in a bloody nightmare. The velvet curtains didn’t crush them anymore – but a hole on the floor would swallow them whole.

Maybe that was all she needed; to be enveloped in darkness and forgotten.

She tried to focus on mundane things to prevent her head from going insane, but it was increasingly difficult when she spotted Jeongyeon from afar, walking with a slouched back and a timid disposition, or Momo’s unfocused eyes that only seemed to light up when Dahyun returned to her side, or even Mina—

Nayeon realized that she hadn’t seen Mina ever since the party. She got inevitably worried; she’d probably scarred her for life.

Mina didn’t deserve any of this. She just wanted a calm, happy life with the most caring girl in the world. Much like what Nayeon felt for Jeongyeon, Mina had this right, too. If she was honest with herself, realizing that she’d taken away Mina’s happiness was the thing that made her want to cry the most.

Just the thought was enough to get her misty-eyed.

*You wanted to protect her, too. But you couldn’t.*

“Stop…”

*You thought everything would be fine after the incident at the cafeteria. The three of you protected her with everything you had, and for once you didn’t feel terrible seeing Jeongyeon and Momo looking at someone else with stars in their eyes.*

Nayeon grabbed the side of her head again, touching her forehead on the desk.

*Why is she different?*
“Enough.”

*Why is it okay with her?*

“It just is!” Nayeon spilled, her bottled feelings spilling all over the floor. “It’s not a stranger, it’s not someone who will take advantage of them, it’s… Mina…”

*And you trust Mina with them.*

“…I trust them with Mina.”

A sudden knock on the door made Nayeon lift her head quickly, wiping her face. She didn’t want to look beat to the world.

“Nayeonnie?” Jihyo’s voice was muffled outside. “Can you open the door? I forgot my key.”

“S-sure. Just a moment,” Nayeon got up to splash her face with some water and calm down before facing Jihyo. She didn’t want to be a burden to her.

After breathing deeply three times, Nayeon walked to the door, trying to fake a smile – it hurt her ego not being able to do that efficiently anymore.

“Did you lose your key agai—” Nayeon’s voice was cut short after she opened the door and saw who was right beside Jihyo.

Jihyo looked at Nayeon with serious eyes, then back at the girl, who put a hand on her forearm. “It’s okay. I’ll take it from here.”

Jihyo nodded, and left, leaving Nayeon alone with the person she least expected to talk to first.

Her very first impulse was to close the door and run away, but Mina placed her foot against the wood before she could do anything. She calmly took a notebook out of her bag, and stared at Nayeon right in the eyes.

“We need to talk. I have too much to say.”

Helpless to deny this fierce demonstration of resolve, Nayeon stepped back, allowing Mina to walk into the room.

The static at the back of her head was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Are you holding up? I'll do my best to post the next one sooner. Classes have started, so things have been a little chaotic, but I'll try! Thank you always for reading and for supporting me. You guys are seriously the best people in the world ;w;

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
Tumblr: niigoki
The silence was incredibly uncanny for someone who had been constantly hearing things inside her head for such a long time. From the moment Mina showed up at her doorstep to now, not a single unwanted sound crossed Nayeon’s mind – it was so peaceful to be like this.

She almost forgot about the guilt tearing through her very soul.

Mina wasn’t saying anything, not yet. She’d walked into the room silently, holding onto that notebook for dear life; it made Nayeon wonder what was inside, but it made her dread it at the same time. She had a feeling that whatever was going to happen next was tied to those pages; she felt her stomach churn.

Her hands fidgeted with the hem of her loose shirt as Mina sat down on one of the beds – Nayeon’s bed – and suddenly the scenario reminded her of the stillness before a storm, much like when she was waiting for her father’s scolding. The sensation wasn’t pleasant in the slightest, but it was still better than having her actual father around; Nayeon would have Mina instead any day.

She was sure that a minute of silence had passed, and she couldn’t hold back anymore. “Mina—”

“Before I do this, I need you to promise me something,” Mina interrupted, still not looking at her. She slightly scratched the rough cover of the notebook to soothe her anxiety. “But I need your promise to be sincere.”

Mina really didn’t have to face her to make her shiver – Nayeon wasn’t in a position to refuse, after everything that happened. Much like the voices, she would accept Mina’s words, even if they hurt. Maybe she wanted to be hurt, in a way. “All right.”

Mina nodded slightly. “I… I will say a few things. After that, I’ll let you speak, and I need— I need you to be honest with me. A hundred percent.” That’s when Mina finally lifted her head. Her piercing eyes met Nayeon’s fragile gaze. “Because I can’t do this alone.”

It sounded much like a plea for help, an extended hand begging for mercy, and Nayeon faltered. Even after everything – after telling herself again and again that she had to endure her punishment, she still hesitated.

Telling the truth when you’ve enveloped your heart in lies was harder than anyone would ever understand.

But if Mina was there, willing to strip herself bare like this, then Nayeon couldn’t – wouldn’t – deny the request. She might think of herself as a monster, but the love she held for this girl outweighed the self-imposed cruelty.

“…Okay.”
“Do you mean it?” Mina pushed.

“I— yes.”

“No more lies?” And one last time, because despite what people may think, Myoui Mina knew how to read others way too well.

Nayeon let out a shaky breath, nodding. “No more lies.”

“Okay, then.” Mina took a deep breath and finally opened the notebook. She caressed the first page with her thumb for a moment, looking down at the contents, like it was a precious treasure. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking these past two weeks. There were too many things going on in my head, and I needed to let them out, somehow. I talked to Chaengie about it, and she suggested me to write my feelings down somewhere, because that’s what she does. I thought it was a good idea.”

Nayeon grabbed her chair and sat down. This was going to take a while, and she had every intent of listening to Mina’s words attentively.

“At the beginning, it was weird. I didn’t know how to start this… I tried to write things as if I was talking to the notebook, but that didn’t sound right. Then I tried to write a story, but it was taking too long to get to the point. I realized that I was thinking too much about how to do this instead of doing it, so I decided to be concise.”

Mina turned the notebook so Nayeon could see her writing, but not enough for her to actually be able to read it. “So, this is what I did. I wrote sentences, simple and straightforward.” She placed the notebook back on top of her thighs. “It was… probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.”

That made Nayeon shiver.

With a sigh, Mina looked at her briefly. “I’ll start reading.”

Nayeon nodded, her heart beating strongly against her chest.

“Here are my truths.” Mina began. “Jeongyeon. I love Jeongyeon. I’ve loved her since high school, and I don’t think I will ever stop. I never thought that I would actually end up dating her. So, when it happened, it was like nothing else mattered. I blinded myself to my surroundings. She was a fantasy, and I didn’t want to face reality.”

“I knew that she was lying about the kiss. I wanted her to keep lying. I didn’t want anyone to bring up the kiss, because I was afraid of what would happen if she thought about it for a second. I didn’t trust her like a good girlfriend should. She thought she was keeping me in the dark, but I was the one keeping her hostage. It wasn’t healthy. I was insecure, and she was afraid. I want to apologize to her.”

She finished her thoughts about Jeongyeon and moved on to another page.

“Nayeon. I’ve always been intimidated by Nayeon. It got especially bad after her musical. She’s amazing and I hurt her. I didn’t think about her feelings when I started dating Jeongyeon. I tried to lie to myself saying that it didn’t make sense for me to worry about her feelings. She didn’t love Jeongyeon anymore. Jeongyeon didn’t love Nayeon anymore. Those were lies. They still love each other.”

Nayeon almost interrupted her then, because it was instinctive – she felt incredibly exposed and she wanted to protect herself. But she promised Mina that she would listen, and that she wouldn’t
lie anymore. So, she gripped the chair until her knuckles turned white, and allowed Mina to continue.

“I didn’t ask Nayeon if it was okay for me to date Jeongyeon, because the answer would be no. I didn’t ask Jeongyeon if she still had feelings for Nayeon, because the answer would be yes. I blinded myself to everything.” Mina lifted her head up briefly. “I repeat some sentences a lot, sorry for that.”

Nayeon just nodded, unable to speak. Mina resumed reading.

“Nayeon lied to us. But I lied, too. Did I lie because of what she did? I don’t think so. It doesn’t matter that she lied. What matters is how I handled the situation. My true nature came out, and it was ugly. Nayeon turned Jeongyeon into a liar, and I did the same with Momo. I believe that this makes us the villains.”

Mina softened her voice, speaking slower. “…Or it would, if this was a fairytale. But it’s not. We are not villains. We are not monsters. We are just girls trying to grow up. I want to apologize to her.”

There was a brief silence; the last sentences felt surreal. Mina allowed the words to sink in, because she knew Nayeon needed it, but soon spoke again.

“Momo.” Mina paused. Nayeon only registered the pause when it went on for too long. She looked at Mina and realized that she was catching her breath and her eyes were glazed over. Whatever she’d written about Momo was hard for her to read out loud.

“Mina?”

“I’m— I’m okay,” Mina looked up to stop tears from falling, and huffed. After recomposing herself, she returned to the pages. “Momo. There are many things I could say about Momo. But if I was to write it all down, I would take up this entire notebook.”

The sentence made Nayeon hold her breath.

“When I think about Momo, my heart aches. When I think that I’ve hurt her, it’s like I’m being torn apart. When I think about all the things I put her through for my own sake, I want to cry. Momo didn’t deserve any of this.”

Mina pressed her fingers onto the pages, as if holding back her anger. “I have no right to be angry at Nayeon for what she did, since I did the same. But if I had to pick something to be mad about, it would be the fact that she hurt Momo. Momo loves Nayeon. I’ve known that for a while. I wanted them to work out.”

Mina swallowed thickly, turning the page with shaky hands.

“I thought that I wanted Momo’s happiness, and that’s why I rooted for her. That’s partially true. But I can’t deny that there was another reason for it. I’m selfish. I wanted Nayeon out of the picture. Once again, I was only thinking about myself.”

Nayeon didn’t move an inch – she couldn’t say that she was surprised about the confession, because the feeling was familiar. The creature called greed, who clawed its way up without people even noticing; it’s what made Nayeon hate herself in the first place.

A sudden protective instinct rose in her chest again, much like when those girls had talked badly about Mina in front of her, or when Mina was pushed in the cafeteria. Nayeon wanted to reach out
and shield her.

She wanted to stop Mina from turning into her.

“I’m selfish. I think I have always been.” Mina continued reading, the emotional exhaustion clear in her voice. “I think that we all have that one person who has the power to give you life and destroy you at the same time. The one who will always be in your thoughts, no matter who you’re with. To Jeongyeon, it’s Nayeon. I could feel it, during our relationship. Nayeon was always there, somewhere, even if Jeongyeon tried to pretend she wasn’t.”

Nayeon couldn’t move. Mina rubbed her eyes. “To me, it’s Momo. As I write this, my hands shake. I feel nauseous, and I want to cry. I don’t want to lose Jeongyeon. I don’t want to lose Nayeon. But I can’t live without Momo.”

There was a silent beat, and Nayeon’s eyes widened.

“…I love Momo.” A final confession – painfully ambiguous – before Mina turned the page once more. “I can’t not love her. She is a part of me. She protects me, and she thinks about me before anyone else, and I know that if she was to leave me forever, I wouldn’t be able to take it. She carried my burden because she wanted my happiness, like she’s always done. Momo is my entire life. Without her, I will never be completely happy. I’ve come to accept that.”

Nayeon finally broke her composure. “Mina—”

“Please, I’m almost finished,” she stopped her gently, rubbing her eyes once again. “I promise I’ll let you speak after that.”

It hurt to listen quietly, but Nayeon firmed herself on the chair with a deep breath and nodded slowly.

Mina’s eyes moved to the notebook once more. “There are more things I need to say, but to different people. For now, I want to solve this problem. And the only way to do so, is to be honest with myself, and with others. And that’s what I plan to do.”

“So here are my truths. I still love Jeongyeon. I love Momo, too. I love Nayeon. I don’t want to lose her friendship. Momo loves Nayeon, and Momo’s happiness is all that matters to me. I’m sure Jeongyeon loves Nayeon still, and the same goes for her. So, where does this leave us?”

Hearing Mina break down their feelings in simple sentences was jarring. Nayeon felt her eyes watering.

“The fact is… there are people that we want, and people that we need. Life tells us to pick one, but… maybe we don’t have to.”

Nayeon could hear her own heartbeat.

Is she…?

Mina finally closed the notebook. “That’s what I wanted to tell you. I know it was a lot, but I hope my feelings came across.”

“They did,” Maybe it was the fact that she’d been hearing overlapping yells inside her head for a while, but Mina’s monologue made perfect sense. “Thank you.”

“I’d like to hear what you have to say, now.”
Nayeon didn’t know where to start. It was a lot to process – she had the feelings of four broken girls in her hands, and it was like she could set the spectacle ablaze with a simple mistake. She could picture ripped scripts and old curtains, an empty audience applauding as the spotlight shined on her.

Mina was the crowd, and Nayeon took off her mask for the first time.

“Momo is in love with you.” She couldn’t keep this in anymore.

She saw rather than heard Mina’s breathing hitching, as if Nayeon had punched her fragile heart, breaking it in a million pieces. Telling the truth was so painful.

“What…” Mina breathed out. A tear made its way down her cheek.

“She told me. One day after we—” Nayeon swallowed hard. “We had sex backstage, after my musical. I didn’t regret it. I didn’t deserve it, but I wanted her to pick up my pieces.”

Nayeon’s voice was trembling and she scratched her knuckles to distract herself from the heartburn. “You’re— you’re right. I still love Jeongyeon. When we broke up… when we came to college together, I still saw her every day. I realized that I regretted breaking up with her a few months after our first day. But I didn’t tell her that, because I wanted her to make her own choices. I tried to move on, but I couldn’t. And then, I fell for Momo.”

Mina sniffled, wiping her cheeks. She nodded, encouraging Nayeon to continue.

“Momo was there for me after my break up, and I couldn’t— I couldn’t help it. She paid attention to me. It’s pathetic, really… all it took was Momo’s comforting words, and I was at her mercy. She was so good at it. She is so good at making me feel loved.”

Nayeon couldn’t only agree with her head.

“The reason I kissed Jeongyeon… the reason I broke Momo’s heart, was because I didn’t want them to have to deal with me. I could never have one of them, because I would keep thinking about the other. I thought about Jeongyeon when Momo fucked me, and I thought about Momo when I kissed Jeongyeon’s lips. I’m a greedy bitch, a poison to everyone around me. I wanted to push them away from me.”

Nayeon’s eyes watered as she let the words out, finally breaking with the weight of the truth.

“I’m sorry, Mina…” She talked over the lump in her throat as she buried her face in her hands. “I’m sorry for what I did… I hate myself more than anything, and if I could— if I could take everything back, I w—would. I would tell Jeongyeon to b—be with you… and I would tell her to cherish you, and I would disappear. You— you deserved happiness—”

In a sudden move, Mina was hugging Nayeon’s small frame, arms secured tightly around her. She could hear Mina’s soft sobs in her ear, her hand moving slowly up and down her back, in an empathic gesture. Nayeon couldn’t understand.

“W—why are you being nice to me…?”

“Because we’re not monsters,” Mina’s voice cracked with the force of her resolve. “Don’t you see what we’re doing? We’re not— we’re just hurting each other further by doing this. It doesn’t matter what you did, Nayeonnie, I can’t bear hearing you say these things about you. I love you. I love you, and Jeongyeon, and Momo, and Sana, and Dahyunnie, and Chaengie, Jihyo and Tzuyu, and— the only reason we’re able to feel this much pain is because of how much we love each
Nayeon’s limp arms moved slowly, returning the hug, softly at first, then tightening just as strongly. Her fingers curled on the cloth of Mina’s blouse, clinging to her for dear life. She missed being held. She missed allowing herself to be held. It was so tiring.

Hating herself was so incredibly tiring.

“I’m sorry…” She whispered against Mina’s shoulder.

“I forgive you. Just please… don’t leave us. Please, Nayeonnie.” Mina leaned back to cup Nayeon’s cheeks, wiping her tears even though her own cheeks were a mess of wet trails. “Momo needs you. Jeongyeon needs you. And if having you makes them happy, I don’t care.”

Nayeon knew what she was going to say even before the words were out of her mouth.

“I trust them with you.”

Perhaps Mina was the unexpected savior they all needed.

Or maybe they’ve all been on the same page all along.

“…Me too,” Nayeon professed the words slowly, closing her eyes. “I don’t mind it if it’s you.”

Mina smiled for the first time and dived back in into Nayeon’s arms.

No hug would ever compare.

--

The sound of the bouncing ball on the wooden floor echoed loudly through the gym. With no one else around to yell commands or cheer loudly, Jeongyeon felt at peace, like the lights over her head only served to illuminate her way to the hoop. She slid gracefully across the courtyard then stopped, ball in hands and knees bent. With one calculated move, she shot the ball right into its target, scoring three points for her imaginary team.

Jeongyeon smiled a little and walked towards the ball again, wiping the sweat off her forehead.

“There you are.” A sudden voice made her turn around, and the sight of her tiny artistic friend was welcoming.

“Hey, Chaeng.”

“I didn’t know this place could actually get empty,” Chaeyoung walked towards the grid, leaning on her elbows. “Every time I walk by I hear screams.”

“How many times have you willingly walked into the gym?” Jeongyeon smirked, making the ball bounce again as she moved to the middle of the courtyard.
“Hey, I’ve watched your games!” Chaeyoung tried to defend herself.

Jeongyeon chuckled lightly, and sprinted again, pretending to evade the opposite team, and jumping high. The ball flew through the air and landed perfectly into the hoop again; Chaeyoung whispered cheers.

“Do you want to join me?” The athlete asked as she retrieved the ball once more.

“I’m not exactly a sports-person.” Chaeyoung said, lifting her broken knuckles.

“You don’t need two hands to do this,” Jeongyeon shot the ball over her head with one hand and her back turned to the hoop, scoring another three points.

Chaeyoung stared at her with a deadpan expression. “Show off.”

“Nerd.”

“Jock.”

“Tiny Picasso.”

“That’s not an insult, dumbass.”

Both girls let out a heartfelt laugh and it felt good – the sound wasn’t as cheerful or genuine as it used to be, but it was a start. Chaeyoung opened the tiny gate and walked into the court, deciding to humor her new roommate. She needed a distraction as well.

Jeongyeon passed her the ball, already jumping side to side like a hyperactive frog. Chaeyoung didn’t exactly know what to do with one functional hand, so she just calmly walked until she was close to the hoop and tried to make the ball fall into that thing. She missed and rolled her eyes.

“That wasn’t so bad.” Jeongyeon tried to cheer her up, fetching the ball.

“I don’t need your pity.” Chaeyoung dismissed her and let out a breathless gasp when Jeongyeon threw the ball strongly against her chest. “Ouch, rude!”

“Sorry!” She laughed a little. “It’s the adrenaline.”

“Hmm,” Chaeyoung eyed her for a moment, then tried again, to no avail. “Goddammit.”

Jeongyeon ran after the ball again, and they kept at it. Chaeyoung was starting to get frustrated, but Jeongyeon’s mood didn’t waver.

“You’re looking better,” Chaeyoung decided to start a conversation after a few silent minutes, because she had a feeling that the adrenaline could finally help her friend open up. They didn’t get to talk about the elephant in the room when they were back at the dorm, and Chaeyoung hated it. She was feeling terribly constricted.

“I guess. Playing distracts me.” Jeongyeon replied, then changed subjects. “Try to aim a bit more to the right.”

Chaeyoung did, failing once more. “Have you talked to anyone recently? Jihyo, Sana…”

“Not really.” Jeongyeon passed her the ball. “I think that if you stand over there you might angle your shot better.”
Chaeyoung huffed, moving to where Jeongyeon pointed. “I was thinking about asking Sana over to a movie marathon. You know, in our dorm.” The ball missed.

“Uh-huh,” Jeongyeon tossed the ball back. Then she frowned, calculating. “Try to step back… right here.”

“Hey. Are you even listening to me?” Chaeyoung snapped, and that made Jeongyeon finally look at her.

“Yeah. Yeah, sorry, I’m not in the mood for this, Chaeng.”

“When will you be? In the mood for this? It’s been two weeks.” Chaeyoung held the ball under her arm, facing Jeongyeon. “Is this your plan? To live with us until you graduate because you don’t want to talk to Momo ever again?”

“If I’m being an inconvenience just tell me,” Jeongyeon stepped forward to take the ball, but the tiny artist jumped back, away from her touch. “Chaeng, give me the ball, come on.”

“It’s not about being an inconvenience, Jeong, it’s about avoiding your friends.” Her voice rose in volume; she was barely aware of the ball poking her ribs. “You had an argument, fine, we all gave you guys time to calm down. But don’t you think it’s time to solve this? You know, like the adults you technically are.”

“It’s not that simple, Chaeyoung!” There it was, the physical feeling of her putting up her barriers. Jeongyeon could nearly see the walls rising around her, and she hated to be approached with the matter all of a sudden. All she wanted to do was play basketball, distract herself from the pain, avoid confrontation–See the world through the frame of her broken glasses, ignoring what was outside.

But now she was cornered once again. “Give me the ball.”

Maybe it was Jeongyeon’s fixation with a goddamn ball, or the fact that she couldn’t look at Chaeyoung in the eyes, or maybe the realization that Jeongyeon wasn’t this great, amazing person that Chaeyoung has always admired in high school, but was instead a stubborn child – but every annoying little thing about this woman suddenly crashed down on Chaeyoung’s already sensitive state, and she couldn’t hold the anger back.

“What the fuck is your problem?!” Chaeyoung let out a full-blown yell. “You refuse to talk to your best friend, you refuse to talk to your ex-girlfriend, you refuse to talk to Mina, who last time I checked was still your fucking girlfriend, what is wrong with you??”

“You don’t understand—!”

“No, you don’t understand! You think you’re the only one who’s upset? Sana is a wreck, Jihyo looks exhausted ninety percent of the time, Dahyun is barely around because of Momo, I haven’t seen Tzuyu smile in days—”

Saying it out loud just made the whole shitty situation feel a lot more real, and Chaeyoung could feel her face heating up. She was shaking. “And you’re making everything worse because of your fucking problems, that you can’t fucking solve, because you’re a fucking coward!” Chaeyoung threw the ball on the ground violently. “Here’s your fucking ball that you love so much.”

Chaeyoung stormed off the courtyard in quick steps, leaving a baffled Jeongyeon behind. The silence after her outburst was maddening, and Jeongyeon felt her knees giving in.
She sat down, lifting her knees, and burying her head in her arms. The darkness swallowed her whole, and she wanted nothing more than to disappear.

It was the second time she’d been called a coward. She knew that. Momo’s voice looped the word at the back of her head constantly.

Jeongyeon didn’t want to be a burden. She thought that she was helping everyone by staying out of the picture, but all she was doing was dragging the group down with her.

She felt lost and alone – a knight in shining armor whose sword and heart were utterly broken.

And without these things, she was no one.

Maybe Jeongyeon was a damsel in distress all along.

--

Dahyun wasn’t one to venture into second-year classrooms despite being friends with some of the students. She tended to avoid it because classes were where large groups of seniors gathered most of the time, and when they spotted a freshman, endless teasing usually followed. This time, however, Dahyun needed to reach someone.

And that person was at the very back of the class, because fate wasn’t keen on being kind to Kim Dahyun most of the time.

She poked her head inside, scanned the place, and finally found her target. With a rub on the dice inside her pocket, Dahyun entered the classroom.

She walked in a crouched manner, trying to escape curious gazes, but her wonky steps just attracted more attention to herself. Soon, she could hear mumbles and laughter ringing around, until someone reached for her shirt, pulling her back a bit. “You lost, freshman?”

Dahyun took a deep breath, her face already red with nervousness. “Hello, fellow adventurer.”

Well, the surprise attack definitely worked; the boy let her go and stared at her for a couple of seconds before laughing in her face. “Excuse me?”

“That was a joke,” Dahyun replied with a forced smile, making her way around him carefully. “I just need to talk to a friend over there.”

The guy snapped out of the weirdness of it all, turning his attention back to her. “Who?”

Dahyun clicked her tongue.

*Spell effects wear off quickly around here.*

Maybe she was going a bit insane, but dealing with heavy stuff required some light-heartedness.
“That girl all the way over there.” Dahyun pointed and he turned his head to look, enabling her escape. She was quite dexterous for a wizard.

Finally arriving at her destination, Dahyun tapped the girl’s shoulder twice. She stopped chatting with her friends to tilt her head in Dahyun’s direction, and widened her eyes when she saw her. “Dahyun?”

“Hey, Chungha.”

“What are you doing here?” Chungha smiled, getting down from the table she was sitting on. “It’s been a while.”

“It has, huh?” Despite all the rumors, bullying, and general anxiety surrounding everything lately, Chungha was a friend that Dahyun admired, and talking to her made her feel at ease.

It was funny, really; norm dictated that Dahyun should be jealous of Chungha – she had dated Sana at some point in the past, even if for roughly two weeks – but Dahyun didn’t care about drama. Chungha wasn’t a bad person, and she still hung out with Sana once in a while, loving her in a platonic manner.

Everything that made Sana happy made Dahyun happy, too, so Chungha’s presence was appreciated.

“Is everything okay?” Chungha asked in a lower voice after Dahyun paused for a moment. “I’ve heard some nasty things happened to you. And Sana, too.”

“Yes… that.” Dahyun looked around; they were still surrounded by people, and the girls who had been talking to Chungha a moment ago were staring. Dahyun sighed. “I actually came to talk to you about this. And… ask you a big favor.”

Chungha has never seen the quirky freshman look so serious, and soon realized that they needed privacy. “Got it. Follow me.” She grabbed Dahyun by her sleeve and dragged her across the classroom, earning a few surprised looks from the people there.

Dahyun knew that Chungha was important in the campus’ party life; that was the reason she even came to her in the first place. Also, having people wonder and whisper about her presence in a second-year classroom on top of a private conversation with Chungha was the scenario Dahyun was hoping for.

She felt her body shiver.

“Okay, we don’t have much time, but no one’s gonna bother us here.” Chungha finally let her go once they reached the end of the hallway. “What’s going on?”

Dahyun took a deep breath.

Roll for initiative.

“Sana is in trouble. Big, big trouble, and I don’t know all the details. But I think you do, and I think you can explain things to me.” Straightforward and precise with her words.

Chungha frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I mean I don’t have anyone else I can trust but you. I know it’s a lot to ask, but can you give me a chance?”
She sounded vulnerable. Chungha knew that they weren’t even that close to begin with. Dahyun had her friends from high school who were like her family, so the fact that she came to her for this was curious.

“…I can’t promise anything.” Chungha was honest with her. “But I’ll listen.”

“Thank you,” It was already step one. “Just… promise me you won’t shut me out.”

“Just say it, Dahyun—”

“Who is Chanmi?”

The look in Chungha’s eyes was telling. Jackpot.

“Why do you want to know?”

“Because she’s doing something to Sana.”

Dahyun saw the way Chungha’s lip twisted and immediately knew that this wasn’t good. The girl was debating if she should bother, especially with a freshman like her, and Dahyun had to think quickly of something that would convince her to talk.

“I know it’s bad.” Dahyun tried. “I overheard a conversation. I know there are drugs involved, and I know she wanted Sana around, but I can’t put these pieces together myself. Please, Chungha, I need—” I need your help to retrieve the relic. “I need your help.”

“You don’t want to go down this path, Dahyun.” Chungha was hesitating still, but wavering.

“You’re right, I don’t.” Dahyun let out a nervous chuckle. “It’s insane, I’m just a girl who watches way too much anime and who got drunk maybe twice in her life, but… it’s Sana. She’s in trouble, and I can’t turn my back on her. Not again.”

It sounded like she was talking more to herself than anything, and Chungha took this as a sign. Her brain started working fast.

Chungha had information – a lot of it. She was sort of an information broker in disguise, but not because she wanted to start drama; all she wanted was to protect herself and others she considered important. Getting tangled in other people’s businesses wasn’t her style, because it just stirred unnecessary problems for her. She was selfish, yes, but in an environment like this, she had to be.

She’d heard the audio. She knew about Sana returning to parties, she knew about Dahyun being involved, but she didn’t dwell much on it at the time; all that she remembered was finding it odd that Sana hadn’t been fooling around anymore with anyone. Now that Dahyun was here, talking to her about it, a puzzle piece fell into place suddenly.

Sana was being cautious because she was being used.

She was probably protecting Dahyun, but Dahyun chased after her anyway.

Chungha huffed, scratching her head. “Now I get it...”

“What will you do if I tell you? This whole shit is not a playground, Dahyun, it’s serious stuff.”

Dahyun bit her lip. “I know. I’m willing to take the risk.”
“All for Sana?”

“Yes.”

Chungha eyed her for a moment, trying to dig deeper into the reason. “Why? Because she’s your friend? You owe her something? To keep a promise? Give me something convincing, or else go. I can’t risk myself for someone who can’t even take the blow—”

“Because I love her.”

Chungha knew many things, but this took her completely by surprise. Dahyun was blushing, but her eyes were dead-set on her objective, even if the hands by her side were trembling. She was telling the absolute truth, and was committed to it, too.

With a soft chuckle, Chungha looked away. “So, the rumors were true. You two were dating.”

“Not really…” Dahyun felt embarrassed by that. “We were… at the beginning of something, I think. But this Chamni person happened before I could tell Sana about my feelings. Now she’s avoiding me, and I just want things to go back to normal so I can tell her.” Her voice cracked. “I really, really want to tell her.”

It was romantic. Chungha felt disheartened by it. Dahyun didn’t deserve to be dragged into this.

But who was she to stop her?

She sighed once more, then lifted her eyes. “…Fine. I’ll help you.” She walked past Dahyun then, leaving her confused. “After class. Meet me in the courtyard. The walls have ears.”

Dahyun nodded, mouthing a ‘thank you’, then bowing. Chungha waved her goodbye with a soft expression.

Things were working. Dahyun rubbed her dice again.

--

Momo was feeling rather alone in her dorm without Dahyun to keep her company. The younger girl had some things to take care of, and Momo didn’t want to burden her too much, so she told her not to worry. Now, lying on her bed without much to do, she wished her brain would stop buzzing.

With a shake of her head, Momo sat up. She couldn’t keep relying on Dahyun to take her mind off the chaos inside her. The past days had been hard and being temporarily distracted by a few jokes and documentaries wasn’t helping anymore. Momo knew that she needed to face this. She knew it.

She would have, too, if her heart didn’t feel like it was being ripped out of her chest every time she thought about the party.

Whenever she closed her eyes, the scene would play in her head. She could see it clearly, even though she had been drunk – her arm rearing back, the look on Jeongyeon’s face, the impact, her
glasses falling, then her own body falling on top of her.

Momo was terrified of herself. She searched deep within her for a reason for such violence, but found nothing. At that moment, Momo had shut down, and something else had taken over. That was the only explanation.

It was easy to think like that.

It didn’t change the fact that Momo had punched her best friend in the face. Out of everything that broke her heart that night, this was definitely the worst.

Guilt was eating her alive, and Momo wanted to apologize a thousand times.

A light knock on the door saved her from sinking too deep into sadness, and Momo got up, slapping her cheeks slightly.

“Dahyun? Did you forget your keys?” Momo asked, trying to sound playful.

“It’s me.” The voice answered, and all the nerves in Momo’s body stopped working.

That voice, so familiar and soothing, the one that always calmed her heart when she was feeling troubled and enveloped her soul like a warm blanket. The voice that reminded her of home, because the person it belonged to was her home. The girl she swore to protect with her life, even when they argued – and who in turn gave Momo a reason to believe in better days.

The voice she never thought she would hear again.

“Momo, please open up?” Mina’s muffled voice was almost too much for Momo to bear. She brought her hand to the metal handle and left it there. She leaned a bit, touching her forehead on the door, and closing her eyes.

Somehow, she knew that Mina was doing the same gesture on the other side.

“Can we talk?” Mina tried again. “Please,” Another pause. Then, “…I miss you.”

Mina would always be her weakness in this world.

Momo turned the handle, stopping midway to reconsider, but eventually opening the door wide. Her downcast eyes climbed up Mina’s body carefully, as if she was afraid of finding a disappointed look staring back at her when she reached the top.

Instead, she found pure, utter relief.

Momo nearly broke. “Mina—”

The impact took her by surprise, but her body reacted immediately. Mina dived into her arms, holding onto Momo like she was her lifeline, and burying her whole face into her chest. Mina’s hands clung to her shirt and Momo hugged her back, just as tightly – she couldn’t even think. Her scent enveloped her immediately and she felt herself drowning. Nothing else mattered.

Just Mina.

“I missed you so much,” Mina choked against her and Momo let the tears she’d been holding back fall. She brought one hand to Mina’s hair, caressing her gently there, like she liked it. Momo and Sana used to do that a lot to her when they were younger.
“I’m here,” Momo exhaled. “I’m right here.”

They hugged to make up for two weeks’ worth of lack of physical and emotional contact, and when Mina finally stepped back, it was like a part of Momo’s soul was missing already. She wanted to hold her forever, but then she remembered that she had punched Mina’s girlfriend in the jaw, and didn’t feel worthy of even breathing the same air as her anymore.

Unfortunately for her, Mina couldn’t stay away from Momo for long.

“Sit with me,” Mina pulled Momo to her bed, sitting on the edge. She didn’t let go of her hand, and Momo didn’t try to break the contact. She couldn’t.

Mina played with her fingers for a little bit, trying to distract herself, and Momo let her eyes roam her features, memorizing every single detail of her face like it was the first time. There was a pattern that Momo followed every time she looked at Mina – she started by her eyebrows, then up to her forehead, then down by the right side of her face, then her nose, where she spent her time appreciating her cute mole, then down her upper lip, bottom lip, the cheeks she loved to pinch, and finally her chin. Repeat.

Obviously Momo didn’t forget what Mina looked like in these two weeks, but seeing her so close to her again made the experience feel refreshing.

Mina was as beautiful as always.

She used her index finger to press on Momo’s digits one by one, from her thumb to her little finger, then back again; the nostalgic gesture made Momo smile softly.

“Have you been eating?” Mina asked gently.

“I have,” Momo curled her fingers then stretched them back, giggling a bit when Mina had to start toying with her hand all over again. “Have you?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good.”

There was silence, and then Mina spoke again. “You’ve been biting your nails.”

“I’ve been anxious.”

“Don’t do it. They were so pretty.”

“Yes, mom.” Momo teased, and Mina slapped her shoulder with an eye roll, but a soft smile tucked on her lips. Things seemed so normal that Momo wasn’t sure she was awake. Maybe she had dozed off waiting for Dahyun; Mina always did seem like a dream in her eyes.

The quiet moment was both comfortable and nerve-wrecking at the same time; Momo knew that the girl in front of her was mulling something over in her head, trying to think of the best way to start this conversation. Momo would wait patiently, even if the urge to bite her nails again was still very much present.

“Do you remember… when I got stung by a bee when we were nine and you started crying because you thought I was going to die?” Mina asked suddenly in a low voice, not looking up.

Momo nodded lightly. “Sana ran to call the teacher and when she arrived she didn’t know which
one of us had been stung because we were both bawling.”

Mina chuckled. “Even then you were taking my pain as if it was yours.”

“I just hated seeing you get hurt.” Momo looked down at their hands. “I didn’t know what to do back then.”

“If it happened now… would you know what to do?”

A part of her almost answered ‘I would fight the goddamn bee’, but Momo didn’t want to fight anything or anyone ever again. “I would take you to the nurse, probably.”

Mina stopped her ministrations on her hands. “What if I didn’t want that? What if all I wanted was to be with you?”

The question caught her so off guard that Momo couldn’t formulate an answer for a moment. She licked her dry lips. “I… I would have to take you there, anyway. I wouldn’t be able to heal you, for as much as I wanted to.”

Mina hummed, and resumed touching Momo’s palms, circling there slowly. “Sometimes… we need to let others take care of the people we care about.”

“…I guess.”

“But you know,” Mina’s thumb caressed Momo’s open palm. “Even if you were not able to heal me, I’d still need you. If I was crying, you would comfort me. You would try to make me laugh, and probably carry me to the nurse, too. I would need you just as much as I would need her.”

“Mina…”

“There are people that we need in this life, I think.” Her voice was heavy with something that Momo couldn’t distinguish; it was strong and new. “For different reasons, and different matters. That doesn’t mean our feelings aren’t as real.”

The silence served as a catalyst for an explosion of questions inside Momo’s head. In a way, she knew what Mina was referring to, but her personal block stopped this river from flowing. She just couldn’t believe her own sense of judgement anymore.

“I talked to Nayeon,” Before Momo could formulate a reply, Mina interrupted her fragile line of thought. “Before coming here.”

“You… you did?”

“Yes. I told her everything I wanted to tell her. And in return, she was honest with me about everything.”

Momo’s heart jumped. “What did she say?”

Mina’s thumb kept stroking Momo’s rough skin. “She apologized. She told me the reason she lied to everyone. She wanted to push you and Jeongyeon away, because she hates herself.”

Even after everything, Momo’s immediate reaction upon hearing something so heartbreaking about Nayeon was to perk up, ready to move. She still wanted to shield her from the harsh world.

“And the reason she hates herself is because she’s in love with both you and Jeongyeon. She couldn’t bear the guilt of wanting two people.”
Momo pressed her tongue to the inside of her cheek. Hearing Mina say that so calmly made her head spin.

“Momo, do you hate yourself?” Mina asked suddenly.

When Momo realized what that implied, she removed her hand from Mina’s touch, a huge shiver running down her spine. “W-what… what do you mean?”

“It’s okay. Nayeon told me,” Mina lifted her eyes; her palms were upwards, and her stance was wide open – she was showing Momo how there was no need to flee. She was vulnerable and completely exposed, urging Momo to do the same. “You’re also in love with two people, aren’t you?”

“I’m…”

“Momo,” Mina’s eyes were glistening. “Do you love me?”

A silent beat.

Then another.

The third one was already unbearable.

“Yes.” Momo wasn’t a liar. “Yes, I do. Mina…” It was so easy to admit that. “…I love you so much.”

Mina’s lips started to tremble, and she cupped Momo’s face, bringing it closer to hers. They touched foreheads, and Momo let out a shaky breath, placing her hands over Mina’s own.

“I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to fall for you. I really didn’t,” Momo continued, letting everything out. “But then we kissed at that party and I lost you to Jeongyeon, and right then I just… I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I never realized how empty I would feel without you, Mina, I really didn’t. God, I’m such a terrible best friend.”

“You’re not.”

“I am,” Momo shook her head, eyes closed. “Confessing to you now is such a dick move. First I punch your girlfriend in the face, and then I tell you that I love you? While still in love with someone else? What part of this isn’t absolute garbage, Mina?”

“The part where I feel the same.”

Momo’s eyes flew open and she leaned back, mouth hanging open. “What?”

*There are people that we want, and people that we need.*

“The part where you’re the one I need, while Jeongyeon is the one I want. The part where Jeongyeon is the one Nayeon needs, while you’re the one she wants.” Mina reached for Momo’s hands once more. “The part where I love you too. You idiot.”

The sting of a bee was nothing compared to the impact of those words.

“We’re all hurting ourselves needlessly with all of this,” Mina has never sounded this confident before. “We’re wasting time hating ourselves instead of loving one another. I told Nayeonnie that I don’t mind.”
This couldn’t be real.

“I don’t mind that you love her. I don’t mind that Jeongyeon possibly still loves her, too. Because at the end of the day, we all need each other.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that the four of us need to talk.” Mina finished, exhausted. She let her forehead fall on Momo’s shoulder and took a deep breath. Her scent calmed her down. “And you need to apologize to Jeongyeon, still.”

They remained like this, Momo bringing a hand to her scalp after a moment. The birds outside still chirped, the students above them still stomped their feet, and the world didn’t end just because of their feelings. It gave Momo a perspective.

“You love me…?” She mumbled.

Mina nodded absentmindedly. “I think… I think I always have. It’s so natural. Loving you. So much so that I only realized it when Nayeon told me you were in love with me too.”

“Is it because we grew up together?”

“That, too.” Mina closed her eyes, basking on the sensation of confessing the obvious to the girl who’s always been there for her. She felt calmer than she expected. “But not only that… or else I’d fallen for Sana, too.”

“Please, don’t.” Momo nearly laughed at how chaotic things would be if that were to happen.

“I won’t.”

Momo laid her cheek on Mina’s hair. “What about Jeongyeon?”

“I love her, still.” Flashes of the brief period they dated popped up in Mina’s mind and she felt her heart constricting. “Just like you’d give Nayeon the world, I’d give it to Jeongyeon.”

Momo didn’t know how to feel about that sentence. It was true – she would go to hell and back for Nayeon, but for Mina, too. Thinking about it, Momo had no right to feel jealous.

Jeongyeon was still someone she cherished deeply, and she didn’t want to lose her, either.

“Would you date me?” Momo asked suddenly, just because.

“Would you share me?” Mina responded.

Silence. Then, “…With Jeongyeon?” Mina nodded. “I don’t… know.”

“I would share you. With Nayeon.”

The conversation sounded otherworldly. Momo couldn’t help but to chuckle at the idea, and the chuckle turned into a full-blown laughter soon. The tears down her face were weirdly warm. “What a mess.”

Mina joined her with a smile. After a moment, Momo moved Mina away from her shoulder and placed a kiss on her forehead.

A gesture that encompassed many things, but mostly ‘I love you. I’ll never stop.’
And ‘Thank you.’

--

It was a lot more than Dahyun expected.

She sat beside Chungha under the shadow of a tree, the courtyard as inviting as ever. The people who walked by had no idea that Dahyun and her new friend were talking about heavy drugs, blackmail, and a shady college business that sounded a lot like a mafia the more Chungha explained things – but hey, it made sense when put into context.

Chungha tried to break things down as well as she could.

Chanmi was the head of traffic on the campus’ grounds, and her influence had been going on for a while. Freshmen didn’t know about her because she didn’t care about them; only older students were allowed into the club. The ones who got hooked on the drugs had their pictures taken stealthily in parties and whatnot, which were then sent to Chanmi’s phone. With their whole lives in the hands of this one girl, people had no other choice but to keep their head low and their pockets full – of money, and information. Chanmi’s new victims were the naïve students who slipped into her den, biting off more than they could chew. It was easy to attract second-year students like that.

“Sana is as popular as her,” Chungha continued, biting her banana. “She has her reputation. Party girl Minatozaki, and all that. Chanmi likes her because sex and drugs pretty much walk hand in hand, and she needed someone to provide the former.”

“Sana is not a prostitute,” Dahyun clenched her fists, looking to the horizon. She had her back turned to the main building, thanks to Chungha’s advice. She knew that the things she was about to tell Dahyun would upset her, and she didn’t need students to see her angry expression as they passed by. “What do I have to do with all of this?”

“You were disturbing Chanmi’s business. Because of you, Sana wasn’t hooking up with anyone else, and the people who wanted a piece of her were getting restless and probably bothering Chanmi to the point where she had to check. You got lucky,” Chungha scoffed. “You’re just a freshman. If you’d been a year older she would find not only a way to wreck you, but to add you to her stash of blackmail.”

“Is this girl a psycho?”

“Pretty much. But hey, drugs, am I right?” Chungha threw the banana peel on the garbage can above her head and laid down, sighing. “You were being bullied, right?”

“For a while, yeah.”

“There was this audio someone recorded of Sana. The one you heard.”

Dahyun nodded, picking on the grass.
“Chanmi just wanted to calm people down. They thought that Sana was lost forever. No more sexing up with Minatozaki.”

“Stop saying stuff like that.”

“It’s the truth, learn to handle it.”

Dahyun knew that Chungha was just trying to toughen her up. She needed it, in a way, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt.

“Sana was having anxiety attacks,” Dahyun spilled after a silent moment, and that made Chungha sit up again. “She wasn’t going to parties because she thought that the whole school was watching her every move. And they were.”

“Shit.”

“Are people really that inconsiderate toward others?”

Chungha softened her gaze, smiling gently. “You’re much too good for this whole thing, Dahyun-ah.”

“I can’t let this continue. I need to bring Sana home.” Dahyun’s put her hand in her pocket, touching something there. “How can I get to Chanmi?”

The question didn’t surprise the older girl, but she did sigh again. “I can’t take you to her. There’s a bunch of bullshit hierarchy that doesn’t make any sense and I never wanted to be part of it.”

Dahyun’s heart dropped. She couldn’t lose the game again, not when she’d come so close.

“…But I know people who can.” Chungha finished, hating every word. She hated the way Dahyun’s eyes shone brightly, too. “They won’t tell you what you want to know, though. You need to play their game.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning asking around for drugs.”

Dahyun’s palms started to sweat, but she nodded. “Right.”

“And don’t be obvious about it. These people might be dumb, but they’re paranoid. The code is ‘voice’. Approach someone in the courtyard, near the fountain, mostly. Start a friendly chat, then ask them how’s their voice at some point. If they look at you weirdly, they’re not your target. If they answer you, you got them.”

It was starting to look more and more like a real game, and at the same time that it filled Dahyun with excitement, it scared her to no end. “How will I know what the reply means?”

“If they say they lost their voice, they’re out of drugs. You need to ask them for throat medicine. That’s what you’re looking for. They’ll probably give you some coordinates, and that will take you to Chanmi. It’s not that hard, really.”

Dahyun memorized Chungha’s words, already planning the way she would have to go by this. There was just one problem. “If Chanmi knows who I am, won’t her… lackeys, or whatever, know me too?”

“Not everyone knows who you are. They don’t have enough brain cells to retain information.”
Chungha looked at her seriously. “Don’t become like them.”

“I’m not gonna become a ghoul, I’m a wizard.” Dahyun smiled for the first time, and Chungha blinked, raising an eyebrow.

“What the hell does that even mean?”

Dahyun just winked coolly, and Chungha rolled her eyes. That girl was either doomed, or blessed. “Whatever. Anyway, that’s all you will get out of me. I didn’t say anything.”

Both girls got up, and Dahyun’s legs felt like jelly. She was terrified of she was about to do, and she knew that if she didn’t thread this thin ice carefully, she could very well get expelled. Sana would be left all alone if that happened, and the thought scared Dahyun more than anything. She needed to be brave, and she needed luck now more than ever.

“Thanks, Chungha. I mean it.”

“Don’t mess up, wizard.” Chungha winked back, and turned to leave, waving.

Dahyun took a deep breath, then let it all out. She put her hand in her pocket again, closing her eyes. Sana’s laughter rang inside her head, and Dahyun knew that she would do everything for this girl.

“Let’s do this.”

--

Snooping around wasn’t the proper conduct of a teacher, but Sunmi figured that she could get away with it by pretending to be lost or confused. Being new on the job had its perks.

The sunset hit the walls of the teacher’s lounge, making it dim, but not enough that the shadows could hide her body; if someone walked in, they would definitely see her. So, Sunmi crouched as she went through the students’ files one by one, hoping not to get caught. Even if the files were in alphabetical order, she was taking her sweet time finding the one she was looking for.

There were not nearly as many students in that university when Sunmi was a student, that’s for sure. She wondered if it had something to do with what she was searching for.

Minutes passed and her heart raced, but finally she managed to find the file. “There you are, you brat.”

Sunmi gathered the rest of the papers on her lap and got up, putting them back on the drawer where they belonged. She was about to turn around to leave, when the door opened.

Shit.

Jea halted on the spot upon realizing that she wasn’t alone, and her eyes went straight to the file in Sunmi’s hand. Weirdly enough, she seemed to be expecting that. “So, you really want to go there.”
“I was just…”

The nurse closed the door behind them, leaning against the frame to stop Sunmi from escaping. “Heo Chanmi. That’s her file, isn’t it?”

Sunmi tried to think of a lie, an excuse, but the more she delayed her answer, the deeper she dug herself. In the end, all she could do was to sigh. “Yes.”

“Figures,” Jea smiled smugly. “You finally caught wind of her, huh?”

“Yubin and Fei might have mentioned something.” She replied, carefully.

The way her two co-workers had dealt with the situation earlier made Sunmi mistrust every other professor; in her head, no one gave a shit about what that girl was doing to the mental health of the students. She couldn’t be sure about Jea.

“Yubin and Fei always talk more than they have to,” Jea rolled her eyes and moved away from the door, walking towards her table. Sunmi followed her with her gaze, confused. Was she letting her go?

Jea put her coat and bag on her chair and motioned for Sunmi to approach her. “Come on. I don’t bite.”

“Don’t you?”

“Only if you ask me to,” She smirked for a moment and Sunmi swallowed. There was something about Jea that made her stand out – a mysterious air to this nurse who dealt with a lot more students than the professors did. “Just come here already.”

Sunmi walked slowly as Jea grabbed her folder, filled with medical records of every student on campus. She opened it right where she wanted it. “Minatozaki Sana. Broken wrist, needs to change her bandages regularly. A bit of an air-head. Quite popular. Is having problems at school.”

She turned the page. “Kim Yerim. Regular headaches. Takes a lot of pain medicine. Started seeing a therapist this year. Is having problems at school.”

Another one. “Park Sooyoung. Used to come see me to skip class. Lots of period cramps. A broken nail. Had a panic attack recently. Is having problems at school.”

And another one. “Son Chaeyoung. Broke her knuckles after punching a wall. It was the first time she ever came to me. Mentioned that she might have anger management issues. Is having problems at school.”

Jea stopped reciting and just showed Sunmi the last line of each student file. The amount of people currently having problems at school was concerning, and Sunmi felt her chest tightening with each one. She almost asked to see Jihyo’s, but restrained herself.

“I see these kids on a regular basis. I see them growing as people, from the moment they walk into this school, to the moment they graduate.” Jea closed her folder after pages and pages of medical records. “Their mental health deteriorates as time goes by. And it got worse when Chanmi showed up.”

“Then why aren’t you doing anything?” Sunmi had to hold her voice back, but her hands were shaking.
“I am,” Jea lifted the heavy folder up, then slammed it on the table, making Sunmi flinch at the loud sound. “This is what I’m doing. Gathering proof that this woman is poisoning our school environment.”

“Gathering? Still? Isn’t that enough proof?”

“It is. But this alone won’t convince Dean Park that she needs to be expelled. Her family gives him money, and he’ll need a damn good reason to reject them,” Jea sounded frustrated all of a sudden, clenching her fists as she looked out of the window. “I’m waiting for the one thing that will finally give me the chance to show this to him. I need Chanmi exposed, but no one will talk because they’re all afraid of her. I need the students to talk.”

Sunmi felt bad for resenting Jea. The nurse was clearly as frustrated with all of this as she was, and she’d been crafting a plan for a lot longer. Suddenly she felt like a child who knew nothing of the world. Yubin and Fei were right; politics were a lot harder to deal with than anything Sunmi could ever have imagined.

“I’m sorry for doubting you.” Sunmi apologized, putting Chanmi’s file down.

Jea just shrugged. “You had every right to. We all got accustomed with how things work, but I’m not going to stop until that girl is out of here.” She reached for the file and opened the drawer again to put it where it belonged. “That’s why I need your help.”

Sunmi lifted her gaze, frowning. “Me?”

“I need you to be like me and do things on the down-low. Don’t make it obvious that you’re uncomfortable with Chanmi’s deal, because you’ll only attract attention to yourself. Keep your eyes and ears open at all times for students who might be willing to talk. But don’t talk to them about it first.”

“Why not?”

“Teachers can’t be biased.” The sentence made no sense to Sunmi, but she sighed.

“Fine. And how will I do that?”

“You’ll figure it out. Meanwhile,” Jea grabbed her things again after organizing everything neatly inside her bag. “Dumb yourself down.”

Sunmi blinked. “You want me to do what?”

“Your biggest weapon is being new here,” Jea walked past her with a pat on her shoulder. “Use that to your advantage, Sunmi-ah.”

With one last sympathetic look, Jea left the room, leaving Sunmi all alone with her thoughts. There were suddenly many things she needed to pay attention to on campus, and she felt overwhelmed with everything.

Thinking about one specific pair of eyes, however, made the task much less frightening.

If this could help relieve Jihyo’s burden, then Sunmi would fight with everything she had.
With a knock on the door, Jeongyeon waited patiently outside the room, not really expecting someone to open it. She still needed a place to sleep, so it didn’t hurt to try. No one answered for a long moment and she was about to turn away when the handle moved. Tzuyu’s presence on the other side was solacing.

“Welcome back.” Tzuyu said with a smile – a tired one, but a smile nonetheless. 

Jeongyeon bit her lip to stop the rush of emotions from overflowing her senses and stepped in, letting her forehead rest against Tzuyu’s shoulder. “…I’m home.”

The taller girl hugged her warmly. Jeongyeon didn’t feel worthy.

“Chaeng says sorry.” Tzuyu muttered against her hair, and Jeongyeon just nodded.

“I’m sorry, too.”

The tiny artist didn’t come back until Jeongyeon fell asleep. For the first time, no nightmares clouded her mind. She didn’t dream, either, but it was a change.

Neutrality – Jeongyeon’s specialty.

--

Jihyo woke up groggily, feeling another body behind her. The warmth was so incredibly familiar that she didn’t need to be fully awake to know that those were Nayeon’s hands sneaking around her waist, and Nayeon’s feet touching her calves, and Nayeon’s nose buried on her hair. She didn’t budge, waiting for her best friend’s next move, because she’d been incredibly unpredictable lately. If Jihyo was to be honest with herself, she expected more trouble from this gesture alone.

“I’m sorry.” Nayeon apologized instead, and that woke her up for good.

Jihyo kept still, not wanting to disturb the comfortable position they were both in. It didn’t feel quite real, to be allowed to touch Nayeon like this again. “Nabongs?”

“I’m sorry for rejecting your help. I don’t want to hurt anyone anymore, but especially you.” Nayeon pulled Jihyo closer, pressing a kiss to the back of her head. “Can you forgive me?”

For a moment, Jihyo was utterly speechless. She searched around her brain for a reason for this incredible change of character and remembered that Mina had talked to Nayeon that day. Whatever Mina had told her definitely worked. Jihyo needed to thank her later.

But now, she just wanted her best friend back.
“Always,” Jihyo intertwined their fingers and exhaled – a breath that seemed to be stuck in her lungs for months. “I love you, Nabongs.”

“I love you, too,” Nayeon whispered over the lump in her throat. “Thank you for not giving up on me, Jihyo-ah…”

Jihyo shook her head. “Thank you for not giving up on yourself.”

They slept like this, and Jihyo couldn’t stop smiling as tears of relief ran down her cheeks.

--

“Where are you going so early?” Momo rubbed her eyes as she sat up on her bed, following Dahyun’s frantic gestures. She knew that Dahyun didn’t have classes in the morning that day, so the agitation concerned her a little.

“Adventuring,” Dahyun replied, putting her phone in her pocket and tying her coat around her hips. She checked herself in the mirror once more, making sure to be presentable, and then hopped towards Momo, placing a soft kiss to the crown of her head. “Sorry for waking you up, go back to sleep.”

She was about to leave when Momo reached for her wrist. Dahyun looked back, and Momo rubbed her thumb on her pale skin gently. “Is everything okay?”

Her voice encompassed a gentleness that Dahyun hadn’t seen in quite some time, and the concern told her that Momo had changed; the numbness in her gaze had disappeared, and honest emotions were reflected through the glint of her eyes. Relief spread through Dahyun’s chest at the realization, and it just boosted her confidence for the danger she was about to put herself in.

“I’m wonderful,” Dahyun replied with a big, sincere smile, so contagious that Momo couldn’t help but to smile back. “You be okay too, all right?”

“Okay.”

They stared at each other for a little longer. At the same time that Momo pulled Dahyun, the younger girl was already stepping forward. They hugged tightly, a gesture that didn’t need words – it was like things were finally getting better. Dahyun didn’t have the time to ask, but she knew that Momo was figuring things out on her own.

They let each other go and Dahyun left the room giving her one last smile.

Once the door closed, Momo stared at it for a second, then kicked the covers away.

There was something she needed.
“Stay here today,” Mina whispered as she caressed Sana’s hair. “You need to rest.”

Sana didn’t answer right away, and just hugged Mina tighter. Even though their beds were glued to each other, Sana more often than not found herself wriggling her way to Mina’s pillow every night. Mina could tell that this double life she was living was too much to bear – she promised to look after Sana with the biggest care in the world, from now on. She had ignored her problems for much too long.

“Do you want me to tell your professors that you’re sick?” Sana hummed, and Mina took that as a sign. “Okay, I’ll take care of everything. You just rest for today, all right?”

“Thank you, Minari.” Sana finally answered, and Mina scratched her scalp lightly.

There was a knock on the door and Mina lifted her head, confused. “Were you waiting for someone?”

“Not me,” Sana replied, letting go of her friend. “Can you—”

“On it.” Mina reassured her, already getting up. She yawned, stretching her muscles, then walked towards the sound. “Who is it?”

“It’s me.” Momo’s voice was a surprise.

Mina opened the door without hesitation and Momo looked like she’d literally gotten out of bed and dragged herself to their room. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Mina couldn’t help but to blush a little and reach out to pat Momo’s disheveled hair with a soft giggle. “Did you fall out of bed?”

“Something like that,” Momo returned the lazy smile with a raspy voice. “I miss you two. Can I come in?”

It was such an innocent statement.

Mina stepped back, and Momo immediately threw herself on the mattress behind Sana, getting under the covers and attacking her with the tightest hug possible.

“Yah, Momoring!” Sana grunted loudly.

The two wrestled for a while as Mina closed the door and returned to their side. The only illumination came from the sun hitting the closed blinds, so the room was mostly dark, creating a cozy atmosphere. As soon as Mina crawled back to her spot, she was met with Sana and Momo’s smiley faces, and nearly cried.

She’s missed this so much.

She’s missed them so much.

“Come here, Minari.” Sana stretched her arms and Mina leaped on them with a wide smile.

“Sana needs hugs today,” Mina notified Momo, who was spooning Sana immediately.
“Sana sandwich day,” was all Momo said, fitting her frame perfectly against her best friend’s.

“I thought that Thursdays were Momo sandwich days,” Sana replied, laughing – she couldn’t even remember the sound of her own laughter.

“We’re changing it to Sana sandwich day.”

“I like Sana sandwich day.” Mina nodded and Sana, defeated, had to accept the cuddles.

The three let out a breathless chuckle at the same time, which escalated to giggles, and a louder laugh, just like the old days at sleepover parties. Mina could picture her mother downstairs, even the smell of breakfast being prepared as they pretended to be asleep because they didn’t want to leave the warmth of each other’s embrace.

Sana eventually fell back asleep, and Mina felt Momo’s hand finding hers over Sana’s waist. They tangled their fingers together, Momo peeking over Sana’s head to give Mina a genuine smile, and Mina squeezed her hand in return.

It felt like coming back home after a long, long day.

--

Dahyun took a deep breath and scanned the yard carefully, trying to pick a target. She prioritized the students sitting down, either reading or eating something, because it meant they weren’t in a rush. She remembered Chungha’s words of wisdom, rehearsing what she was going to tell them a thousand times over, but the nervousness at the pit of her stomach wouldn’t go away.

She was hesitating again and hated every minute of it. Dahyun closed her eyes and pictured her favorite memory from a few weeks ago – Sana’s smile as she looked at her from above, right under the shooting stars. It gave her the strength she needed to push forward.

With a fierce nod, Dahyun rubbed her dice, touched her pocket, and finally walked up to a girl sitting alone near the fountain.

“Morning!” Dahyun’s voice cracked and she wanted to run away immediately.

The girl lifted her eyes from the book she was reading and tilted her head to the side. “Can I help you?”

“Yes, I think you can, actually.” She looked at the girl’s book. “Is this book for class?”

“It’s for Miss Sunmi’s literature assignment.”

“Oh, could I check the title? I’m attending her class next semester, and I’d like to be prepared.”

“Sure,” The girl didn’t seem to think anything was suspicious and passed her the book nonchalantly.
Dahyun muttered a ‘thanks’ and pretended to read the cover. Then, she started clearing her throat, forcing a cough out. “Sorry about that, my throat has been so dry lately.”

“It’s… probably the pollen?”

“Maybe… say, how’s your voice?” Dahyun hoped that the transition was smooth enough for the girl to pick up on what she meant.

For a moment the girl just frowned, grabbing her book back, but then she turned around to check if they were alone, and that’s when Dahyun knew she caught one. “My voice is good. How’s yours?”

“Terrible. I need some medicine desperately, you know?”

“Oh,” She widened her eyes. The code seemed to have worked. “Is it your first time?”

The conversation shifted, and Dahyun couldn’t mess it up now. “It is. I’ve heard that this was the place to come. Was I right?”

“You were,” the girl smirked, putting away her book. She lowered her voice – which was unnecessary, since they were far from anyone else. It just proved that those people were indeed paranoid. “You’re looking for Chanmi, huh?”


“No worries. I’ll hook you up.”

It really was easier than Dahyun thought. Perhaps drug-dealing wasn’t as shady as the movies made it out to be.

The girl took a piece of paper from her own notebook and scribbled a rough map on it, in a hurry. She passed it to Dahyun, then looked at her in the eyes. “Burn this once you find the place. Chanmi will kill you if she sees it.”

“Yeah. Cool, don’t worry.”

“Cool.” She patted Dahyun on the shoulder and got up, taking her bag and book with her. “See ya around, friend.”

“W-wait, wait!” Despite being given invaluable material, Dahyun still needed something more. “Can you tell me what I should say once I get there? I’m just afraid they will reject me. I really, really need some… uh. Medicine.”

The girl looked around once more, then sat back down with her bag hanging from her shoulder. “You’ll probably be greeted by either Hyoyoung, Noori or Taewoon. They’re the ones who talk for Chanmi. She’s usually too busy with other stuff. Just be direct with them. What do you need?”

“Uh—” Dahyun had to think quickly. Heavier drugs were probably harder to find, but if Chanmi could get a hold of them, then that would expose her even more. So, she leaned in and whispered on the girl’s ear for no one but them to hear.

The skeptical look on her face as she leaned back told Dahyun that she didn’t believe her in the slightest. Dahyun wouldn’t believe herself, either. “Seriously? You look much too healthy for that kind of thing.”

“That’s because I haven’t done much.” God, she really hoped this lie could get her through this.
My first time was actually last week. My cousin brought us some, and now I can’t find it anywhere. Please, I haven’t been able to stop craving it. Help a friend out?”

The silence cut deep. Dahyun was much too lame to be talking about drugs, and the girl probably caught on her bullshit.

“She can get it for you,” The reply came, and Dahyun widened her eyes. “That girl can get anything. But you’ll have to either have a lot of cash, or give her something she wants, you know? This kind of thing is way above anyone’s level. Rare stuff.”

“Y-yeah, yeah. Sure. I got it.” She couldn’t believe she made it this far. “Thank you so much, friend.”

“It’s all cool. Look, I really gotta go.” The girl got up again, already walking away. “See you.”

Dahyun smiled and waved until the girl was gone, then nearly collapsed in the fountain. Catching her breath and calming down, Dahyun finally read through the map. She widened her eyes, touching her pocket again. “Holy shit.”

She had a map of Chanmi’s den.

And it was right past some bushes in the courtyard, hidden under everyone’s noses.

How come the dean doesn’t know about this? Dahyun wondered briefly, but soon got up to find her next target. She didn’t have time to dwell on it.

There were more people to talk to.

A lot more.

Her next target was under a tree, and she mustered her best smile. “Hey, morning!”

Jihyo’s mood had improved so much that day that every single person she talked to in class pointed out how her face seemed to be healthier. She smiled at them, dismissing the exaggerated compliments, but feeling giddy deep down. It was incredible the effect that Nayeon’s mood had on her. If she was healing, then so was Jihyo – and she hoped that this meant that her friends were starting to talk to each other as well.

She didn’t have time to ask Nayeon about specifics because of class, but she would as soon as she returned to the dorm that day. She didn’t want to have this conversation through text, it just felt shallow and empty. Jihyo wanted to be physically present for her best friend; even she wasn’t able to help her directly, witnessing her change was everything she needed.

“Jihyo-ah, could you help me today with my part for the orchestra? I’m sorry to bother you so much with this…” Her friend Chan approached her carefully with his music sheet in hands as she was about to leave class, and she grinned.
“You’ve been stuck on this forever!” She teased, but ruffled his hair. “We won’t leave that music room until you get this today.”

Chan laughed nervously – she did seem to be better, but was still a ruthless teacher. “Thanks.”

She bid him goodbye warmly and stepped outside, only to be greeted with Tzuyu waiting for her leaning on the opposite wall. “Tzuyu-ah, hey.”

“Hi,” Her smile was forced, and Jihyo’s heart immediately leaped. “Lunch?”

When Tzuyu offered her arm, Jihyo knew that she needed the support. Something was wrong. “Of course. Let’s go.”

They walked calmly towards the cafeteria, and Jihyo expected Chaeyoung to be waiting for them – those two were never apart. When Tzuyu guided them to an unfamiliar table, Jihyo frowned. “Is Chaeyoungie busy today?”

“You could say that.” Tzuyu sat down with no intention of getting up to grab her food, and Jihyo joined her, bumping shoulders, and caressing her hand.

“Hey. What’s wrong?”

Tzuyu didn’t answer for a moment, looking down at their joined hands and letting out a sigh much too heavy for someone her age. “Chaeng and Jeongyeon had a fight. She told me she yelled some horrible things at her because her mood got out of control.”

“Oh, no.”

Tzuyu lifted her gaze; she looked so vulnerable. “All of this has been so stressful for everyone, but it’s affecting Chaengie so hard. She hasn’t been… stable, lately.”

There was a weight in Tzuyu’s voice, like her whole universe was being torn apart at the seams. Jihyo knew that Tzuyu considered Chaeyoung her support in life, and the older girl could count on her fingers the number of times those two had argued over anything.

Chaeyoung loved the group more than anything, and Jihyo wanted to find her immediately and tell her that things were going to get better. Nayeon was already willing to open up, and the others were probably in the same path.

“Where is she now?” Jihyo asked gently.

“She was painting when I saw her this morning. She left the room without saying goodbye… she never leaves me without saying goodbye.” Tzuyu sounded so miserable that Jihyo pulled her in for a side hug, rocking her back and forth.

“Don’t worry, we’ll help her out. She’ll be okay, Tzuyu-ah.”

Tzuyu sniffled, rubbing her eyes. She wanted to believe that, but she’d never seen Chaeyoung so upset to the point of avoiding her as well.

Jihyo promised to accompany Tzuyu on their talk when their classes ended in the evening. Maybe she could calm Chaeyoung down by telling her how Nayeon was feeling better.
Mina felt a poke on her shoulder and turned head slightly. “Yes?”

“I was thinking.”

“About?”

“Calculus, mostly,” Momo teased and Mina rolled her eyes, already returning to her position. She heard Momo giggling and felt her heart do a tiny somersault. “Come back.”

“Be serious.”

Momo let her fingers tap on the skin of Mina’s neck, like she usually did when she was pensive in class and didn’t want to disturb the professor. “I want to apologize to Jeongyeon.”

This simple sentence was enough to make Mina’s eyes shine, happiness taking place inside her chest. She turned around again with a hopeful little grin. “Really?”

“Really,” Momo’s voice was low. “You were going to talk to her today, weren’t you?”

“I was thinking about it.”

“Take me with you.”

It was not what Mina was expecting, but the outcome of a conversation between the three of them could be a lot better than if she went alone. She thought a bit more, and something else crossed her mind. “Okay. Let’s take Nayeonie, too.”

Just the sound of her name was enough to make Momo blush. She missed Nayeon absurdly. “Okay.”

They both nodded in sync, and Mina rolled her eyes, eliciting another giggle from the girl behind her. Momo’s fingers never left her neck, and Mina couldn’t help but to smile.

Having Momo’s support made everything feel less lonely.

--

Nayeon’s return to the Drama Club was celebrated with snacks and soda, courtesy of Mr. Kwon and Jennie. The two of them had missed her presence in their activities more than they would ever admit, and Nayeon’s chest warmed at the thoughtfulness. She kept trying to remind herself that lots of people loved her despite her self-hatred. It was hard.
She kind of wished Jihyo was there with her for constant reassurance.

The voices in her head had also calmed down considerably ever since Mina’s conversation and her apology to Jihyo. Nayeon figured that they would vanish completely once she learned to let go of her demons and accept the love she fought so hard to reject. Another difficult task that required assistance. Nayeon knew that she would need a lot of help to get back on her feet.

Thankfully, she was surrounded by love.

“All right you lazy butts, gather around, let’s have an exercise.” Mr. Kwon clapped his hands to call for attention and everyone quieted down instantly. Jennie sat next to Nayeon on the wooden floor, a comforting hand on her thigh. “Pick a partner and let’s do the one where you say a word, and the other person has to reply with another word that reminds them of the word you said. Sit in front of one another and don’t be loud. I have a migraine.”

There was a round of laughter across the room, and soon enough everyone was easily paired up. Jennie and Nayeon just had to turn around to face each other, and held hands, eyes closed.

“I’ll start,” Jennie said. “Hmm… I’ll go easy on you since you just got back.”

“Are you looking down on me, Kim?”

“Oh, Miss Im, I would never!”

Nayeon opened her eyes quickly to slap her shoulder, then closed them again. Jennie just laughed before turning serious. “Ice.”

“Cold.”

“Mountain.”

“Climb.”

“Tiring.”

Nayeon smirked. “Lazy.”

“Netflix.”

“Chill.”

“Pervert!” Jennie giggled.

“Innocent.” Nayeon replied calmly, biting her lip on a smile.

“Hmm… Love.”

That was the moment it hit Nayeon – when the first thing that popped up in her head was neither Momo nor Jeongyeon.

It wasn’t even one person, either.

“…Nine.”

Jennie opened her eyes to ask about the weird association, but upon seeing the utterly heartwarming smile on her friend’s features, she was rendered speechless. She softened her gaze
and closed her eyes again, allowing Nayeon this moment.

The exercise continued, and Nayeon felt one more voice leaving her head.

After class, the students spent some time with Nayeon, chatting and overall being supportive of her return. By the end of the impromptu party, Nayeon felt renewed and cleansed, in a way. She wanted to get better, and if the people around her could help her with it, then she would stop shoving them away. It did no one any good.

She was the last one left in the theater building; there was something she needed to do alone. Moving past the velvet curtains, Nayeon sat on the edge of the stage, looking at the chairs in the auditorium. They were empty, the place was silent, and she could hear the murmuring voices at the back of her head, not entirely gone.

*No one came to watch you today. You’re up here all alone.*

Her hands touched the wooden floor, gently caressing the stage.

*Nine? Don’t be a liar. You should have said two. Greedy bitch.*

Her feet dangled from the edge peacefully.

*So many people like your façade. What would they do if they saw the real you?*

The last rays of sun kissed the red chairs of the invisible audience, and Nayeon smiled.

*You’ll be okay.*

There it was, the one voice that always pushed her forward.

“Thank you.”

She used to hate all of them, because she couldn’t distinguish the lies from the truths. Now, she was willing to listen to each one carefully, and accept the positive thoughts.

It was her beginning.

“Nayeon?” Mr. Kwon interrupted her meditation and she looked around, already getting up.

“Sorry, I just needed a moment.”

“It’s fine, dear. Some friends of yours are here.”

He stepped back and Nayeon’s eyes widened at the sight of Mina and Momo. It was like seeing them for the first time in eternity – especially Momo.

God, *Momo*.

“Hey, Nabongs.” Momo’s voice was everything she needed to hear today.

Mr. Kwon eyed the scene with a knowing eye and left, allowing them to be alone. The two girls approached Nayeon, and she couldn’t help but to think how funny it was that their private moment was happening onstage.

Except that this time, she wasn’t acting. Not anymore.
“Hi, Momoring.”

Momo stopped at a safe distance, not knowing if she was allowed to come closer. Nayeon didn’t move, either, and Mina had to be the one to give Momo a little push. Sometimes, she needed it.

When she stepped forward, Nayeon met her halfway, and the arms around her shoulders secured her into place. She inhaled deeply, burying her nose on the crook of Momo’s neck as her body melted against her front. Momo’s hands scratched the baby hairs at her nape carefully, and all the memories of the times Momo protected her rushed in, making her stomach flip.

“I’m sorry,” Nayeon blurted out, because it was the first thing she needed to do. “I’m sorry I played with your feelings. I’m so, so sorry.”

“I forgive you.” Momo muttered on her hair, because ultimately, she just wanted her Nayeon back.

They kept hugging for a long time and Mina eyed the scene with fondness. She had to admit that she thought a lot about this – if she would really be okay with Momo and Nayeon loving each other in front of her. For such a long time Momo’s affections were so exclusively hers that even though she was rooting for her happiness, she didn’t think of what she would feel once Momo found someone else to share her warmth with.

Looking at the scene now, Mina realized that she truly didn’t feel any type of discomfort; on the contrary, she wanted them to rely on each other.

Momo had so much love to give. She wanted Nayeon to experience it, too.

They let go of each other and Momo couldn’t help but to lean in a place a chaste kiss at the corner of Nayeon’s mouth. The actress blushed, giggling shyly. She looked over at Mina, then, maybe searching for approval, and Mina just nodded with a smile.

“I missed you.” Momo mentioned, still star-struck with the woman in front of her.

“Me too.” Nayeon smiled, smugly. “Mina got to you too, huh?”

Momo chuckled, looking back at Mina. “She did.”

Mina laughed as well and when Momo stretched an arm, she dove into a group hug with the tree of them. It just made her believe even more in her conviction – that this is what they should’ve been doing all along instead of avoiding their feelings.

There was just one person missing.

“We came here to ask you something, Nayeonnie.” Mina said after parting from the embrace. Nayeon tilted her head, and Momo was the one to say it.

“We wanted to talk to Jeongyeon. Mina thinks—” She paused, reconsidering. “We think that we need to be together for this. And no one knows her better than you.”

Nayeon felt herself being pulled back into her hole of self-hatred and pity; thinking about what she’d done to all of them was hard, but not talking to Jeongyeon for so long was the worst she’s ever had to face.

Deep down, Jeongyeon was still the girl she’d pictured marriage with. Nayeon never let go of this dream, even when she tried to fool herself that she had. A shiver went down her spine, because she had no idea how to face Jeongyeon after breaking her so thoroughly. It was like she had destroyed
Jeongyeon’s entire future with her deceit – and by proxy, hers.

It was scary.

It was terrifying.

She felt a squeeze to her hand and saw Mina’s fingers intertwining with hers. Momo did the same with her other hand, and Nayeon understood what they meant.

“Together. Okay?” Mina’s words were powerful.

Nayeon took a deep breath, eyed the empty audience one more time, and finally made a decision.

“Together sounds nice.”

The three finally turned around, leaving the theater.

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Chaeyoung couldn’t focus on absolutely anything. Her head had been a jumble of angry thoughts ever since she left the room in the morning without talking to Tzuyu – she couldn’t risk it. She didn’t want to talk to Jeongyeon, and Tzuyu was right by her side. If she was to explode on Tzuyu’s face, she would never forgive herself.

Painting wasn’t helping. She spent the whole day in the art studio, trying to come up with an idea for a new piece; she went through everything – expressionism, cubism, baroque, realism, Dadaism – and absolutely nothing was working. Everything she tried to portray came out messy, a chaos of black lines, red dots, and brown abstract figures that mirrored what she was feeling.

Anger. Pure, raw anger bled through her pores.

At the thirty-seventh attempt, Chaeyoung nearly threw the canvas on the floor.

“Fuck this,” She said out loud, not caring if others would hear her, and shoved her materials back into her bag carelessly. She had to get out of there and be alone. She couldn’t see anyone, because she would just yell at them.

She was glad that a part of her was still rational enough to avoid everyone.

Chaeyoung stepped down the hallway, turning left to go downstairs, ready to leave the main building. People walked past her without sparing her a glance, the setting sun made everything darker than she liked, and she had no idea where she wanted to go. Leaving for the dorm would just mean having to face Jeongyeon, and she couldn’t do it right now. The courtyard was going to be dark soon, she hated the gym, the dance studios were probably filled with people, and the computer room was closed by this time—

Truly, her only safe space was the art studio, but not even that was helping. It was like she had no one, and nowhere.
Chaeyoung moved her broken knuckles and the pain shot through her arm harshly. This made her stop on her tracks and hiss.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid.”

“Hey, where’s Minatozaki?”

The sudden low, raspy voice caught her attention. Chaeyoung turned her head and saw a group of girls chatting next to her. A blonde one had approached them, hands in her pockets and a nasty attitude.

Chaeyoung had seen her before.

“I don’t know, she didn’t show up today.” One of the girls answered.

“She’s sick, or something.” A boy shrugged.

“Which is weird, she was looking fine yesterday.” Another girl giggled. “But I mean, I’m glad I didn’t get that kiss, or else I’d be sick today, too.”

“You tried to kiss her?” The blonde asked with one eyebrow raised.

“Only everyday for the past two weeks.”

“And still nothing?”

“She hasn’t kissed anyone ever since she came back,” A third girl intervened. “It’s so weird. She flirts with everyone, but when it comes down to it, she runs like we’re the plague.”

The blonde didn’t seem amused by it. “That fucking little slut lied to me…?”

“Hey!” Chaeyoung yelled.

The whole group turned to look at her at the same time, and the blonde eyed her from top to bottom. “Are you talking to us, midget?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

That’s when the blonde removed her hands from her pockets and stepped forward. “Wanna say that again?”

She was a lot taller, and coming closer, but Chaeyoung couldn’t see or hear anything but this absolute scum in front of her. She was talking about Sana.

No one was allowed to talk about Sana.

“I said shut the fuck up.”

There was a silent pause, and the group of friends exchanged gazes, unsure of how to take this. No one had ever talked to their leader like that.

“Who the fuck are you?” The blonde stepped dangerously close to Chaeyoung’s personal space, but she didn’t budge an inch.

“Chanmi, let go.” One boy tried.
The name made something inside Chaeyoung snap.

*That’s* how she knew her.

She was the one who had made a crude gesture in Sana’s direction that day.

She was the one the people in the studio were gossiping about.

She was the one who had made Dahyun *trip*.

“You absolute *bitch,*” Chaeyoung’s nails dug deep into her palm as her one good hand clenched in a fist. “You’re the one making my friends’ lives miserable!”

“Your friends?” Chanmi smirked then, nearly breathing on Chaeyoung’s neck. “What, Minatozaki? Are you friends with that whore?”

“Stop calling her that!”

A crowd had gathered around them at that point, with Chanmi’s gang trying to control the situation, but also afraid of touching her. They had no idea what to do, and a loud murmur could be heard, getting louder and louder as more students stopped by to check what was going on. All they could see was Heo Chanmi and a tiny girl facing each other closely, and things seemed to be escalating.

“Or what? It’s who she is, and she knows it. Everyone knows it.”

“Shut up! Shut your *fucking* filthy mouth!”

“Make me!” Chanmi laughed, then pushed Chaeyoung by her shoulders, making her fall on the ground.

The collective gasp was loud, but still, no one did a thing to help.

Because that was Heo Chanmi.

Chaeyoung stood still for a moment, processing that she’d been *pushed down,* and that’s when her pent-up anger finally exploded.

Dropping her bag, her legs pushed her forward, and she pounced on Chanmi, knocking the both of them over. Chaeyoung couldn’t register a single thing after that.

That’s when people finally started yelling. Some tried to stop them, removing Chaeyoung from on top of Chanmi, but Chanmi, in a clearly unsettled state, just pushed everyone away and tore through the chaos to land a punch on Chaeyoung’s body. The tiny girl tried to protect herself by kicking and rustling, still too infuriated to try and run away. She refused to run away from someone who had hurt the people she loved the most.

They grabbed at each other for what seemed like ages, pulling each other’s hairs, screaming insults, and trying to knock the other down, until Chanmi realized that the girl wasn’t using her right hand. There were bandages enveloping it.

With a calculated move, Chanmi grabbed Chaeyoung’s wounded hand, and squeezed it.

The pain was so much that Chaeyoung felt her throat scratching from the sound of her scream.

“Chaeyoung-ah!” A voice, familiar above all else, finally pulled her back.
The tears in her eyes prevented her from seeing, but she felt Tzuyu’s arms around her, protecting her from the tumult. Chanmi had been removed after that by a few brave students, and it didn’t take long for professors to arrive.

“Everyone, settle down now!” Sunmi’s voice was loud and commanding, and it worked partially; Fei, Yubin, Jea and two more professors tried to handle the situation.

“This crazy bitch jumped me!” Chanmi yelled, still trying to break free from the hands around her wrists. “You try and jump Heo Chanmi, you get what you deserve, bitch!”

Sunmi turned to her, mouth agape.

Heo Chanmi was involved in this.

“Calm down, young lady.” Sunmi managed to speak calmly, despite her own rising anger.

“Don’t tell me to calm down!”

Well, Jea will have a field trip with this, Sunmi thought.

“Tell her! Tell her that she jumped me first!” Chanmi looked around, not only at her gang but at everyone who had witnessed the scene. She said it with conviction, because she knew that the whole school was wrapped around her finger. She was the queen, and they were all pawns, all of them.

No one would dare to defy her.

“Is it true?” Sunmi asked the crowd.

“It’s a lie!” Tzuyu, who was still holding Chaeyoung’s wrecked body in her arms, yelled as she cried. “She would never— she needs a doctor, her hand is broken!”

“I got this,” Jea intervened, stepping into the spotlight. “Help me carry her.”

Tzuyu and Jea managed to lift Chaeyoung, walking away from everything. They would interrogate her after dealing with the primary issue.

Jihyo showed up at their side as well, and Sunmi held her breath. As they passed each other, they exchanged a quick, but meaningful glance. The tears in Jihyo’s eyes were heartbreaking, but Sunmi needed to deal with the mess first.

“I asked, is it true?” She questioned the students again after Chaeyoung had been removed.

The murmurs were plenty, hesitating and vulnerable sounds of kids who were all incredibly afraid of one single woman. Sunmi swallowed thickly, but waited.

“The girl attacked Chanmi, first.” One person finally spoke up, albeit quietly. Soon others started to agree with awkward hums, heads down in shame.

Sunmi’s heart tightened in her chest. She couldn’t fight against the words of ninety-nine percent of the students. That wasn’t the proof she needed to help Jea.

She felt incredibly helpless.

“She didn’t.” A sudden voice rose, from the very middle of the crowd.
Chanmi frowned, searching for the girl. “Who said that?”

“I did.” Dahyun stepped out, holding her cellphone in hands. “Chanmi pushed her first. Chaeyoung was just defending herself.”

“You can’t prove shit!” Chanmi’s eyes burned with hatred when she realized that Kim Dahyun was speaking against her.

“Yes, I can.” Dahyun didn’t even bother to feel intimidated.

She walked towards her slowly, dangling her phone right in front of Chanmi’s nose.

“You’re not the only one who knows how to record. Bitch.”

And for the first time since her reign began in this school, Chanmi was rendered speechless.

Chapter End Notes

It wouldn't be me without a few cliffhangers. This was the longest chapter I wrote to date! I hope it came out okay. I'd love to hear what you have to say, so feel free to leave a comment, either here or in any of my social media. See you next chapter!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
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CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/niigoki
(XIX.) Repair

Chapter Notes

Welcome again! Enjoy this one. I think you will.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Facing Jeongyeon sounded terrifying, but with Momo by their side rambling in desperation, Nayeon had to admit that the weight of the guilt eased a little bit. The girl was very much panicking, and even though it wasn’t supposed to be funny, Nayeon couldn’t help but to feel a tug on her lips pulling into a grin.

“She’ll never forgive me,” Momo kept going on, only pausing to bite her nails. Nayeon noticed that every time her hands went up to her mouth, Mina slapped them away, scolding her. “I punched her. In the jaw. Oh my God, she’s going to hate me forever.”

“Momoring…” Mina tried, but had to stop with a soft sigh and another slap to her best friend’s wrist. “Stop with the nails!”

“I think I broke her glasses too? Guys, she needs those, she’s blind as a bat. I’m such an ass; do I have enough money to fix them? How much do glasses even cost?”

“She wears contacts most of the time, Momo.” Nayeon tried to soothe her worries. The situation was kind of surreal. Out of everyone, she didn’t think that Momo would be freaking out the most – honestly, that was Nayeon’s job – but with each step that took them closer to the dorm, the dancer got more and more nervous.

“That doesn’t mean it was okay to break them!” When they finally reached the building, Momo froze. “Wait, wait, hold on. I think I’m gonna be sick, this was a bad idea.”

“Momo, you said you wanted to apologize,” Mina placed a hand on her forearm—the gesture was warm and gentle. “If you don’t talk to her it will just be worse. I’m scared, too. Just like Nayeonnie, but she’s been holding her nervousness back because of you.”

That made Momo snap and stop shivering for a second. She turned to said girl and realized that Nayeon was forcing a smile, but her nails were digging into her palms. Nayeon just rolled her eyes at Mina. “Nothing gets past you now, huh?”

Momo reached for Nayeon’s hands, cradling them delicately in hers. “Don’t do this, it’ll hurt you.”

“Says the girl who was biting her nails two seconds ago.”

“Okay, that was—” Momo stopped, getting caught. “Fair enough. I won’t bite them anymore, so stop doing this, okay?”

“...Okay.” Nayeon smiled sincerely and Momo mirrored her expression, letting her go.

This dynamic was one of the things that warmed Nayeon’s heart; the fact that she could promise not to hurt herself if Momo did the same, another reminder of how much she came to rely on this girl for guidance and comfort.
Nayeon admitted that she wasn’t healthy yet, emotionally speaking. She tried to get away from the people who positively influenced her, and it did nothing but cause more distress and pain to everyone. With Mina’s help, she could learn how to trust again, and Momo was a big step forward already.

“Okay, see what you just did there?” Mina asked, making both Momo and Nayeon look at her.

“Huh?” Momo tilted her head sideways, like a confused puppy.

“This thing you just did, where you were sincere with your feelings? Do it with Jeongyeon. No mystery, right?” The smug little grin that crept onto her face was so rare that it made Momo forget about her panic for a moment.

“Whatever,” she said as she put her hands in her pockets with a childish pout, walking past everyone. “Let’s just go, Jeongyeon is probably sulking on her own.”

Nayeon and Mina exchanged amused looks and followed her upstairs.

The hallway was empty and hot due to the lack of ventilation caused by a broken AC, and Nayeon took a deep breath, already hearing low murmurs resurfacing at the back of her head. She missed Momo’s rambling now—it distracted her from the voices that, while not as many as they used to be, were still a pain in the ass to deal with.

The heat didn’t help, either. She was reminded of the time before the musical where she hadn’t slept at all to practice her lines and was living off coffee. Nayeon had felt dizzy and much too hot that day, like her lungs were burning on the inside. She developed sensitivity for high temperatures because of the hallucinations she sometimes saw and the bad sensation it left in her stomach.

Or maybe that was just the effect Jeongyeon had on her.

Just thinking about her name caused a wave of memories to come crashing down on her, and she could easily cry if she focused on it. God, she had fucked up so badly. Momo thought that Jeongyeon would hate her, but if there was anyone out of the three of them who deserved Jeongyeon’s hatred, was Nayeon.

A punch in the face was nothing compared to a broken heart.

Jeongyeon’s weak voice was still very much vivid in her head.

“How could you?”

Nayeon didn’t even notice that the girls had stopped and bumped into Mina accidentally. “Oh, s-sorry.”

“Are you okay?” The concern in Mina’s voice was clear.

“Yeah,” the lie slipped out naturally, but she bit her tongue. Nayeon had to remember to be honest with them. “I mean… I’m scared.”

Mina nodded in understanding. “I am, too. But I was scared to talk to you and Momo, and that went quite well.”

“You’re a lot braver than us, Minari,” Momo said with a weak chuckle, facing the door to Jeongyeon’s rented room. “Who wants to knock?”
There was a silent beat where they just exchanged looks and Mina was about to step up, when Nayeon touched her shoulder. “I will. I’m the one who caused this.”

The other two agreed and let Nayeon take the lead for this.

She took a deep, deep breath, closed her eyes, and exhaled. She had to get rid of the voices, first, and meditating for a moment usually worked. Once the buzz in her head went away, Nayeon lifted her wrist.

And stopped.

Her mind went blank.

What was she even going to tell Jeongyeon?

There was no script, there was no stage, just a vulnerable, honest Im Nayeon talking to a broken, brutally genuine Yoo Jeongyeon. She was about to stand in front of the girl she’s loved for years and beg for forgiveness, and she couldn’t even picture the words in her head anymore. Everything was suddenly still, and Nayeon felt her throat closing with each intake of air.

The size of her mistake suddenly pressed down on her chest, and it was too much. Jeongyeon had done absolutely nothing to deserve this. She had moved on with Mina, even holding a cross that wasn’t hers to bear, and all of them had lied to her. The three girls who were supposed to be her family had all toyed with her for their own selfish reasons.

And it was Nayeon’s fault.

Jeongyeon trusted her with her life and Nayeon broke that trust. They had exchanged pretend vows under sheets, talked about their future together countless times over dinner, kissed with promises of a happy life leaking from their lips, and everything at that time had been so honest. Nayeon had meant every single word.

She only turned into a liar when she started lying to herself.

Was it too late? It was too late. She couldn’t possibly take it all back.

What if Jeongyeon hated her?

It terrified her to realize that she might actually not be able to recover if Jeongyeon actually hated her.

“Nabongs?” Momo’s voice brought her back from the pitch-dark abyss she was falling into.

Nayeon’s arm went limp by her side and she turned to looked at them with watery eyes. “…I can’t do this.”

“Hey, it’s okay. We’ll do this together.” Momo stepped forward to hold her hands, but Nayeon shook her head, distancing herself.

“No, I can’t. I’m not strong. I’m a coward, a liar, and I don’t deserve to be forgiven—”

Mina noticed soon enough that Nayeon was relapsing into her insecure self, quite literally curling in on herself by hugging her own arms tight. Mina needed to bring her back to the light with the right words, and after thinking for a second, she opened her mouth.

Only to be interrupted by her phone buzzing,
Momo and Nayeon’s phones buzzed at the same time, but they didn’t mind it. Momo was still trying to calm Nayeon down, and Mina was about to ignore it, too, but whoever was messaging her was sending multiple texts. This compelled Mina to check quickly, and she took the device from her pocket, scanning the messages as they came.

Her heart dropped.

“Guys.” Momo and Nayeon didn’t hear, so she spoke louder. “Guys!”

That made them look, and Mina turned the phone to them with a trembling hand, so they could read Jihyo’s messages.

[GodJihyo, 6:47pm]

Chaeng is in the hospital
We came with her
She got into a fight with Chanmi
Her hand is broken
She had to go into surgery
It looks bad
Tzuyu is with me
Come if you can
Please

It was like nothing mattered after that.

Momo immediately turned around and banged on the bedroom’s door, speaking loudly.
“Jeongyeon, open up. It’s Chaeng, she’s in the hospital.”

It took seconds before the door was almost ripped open from the hinges and Jeongyeon’s pale face came into view. She took a moment to notice who was in front of her, but didn’t have the luxury to deal with it now.

All that she needed to know was, “Which hospital?”

Mina hopped away, talking over her shoulder. “I’ll get Sana.”
Dahyun had never once stepped into the dean’s office, but now there she was, sitting face to face with the man himself, and Miss Sunmi by her side, who had escorted her there. She was trembling like a leaf, and to calm herself down, she played with the dice in her pocket and looked around the office, catching as many details as she could. It was something that helped with her anxiety, and she did it a lot when she was about to get the results for a test, too.

The office looked extremely out of place if compared to the rest of the school. Everything looked expensive, from the blood-red leather of the chairs to the beautiful paintings hanging from every wall – Chaeyoung would lose her mind in here, Dahyun thought – and even the little statues adorning the old, massive bookshelf behind the dean looked like they were found in Ancient Egypt and purchased at an auction for absurd prices.

There was a life-sized marble statue watching everyone from the corner. Dahyun had to admit that it was starting to freak her out.

She felt locked in a dungeon, ready for another hard campaign.

**Mission: Escape this place alive.**

“So,” The dean finally spoke after looking over Chaeyoung, Chanmi and Dahyun’s student files carefully. He put the papers to the side and leaned on his wooden desk with both elbows on top of it. “Miss Kim Dahyun.”

“Y-yes, sir.” She swallowed, focusing back on the man in front of her.

“You’ve enrolled this year. No astounding grades, but no bad ones, either. Still undecided on your major. Never got involved in any problems. Overall, an average student with a normal, calm campus life.” Dean Park spoke as if every word was meant to hurt, even if they weren’t necessarily lies.

“That… sounds about right, sir.” Dahyun felt so intimidated.

“And now, suddenly you’re here.” He sounded confused, if anything. “Miss Sunmi told me about what happened and who were the people involved, and you’re not even one of them. Unfortunately, Miss Son Chaeyoung had to be taken to the hospital in a rush, so I cannot talk to her at the moment. Miss Heo Chanmi claims that she was a victim, and that she shouldn’t even be subjected to my interrogation.”

The silence was weird. Dahyun wasn’t sure if he wanted her to say something, or just wait for him to continue. Perhaps this was some kind of psychological torture.

“So, tell me,” he leaned forward, his eyes piercing her very soul. “Why are you here?”

The question was quite simple, but Dahyun blanked for a second. There were so many things affecting her at the moment, that she lost her focus and couldn’t formulate a sentence.

“I— I’m… there’s this… um…” she tried to speak, and when the dean frowned, she felt physically sick. Why couldn’t the words come out?

Oh, right; because she had just exposed a drug dealer, who would probably come for her and her whole family for revenge, murdering everyone she loved, and Dahyun couldn’t even afford protection, or a lawyer. This, and the fact that she saw her best friend’s hand being crushed right in front of her eyes, heard her scream, and still didn’t stop recording to help her, because the damn
footage was more important than one of the people she loved the most in this whole world—

A sudden hand was on her shoulder and Dahyun snapped out of it. She looked up and saw Miss Sunmi’s friendly smile, as the professor rubbed her thumb on her shirt to calm her down. “It’s okay, darling, take your time.”

The voice was soothing and reminded Dahyun of someone.

Sana.

Oh. That’s right.

All of this was for Sana.

Dahyun closed her eyes and breathed. She pictured Sana’s smile and bubbly laugh in her ear, and thought that waking up to these things one day would probably be the best gift the world could offer.

Sana was so worth fighting for.

She opened her eyes again. “I’m here because I have proof that Chanmi isn’t innocent. That she’s a criminal presence in this campus.”

That seemed to take the dean aback, because he straightened his back, moving away from her. Sunmi gripped Dahyun’s shoulder a bit tighter; she noticed it, but didn’t break eye contact with the man in front of her.

“How so?” Dean Park asked.

Dahyun took her phone from her pocket. “Before the fight broke out, I recorded Chanmi and Chaeyoung. They were arguing, and Chanmi was taunting Chaeyoung, and made her upset. But Chaeyoung didn’t lay a finger on her. Chanmi was the one who pushed her down before everything went down.”

With a swift swipe of her finger, Dahyun found the video on her phone, and showed it to the dean. Everything she had just described happened onscreen; from the brutal exchange of words to Chaeyoung’s yelling, Chanmi’s mocking laughter, and finally the push. The video shook a little – Dahyun had trembled when she saw Chaeyoung falling – but it soon stabilized again. It was clear that Chaeyoung had pounced on Chanmi after that, and Dahyun could feel sweat sticking to her forehead.

She looked at the dean, and his reaction wasn’t good. He was serious, his brows furrowing sometimes, as if what he was watching disgusted him. Dahyun could relate.

The footage got to the point where Chaeyoung screamed in pain, and Dahyun turned her head away, closing her eyes. Her teeth pierced her bottom lip in pure anger at herself.

I just stood there.

Sunmi rubbed her back, and Dahyun sighed deeply, moving her eyes back to the video. Once Tzuyu showed up and the professors arrived, the fight seemed to have stopped. Dahyun had cut the video right after a multitude of students had started defending Chanmi, saying that she had been the victim.

Dean Park placed the phone down after that, pushing it across the table to Dahyun again.
“Well,” He was slow with his words, suddenly looking ten years older. “Miss Chanmi certainly seemed to have pushed Miss Chaeyoung first.”

“Yes.” Dahyun perked up at this, a glint of hope in her eyes.

“However,” He wasn’t done. “Miss Chaeyoung clearly acted violently, as well.”

Dahyun’s heart dropped. “But—”

“I am not here to discuss who was right or wrong, Miss Dahyun.” The way he spoke was off, as if there was something holding him back from saying what he really thought of the whole situation. “What is clear to me is that both students acted in reprehensible ways, and this institution does not tolerate this kind of behavior.”

“She was just defending herself!” Dahyun got up from her chair, panic rising in her chest.

Sunmi had to think quickly. She couldn’t let this happen, not when this student had in her hands valuable proof of injustice, something powerful that could help her and Jea to convince the dean that Chanmi had to be expelled. She had to calm her down before all credibility was lost.

“What Miss Dahyun means,” Sunmi’s both hands were on the girl’s shoulders now, and she gently pushed her back down, “Is that Miss Chaeyoung acted in the heat of the moment. Still, I believe that she was the one who suffered the most with this ordeal, Dean Park.”

Dahyun looked up at the professor, almost not believing that she was defending her.

“A broken hand that could have been avoided had she been willing to restrain herself.” He wasn’t budging and Dahyun looked back to this man, her mouth hanging open.

“That is true,” Sunmi’s heart was beating out of control, and when the student’s eyes fell on her once more, filled with hurt, she had to bite her tongue. This wasn’t an easy game, and having Dahyun in front of her to remind her of her humanity on a crucial moment like this was incredibly distracting. “However, Mr. Park, Miss Chaeyoung has not once acted out of line in this institution. You read her file yourself. This is her very first act of misconduct. Do you not think that she deserves a chance to redeem herself?”

Dahyun felt like she was on a rollercoaster, with ups and downs that she couldn’t predict. What was this professor’s deal? Was she with or against her? And why did the dean sound like the villain here?

“It sounds to me, Miss Sunmi, that you’re siding with Miss Chaeyoung a lot more than you’re willing to side with Miss Chanmi.”

“What!” Dahyun gasped, then felt Sunmi pinching her shoulder painfully.

“Quiet.” The professor muttered, trying to retain her professionalism. Jea’s words finally made sense in her head, and she had to thank her later for the warning.

Teachers can’t be biased.

“I am just looking at the scenario objectively, Dean Park.” She had no idea how the words managed to come out of her mouth without her stuttering, considering that she was holding onto Dahyun for support more than anything. “I am not familiar with Miss Chanmi’s file. Has she acted out of line before?”
She prayed for this lie to be convincing.

*Your biggest weapon is being new here. Use that to your advantage, Sunmi-ah.*

Dahyun turned back to the dean and waited for him to say something. Even if he didn’t know about the drugs, Chanmi had to have a misconduct mark in her file somewhere. It was just impossible for her to fool every student, professor, and the dean—

“She has not, Miss Sunmi.”

Dahyun almost—almost—yelled again. Chanmi really had every single person in this campus wrapped around her finger.

Sunmi dropped her shoulders, her bravado wavering. “…I see.”

When Dahyun felt the grip on her skin loosening, like a defeated soldier finally giving up after a long, tiring battle, she remembered what she ultimately wanted to show the dean.

It wasn’t the video.

It was her hidden treasure.

“Actually,” Dahyun spoke up again, grabbing her phone. “She has.”

“Is that so?” The dean sounded quite upset all of a sudden, as if he was tired of this conversation and wanted to get it over with quickly.

“Yes, sir. Chanmi is still a criminal that plagues this campus.”

His eyes examined her phone. “A bold statement, Miss Dahyun, seeing as Miss Chanmi hasn’t visited this office once.”

She decided to ignore his pointed hostility. Dahyun’s thumb worked fast as she opened her recording app. With a swift move, she scrolled down innumerable audios. “All of these audios are from today. I spent the whole day and afternoon recording conversations with people secretly, and I’d like you to hear a few of them, sir.”

Sunmi’s eyes widened, the flame of hope reviving inside her. This girl was full of surprises.

“Miss Dahyun, secretly recording private conversations is not—”

“Please, sir. Just give me a chance,” Dahyun interrupted him, the desperation in her voice so raw that his gaze actually softened for a moment. At that instant, Sunmi saw a flash of something else inside the dean—guilt, perhaps. This just confirmed everything Fei and Yubin had told her that day.

The dean really was a hostage to Chanmi’s family.

“…Very well.” He leaned back on his chair and Dahyun let out the breath she was holding.

She pressed play.

The first seconds of dialogue made no sense for Dean Park or Miss Sunmi, but the rest of it caught their attention.
“I need some medicine desperately, you know?”

“Oh. Is it your first time?”

“It is. I’ve heard that this was the place to come. Was I right?”

“You were. You’re looking for Chanmi, huh?”

“Y-yeah. I’ve heard some things.”

“No worries. I’ll hook you up. Burn this once you find the place. Chanmi will kill you if she sees it.”

“Yeah. Cool, don’t worry.”

“Cool. See ya around, friend.”

“W-wait, wait! Can you tell me what I should say once I get there? I’m just afraid they will reject me. I really, really need some… uh. Medicine.”

“You’ll probably be greeted by either Hyoyoung, Noori or Taewoon. They’re the ones who talk for Chanmi. She’s usually too busy with other stuff. Just be direct with them. What do you need?”

“Uh—”

The whisper wasn’t caught by the microphone.

“Seriously? You look much too healthy for that kind of thing.”

“That’s because I haven’t done much. My first time was actually last week. My cousin brought us some, and now I can’t find it anywhere. Please, I haven’t been able to stop craving it. Help a friend out?”

“She can get it for you. That girl can get anything. But you’ll have to either have a lot of cash, or give her something she wants, you know? This kind of thing is way above anyone’s level. Rare stuff.”

“Y-yeah, yeah. Sure. I got it. Thank you so much, friend.”

“It’s all cool. Look, I really gotta go. See you.”

The recording stopped playing, and Dahyun could literally feel the tips of her ears burning. She took a meek look at Mr. Park’s expression, and his face wasn’t at all what she expected to see. He didn’t look surprised, or angry, or shocked at the revelation.

If anything, his pale face told Dahyun that this man was terrified.

He didn’t interrogate her about her own voice being recorded asking around for drugs. He didn’t reprimand her for invading people’s privacy. And he didn’t question the truthfulness of the dialogue.

The first words out his mouth were simply, “…How many of these have you recorded?”

Dahyun slowly grabbed her device, her instincts suddenly telling her that she needed to protect it.
“There are seventy-two audio files on my phone. But I talked to a hundred and twelve students.”

“Why didn’t you record the others?” Sunmi frowned, confused.

Since Mr. Park seemed to be having a sudden out-of-body experience, Dahyun turned to her to answer. “Because I erased every recording where the students revealed their names.”

Mr. Park lifted his head, sweat glistening on his forehead. “Why?”

And looking at this man now, fragile and petrified, Dahyun wasn’t afraid anymore. He looked like a deer in the headlights, caught red handed by a simple freshman with a cellphone, and the anger at the injustice dissipated from Dahyun’s bones, being replaced by a calm and collected mindset.

She wasn’t trembling anymore.

All that she felt was pity for this man.

“With all due respect, sir,” It was Dahyun’s turn to lean in with her elbows and look at him in the eyes. “My intent is not to punish the victims of a flawed school system, but to expose the culprit of illegal drug-trafficking. You say you were not aware of Chanmi’s business, fine, she might have tricked everyone,” Her eyes dug deep into the dean’s. “But with seventy-two recorded examples of proof, plus a video, can you really say that Heo Chanmi and Son Chaeyoung are the same and should be punished equally for what happened?”

If Sunmi could have clapped, she definitely would have.

She needed to restrain the student from losing her composure, however, and touched Dahyun’s shoulder again, pulling her back to her place. “That will be enough.”

The two women could see the gears inside Dean Park’s head turning. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket, wiping his forehead with a trembling hand, trying to get a grip once more on the situation.

This was delicate, Sunmi could tell. Dahyun had made things incredibly difficult for the dean, who relied on Chanmi’s family to keep the school going. He needed to find a way to balance things out, somehow.

“I…” He started, after a silent moment. “I cannot discard this proof.”

Dahyun and Sunmi’s eyes lit up at the same time.

“But I cannot disregard Miss Chaeyoung’s conduct, either.” He sighed, painfully so. “If I am not mistaken, Miss Chaeyoung’s medical record pointed out that she has anger-management issues. This kind of behavior, if allowed to continue, is a threat to other students, just like Miss Chanmi’s business.”

“What?” Dahyun gripped her chair. “Chaeng doesn’t have anger-management issues!”

“Doesn’t she? Well, we can confirm it right now.” Dean Park grabbed his phone and dialed a number.

“Hello?” The voice on the other side picked up.

“Miss Jea?”

“Yes, sir?”
“Could you come over with Miss Chaeyoung’s medical file, please?”

Sunmi froze in place. She knew what he was doing.

Mr. Park knew that Chanmi was going to be expelled. There was no other way around it, not with Dahyun’s recordings threatening them. So, he was using Chaeyoung as collateral – if he could expel Chaeyoung as well, maybe the Heo’s wouldn’t be as angry with him.

What a fucking pig.

“…Understood, sir. I’m on my way.”

“Jea.” Sunmi spoke suddenly. She needed Jea to know that she was in the room, and hoped that this would be enough for the nurse to understand what she was trying to say. “It’s Sunmi.”

“Oh.” A pause. “Hey.”

“Just wanted to remind you that it’s Son Chaeyoung’s file that the dean was referring to.” She stopped, licking her lips. “You know. There are many Chaeyoungs on campus.”

She could hear a tiny snicker, and begged for the sound to be an indicator that Jea understood her pleading. “Got it. I’ll be right there.”

“Thank you.” The dean put the phone down and the three waited. “Would you like some water?”

“No, thanks.” Dahyun and Sunmi answered at the same time, with the same resentful tone. He was their enemy in that room, and the atmosphere reeked of dirty politics.

It didn’t take long for Jea to knock, coming in with the file in hands. Dahyun’s chest tightened at the sight of the nurse, because she was reminded of Chaeyoung’s hand.

“Miss?” Her voice was so incredibly weak suddenly. “How is Chaeyoung doing…?”

Jea shot her a sympathetic look. “I had to put her in an ambulance. She’s getting surgery as we speak.”

Dahyun’s eyes watered with that simple sentence, every ounce of confidence and strength vanishing. She felt like a child again, in the middle of three intimidating adults. She just wanted to be hugged by her friends.

She didn’t want to do this anymore. Even Sunmi’s small caress on her hair didn’t make her feel any better.

“Thank you, Miss Jea.” The dean took the file from her hands and opened it.

Sunmi side-eyed Jea, who just returned the stare with one of her own. She had no idea how to decipher the nurse’s eyes, so she just sighed, closing hers.

All that the dean needed to expel Chaeyoung too was the proof written in the medical file that she was indeed struggling with anger-management issues. The fate of that girl was on Jea’s hands, and Sunmi couldn’t warn her about it beforehand. She felt terrible.

Chanmi would go down, but she was taking an innocent student with her.

One of Jihyo’s friends. Sunmi’s heart bled when she thought about it.
“Miss Jea… is this the right file?” Mr. Park asked after inspecting the pages thoroughly.

Sunmi opened her eyes.

“Yes, sir.” Jea answered, nonchalantly.

“I can’t seem to find what I’m looking for.”

“Which is?”

“The page where it’s written that Miss Son Chaeyoung has anger-management issues.”

Jea raised an eyebrow at that. “That’s because she doesn’t, sir.”

Sunmi’s knees weakened, but she held herself up.

“…I am sure of what I saw, Miss Jea.”

“Well, I look at all these files once a day, sir, and this condition has never been recorded in Son Chaeyoung’s file.”

The silence in the room was so heavy that Dahyun felt her stomach churning. She had no idea what was going on, but she felt the invisible argument taking over the place slowly. Looking at the professor, the nurse, and the dean, Dahyun could tell how tense they all were – defiant, even.

She didn’t get it. Chaeyoung was innocent, why was this happening?

“Must’ve been another Chaeyoung.” Jea completed, the smirk dripping from her voice, even though her face was impassive. “There are many Chaeyoungs on campus.”

Sunmi closed her eyes again, thanking Jea for being so goddamn clever and intuitive.

The dean put the file down, sighing – defeat.

“I see.” With nothing else to add that could potentially incriminate Chaeyoung, and a cellphone filled with proof of Chanmi’s drug-trafficking, he had absolutely no other choice but to give in. “You’re free to go, Miss Dahyun. I’ll deal with Miss Chanmi now.”

Dahyun didn’t know what that meant, but it felt like a victory.

“Thank you, sir.” She got up, bowing respectfully.

“You two please escort her out.”

“Let’s go, dear.” Sunmi walked by her side, with Jea right behind her.

Once they opened the door, they saw Chanmi waiting to return to the dean’s office. Her hair was still tussled from the fight, her arms were crossed and she had a mean look on her face, and when Dahyun walked by, Chanmi expected her to smirk and laugh in her face, thinking that she was so clever.

But Dahyun didn’t.

She barely spared her a glance, and just walked away with her head low. Chanmi frowned at this.

“What is up with you, huh?” Chanmi got up, yelling as Dahyun left. “You call me a bitch, thinking
you’re so smart with your phone, then leave that room like a loser? Where’s your pride?!”

Dahyun couldn’t care less. Chanmi kept yelling nonsense until the dean called her up to his office.

Sunmi stepped back a little, allowing Dahyun to walk in front of them, and turned to Jea. “What was that?”

“Heo Chanmi knew she wasn’t invincible. Someone would eventually stand up to her,” She pointed to Dahyun with her head. “And the girl who did is totally indifferent from her. Wouldn’t that hurt your pride?”

Sunmi realized that Jea was a lot smarter than people gave her credit for.

“By the way,” the nurse continued. “Thank you.”

“For what?” Sunmi almost laughed. “You’re the one who saved that girl from being expelled.”

“Because you warned me through the phone.”

Warmth invaded Sunmi’s chest and she shook her head, chuckling weakly. “How did you even get what I wanted to say?”

“I put the pieces together. Chanmi and Chaeyoung getting into a fight. The dean suddenly asking me about her medical record. You suddenly speaking up.” Jea looked up to the ceiling. “The only reason he could possibly want her file was because he wanted to use her anger as a weapon, somehow. Probably to harm the poor girl. So, I took that out.”

“You’re… something else, Jea.”

She laughed a little. “I had to rush to delete that from her record. I could get arrested for that, you know.” Jea grinned lazily.

“Guess you gotta fight crime with crime,” Sunmi replied, and the nurse bumped shoulders with her, playfully.

Jea moved to where Dahyun was and put an arm around her shoulder. “Hey, kid. Do you want to see your friend? I’ll take you to the hospital in my car.”

Dahyun just sniffled; she’d been crying the whole way out, the weight of her actions and words finally catching up to her, and simply nodded. Jea guided her to the parking lot, and Sunmi stopped on her tracks, watching as they got further and further away.

There was nothing she wanted more than to accompany them and be there for Jihyo, but she couldn’t. She had her job to do.

All things considered, it had been a good evening. She hoped that Jihyo was strong enough to endure this, just for a bit longer.
The hospital wasn’t as big as the girls were expecting, so they managed to find Jihyo and Tzuyu fairly easily after turning a few corridors. The two were on a white couch at the waiting room, with Tzuyu’s head on the older girl’s lap as she seemingly slept. Tzuyu’s eyes were red at the brims, a sign that she’d been crying up until recently, and everyone’s hearts compressed at the same time.

Jihyo looked up from caressing Tzuyu’s hair, and upon seeing most of her friends, she managed a small grin. “Hey, guys.”

“How is she?” Jeongyeon was the first to speak in a low voice. She didn’t want to wake Tzuyu up, but couldn’t contain her worry, either.

“The surgery shouldn’t take a lot longer. They will call for us when they move Chaeng to a comfortable room.”

“Did you call her parents?” Nayeon asked, sorting out the priorities.

“Yeah. They should be here, soon.”

“That’s good.”

Sana kneeled to where Tzuyu was, and touched her hair gently, too. Then, she looked up at Jihyo. “She must’ve been exhausted.”

“She cried herself to sleep.” Jihyo sounded tired as well and stifled a yawn. “I’m glad she’s resting, now.”

“God, what happened?” Momo was the one to ask the million-dollar question, and everyone’s eyes were on Jihyo at the same time.

The girl sighed. “Chaeng was fighting Chanmi. I don’t know how it started. When we got there, they were already going at it. That bitch probably saw her knuckles and smashed Chaeng’s hand.”

“I’m gonna kill her.” Momo’s speed of breathing increased in sound with each word, both hands already curled into fists by her side. She felt someone enveloping her knuckles and turned her face to see Nayeon securing her in place, like she’d done do her a few hours ago.

“Calm down. Let’s check on Chaeng, first.”

Momo’s shoulders dropped and she exhaled, nodding weakly.

“We should sit,” Mina spoke up for the first time. She was absolutely shaken by the news – even though she was the one who had received the message and pulled everyone together, now she was quite a wreck. It was like everyone’s problems were suddenly minimal, and only Chaeyoung mattered to all of them. It was a harsh turn of events, and Mina didn’t know what to feel.

They moved slowly to the couches around Jihyo, sitting in pairs. Nayeon and Momo sat side by side, Mina and Sana did too, and Jeongyeon sat across all of them, with her back to the door, and her front to the corridor, like Jihyo. She wanted to be the first one to see the doctor when he arrived to tell them about Chaeyoung’s situation.

Their argument at the gym that day was weighing heavily on her, and all Jeongyeon wanted to do
was to apologize. For many things, really, that she couldn’t put into words right now. She hoped to be able to talk once Chaeyoung woke up.

Mina felt Sana’s fingers intertwining with hers gently, but barely registered them. When Sana’s head fell on her shoulder, Mina sniffled, trying her very best not to break. She wasn’t the only one hurting; her tears wouldn’t help anyone.

“It’s okay to cry,” was all Sana muttered, and when Mina looked down to refuse, she saw that Sana’s cheeks were already wet.

So, Mina just closed her eyes, and let some tears fall as well.

They didn’t need to be strong all the time.

Momo’s leg bounced up and down as she stared at her hands, trying not to bite her nails, because she promised she’d stop. She wanted a distraction, and Nayeon was right by her side, but Jeongyeon was also right in front of her, and she didn’t want to act on impulse.

They hadn’t discussed things yet; Momo hadn’t apologized to Jeongyeon, neither had Nayeon, so this situation was both heart-breaking and awkward at the same time. It was hard to keep her composure when her brain kept pulling her towards two different directions. Most of all, she wanted to speak with Jeongyeon.

It wasn’t the right time, though. Not with everyone else involved and more pressing matters in their hands.

“I’ll get some water,” Momo got up, unable to stay still. “Do you want some?”

“No, thanks.” Nayeon answered.

“Minari?” Momo saw her tears and caught her breath, fighting every urge in her body to wipe them and hug the girl. Sana was also crying, and it hurt more than anything.

“I… I do, actually.” Mina rubbed her eyes. “Thank you.”

“Okay. Sana?”

She just shook her head.

Momo’s eyes fell on Jeongyeon, then.

“Jeong?”

She blinked. Momo’s voice sounded distant, but she looked at her. For the first time since their argument, they were looking at each other in the eyes, and Momo swallowed a lump in her throat.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Do you want some water?”

“Oh. No, thank you.” The exchange was awkward and filled with regret and tension, but Momo nodded and finally turned around to grab the cups.

“Not going to ask me?” Jihyo said as the girl filled the plastic cups, a teasing tone underlying in her voice.
“I will bring you some regardless. You’re bad at taking care of yourself.” Momo’s reply cut deeper than Jihyo expected, and her gentle smile healed wounds.

Upon delivering everyone’s cups, Momo sat back down, drinking contentedly. The plastic in her hands distracted her, now.

A few moments later, someone entered the room.

Sana lifted her head from Mina’s shoulder, speaking first. “Dahyunnie.”

Everyone looked at the last one missing from the group, smiles adorning their faces.

Dahyun thought that they were shining. It was so comforting, to return to their side after being subjected to an emotionally exhausting interrogation. She managed to return the grin, despite the pain in her gut. “Hey, everyone.”

“Are you okay? Where were you?” Jihyo asked, concerned. Dahyun was the only one who hadn’t answered the group chat, so Jihyo immediately thought about more problems.

“Defeating the Lich King,” was all Dahyun said, dragging her tired body to one of the couches. There was some space beside Jeongyeon, but Dahyun’s eyes were focused on one person only. She didn’t spare a glance to anyone else on her long, tortuous way towards her friends, and when she finally reached her destination, she stopped.

Sana looked at the girl in front of her, and Dahyun looked back.

Mina didn’t need words to understand. She untangled herself from Sana’s side with a soft smile and moved to the other couch, next to Jeongyeon.

The way Sana was staring up at Dahyun encompassed many things, but her wonderstruck expression was enough to make the younger girl nearly break down in tears again.

“May I sit next to you?” Dahyun asked, without needing to.

Sana nodded. When Dahyun plopped down beside her, there was no space in between them. Their shoulders and thighs touched, Dahyun kept looking straight, as if gathering her thoughts, and Sana’s heartbeat rapidly increased with each silent second.

The last time they had talked was at a party, when they had to break up a fight between their friends; now they were together again, after another fight. Maybe it was a sign.

Sana thought a lot about the moment they would meet again, but she couldn’t predict these circumstances. Dahyun looked broken, and Sana fidgeted with the hem of her coat.

Unlike the others, Sana was terrible at feigning ignorance. “Dahyunnie, I—”

Dahyun buried her head on Sana’s shoulder suddenly, nuzzling her neck as she sighed deeply. She inhaled Sana’s scent, committing it to memory, because she’d experienced loss before and didn’t want to go through it again. Everything she did, every single action, word, and sweat that transpired in the past hours, it was all—

“For you.”

“Huh?” Sana asked.

“I did it for you. I’d do it again, too. Over and over again.”
The two of them were in their own world. Sana brought a hand to her hair, tangling her fingers in the smooth, beautifully dyed locks. “What do you mean?”

Thinking about it hurt her brain and her heart. Dahyun tilted her face a little, her lips touching Sana’s pulse point softly. She almost puckered them to press a single kiss to her skin, but didn’t. Bringing her arms around Sana’s waist, Dahyun closed her eyes, and murmured as gently as she managed. “Can you hold me for a little bit?”

Sana did. Embracing Dahyun like this again was second-nature and brought her memories of happier times; stars, piano music, dancing, kisses. All of this came crashing down at once, and Sana let a small tear fall. She pressed a kiss to the top of Dahyun’s head, hoping that it could be enough for now.

Deep down, all that Sana wished was to be enough.

Mina looked at the scene fondly and wiped her thumb against her glistening cheek. It was a weird sensation. It felt like things were simultaneously getting better and worse at the same time. Perhaps it was the tense atmosphere of the hospital, haunting and suffocating, or maybe it was Jeongyeon by her side that made her feel this way, but Mina wanted to curl on herself and sleep until Chaeyoung woke up.

She thought she was ready for this. She had rehearsed her speech, the words she wanted to tell Jeongyeon when they talked again, but now, she was as terrified as Momo and Nayeon had been.

“Are you cold?” Jeongyeon broke the silence, making an ironically soothing spark of pain strike at Mina’s heart. She was still incredibly weak for her demonstrations of affection, even the smallest ones. Jeongyeon would always prioritize other’s well-being, and seeing Mina hugging herself probably stirred her protective instincts.

“N-no. I’m just… anxious.” This isn’t how the talk was supposed to start, but there was no other way around it.

“Yeah…” A pause, followed by “I am, too.”

Mina stopped, and finally turned to look at the girl properly. This was definitely not what she expected Jeongyeon to say. All this time, Jeongyeon had been protecting her, coddling her fondly in her arms and heart, without space for fear to come in. Jeongyeon tried her best to reassure others whenever she could, even if the situation wasn’t the most favorable. But now, she was finally honest with herself.

Something had changed. Jeongyeon probably had thought a lot about things.

Mina opened her mouth to keep the conversation going, but Chaeyoung’s parents arrived at that moment. With the girls’ greetings, they sat down to wait with them, as well.

It took thirty more minutes, but the doctor finally stepped out of the surgery room. Jeongyeon was the first to lift her head, expectantly.

Jihyo woke Tzuyu up, and the younger girl rubbed her eyes sleepily. When she saw the man in the white coat, she sat back up, eyes widening.

“She is recovering well,” the doctor’s first words were calculated to calm everyone down. “The surgery went fine, despite the damage. The anesthesia should wear off in an hour or so, and she’ll wake up slowly. Visiting hours will be open for you, but please refrain from crowding up the room. Two people at a time, at most.”
“Her hand,” Tzuyu said. “Will there be permanent consequences for her hand?”

The doctor looked at them with hooded eyes. “She… might have difficulties moving her index finger from now on. It was the most damaged area. But aside from that, nothing else.”

Jihyo heard Chaeyoung’s parents stifle a gasp, and it was like her world was shattered to pieces.

“She’s an artist, you see,” Tzuyu kept going, her voice cracking. “I just wanted to know… if she’ll be able to paint again.”

“This, my dear, won’t be a problem at all.” His smile was honest. “She will heal completely. We had to add some metal plates to her fingers, but those will come off eventually. I’m sure she’ll whine a lot, but nothing that will stop her from chasing her dreams.”

The girls let out a relieved breath at the same time.

“Thank you…” Tzuyu smiled, rubbing her eyes. “Thank you for taking care of her.”

“She’s incredibly strong.” He nodded back.

“Yes,” Sana was the one who spoke this time. She smiled through the tears, holding onto Dahyun’s hand unconsciously. “She really is.”

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It was hot. Chaeyoung opened her eyes slowly, waking up to an unfamiliar ceiling, with only a thin white sheet covering her body. She blinked several times before she managed to lift her left hand to rub the dizziness off her eyes. Letting her head drop to the right, she saw a widow with its curtains down. It was dark, but a soft yellow light on the corner of the room illuminated the place in a way that wasn’t harmful to the eyes.

She frowned, taking a deep breath, and looking to the other side. Sitting on a chair next to her was Sana, dozing off. She hadn’t realized that Chaeyoung was awake, and memories of what happened earlier were starting to return to the little artist.

She remembered a fight, a blonde girl, and an incredible amount of pain shooting through her right hand. Looking down, Chaeyoung realized that her hand and wrist were wrapped up in bandages, and came to the conclusion that she was at the hospital, waking up after surgery.

Her throat was really dry.

“Sana…” Chaeyoung tried, but her voice came out raspy. She coughed, then tried again. “Sana?”

Sana lifted her head, and her eyes shone, her face breaking into a smile. “Chaeyoungie… How are you feeling?”

“Very thirsty.”

Sana giggled, and got up. “Wait, let me help you.”
She fiddled with the buttons by the side of the mattress and finally found the one that prompted the bed to automatically move, making Chaeyoung sit up slowly. Once she was comfortable, Sana grabbed a cup of water that was on a stand right beside her and helped Chaeyoung drink slowly. Some water dripped from the corner of her mouth, and Sana yelped a little, using her shirt to wipe it.

“There was probably a towel around here, somewhere.” Chaeyoung teased, which earned a pout.

“Finding it would mean getting away from you.”

The words made Chaeyoung feel giddy inside and she just smiled, looking down. She finally checked the condition of her hand properly, but there was nothing she could see or feel beneath the bandages.

“Look,” Sana lifted her broken wrist. “Now we match.”

Chaeyoung chuckled, lifting hers. “Yeah. Guess that’s not so bad.”

The two exchanged meaningful glances, and Sana brought her chair closer to the bed, sitting down so she could lean with her elbows on the mattress. She looked up at her injured friend, bringing her good hand to her stomach, drawing circles there.

“I heard you were very brave today.” Sana had this way with words that made Chaeyoung want to wrap her in an embrace and never let her go. She made her feel at peace.

“I was an idiot,” Chaeyoung’s head rested on her pillow. “I let my anger get out of control.”

“What did she say to get you so angry?”

“She…” The words were very clear in her head, still. “She said bad things about you. I couldn’t deal with that.”

Sana blinked, the hand on Chaeyoung’s stomach stilling. “You… did that for me?”

The tiny artist looked at Sana in the eyes, trying to express something that words could never. “I did, and I’d do it again. I’d do anything for you, Sana.”

Tears started stinging the corner of her eyes. Chaeyoung put her good hand on top of Sana’s on her stomach, rubbing her knuckles with a thumb. “You mean a lot to me, you know? I don’t think I say this enough. You were the first person I could talk to about being gay, and you were always there for me one way or another, and I just couldn’t… I couldn’t stand hearing that coming out of that girl’s mouth. You were already so sad and affected by everything, and I just… wanted to protect you. But all I got was a broken hand and embarrassment.”

Sana turned her palm upwards, so they could hold hands properly. She could respond with a million different things, spit a thousand words to this girl who loved her so much, but Sana had a feeling that she didn’t need fancy sentences to get her meaning across.

So, she settled for something simple. “You mean a lot to me, too.” She gently brought Chaeyoung’s hands to her lips, kissing the good knuckles. “Thank you.”

Chaeyoung’s smile was everything she needed to see.

“The girls are all waiting to come see you. Your parents had an emergency call and couldn’t stay, but we promised them we’d look after you.” Sana said, and Chaeyoung just nodded.
“I bet they’re worried about me.”

“We all were.”

Chaeyoung swallowed, a faint blush tinting her cheeks. “Is… is Tzuyu here too?”

“She is,” Sana softened her gaze. “We thought that she would want to be the first to come in, but she said that she wanted to see you last.”

Chaeyoung’s heart dropped. She probably made a fool out of herself, with her incredibly bad temperament and exploding at everyone’s faces. God, she probably hurt Tzuyu without even noticing. “…Oh. I understand.”

Chaeyoung laughed weakly and found that she couldn’t stop. Her body wrecked with the broken laugh and she felt heavy suddenly, like a block of marble was pressing on her chest, painfully. She didn’t want to lose Tzuyu. That was the thing she was most afraid of, but she probably screwed it up because of her uncontrolled rage. Like she always did.

Sana cupped Chaeyoung’s cheek to wipe a tear there, and she finally stopped laughing, turning to look at the older girl. Sana got up and leaned down to press a kiss to Chaeyoung’s forehead.

And the gesture made something boil inside Chaeyoung. She tried to find an excuse for this sudden urge, like after-effects of the anesthesia, or even trauma from the past events, but in the end, it all came down to her tiny body being unable to hold it back any longer.

It felt pointless to hide it anymore.

“Sana… can I tell you a secret?” Chaeyoung lowered her voice, and Sana nodded. She finally spilled. “…I love my best friend and I don’t know what to do.”

Saying it out loud made everything sound dumb. She could’ve confessed this another time, when the girls weren’t all open and vulnerable like this.

Or being open and vulnerable was what made the situation perfect in the first place.

Sana stood there, looking at her with the softest expression in the world, which turned into a trembling pair of lips and a tight hold on Chaeyoung’s hand again. She breathed out in a chuckle. “…Can I tell you a secret?” It was Chaeyoung’s turn to nod. “No matter what I do, I can’t stop loving Dahyun.”

The natural grin in Chaeyoung’s face told Sana everything she needed to know. “I thought you were going to tell me a secret.”

The two of them laughed together – two broken girls, with two broken bones, that were patching each other up by simply existing in the same world. Sana thought that miracles were real, after all.

Medicine is overrated.

“I’ll let the others talk to you, now.” Sana finally let her go with a loving gaze. “I’ve spoiled you too much.”

“I like your spoiling.”

Sana giggled, and walked to the door. “Be well soon, Chaeyoung-ah.” And because she needed it, too. “Everything will be okay.”
“Sana-ya.”

She stopped with her hand on the handle. “Yes?”

“Give her a chance. You deserve to be happy, too.”

The words sank deep into Sana’s bones, making their way up to her heart and she felt the tips of her ears burning. She tried to remember the reason she was even avoiding Dahyun in the first place, but it was like all the self-hatred and loathing suddenly vanished.

She just wanted to be happy.

“…Okay. You talk to her, too.” She answered, then opened the door. Chaeyoung blushed, leaning back on her comfy pillows.

Momo and Mina walked in together after that. They sat next to the bed, relieved to see that Chaeyoung seemed to be doing much better than they thought, and Momo teased her about having more guts than anyone she’s ever met, including herself.

“I wish I had guts and your muscles to back them up.” Chaeyoung scoffed, making the two girls laugh. It was so nice to be together again. Chaeyoung didn’t ask about the fight at the party, or how things were going with Jeongyeon and Nayeon, because she wouldn’t be able to fix anything by worrying about them.

If Mina and Momo were laughing together with her, then things couldn’t be so bad.

“I’ll treat you to some ice cream when you get better,” Momo said, poking Chaeyoung’s belly.

“Now I need to get better soon.”

“We’ll paint together, too.” Mina offered, and that made Chaeyoung’s eyes shine.

“Did… did the doctor say anything about the damage?”

“He said that your index finger might be numb for a long time.” Mina was smiling as she brushed a strand of hair from the shorter girl’s face. “But nothing that will hinder your career, Picasso.”

Only good news was reaching her today, and Chaeyoung thought that maybe the world finally decided to give her and her friends a break. “I’m— That’s all I needed to hear. Thank you, guys…”

“Please don’t cry, I can’t handle more people crying today.” Momo whined, squishing Chaeyoung’s cheeks until she mumbled nonsense. Mina chuckled at their antics feeling relieved. Knowing that Chaeyoung was doing fine was all that mattered to her.

After a few more minutes chatting, the two got up and bid her goodbye, with a pinch to her cheeks and a ruffle to her hair. Chaeyoung groaned lightheartedly; seeing her friends joking around like old times was enough to energize her.

Nayeon and Jihyo walked in afterwards.

And seeing Chaeyoung’s toothy grin after stressful waiting hours was so overwhelming that Jihyo couldn’t hold back a sob. She sat on the chair and held Chaeyoung’s hand, pressing a tiny kiss to her good knuckles. “Thank God you’re okay…”

“Hey,” Chaeyoung was never good and handling a crying Jihyo. She spoke through the lump in her throat. “Thank you for being there for me. Sorry… for being a dumbass.”
Jihyo shook her head, with Nayeon’s hand caressing her back as she smiled down at the tiny girl. “You did well, Chaeyoung-ah.”

It was good to hear that.

Chaeyoung noticed the bags under both girls’ eyes. They had clearly suffered a lot through the past weeks, and Chaeyoung felt guilty for adding to the trouble. However, there was something different about them, as well. Nayeon kept leaning on Jihyo, and in turn, Jihyo unconsciously touched Nayeon every time she could. It was like they’ve missed the physical contact, and were just now returning to what they were. Chaeyoung knew that they’ve been best friends for a long time, and even though the whole group was Jihyo’s priority, she had a soft spot for Nayeon’s well-being. The past days were probably taking a huge toll on her because of that.

“You guys are looking good.” Chaeyoung blurted out, and the two older girls eyed each other.

“We’re feeling better now that you’re okay.” Jihyo said.

“No, I mean… Between yourselves. I can’t even remember the last time I saw you two hanging out together.” She smiled, scratching her cheek meekly. “I guess I’m just happy that everyone came to see me despite everything.”

Nayeon understood that. She felt her chest swelling with fondness, not only for Chaeyoung, but for the whole situation she put the others through. “You know, you being here kind of brought us together.”

It was probably too soon to joke about it. Chaeyoung didn’t care. “Damn, I should’ve broken this hand a lot sooner.”

Strangely enough, they all laughed. Nayeon played with her messy hair, and they finished their conversation with a soft ‘get well soon, we’ll wait for you’. Chaeyoung was sure her cheeks would hurt tomorrow from how much she’d been smiling.

Dahyun walked in next, alone. The immediate grin on her goofy friend’s face made a sense of nostalgia wash over her and Chaeyoung nearly cried.

“God, I miss you being my roommate.” Was the first thing Chaeyoung said, holding back a huge amount of emotion. “Like, a lot.”

“Then scoot,” Dahyun pushed her a little and Chaeyoung laughed, giving her friend space. Dahyun leaned with her, a bit uncomfortably since the bed wasn’t meant to fit two people at all, and the two sighed at the same time, looking at the ceiling.

“This room is missing some glow-in-the-dark stars.” Dahyun commented off-handedly.

“And anime posters.”

“And maybe if we remove all of those pills from the shelf we could fit in some figures over there.”

“Where would we place the RPG board, though?”

Dahyun squinted her eyes. “Under the bed. No one can know how much of a nerd you really are.”

Chaeyoung elbowed her, and Dahyun nudged her back, and they laughed. The moment felt misplaced in the grand scheme of the universe, but Chaeyoung wouldn’t trade this for anything.
“I avenged you.” Dahyun spoke after a silent moment, a serious tone adorning her voice.

“Huh?”

“I… exposed that girl, Chanmi. To the dean.”

Chaeyoung frowned, her eyes moving slowly to decipher what exactly that meant. “You did what?”

Dahyun opened her mouth but closed it again. She tried once more, but the overwhelming feelings that were stored in her brain whenever she thought about the situation hindered her speech. She managed to let out a sound after a moment; it was mostly a broken sob.

“I j-just stood there…” Dahyun would never forgive herself for that, and now she was letting her feelings spill.

“Dahyun—”

She leaned against Chaeyoung, head on her shoulder, hugging her gently. She tried to speak, voice muffled by Chaeyoung’s hospital robe. “When… when the f-fight broke out… when I heard you two y-yelling. I took my phone a-and filmed it. I filmed her p-pushing you down, and everything that happened afterwards. Your… your hand, too.” She took a deep breath, almost heaving. “S-she hurt you so badly, Chaeng, and I didn’t— I didn’t step up. I d-didn’t defend you. I just stood there.”

Chaeyoung pieced everything Dahyun was saying in her head as she tried to comfort the girl. “You filmed the fight… and showed it to the dean?”

Dahyun nodded, body still wrecking with sobs and guilt. “That recording w-was proof that you didn’t start it. You’d n-never get physical with someone, Chaeng, I had to… I had to prove it to him. That you’re a good person. You’re such a good person, Chaeyoung. Y-you’re— God, I got snot on your robe.”

She leaned back and reached for a wipe to blow her nose, her head hurting from crying so much. Dahyun closed her eyes to get a grip again and clear her head. When she looked back to her friend, she didn’t expect the fragility in her gaze.

“…You’re a goddamn genius, Dahyun.”

There was no guilt, no remorse, no pain in Chaeyoung’s words. She didn’t blame Dahyun for not helping, she didn’t hate Dahyun – she was praising her. There were tears in Chaeyoung’s eyes, but a smile, too.

“You’re not… mad at me?” It was hard for Dahyun to believe her.

“Mad? Are you kidding, you went to the dean with recorded proof.” Things were sinking in. “Wait, what did he say? Am I in trouble? I thought… I thought I’d be expelled after this.”

Dahyun just shook her head. “You’re off the hook. I think that… Chanmi is the one getting expelled, actually. I don’t know, Miss Jea and Miss Sunmi helped me out. It was so weird and terrifying.”

It was too much to process for one night. Chaeyoung couldn’t stop a bubbly laugh from climbing up her throat. “Holy shit, wizard. You really defeated the Lich King.”

In the end, that was all she wanted to hear. Dahyun joined the ridiculous laugh, and both friends
touched foreheads, basking in the sensation of being together talking about geeky stuff after a chaotic day. It felt freeing, in a way.

Drawing back to look at Chaeyoung with one last, loving gaze, Dahyun pointed at her broken hand with her head. “I heard you’re an alchemist, now.”

“Huh?”

“Metal plates in your hand? Tiny and irritable? You’re the whole Fullmetal Alchemist.”

Chaeyoung grinned, punching her shoulder softly. “Don’t call me tiny.”

Dahyun chuckled. “Jeongyeon is gonna love it.”

The name made Chaeyoung sigh. “I hope so.”

She was still afraid of facing her friend after their argument. The terrible words she spilled that day still rang inside her head, and she felt extremely guilty. Chaeyoung wasn’t in her right mind when she yelled at her, and Jeongyeon was clearly too fragile for it – more fragile than she’s ever seen her.

Dahyun rustled the sheets, finally getting up. “Time for this wizard to rest a little bit. You rest too, elf.”

“Yeah,” Chaeyoung felt warm. “Come back to our room, okay? I miss you.”

With one last nod, Dahyun tuned around, but Chaeyoung called after her. “By the way,” She bit her lower lip, thinking for a second, but ultimately decided to go through with it. “Sana wants to talk to you. She has something to say. And if you really did kick Chanmi out of school… then you need to tell her that.”

Dahyun’s eyes shone at the mere sound of Sana’s name, and Chaeyoung knew that there was nothing else in this world that mattered to Dahyun more than Minatozaki Sana. She was glad that those two had each other.

“Thank you, Chaeng. I will.” Was all Dahyun said with a bright smile, before leaving the room.

There were only two people left to visit her, and Chaeyoung wasn’t ready for neither of them.

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Nayeon saw the movement from the corner of her eye and turned her torso slightly to catch Jihyo walking away from the group with her phone in hands. She was going to ask if everything was okay, but decided to let Jihyo solve her own issues, too. If she needed help, Nayeon was sure that she’d be the first to ask.

Jihyo had just left Chaeyoung’s room when she felt the vibration in her pocket. The name on the screen made her heart beat faster and she had to walk away from the group to take this call. It was
quite late in the night, and the hospital corridors were empty; once she found an isolated spot, Jihyo picked up.

“Wine delivery, what’s your emergency?”

Sunmi’s chuckle on the other side was comforting. “Kids these days. Only think about booze.”

“After what happened today, you can see why.”

“You don’t need alcohol to be strong. I know that from experience.”

Jihyo didn’t know what it was about her voice that made her want to melt into the professor’s embrace, but right now there was nothing she needed more than to feel Sunmi’s arms around her, and her soothing voice in her ear telling her that everything would be fine. She truly felt like a child. “Why didn’t you come?”

“I couldn’t,” Sunmi sighed. “Believe me, there’s nowhere I’d rather be than by your side right now.”

“Are you always this smooth?” Jihyo teased, despite being tired.

“Sorry, it’s a habit. I’ve been trying to woo this girl for a few years now, but she’s really dense.”

“Oh,” Jihyo caught her breath for a second. “Keep trying, she’s bound to fall for your charms at some point.”

“I will.”

“But if you don’t invite me to your wedding, I swear.”

Sunmi laughed, a full, contagious laugh, and it made Jihyo feel that much better. She was incredibly sleepy, but the tie in her stomach was finally loose enough for her to be able to smile again; she wanted to share this feeling with her childhood friend. She hoped that Sunmi felt the same.

“Sunmi-ah.”

“Hm?” Her laughter died down and she paid full attention.

“Thank you for helping me today.” A pause. “...I miss you.”

The silence told Jihyo that it was a poor choice of words. Maybe Sunmi was still in school, risking her career by calling her and being mushy like this, but Jihyo had to take the leap, because she really wanted to hear a word of praise before sleeping that night. Perhaps she was being too greedy.

“I miss you, too. You did so good today. I called to tell you this.”

Perhaps not.

Jihyo felt tiny fireworks exploding inside her and bit her tongue as her smile grew out of control. She could have squealed, like a teenage girl in love – she certainly felt like one.

“Thank you.”

“How’s your friend?”
“She’s fine. I just left her room, and she was smiley and cheerful.”

“She’s really strong, isn’t she?”

“Incredibly so.” Chaeyoung’s grin popped in Jihyo’s mind and she giggled a little. “I’m glad to have her.”

“Your friends are incredible, just like you.” Sunmi wasn’t teasing this time around. Jihyo was an expert at identifying her various tones and nuances, and the fact that she was being totally honest was enough to make a blush creep behind her neck.

“If you say so.” Another thought crossed her mind, and she turned serious for a second. “Say… do you know if Chaeyoung is in trouble?”

Sunmi’s silence was terrifying for a moment. “She was, but your friend Dahyun saved her from being expelled.”

Jihyo frowned. “Dahyun? What do you mean?”

“We should talk about this another day,” Sunmi put this aside for now. It was too much to take at once. “I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

A part of Jihyo wanted to push her, but it was probably for the best that her brain rested for now.

“All right.” She paused for a moment, licking her lips before changing subjects. “You should come have dinner with us again, soon. Grandma misses you.”

Sunmi hummed, then asked. “How about you come over to my house this time?”

That was new. Jihyo had been to Sunmi’s house before, but they were kids back then, and Sunmi still lived with her parents. Then the professor’s mother dragged her husband away from the house to leave the place all to Sunmi, and Jihyo hadn’t stepped in there since. She didn’t know why; it was like the place was suddenly off-limits because it was Sunmi’s house, and she was her teacher. Thinking about being all alone with her sent a shiver down Jihyo’s spine.

“Do you always invite students to your house like this?”

“Oh my God, are you going to be insufferable forever?”

“Only if you’ll have me forever by your side.”

“Now who’s being smooth?”

The two laughed again, and Jihyo softened her gaze, thinking about how nice it would be to fall asleep to her voice and silly banter.

“Okay.” She ultimately answered, then yawned. “Okay.”

“You should rest. You had a tiring day.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Jihyo could practically hear Sunmi’s eye-roll. “I will. I promise.”

“Good. Good night, Jihyo-yah.”

“Night, Sunmi.”
There was no sound for a few seconds, then Sunmi hung up. Jihyo wouldn’t stop smiling as her back hit the wall, and she slid down to the floor, holding the phone close to her chest. Cheesy.

Park Jihyo liked to be in control. She wanted to guide people and have a hold of everything, because this way, she wouldn’t lose anything.

When it came to Sunmi, however, Jihyo couldn’t control herself – so she closed her eyes and let herself fall.

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Jeongyeon walked in alone, closing the door softly behind her. The two girls looked at each other from the distance for a moment, absorbing the atmosphere; it was a mixture of heavy pain and utter relief. Seeing Chaeyoung looking so healthy despite everything just reminded Jeongyeon of how strong that girl was, and how lucky they all were for having her around.

It also made a part of her brain whisper to her how much she didn’t deserve a friend like this, because she was a coward who ran away from everything, while Chaeyoung was willing to fight.

Jeongyeon decided to move before her thoughts swallowed her whole. She finally sat close to her temporary roommate.

“Hey.”

“Hi,” Chaeyoung looked at Jeongyeon’s hand, clutched at her side in an awkward position. She looked so small next to her, that her heart tightened. “Listen… I’m so—”

“No, don’t.” Jeongyeon interrupted her, still avoiding her gaze. “Don’t apologize. Let me apologize, instead.”

“But, Jeong…”

“Let me do this, please.” Her voice was strained, like she was trying to pull something massive up a steep mountain all on her own. “It’s… it’s important to me.”

Chaeyoung closed her mouth and nodded, deciding to wait for Jeongyeon’s words.

“You… you were right. I am a coward. I can’t even look at you in the eyes for this,” Jeongyeon chuckled weakly, playing with her own fingers. “It’s hard, doing this. But I’ll try, because if I don’t change, nothing will. And I will just keep hurting everyone.”

The sigh was heavy, and Jeongyeon looked ten years older suddenly. “I’m not… very good at being in touch with my own feelings. I tend to run away from them. I want to help people, and if I can leech off their feelings, then I can lie to myself and pretend that I’m okay. If I can make everyone happy, then I’ll be happy too. I never want to hurt anyone, because if I do, I’ll have to face myself, and the consequences of being myself. It’s… hard.”

The light at the corner of the room buzzed as Jeongyeon adjusted her position on the chair. She
touched the mattress of Chaeyoung’s bed, scratching the white sheet slightly. “You know, Chaeng… I don’t like myself very much.”

The words stung so much that Chaeyoung could feel the metal plates pulsating inside her bones.

“I look in the mirror and see a reflection of someone who isn’t exactly me. I see an athlete, a potential director, a friend, a girlfriend. I see me like others see me. But I don’t see myself. I never did.” Jeongyeon swallowed the tears, closing her eyes and tilting her head up. “I’m not strong… not at all. I pretend to be, because people like to be taken care of, and if I can provide that, then I will try. But when push comes to shove, I break. I break, and I run away, because I can’t be honest with myself and the people around me.”

She sniffled, breathing out. The air in her lungs were heavy, like the hospital mood.

“I wasn’t honest with Mina. I wasn’t honest with Momo,” Jeongyeon licked her dry lips. “I wasn’t honest with Nayeon. And that day at the gym, I couldn’t be honest with you.”

Chaeyoung moved her hand to brush her fingers slightly on Jeongyeon’s knuckles. The touch was electrifying. “Then be honest with me, now. Start with me, Jeong.”

The words opened a door to a myriad of unspoken feelings and bottled up emotions that had been resting inside Jeongyeon for much too long. She knew that everyone had those – their fair share of secrets and thoughts that piled up and would eventually collapse, breaking the person and everything around them.

At least, that’s what Jeongyeon always felt that would happen; that if she was honest with herself, she would destroy the perfect world and bonds she so carefully constructed through her life.

Twenty years of careful calculation. Shattering this reality was scary.

Jeongyeon opened her eyes and finally looked at Chaeyoung, and when she saw a smile instead of a sad, angry, sorrowful, pitiful, hateful look, it was like someone had cut the ropes that tied her to her invisible burden.

It was at that instant that Jeongyeon finally realized – being honest didn’t mean losing the people she loved.

It meant loving the people she lost.

--

The hospital corridors were cold despite the warm weather. Sana figured that it was because of the lack of windows and sunlight, and walking alone through them at night didn’t exactly make the place more inviting. She rubbed her arms to get a little heat going as she walked around, aimlessly.

She had left Chaeyoung’s room and decided to let the others chat amongst themselves. Chaeyoung’s words were hanging heavily in her mind; Sana wanted to talk to Dahyun, but didn’t know when, or how. This situation made her anxiety spike, which prompted her to pace around the place, and when she came to, she found herself deep into the unknown. Sana knew that all it would take for her to return to her friends was to turn on her heels and walk the same path back, but something stopped her from doing so.
Maybe she wanted to be found, instead.

Sana let out a breathless chuckle. She remembered, weeks ago, when she had roamed the whole campus, chasing her friends to ask them to go to a stupid Drama Club party with her because she didn’t want to face her feelings for Dahyun. In the end, Jihyo was the one who had found her, freeing Sana of her duties for once.

She hadn’t even realized the size of the burden she’d been carrying back then, and how things would escalate as time went by, but looking back, everything was so much. Sana had no idea how she managed to get through it all – not with how bad her self-hatred was.

It didn’t take long for her to understand that, even though her friends were part of the reason for her anxiety, they were also her cure. It was a contrast – Sana could have easily solved her emotional issues had they not been present in her life, but—

Living in a world where they didn’t exist to hurt her and patch her up at the same time wouldn’t be worth it. She had to hold Mina’s hand as both of them cried, had to listen to Momo’s confessions, had to hug Nayeon, who was nothing but a mirrored version of herself, had to joke around with Jeongyeon and help carry her to her room after the fight, had to love Chaeyoung and feel loved back, had to rely on Jihyo, had to dote on Tzuyu—

The only thing she didn’t have to do, was hurt Dahyun like she did. That was her unforgivable sin.

Sana wondered how low she would have to bow her head.

“Are you lost?” A voice caught her by surprise, and Sana turned around.

The words got caught in her throat when she saw Dahyun centimeters away, and she had to force them out. “No, I… I was thinking a little bit.”

Dahyun hummed. She swayed, touching her back on one of the white walls, hands by her side. “Can I think with you?”

It was an innocent statement. Sana stopped fidgeting with her bandages and nodded, stepping a little so she could lean by Dahyun’s side.

The silence was weird; heavy yet comforting. Sana could almost feel the warmth of the girl by her side, even though they weren’t touching. She looked down at her broken wrist, and almost reached for Dahyun’s hand by her side with that same injured hand. Sana tried to be careful with her wound, but when it came to Dahyun, it was almost like her touch alone would be able to magically heal her.

The words were begging to come out.

“Dahyun—”

A sudden soft piano melody reached her ears and she moved her gaze to the phone in Dahyun’s other hand.

The younger girl smiled a little bit. “Remember this?”

Sana could almost feel the grass underneath her and the shooting stars above her head as she listened to the gentle music. She softened her gaze. “Of course.”

“I really like this song,” Dahyun put the device in her pocket, with the speaker poking out to keep
the sound at a good volume. “It reminds me of happy times.”

Sana didn’t know what to say – or even if she could say anything at all – so she just did what she’d done back then; she closed her eyes, and just felt. The rough wall behind her, the way her fingertips scratched the surface slightly, the sound of the fluorescent lights buzzing above their heads.

Dahyun’s hand touching her bandages, holding her fingers gently.

Sana’s eyelids fluttered open, and she turned her head to see Dahyun’s gaze on her, her body turned towards her. She captured every detail of Dahyun’s beautiful face like it was the first time; her pale skin, the pretty eyebrows, the fluffy cheeks, the slope of her nose and plump lips.

If love was a word, then Sana wanted to say it, over and over again.

“What did you mean?”

“Hm?” Dahyun had come closer.

“When you said you did it for me,” Sana muttered, her eyes darting everywhere, unable to stop admiring the girl in front of her. “What did you mean?”

Dahyun’s shoulder slid against the wall as she took another step forward. “I… did something crazy. And when I thought about the consequences, I realized that I didn’t care. Because I did it for you.”

Sana felt herself being pulled, slowly. “What did you do?”

Dahyun smiled then, lazily. She brought her hand up, tucking a strand of hair behind Sana’s ear. “I fell in love with the moon. Crazy, right?”

There was a moment between the touch behind her ear, kind and tingly, and Sana’s brain processing this confession, in which the air was quite literally knocked out of her lungs as Dahyun went out of focus. Their noses touched, and before Sana could ask, she saw Dahyun tilting her head. Her eyes fluttered shut automatically, and she pressed forward, trying to chase the feeling.

With a parted mouth, Sana felt a kiss to her upper lip, then another on her lower one. Dahyun was still holding onto her wrist, pulling a little bit, and Sana broke free of her hold to cup the younger girl’s cheek, finally pressing their mouths together.

Sana kissed her like she needed her to breathe, kissed her like the stars in the sky were about to fall on their heads, kissed her like this was their last moment on Earth. Sana wouldn’t mind dying wrapped around Dahyun if that was the case.

When Dahyun licked into her mouth, slowly and passionately, Sana realized that she didn’t want to die at all. She wanted to stay alive, and apologize, and hold Dahyun’s hand and neck, and kiss her again even though they hadn’t stopped. She wrapped her arms around Dahyun’s shoulders, pulling her flushed against her, fingers tangling in her hair.

Life, Sana reckoned, wasn’t as bad as she thought.

It was hard to break the kiss. Every time one of them pulled away, the other dived back in, pushing and pulling, like waves creating patters on the sand. Sana sunk her teeth softly in Dahyun’s bottom lip and felt the girl sighing against her mouth. It wasn’t aggressive; it was an addiction. It was an apology and a statement, a silent dance to the background music.
It was a sentence, and much more.

“Don’t ever leave me again,” Dahyun whispered against numb lips, eyes still closed. She kissed her again. “Please, don’t leave me again.”

There was a sob in there somewhere, and Sana couldn’t tell if it was hers, or Dahyun’s. She nodded, lips touching everywhere they could; the corner of Dahyun’s mouth, her cheeks, accidentally her nose, her jaw. Sana would drink everything this girl had to offer.

They had to draw back at some point, because not being able to look at Dahyun was as painful as not being able to touch her. Sana’s arms moved, hands holding the younger girl’s face with the utmost care in the world, like she was her precious treasure. They were both crying, and Sana let out a broken chuckle as the pads of her thumbs wiped the wetness from pale skin.

“When did you learn to kiss like that?” Sana asked, the smile on her face more beautiful than Dahyun could possibly describe.

“I might have practiced,” Dahyun sniffled. “My hand is a great tutor.”

Sana laughed between teary eyes. “I’ve been told I’m a better one. If you’ll have me.”

Dahyun reached for Sana’s broken wrist, taking the bandaged hand and kissing the top of it with reverence. “You’ve had me since high school. It’s only fair I accept.”

The pull at Sana’s heartstrings physically hurt. She dived in for a hug.

“Dahyunnie.”

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry.” Because she had to.

Dahyun pressed a kiss to the shell of Sana’s ear, and swayed with the girl in her arms, side by side. “I forgive you,” She took a deep breath. “…I love you.”

Saying it out loud was definitely better than sending a text message.

Sana whimpered, and hid her face on Dahyun’s shoulder, fearing that her legs wouldn’t be able to hold her up. Her cheeks hurt. Maybe that smile would become permanent.

Her voice came out muffled. “Thank you…”

They didn’t want to go back to the others yet, so they sat on the floor and snuggled for minutes. Then, Dahyun told her about Chanmi, because she’d promised Chaeyoung.

Holding Sana’s hand made everything less scary.

Kissing Sana’s lips made everything worthwhile.
Silence was all that managed to come out of Chaeyoung’s slightly parted lips when Tzuyu walked into view. The girl was still tall, still beautiful, still Tzuyu – and these elements were enough to destroy Chaeyoung’s world and rebuild it again from scratch.

She could feel it, too, with each step and movement. Chaeyoung was sure that she had memorized everything that was Tzuyu in the years they’ve been best friends, because she was nothing if not an artist in love, who captured every detail of a masterpiece, and yet that girl managed to still surprise her every day.

Words weren’t enough. Never have been.

But words were all she had. “I—”

“I was a fool to ever think that I was someone pure,” Tzuyu uttered the sentence like it was meant for Chaeyoung alone; a secret woven into the fabric of time. “I’m not a god, I’m not a king, but goodness… she’s my cure.”

The verse was very much familiar. Tzuyu walked around the bed, ignoring the chair beside Chaeyoung completely, and sitting on the other side of the mattress, next to her head, and where she could look at the damaged hand properly.

Tzuyu touched Chaeyoung’s shoulder, fingers slowly sliding down to where the bandages began. “Ambrosia, Ambrosia, Ambrosia, the woman I want, that I adore. I’ll never believe I’m worth you love…”

“But I’ll never stop wanting more.” Chaeyoung finished in a murmur, eyes glued to the girl hovering above her; a simple worshipper, who in a twist of fate, was noticed by her deity.

Tzuyu finally gave her a sign of what she was feeling by cracking a soft smile, one thumb rubbing the white bandages. “Those were your words to me, weren’t they?”

Chaeyoung swallowed hard, feeling like she’d been caught stealing, or murdering someone – whatever it was, made her heart pick up speed. She didn’t know why it was so hard to admit it, why it was almost impossible to let the words come out, the three simple words that were set in stone inside her chest and would never be erased, because Son Chaeyoung spent her entire life in love with Chou Tzuyu and she would keep loving her, to the end of the world and back.

“Yes,” In the end, all she could do was let Tzuyu guide the conversation. “They were.”

Tzuyu’s hand touched her face, tracing down her jawline gently. “And you remember what I told you back then?”

Chaeyoung searched inside her faulty memories. “Something about… me being worthy?”

“That’s right,” Tzuyu lowered her gaze. “Your mole is so pretty.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” There was a pause. Tzuyu blinked. “Can I hug you?”

Chaeyoung was spreading her arms before Tzuyu could even finish the sentence. “Don’t ever ask.”

The arms around Chaeyoung told a story – about a girl who grew up with another girl, who saw her
hobbies turn into passions, saw her life turn upside down, saw her never give up despite the obstacles placed on her path. The arms around Chaeyoung told her many things, but it was a simple squeeze and a shaky breath on the crook of her neck that told Chaeyoung everything she needed to know.

“You don’t want me to apologize, do you?” Chaeyoung scratched the back of Tzuyu’s head, fingers in her hair.

“Not for what you think you need to apologize for.” Tzuyu’s voice was muffled.

“The fight...?”

“Yes. Don’t apologize for that.”

“Then for what? Tell me, and I will.”

Tzuyu lifted her torso, looking right into her eyes, closer than she’s ever been. “Apologize for pushing me away from your heart for all this time.”

Chaeyoung felt the blood rushing to her face, and for some bizarre reason, she laughed weakly. She poked Tzuyu’s nose, then cupped her face with her good hand, and laughed even more. “How do I even do that?”

The answer came in the shape of a smile. “Close your eyes, and I’ll help you.”

So, Chaeyoung did.

She should have expected it; all the signs pointed to this moment. Lately, Chaeyoung had been feeling that her feelings weren’t one-sided after all. She was just so used to hide and never believe that the universe could possibly make her happy, that her uncertainty tied her up and hindered her gestures and words.

When it did happen, Chaeyoung wasn’t ready. She felt soft lips falling on her own, and froze, her hand still touching Tzuyu’s cheek. Tentatively, she moved her mouth, trying to match the rhythm.

Tzuyu was kissing her. The darkness sharpened her senses, making the kiss feel better than anything she had ever experienced in her short life. Chaeyoung wondered if someone could die of happiness. It was overwhelming.

Tzuyu pulled back, and Chaeyoung finally opened her eyes. The kiss had been nothing but a gentle press of lips, and the artist knew why. She didn’t care, though; what mattered were her feelings.

And she was unable to hide them any longer.

“Be my girlfriend?”

Sana would have a field day with this story. Who says that after their first kiss?

Tzuyu let out a broken laugh, hugging Chaeyoung again. “I thought you were already mine.”

Chaeyoung sighed, kissing her hair. “I think I was born to be yours.”

And just like that, in a hospital bed under the lowlight and with a smashed hand, the artist tasted the nectar of the gods.

It was truly divine.
After spending so much time in the hospital, going back to the dorm was refreshing. Jea took four girls back to campus in her car and paid for a taxi to take the other four. Chaeyoung would stay in the hospital for a few more days, and the nurse reassured the group of friends that she would call whenever the girl was discharged. They all thanked her profoundly, with tired eyes and dried tears. Jea looked at their faces one by one and saw a glimpse of herself in each distant gaze. With a soft grin, she ruffled their hairs and told them to get some rest.

“You did well today, girls.”

It was nice hearing that. The eight of them bowed and wished her a good night in unison, and then turned to climb upstairs, where their rooms and comfy beds were waiting.

It was past midnight, some of them had classes in the morning, but they knew they wouldn’t be able to sleep that night. For many reasons.

Dahyun and Sana were glued at the hip, and almost walked together into Sana’s room. It was only after a moment’s delay that they noticed the mistake, and chuckled together, blushing slightly.

Jihyo observed the scene with fondness, elbowing Mina’s sides and pointing at the two sweethearts with her head. “Look at them.”

When Sana leaned to kiss Dahyun in front of everyone, no one made a sound. They weren’t in the mood to mock them or ask for details – after so much suffering from all ends, seeing their friends happy was enough to calm everyone down.

“Should we change rooms again?” Momo asked, walking up to the love birds. The teasing was met with a hug from both girls, and Momo laughed, whole-heartedly.

That’s when Jihyo had an idea. “Hey, guys, come here. Group hug.”

She opened her arms, and everyone latched onto her immediately. The silence pacified the turbulent feelings inside each one of them; the pairs of arms recharged their tired souls, each caress renewing their bond and taking back what was lost.

“I love you guys.” Jihyo murmured.

There was a multitude of disjoined replies. ‘Love you too’, ‘I’m sorry’, ‘Thank you’, a few chuckles and a sniffle. Jihyo missed this. They all did.

Finally letting go of each other, the eight girls exchanged one last gaze and a smile before stretching. Momo yawned first, and the others accompanied her shortly after. They felt complete and secure again.

Well, most of them.

Nayeon felt a hand on her forearm and looked up. Her heart jumped at the sight of Jeongyeon.
“Hey… can we talk?”

That question alone was enough to tell her that something was different about her. She didn’t ask if Nayeon was tired, didn’t think about her well-being first, and didn’t seem to be expecting Nayeon to deny her. It made Nayeon shiver.

“Yes,” She turned around and saw Momo and Mina looking at them, expectantly. “But the four of us.”

Jeongyeon just nodded. It was finally time.

They bid the other girls goodnight and entered Momo and Jeongyeon’s room, with Mina closing the door behind them. She didn’t think that this conversation would be taking place today after everything that happened, but then again, it was probably for the best. The least they thought about it, the better it would be. Anticipation was poison to a situation like this.

Nayeon couldn’t help but to look around the room for a moment. She saw Jeongyeon’s anime figures, medals, and Momo’s pile of clothes thrown carelessly on the corner of the room, and it felt like home. A strange sensation of nostalgia settled within her as Jeongyeon sat on her bed.

Momo, Mina and Nayeon waited, in front of the other bed. They looked at the girl, all rehearsed words erased from their minds, and just waited. It felt like Jeongyeon wanted to speak first.

“You can sit.” Jeongyeon said.

“Don’t worry about us.” Nayeon replied.

Strangely, Jeongyeon breathed out a chuckle at this. “Right. Okay.”

Momo bit her lower lip, itching to talk. She wanted to apologize. That was the first thing she wanted to do, but something was holding her back. Perhaps it was Jeongyeon’s aura, spreading through the room in a constricting way; she couldn’t tell. But the words just wouldn’t come out.

“I had a long time to think about many things,” Jeongyeon started, looking at her hands. “What happened between us, the events that lead to that… but mostly, about myself. I took the longest when it came to myself, because it’s just very hard to face my flaws. But you all know that by now. I know you do.”

She looked up. “Chaeng had to yell at me so I could finally get it. Hiding my feelings helps no one, so I want to open up to you. Will you hear what I have to say?”

“That’s all we want,” Mina encouraged her. “It’s the only way we can fix this.”

Jeongyeon nodded, took a deep breath, and rubbed her eyes. “Okay,” She looked at Momo, first. “You punched me. In the jaw. And you broke my glasses. That hurt.”

It was the most obvious fact, and yet Momo felt like she’d been punched back. She couldn’t hold back anymore. “I’m sorry, Jeong. I’m so, so sorry.”

“Momo, I consider you one of my closest friends. And you punched me.”

“I— I know,” Momo ran her fingers through her hair, desperation taking place inside her. “I thought about this every day. I’m… I don’t know what to say. I can only apologize. I don’t even deserve your apology… just— just know that I’ll do anything, anything to have your trust again, Jeong. I’m sorry.”
Jeongyeon swallowed hard, blinked, and looked at Mina next. “You knew that I kissed Nayeon at that party, and you didn’t tell me, even when we started dating. I kept a lie, but you lied too. Why?”

Mina couldn’t even worry about Momo sobbing next to her because the spotlight was on her now. Her throat was dry, but she promised to tell the absolute truth. “…Because I didn’t want to risk losing you.”

“Losing me? Like… some sort of prize?”

“…I want to say no,” She understood now why Jeongyeon asked them to sit. “But that would be a lie. I wanted you to pay attention to me, and when you called me to help with your movie, I thought that this was finally my chance. So… I kept the lie locked away, because I wouldn’t have anything interfering with this chance.”

Mina’s voice cracked. “I’ve liked you for three years, Jeongyeon. When you idealize someone for that long, you start losing sight of the person, and all that is left is a fantasy.”

The hurt in Jeongyeon’s eyes was apparent. “So, you weren’t dating me. You were dating the Jeongyeon you thought I was.”

“I… I think so,” It was so hard to admit that. “But only because I don’t know the real you. And I want to.” Mina wiped a single tear with her thumb. “I d-don’t want to give up on you.”

Jeongyeon opened her mouth to say something, but gave up midway. She gripped her knees and moved her gaze to the last one in line.

“You… broke my heart.”

It was a thousand times worse than anything the voices had ever told her. Nayeon’s knees gave in and she sat on the bed. “I know.”

“You used me.”

“I know.”

“You kissed me to make Momo jealous, disregarding my own feelings.”

It wouldn’t stop. Nayeon had to endure it. “…I know.”

“And I kissed you back, because for a second, I thought that we could go back to what we were.” The moment the words left her mouth, Jeongyeon cried. The other three girls lifted their heads at the same time, staring at her in astonishment.

That, none of them could have predicted.

“You…” Nayeon couldn’t even speak.

“You wanted me to be honest,” Jeongyeon didn’t stop the tears. “I’m being honest now. I never… I never wanted to break up with you. I thought you were the love of my life. It didn’t matter what I did, it didn’t matter who I kissed, you wouldn’t leave my head. You were my first, Nayeon, and I wanted you to be my last. I never stopped loving you, and you broke my heart.”

No one moved – no one could move. The weight of this confession rooted them in place.
Jeongyeon wasn’t done. She looked back at Mina. “But then you showed up! And for the first fucking time, when I kissed you, I didn’t think about anyone else but you. You made me happy, Mina. I wanted to love you, because you made me genuinely happy.”

Mina let out a hiccup and sat next to Nayeon on the bed.

Jeongyeon’s gaze fell back on Nayeon. “When we talked in the bathroom at the house party I told you I was learning to love Mina. But the truth is that I was learning to let you go. I wanted to let you go so desperately, Nayeon. I didn’t want to be a burden to you. I wanted to be happy, and I wanted you to be happy, too. Fuck.”

Then, she looked at Momo. “And you punched me! You avoided me when I started dating Mina, and you treated me so coldly that I wanted to cry sometimes. And even after all of this, I still can’t be mad at you! I want to be, I want to let this anger flow, I have every right to be upset. But I’m not. Of course I forgive you, Momo, you absolute idiot.”

Momo sat on the bed, too, her loud sobs mixed with everyone else’s.

The words wouldn’t stop pouring out of Jeongyeon’s mouth; all those weeks and years of repressed feelings came crashing down, and for a moment Mina thought that this mountain of lies was too big for them to come out of unscathed.

Maybe they weren’t going to fix this after all.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” Jeongyeon spoke up after a long moment, in which they gathered their thoughts and calmed down. The sobs had lowered considerably, but were still there. “I don’t want us to avoid each other anymore. This whole thing is a mess, I’m confused about my own feelings, but—I can’t fathom going through college without all of you. I want us to be okay.”

She breathed deeply, and lifted her gaze, only to realize that Momo, Nayeon and Mina were staring at her too. That was the reason Jeongyeon had hidden her pain – watching them cry because of her hurt more than anything.

But she couldn’t go on pretending the world was bright all the time. She couldn’t protect people by lying to them. And she definitely couldn’t go on lying to herself.

It was painful, but it was life.

“You hurt me a lot,” Jeongyeon finished. “But I hurt you, too. And I’m sorry.”

Nayeon got up from the bed and walked up to Jeongyeon’s mattress, sitting next to her. They stared at each other, eyes searching for what was lost, and Nayeon took her hand in a gentle hold. “Mina came to me yesterday. We talked a lot, and she told me something that I think you need to hear, too.”

Jeongyeon sniffled, nose red and heavy eyes, and nodded.

“She told me that we’re not monsters. Getting hurt, hurting others, facing our demons… that’s just part of growing up. I think I agree with her.”

“She’s always been smart.” Jeongyeon muttered. Mina chuckled in between sobs.

“She also told me that we’re hurting like this because we love each other. In different ways, and different intensities, but when it comes down to it, we simply love each other. I think she’s right again.” Nayeon’s voice was gentle as she touched Jeongyeon’s fingers.
Jeongyeon looked at her. “Nabongs… do you still love me?”

That answer was automatic. “Yes.” Nayeon sighed. “I never stopped. I regret breaking up with you. I’m sorry I never told you that.”

“Then… Momo…”

“I love her, too. I did what I did because I couldn’t accept that I loved the two of you. But I do. I admit it. I can’t change this part of me.” The words flowed easily as Nayeon held her hand. “I’m sorry I hid this from you. You too, Momo.”

“I get why you did it,” Momo side-eyed Mina, smiling a little. “It’s hard to admit you love two people.”

Jeongyeon knitted her eyebrows. “Two people, huh…”

“Jeong,” Mina was the one who got up this time, sitting on Jeongyeon’s other side. “I love you, still. I promise you that.”

“You love Momo, too, don’t you?” It wasn’t a question, just a statement.

“Yes.” Mina grabbed her other hand.

Jeongyeon looked at Momo. “And you love them.”

“With my whole heart.” The conviction in Momo’s voice could have shaken Jeongyeon to the core, but it warmed her heart instead. This was weird.

She felt Mina’s hand tracing her face, and Nayeon intertwining their fingers.

“We admit it. And you?” Mina asked.

Jeongyeon could feel her walls rising from the ground, ready to guard her vulnerable emotions once more, but she forced them down. She felt loved by all sides, the touches calming her beating heart, and her head pounding after crying so much. It was foreign to her, but ultimately, her honest words were all she had.

“I don’t think I can stop loving you,” She turned to Nayeon. Then, to Mina. “And I never broke up with you. I don’t want to, either.”

She felt greedy. So that’s what it felt like.

Luckily, she had guidance this time.

“It’s alright.” Mina smiled. “That’s part of you.”

“And I love this part too.” Nayeon put her chin on top of Jeongyeon’s shoulder, closing her eyes. Momo finally got up, and kneeled, leaning against Jeongyeon’s legs, hugging her knees close. Jeongyeon was completely enveloped, and for as weird as it felt, it was everything she needed.

She wanted this.

“I love you,” Nayeon placed a kiss to her cheek. “I love every part of you. Even the parts that are not mine to love.”
Jeongyeon laughed then, a lighthearted sound that freed her soul. She fell back on the bed, looking at the ceiling and sighing, her hands still holding Mina’s and Nayeon’s.

“I love you too.”

Nayeon and Mina snuggled by her side, and Momo smiled, closing her eyes with her head on Jeongyeon’s lap.

The four of them slept like this.

And it was okay.

Chapter End Notes

So, hopefully this cleared out a few (many) things. It’s not over yet! Thank you so much for putting up with my delays. Your patience is much appreciated! Feel free to drop on any of my social media to yell at me (or just write your thoughts!)

See you next time!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

Find me on my social media:
Twitter: @niigoki_
Tumblr: niigoki
CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/niigoki
Warmth. That was the first thing Jeongyeon felt upon slowly waking up from a deep, dreamless sleep. She was covered by a blanket, and the pillow under her head was familiar – her own pillow, this time, not Dahyun’s. Moving her fingers a bit, she brought the pillow closer, and buried her nose in there, taking a deep breath. She felt at home and at peace.

There was still something warm surrounding her.

Jeongyeon tried to move her torso this time, but found herself locked in place. She thought that she should be startled by whatever was hindering her, but something inside her soothed her worries, her subconscious mind light and secure. This wasn’t a threat. It was okay.

Her eyelids slowly fluttered open, and the familiar view of the window sills of her dorm room greeted her, with blinds that were shut, stopping the sunlight from breaking through. Moving her gaze, she saw the medals hanging in front of her bed, unmoving, like everything else. Jeongyeon brought one arm up to rub her eyes.

It was warm.

Then, she looked down, and saw Nayeon.

The girl hugged her, deep asleep still, and looked peaceful – Jeongyeon couldn’t remember the last time she found herself in this position. It was in high school, probably, right after a passionate love-making session. She could nearly hear Nayeon’s hushed giggles and raspy voice wishing her a good morning, as the brightest smile cracked on her features.

The memories of last night and the conversation she had with Nayeon, Mina and Momo finally resurfaced. She remembered falling asleep with the three girls enveloping her entirely, only to wake up uncomfortably in the middle of the night and make sure to adjust their positions. Nayeon had crawled into bed with her, which only meant that Momo and Mina were—

Jeongyeon tried to turn around, but her movements awakened her companion.

“Hmm… Jeongyeonnie?” Nayeon mumbled, pulling her closer and sighing. Jeongyeon’s heart jumped, simply at the way Nayeon had called for her, the memories attached to it still strongly rooted within her.

“Hey,” She couldn’t suppress a smile. “Go back to sleep.”

“What time is it?”

Jeongyeon let herself fall back into the mattress, looking at Nayeon with softness and wonder. “I don’t know. Early?”
Silence filled up the room as Nayeon seemingly accepted this answer, and soon enough she retreated back into dreamland. All that Jeongyeon could do was watch with nostalgic interest. She wanted to say something, the words climbing up her throat, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. Even though they had talked, Jeongyeon still felt quite guilty, and didn’t want to do anything behind Mina or Momo’s backs.

Speaking of which—

Jeongyeon once more tried to move, but this time she removed Nayeon’s arms from her waist gently before attempting anything. When the girl didn’t budge, Jeongyeon finally turned around enough to see that there were indeed two people sleeping comfortably on the bed next to her.

Momo had her back turned to Jeongyeon, but the athlete could see the arm around her roommate’s frame, hugging her closely. Mina was clearly very comfortable in this position, and Jeongyeon knew that those two had probably slept together like this a lot throughout their lives. She waited for it – the pang of jealousy that she expected to hit with Mina looking so safe in the arms of someone else, but it never came. Instead, she felt the corners of her lips turning upwards. She wondered for a moment if it was because, maybe, her love for Mina wasn’t as strong as she first believed. But then, she realized that that wasn’t the case.

It was just because it was Momo.

There was something about Momo protecting her that made Jeongyeon feel relieved.

Thinking about it just made it easier for Jeongyeon to turn back to Nayeon and hug her too, closing her eyes and allowing her muscles to relax. This was familiar, and for once, Jeongyeon didn’t feel bad for not pulling away.

They slept for two more hours before Nayeon started moving this time, untangling herself from Jeongyeon slowly. She rubbed her eyes, a soft yawn leaving her lips as she faced the ceiling. She allowed herself a quiet moment before her brain started up like an old car; bit by bit, yesterday’s sleeping arrangements sank in, as well as the place she currently found herself in, and Nayeon finally blinked, turning her face to the side.

Jeongyeon was already looking with a soft grin. “Morning.”

It was a bit surreal. “Hey, morning…”

“Still as spacy as ever.”

“I’m not spacy,” Nayeon defended against the teasing, but then realized that she had hogged all the blankets to herself. “…It used to be worse.”

Jeongyeon chuckled with a raspy voice. “It did. You gotta work on that.”

Nayeon grunted, but then smiled. She bit her lower lip as her eyes fell upon the ceiling again, thinking about what to say next. Things were too fresh, and she wasn’t sure if the things she wanted to say would be adequate.

“How are you feeling?” She went for the safest route.

Jeongyeon pondered for a moment, also turning on her back to stare at the ceiling. “A whole lot better. You?”

She waited for the voices, and they were the quietest they’ve ever been. Nayeon smiled. “A lot
lighter.”

“Thats good.”

It hit Nayeon that she didn’t know what time it was – and that she also didn’t care. She didn’t have classes in the morning, but even if she did, there were certain times where you had to take a break from everything and focus on yourself. Nayeons healing process involved knowing that the two people she loved, plus the girl they loved were all in the same page, and feeling better about themselves. This was the most important thing at the moment.

“We all just fell asleep like that, huh.” Nayeon observed, smiling.

“Yeah,” Jeongyeon laughed a little. “It was a really bad position. Momo was on the floor, I dont even know how she managed to sleep like that.”

“Momo sleeps anywhere.”

“That’s true,” Jeongyeon sighed. “Still, I didn’t want her to be there.”

The mood seemed to shift and Nayeon took a risk. “Where did you want her to be?”

It sounded like an innocent question, but the answer could be a heavy one. Nayeon waited expectantly, but Jeongyeons reply came out as ordinary. “On the bed with us, at least.”

“Oh.”

It was simpler than she thought.

“If this bed could fit four people, anyway,” Jeongyeon chuckled. “I had to move them to the other one.”

The second Jeongyeon finished saying that, Nayeon lifted her torso to look at the other bed, and saw Momo and Mina’s tangled bodies, breathing slowly. The sight, and the fact that Jeongyeon didn’t seem to have a problem with it, warmed her heart in a way that left her breathless. She fell back on the mattress and smiled, hiding her face in hands.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked, confused at the reaction.

“Nothing, just…” Nayeon struggled with the words, finding it hard to describe the flames set ablaze inside her heart. There were many things she could say, many expressions and fancy words she could use to dance around the issue a little longer, but eventually, it would all come down to the same thing. Nayeon allowed herself to fall a bit more. “This feels right. The four of us.”

Jeongyeon processed it slowly, still afraid of taking this step. But if Nayeon was willing to be vulnerable and honest, then she wouldn’t fall behind. “Yeah... the four of us.”

Nayeon looked at her, and Jeongyeon stared back, and the words fell out of Nayeons mouth.

“I love you.”

She’s wanted to say this again for so long. Jeongyeon felt her face reddening at the confession – one that was a long time coming – and turned her body towards Nayeon.

“Love you too, Nabongs.”

“Ew, get a room.” Momo’s sudden raspy voice broke the mood. It was so unexpected that Nayeon
snorted, hiding her face on Jeongyeon’s shoulder.

“I did, dumbass. This is my room.” Jeongyeon replied, turning her neck so she could look at her roommate.

Momo was in the same position, a lazy smile adorning her features. “Good. Don’t go anywhere again.”

It was soft, and filled with honesty. Maybe a bit weird considering everything, but if weird meant that they could joke and talk freely with each other again without the lies and exhausting emotional burden, then Jeongyeon didn’t want to be normal ever again.

“Guys,” At last, Mina spoke up, lifting herself up to look at Jeongyeon and Nayeon with sleepy eyes. “What time is it?”

Jeongyeon finally grabbed her phone. Her eyes widened, and she jolted, sitting up straight. “Shit, it’s almost 1:00pm!”

There was a pause, and soon after, a scurry, as panic spread through everyone. Mina got up, followed by Momo, then Jeongyeon, then Nayeon, as they all crowded the bathroom to at least brush their hair for a minute to look somewhat presentable. Jeongyeon yanked the brush from Momo’s hand, complaining that she took too long with that mane of hers, which prompted Momo to whine and grab a spare comb from their drawer. Momo then combed Nayeon’s hair as Jeongyeon got busy with Mina’s, then elbowed everyone, trying to wash her face. Jeongyeon once again scolded her, saying that she was making a mess, because the sink was now all wet and the bathroom wasn’t big enough for this. Nayeon grabbed a hand moisturizer from the sink without even asking because it was a gift she’d given Jeongyeon anyway, so technically it was hers too. She then passed the pot to Mina, who was squished against the door. She was the first to leave the chaos of the bathroom, followed by the other three.

They gathered their things quickly, hoping to have lunch before the cafeteria closed for the afternoon.

And throughout all of this, none of them stopped smiling.

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For the first time Dahyun understood what waking up without a hangover when you were expecting one felt like – liberating and incredibly relieving. It’s not that she had consumed any type of alcohol the day before, it’s just that she went to sleep with so many thoughts and feelings in her head and heart that she kind of expected to wake up with them still squeezing their way inside. Instead, she opened her eyes and saw Tzuyu typing on her phone with a smile, the faint phone light hitting her cheeks.

Dahyun’s first gesture was to grin that morning, and she missed that. “How’s Chaeyoungie?”

Tzuyu jumped a bit startled, then blushed, still happy; of course Dahyun had assumed correctly.
“She’s sending me lame jokes, so I’m taking it as a sign of recovery.”

“Oh, do tell.”

Tzuyu turned her body to her roommate. “How does Salvador Dalí start his mornings?”

“Is this an art joke?”

“With a bowl of Surreal.”

“It’s an art joke.”

Tzuyu snorted and giggled lowly, with Dahyun mirroring the sound. It felt good, to laugh so early in the morning after a week of nothing but anxiety and awkward moods between all of them.

Dahyun took a deep breath and sat up, rubbing her eyes. She looked at Chaeyoung’s empty bed and missed her; as expected, the room didn’t feel complete without its third dweller.

“How are you feeling?” Tzuyu asked, her eyes trailing Dahyun’s movements as the girl moved to the window to open the curtains.

“Hmm… I’m good. I think. Close your eyes.” Tzuyu did and Dahyun squinted hers, one movement of her hands allowing the sunlight to enter. “And you?”

“I’m okay. I’ll be better once Chaeng comes back,” Tzuyu pried her eyelids open slowly, then looked down at the phone in her hands, her heart picking up speed when she thought about an important detail that she hadn’t told anyone. She decided to start with Dahyun. “She… asked me to be her girlfriend.”

Dahyun froze, eyes wide as she turned to her. “Like… right now?”

“No. Back at the hospital.”

“Oh!” Apparently that visit had brought surprises to all of them. With a small bite on her lower lip and a wide grin, Dahyun decided to not mock her friend for now, and leave the sarcastic remarks to when the couple was together. “And did you say yes?”

It was like Tzuyu couldn’t control her expressions anymore when she thought about it. Her whole life had been Chaeyoung, and now they could spend the rest of it properly together. “Yes.”

Dahyun softened her gaze contently. “I’m so happy for you two.”

“Thanks,” Tzuyu smiled shyly then yawned, finally sitting up too. “I am, too.”

They started their morning routine like usual; Dahyun brushed her teeth and washed her face first, then moved out of the bathroom so Tzuyu could clean herself. There were a few clothes scattered around the place – result of negligence from both parts when Jeongyeon was living with them – so Dahyun grabbed each piece and put it back into their shared wardrobe. She then started changing clothes. Once Tzuyu left the bathroom, Dahyun got in once more to put on light makeup and sunscreen, allowing Tzuyu to take off her pajamas and organize her material for the day. With Dahyun ready, all that was left was Tzuyu’s makeup; she sat on the bed and waited for her roommate.

When Tzuyu walked out of the bathroom ready to go, Dahyun smiled. “Shall we?”

“Yes.”
It was an ordinary morning; students on the hallways moved sleepily as their bodies got used to the time, some birds chirped on the outside, that one flickering light on top of the stairs still buzzed, unfixed. Still, something about that particular day felt different.

Before they could go downstairs, Dahyun stopped. There was something still missing.

“Hey, Tzuyu… you go ahead, I’ll meet you at the cafeteria.”

Tzuyu stared at the jittery girl in front of her and just nodded with a grin, not needing explanations. “Okay.”

Dahyun then moved upstairs, brushing past a few people on the way until she reached her destination. She stood there for a minute, looking at the door as the thoughts from last night poured down once more, and realized that she was feeling nervous because there was an emptiness inside her. Tzuyu’s confession had stirred something inside Dahyun, and it only hit her at that moment – strong, like the words of a superior, but still soft, like a piano melody.

Right then, she understood. She might still be undecided about her major and about most of her life choices, but there was one thing that she could see for her future, and she wanted to grasp it, and cherish it.

She knocked on the door.

Sana opened it after a second, eyes glazed over with sleep, and a gentle smile as soon as she saw Dahyun. “Dahyun—”

“Will you be my girlfriend?”

The words were out before anything could happen and Sana was suddenly wide awake. And before she could answer, she felt her eyes blurring with tears as she brought one hand to her mouth, and just nodded. “…Yes.”

Dahyun might be undecided about various things, but she knew that falling in love with Sana was the best decision she’s ever made. She wrapped her arms around the girl and felt her hugging back, little choked giggles against the skin of her neck. Sana kissed her cheek, still laughing, then her nose, then a peck to her lips, and Dahyun couldn’t stop herself from grabbing Sana’s cheeks and pressing countless kisses to her mouth as they laughed.

“I love you.”

Sana nodded, forehead pressed against her new girlfriend’s. “I love you, too.”

They heard a soft clap coming from inside the room and Sana flinched, hiding her face on the crook of Dahyun’s neck. Dahyun raised an eyebrow and realized that Jihyo was applauding from the inside.

“What a way to start my day.”

“What are you doing here??” Dahyun asked, cheeks red.

“Nayeon ditched me and Mina ditched her, so I came over.” Jihyo laughed, walking towards them. “Don’t mind me.”
“Too late, I’m minding you!”

Jihyo just grinned and jumped on the two girls, and suddenly a group hug was in session, with them stumbling over each other.

The voices saying that Minatozaki Sana was a bad person didn’t suddenly vanish because of that, but she decided to stop believing them, because Dahyun was the sun.

And if Sana could be loved by the sun, then she wasn’t a monster after all.

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It was clear that something had changed in the campus. Whispers and concerned looks became more and more apparent as the day went by, and everyone noticed. It was like something was missing, a driving force that had suddenly been removed from the equation, leaving people confused.

It didn’t pertain only to students, either; teachers seemed to be fidgety and at the edge of their seats for the whole day, which only brought more concern to the ones around them. Rumors flew quickly, and subsequently transformed; no one knew what to believe in anymore – or even if any of it was even true.

Something was off, but no one could tell exactly what.

Dahyun had an idea.

“You feel it, don’t you?” Chungha walked up to Dahyun in the middle of the courtyard after lunch, hands in her pockets and chewing gum in her mouth. “The air has changed.”

Dahyun looked up from the book she was reading, surprised that the girl even wanted to talk to her after their conversation the other day. “Oh, hey. Uh… it has?”

Chungha sat down next to her on the bench, and offered her some gum – strawberry flavored. “Don’t play dumb, wizard.”

Dahyun had no choice but to accept, a bit uneasily. She chuckled nervously, putting the candy in her mouth. “I guess.”

“Word around here is that Chanmi didn’t come to school today and no one can get a hold of her,” Chungha side-eyed her, sharply. “Know something about that?”

It was crazy how fast news traveled, but Dahyun admitted that she expected someone to confront her at some point – that was one of the reasons she had isolated herself in the courtyard in the first place. Sure, she would probably be safer with Sana and the others, but she didn’t want to bring this issue to them yet. They promised to stick together after everything, but the outcome of this particular affair was still something that Dahyun wanted to see for herself. She was glad that Chungha was the one who came to her first.
In the end, she trusted Chungha.

“She was expelled,” Dahyun closed her book, looking at the trees in front of them. “I had proof of her drug dealing business and the dean couldn’t refute.”

Chungha knew many things and was sure that nothing else could surprise her when it came to shady school business, but Dahyun’s sentence left her speechless. She dropped her gum on the grass, her mouth hanging open. “What?”

“It’s the truth.”

“But… how did you—”

“It wasn’t easy. I think that Chanmi had the dean wrapped around her finger, too. It was like he was fighting against punishing her with everything he had,” Dahyun’s words slipped out easier than she expected. Talking about it was the last thing she wanted to do, but she knew that she would have to face the consequences of her actions. She wasn’t afraid of it, though. Not anymore. “If it wasn’t for your help, I couldn’t have done it. So, thanks.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

It was clear that Chungha wouldn’t let her off the hook so easily, so Dahyun sighed, and started explaining. It was a lot.

Once she was done, Chungha kept staring for a silent moment, then looked down at the ruined gum on the grass. “You’re… crazy, Kim Dahyun.”

“Crazy in love.” Dahyun winked and pointed finger-guns to the girl beside her.

“I’m serious,” The baffled chuckle didn’t do justice to what Chungha was really feeling. “Chanmi has an entire phone filled with pictures, she could leak it all on the internet because of that.”

“She could… I don’t think she will, though.” Dahyun scratched the cover of her book slightly. “Something about pride. I don’t know.” She shrugged. “Besides, if she does, I’ll leak the audios, too.”

“Will you?” Chungha raised an eyebrow.

Dahyun licked her lips, then lifted her gaze. “Yeah. For Sana, I will.”

The two stared at each other for a silent, tense moment, then Chungha shook her head with a grin. “Jesus… did you even tell Sana that you’re in love with her?”

“Um… she’s my girlfriend now, so…”

“What!” Once more, the freshman managed to surprise her, but this time, Chungha was smiling. “You’re dating party girl Minatozaki?”

“No, I’m dating Sana.” The titled riled Dahyun up. “That’s all.”

“You might want things to be that simple, but you know people won’t settle for this, right?”

“We have nothing to do with people! Look, Chungha,” Dahyun got up, now frustrated. “I get that you know stuff, and that you’re part of this… big campus hidden society or whatever, but Chanmi is gone. Sana isn’t attached to her anymore. She’s not even attached to me. She can do whatever she wants, because it’s her life. She’s free. I just want…” Her shoulders dropped, losing strength. “I
just want to be there for her, when she needs me. I want her to be happy.”

The pause was heavy and Dahyun hugged herself close, as if waiting for harsh words to be thrown at her again. She didn’t want to be part of any of this anymore, but she had brought it on herself by getting tangled with problems that were way bigger than she could chew. Chanmi’s followers and Sana’s fangirls would probably come for them, and Dahyun tried to avoid thinking about it, but now she was feeling small again. She hated the feeling.

“Okay,” Chungha finally said, getting up. She crouched to take the piece of gum from the floor, wrapping it on a piece of plastic. “You’re right. What you two do is your business. I’m sorry I meddled.”

It took Dahyun by surprise. “Oh… that easy?”

Chungha giggled, putting one hand on Dahyun’s shoulder as she walked past her. “You make it easy. Sana needs someone like you.”

The freshman just followed her with her gaze, suddenly feeling lighter. This simple reassurance was more powerful than anything, and for the first time Dahyun thought that they could move forward, together.

“Thank—”

“Don’t thank me. You did it all on your own.” Chungha’s eyes were distant, suddenly. “You’re a good person, Dahyun-ah. Sana needs a good person by her side.”

Her words were gentle, but there was a tint of blue to them – regret, maybe, or self-introspection. Those were the words of someone who knew when they had been beaten.

Dahyun watched Chungha walk away, then put one hand in her pocket, rubbing her dice gently.

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It was awkward, Jeongyeon wasn’t going to lie. She knew that she was technically still dating Mina, and that they had talked and opened up to each other, but a part of her still felt guilty of showing affection when she had just snuggled with Nayeon and told her she loved her a few hours ago. She was having a harder time adjusting to this than any of them, and decided to discuss the issue at lunch.

Setting down her tray, Jeongyeon sat on the table where Momo, Mina, and Nayeon were waiting, already eating. “So… I have a question.”

“Yes?” Momo said with a mouthful. Mina slapped her slightly; she’d always been annoyed at this habit of hers.

“Are we just… dating each other, or…” Her cheeks reddened. Talking about it still made her nervous. “Because we talked, but I don’t think that this was made clear… or am I just dense?”
The four of them exchanged looks and ate for a minute before talking.

“I mean, you are dense,” Momo teased. “But that’s a very good question, actually.”

Despite the mood, Jeongyeon smirked a little. She liked having Momo’s teasing back.

“If… we all agree to it, I think we could be.” Mina spoke in a timid voice, then her heart picked up speed. “C-communication is important, it doesn’t matter what we do, right?”

“R-right.” Jeongyeon mumbled. “Okay… so do we? Agree to this?”

More silence. The four put more food into their mouths to gain some time before someone answered the unanswered question.

“I do.” Nayeon finally spoke up, moving some carrots on her plate with her fork. She heard the voices almost immediately, bashing against her skull, reminding her that she was nothing but a greedy monster for fantasizing about two people, but she did her best to muffle them and wait. She promised she would be honest, and she wouldn’t go back on that promise.

There was more silence, then Momo swallowed her huge piece of steak. “…Me too.”

Nayeon let out a breath that she didn’t know she was holding, and ducked her head, trying to hide the smile that she couldn’t hold back. Momo always came to her rescue, in the end.

Mina and Jeongyeon looked at the two girls in front of them, then at each other. Jeongyeon could’ve sworn that there was a message in Mina’s eyes, something strong that pulled her in; the answer was in front of her, and she could grasp it with a reach of her hand.

However, Mina’s bravado faltered. She still felt like she would hurt Jeongyeon if she let herself indulge in her desire.

So, Jeongyeon eased her worries. “Okay. Me three.”

Just like that, a huge burden was removed from Mina’s shoulders, and she smiled. “Really?”

Jeongyeon returned the smile. “…Yeah. Yeah, really.”

Mina nodded, placing a hand on her girlfriend’s forearm. Nayeon and Momo watched with a pair of gentle grins.

“Okay, but just so you know, I’m not kissing Jeong.” Momo broke the loving atmosphere, making Mina and Nayeon laugh.

“Ew, I’m not dating you!” Jeongyeon retaliated, then paused. “…That’s a thing I can do, right? Like… not date her?”

“No one’s forcing you to do anything, Jeong.” Nayeon couldn’t believe her ex (current?) girlfriend, sometimes. “You don’t even have feelings for Momo.”

“Damn right.”

“Just like I’m not dating Mina.” Nayeon commented, taking a sip of her juice.

This seemed to awaken something within Momo’s brain; she blinked, putting down her knife and fork. “Wait, so let me just—” Momo’s hands started moving, making gestures. “So, from now on I’m dating Mina and Nayeon. Jeongyeon is dating Mina and Nayeon, too.”
“Yes.” Nayeon nodded, encouraging her to continue.

“Nayeon is dating both me and Jeong, and Mina is also dating me and Jeong.”

“Right.”

“So… I’m not dating Jeong, and you’re not dating Mina.”

“Yes.”

“…Wait, I’m lost.”

“Jesus, Momo— do you want me to make a chart?” Jeongyeon rolled her eyes, finishing her vegetables and Mina and Nayeon laughed together one more time.

The two went back and forth for a while, pointlessly aiming harmless insults at each other, until Jeongyeon really got up to grab a napkin and a pen, sitting down once more and doodling a helpful relationship chart for the four of them. It was a poor doodle, but it got the point across, and the discussion ended with Momo’s satisfied hum as she finally understood the situation they were all in.

“That’s not so bad.” Momo concluded, crossing her arms. Jeongyeon could’ve sworn she saw her wag an invisible tail – that girl was acting like a hyperactive puppy. She hated to admit that it was cute, and that she’s missed her this much.

After they were all done with their food, Momo spoke again. “So… does that mean we can… you know. Kiss each other? If we want to.”

That was another story entirely. No one exactly knew what to say to that – they all had assumed that they would be getting their share of affection at some point, but how and when was still a mystery.

Four people was a lot more complicated than they thought.

“I think so?” Nayeon said slowly, more of a question than anything.

“If we’re dating, then… we can, right?” Mina sounded less sure than previously.

“Do we have to… warn each other beforehand?” Momo scratched her head. “For example, if I was to kiss Nayeon, would I have to tell Jeong first?”

They turned to Jeongyeon and the athlete was frowning, not really sure if she wanted to receive a newsletter every time Mina or Nayeon kissed her roommate. “Isn’t that inconvenient though…?”

“I wouldn’t want to do it behind your back, that’s all.”

“It’s not doing it behind my back if I know you’re dating them too.”

“It’s not?”

“I don’t know! I never had— I never dated two people at once, who also happen to be dating my best friend!” Jeongyeon bent over of the table, groaning. “This is confusing.”

It really was proving to be a lot to handle.

“How about,” Mina said after a moment. “We work with a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy?”
“Meaning?” Nayeon asked.

“Meaning we don’t have to tell each other what we do with one another.” Her cheeks were heated as she suggested it, because it sounded absurd, but it was really the easiest conclusion she could reach. “We all know we’re dating, and we all agreed to… share.” She scowled. “Okay, that’s a bad way to put it, but… you get it.”

The other three slowly nodded, urging her to continue.

“So… I don’t think we need to feel guilty about anything. We know we love each other too much to ever think about hurting someone.” Mina turned serious. “But if any of us starts to feel uncomfortable with this arrangement, we have to say it. Okay? We need to trust each other completely for this to work.”

There was a resonant ‘okay’ and more nodding, and then they all collapsed on the table, exhausted. Momo started giggling then, and it escalated to a full laughing session. The sound was odd considering what had just transpired, but it brought a smile to their faces nonetheless.

“What are you laughing about, weirdo?” Nayeon asked.

“I just realized how lucky we are that the ones sharing a room are me and Jeong.”

And that made everyone laugh too.

It was a lot, but if asked, they wouldn’t have it any other way.

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The e-mail arrived in the evening, to all students.

Jihyo was helping the freshmen put away their instruments after a productive rehearsal afternoon, when her phone buzzed inside her pocket. She ignored it, making small talk with her friends and giving other people advice on how to improve their skills, finally finishing organizing the place. Chan had stayed behind to carry the heavier instruments while Jihyo tucked away the chairs, then both of them left the music room a little breathless, but happy.

“Thanks for staying,” Jihyo said, gripping the strap of her backpack. “Also, you finally managed to memorize your whole part, huh?”

“All thanks to you, professor.” Chan was so polite and kind that most of the time Jihyo didn’t know if he was teasing her, or if he actually thought of her as his mentor of sorts; she laughed it off either way.

“Stop.”

“I’m serious! You’re a really great teacher. Very patient, even with someone like me…”

“You do your best and never give up, Channie,” She smiled at him, turning the corner, and
stopping at a vending machine. “That’s really all I can as of you.”

He blushed, scratching the back of his head as he watched Jihyo inserting four coins into the machine and ordering two cans of soda. Once they came out, she tossed him one, opening the other.

“H-huh? No, please, let me pay—”

“This is a gift for your efforts, accept it.” Jihyo winked, waiting for him to open his so they could clink their cans together.

“Thank you…” Despite his timid disposition he smiled largely, and Jihyo couldn’t help but to enjoy spoiling her band mates once in a while.

“Cheers!” The deaf sound of metal clinking was refreshing, and the two took a sip.

Putting one hand in her pocket out of habit, Jihyo’s fingers brushed against her phone case, and she remembered that someone had sent her a message earlier. She dragged her thumb along the screen only to be greeted with an e-mail from the faculty office, and raised an eyebrow.

Opening it was easy.

Reading the entire message was hard – and it got gradually harder with each sentence.

She didn’t even finish the whole thing before she dropped her can on the floor, soda spilling all over her shoes.

Chan jumped at the sudden noise, staring at Jihyo’s pale face. “Woah! A-are you okay?”

“What the fuck?” Jihyo muttered under her breath as her hands trembled, and she turned around, sprinting out of there at full speed. Chan yelled something behind her, but she couldn’t hear. Her heart was racing at a thousand miles per hour, and her thoughts swirled chaotically. She was angry, and she needed answers.

And there was only one person who could provide her with them.

--

Sunmi waited.

The main building’s roof was the only place she thought about after that e-mail was sent, and she would wait for Jihyo there, because she knew that she’d find her eventually. No students went up there past five, so it was their little hideout of sorts – a place within the school where they could talk privately without being caught. Sunmi shouldn’t encourage this behavior, but right now she didn’t care. She wanted to be there for her.

It took half an hour, but eventually the door to the roof slammed open unceremoniously, and Sunmi flinched. She closed her eyes as she leaned on the rail, and took a deep breath, waiting for
“Sunmi.” Jihyo sounded tired from running around. Her strong steps came closer and soon she was by her side. “What the fuck?”

“I’m sorry,” Those were the first words out of Sunmi’s mouth as she turned around to look at her childhood friend. “I’m so sorry they had to do this.”

The vulnerability displayed by the woman took Jihyo aback, and her anger subsided enough for her to think clearly. Of course Sunmi had nothing to do with this, she was just a professor. Whatever had happened was the dean’s fault.

“But… why?” Jihyo settled for simplicity, still trying to catch her breath. “Why the theater building?”

“Putting up plays every semester costs a lot more than you realize.”

“Then— make it once a year. Cut production value, make it cheaper, I don’t know.” Jihyo was well aware that she was trying to find easy solutions to a much more complicated problem, but that was who she was – a fixer, who needed immediate responses. It was this side of her that made everything so hard on her during the past month when her friends were all crumbling down.

“It’s not viable, Jihyo-yah.”

“Fucking hell, what did the dean even do?!” Jihyo raised her voice, gripping the metal rail with one hand until her knuckles went white. “Did he mess up the taxes? Bought a castle and now he can’t afford maintaining the school? Gambled?”

Sunmi could feel the raw anger radiating from the girl in front of her and it was hard keeping calm when she knew that Jihyo deserved a rest after everything that happened. Her friend Chaeyoung was still in hospital with a smashed hand caused by Heo Chanmi, and now, with the thug’s family withdrawing the ‘generous donations’ they deposited every month on the dean’s account, another precious thing was being taken away from Jihyo and her friends. Sunmi also wanted everything to stop, and for the universe to give them a break for once.

She decided that Jihyo deserved the truth, at least.

“I’ll tell you. I can’t ask you not to tell this to anyone, because it wouldn’t be fair of me, but I trust you enough to be wise about this.”

“Wise about what?”

“Jihyo, half of this school’s funds came from Heo Chanmi’s family.”

The silence was massive. Sunmi forced the words out.

“When your friend got her expelled, her family obviously didn’t like it. The dean lost his most precious source of income, and now he’s trying to find solutions to keep this campus open.”

Jihyo literally felt the strength in her legs vanishing, and had to hold on to the rail with both hands as she processed this information. She knew that Chanmi was up to no good – knew about the blackmail, the parties, the drugs. But this was a whole other level of insane, and for once she couldn’t formulate a coherent thought.

“The dean was being bribed…?” Jihyo let out the words, trying to make sense of it.
Sunmi swallowed thickly. “Yes. I only found out recently, too.”

“Holy shit.”

Jihyo finally gave up and sat down, pulling her knees against her chest as she fell in a deep, silent meditation. Sunmi sat next to her and allowed her this moment to think about what she wanted to do with the information. Jihyo loved the school, just like Sunmi did – knowing that it had been controlled by a family of thugs this whole time wasn’t easy to accept.

“So… he’s cutting costs.” Jihyo muttered.

“Yes.”

“Because if he doesn’t, this whole place might close down.”

“Yes.”

“And the first solution… was to close down the theater building.”

Sunmi looked down. “Unfortunately, yes.”

Jihyo sighed, immediately thinking about Nayeon, and how much musical theater meant to her. That was the reason she even came to this school in the first place, and the news would definitely crush her spirit.

She was just getting back on her feet, too.

“Are they… cancelling the course? Are the theater majors going to have to move schools?” Jihyo sounded so afraid and small suddenly that Sunmi’s heart physically hurt.

“No, they can keep studying here. There will be a change in classes and schedule, and I’m sure that plenty of students won’t want to keep studying in a place that can’t even afford putting on plays anymore, but… it will be their choice.”

“Fucking hell.” Jihyo had no idea what Nayeon would choose. Throughout her whole life, all she’s wanted was to be a star, stand on stage and shine and sing; coming to this school was a dream come true. Having all of her closest friends there with her was just a bonus.

But now, Nayeon would probably have to decide between sticking around with a faulty education, or moving to another college to keep following her dreams.

All that Jihyo knew was that she would support her choice regardless.

“There’s something else you need to know,” Sunmi spoke after a moment. “The professors are having a meeting tomorrow. I think that they feel guilty about this whole situation since apparently everyone knew, but never did anything. We’ll try to come up with a compromise and bring it to dean after class.”

This lit up the fire in Jihyo’s eyes once more, albeit just a little. “You are?”

Sunmi shot her a small smile. “We are. I can’t guarantee that we’ll be able to reopen the theater building, but… we’ll see.”

Jihyo was aware that Sunmi was trying to look at the bright side, but still didn’t want to fool her or treat her like a kid, so she was being completely honest. With a nod and a tired sigh, Jihyo let her head fall on Sunmi’s shoulder, exhausted of this whole conversation.
“Thank you for not giving up on us.” Jihyo muttered.

And Sunmi knew that she meant the students, but she also knew that Jihyo was talking about her friends. She placed her head on top of Jihyo’s, just this once. “I’m not giving up on you.”

It made Jihyo’s heart skip a beat. The two stood like that until it was completely dark, then Sunmi removed her head from Jihyo’s, asking her to sit up again. Jihyo missed the warmth instantly, but endured it.

Once recovered, the professor helped Jihyo get up, and told her to leave the roof first.

“By the way,” Jihyo said, one hand on the door handle. “I remember you saying something about dinner at your place.”

“Oh,” Sunmi blinked, then smiled. “The invitation is still up.”

“Friday, then.”

“Do you always invite yourself over to professor’s houses?”

Jihyo couldn’t help a sly, tired grin. “Who said I want you? I just want your wine.” And with that, she left before Sunmi could reply.

And the words ‘want’ and ‘you’ really shouldn’t affect Sunmi as much as they did, but they did anyway.

--

It started with Jihyo coming back to her room only to find that Nayeon wasn’t there. She then left, knocked on Jeongyeon and Momo’s room, and surprisingly enough, found Nayeon with the two, as well as Mina. Nayeon sat on Jeongyeon’s bed, hugging her with red rimmed eyes, and Jihyo rubbed hers to stop from crying. She sat down next to her, wrapping her arms around Nayeon too to offer her comfort before trying to settle her anxiety with Sunmi’s words.

Nayeon seemed to regain a bit of color to her face after knowing that the professors were willing to do something about it, and Mina and Momo sighed as well – a small relief, but a relief nonetheless.

There was another knock after a few minutes, and this time Momo got up. It was Tzuyu, who had also come after realizing that Nayeon wasn’t in her room. Mina made space on the bed so Tzuyu could sit too, sandwiched between Mina and Momo, and Jihyo once again soothed her worries by telling her about the meeting tomorrow.

One more knock, this time Sana and Dahyun. Sana nearly tripped on her way to Nayeon, crashing into the girl and giving her the biggest, most comfortable bear hug of all times, which actually made Nayeon chuckle a little. Dahyun frowned at the sight of everybody crowded into a tiny room, but Momo only patted the spot behind her on the bed. Dahyun wasn’t one to deny Momo’s
affections.

Sana was still hugging Nayeon when Jihyo explained one more time what Sunmi had said. This calmed her down considerably – it didn’t mean she let go of Nayeon, though. Jeongyeon tried to move to give Sana space, but Nayeon clung to her blouse with a whine, so she had no option but to stay. Sana accommodated herself on Nayeon’s lap, and everyone giggled.

Tzuyu looked around, glad that everyone was smiling even after the bad news, but feeling that someone was missing. With one quick movement, she dialed a number on face-time.

It rang twice, then Chaeyoung picked up.

“So, I’m willing to break this other hand to fight the dean for you.”

That was her first sentence, and it was too soon, but so very much Chaeyoung that all of them burst into a laughing fit after a silent beat.

And it was right there, with everyone laughing together after a crisis, that Jihyo looked around, and saw the eight people who mattered the most to her in the world, all there for each other, like they were supposed to be.

She realized that they would be fine.

--

“I don’t get any of this.” Momo said out loud to herself as soon as the bell rang.

Morning classes were the worst, but calculus morning classes took the prize for that category. Momo would never be awake enough to think about numbers at eight in the morning, so when the bell finally rang and the professor said that they had to hand over their homework by tomorrow, Momo was sure that this was what Hell looked like.

She poked the girl in front of her, repeating the words. “I don’t get any of this.”

“What don’t you get?” Mina asked, turning around with a teasing smile on her face.

“’Any’ being the imperative word.”

Mina giggled, remembering that they had this conversation before, a long time ago. The Drama Club party almost felt like a whole other timeline now that they were finally open and honest about everything, and Mina liked the change. It was for the better.

“Alright, let me change my question: do you want me to teach you, or do you just want to copy my homework when I’m done later?” Mina poked Momo’s forehead, because she was pouting, and it was cute.

“I don’t… uh,” Momo thought for a second. “Teach me?”
“Really?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?”

“Nothing! It’s just that you usually don’t want to bother with math.” Mina chuckled.

“Well, maybe I want to impress my girlfriend, sometimes.” Momo replied, and immediately felt her heart racing.

“Oh.” Mina felt a blush creeping from behind her neck and averted her gaze a little.


“Not really,” Mina got up, grabbing her bag. “I just… have to get used to it.”

Momo got up too and the two walked side by side, leaving class to go to their next one.

“I get it, though,” Momo continued, casually. “It’s not too soon, it’s just weird, right?”

“Yeah… I don’t know what’s so weird about it.” Mina really tried to understand why she had such a block when it came to calling Momo her girlfriend. With Jeongyeon it was completely fine, because they have been dating for a while – although she still found it hard to find a nice pet name to call her. She had tried ‘baby’ and ‘babe’, but just the thought of it made her blush uncontrollably. Crushing on someone for three years and finally getting to date them had this effect on you.

“It’s because we’ve been best friends for so long,” Momo concluded. “I don’t know, I guess you’ll always be Mina first and girlfriend second. That’s why it’s weird.”

Momo’s confession was incredibly endearing and Mina stopped in the middle of the hallway with a dumb smile on her face. Momo just turned to her. “What?”

“Momo, that was cute.”

“What— no, it wasn’t.”

“It was!”

“Shut up.”

Mina bumped shoulders with her and chuckled, and Momo’s heart soared at the sound. Has Mina’s laugh always been so angelic? Or was this just the side-effect of being in love with her?

When did you get so cheesy, Hirai Momo?

“But really, can you teach me later?” Momo changed subjects before she embarrassed herself further.

“Sure. Let’s use my room after lunch, Sana is doing something with Dahyun and will be late.”

“Okay.”
Sana hated that she could still feel the eyes on her wherever she went. She told herself countless times after accepting Dahyun’s proposal to date her that she would face her fears and come forward with her relationship status to anyone who asked, but so far, all she managed to do was avoid the topic when it surfaced in casual conversations. People still flirted and teased, completely unaware that they were talking to a committed girl now, and Sana couldn’t find a breach to say anything.

It didn’t help that most of them also mentioned Chanmi whenever they could, as if Sana knew of her whereabouts. Suddenly it was like they were best friends.

“So, Sana-ya, are you free after lunch?” One girl asked, followed by another, followed by another.

“I’m… rather busy, I’m afraid.” Sana bit her tongue countless times.

People pressured her and pushed her around – not physically, but with words – and Sana thought that this would have ended as soon as Chanmi was erased from the scene. Apparently, no one got the memo of her expelling, so it was harder than she expected. Sana couldn’t bring herself to tell them, either.

“Guys, please, I need to eat.” Sana tried to push her way along the hallway, but someone would always cling, grab, pull. She felt her heart picking up speed and flashbacks of her anxiety attacks resurfaced, bringing terrible memories.

She felt lost, and alone. She didn’t want to be here. She wanted—

“Sana!” A voice, familiar and louder than the suffocating abyss.

She lifted her gaze and the darkness dissolved, replaced by light. Dahyun’s smile was truly her favorite sight in the world.

“Dahyunnie, hey.”

The people finally made way after seeing Dahyun at the end of the corridor, frowning and exchanging gazes as soon as Sana reached her and grabbed her arm. It was like the fact that Minatozaki Sana didn’t want to spend time with them, but some random freshman instead was ludicrous.

“Who’s that, Sana-ya?”

“Come on, you promised to hang out with us today.”

“Hey, freshman, don’t hog her all up to yourself!”

“Let’s go, Sana-ya, I want to show you something.”

“Does Chanmi know her, Sana-ya?”

Dahyun felt the grip on her arm tightening as Sana’s crooked smile faded. Sana just wanted to leave that place as soon as possible, and avoid these people, and Dahyun couldn’t bear seeing her in pain anymore.
She stepped forward, shielding Sana from these filthy gremlins, and took a deep breath.

“I’m Kim Dahyun, and I’m Sana’s girlfriend. And I’d really like to spend some time with her without your noisy, unnecessary chattering in our ears for once, so if you don’t mind,” Dahyun’s eyes were piercing. “Leave her. Alone. Thanks.”

And with that, she turned around, grabbing Sana’s hand and walking away.

“Oh, and by the way,” Dahyun stopped, turning her neck to look at the baffled expressions of half the hallway. “Chanmi was expelled. So you can all go back to living your lives now.”

That was the final hit, and the silence lasted until Dahyun and Sana were out of sight. Then, all at once, it was like everyone had been shocked violently; people yelled, grabbing their phones, and typing every sort of message in their respective social medias as quickly as possible.

Sana gaped all the way to the cafeteria, and before they could enter, she pulled Dahyun to the corner, pinning her to a wall and sealing their lips together. It was the roughest kiss they’ve ever shared, and it took Dahyun by surprise.

Sana only pulled back to whisper against her mouth. “I fucking love you, Kim Dahyun.”

She would have answered if she wasn’t completely sucked in by the kiss once more.

Dahyun had a feeling that Sana knew, anyway.

--

Tzuyu’s phone rang during her break, and she stopped crouching to answer it, letting the camera hang around her neck. She hated being interrupted during a photoshoot, but when she saw the name on the display, her eyes widened, and she picked up quickly.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Tzuyu? It’s nurse Jea.”

“Y-yes, hi!”

“I’m calling to tell you that Son Chaeyoung is being discharged from the hospital on Friday. She’ll go back to her house and return to campus on Monday.”

Tiny fireworks exploded inside Tzuyu’s chest and she nodded strongly, even though the nurse couldn’t see it. “I see! Thank you very much for calling.”

“No problem, kid.” Jea’s voice changed from formal to casual, the lazy grin apparent in her words. “I know things have been chaotic, but we’re working on it. I’m sorry for everything.”

It was weird that Jea was suddenly apologizing, but Tzuyu felt the honesty in her words. The nurse sounded tired even though she tried to appear cheerful on the phone, and Tzuyu realized that she
probably had a lot to deal with daily, specially considering what Jihyo had told them about the bribery. Jea, most likely, carried the heaviest guilt of all.

“I understand, miss.” Tzuyu decided to accept her apology. “Thank you for doing your best, too.”

There was silence, then a muffled laugh. “Huh, who knew that encouraging words from a student would help this much. I appreciate it.”

The two chatted for a bit, then bid each other goodbye after Jea asked Tzuyu to tell the other girls about Chaeyoung. Tzuyu then tucked her phone away in her pocket, and grabbed her camera once more, looking around the courtyard, and walking towards the fountain. She crouched where the droplets of water nearly hit her, and snapped a few pictures.

Checking the result brought a smile to her lips.

She truly captured the best frames when she took pictures for Chaeyoung.

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Jeongyeon was nearly falling asleep standing up as she waited for Mina’s class to be over. She was used to Mina’s schedule by now, and was even glad that most of her classes didn’t conflict with hers because she could come meet her easily this way, but basketball practice took a toll on her in the morning and taking a shower always made her sleepy.

Finally, the loud sound of the bell rang above her head, waking her up for good. The classroom door opened, and people started coming out one by one. Jeongyeon’s eyes moved back and forth and finally landed on her target. “Minari!”

Mina looked up and found Jeongyeon’s bright smile and oversized hoodie leaning against a wall. She smiled and waved, walking up to her. “Hey, Jeong.”

Something about meeting Mina after class was so familiar and nice that Jeongyeon’s first instinct was to lean down and give her a peck on the lips, like she’s done lots of times before. She froze for a second, still a bit hesitant, but remembered what they had all agreed on the day before, and decided to give her mind a break, and let her heart take the wheel.

She was already leaning when Momo’s frame came into view, right behind Mina. Jeongyeon blushed, nearly tripping on her own two feet as she pulled back. “You’re in her class?”

“Yeah, why?” Momo sized Jeongyeon with her eyes and smirked. “Were you about to kiss?”

“Wha— no! I mean, yes! Wait, I don’t have to tell you that!”

Mina would never say it out loud, but the way the two bantered was stupidly adorable.

“Fine, I’ll pretend I never saw you two.” Momo turned her back to them and stood there with her arms crossed, waiting.
“Do you *have* to stand there?”

“Just get it over with, Jesus.”

Jeongyeon grunted and rolled her eyes, then looked at Mina again. Now she looked like a lost puppy and Mina had to take the lead, or else they would never get used to this whole thing.

“Just kiss me, dummy.” Mina giggled, bringing one hand to the back of Jeongyeon’s neck. She pulled her forward, and their lips met in a slow, simple kiss. It made both their hearts jump in their chests, because while it wasn’t their first kiss, it definitely felt like it.

That was the first time they kissed without lies hovering above their heads, and without having to worry about its consequences. They allowed themselves this moment, just the two of them melting into each other, and Mina’s affection for Jeongyeon only grew when they pulled apart.

“Woah.” Jeongyeon muttered a breathless word, sure that she managed to fall more in love with Mina at that simple moment.

“Yeah…” Mina smiled shyly, and pressed another kiss to Jeongyeon’s cheek, because her chest was exploding with absolute love. Jeongyeon brushed her thumb against the patch of skin, Mina’s kiss still lingering hotly, and sighed happily.

Okay, you can look now.” Jeongyeon finally called for Momo, who turned back around.

Mina blinked. “Are you smiling?”

“What?” Momo tried her hardest to get rid of the smile on her face, but it was impossible. She covered her mouth then, looking away. “No.”

It just made Mina happier.

“Whatever! What do you want, Jeong?” Momo tried her hardest to change subjects, embarrassed at being caught.

“Oh, right! I just wanted to ask if you know about the event the theater majors are planning in the evening.”

“Event?” Mina tilted her head sideways, curiously.

“Yeah, Nayeon just texted me. Apparently, they’re all gathering in front of the dean’s office right when he’s about to leave to talk to him personally about the shut-down of the theater building.”

“Sounds dangerous,” Momo commented, but approved of it. “I want in.”

“Me too,” Mina nodded. “I want to support Nayeon and the others. It’s just not fair.”

“Good, I was hoping you would. I’ll text the other girls and ask, too.”

If there was something the three of them agreed, was that they would go to Hell and back for Nayeon.

With everyone’s agreement on the matter, Momo relaxed again. “You could have texted us too, you know.” She grinned slyly again. “No need to come all the way here.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t know you’d be here, loser.”
“So you just came for Minari.”

Jeongyeon had no idea why it felt like she had just been caught, but she crossed her arms in a defensive position. “What if I did? Maybe I just missed my girlfriend.”

Mina felt caught in between the two and hid her burning face in hands with a sigh. Despite the argument, the atmosphere didn’t feel threatening in the slightest. She was afraid that jealousy would be a problem with Jeongyeon and Momo particularly, but so far, all those two seemed to be doing was being silly together in the friendliest possible way, throwing jabs at each other like old times.

“Well, you got your time, now I get to spend time with our girlfriend.” Momo grabbed Mina’s hand then, dragging her away and poking her tongue out to Jeongyeon.

“F-fine!” Jeongyeon managed to yell, her voice cracking. “Take care of her well, dumbass!”

“I always do, idiot!”

“I know, stupid!”

More back and forth followed until they were finally out of sight and Mina started to giggle like a teenager who had just received a message from her crush. Momo looked at her, cheeks still flushed. “And what are you laughing about?”

Mina just bit her lip, staring back. “You said ‘our’ girlfriend.”

She was sure she’s never seen Momo redder in her life.

---

Sana’s bubbly laughter was music to Dahyun’s ears, and she knew she’d never tire of hearing it.

“Where in the world are you taking me, Dahyunnie?” Sana asked, but didn’t stop following, fingers intertwined.

“I want to try something,” Dahyun responded without looking at her. “I had this idea yesterday.”

“Hmm, now I’m curious.”

“You’ll see.”

They walked hand in hand along hallways and stairs, and Dahyun could feel people staring. Good, she thought. She wanted everyone to know that Sana wasn’t available.

Sana, on the other hand, was surprised. Instead of feeling pressured by the unwavering gazes now, she felt safe, as long as Dahyun was by her side. The younger girl had told those people loud and clear everything that Sana had been wanting to say herself, but couldn’t because of her anxiety. She had a feeling that she would be able to get back on her feet and fend for herself again very soon,
with Dahyun’s help. But for now, she would let herself be protected by her wizard in shining armor.

She really loved Dahyun more than words could express.

Reaching the music room, Dahyun opened the door and grinned. “Good, the place is empty like Jihyo said.”

“Jihyo is part of this?” Sana was getting more and more excited.

“Not exactly… I just asked her if she could pull some strings and get us a private room for the afternoon.”

Sana actually swooned at this. She closed the door behind them, blushing a little. “When did you get so bold, Dahyun-ah?”

“Huh?” Dahyun blinked, then waved her hands. “N-no, nothing like that! I just wanted to— I mean, not that there’s anything wrong with— you know!”

With a giggle, Sana stepped forward, cupping her girlfriend’s cheeks, and softening her gaze. “I know, baby. I’m just kidding.”

The pet name could give Dahyun a heart attack; Sana did it so effortlessly. Everything about loving Sana was absurdly easy.

“R-right. I knew that.”

Sana smiled and leaned a bit, but stopped. She searched for permission in Dahyun’s eyes, and found her answer in a delicate nod. Then, she kissed her.

It became clear that kissing Dahyun was becoming an addiction, and Sana couldn’t get enough of it. She wanted to shower her in physical affection, because words had never been her forte – it only became worse after her attacks. She worked with gestures, nipping at her lips, and sucking at her tongue, trying to find what was lost.

And the fact that Dahyun kissed her back just as eagerly made her melt, because it felt like a constant reassurance that she was, indeed, loved back. If it was anyone other than Dahyun, Sana wasn’t sure she’d believe that.

Parting was always hard, but necessary, and Dahyun was always left breathless after it.

“Hey.” Sana muttered in the minimal space between them.

“I… forgot everything I was supposed to be doing.” Dahyun chuckled back, and leaned once more to kiss the corner of her mouth. Sana tried to chase her lips again, but Dahyun had to stop her with a whine. “Sana… focus, we gotta focus.”

“Hmm, right.” Sana’s silly smile could brighten anyone’s day.

Finally, she stepped back, allowing Dahyun to continue with her surprise – which was good, because Dahyun had no resolve nor strength to be the one to leave Sana first. Combing through her hair with her fingers, Dahyun moved towards the piano in the corner of the room, and sat down.

“Okay, so remember when you taught me a few stretching exercises? You said you wanted to help people through dance therapy, right?”
Sana nodded, standing next to her.

“I thought about that since that time, and I think you actually helped me decide my major.”

“Oh? I did?” Sana clapped her hands together. “Wait, Dahyunnie… are you going to major in dance therapy too?”

“Not dance therapy.” Dahyun turned towards the piano, letting her fingers rub the keys gently, before pressing them in a rhythm. The melody echoed through the room, and it was familiar. Sana felt warm all over, her heart skipping a beat at the beautiful sound that she’d heard twice coming from the speakers on Dahyun’s phone.

Their song.

“Music therapy.” Dahyun said in a low voice, still playing.

Words truly couldn’t begin to describe Kim Dahyun.

Sana took a deep breath after a moment and started moving to the sound, closing her eyes to stop herself from tearing up. Her arms and legs flowed flawlessly, slowly, perfectly, and Dahyun watched from the corner of her eyes as this girl conveyed everything she couldn’t say into movement.

I love you.

I cherish you.

I adore you.

It was right then that Dahyun knew she wanted to spend the rest of her life with this woman.

Sana’s dance told her that the feeling was mutual.

Words were overrated, anyway.

--

“And when you add this number— what are you doing now?” Mina had to pause for the fifth time because Momo got distracted with something else from Sana’s shelf like a child.

“Aww, she framed this picture of us!” Momo stretched her arm, grabbing a frame with an old photo of the three of them when they were kids, absolutely soaked in mud. It had rained that day, and Sana had the amazing idea of playing outside so they could jump on water puddles. The one who created the biggest splash won.

Mina had tried to make them change their mind because she knew that her mother would be mad if she returned home dirty, but Momo had thrown puppy eyes at her, saying that she wouldn’t play if Mina didn’t tag along, and it was a lost case. Mina couldn’t deny Momo’s plea, so in an act of
rebellion, she let herself go for the first time, splashing water left and right.

Sana had won, because her energy seemed to be endless at that time.

(Not that now was any different).

“Sana’s mom took this picture when we showed up on her porch.” Momo laughed, the memories attached to the picture still crystal-clear in her head.

“I was almost crying, thinking that she would yelling at us.” Mina joined the trip down memory lane. “My mom definitely would have.”

“Your mom would’ve yelled, then thrown you in the bath, then given you warm milk and a blanket.”

“That’s fair,” Mina smiled, then remembered they were supposed to be doing homework, and snatched the picture from Momo’s hand. “Can you please try to concentrate.”

Momo groaned, leaning on one arm. “Fine… numbers. Let’s go.”

They talked for an hour, with Mina’s seemingly endless patience being the driving force of this study session, as she guided Momo through the magical world of calculus, only for the girl to whine and get distracted every ten minutes. After a long, tiring hour, the exercises were done, and Momo got up to collapse on Mina’s bed, nose buried in her pillow.

She mumbled something unintelligible and Mina laughed, looking at her from her chair. “What was that?”

More muffled words came out.

“Momo, I literally can’t hear a word you’re saying.”

“I said,” Momo turned on her cheek. “Why the fuck do we need math in an art school?”

Mina giggled, putting away their notebooks. “You’re going to need math in the future, you know.”

“Calculators exist, Mina.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“It is.”

“We’ve been through worse.” She meant high school, but realized that it could have meant anything that had happened in the past month with their friends, and tried to fix it. “I mean, chemistry was terrible.”

“Hm.” Momo just hummed, and kept in silence after that.

Mina took this opportunity to organize the room, moving around and putting things back in place, in the wardrobe and the bathroom. Momo seemed to have slept and Mina couldn’t help but to grin as she walked past her. Studying really took a toll on her best friend, and it was cute, in a way. Mina wanted to help her as much as she could.

It dawned on her that this was the first time they spent time alone like this after deciding to date. The four of them hadn’t talked about their arrangement to the other girls from the group yet; they decided to test it out for a few days and see if it would work before coming out as a polyamorous
relationship to their closest friends. It’s not that they were afraid the girls would judge them, it was just very hard to come up with the subject suddenly and casually. The four of them wanted to be together for this, because they would be able to explain things better that way. Mina was glad about this agreement. She was still getting adjusted.

“You’re thinking out loud.” Momo’s raspy voice took Mina out of her trance.

“Am I?”

“Hmm. You do that a lot when you’re troubled.” Momo opened one eye, a lazy smile adorning her features. “Come here.”

Mina felt a pull on her heartstrings, and walked towards the bed, sitting on the edge. Momo yawned and stretched like a cat, sitting up so she could face her better. “You okay?”

“Yeah. I mean… I’m worried about the whole budget cut thing, and Nayeonnie. But I’m okay.”

“I’m worried, too.” Momo sighed. “Fucking asshole.”

“The dean?”

“Yeah. Can’t believe he controls our lives.”

“It really sucks.”

Momo nodded, then scratched her knee. “And other than that, what’s on your mind?”

Mina paused, humming. “I guess… I was just thinking about us.”

“As in… you and me, or the four of us, or the nine of us, or…”

Mina let out a breathy laugh. “There is a lot of ‘us’ now, huh…”

“Yeah,” Momo came closer and propped her chin on Mina’s shoulder. “I like it, though.”

Her voice was suddenly really close, and Mina swallowed, something inside her pulling her face to the direction of the sound. Her eyelids flickered. “I like it, too.”

Something was happening.

Or maybe Mina wanted something to happen.

“Mina,” Momo spoke up before her thoughts could. “Can I kiss you?”

Even though she expected it, her chest tightened. “You… want to?”

Momo licked her lips. “I’ve been wanting to ever since the last time we kissed.”

Oh. That was a long time.

The confession made Mina adjust her position on the bed, and Momo lifted her chin from her shoulder to face her, eye to eye. They looked at each other for a bit, then someone cracked a smile – Mina was sure it was her – making both of them chuckle nervously. Momo’s hand slid along her thigh, drawing circles there. It didn’t tickle. Mina liked the sensation.

She let go of doubt and insecurities.
“Okay.”

They leaned in at the same time, unable to hold back.

Kissing Momo was so much different than kissing Jeongyeon.

Kissing Mina was nothing like kissing Nayeon.

Their lips whispered nostalgia and youth, the joy of kissing the person you’ve known the longest, remembering that they’ve always been by your side, and would continue to be for as long as you drew breath.

Momo missed this warmth.

Her hand moved slowly upwards, around Mina’s waist, pulling her closer as another snuck behind her neck and into her hair. She massaged her scalp with the utmost care and Mina sighed against her mouth. She tilted her face to deepen the kiss, heart beating fast.

The position wasn’t exactly balanced, and at some point Momo fell backwards on the bed, with Mina on top of her. The two yelped, but didn’t let go of each other, then Mina lifted her torso to look at the girl beneath her.

“Well, hello.” She smirked.

Momo mirrored the expression. “So. You like this position, huh?”

Mina’s flushed cheeks and glazed eyes told Momo everything she needed to know. “Oh, shut up.”

“Make me—”

And Mina did, once, twice, countless times. She was beginning to understand how Momo liked to be kissed, and felt proud of each and every sound she managed to get out of her. They kissed in various ways, and Mina ended up rolling to the side. She pulled Momo to another languid kiss as their legs tangled together, skin brushing against skin – it was nice.

She didn’t feel guilty.

Momo’s thigh got dangerously close to the area between her girlfriend’s legs at some point, and Mina made a sound that startled her. They broke the kiss, and Momo looked down.

“Oh, shit— sorry. I didn’t mean…”

“It’s… it’s fine.” Mina tried to catch her breath, stuttering. “I d-don’t mind.”

Momo paused for a moment, catching the details. Mina sometimes said things she didn’t mean because she wanted to show others that she was ready for anything, but Momo always knew.

She removed her leg, brushing Mina’s face with her knuckles and a soft smile. “Let’s take it slow, okay?”

Unconsciously, this made Mina feel relieved. She bit her lower lip and nodded. “…Okay. Thank you, Momoring.”

Momo leaned forward, pressing a kiss to her forehead, and hugged Mina close. The embrace was warm and safe – the closest thing of home that Mina ever had in this city. She felt explosions inside her and nuzzled Momo’s neck with a deep sigh.
“Hey, Momo.” She whispered against her collarbones.

“Hm?”

“I love you.”

A pause, then a kiss to the crown of her head.

“Love you more.”

And just like that, they were swept away to the land of dreams, in the same position they had fallen asleep countless times throughout their lives.

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The crowd was bigger than Nayeon anticipated, and the murmurs were loud. Word of the theater students’ event spread as quickly as the news about Chanmi’s expelling, so the conversations between students as they waited in the cramped hallway ranged from a variety of topics. Nayeon’s hearing was pretty good, so she could make out the words ‘drugs’, ‘college’ and ‘shut-down’ all mingled together into one. It was pretty chaotic.

“Do you think he’ll leave his office knowing that there’s a crowd out here?” Jennie asked Nayeon as they sat down, bored from waiting.

“I want to say yes,” Nayeon gritted her teeth, remembering Jihyo’s words. “But he’s a coward, so he might as well live there for the rest of his life.”

“Girl, I’m not staying here for the rest of my life, I have stuff to do.”

Nayeon laughed a little. “Where’s your resolve, soldier?”

“In the shopping mall, is called ‘MAC is having a sale Saturday’.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

They laughed together, and it relieved some of their anxieties. She really appreciated Jennie’s company; the girl always managed to make her smile.

A familiar figure showed up amidst the crowd and Nayeon raised her hand to grab her attention. “Jeongyeonnie, here!”

Jeongyeon waved back when she saw her and squeezed through, managing to settle next to Nayeon. “Hey, sorry I’m late.”

“It’s fine, he’s still in there,” Nayeon pointed with her head. “Jeong, this is Jennie. We were on the play together.”

“Oh, the villager!” Jeongyeon smiled, proud of herself for remembering her.
“That’s me,” Jennie laughed. “Nice to meet you.”

“This is Jeongyeon, my—” Nayeon stopped mid-sentence, the realization of what she was about to say hitting her hard. She decided to go through with it. “My girlfriend.”

It took Jeongyeon by surprise. Hearing Mina saying it was one thing, but hearing that word on the tip of Nayeon’s tongue once again after so many years left her breathless. It was like being hit by a truck, pulled apart, and pieced together again by the most loving hands in the world. She wasn’t going to cry in the middle of a crowd, but had Nayeon said that privately, Jeongyeon definitely would have.

“Say what now?” Jennie looked at both of them with a shocked grin. “Nabongs, you’re dating Yoo Jeongyeon??”

“Oh,” This could be a problem. “You know her.”

“Who doesn’t?” Jennie frowned. “Wait, Jeongyeon, weren’t you dating someone else? This other girl… what was her name…”

“Mina.” Jeongyeon said, then scratched the back of her neck. “Yeah, that’s… complicated.”

“Oh, drama. Love it.”

“We should leave this to another time.” Nayeon interrupted, knowing fully well that when Jennie caught wind of hot gossip, she wouldn’t let go.

“Oh, come on, there’s nothing to do. Entertain me for a second.”

“Jennie, no.”

“Fine,” Despite everything, Jennie still respected her co-star. “I won’t let you off the hook, though.”

Jeongyeon chuckled nervously and Nayeon simple rolled her eyes, sneaking her hand on the floor until she could hold her girlfriend’s. The two shared an intimate look and a smile, and Jeongyeon rubbed the back of Nayeon’s hand with her thumb.

One by one the other girls arrived at the dean’s door. Jihyo, Sana and Dahyun got there together, then Tzuyu, and Mina and Momo lastly. They had to sit in separate places from each other because of the crowd, but they let Nayeon know that they were there.

A long time passed, and the students started getting restless. Some started joking around by yelling, others started chanting, only to be shushed by the ones who wanted to take this seriously. A few arguments broke out, but managed to be contained before anything got out of hand – they were right in front of the dean’s office, after all. In the end, all they could really do was wait, which was incredibly frustrating. They felt powerless.

Suddenly, loud voices at the end of the hallway spoke up, coming closer.

“Please, make way. Excuse me. Please, move aside.”

Heads turned, and some students started cheering, prompting others to do the same. Nayeon stretched her neck to see what was going on; the smile on her face when she saw the people walking towards them was involuntary.
In front was Jea and Sunmi, followed by every single professor in campus. They walked like they meant business, and Nayeon was sure they did.

The professors stopped upon reaching the dean’s door and Jea turned around, facing the students. “Alright, attention, please.”

The silence was immediate.

“First, I’d like to say that we understand the situation, and as professors of this institution, we won’t stay silent. We’ll do everything in our power to ensure that the theater building remains open, and that the theater majors suffer no setbacks because of a situation that was out of their control. We pride ourselves in having one of the best courses of this country, and we’ll always aim for the best for all of you.”

Jea paused and swallowed, her bravado wavering. “With that said… I’d like to apologize, from the bottom of my heart.”

She bowed deeply.

“We’re very sorry.” The other professors said in unison, bowing in front of everyone as well.

Jihyo felt a lump in her throat watching the scene.

Nayeon started clapping first, followed by everyone else. There were no cheers and no yelling, simply a round of applause to the mentors of this school they loved so much.

Jea lifted her head and pursed her lips, taking a deep breath. “Thank you.”

Finally, she turned around, and opened the door to the dean’s office.

With all the professors inside, the door locked once more.

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“Ouch, careful, idiot.” Chaeyoung complained to her brother as soon as he tried helping her get out of the car and bumped into her shoulder.

“Does your shoulder hurt too?” He asked, skeptically.

“No, but let’s not take any chances. Hospital food sucks.”

He laughed, ruffling her hair, and both got inside the house. Chaeyoung inhaled the smell of wood and incense and grinned; home sweet home.

Her parents were rarely available, but they managed to take a break to help their daughter get back into her routine. Her hand was still enveloped in bandages that had to be changed once a week, but other than that, Chaeyoung looked completely fine. She appreciated being babied for the time being, though.
It was Friday afternoon and for as weird as it sounded, she couldn’t wait to go back to college. She missed her friends absurdly even though they spoke through the group chat every day; it wasn’t the same. She wanted to hang out with them, and hug them, and tell them that she wasn’t going anywhere. She’d been updated in the whole Chanmi scandal too, so she felt safer without her around. Her goons also seemed to have given up chasing anyone who had anything to do with it, because they just weren’t this motivated in the first place. Fear was the only thing that moved them; in a way, everyone could live a happier life without Chanmi around.

Sana also seemed to be feeling a lot better, which was everything that mattered to Chaeyoung.

Among other things.

The tiny artist walked upstairs and smiled when she saw her room. It’s been a while, so she sat on her bed and let herself fall backwards slowly, sighing deeply at the sensation of her own mattress beneath her.

“There’s really nothing better than your bed…” Chaeyoung mumbled to herself as she sank into the feeling of familiarity and comfort. This was pretty great.

Her parents called her down for lunch after a while, and it was the first time everyone was together eating at the table in almost a year. Chaeyoung had no idea how much she’d missed this until her mother’s food melted in her mouth, making her groan in pleasure.

“Mom… can you quit your job and work at the campus the cafeteria, please?”

Her mother just laughed and told her to eat up.

They talked about many things, but Chaeyoung didn’t bring up the drugs and blackmail. Her family knew that she’d gotten into a fight, but after the initial shock was over, all they really wanted was for Chaeyoung to heal. Now that they were finally together, they tried to bring up the topic.

Her parents didn’t chastise her for being violent, but just wanted to understand what made her so angry. Chaeyoung felt her heart picking up speed, because she’s always wanted to hide this from everyone, especially her parents. Right now, however, she had a good opening to talk about her anger-management issues. So, she did.

They were a lot more understanding than she expected. Chaeyoung felt incredibly lighter after their talk, and even left the table with a hug and a kiss from her mom and dad.

Maybe she could start opening up about other things as well, at her own pace.

Chaeyoung once again went upstairs and lied down on her bed, now sleepy because of lunch and her medicine. She decided to take a nap and rest her body.

A knock on her door made her open her eyes and she frowned.

“Hmmm what? Let me sleep…” Chaeyoung whined, rubbing her face.

“You slept for two hours,” Her brother said. “You have a visitor. It’s Tzuyu.”

This certainly woke her up. Chaeyoung sat up immediately. “Oh! Tell her to come up!”

He did, and soon enough Tzuyu’s beautiful face came into view.
She looked like a dream. Maybe it was the painkillers’ effect.

“Tzuyu…”

“Hey, lazy butt.” Tzuyu walked towards her, pushing her down on the bed when she tried to get up. “Lay down, you’re still sleepy.”

“No, I’m awake… I think. Are you real?” Okay, the medicine was definitely making her mumble incoherently.

Tzuyu just giggled and held Chaeyoung’s good hand. “I’m very real.”

The gesture made butterflies go loose in Chaeyoung’s stomach and the lack of sobriety made her lean forward and lean her forehead against Tzuyu’s neck with a small laugh. “You came.”

“I wanted to see you.”

“Thank you,” Chaeyoung looked up, and they were very close. “I missed you. A lot.”

“Me too…” Tzuyu peeked at the door that was still open, but decided to take the risk. She pressed forward, stealing a quick kiss to Chaeyoung’s lips, then pulled back casually.

Chaeyoung was sure she was malfunctioning. “That was— are you sure I’m not dreaming?”

“Stop being so romantic all the time! Is this what dating an artist is gonna be like?” Tzuyu chuckled as their fingers intertwined.

“Dating… oh yeah.” It was like a switch was suddenly pressed inside her brain and she remembered that she was, indeed, dating Tzuyu. Their kiss at the hospital resurfaced strongly, and Chaeyoung’s cheeks flushed; she only hid her face on Tzuyu’s shoulder again. “Oh my God, I’m dating you.”

“Yes, you are.” Tzuyu patted her hair, not quite believing that being in love could feel this good.

“Surprised?”

“Honestly, we could be married for a hundred years and I’d still wake up shocked that it happened.”

Tzuyu’s legs bounced up and down as she tried to hold back a squeal. “You’re just so…”

“Dumb?”

“Loving.” She sighed, pressing her cheek against the top of her head.

They stood there in silence, basking in each other’s presence. Tzuyu had always been afraid of relationships because for her, being in the same room as the person she loved was already enough to make her the happiest person in the world. She knew that people craved touch and physical affection, and she’d always been terrified of not being able to reciprocate in the same amount.

With Chaeyoung, however, she felt at peace.

“Say… can I ask you something?” Chaeyoung said after a moment, sitting up again.

“Anything.”

“Since we’re dating now… I just wanted to know… what would be okay with you? Like holding
hands, and hugging, and kissing…”

Tzuyu didn’t expect that question to come up so quickly into their relationship, but she was glad nonetheless. If there was one thing she learned this past month is that communication is everything. “All of this is okay. I might… not want to kiss, sometimes. And when I do, I might want it to be just… you know, lips?”

Chaeyoung nodded, paying full attention. “That’s completely fine.”

“I don’t think I can do anything past that,” The hardest part was admitting it. “B-but I really don’t mind if you want to—”

“Hey,” Chaeyoung rubbed Tzuyu’s knuckles with a soft smile. “We’re not doing anything you don’t want to do, okay? I don’t care about this stuff, either. Sex and everything… it’s literally so irrelevant to me.”

That took her by surprise. “It is?”

“Yeah,” Chaeyoung’s toothy grin was shining. “We could spend the rest of our lives holdings hands, Tzu. I just want to be with you.”

The amount of relief that this simple statement brought Tzuyu was overwhelming and she could cry. She wouldn’t, though, because she just wanted to smile from now on, with Chaeyoung by her side. “Thank you, Chaeng… I love you.”

Chaeyoung, on the other hand, felt her eyes watering at the phrase, because she was a hopeless romantic. “Love you too.”

Tzuyu had to spend the rest of their afternoon wiping her girlfriend’s tears. She decided that kissing them instead was a lot more effective.

They cuddled in bed for a long time – Chaeyoung learned that cuddling was definitely okay – and the way she fit against Tzuyu’s taller frame was nothing short of perfect. Chaeyoung didn’t want to be biased, but she truly believed that they were meant to be together like this; her head tucked under Tzuyu’s chin as the photographer ran her fingers up and down her back. Chaeyoung wasn’t concerned about getting caught anymore.

Tzuyu allowed them a moment of tranquility before sighing. While seeing Chaeyoung was definitely her priority that day, it wasn’t the only reason for her visit. She needed dive into more serious matters, and she needed Chaeyoung to be the first to know.

“Chaengie.”

“Hmm?”

“You’ve heard about the dean’s decision, right?”

“Yeah,” Chaeyoung tried to remember. “After the professors met with him he told them that his final verdict would be announced on Monday.”

“Yes… I actually did something, Chaeng.”

That was a red alert. “Something?”

Tzuyu moved, detaching herself from Chaeyoung’s arms, and came closer to whisper in her ear,
even though there was no one else around to listen.

When she was done, Chaeyoung could only stare at her like she was insane.

“Wait, what?”

“"You brought wine.” It wasn’t a question, but rather a deadpan observation.

“Should I not have?” Jihyo asked innocently and Sunmi just rolled her eyes and made way for her to come in.

It was incredibly weird walking into Sunmi’s house after so long. The place was still the same, albeit less crowded with stuff and cleaner. Jihyo remembered that Mr. and Mrs. Lee used to collect stones from different parts of the world, so the wooden floors were always surrounded by colorful minerals everywhere you looked. Sunmi detested this habit, because she always tripped on the goddamn things. When her parents left the house, the first thing she did was celebrate the lack of stubbed toes.

Sunmi stretched one arm, asking for the bottle, and Jihyo passed her with a smirk. They walked towards the kitchen, where Sunmi opened the minibar, then looked at Jihyo straight in the eyes. “I have nowhere to put this.”

Jihyo finally couldn’t hold back her laugh. “Why do you have so much wine, you drunkard?”

“Because I told people once that I enjoy fine wine and now I get one every time I visit my friends’ houses!” Sunmi really looked like she was about to cry. “Why would I drink all of this, I live alone.”

“Maybe they’re expecting you to find a husband soon?” Jihyo tried, unable to stop teasing her childhood friend.

“Well they’ll rot waiting.”

“Rude.”

“Whatever, let’s open this damn bottle.” And with that, Sunmi nearly smashed the minibar’s door closed and went back to the living room to search for a corkscrew. Jihyo was having too much fun and they weren’t even drinking yet.

Dinner at Sunmi’s was pleasant. Contrary to what Jihyo expected, the woman actually knew how to cook, and they ended up enjoying a nice plate of spaghetti with shrimp paired with a glass of white wine. It was incredible how relaxed she was feeling; Jihyo was sure that she had aged at
least ten years after the events of that week.

“How’s dinner?” Sunmi asked midway through her plate.

Jihyo hummed. “Decent, I guess.”

“Okay, you know what,” The professor swallowed her shrimp before continuing. “You should have brought your grandmother, she would appreciate my efforts.”

“Grandma would kick my ass if I made her miss the last episode of her drama.”

“Maybe you deserve some ass-kicking.”

“I’ve had nothing but my ass kicked this whole month, give me a break.” Jihyo chuckled despite the hostile way she tried to say that and Sunmi laughed too, taking another bite.

The conversation was nice, and diving into their past was always fun. Jihyo kept remembering all the games they used to play when they were smaller, and Sunmi tried to convince her that her mind was fuzzy and that not nearly half of those things had actually happened.

“You’re delusional.”

“You did have a pirated Pokémon game that you made me play to get scared!”

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“I’m not doing this.”

“What, afraid I’ll beat you?”

“You will beat me at an annoyance contest, you do it every time you talk.”

“Ouch, that hurt my feelings.”

“If you had any.”

“Are you calling me insensitive?”

“Can you please finish your plate, the food is getting cold.”

“Okay, you just sounded like grandma. Are you getting old?”

“I swear to God, Park Jihyo.”

It went on and on, and Jihyo had to admit that riling her up like this was stupidly fun. Sometimes they would keep in silence and eat, until someone looked at the other. Jihyo got caught most times and nearly spit her wine when she tried to steal a glance over the glass.

“You’re such a brat.”

“Any news from the dean?” Jihyo had to ask after a while, and she decided that ripping off the band-aid like this was easier.

Sunmi kept in silence, taking another sip of her wine, then sighed, shaking her head. “Not yet.”
“So, he’ll really just say something on Monday…” It was frustrating, but Jihyo had to learn to let things flow at their own pace.

She tried.

Despite her attempts, Jihyo couldn’t seem to get rid of the tension in her body. Mentally, she could convince herself she was relaxed – but physically, she wasn’t having it. Her addiction for control still got the best of her, and it was incredibly difficult to change this part of her, even in good company.

This did not go unnoticed by Sunmi, who put down her glass with a concerned look on her face. “Jihyo, why don’t we stop talking about things like that? For now, at least. Let’s just be two old friends enjoying each other’s company.”

A pang of… something went through Jihyo’s chest at the word ‘friends’. It wasn’t the pain of rejection – Jihyo wasn’t stupid, she knew this situation wasn’t strictly platonic. It was more irritation with the fact that Sunmi wasn’t being completely honest with herself about what was going on between them.

Jihyo hummed at her own thoughts, and then picked up her glass to drink.

Soon enough, dinner was over – dishes were done, the table was wiped down – and the pair found themselves on Sunmi’s couch. The unfinished wine bottle sat on the coffee table along with Jihyo’s glass, which had been filled halfway. They sat next to each other in silence, a sort of melancholy washing over them.

Jihyo was still tense, Sunmi could tell. The way she was sitting, with one leg folded over the other, leaning with her chin in her palm – Sunmi had to do something. The whole point of this dinner was to help her relax and let go of troubling thoughts, and things seemed to have started off on a good note. But now, her efforts were going downhill.

It was hard to help when Jihyo refused to meet her gaze.

“Is something wrong?” Sunmi asked.

The younger girl finally turned her head to look at her, her eyes a little glazed over. “Funny. I was about to ask you the same thing.”

This baffled Sunmi. Why on earth would Jihyo think there was something wrong? Everything was fine, she was having a calm evening with her childhood friend—

Like a bolt of lightning, the revelation hit her.

It wasn’t that she didn’t know that things between Jihyo and herself had become different since they reunited. One of the first things Sunmi had noticed was how pretty Jihyo had gotten – beyond that, even. The familiar closeness between them had transformed into something new, and awesome, and brave.

But also, risky.

Sunmi had her reservations at school, because she could get in serious trouble for indulging a student. She’s heard of other teachers who had gotten fired for less than that, and Sunmi couldn’t fathom doing something else for a job. She genuinely loved teaching, and genuinely loved her alma mater.
“Perhaps.” Sunmi’s voice tone changed. “I’m not… quite sure myself.”

Jihyo hummed again, eyes on her glass. “So, what would it take? For you to be sure.”

It was a dangerous game, and for the longest time Sunmi had tried to avoid placing her pieces on the board. Right now, however, Jihyo had her completely cornered. No school, no dean, no colleagues – just the two of them on a couch, with a need to face this.

“One move,” Sunmi breathed out, defeated. “From you.”

Jihyo looked up, sitting up straight slowly. Their eyes met in an intense battle of endurance.

Then, Jihyo snapped out of her gloomy state. “Why me?” Her voice came out fragile.

It was moments like this that reminded Sunmi that Jihyo wasn’t built to endure the punches life kept throwing at her. She just wanted to let someone else take control for once, care for her like she cared for everyone, guide her. Sunmi wanted to provide all of that.

Desperately so.

“Because I can’t bring myself to do it,” Sunmi gave her an apologetic smile, unmoving. “But I can catch you if you let yourself fall.”

Jihyo slid closer, shoulders touching, and paused. She turned around, took a sip of wine, but didn’t swallow right away.

With one hand, she traced Sunmi’s jawline slowly, all the way to the tip of her chin. Then, she pressed her thumb on her bottom lip, urging her to open her mouth slightly. Jihyo’s eyes were hooded, carrying an absurd amount of feelings that needed to come out. Seeing the woman she’d been attracted to for so long in the position she was in right now set her insides ablaze.

With a tilt of her head Jihyo pressed her lips against Sunmi’s.

She opened her mouth, transferring the liquid to the other woman. Jihyo pulled back and watched as Sunmi rolled the wine in her tongue, tasting it, then swallowing it without spilling a drop. She licked her lips with her eyes closed, and then opened them, grinning.

“You’ve done this before, huh?” She chuckled.

“Maybe once or twice,” Jihyo was really good at pretending that her heart wasn’t about to burst. “And it wasn’t wine, it was cheap alcohol.”

“I’m sure it doesn’t have the same effect.”

“Yeah,” Jihyo looked at her lips. “I also haven’t been crushing on them since I was twelve, so. You know.”

Sunmi let out a sigh, and put a hand on Jihyo’s neck this time, brushing the skin lightly. No one moved for a second, but they could feel their breaths mingling.

“Why can’t you kiss me first?” Jihyo murmured.

“I’m your teacher.”
“You’re the friend I grew up with.”

“I’m six years older than you.”

“We’re adults.”

“I’m—”

“You like me,” It came out almost like a plea. “I like you, I’m twenty years-old, we’re all alone at your house, Sunmi, please.” A whine, followed by Jihyo’s grasp on her shirt. “Please, just… I need you.”

Sunmi knew how hard it was for her to admit when she needed help. Perhaps that’s what finally broke her.

A nod was all it took, and Jihyo pulled her back into a proper kiss this time. It was messy, and rough, and probably the best of Jihyo’s life. Their tongues met, rolling around each other, and Jihyo sighed. It felt good.

So good.

Sunmi took Jihyo’s wrists, removing her hold from her shirt, and guiding her hands above her head as they kissed. Slowly, she prompted Jihyo to fall back on the couch, binding both of her wrists together with one hand, as the other made its way back to her face.

In an improvised move – and because she wanted to – Jihyo bit Sunmi’s lower lip, and the woman couldn’t help but to smile on the kiss. She pulled back a little, licking the wound. “Ouch.”

Jihyo was breathless, but giggled. “You’ve had worse.”

“I shouldn’t have told you about my private life.”

“Yes, you should have,” She struggled against Sunmi’s hold. “Because now I know everything you like.”

Sunmi actually blushed at the innuendo, and decided to shut her up with another lengthy kiss. They took their time exploring each other’s mouths, and Jihyo bucked her hips at some point, groaning slightly. They parted once more.

“Are you uncomfortable?” Sunmi asked.

“No really,” She paused. “I mean, a bed would be nicer, but I’m not complaining.”

She shouldn’t be surprised at the suggestion. “Do you… want to go to the bed?”

Jihyo opened her mouth, and then closed it again. The realization that this was happening, and that Sunmi was the one who had asked was overwhelming. Jihyo bit her lower lip, still feeling the strong grip on her wrists, then shivered. “I really do.”

There was no denial this time.

Sunmi smiled and pulled her up, dragging her along the hallway by her hand as the girl giggled like an idiot. Jihyo nearly tripped on the carpet and Sunmi had to catch her, laughing too. She paused to look at her in the eyes. “You’re not drunk, are you?”

“Nope.”
“You swear? I’m not doing this without your full consent, Jihyo-yah.”

Knowing how serious she was about this, Jihyo let go of her, standing perfectly balanced on one foot as she counted all multiples of seven in order. “There. Happy? Fully sober.”

Sunmi eyed her from top to bottom, suddenly realizing that her outfit had maybe been carefully planned for this night.

Jihyo was wearing fishnets.

*Sunmi, you dense idiot.*

“I’m convinced.” And with that, she crouched, swiping Jihyo off her feet as she carried her to the bedroom bridal-style. Jihyo yelped and wrapped her arms around Sunmi’s shoulder, kicking slowly in the air. Upon entering the room, Sunmi turned on the lights with her elbow, and finally dropped Jihyo on the mattress unceremoniously.

“Ouch, careful! I’m fragile—” She didn’t get to finish, because her lips were sealed in another kiss.

Sunmi pulled back quickly, getting off of her for a moment. “Wait.”

She paced around the room, turned on a faint red light on her nightstand, and then turned off the one up on the ceiling. The place was enveloped in darkness, only tinted red by the small lampshade. Sunmi then dove back in to where Jihyo was waiting with parted lips already.

They took their time savoring the leftover taste of wine in each other’s mouths as Jihyo’s hands scratched Sunmi’s scalp, fingers lost in long, black locks. At some point she reached for her neck, playing with the collar of her shirt, trying to pull it back. Sunmi then moved her kisses to Jihyo’s jaw and down her neck, and Jihyo took a deep breath.

“You like that?” Sunmi whispered against her skin.

“Yeah…” Jihyo could barely speak. “It’s hot.”

“Neck kisses?”

“No. I’m hot. This top needs to go.”

“Oh.” Sunmi lifted her torso, allowing Jihyo space to move, and the girl didn’t waste time taking off her top and tossing it aside.

Then, she collapsed on the mattress again. “Better…”

Sunmi couldn’t help but to stare.

Yes, she knew that Jihyo had been blessed with ridiculously beautiful breasts, and that they were bigger in size than the average woman’s – Sunmi included – but she never expected to see them up close in a situation like this. The two have been to the beach and the local pool once or twice, but bikini tops and bras had a completely different feel to each other.

The fact that Jihyo was wearing black lace lingerie to match her fishnets didn’t help.

“Like what you see?” Jihyo smirked, cheeks flushed and head up in the clouds from all the kissing.

“Don’t ask me that,” Sunmi mumbled, crawling on top of her once more and lowering her mouth on her pulse point. “You drive me crazy, Park Jihyo.”
Jihyo’s breathing stuttered and she lifted her hands up so she could be completely open and vulnerable to the woman on top of her. “Take care of me, please.”

It was all she needed to say. Sunmi kissed her lips once more. “I’ve got you.”

She explored every part of Jihyo’s body with her lips and hands – her collarbones, behind her ear, under her jaw, her chest and shoulders, her stomach and thighs. Sunmi would tell her to move her hips up, or tilt her head to the side, and Jihyo would obey without a single thought. She didn’t want to think carefully about each and every move, she just wanted to feel.

And Sunmi made her feel lots of different things.

One thigh made its way in between her legs and Jihyo groaned, moving a little to get more friction. Sunmi grabbed her hips, securing her in place. “Hush, we’ll get there.”

“Hmm.” Jihyo just hummed, heat pooling in her belly already.

Sunmi’s lips were back on Jihyo’s, and she kissed her strongly, moving her thigh with purpose. This had the desired effect, and soon enough Jihyo’s kisses turned into moans against her mouth as she tried to keep up the rhythm. Suddenly, Sunmi sunk her teeth on her bottom lip, inciting a yelp.

“Asshole.” Jihyo chuckled, licking the metallic taste of blood.

“You love it.”

“I do,” She sighed. “Wish you could mark me.”

Sunmi kissed the side of her head. “I can’t give you hickeys, your grandma would personally murder me.”

“She wouldn’t even see them…”

“I can’t, Jihyo.”

She groaned, sounding like a whiny baby, then tried again. “Not on the neck then. But somewhere no one would know…?”

Sunmi was about to deny her again, but the idea didn’t sound so bad. She stared at Jihyo underneath her, and the girl was giving her the puppy eyes. She bucked her hips against Sunmi’s leg. “Please, Sunmi-ah…”

A whiny Jihyo, Sunmi learned, was a dangerous weapon.

She didn’t answer, and slid down until she came face to face with Jihyo’s left hipbone. She bit there, and sucked, and it hurt so good that Jihyo let out a louder sound. She didn’t try to cover her mouth, groaning and whimpering until Sunmi was done, then collapsing again. The professor wasn’t done, and did it once more, a little above the place she’d just bitten. And again, and again, until Jihyo’s left side was almost entirely covered in hickeys.

Sunmi leaned back to admire her work – Jihyo was a mess, and she hadn’t even done anything. “Happy?” Jihyo just nodded, and Sunmi giggled, moving her lips back to meet Jihyo’s. “Can’t even speak.”

They kissed and Jihyo was ridiculously sensitive. Sunmi decided to remove at least one part of her undergarments. With a swift move of her fingers, she unclasped her bra, taking it off and putting it
aside with the top on the floor. Jihyo’s perked nipples were truly a gorgeous sight.

“How sensitive are you?” Sunmi asked, before doing anything.

“R-right now, very.”

“Hm, good.” Sunmi brushed a thumb over one nipple and Jihyo gasped, arching her back. She kept toying with her left side, as her mouth took in the right one. The combination of wet tongue and circular motions was driving Jihyo crazy, and she didn’t try to be quiet.

“F-fuck… ah—” Jihyo moaned, and Sunmi changed sides, giving both breasts equal attention from her tongue and fingers. It was paradise on earth.

Still, for as good as she felt, Jihyo needed something filling her immediately, or she would go insane. “S-Sunmi-ah.”

Sunmi let go of her nipple. “Yes?”

“Just… fucking hell—” She tried to speak, but Sunmi’s thigh was once again brushing against her core as both thumbs worked on her nipples at the same time. “I need you…”

“Need me to do what?” Sunmi bent down to kiss her ear and whisper. “Use your words, baby.”

Jihyo was already about to explode; using that nickname now was completely unfair. “Get in me… fuck me, please, anything—”

Sunmi tried to keep her composure, but having Jihyo squirming under her and saying all those things was quite a lot to take. She swallowed thickly, heart racing at the sounds and movements of this woman she was quite possibly in love with, and decided to stop torturing her. “Okay. I got you.”

Stopping her ministrations on her breasts finally, Sunmi told her to lift her hips so she could remove her panties and fishnets. With those gone, Jihyo was completely bare, and waiting. She spread her legs instantly, and Sunmi saw her glistening. She wanted to lick her clean.

But she had another idea.

“Hey, can I go get something?”

Jihyo’s eyelids fluttered open. “Huh?”

“From my box. You know, of… stuff.”

“Oh. Your sex toys.”

“Yeah, that. You don’t have to say it.”

Jihyo giggled despite being dizzy. “I can’t believe you’re shy after all this.”

Sunmi got up, moving to her wardrobe. “Don’t ruin the mood.”

The box had quite a few things that Jihyo couldn’t see, but was suddenly very interested in. Maybe some other time. Sunmi grabbed what she wanted, and put it back in place. Then, she tied up the harness around her hips, took a bottle of lube to rub all over it, and walked back to bed with something that made Jihyo quite almost drool.
“You have a strap-on and never told me?”

“I don’t tell you everything about my sex life.”

“You should.” Jihyo grinned, but immediately groaned at the feeling of the plastic and lube against her slit.

“Is this okay?” Sunmi asked, positioning herself above her.

“Fuck yes.”

Sunmi couldn’t help a laugh, and leaned to kiss her once again. “That’s good. Just relax, I’ll do everything.”

It was all Jihyo needed to hear.

She felt the toy rubbing against her folds slowly and hummed contently as Sunmi kissed her cheek, and chin. Then, Sunmi guided the cock until it was right against Jihyo’s entrance, and pushed forward.

It filled her easily, and Sunmi stopped at some point, letting her get adjusted. “Can I—”

“Yeah, m-more.”

One more thrust and the strap was inside completely. Jihyo’s high-pitched whine was music to her ears. “I’ll move now.”

Jihyo just nodded, and Sunmi started to retreat, only to push it back in. The pace was slow at the beginning, with Jihyo’s hands grabbing at the sheets with each thrust of her hips. After a while she sped it up, hitting all the right spots with Jihyo’s legs spread as much as she could handle. Sunmi kept moving at the same pace without faltering once. They kissed and Jihyo hugged her, groaning in her ear senseless words; sometimes her name, sometimes asking her to go harder, faster.

“S-Sunmi… Sunmi…”

Sunmi’s hand moved to her clit, brushing a thumb there, making Jihyo’s back arch. “Shit— don’t stop, don’t…”

“I’m here, baby. Let go of your worries. I’m right here.”

It was so easy when Sunmi said it.

Those words were enough to tip her over the edge, and Jihyo felt her orgasm washing over. She came with Sunmi’s name on her tongue, one hand on her hair and another scratching her back, trying to find something to ground her.

Jihyo collapsed after that, breathless and messy, and Sunmi laying on top of her and panting at the same time. They stayed like this for a moment, then Sunmi slowly pulled the toy from inside Jihyo, making her whine a little.

She removed the strap-on and tossed it on the floor, too tired to care about it for now. She lied down on the pillow next to Jihyo, closing her eyes.

There was nothing but echoes of heavy breathing across the room for a long moment. Sunmi was sure she would freak out if she stopped to think about what she’d just done.
Then, Jihyo turned to her, skin hot and sticky, but with the brightest smile in the world.

“Don’t run, but…” She laughed weakly. “I think I kinda love you.”

Sunmi had no idea why the words hit her the way they did, but she smiled back, hugging Jihyo close as the girl fell asleep on her chest.

“I’ll take care of you,” She muttered on her hair. “I’m not going anywhere.”

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They expected an official statement.

They received another e-mail instead.

“Hello, this is dean Park.

I would like to formally inform all students that the theater building will be reopened next semester, and the course won’t change. Theater majors will not suffer any setbacks, and plays can still be enjoyed by everyone. I apologize for the hasty decision.

In other news, next year I’ll be stepping down as dean, and another shall be taking my place. This school will be taken care of by a subsidiary of a big conglomerate. The campus will not be affected in any negative ways with this change; on the contrary, we expect big developments, and we are excited for the future.

I apologize for the unprofessional behavior I have shown this past week. It is not becoming of a dean, and I recognize my mistakes. I sincerely love this school, and I would never leave it at the hands of people I didn’t trust. Therefore, even though you might not have reasons to, please believe me one last time when I say that the future is bright.

Thank you to all professors who have shown compassion and kindness to the students. Please guide them from now on, as well.

Thank you to all the students who work hard for a fair and just school environment. You are brave, and I am very proud of all of you.

Last, but not least, thank you to the Chou Industries. I leave the campus in your hands.

Have a wonderful year.

- Park Jinyoung.”
Thank you so much for being patient with me. This story will come to an end soon. Wow, it will be an year in October! Thank you a lot for putting up with my delays, and thank you always for being so excited about every chapter. I love when you yell at me here, or on twitter, or CC, it's always the best ~

Also a special thanks as usual to my lovely girlfriend for all the support and art! Also, my incredible beta for helping me out with that smutty smut and making this story pretty!

See you next time!

Tag: #TWICEWereAMess

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