Macabre

by 11dishwashers

Summary

Jungwoo learns how to deal with infatuation and obnoxious sex robots.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

To the breeze that passed me by that evening; I encourage you to resume the action of ignorance towards your surroundings, for if you'd hesitated for a mere second you'd have bore witness to the walking disaster I had become- unknowingly, of course, I wasn't out to ruin myself with the cheap heels and single straps the rest of the group wore that night, and with some asided sneers, the taxis on call after a date with the bottom of the glass. I had been making a fool of myself in the restaurant's beer garden, dressed up to the strong fives along the light sixes in a suit that had no place on my body. The person I talked to wore a pinstripe but came across as feminine, and they seemed to have their wits gathered to their head that night, clinging at the scalp and derooting the ego, and they were saying something about startup companies in silicon valley which 'boasted an exponential amount of potential' and required but a drop of funding to a punctured bucket; the pleasure would be all mine, they assured me. They had a thesaurus infestation within their tongue, whoever they were.

"I'm quite alright with not investing," I said. Even though it was outside, the coldness that descended upon the room was sign enough that something was about to go wrong- I was far too weak mentally to embrace such a truth, and instead hugged myself through the blazer some more as if all of this was physical rather than emotional. "That's what I've been doing for years now, and life hasn't considered
it bad karma. I sleep at night still. We all start from the bottom of the ladder, and really there'd be no excitement within what we pretend is the science industry- I digress, it's the business one, good lord is it - without the satisfaction of knocking other people down a peg. It's nothing personal."

The coldness was dressed well tonight, and there I saw it in the shadows of a supermarket uniform on its way to the men's room. This coldness was my bell boy, my penthouse prince, my unfortunate kryptonite of the 808s kind, cheekbones more hollow than my memory had keened to form, enchanted beyond any belief or dignity. The coldness was in earshot; Wong Yukhei, just as the person across from me said with a condescending snort, "I bet you're working on a novel- right? Been working on one for quite some time now? You're a busy man, can't find the drive for it. Tell me the plot. What brand of pessimistic is the main character this time around? Is she in Moulin, Paris?"

Yukhei stifled a laugh; he must've heard. This was a blow to the head for me, and that was where I'd kept my pride folded up for later examination, prodding and use, now resorting to the last limbs and safety net, the very core of my shallow achievements as a person- chin up, Kim Jungwoo, you're gorgeous in the face. Handsome, even. I told myself that Yukhei would look back if he'd even captured an impression enough to skew towards the light, and he'd see the contours of my boyish charm rough with the late twenties. Dear god(and no, not as a phrase, I'm requesting a pipeline towards my lord right now, who shan't go ignored before my own earthly delights next time I accomplish a sin in broad daylight) please let him notice what I'm good for, and none of that extravagant bullshit my speech had taken a liking towards. "Alright, wiseguy," I said, perhaps with disinterest downplayed enough that it lost the signs of the emotional front it truly was. I had a thick skin in the solitude, but not when Yukhei was bouncing off the walls. Why was he even here in the first place? Didn't he have pavement to pound, childish blunts to hit, streetwear shops to window? It was a hack industry, full of hacks who hacked with great pleasure. I was used to the fibers of my being taken from me and pinned for inspection. I was used to the public undressing, the taking down of iced footholds- "that's not the best way to go about begging for funding, is it? When dogs want a bone thrown their way, the owners surely feel more charitable if the mutt whimpers rather than barks."

"You want to feel pity," the person said. I was beginning to suspect it was a man, in touch with his feminine side, hot on the pursuit of the rest of the firm I played entourage for- it was true the posse of girlos were drop dead gorgeous, and each one was hotter than the last no matter what order they arranged themselves along the burgundy lounge chair in. I'd lost them somewhere, after my lungs started whining for a fix of the old tobacco- old in that it was stale. The past week hadn't presented the opportunity to restock my case, and all I could do was look at the engraved clasp with some sorrow, some guilt divided between my face, as if it was another fucking mouth to feed under my roof. Another one, I tell you! The chequing account, the incompetent robot, the cigarette case, the giraffe, the pelly, and me. It was almost picturesque. I had half a mind to expect some greying illustrator upon my fictional doorstep the closer I got to bankruptcy through the paradoxes, the closer my scalp subjected itself to sunburn and god’s smiting and a heavenly chorus, to appear from the thrums of a single bedroom suburban fantasy and throw a mason jar of diluted, red watercolour paint on my face as blush.

"Perhaps," I said, and I'd been ignoring Yukhei before this very moment in favour of thinking about him with sense that had a slight rationality to it. He'd cleared off now, and the beer garden became hot with sparks of conversation yet again, the courtyard of loners in the midst of what was, by all means, a high end orgasm for restaurant reviewers and cynics and upbeat foodies. When I took a drag this time, I blew the smoke towards the man's face on purpose. He wrinkled his nose, which was curious as I'd been under the impression that he was trying to separate his likeness from that of a pleading dog's. "I must be on my way now," and I'd decided it just then, crunching my smoke against a glass ashtray on one of the stray tables. "See you."
He didn't say anything, thank god. No hindrances and no half baked pretenses of insults hiding behind begging, and if he'd have saved some face with politeness, that would've just made everything worse. I retreated indoors to where the burgundy was sucking the souls out of people. The girls were on the lounge chair where I'd left them, excluding our beloved minx Jinsoul who couldn't stand to treat a room with her presence for more than two seconds at a time. If she was mingling, I'd have to dial her up at three in the morning to make sure she hadn't been abducted from her footpath, carved out of dove wings and pink silk and sex appeal- she was the one who threw off the flower arrangements in the rows and made it so the backwards tilt of her head was end game. In saying this, I realise and accept the impressions and subsequent depths of my objectivity when it comes to these girls, but it must be obvious by my words- and if not my words, rather the platonic mannerisms I adopted around them- that I worked with women and played with men.

To my offhanded pride, Haseul's eyes lit up when they flicked over me. Her smile was gummy and adorable, but too childish to lead to much luck for her with sane humans. The rest of the girls gossiped more than they cared to admit, and sometimes with giddy arrogance, they'd speculate over poor Haseul's sexuality, and one would say, maybe I'm just imagining it but I could've sworn she was checking me out in my new Chanel, and the other would say, no you're right, I saw her. It was a way to feel loved. We were scientists, and still we acted like busybodies for having more of a social groove than the architects in our lives, exfoliating a week of hard work in the circulation of rooftop bars. The wine vapours would draw the gunk out. Humans; we're all the same. "Thank god you're here," Haseul said, making room for me on the sofa. This was made possible by the fact that the whole line of them were compactable. "Jinsoul abandoned me," for a while now, she'd been protesting her isolation from the rest of the group with flamboyance towards its metric popularity. Nevertheless, we seemed to get along just fine, excluding Joohyun, who everyone kept at a severed arm's length.

"There's someone transferring to our location," Kahei said leaning forward, hands on her knees, nails ripping the pantyhose. She seemed so sensationalised that all her eyes were missing was a reflection of the Chinese flag and some sparklers. "A man."

Haseul snorted, and she kept glancing between Kahei and I as if deciding who to appeal to. She must've known- it made sense, as she was in praise of me most of the time, despite the fact that I did nothing to warrant much of anything. Back in the beer garden, I had lied; there was bad karma playing itself out all over the periscope of my life, and soon I was worried that a mother, lost in life, would abandon her child in a fashioned crib on my fictional doorstep so I'd be forced to take another brat in. The robot was enough of a hassle. When I got home tonight, before I could even loosen my tie, he'd pounce on me and I'd be subjected to a round of dryhumping while he asked why I never brought any alcohol home for him. I'd have to lie yet again, and say that his firmware didn't allow for it. "Don't say it like that, it makes us sound depraved."

"All scientists are depraved," Kahei said, "depraved and thirsty," and then she cleared off in search of a free glass of wine.

I drank through the rest of the night simultaneously hoping that Yukhei would materialise before me and that he'd drop dead in the Congos. By the end of it, he hadn't shown that fucking gorgeous face of his and though I hadn't set out with it paved as an intent, as soon as he walked past me earlier it became evident that the night would be a waste in absence of him.

I returned to the flat that had not missed me, lift slumped with its split ends mixing with broken wires- it was obscene to envision for the lump of blood, sweat, tears and just a bit of money I paid each month for the place, but I had to take the stairs on my way down and a parched breath on my
way up. When I opened the door, the robot screeched at me with the nerves it developed around what it regarded as its apprentice in evolution. You heard it first here folks; robots don't believe in a hierarchy of consciousness despite the stereotyping, and seem to adhere to the mental state found in the common housecat, viewing the strings of a marionette within its own whininess. Nakamoto Yuta was hot on my trails, first in the mirror I had beside my coat rack and then with scorching passion for me. The depths of it scared me sometimes. Posed with a job accompanied by heroin chic levels of taxing, I feared that one day I'd crack and fall for him, more than a creator can fall for its first immoral experiment, more than a creator at mercy to its creation, and soon the petals would catch the aircon's breeze and we'd share a moment of synchronised anticipation.

Nakamoto Yuta was beautiful; that was the point after all. It was understood that fleshlights needed little more than sterility, but that if one were to proceed under the impression of consensual sex, the subject(notice: it's gotta be subject, and never quite object) must be to die for in an explosion of personality. I won't beat around the bush here, but Yuta was a sex robot who'd eaten up too much of my first gig's resources and time with his hardware glitches. I felt bad and now he lived in my house, annoyingly so, humping my leg when I woke up in the morning and spending the days crocheting scarves by my seldom-lit fireplace, proof that allowed me to breathe with relief. I could never be accused of sociopathic tendencies this way, if only people knew he wasn't my roommate or doting housewife. He took one look at me and said, "did you know that one cigarette burns five minutes off your lifespan?"

I pushed past him, but to my horror, he was still there. He followed me to my kitchen island and watched as I slapped some stale nutella on a cracker. The knife was already used but still, my stomach called out to me and cited my disinterest as a prelude to my denial— it went undenied, despite myself and my own reverse psychology. "What's that gotta do with anything?" I said, crunching(and glaring, lest it go unassumed in Yuta's presence).

"Just some motivation," he said. When I looked to my side, his face was no longer hovering by the crook of my neck. Distantly, the noise of the tv washed into the room and some B-lister woman began a drone, maybe related to the dangers which were creeping into the circulation of pop culture at the moment, and even so I knew Yuta could hear each time my bites grazed my tongue as his ears were running on something wild, so out of my reach and my own constellations and lost on the brink of another galaxy, that one could tell just from the way I'd described it that I'd never been the guy to develop the senses.

"Unwarranted motivation. You know I smoke to look cool," and this part was true. In theory, I smoked because the smoke had made itself comfortable around the vitals of my interior, but I liked to believe that it was still a matter of looking nice when the opportunity presented itself, and a list of simple pros that amounted to a coast ride until I'd end up caked in hospital sheets. Firstly, you can evade non-smokers at functions by escaping dredges of common sense with a stick of fucking tobacco, an empty space. Secondly, it turns me on when attractive people smoke and the thought of the same effect applying to me is even more attractive somehow. Thirdly, it's something to do. Simplicity had some space on my mantelpiece. I hadn't been a fan of minimalism when it was first birthed out of lack of confidence, perhaps causing its own developers to grow cathartic over drying paint— but simple pleasures were simple pleasures and cheap thrills were cheap thrills and fast food was objectively better than any other shade of grease. Elaborate pleasure may be a favourite of mine, but I knew when the application of it couldn't wrap around into 'worth it'.

Yuta was scared of mortality. He never said it, but when I took the time to shift the placement of how I viewed the situation, when I became the creator and he became the lab rat, it was as obvious as any scientific truth that the thought of my eyes dimming made him feel lost. Perhaps he was scared of the immortality just as much. He'd never been more self-centered than any other man, but he surpassed the other models in this category; it wasn't out of the question that he thought about himself a fair
amount. In any case, he liked to tell me to quit smoking every day. Sometimes, to quit shaping myself into a work horse- ironic. "But then you wouldn't exist," I'd say. His adoration for me hadn't reached the skyrocketing levels any other scientist would expect.

"I guess," he'd say, and then he'd begin stripping down to the briefs. He always wore black pairs, perhaps as some fourth law of robotics which Isaac Asimov had missed out the first time around on account of being straight, or with a moral compass tucked away into the breast pocket of his lab coat. I wasn't known to wear these, you see- no compass for me. Though it wasn't like robots could offer consent back when old Isaac was weeping into the case of a calculator.

I wandered out to the sitting room with half a mind to believe I was still under the influence of a clean cut friday night. The girls and I- Dream Team Gleam Butterfly Flower Power We Can Do It! - had made some significant advancements in the touching up of eyelashes, and our current test subject Lindsay Newton looked more human in the same way that kbs truly didn't affect the quality of music. Still, it seemed to be an occasion worth drinking to. We were maintaining the baton in its sterile whites, strengthening our metronome until it adjusted to business levels through scenery and immersion alone, and soon the pace would speak in a language we couldn't understand through lexicon and burst bubbles and all that company jargon. Yuta was watching a recorded tape of MTV Cribs and laughing at how much more the hosts understood than him in regards to the world. This tape was one we'd dug up from a secondhand shop- more accurately I had, as it was on the quays in some dead end Busan division, and he had a crippling fear of water and thus avoided it in the kilometers.

"Can I fuck you?" I said, less spur of the moment than I was letting on. He looked at me over the back of the sofa. It was leather and black, by order of some greater gothic ghoul within me, all the g's in place when the timing was right; glam overtook another part of me where the butterfly wings had free reign over my motor control.

"Well, you already know the answer to that."

And so I fucked him, though this might be a redundant thought to add above all else. By the time I was done it was nearing four in the morning and even then, I knew that pillowtalk would be the thing to throw me into a coma, not the rational exhaustion which was irrationally lost on me. The lights had been off all night and all morning. Yuta clung to me as usual, and I remember, maybe with that distinct routine, whining about Yukhei. It had escaped me that this might be a cruel thing to do.

"I don't see why he wouldn't like you," said Yuta, charitable as he could be with the added degradation of ruffling my hair- to think that I had fucked him and not the other way around. I'd never felt more delicate in my life, swayed to my knowledge that I had unrequited hots for the receptionist. In this day and age, we were seeing the gender roles become flipped and mirrored, and now women tied their accomplishments to their underdogs, binding rings and all that- Yukhei was the pretty little thing and I couldn't help but find this movement justified by the deep slumps of history. "Unless he's straight."

I snorted and felt a bit better by such an honest admission. "He thinks of me as a superior, and not by anything remarkable or forthcoming, but rather by the zeroes in my salary and the absence of them in his."

"Be more approachable," Yuta suggested; not if I didn't want to come off as an uncle. If I was lucky, Yukhei would have marginal workarounds in the pursuit of money, and a minor one on the list would be the fact that I have a dick and am only two years older than him. Then again, gold diggers seemed to think that old people were easier to manipulate. Perhaps I'd try a bald cap. As far as I was concerned, it was all fair game for fear that the work house would transform into no man's land.
before my very eyes, when the new guy transferred in and Kahei would try her arms at grabbing his
and the rest of the girlos would go stir crazy inside their ball and chain loneliness pens.

It became increasingly odd that Yukhei hadn't hooked up with one of them yet. How would I know,
right? Well, I can assure you that the girlos share everything with each other, and by default of the
universal laws and the mannerisms I adopted, I was one of them too. It was hard not to hope-
sometimes I allowed a sliver of it when the days were at their darkest, when his attire replicated this
trend in such a way that framed his body too well. It had been little over four months since his
employment and yet I was a rejection away from sacrificing chickens in his honour.

When I tilted my head, Yuta was out cold and I was presumed to be through a split second without
biting down. I scraped myself away from him and went to the kitchen with the faint calling of the
ghost of hunger past at my conscience.

Haseul, ever the hard worker, was having what the rest would portray as a 'rendez-vous' with
Lindsay Newton to discount her advancements within the field rather than upon the midriffs of club
girls, shield it from the eyes of the general public(read: GP in the soft hands of the girlos). I was
trying to figure out what was so different about her when she took a sip of her vanilla frappé and
some liquid lipstick smeared onto the straw; bright red, almost unwearable in the free reigns of
independence, without parents to dictate what they should've continued to dictate. Straight from the
racks of Hot Topic, she was wearing a full face of makeup. All of this surprised me but I stayed
quiet, not through her intimidation tactics that went undervalued within the dishwasher tray of her
flaws, but rather because she had a timid chemical structure and would dissolve before me, leaving
me to direct all dustpan related wishes to god and scoop her ashes up with my bare hands.

"It's ridiculous," she said, eyes sweeping over Lindsay- this was the same mundane event which
occurred at least five times over by now and I'd arrived little over a half hour ago. She was the only
one present for this arrival, and had shown me a picture of Jinsoul from her own cousin's resident
block party that began as a fall carnival love affair and ended well into the night, crows picking at
gutter fries and free-the-soles clampering about in their strappy footwear. I didn't like to conspire
before an absence of audience, but Haseul had long since dropped the marble in regards to- hear me
out here, what I believe- might be a transfixion with Jinsoul as a body of regality rather than a body
of bulk scientific work. Jinsoul was the minx, as I'd said earlier, and had the one sided soulmate
virginites of at least ten men strapped to her Moschino belt. She generated an onslaught of 'who's so-
and-so in the fourth aisle with the huge tits and long hair' whenever science journalists uploaded
photos to a terribly formatted slideshow website passed off as the word of the anti-god organised by
the columns, the bright loops of ribbon banners and the date. Haseul was in a vulnerable position if
so; vague sense of guarded, what with the fact that Jinsoul incited sorrowful jealousy within her
entourage, but perhaps the thought that she was unattainable could be comforting. Regardless,
Haseul kept her private matters close to her chest, now adorned by a gold charmlet cut to read her
own name. "So much necessary advancement and we still can't perform human testing."

I had no strong opinions on the matter, as some timid creature that resided in the tubes of my lungs
had long since dictated that the only matters I found myself involved with were those of the brain, the
tissue, no fishing line or trippies or politics but rather the physical examination of intellect and the
imitation reversing its own meaning. "Did you read about that cat in Brazil? They embedded a chip
in its brain to make it suicidal."

"-and it leaped from the facility's balcony. Yes, I've heard," she said, smiling at me with a marginal
amount of smugness. She was no stranger to it, though I haven't dropped the gavel so harsh on her as
of yet- I was treading lightly in terms of her flaws for fear of getting my foot trapped in a skull. If I
tripped with enough force, gravity would have my hands pulling at the curtain until the foulness was exposed through the shadows with the light hitting it from every side.

"Ah," I said, tight lipped in turn. "Still. It landed feet first."

"They say it was prodded off the balcony as it is. I hear people calling it inhumane, and I think, well of course it's inhumane; it's a fucking cat."

This struck me as a bit apathetic on Haseul's part, especially after having seen the streamlined news website on my phone reporting such a tragedy; they had a tile of cat photos with no intrigue when one took away the knowledge that the thing's ugly, scratched up ears now resided in a pet cemetery, half gravel and half cartilage. If I had it my way, we'd all be arch androids before life could claim us and set us down the white carriage, the lace stroller of unearned status on account of niceties.

Why shouldn't we harm others, when did humans gain a right to righteousness?

She grew sick of Lindsay despite all the proclamations of dating around the flat hands, and nudged the outlet with the tip of a converse until it powered off and killed Lindsay's memory bank. It always freaked me out to think about how a coffee run could affect the emotional state of something so deeply. I'd forgotten to ask, but the imprint of Haseul's makeup was going stir crazy in my douser and began to reap all forms of havoc as she turned to look at me. I could very well have seen the lasting blender print of pink foam and white powder and primer collecting around her ears like sweat, within the confines of some London fashion week article wherein each look featured was designated towards photos and dubbed 'unwearable'. How avant garde. Was she a genius with her makeup, or incompetent to the point of becoming a subject matter- what the designers imitated before a dark green chopping board? I picked a box stanley knife from the tray and wondered whatever it was there for in the first place.

Passing the mirrored walls of a corridor, she said, "oh god, my makeup's ruined. So much for two days out of one application. I look like a horror movie antagonist."

"That's not inherently bad," I said, thinking about Suzy in Suspiria. I hadn't grown close to the film industry through my years of cutting ties, but the thread was so out of the way and skinnied by the hair that it wouldn't do much use to say I hated the whole shebang and the fretful and monotonous conversations that occurred after each box office hit, sometimes the cult classics that were making bounds in financial trajectories to little acknowledgement, and so I had yet to proclaim my hatred for theater, as true as the case was. The corridor was long and empty and this caused Haseul's flats to reverb about the de facto walls, reminiscent of our very own original subject matter. Lesbians liked horror movies; this was a fact of life's skim. All it'd take would be a gingham jacket and a Buffy badge and a beret and Kahei would shut her conspiring trap.

"It doesn't suit me," Haseul said, perhaps also thinking about Suzy in Suspiria. "I don't have that weird, pasty look about me, you know what I'm saying? With the neck creases. Sometimes I think I don't have a neck at all."

I didn't dwell on this statement for too long, and most of this blatant ignorance lent itself to how eyecatching she'd be with the right retinas, marinated in the grace of god and classical upbringing which never resorted to the sea of gold and grey and pointiness of shattered classical music, the dirt caked pair of runners done in with the thrill of the hunt rather than the flight of prey. The loftiness of our corridor had me pinned, and it took an ordeal of utmost triumph to walk to the end of it without breaking into self-conscious tears. Perhaps, of being worn down to the bones upon arrival in the cafe of the station garage across the road. We went and encountered the rest of the girlos, posed over the freezer as Kahei threatened to buy a cornetto despite the streets being punctured with post-Winter, still. It was neverending.
"Oh, Jungwoo," she said, twisting the strawberry cornetto about so it carried the weight and functionality of a baton. She'd been maintaining a colour code on the rest of us for as long as I'd been working with her; she was pink, again driving home the fact that her pedigree status was one earned through the feathers of some sort of oblivious adoration for everything that skated by her line of sight, and it was blush pink too though she reflected a stupidity which allowed no room for embarrassment. I was the brown of the working man's tweed, back in Ancient Rome with a tunic to symbolise all my shortcomings. Haseul was red and black to show the world that Kahei had caught onto her strong willed lecturer aura with the niches left in the wake and never in the dust. For Christmas, Kahei wrote my card with a glittery brown gel pen and I opened it, sniffed to see if it was scented with unicorn shit, or if on the lower rack of branding, horse shit- they served as much a purpose as each other to embody the classroom's pigtailed girl. I hadn't stood in one for a noteworthy amount of time but the dynamics of a classroom never seemed to evaporate, even when willed to. The workplace was one for those who always had a calculator on hand during maths tests. Kahei was in the far back, stirring with the cuffs of her lazy sunday tops and the clock which was dying with how slow it had been forced to move, smacking some cherry gum and being the brunt of her teacher's vouchsafed AP advice- this was how I imagined her, out on the track field with the yellow-blue cheer uniform plastered to her back with sweat and the peppiness of a late nineties movie. When she spoke, the sound mixing would inevitably draw some charred bits out of it and I'd have to turn the surround all the way up. Jinsoul was in tow as she had a fleeting moment of sanity, examining the interior design magazines on the swivel rack. "Jin says I'll get a cold if I buy ice cream, but I wanted it so bad it's honestly unbelievable," said Kahei to me.

"You should get it anyway, que sera and all that- if you're going to fall devastatingly ill it might as well be during the peak of our work. Catch yourself a break," I brought the words of wisdom to the entourage, as seldom as it occurred I still operated beneath six heaps- first the smoking section plastic and then the self indulgent ignorance and then the willingness to retain my awful personality and so on and so forth- that it was an occasion born out of monotony through its frequency, and not through the existence it had, influenced from my good friend Nothing. I myself was considering calling in sick today, and had lied in bed with my feet going cold, going through the lowdown of strenuous vocal exercises to capture the bogs of nasalness within my voice; I definitely had it in me. My teenage years were my blunder years to no credit of uniqueness, and my nasal voice pigeonholed my status as one of the boyish charms. If I woke the beast, I could convince you that I was on my deathbed, and to buy store lilacs before the sudden rush of swine flu could invoke a flower siege throughout the country. It'd be a case where the Dutch tulip carried the economy of a first rate property and then the economy of an onion, as described by Ernest Hemingway. The florists would roll in cash while bankrolling designers.

In any case, I had showed up to work like the ash covered phoenix lured out from the fire pit, with a sense of accomplishment so empowering I had a notion that Yukhei might look twice when he arrived. I'd had a delusional fear that if I didn't show up he'd forget about my existence. If he were even to think of me, it'd maybe be some vision of a self-presumed visionary typing away at the postmodern novel that spoke volumes within two hundred pages. I was scared that he'd caught smoke of my manner of speech on Saturday at the beer garden and its undeniable pretentiousness. In my defense, it only came about because my father had found some merits within the classical journalism industry, and was coming home to lead by example, end the reign of 'youngster talk' and bring back formality to the strapped mannequins. My walk cycle claimed this mentality without my brain having the will to stop it, and soon I'd begun speaking with a bad breakout of thesaurus mouth just like the people I mocked. If Yukhei had noticed it(and he surely had) it'd be unbearable to the point of insanity, and I feared this morning that I might never recover from my stoop among the cement, and I'd have to marry myself off, making my heart unavailable for men like him due to minor emotional trauma. It claimed the most desperate of us, I supposed.
Kahei wasted our time immensely before buying the ice cream. On the walk back to the facility, she licked at it with a notable amount of smugness, and allowed it to dribble with dangerous proximity to the sleeves of her dress shirt. It seemed to me that those freezer ice creams weren't the type to melt beneath ultra hot desk lamps. Still, she'd consumed half of it and the concrete consumed the rest. "Yukhei!" she said, upon seeing the object of my infatuation at the desk, attracting zero interest from anyone besides me, inoffensive and the bearable, even stylish hints of nerdy and presentable before a board of IT directors- he sold the computer technician look well and gave it a good name, despite being the receptionist to an artificial intelligence facility which was stagnant in terms of aptness. His mere presence frightened me and muddied the waters of my self assurance- I was sweating and flushed under the operating lights, hogtied in the dark, taking on the appearance and musk and incompetence of a pig.

The girlos were no longer banded together, and had scattered themselves about their practical rooms which were only separated by difference in music taste and the agreeance that no one could stand to be around each other for too long. I stood next to Kahei still, and felt the phantom traces of a sunday mass suit itch against my neck. As a child, I had been insolent and living up to a wide array of stereotypes, from the ones detailing those with silver sticks up their asses to the ones about choir boys, but the untouched, dead horse had been left alone on account of the fact that my parents weren't hip like the rest of the artsy ones in the estate, and had flocked towards organ hymns and incense on sundays, possibly as a chance to wear hats that were otherwise too hard to get away with on the streets. Thing is, I'd grown used to that catholic guilt that plagued all things marble down to the baths in our very own homes, and this was an exact reflection of what I'd had prayed into me to replace other things which could also go inside. I was observing my defamation through a looking glass and when Yukhei smiled a feeling washed over me that it had come to me before in a dream- which was likely. I wasn't a teenage boy anymore, and even when my passport had been strewn in as backup I still had never been one. I was lacking in convention but still my wet dreams came as often as I did, twice a day on week days and in my waking moments during the weekends. I was fond of sleeping them away. Of course, fucking Yuta counts as masturbation, otherwise the whole concept of sexual bragging would be cheating with a front of elastic, and the characteristics of a fleshlight had still made themselves into a form of personality on the microwave dish, though he wasn't so inhuman and pink and rubber. In other words, if I poked him, he wouldn't flobble about.

Kahei was saying something about her terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, molded over the prospect of eating ice cream when she knew all too well that there were old people all over the country without the immunity towards absences, whether it be of humans or temperature, and had been reported to have died slow and blissful in their apartments with their throw blankets serving preemptively as stretchers. Yukhei seemed to give a shit about the details. By the time she'd finished describing the tendrils of the melting process with some glee- however could it be accomplished with the frost- he was absorbed to the soap opera, and had long since given up on breaking the eye contact without being obvious about it; transfixed, a detached version of myself could say. I suddenly got the sense that I was never intended to be a part of the conversation. However, my envy was the size of a fist and it ringed the life force out of me into a horrible, stubborn, spiteful gloop of a liquid which only resembled a product of human life by the parallels between its disgustingness and sweat. I couldn't leave, because if I left, I wouldn't be here in my front row seat to the Kahei gossip show and subsequently the Haseul losing-end-of gossip show and Yukhei would'n be the tentative audience. Sometimes the depths of my own bad decisions astounded me. What I found particularly startling, was the fact that my infatuation had dragged on so long despite my never having talked to him before. Long live the impulsiveness.

"You could say I regret it," she said in reference to the ice cream, again, which reminded me that the Kahei Show was going forty seasons strong despite her only being twenty eight- still the oldest out of the pack of us, the young adults being ushered through a cloak room full of cobwebs in
anticipation for the big three-oh, and despite this it was an ongoing anomaly that we hadn't died of old age within the world of diapered entrepreneurs and their sinamay safety pins. I was withering inside my amber shell, and I'll leave it up to you whether that means I'm a beached sea turtle or a snail living up to similar crash landings. Does it matter anyway?

"It wasn't the smartest decision in the world," Yukhei said, grinning with his inclusion in the supposed humour of the situation. It was a goddess bestowed microphone and center stage suited him well. Being under the full attention of Kahei was an experience that lead many to change the wording to 'being beneath'; it was like having the lense of a panopticon slide over you by tired yet precise hands, and each habit of yours was noticed, but the catch laid in the fact that there always existed the possibility that it wasn't. Despite myself, I was indeed in awe of her aura. "Well, I figure it's not snowing anymore, so there's always that," he figured. Inwardly, I willed him to speak to me. Telepathy didn't exist but neither did his attraction towards me and both of these facts were upsetting to no end.

"I guess not," Kahei said.

And then she walked off. No, I kid you not, she just walked off. She had a tendency to shoot the lead arrows through people who would go on to doubt their own social skills, despite the fact that she was the sniper in the first place. She was unassumingly rude and unassuming and rude and gone. I observed Yukhei and he glanced at me. It almost escaped me that he'd gone red even though I was staring at him in the open sense of the word. I had no binoculars or shamelessness behind a root off a road or beneath the stretch of a shadow, and it was with deliberateness to my actions that I proceeded to watch, perhaps gaze when viewed by the right type of romantic, at him. It was just us and I felt serene- not that this hadn't happened before. Usually, we took to the weather to make the most of our clashing personalities. "She's a riot," he said while nodding towards Kahei's super imposed absence, and I thought- oh god, how embarrassing and wrong was that, huh? He was speaking just a tier above our age group in regards to my father's slang term animosity, and I half expected some form of leg warmer to materialise along the curve of his neck. Then, to my horror, I found myself endeared at the mere mental image of him wearing a technicolour sweat band. It'd push up his hair nice- when it was closer to the light, it could be swept up into the moth territory until it was no longer such a muddy shade of brown. Then, to my horror, I found myself endeared at the mere mental image of him wearing a technicolour sweat band. It'd push up his hair nice- when it was closer to the light, it could be swept up into the moth territory until it was no longer such a muddy shade of brown. I had this sudden urge to touch it that surpassed the playpen of my soul and transcended to some sort of ugly, cliche suppressing, and just like that my hand was kept at my side in a natural move made unnatural by virtue of the fact that I had even considered it a move in the first place. I was so worked up that blinking would take its toll on my mental state, and I'd never been good at chess so all of this was quite disconcerting- you must understand. Calculation was a first, second and third nature for me as a mathematician who couldn't quite work up the courage to overthink the theory of incompleteness, and the hat in the ring that said math wasn't as concrete as I'd first perceived. Neither was romance. I'd been going under the belief that it was too sacred for the footprints of my doc shoes to tarnish, and that I'd never find a way in without the designation of eternal smugness at the hands of being sought out by someone else.

As the curtain drops, metaphorically speaking, Yukhei was treating me to a patch of small talk before I could begin to flirt. Who am I kidding- I wouldn't anyway. "Were you already at the garage?" he asked, standing up behind the desk. He was a secretary, as you can imagine by the contours of his face; very pretty and more often than not, unfair amounts of placid when he was pushed to the state of boredom. I felt as though I'd read something on the matter of standing up before, that men do it as some sort of animal instinct to be on eyelevel. I had never thought this to be true, or even to be notable enough to expend a paragraph of ink on (ironic, I know) but now it made sense in that if I had the folds of one of those putrid hound lizards they'd fan behind my head now with trepidation. In
hindsight, my nervousness towards the prospect of talking to a crush was a lot more aggressive than the usual cut-here dashed scissor lines of cute blushing and I still don't know what that says about me. Perhaps if something's kind to me, if I'm struck over the head with the pleasurable experience of being transfixed with someone pleasant enough, then I develop a need to destroy it and thus myself. Or maybe I'm just, was just an absolute fucking weirdo. I dropped the psycho analysis with an idea that I was treating my mental state like that of one of our robot overlords.

"Yeah," I said.

He stumbled back, for what reason I couldn't tell. Perhaps the mere sight of my loose hanging threads had done him in in the laziness; it was monday and I'd stitched myself together limb by limb until most of my prosthetics had been accounted for. I woke up to a hand groping my ass and a dash of white heads along the line where my cheekbone should be found. Mondays were just as every day of the week, and that meant they took their toll on me and Haseul and never Yukhei- his worst day was wednesdays, and believe me when I say I've been looking enough to tell. Putting that aside, I'm sure his restlessness at these times must be visible from space, and just last week he'd washed up at his desk(his job wasn't even hard and still he acted the driftwood) with his Calvin Klein graphic print sweatshirt on backwards. "Ah, I was only asking because I guess I wanted to head over there now, haha," he said- this was all playing out in such a way that a zookeeper might emphasize with him dearly.

I raised both eyebrows and considered death. "Me too. I forgot to buy... chewing gum-" this was a lie as any other. To be fair, I'm sure the lies would collect by the lines of a window, leaking with spit, had I been presented with an opportunity to trade moral conduct for Yukhei's company at all times. I imagined it then; this was my small death worming its way through the flesh it'd claim, us two on a dinner date in a respectable establishment of the culinary arts- just fucking with you, I'd never call it that. What I do call it is irony. The thought of me and Yukhei across from each other was one replicated by real life, right now as I monologue with my vaguely self sabotaging mind, and there was something that gleamed about what reality would go on to forbid of me, the image of the candle lit dishes with cooked fish so white that the spleen laid silver and visible and ribbed by the strand, it tasted sweet and crisp and the red skin of the apple between my gums melted. I was in love with a scene; Yukhei with his elbow on the table in search of the line of causality without casualty, leaning over to tell me about the ins and outs of what would turn out to be a grand life(with me)- wouldn't that be something? Something creepy, perhaps. A beast was at the door and on the train tracks that I'd entangled myself with, gaining on me with a pace I'd never once imitated in the confinements of a P.E hall, jogging on the spot, a pace only Yuta could match as he ran out the door with his messenger bag whacking off his hips, out to rescue me from the claws of this terrible thing. It was of course tragedy overgrown and shielded by the rags of hair. If I let myself fantasise just enough, my brain would turn into fluorescent pink chewing gum and would double cross me for the hope that any of this was in any way realistic.

"Walk with me," he said, and in the look on his face I found the mercy of a savior that beckoned me forward. So this was what it felt like to worship. It was unhealthy and at ease with the presence of limerence, and for some reason the thought that I was feeling something so strong comforted me as I breathed the air in the reception and smelled linoleum, which I didn't think was something I'd ever taken the time to notice before. I followed him out the door, invigorated and fearful.

"It's what dreams are made of," Yuta was talking about tempura in what I'd deemed was an effort at a pep talk. It hadn't been falling apart, exactly, and the misplaced trust he put in me wasn't what I wanted him to put in me but it was nice to have someone care enough to bother with the white lies. The funny thing was that he didn't think he was lying, all the while talking me through possible
signals of Yukhei's requition for an array of scandalous matters. He lounged back and it made the brown faux leather of the chair creak just a tad- this was in effect due to its rubberness, too soft and easy to mold to ever have a place within the interiors of cars. "Wow," some sauce dripped off his fork in the long path to his mouth- he'd brought this upon himself of course. "Jesus, this place is great. We should come again some time."

"Us two, yeah," I said, though it came out as if the breath was being taken from my lungs by force. It was a great disappointment that I'd anticipated leading up to the moments of my eightieth miss of the mark. The restaurant was nice and the waiting staff were required to wear black through the influence of some fashion-oriented deity above, and it all went together with an appropriate dimness, an appropriate brightness in turn, though nothing for the nocturnal creatures to sharpen their claws for and just enough so that the shadows were cast with an opportunity to gleam, and all of this was pleasing in the eyes and not in a rather sore part of my brain, which was dedicated to boring Yukhei related fantasies. The tempura didn't have the silvery, slivery strands I'd thought of during this morning’s exit left. I ate it regardless- of course I did, I'd smothered my fussy eating habits by the time I turned twelve and began staying at other people's houses- and played out a scenario in which Yuta transformed into Yukhei before my very eyes, possibly several times, though I wasn't keeping count. It disconcerted me to find that the vision of Yuta ceasing to exist was disconcerting. I hated to admit it sometimes but the plating of his elaborate form was attached to my skin, and this was a roundabout packaging where I'd turned the emotional to the physical. How typical of me to say this. "Hey, watch-"

He swiped some of the sauce off his(my) jeans with a loose tissue. "You should come here with Yukhei," he said, terribly selfless in that we both knew he was somewhat enamoured with me. I wasn't sure if he knew that I knew, but if such was the case it had little weight in his matters of justice and where he believed happiness should be allocated in the food chain, and he remained the sole person I'd met who'd carried through with the notion of loving and letting go. To my dismay more than his, it wouldn't be so much of a case of me leaving him for distant gardens full of unnatural and bright poisons, but rather I'd stick with him in the confinements of the sinking ship; we truly were in this together. Maybe I'd fuck him later, and pretend to myself that I was hate fucking someone who deserved the brunt of my hormonal teenage rage. "What kind of food does he like?"

"God, if I knew that I'd practically have his hand in marriage, in America at least." I decided I needed a smoke. Pulling my casing towards me- the aforementioned burnished one, its mouth was less snappy lately as I'd gotten over my eternal rut in regards to shopping or even leaving my house aside from picking up the heaps of takeaway I consumed every month- I wondered to myself if Yukhei smoked. Last weekend, if even I could recall the depths of its notoriety upon my mantle, I'd seen him in the beer garden and he hadn't seen me. He'd been alone and perhaps passing through, though I must say the smoke had evaded him if anything. His dress shirt was so white I'd expected the Colgate toothpaste presenter to get beamed down from space. Or, wherever they kept those archandroids, and to present an electric toothbrush as a wand while waving it about. So there you go- not even the grey sat itself into a layer on his clothes.

Yuta came with me and we stood in the tanxi bank without sticking a hand out once, aside from his performance piece on the episode of MTV Cribs he'd ignited in the hearts of the people earlier. He'd made three scarves while I was letting my spinal chords collapse over a desk at work and had presented them to me with haste. I'd said I liked the shimmer of the blue crochet one; shell patterns with some waxed yarn, and I knew then he'd beg me for another shipping of spools so he might complete some shipping between himself and the old ladies loitering about the city. I smoked myself into an early grave while he watched, clearly uncomfortable but too timid to say anything- or perhaps I possessed a temper that passed a degree of bad and set things on fire, mercury expanding until the glass tubes burst. In this ordeal of him telling me to quit, I had yet to blow up and was instead playing the part of weary, even jaded. The taxis slowed before our spot on the pavement then
"Smoking kills," Yuta said as he looped a scarf around his neck. It was pink and chunky, one of those types that were spliced into such a niche category that there as more of a hope in finding the gap between barbed wire knot, rather than a market for the gaudiest item of clothing I’d ever laid eyes on. We must rule out the male population, and despite the fact that pink is strength in the form of a pantone, it seemed that there were still resignations when it came to wearing it. So out of the women, we rule out the fashion minded ones and are left with people who probably work from home. These people obviously don't need to mummify themselves out of the cold and thus our lead is cracked beyond the peering.

"Christ, you must be tired. No statistics for me today?" I flicked some ash off my cigarette and felt incredibly lonely and incredibly grateful all at once. There was something about the thought that if I were to literally fucking kill someone, upon the least desired form of confessions in relation to the household man, Yuta would jump to spend some time in my company, as he kept look out and I buried the body. But even so there was a ghost that hadn't let up just yet, I'd tremble while it told me that unconditional love was reserved for those with no bearing on batons and those whose moral high grounds were below sea level and above all else, those who were subject to puppy love. Yuta had captured this resemblance since he'd blinked on the operating table. His eyes weren't greased closed but rather greased open; he thought himself to be twenty five but mentally he lead me to believe he was nineteen, physically there were so many parts it was hard to calculate- none older than four years in a storage container with bubble wrap stretched to the literal bone. "Well, alright... let's get you home."

To my knowledge, the crops along South Korea's caved marrows were thriving for once in their collective lifespans and the people were happier because of it. Clouds had parted to a grave extent somewhere, and when the hands of god transcended existence they picked me to bless for once in my damn life. My white heads fell off in the shower and Jinsoul had cut ties with her scathing manner of speech; on the horizon, there was a new vision in the eyes of believers in the red string of fate, and I'd picked the slack from the spool and was holding it with two hands in the air, finding some glee rather than leverage or envy that Haseul and Jinsoul were getting along, spending more time around each other and had shaken the long-neglected black polished chips of their shoulders. I suspected they were fucking, and the fact that they were both women made me giddy- not in a dick hardening way so much as a, holy shit the government was wrong about us, we do exist! way. But really, this wasn't enough to flounder beneath circumstantial evidence and label it as the grace of god. I wasn't religious and to prove my point further with some present tense, I'm not religious, never have been, and I can't see the future but I highly doubt I will be, believe me when I say this. However, Yukhei had began engaging with me in casual conversation each morning. In every coat I owned(not many; I was always a subscriber to the belief that one should let clothes breathe, rather than smother them with the usual old double lined felt that's been in this season, and every season of a similar nature since perhaps the dawn of time- bypassing the requirement of sewing machines and existing regardless) there were the wrappers of tire gum. I don't even think I've had tire gum since I was in elementary school, so there you go. More often than not, as I chewed it without pause when restrained by my desk and my desire to 'work hard', it'd get stuck in my teeth and I'd have to pick at the gum with the inner workings of a ballpoint pen until it dislodged itself.

I'd walk in and Yukhei would be there with the usual semantics, pretenses of a balancing act between the handling of calls and the handling of Kaheis, and he'd call out a charming 'hey!' and I'd think, good god I've done it again. What am I wearing? Is it the clothes, or is it the fact that my skin has diluted into clearness and greyness combined? In the coming months, such has been the case, even though I wasn't working around a Korean skin care routine like my good friend Jaehyun was. I
couldn't fault him for basking in the face masks of his girlfriend. He'd become a disciple of good skincare, and had proceeded to pester me about it for days on end to the point where he grew defensive when I asked if he'd been recruited into a pyramid scheme. Perhaps my severing of arms with him in lately- when he wasn't working he was letting up that he was, and we met only once a fortnight to discuss soap operas over drinks- had done its reversal of damage upon my appearance. Perhaps my eyes were glazed with all that stupid wonder I'd come to possess and now I appeared more feminine- if I was Yukhei in more ways than one, I'd like them pretty conforming to the fact that I myself am pretty. He walked with me to the station garage every morning and talked about dreadfully lofty topics that floated along the pool water. This was all agreeable to me, having been willing to cut throats for simplicity's sake in the past. I took a dip in the surface and felt the chlorine lavish at all my wounds gained from decompression disorder, and found some schadenfreude at my own expense, miracles working over the shallow ends of the tiling.

"It seems like I never see you at the faculty's drinking nights- why is that? You know you shouldn't feel like you don't belong just because you're not a scientist. Many great people weren't scientists and still they take shits like the rest of us," I paused to marvel at my own weird word choice, the slog mixed with a deplorable form of eloquence, then dropped down to a crouch to survey the bottom rack of papers as I did every morning. I've long suspected this garage of putting sponsored magazines at eye level so as to attract the old people, utilising techniques one could credit to the drawing of bulls by the colour red. All the faces that curved on the rack were shiny; part due to the lamination of the cover sleeves and part due to the real surgery they'd undergone. It left some room to dwell over the merits of such alterations. I knew Jinsoul had some surgery performed but I hadn't come around to figuring out why a scientist needed such a thing- maybe that was her method of learning to live with herself. It wasn't botched but sometimes between blinks her eyelids would fold the wrong way.

Yukhei snorted somewhere behind me. "It's not because you're scientists, you know. Not everything's a direct effect of your career-" this was news to me. I hadn't realised that there were things about me that had yet to be discovered by the temple master himself. It bothered me how he could speak with some humour, some direction, and that he was mocking me so mildly it was almost like words exchanged between friends. Perhaps this was a good kind of annoyance though, as it lead to his continued rant about the system we'd carved from what could've been aluminium and caffeine and nothing else. "It just feels like the rest of the girls," he cringed at his own implication and picked up the pieces, "don't really wanna bother with me. Which I guess is fair enough."

"I suppose they don't have to engage if they don't want to," I said, which was true, and I was still summoned to the horror show without getting caution tape clung to my skin, though it had ghosted through the presence of my muscle and I knew this as a fact- I had been handed a brush and a map key for the sections of Yukhei's problems and previously I had thought this was a luxury reserved for those who grew attached to others, had been grown attached to. Observing myself, there were no scars made from doing obscenely, stupidly immature stuff with friends as a teenager, and no traces of glow from the knowledge that people needed me to exist as a functioning body rather than a skeleton, two meters below the ground or maybe even below sea level. It was as if no one had bothered to pull the plastic throw off me and my leather was expiring without blooming first. Within Yukhei's words, it could be extracted that he'd developed enough trust in me to gossip by exposure- and if he was a gossip hound, I would've been clued into this by now through the blood lust and snake lust of the girlos. He trusted me. We stepped outside and he unsheathed an umbrella from where it had been tucked under his arm, and the water ran down its spout at such a pace that lead to constant dribbles off its lip. The walk was maybe twenty meters. For twenty meters, I was embarrassed- the umbrella made me feel old and oblivious to the impression it cast, subconscious or otherwise. He was trying tremendously hard to shield me away from the rain too and his arm kept shifting closer to my cheek, and if I had looked up I'm sure the distance between our noses would've
had me boxed off to some asylum, where all the women ironed their pet cats and all the men drew neanderthal-esque pairs of tits over their dormitory walls. I didn't like to dwell on his height often, but sometimes in the darkness of Yuta's hold I'd think about his knees trapping my thighs as he thrust hard. They jutted out through his jeans; as a male secretary, he was required by a greater force of universe to wear light wash ones every day. Dark wash wouldn't do, and neither would lab coats on any self respecting scientist out of college, nor wires buried within synthetic human flesh- we'd figured out how to hide signs of technology on the form of the robots so long ago, and still it seemed to be a shadow by satan's door to make an attempt at this. Manufacturers were creeping about with binders folded into their bellies and as they creeped they saw opportunity rise for a word in edgewise, proposing the idea that robots had the right to know what they were. I had thought that this was some sort of budding robot patriotism that one could find in the pages of a twenty first century sci fi novel. Though, to be frank with you and in turn myself(not through relation, rather through narration), they didn't give a rat's ass about what I of all people thought, and lawmakers across the planet were throwing the professional opinions to the wind, bankrolled through another coastal Southern European holiday by the hands that fed them. If the graze was there through blanked fingers, what was a self made man to do but to go along with it? And here I stewed, a product of extended education that elongated through the stratosphere, not self made nor a skin of plexiglass molding when willed to.

"I hate my job," Yukhei said quietly, perhaps in the hopes that I mightn't hear him, perhaps in the hopes that I would- either way he'd thrown his hat into the ring and now it was my move to make. I was reminded once more that romance consisted of the pillars of attraction, so well placed that the adjoining numbers of a chessboard lined up with my stress aches at night. The automatic doors of the facility slid open for us and I caught our reflections for that golden second. Of course, I looked no closer to death's door than I had last week, but in spirit I knew it was somewhat the opposite- the calories of my takeaway had begun reaping what all that dry duck had sown and my life was being fucked with. I had complained about having misplaced cheekbones but now they seemed embedded beneath my pasty skin, ghoul esque in such a way that I was ready for the shaky cam and the subsequent place in iconhood and cult of repellarity and pop culture. My eyes would poke out from above my white sleeves for two seasons on the movie posters, and ticket sales would fizzle down but in the years to come they'd label my horror flick as a sleeper hit. I'd be the star.

"It seems boring," I said, wishing that what I'd said was something that'd resonate with him; that he'd find it most agreeable. The facility was quiet but there was always the sound of metal breathing in the foregrounds. It was easy to ignore when one took into account that we were polluting the noise too with our lungs, and for some off the loose outlets, smoke at the back ends of the building where the windows overlooked flats, and the ash would catch the breeze, resurface in tinted layers on the laundry hampers of house maids who'd had their hand forced to become house maids with little to no gain. "I suppose hating our jobs is the company motto, after all."

Yukhei laughed at that; so ugly and boyish it was ringing the tears from my otherwise unimpressed heart. He shook the rain off his umbrella all over the linoleum floors. It was late enough in the day that my lack of work conduct was disgraceful, and even moreso a deadline credited to what had been so foul it tarnished the rest of me and became my life purpose, but I suppose that there are times in life where you must choose between two evils- to me this was more of a detour, a sabbatical from all the work I had yet to flash the torch through. The meat of its taxing effects was oily and they flared in sputters. I kept an elbow on the desk as I talked the rest of the day away with Yukhei. He picked up a call from a more persistent line and went wide eyed, and this was towards the graveyard shift in our establishment of slackers so there was no shade and all dimness; his pupils flashed with something only a dormant yandere(yet I couldn't deplete the idea that if it really came down to death- not lashed out on anyone in particular, but rather as a stage of being- I'd rather die for my lover than kill for them, as this way I didn't have to get all that waxy blood on my hands. Even if I used a clean
method like asphyxiation, I knew that whenever I looked downwards I'd see the wax swelling with heat rather than dissolving. More worryingly, I'd develop an awful association with choking and death, and wouldn't be able to jam the curve between my thumb and index finger against Yukhei's throat as I came inside him for fear of remembering) like me could notice. For a second, the thought that he looked quite robotic plopped a boulder right in my hollows. I was weighed and hesitant, watching him bow his head and his hair falling- as the cliche goes- so perfectly imperfect, it seemed above the strands of everyone else and not just because he was tall. His scalp was closer to the electrical lines slicing the city and thus his brain was more prone to catch the air between machines, the invisible waves of stuff that didn't move in waves. I assumed Hong Kong was much of the same hostile architecture and hostile aesthetic.

This was all bullshit, of course. To lay the joker face up; that just wasn't how androids worked.

"Oh, definitely," Yukhei said down the mouthpiece. He glanced at me, then looked. Odd - I was missing whole shades of my appeal with the downward thrums of the lighting and my recent weight gain and my eyebags had been collecting the blood, sweat and tears I thrust upon myself on the daily, never the fillers, empty, hollow, unappealing. My mother used to say I looked like Bambi. Now, I was the huntsman in the tweed. Still he watched me. "No, that's fine. It's just common sense really..."

The spiritual new kid was shipped over to us in a mercedes the colour of chocolate foil- this was a gift from someone, not a vital one bestowed upon themselves without the appropriate levels of tackiness or richness to pull it off. He searched for his keys before stepping out onto the dirt car park and Haseul turned away from the window to convey her disgust, perhaps I thought, at the idea that this guy would dare to stir up the repressed sexuality of the girlos. "Get a load of this," she said in such a way that made me realise I was more a girlo than her for the sixtieth time in the coming months. She was referring to his haircut, adorned fresh and crisp by actors in a constant affair with hair mousse. Perhaps she hadn't realised that this guy didn't shove an appendix up his ass and beg in the innocent connotation for the job, and instead he was more than likely skilled at what his designated life suppressant would be. "I bet he's rich."

"If I was rich I wouldn't come near this place," I said, and she snorted. He'd stepped out of the car now and glanced back at his reflection in the window, picked at his face. I couldn't see the damage, or what would lead him to do so, but already I knew it was for some humanity deemed shallow, some milk skimming on the froth rather than, say, a case of heroin shakes.

By some crueler means, we were introduced to each other through the midst of a coffee trip on my end of the hesitant line. He had his coat on indoors and it was slim in such a way that had me suspecting that he too, might be slim, and when he extended a hand out for me to shake, the beams of the beer garden began materialising overhead. His name was Dongyoung and he liked jazz soul; concerts were just thrilling enough to get him melded in the feet, shoes scuffed on a level that had drained the weight out of messy and had become a downright accomplishment, but he was just boring enough that singing was a pass time held near and dear to that little bump of masculine blood clot on his heart, feeding him up to the size of a pig that lay on its side with its belly stuck to the pen's hay. He didn't like a 'sportsball' but he remained an avid knucklehead regardless, favouring the brand of arrogance found in online music 'critiquing'. Lots of air quotes here but only because I wanted to punch any notions that I might've phrased such things in such ways. When he dried his hands with the perfunctory paper towels and the dryers, he reminded me that I too was arrogant. In my defense, if we didn't have it bred into us as filling rather than genes, there'd be no hope for some of the losers on the planet. Maybe all of them. The pandora's box was forever obnoxious as a citation, but we couldn't envelope the good traits without also taking the arrogance that came with these things. He
told me that there were some hindrances in taking on such a career, hostile on the turf of a neglected astro pitch- I reminded him that, "it's not a battle ground really. If you beat me to death you're still no closer to deserved pay."

He hummed as if I had said something introspective, though the statement didn't wear its way into my mental loops- not especially, perhaps not at all. "You're all so extravagant," he said, pausing over the washed ash tray filled with toasted peanuts. The salt clung to the edges, and in the u-booth there never seemed to be enough to spread, but still if Jeungeun coerced a blind person into sitting with us, the thought might go through his head that he was facing the restless waters on the edge of a cliff, factory fumes persevering through the rot of rusted lobster pots and heavy duty rope. As it was, she kept searching through the small crowd of social acceptance electioneers in the bar; her eyes were drawn to the movements of some bartender in all his stiffs, and she had her hair so perfectly placed that the other woman waiting by the hollow door frame would envy it. She wasn't listening to us.

I shrugged. "You're only saying that because they dress well." This much was true, and I didn't have the care or competence within me to pile on the flattery. Haseul and Jinsoul had cleared off long before this conversation took place; Haseul seemed hesitant in the presence of Dongyoung anyway, as it goes she shook his hand and made a face at me when he wasn't looking, I assumed because his hair gel was applied in such generous amounts that at first glance I'd thought a seagull was having its dying breaths on his scalp, compact and slick with a deplore of black oil. It reeked too, but not in a way that forced my nose to wrinkle- I'd never been prepped for incisions before but it gave me that feeling when I turned my head. I did so, hands finding the blocked imprint of my case through my coat pockets.

"You do too," said Dongyoung, to my great surprise. I decided I liked him well enough with some ideas that flattery allowed glass stock in people. Two days ago, he'd caught my eyes as I lit up a cigarette two steps out the door, and he seemed posh but not unruly- his shelter had been made of straw growing up, yet it was comfortable and a middling yellow, certainly not enough to send a kid up the walls, and so he'd never broken the hearts of his parents by tying himself to the railways as they thrashed about, never felt the burn of 'substance abuse'. It occured to me that he was just poor enough; of course he'd be preening at the sight of who he'd thought was a well made man smoking his way out of work. Well made man, sure, a snort- my infrastructure had crashed before him. Jeungeun departed. Neither of us begged her to stay, and so she was eyefucking the bartender under the impression that she wanted a virgin sex on the beach. The thickets of people reminded me that Kahei was here somewhere, sucking the blood out of one of them through his bravado and then through a premature scab on his neck.

"Don't tell me you feel out of place," I said, amused by the thought more than anything else. "I'm really nothing special, all the ex business majors look like me. I just need a skin care routine- then I can start an advice column.

"Kahei would do well with that," he said, which made me actually laugh. I'd never thought about other people thinking about her, but she was as gorgeous as the rest of us, tumbling about a sea of sirens without any of the vocal theatrics or slalom tricks or acrobatics, face cut up from a photoshopped rookie shoot. She'd been wearing a black cocktail dress and her hair sprung up to incite jealousy among poodles, and when we walked in, the veiny disarray of civil workers had turned their heads in the admiration of assets rather than the package- only men captured this look so down putting and throbbing with bad intent. Her limbs weren't visible in the gaps between the lot of us and it was growing apparent that she'd left with a fistful of tie, palm laid flat for the lookers to eat out of.

Later on Dongyoung and I searched for a taxi for dozens upon dozens of seconds. He got antsy when the cabbie slowed the refurbished Toyota in front of a run of the mill officetel, and got out to
Rich kid, maybe, but not anymore. Some wrinkles of a fall from financial immortality had begun to show. I wondered quietly, what he'd done to get his green drip ripped from his arm, bandages trailed with blood. It was nearing midnight and Yukhei stayed at the back of my mind; for the journey the cabbie and I played off each other's adaptable levels of social impotence and formed a nice back and forth, discussing the values of the alcohol I had tonight, and when he pulled in at the complex, I smiled at him, tipped him, sent him off on his merry way with a wave and a pound of gratitude that had flipped off the redundant. Up the stairs, I had hummed the scraps of some distant melody I had yet to remember, possibly from the jazz soundtrack of the bar. In the flat, I greeted Yuta without finding him annoying, not in particular, and we watched the end of a recorded episode of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, content too impeccably human for him to get the last(or even first) laugh on.

Brushing my teeth, I scrolled through some news articles of a site I trusted with the miniscule degree of hesitance and found great comedy in the fear mongering about what was advertised as an 'upcoming' hurricane next week. In my bed, I broke down and cried about that fucking idiot Yukhei. No particular reason; quietly as possible, so not even god could hear me and convict me of sinful, idle fantasizing.

For a week, I tried with good intentions to wean myself off the desire I had for him. The play button required but a good wedge of distance, the foundations of which began with an act of self sabotage. I tried to forget. Dongyoung had reminded me that one could enjoy the company of others. He was a cypher for sure, and I knew as clear as day that I'd never get to swab the rust of inner workings, but I hadn't needed an upright posture or a black leather swivel chair to get me laughing in a gesture deemed out of character through mood swing alone. Dongyoung was a friend that I valued and kept at a hand's reach, which was more than I'd snagged since the social gracings of third semester college, on the brink of getting cut and tired as shit of class and ready to drown this out with the idea that independence was engraved on the napes of every human being. I had half a mind to introduce him to Jaehyun, I tell you- they were both that offbrand sort of double lined wallet, off kilter by mishap and damp eyed by tiramisu.

These were all the bulbs of grandiosity for someone so pathetic and- not quite in spite of myself, having a track record of losing the plot upon the slumps and bell jar curves of every facet of my life- I gave up. It was begrudging at first. My emails took time to sort through, I thought to myself. I could show up early and have them done by lunch- that way I could smoke out the shoebox bathroom window and sort through the paraphernalia for snowboarding; a hobby I would never pick up. The hurdles were ridiculous to set up for myself as I wasn't a networker, nor did I have any need to meld the sheep's clothing around myself. The preconceived ambition of a freelance tier of incoming emails had fallen flat the day of my high school's standardised testing. I was too smart to burn bridges like that, my father said, ever the dissuader.

When I was avoiding Yukhei, my mind took the cape as red and reigned in its lust for later use. In my head he was always a fingertip, a layer of denim, a ribcage away from me, breathing down my neck as I read through research surveys and saying I could do better as I examined Lindsay Newton's poorly designed form. I could do better, alright. I hadn't sucked a dick in a good year- why is that? For some straight guy?

In any case, the beams of my ceiling(in that it was composed of me and not my salary, the exact shade of cream my bones took on and my piss poor pain threshold when it came to needles) imploded in a move that dozens of brain cells all over the world had been anticipating. Yukhei really was too wonderful. He looked at me from across the dirt one Thursday morning, sun risen and unforgiving, and said, "we're not in any state to be going into work."
We never called but it was still a sickie. I had these phantom shivers where my tears would be blotting on my misplaced cheekbones later, because it was sick and pathetic that I’d fallen in love knowing I was as undesirable as I was. Any sort of reciprocation would first and foremost not exist, and secondly liquidate through a bat of my eyelashes. We went to an internet cafe and he paid for an hour, and as we sat there playing a rendition of Starcraft, I felt him fall through my fingers like sand. He had his eyes trained on the screen at all times. Through a series of wrist flicks, he joked about having, "carpal tunnel syndrome."

"You surely can't be playing it *that much*," I said, amazed at his unashamed slew of hobbies I had the tunnel vision about. I was definite about my stance on gaming as a profession or a hobby or a thing of pure existence, that it should be committed but not undone or announced, but this was what lead to the impressed razors sitting along my collarbones. The fade was pinning out around me, and he talked about his descent into what he described as a miracle in the form of methods by which internet creeps might converse, eyes wet from how little he blinked. That wouldn't happen to a robot- I told myself this much. Humans could love, but still he wouldn't love me; if he was a robot, at least I wouldn't have to resort to the confronting of myself and my awful arrangement of household flaws. He didn't move for a moment then.

"It's an escape," he said, perhaps to the monitor, suppressing some upset that maneuvered its way into his tone, "and it's fun."

He hadn't given me much to chew on there, though I was under the impression that with some incisions, he'd be flush with blood, chance of it appearing red withheld in favour of glossing over some sort of missing part of me. I don't know why I was so sure of this but I’d been born headstrong with a thick jut of the forehead marrow- in classroom debates I was picked for my ability to argue, and when the competition rose up to levels surpassing some throwaway private high school, I was failed for my ability to miss what was wrong with my arguments, almost every time. My friends thought I was glaringly stupid for this. Jaehyun still believed it, but of course the ruler wasn't destined to be held up against my semester of debating. It engulfed all, and at one point he refused to let me place the pizza order as I'd "fuck it up somehow, stupid." I watched Yukhei as the dredges of boredom jumped the proverbial starting gun. He wasn't boring me; I was simply bored by the situation. It was god's fault. If he was before me, I was certain I'd strangle him with a harp string as the fairy gold spit from the iron, caked my fingertips. Angels would crowd to lick my hands, and I'd proclaim it a delayed arrival of all those years I kicked off undeserving.

The hour rotted in a similar fashion as to how it peaked in the first place. It was too early to drink with any strand of casualness, and thus Yukhei suggested we window shop ourselves into early debt-ridden graves. My expectations were lower than my ambitions for all of this- he was wearing jeans, again and again and again, but still we toured the clothes shops with all the resemblance of teenagers skipping school. The angst puddled on his face, but sometimes through the midst of layer upon layer of tacky windbreakers, he'd smile, shocked with himself. Jesus christ, he was hot. My dick went on the very brink of hard when he waltzed out of a curtain-divided dressing room, features bending to fit the awful lighting, the blue of the carpet, in some skimpy pink velvet crop top I was sure I'd seen Kahei wear before. I'd never thought about it until that moment, but it occured to me that if I was straight she'd have me by a choke hold everyday. The square of his stomach was flat and soft, just thin enough that it allowed a reducted space for his organs to wriggle about in. One could wonder how they all fit slick together like that. What I wondered, was what he'd do if I advanced on him; a push behind the curtains so I was facing the mirror, so I could see myself lowering to my knees, taking him in my mouth, how he had a neck on me in height and then as his throat pushed to my shoulder, two hands peeling off that fucking crop top.

"Wow, I never thought something like this would *suit me*," he said in such a way that made it impossible to tell if he was joking or not. He leaned into the mirror, so close that he could see nothing
but his face and the clots of pores on his nose- they pissed me off to no end, as once I'd noticed everyone's noses were stained with blackheads it became an unavoidable, disgusting, greasy foundation of a face- and tugged at the hem. It drew down over his stomach and snapped back in place. I said nothing, though my place in the mirror was another example of a foundation tarnishing its feature. He must've seen me looking, and as my pride tore my dark liquid worry from my cylinders, I thought surely I hadn't been this bold before; the way his eyes flicked up from his hands to watch for a turn of the head, good god I hadn't known the role of a pervert could be quite so enjoyable, of a sex fiend or a club binger or a slut. With a step backwards, I broke the connection and felt that tension wash over my ligaments. They'd gone rusty from how little I tended to move. Well, they said you lose calories during intercourse, and lately Yuta had gone without his usual pleasure sobs, smothered by the pillows, and so I'd jammed in place. Yukhei rubbed at the satin and exhaled when it raised in ripples beneath his fingertips. "I should totally buy this," through the brief, ensued silence, he made a show of plucking the price tag from where it dangled at his midriff, read the numbers in the most purposeful of manners, inducing a presumption that he perhaps didn't understand the number system here. He was from China, after all. Hong Kong, Kahei said; they talked about life beyond the striking coolness of culture shock often, separate instances wherein they'd heard licks of Mandarin being spoken on the train or in the elevator up to a stingy hotel room, were enlightened with rightness in all senses of the word(never crossed into the righteousness territory, for as much as they argued over the characteristics of China as a landform it wasn't a human and didn't have these emotional entanglements) and a desire to revert all conformity they'd picked up . Being a foreigner is being expected to mold over time, to break all your limbs and fit, she'd said over a spoon of fried rice. At the time, it had astounded me to find there were types of people whose hands were flattered, in appearance, by the proximity of ceramic spoons. How disagreeably unfair and how disgracefully so.

"You should. I don't say this every day- well usually, I say these things at night- but it looks fantastic," I laughed nervously for the novelty and gimmick. However, I wasn't nervous. There was something serene about all that I was observing, in the manners of a breaking moment, and really, it had never been like this before. Perhaps with the inclusion of nervousness, it'd sweeten the packaging of tension and sell it better. All those bright colours rose with the helium to the top of people's heads. In actions deemed intentional, intentions deemed enacted, I was enforcing this magnetic simplicity... almost stupidity, but the kind that brought happiness to the children with square eyes and a satisfying life to the radiators of such one track minds. I'd practically laid my skeleton out before him, fluffed with dust bunnies from the fitted suits I kept in my closet, and now he knew that the attraction was there. There was morbid glee in how his eyes widened- perhaps in disgust, directed at me- oh joy! He knew I wanted to fuck him! My face had gone red and all! I'd really done it this time! The ship that had bottled in my gut was spiking out by the mast at such an oddity, as for once in my life my attraction towards men had been revealed by myself rather than whoever was at the end of the knife. This is a once in a lifetime cut in half by the proceedings; pay attention, capture it well so my eyes are bright and gooey and pretty as a doe's.

He murmured out some bland nothings while switching back to his graphic prints. By the 'mind the step!' sign outside, he came to a conclusion that it was darker than the clock had been lead to believe out among the study room transfers, daywalkers tapered in by a safety net. "I didn't realise the time was going by so fast," he scratched his head as he said it, muddy dog hairs flitting to the pavement in a worrying abundance. Whatever did he have to be stressed about? I pressed my lips together in self inflicted embarrassment, because why on earth would I know what he was stressed about in the first place? To god's utmost dismay(he'd been lending me a last chance by the foot of his throne, thereafter I'd start a slow descend into the garden of earthly resemblance for all the times I fucked Yuta without finishing him off when I was done), Yukhei had joined my courts as a stranger in the gallery and not as a component who'd spur on a notable case study. Nothing about him was particularly detailed. He grew up in a grasshopper infested set up in suburban Hong Kong, two As
away from passing a bar exam, and had been shipped off to Korea, 'pronto', for some educational procedures I hadn't the brain to understand. He played the part of an old dance teacher's instrument of eternal fantasy and youth when he got involved in some hip hop group. *He teaches b-boying but for ages seven to ten, so basically he teaches your average dumbed down “contemporary”*, Yukhei had said on the matter when I pressed him for more information- perhaps to talk more, rather than for any speculation to be dismissed. It turned me on that he knew how to dance like that and I was incredible amounts of ashamed at the time, but it didn't stop me from imagining him stretching before the towers of mirrors as the leans on his hamstrings tore and recomposed themselves, wearing a wifebeater and a pair of elastic safety shorts, like those of a girl's.

And whatever happened to this hip hop group?

A laugh, then, *I was injured. It wasn't really like, objectively fatal, but it still felt that way to me. I couldn't leave my room for weeks. It surprised me that people were asking after me, even though before, I would've assumed they would. My roommate got sick of me, and I just let him stew until he grilled me over it for a full hour. He broke a fucking plate over the table. I called him a pathetic asshole, picking on a sick guy, y'know? So.*

Video game obsessions always infested in feelings of inadequacy when they were fresh and bleached. In hindsight, this might've been some foreshadowing to his rendez vous with Starcraft earlier. His left ankle stuttered a bit when he put weight on it, and this was what he'd defined as a shit ton of time after the injury- the state of permanence was terrifying to me, who had cried for days when I spilled boiling tea on my hand as a kid and worried it'd blister and swell until the seams of oven mitts would burst, and I'd be stuck with this hideous appendage buckled into my form and it'd never lay off, never heal, never move with its shade casted upon a livelihood of moderate shallow appeal. He'd never dance again; he said by the time it was healed so as to not to split in two upon the first count, he'd already drowned in enough misery to eject him from a lifetime. It made him too sad by association. Overwhelmed with the capital 'o', the spiralled mouth.

*It'd be funny if you joined in our field of research, however passively, with the hopes of constructing a prosthetic ankle to dance on, like in one of those legacy movies.*

*I'm not that complicated*, he'd laughed.

"I guess it is sort of late, by winter standards," I said and stood still on the footpath, so that a shoal of high schoolers in sheened northface jackets might pass me by with ease. The shortest one of the lot reeked of hash in the moment it took for him to walk by. Upon instinct, my hand graced the square of my case through my pocket yet again. If it seems like I'm describing this a lot, I can assure you it's because I'm thinking about it a lot, which is weird because lately, I've been hitting all the gestures of a boring life without taking the objectivity necessary to reflect on this. Dongyoung was in the grey with me, passing over the rumpled tissue numbers he got wherever he went with his body set aflame in appeal. Yukhei, in the distance, echoed in twisted distortions awaiting the burden of being uncovered, as someone who could join me in this selective happiness endeavour in the future, should the circumstances lock together just right. I willed for this to be the case; I loved him, of course. I was in love with him. As he flagged a cab by the curb, it struck me sideways with force that he was my savior, a guardian angel unfortunately subject to availability. What a terrifying mentality to have. I knew in that moment(though I’d argue each thing can only be known in moments draped in a channel of vagueness, as we never quite slipped off the groove of this, never allowed to simmer whether marinated with positivity or otherwise) that my admiration could be mistaken for the flying sparks of stalker behaviour, warning shots through lines of caved sand, by anyone but me. With the right yearnings, it could happen to any one of us. I'd moved on from the idea of a lucky break in this department and in this era, should it be composed of a month or a decade or a small wheel of lifetimes.
He was sitting in the lap of the backseat after a moment that had forgone me, another one lost to some paradoxical inner monologuing- mindless and mindful and basking in attention as a paper partition revealed only the general size, the shapeless forms of my sense's shadows. I saw him there, below eye level with me for once in his life. He always stood up when I approached the reception desk, again with the flaunting of a skull full of frills, but now as he sat in the cab and looked to me I found some attractiveness to it. His cheekbones made asymmetrical slants that sliced close to his nose. "Get in out of the cold," he said, assumingly to me, shifting over on the leather with ease. I got in out of the cold. Of course I did; it was he who asked it of me, and if by any chance I'd morphed into the chicken on its way to headless, post-slaughter flailing, I would blame this on myself and not shoot the messenger, however tempting the deflection of guilt and responsibility might seem at first enchantment. He told the cabbie an address I couldn't make head or tail of and swindelled him into a conversation before I could rattle off my own. The way Yukhei made small talk was comparable to the way pressured breadwinners boasted at job interviews, as if he was pleading for good will- first bashfully, then arrogantly as he came to the conclusion that it was deserved- and he sweated an awful lot while doing so. It was kind of gross. However, it was only a feather on the stack of stipulations and I hadn't been in want of a transfer to the weighing scales.

The cabbie spoke slowly, perhaps shoving a case of food poisoning down his throat, one hand on the wheel and the other fucking around with the mirror. Yukhei winced at this but said nothing. For the whole drive, the shallow ends of a conversation were clipped by sounds of motorbikes going by, in what hadn't been destined to grow into a fast lane but, most assuredly, was one; most of these kids went by without helmets on, girls sitting on the tail of the bar so their long hair didn't blind the guys as it scalped. Sometimes I'd catch the eyes of passengers in the cars next to me, and this was as amusing as anything else on this godforsaken planet. Very amusing really- I suppressed a smile until I'd lost trace of why I'd prevent myself from smiling in the first place. When the car pulled up in front of an attached house, Yukhei seemed to look through my flesh and beyond the window, saying, "I rent the bottom floor- no stairs that way."

The bottom floor was consisted of dribbled cement walls, spotty with an intact skin of imperfections and toolbox imprints. He had a porch with a glass sliding door, passing through its own linoleum strip of brown bar and each time it'd drag the grease and dry cobwebs with it, wisps on the surface that ignited even from afar. His curtains were drawn in both windows. I raised my eyebrows and said nothing; perhaps I knew what was going on before it had the chance to fatten into a situation. Was this an escapade so fitful and desperate that it bubbled up in broad daylight, rather than in a broad's night time as she flicked through a snakeskin money clip? Did he wake up thinking he'd call my name from across the dirt car park? Was I- what was the word for it, again, that one that I should know by virtue of my age and academic history, not of education but rather of the crowds I'd been amongst? I couldn't think of it, but it was really going in at my brain. Half of it would detach from the rod it spiked out from if this trend continued.

"You can come in," he said, unmistakably shy. I was giddy about this, of course. My dick was content in my trousers without being content in them, but really it was the dry ice being scraped from my heart that sealed the whole, jesus christ, holy shit, affair; quite possible affair, judging by all the openness I had displayed in my interest and all the mugfuls of genuine, flustered shifts of tide he'd displayed in this. Then again, maybe he was a boneheaded heterosexual who hadn't considered what I'd been doing as flirting in assortment of shape and manner. Maybe it hadn't dawned upon him at all, and I was unfortunately smack dab in the center of his net with the sops of seaweed clinging alongside me, in an outcome I had been inclined to deem as 'lucky' before, whether it be a stroke in the sexual sense rather than the medical sense, or a break in the dam withholding a puddle rather than a bone, or directed in a sweep over my face, down to the rumples on my throat that surrounded my adam's apple, down to muscle soft and expanded into mounds. Doom was impending. He'd take me into his house and present a blue bottle, molded like a Christmas repackage of a scented candle and
held out before my stubby nose. Dermatologically tested, he'd say, it's moisturiser that allows your
skin to accumulate its very own respiratory system. Lots of people leap at these kinds of things-
they're booming 'on campus', where the students turn about and dot the green. Care to invest in my
business? Or, you could even start your own! I'll help you!

I'd push the bottle away from me but the reek of baby's paleness would still get all up in my face. Are
you in a pyramid scheme?

Course not, he'd say as defensive as possible. Jaehyun would appear on his newly set up Weibo
page, both of their faces patted with whatever empty chem cells they'd packaged as moisturiser. This
wasn't even the worst case scenario, and still I found it in me to tell the driver to step on it. Another
choice barred from me that I pretended I was respecting enough to seize. Yukhei led me up the drive,
which took a punctuation mark over two seconds due to the pathetic, miniscule scale of it. The
concrete burst into cracks whenever it felt like, and each one of them posed an opportunity to hide
from the police within its folds and hollows. "Sorry for the mess," he said, then as the key clicked in
the latch, "you'll see."

I'll see indeed. On every square inch of the kitchen table, there was a takeaway container with
condensation warping the blue marked writing on its lid- some were piled on top of each other,
these pillars of grease and maggots of rice grains clustered in the dents in the foil, so high that the sun
shone through despite the giant averter of light rather than the other way around. Hot christ, was it
disgusting . Appalling through and through, a needle dug under the six layers of portentousness it
took to get to the core of disgust- the pure kind, the wrench lifting a floorboard torn to ruins by
woodlice that sprawled away from the directions of drafts. "Sorry," he said again, perhaps noticing
my whole gesture of ogling. I didn't want to be rude about Yukhei's similarities to a barn animal
fending for its life in a cage at the Chinese take out- should such a pointless, contextless situation
arise- but the pink of the back slick with sweat, the smell of old chicken from a good yard away, all
that fucking orange was impossible to be treated with general teachings of polite condescension. I
knew the inner workings of such matters quite well, on account of having two parents who excelled
at all that required an upturned nose, and this was what lead me to believe that a statement in
ignorance could not be made. "I hate cooking for myself," he said before I could beat around the
bush- still I'd do it, but with a baseball bat rather than the feather of a pedigree swan on the mist. "I
always burn the rice. Or the ramen. Both, I guess."

"You burn ramen?" I said with a clipped laugh. He was smiling at me. The thought that there was
something subjective in me which allowed room for cheerful maneuvers was so uplifting that white
satin began materialising on my hands. First the thumb, then the elastic spread between it and my left
index. I moved to him and, with a tentative swab of my chin- to the right, that was what seemed
natural at the time. I thought that there existed a possibility I'd read about it before, that all the
creativity was in the right side of the brain so that the blood vessels and reeds of nerves- not
explicitly- laced together with vital organs down in the copper tank of my stomach. A myth, almost
slitted by the throat- how obvious could it be that it was a myth? When I turned my head, no
thoughts came to me other than that buzz of disgust, though maybe this was a reactionary above all
else. Stories weren't formulating in my head, hive minds of hive minds of hive minds. I became no
visionary but still I carried an unforeseeable future about should I happen to cross paths with one of a
generous breed. "Don't tell me you're cooking it on a brazier, or something equally stupid..." I hadn't
trailed off but to me, the three dots can resemble a certain act of intimacy as much as any listlessness.
We were close enough that words required no forthcoming presentation, yet held that crystallised
weight so separate from the aforementioned glass- if you don't remember this glass, I invite you to go
on a little treasure hunt for the words as lofty as any other, and I promise you from one arrow picker
to the other that it won't be a wild goose chase- it was a bit terrifying. Terrifying and free, a summit
or a dip in the tracks no sturdier than the needle marks on forearms. I put a hand on one of the lapels
of his jacket. He'd yet to remove it, and when brushed with my thumb it felt like nothing more than a
"I burn ramen, to be honest with you," he said, and when he snorted the proximity his nose had to my roots alarmed me just a bit- I should've known better, that I was advancing and hoping to god he wasn't straight. Laugh all you want but to me, it shows an immense boulder of strength and character that I might stick with my self developed institution of paranoia while it burned to an ash scrape. You never know with people. Sometimes, they turn on you with an expectancy for you to do the same. In middle school, I had attended a cram study a pace and a subsequent slump away from my house, wherein a social group posed as a loop of 'study buddies' had fed off each other's presence for they hadn't had the time to absorb the presence of anyone else. We were friends through the thin, and then the thick oil layers leading up to the exam period. My closeness with one of the boys had reached incredible, risky heights; Qian Kun. I still remember his name on the attendance sheet, Qian Kun, between the dislikes of Lee Taeyong(pretty in the face but he always snarled when people made an attempt to talk to him. At first I suspected his school environment had carried him onto a pedestal with hard, chipped worker hands, but then a twitch in his eyes flitted below the surface and it came upon me that he was scared to reveal his personality to anyone, and an unfortunate pock of a lisp) and Kim Hyunjin(a violin specialist, younger than the rest of us and in possession of some serious child genius chops). Kun was an immigrant who spent all his time filling in primary school Korean textbooks. He'd had long hair that feathered out behind his slim neck, and one day he chopped it off by the yard, then had kissed me out of some idiotic middle school frustration, secluded in the shade that the opposite building cast upon the study hall when everyone else had left, shielded from deity smite by virtue of our ceiling that allowed no room for the bird's eye voyeurism. When I reciprocated, he kicked me hard and called me a fucking freak. I laughed at his awful pronunciation until he kicked me again, and then he... he... dropped off the map.

Of course, I wasn't so fractured that I might carry about this spine of drama with the toad wax burning up the edges before it could ever become posted trauma. It was just a useful tendency; to remember the methods which people had used to incite pain in others, and more specifically, pain in me, screaming for a way out. I kept a hand at my back though there was no knife in my grasp, and even so I don't think I could've expended Yukhei as easily as he could've expended me. I needed some self confidence, really- the insecurity was ravaging my common sense so only the vapours remained.

He kissed me first. I hadn't the time to process it before it was over, but the phantom bruises dotted up the sheath of my calves as soon as his eyes were a viewable distance from mine. God, they were so goopy, pooling up amongst the scaly shutter, examining me until I was prodded into a reaction when the pan flew off the handle. No such things occured; I just felt an unmeasurable sense of lightness that seemed to come with the territory, the connection of finally being close to someone who wasn't a robot beneath a service contract or a boy fulsome with resentment, of being accepted. It was easier to kiss him the second time, and easy the third too. It materialised with peak melancholy that this was what came easy to so many romanticists across the world, and that it had sapped years and years from me, and pinched a scar tissue I hadn't come to terms with myself on the right hand and the dick. When it eventually happens, by brute force or similar methods of assassination, loving out in the open can be as simple as going along with a clot or an impulse.

When he pulled away, there was something more attractive fitted to his features than when he'd leaned in in the first place. His hair was muddy and brown and reeling out in my right hand, and his coat felt cheap, a descendent of plastic beneath my fingertips. He was less guarded than I'd ever seen him, but I couldn't blanket the fire that there was something more to it- a splinter on the eight-oh-eights dashing their uniformity, which was also whole and painful and terrifying in its own way. It occured to me that no matter how deep I dug, there was an ordinance in place that enacted whenever I tried to get close, and it prevented me from ever truly understanding what Yukhei was thinking at any given time.
Honestly, I hadn't meant to say it. It was deplorable in terms of actions, and grandiose in terms of calamity. People assumed I was standoffish and resigned, and that I scrubbed my brain with metal rags to delete all which might be open to exposure, but I was an awful fiend for decisions of the scatterbrained sort, shitting on in divulgations to infinity. "I think I love you," I'd said, almost panting. I was dizzy off of it- it's a case of having to be there for the sorrow, but never wanting the trade off of transport.

In the ensuing moment, a lot could be said as it was whittled at in silence. Yukhei chewed on his lip and stayed close but it pained me to have the foresight and understanding, that I knew I was about to be pushed away and expended with a flick of a rubber sole so my smoke was squeezed out of me. "No you don't," he said, scathing, skirting around the boundaries consisting of all those furious tattle tale signs.

I never would've imagined he'd reach down and snap two of my fingers in half. Horror and macabre; all eyes in the room widening and all that which wasn’t an eye widening still as placeholders, taking on this form of emotion I’d never had the capacity- no, the ability- to understand, seeing as what I saw when I looked down was my skin crumpling like crepe paper, the internal exoskeleton flashed with white lights, wires a bright, baby blue.

End Notes

there is a prequel to explain what happened. if you liked this, i'd be so happy to recieve your thoughts <33 the comments keep me going tbh ! add me on twitter: @11dishwashers
also i don't necessarily agree or disagree w/ any of jungwoo's... ideas lmao

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!