Amor Omnia Vincit

by JustCallMeJo

Summary

Lee Taeyong and his brothers just moved to a new town, new school, new routine. Again.

They do not adjust in the best way possible but they have each other, which has always been enough.

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Everyone’s pondering over the quiet ice prince and his brothers. Who are they really and what are they hiding?

Now on wattpad (not my account); https://www.wattpad.com/694974102-amor-omnia-vincit-chapter-1
Notes

I don’t know what this is...

I rly have nothing to say.

My first published NCT fic! Hope you’ll enjoy, i have no direction at the moment (I literally have no idea what I’m doing I just wanted a cuddly family fic) except wanting to finish this fic before summer is over. Wish me luck and enjoy reading!!! <333

PS not completely proofread, I skimmed it XD

PPS some characters will probably be OOC (not excessively so though) as I had to tweak it a bit to fit the story, but hopefully you’ll think that it’s good OOCness XD

See the end of the work for more notes
It’s three months into their senior year when the news come. They all live in a small town. Everyone knows everyone. Which is why everyone knows when a new family is moving in.

Yuta sprinted through the corridor after soccer practice, Johnny and Jaehyun hot on his heels. They had just showered, wet hair flopping about their faces.

They turned the corner just as Ten exited the dance room.

Jaehyun grabbed his arm as they were sprinting by, dragging the Thai boy with him.

“Woah. What’s the rush?” Ten asked as they continued sprinting.

“It’s discount day! Doyoung and Taeil are already waiting in the car!” Johnny panted.

“Oh my god it’s Friday!” Ten exclaimed in English, having forgotten about discount day after focusing so much on the choreography for the upcoming dance recital. He was the leader of their dance troop after all.

As they exited the school they saw Mark walking with his head in his phone.

“Hi Mark. Bye Mark,” Yuta huffed as they ran past him. Mark looked up in surprise as they rushed by.

“See you at home lil bro!” Johnny shouted in English and Mark made a dismissive hand gesture while muttering ‘stupid discount day’.

They finally. Finally. Reached the car. Doyoung and Taeil were sitting in the front, messing with the radio.

“Taeil scoffed playfully, watching the newcomers’ ragged appearances.

“Har har.” Jaehyun deadpanned, trying to catch his breath.

“Let’s go then!” Doyoung announced and Taeil revved up the car, Jaehyun and Yuta in the backseat while Ten and Johnny were in the very back of the pickup.

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“I love discount day,” Yuta sighed as he sipped his milkshake. “It’s perfect for struggling students like us.”

Every Friday was discount day at the local diner in their little town and every Friday the group of best friends went to buy junk food.

“Don’t act like your parents aren’t sending you allowance,” Doyoung rolled his eyes at the Japanese boy and took a bite of his hamburger.

“Yes. Unlike some of us that actually work hard for our money,” Taeil said pointedly, referring to his part time job at the cinema. Yuta simply ignored them.

Ten looked up from his fries and caught sight of two people from the dancing team.
“Momo! Lisa!” He called loudly, waving his hand. They smiled and walked over, Momo holding hands with her girlfriend Sana.

“Hey Ten oppa, sunbaenims,” Lisa greeted, bowing slightly to Ten’s friends.

“Hah! Someone with a little respect,” Johnny smiled proudly.

“Mmhm,” Ten rolled his eyes.

“How’s the choreography? Give me your honest opinions. You hate it right?” Ten managed to huff out in one breath. Momo laughed.

“It’s really good oppa, we promise,” she smiled reassuringly. Just then another voice called out for Momo and Sana. Ten thought it was a sophomore named Dahyun.

“We have to go, see you at practice on Monday,” Momo waved goodbye. Sana giving them a polite bow.

“They’re too cute,” Lisa gushed. “By the way, oppa, did you hear about the transfer?” She sounded overly excited all of a sudden.

“What transfer?” Doyoung spoke up, curiosity clear on his face. The others perked up as well. It wasn’t often interesting things happened in their town.

“Apparently a family is moving here this weekend. I think they were talking about a new senior and junior and a sophomore,” Lisa explained.

“Wow. That’s so weird,” Taeil said, stunned.

“We know everyone. It’s going to be interesting with new faces, I’m so tired of yours,” Yuta told them cheekily. Johnny smacked the back of his head.

“Well. Thanks for the intel Lisa. I’ll see you on Monday,” Ten smiled, watching the younger walk off to her friends at another table.

“Oh my god. Transfers. This is going to be so much fun,” Doyoung gushed eagerly.

“Maybe. What if they’re total jerks. They’ll ruin our perfectly peaceful town,” Jaehyun complained.

“No, what if they’re super hot girls. We’ll get some action we haven’t already gotten,” Yuta wiggled his eyebrows. This comment led to Doyoung asking if he thinks with his dick which led to Yuta throwing a fry that mistakenly hit Johnny which then resulted in a food fight.

Taeil simply rolled his eyes with an exasperated smile at everyone.

~

Taeyong sighed through his nose as he stepped out of the van. He pursed his lips at the huge house. Donghyuck jumped out of the car to stand next to him.

“Looks better than the last place,” he said sassily. Taeyong ruffled his apricot hair causing the sixteen year old to whine.

The silver blonde male stepped back to the van and opened the door, helping Jisung out, carrying the child on his hip as the others filed out as well. Sicheng’s eyes were wide as he observed the yellow house. Taeyong noted that Sicheng was outgrowing him by a few centimetres, Donghyuck almost
catching up to him as well.

“Sicheng-ah. You need to stop growing,” he pouted and dragged a hand through the brunet’s soft hair. Sicheng only offered a blinding smile.

Lucas and Jungwoo held hands, observing their surroundings quietly for once.

Chenle walked up to Taeyong and Jisung, grabbing his eldest brother’s hand.

“Welcome home, my dear brothers,” Donghyuck sighed.

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That night Taeyong fell into bed with an exhausted huff. The day has been spent moving the furniture around to their satisfaction. Donghyuck and Sicheng got their own rooms, as well as Taeyong while Lucas and Jungwoo shared a room. Chenle and Jisung also got to share a room.

After setting up all their furniture and unpacking the boxes, Taeyong ordered pizza, as the fridge was empty.

The silver haired male sighed and burrowed his face into one of his soft pillows. He hated this. The constant moving. At least his parents had sent him a message saying that this job would allow them to stay in the town for at least eight months which was longer than usual.

After wallowing a bit more in the muscle cramps he had after moving around heavy loads, Taeyong finally got up and shrugged out of his jeans and shirt to switch into pyjama shorts and a white T-shirt. He laid down and almost immediately fell asleep.

Although, Taeyong was a very light sleeper, having become so after taking care of six brothers during his whole life, thus he startled awake when the door opened softly. Chenle peeked his head in, Jisung holding the older’s hand and sucking on his own thumb. Taeyong was alert instantly.

“Hyung,” Chenle whispered. “We can’t sleep.”

Taeyong let a soft smile grace his features.

“Come here,” he pulled up the comforter so they could creep in. Chenle settled on his right side, Jisung on his left, both burrowing into his warmth and snuggling up to his chest. Taeyong felt incredibly fond as he hugged them close.

That’s when the door opened again. Lucas and Jungwoo both walked inside the room.

“Hyung~” they both started in unison. Taeyong was already gesturing them towards his bed. Jungwoo squeezed in behind Chenle while Lucas wrapped himself around Jisung and to an extension Taeyong.

They laid together, breathing softly for a few minutes when the door opened again. Sicheng and Donghyuck snuck inside, the sixteen year old holding onto Sicheng’s arm tightly.

“Gosh,” Taeyong breathed out. “Come here you big babies,” he teased causing the youngsters to laugh. Donghyuck and Sicheng jumped on the bed, squeezing in and maneuvering their younger brothers to fit. Taeyong was glad he invested in a bigger bed after hearing about the move. He observed his brothers’ faces. Jisung was sleeping soundly, snuggled comfortably under the covers feeling safe between all his hyungs. Chenle was breathing evenly but he was not quite sleeping yet, his face peaceful as Jungwoo carded a hand through his hair.
Lucas was snoring rather loudly, mouth open and legs tangled with Donghyuck’s. Donghyuck was wide awake staring right back at Taeyong who gave him a reassuring smile. The younger gave a small smile back and it hurt Taeyong to see how tired Donghyuck was. And he knew it wasn’t only because of the moving they’d done today.

Sicheng was looking up at the roof, eyebrows furrowed, lips pursed in thought.

“Guys,” Taeyong called quietly. Gaining everyone’s attention except for Lucas and Jisung who were sleeping. “You know I love you all so much right?” He said and made sure to look them all in the eye sternly. They all looked shy at his confession but smiled brightly at him nonetheless.

“We love you too hyung,” Sicheng whispered for them all. Taeyong managed a grateful smile. Then they closed their eyes and drifted off to sleep in the comfortable loving safety that came with being surrounded by each other.

~

Sunday was a lazy day. Taeyong made Sicheng run to the grocery store first thing in the morning, Jungwoo and Chenle coming with, while Donghyuck, Lucas and Jisung watched cartoons. Taeyong himself unpacked the kitchen boxes that were left.

His brothers came back from the grocery store relatively quickly with everything he had put on the list and then he could finally make breakfast. He sent Sicheng, Jungwoo and Chenle into the living room to watch cartoons as well while making pancakes and setting the table with a big breakfast.

All of the boys whooped excitedly when they saw their breakfast buffet. The rest of the day was spent doing basically nothing.

As Taeyong was sitting on the couch, Jisung laying on his stomach and Chenle coloring by the table, Lucas walked in.

“Hyung, can you help me dye my hair?” He asked brightly, a wide smile plastered on his face. Taeyong looked up at his brunet brother and quirked his lips into a smile.

“Yeah,” he exhaled, patting Jisung’s butt before getting up. “Let’s do it.”

Donghyuck decided he wanted to help as well, so together they dug through the hair color storage that had gathered over the years. Taeyong was a big fan of expressing yourself and therefore he always allowed his brothers to color their hair (although Chenle and Jisung were still too young) or get piercings (appropriate for their ages) done if they really wanted to.

They sorted out Sicheng’s brown color, Jungwoo’s black, Donghyuck’s orange and Taeyong’s silver blonde before settling on a honey blonde.

“I like this one,” Lucas nodded, determined.

“I agree. I think this will suit you,” Taeyong smiled tenderly and ruffled Lucas’ hair.

After the process was done Lucas ran to every room, showing his brothers his blonde locks.

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Taeyong woke up early the next day, the sun barley up as he rose from his bed.

The blonde male stretched his body, joints cracking satisfyingly before he walked out of his room. Taeyong popped his head into Chenle’s and Jisung’s room to find his youngest brother awake. Taeyong smiled and stepped inside, picking the youngest up when Jisung made grabby hands.

Taeyong went about his morning routine of making breakfast and packing lunches with Jisung snoozing on his shoulder.

“Are you tired baby?” Taeyong hummed and nuzzled Jisung’s cheek with his nose, pecking it lightly. Jisung made a noise and Taeyong took it as an affirmative.

As the clock hit seven he left Jisung at the kitchen table to wake the others up.

Eventually everyone had made their way downstairs to sit groggily in the kitchen, breakfast slowly being shoveled into mouths.

After breakfast Taeyong went upstairs with Chenle and Jisung to help them dress. The youngest two sat on his bed as they watched him dress himself up in a pair of skinny, ripped grayish jeans and a simple band T-shirt which was so oversized that the sleeves reached his elbows. He compensated by tucking the front part into his pants. He hastily put a safety pin earring in his lobe and a simple small hoop in his upper ear piercing. Taeyong swept his hair to the side and noticed his roots had grown out quite a bit. Honestly it looked kind of good so he didn’t stress over it.

His ever-present bracelets rested on his wrist and he fiddled with them a bit nervously.

“Hyung?” Chenle called, smiling widely when Taeyong turned to him.

“Aww you’re so cute,” Taeyong couldn’t help but card a hand through his hair and coo.

He picked Jisung up and held Chenle’s hand as they descended the stairs. Donghyuck was sitting on the couch playing on his phone while waiting, a light touch of smokey eyeliner around his eyes, hair wavy and soft, falling over his forehead. He had a crystal shaped earring dangling from his left earlobe. He was wearing blue jeans and a pink hoodie, his middle fingers painted a hot pink because Donghyuck liked to challenge people by doing so and Taeyong frankly loved it when he did that.

Sicheng had settled for black jeans and a striped sweater, his brown hair styled away from his face and his ever present silver necklace with a feather pendant. The necklace had been something that caught his eye several years ago, especially after the lady at the store told them the meaning of a feather was uplifting, weightlessness, positivity and limitlessness. Sicheng fell in love and Taeyong had watched with a smile as his brother purchased the item.

Lucas was wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt but his tall body and handsome face coupled with his newly dyed hair would certainly make him stand out at school. He also wore a simple bracelet that he braided himself after Taeyong taught him how to do it. He never took it off.

Jungwoo had ripped black jeans, a graphic wide shouldered tank top and a pale pink jacket on. His black hair was styled away from his face, looking soft and fashionable. Taeyong smiled at his choices. Jungwoo liked to dress differently than other kids and Taeyong dearly hoped he wouldn’t get in trouble. He knew it was similar to what Donghyuck did, but Jungwoo was very soft spoken and often seen as fragile while he in real life was actually very confident. Taeyong did not want anyone to break his spirit.

“Yongie hyung, can you help with my makeup?” Jungwoo questioned and looked over to his eldest brother with a bright smile. This was not an unusual occurrence. Jungwoo had discovered makeup a
year ago and found he liked it. He didn’t use it a lot and mostly subtle foundation or lip tint, but on special occasions he went all out.

“Yeah, of course,” Taeyong said and walked over, taking the makeup brush on the counter.

After Taeyong had applied a subtle amount of makeup Jungwoo smiled thankfully, earning a one armed hug from his oldest hyung.

“Okay, everyone ready?” Taeyong asked. After a chorus of affirmatives he ushered them all out to the van.

They dropped off Lucas and Jungwoo first with a ‘good luck’ and ‘have fun on your first day’. Taeyong stuck around long enough to see them walk into the school, Jungwoo linking their pinkies together out of habit while Lucas simply smiled like always.

Then Chenle was dropped off with a good luck kiss on the cheek courtesy of Donghyuck. The seven year old waved enthusiastically until he reached the entrance where a teacher waited for him with a kind smile.

Taeyong, Sicheng and Donghyuck followed Jisung into his preschool and made sure the youngest was feeling okay with the new teachers before hugging him goodbye. Taeyong made sure to plant a peck on his forehead and hugged him one last time before Sicheng and Donghyuck had to drag him out.

Then the three eldest brothers made their way to the one and only high school in town, Donghyuck playing Michael Jackson over the speakers the whole way there.

Taeyong knew classes had already started but the principal had also told them to come by the office first so he figured it didn’t really matter.

“Oh, we’re here,” Taeyong exhaled as they came to a stop in the parking lot that was void of life. Donghyuck sighed quietly.

“I know this isn’t ideal, it being in the middle of the term, but we have to try at least. Right?” Taeyong tried to sound positive.

“Yes. I know. I don’t have a problem adjusting. It just gets tiring to leave my friends behind every damn time,” Donghyuck voiced his thoughts. “And what about our youngsters? Their childhood will be properly fucked up if this continues,” he spat.

“Language,” Taeyong reprimanded almost absentmindedly.

“Well they have us and each other so it can’t be that bad. We’ll just have to endure it. What else are we supposed to do really, huh Donghyuck?” Sicheng argued determinedly. Taeyong frowned as Sicheng wasn’t the type to argue so heatedly.

“Whatever,” Donghyuck huffed tiredly.

“Let’s just get through this day and see what happens,” Taeyong decided and they finally got out of the car to go inside.
The principal was old and bald and male. Could it be more cliched? Taeyong almost laughed at the offended look on Donghyuck’s face when the younger saw the walking cliched disaster this school turned out to be.

“Here are the schedules, I will take you to your respective classrooms and you can officially begin your time here at our school,” the principal droned monotonously.

Donghyuck made gagging motions behind the old man’s back, which earned him an amused forehead flick from Sicheng.

They reached Donghyuck’s classroom first. “Good luck,” Taeyong said lamely.

“I don’t need luck I’m a walking miracle,” Donghyuck scoffed and pushed the door open with confidence, Taeyong huffed an exasperated laugh at his brother’s antics. The principal simply walked them to Sicheng’s class next, Taeyong squeezed the brunette’s hand quickly. Sicheng gave a bright smile and a wave before disappearing inside.

Taeyong sighed internally as they walked the halls again. He wasn’t worried about his brothers. They would settle immediately, he thought, as he absentmindedly chewed on his fingernails. The silver haired male noticed and whipped his hand down, glueing it to his thigh instead.

“Okay. This is your classroom. Have a good day!” The principal looked solely relieved to be done with his mission and walked away briskly. Taeyong rolled his eyes and knocked on the ugly green door in front of him. After a few seconds it opened to reveal a middle aged woman, wearing glasses and holding an English book. Shakespeare from what Taeyong could see. He internally questioned if the school could get even more cliché. The teacher looked stunned for a few seconds before she raised an inquiring eyebrow.


“Oh of course. We’ve been waiting for you!” She exclaimed and opened the door wider. He schooled his expression and slowly strode into the room. He could feel the intensity of everyone’s eyes on him.

It’s just another first day in a new school. Nothing he hadn’t handled before. Nothing he couldn’t handle now.
Mark looked up as the door practically flew open. The teacher was in the middle of solving an equation on the board but he abruptly stopped to squint at the figure on the doorstep.

“Hi, I’m Lee Donghyuck, your new student,” the boy said in a melodic voice with a high pitch. “This is Advanced Math, right?” The boy asked and raised one eyebrow at the teacher’s stunned face. Mark couldn’t help but admire his confidence. The boy was, simply, beautiful. Beautiful was the only word Mark’s brain could supply. The hint of eyeliner, the nail polish, the pink hoodie. Mark didn’t know what to do with himself, his brain was short circuiting.

“Oh. Yes this is advanced math. Welcome Mr. Lee, please take a seat next to Mark,” the teacher suddenly regained his senses. Mark gulped and waved his hand a bit to show where he was. Then Donghyuck met his gaze right on and the older boy could feel his insides quivering.

When the new male finally took a seat and turned to Mark with a small “hello there handsome” Mark knew he was screwed.

Johnny was snoozing in his textbook, Jaehyun sticking pieces of paper in his hair and the teacher reading out loud from the (stupid) book in the background.

She stumbled several times over the pronunciation but Johnny and Jaehyun knew better than to correct her. They had learnt that the hard way in junior year.

A sudden knock on the door jostled Johnny enough so that all the pieces of paper in his jet black hair dropped to the floor.

“Aw man,” Jaehyun sighed, disappointed. Then they both turned to the front as a person walked inside.

The whole class was stunned into silence, staring at the ethereal being at the front.

Johnny’s jaw fell open, Jaehyun’s eyes widening. They could even hear a small ‘wow’ coming from the back.

The boy was stunning, sharp eyes, jawline that could cut through diamonds, collarbones peeking out from the shirt he was wearing, delicate, veiny fingers gripping the strap of his shoulder bag tightly.

His hair was a glaring silver blonde over dark roots and his frame was small and thin but it did not look weak in any way.

To summarise he looked like a fucking ice prince that could break everyone’s hearts.

Johnny and Jaehyun broke out of their staring together with the rest of the class when the teacher cleared her throat.

“This is Lee Taeyong. He is a new student, please make sure he feels welcome,” she said with a beaming smile. She was probably excited about having a new face to teach, especially one so stunning. “Mr. Lee please take a seat next to Joy. Joy if you could raise your hand dear.”

Jaehyun shivered involuntarily when Taeyong’s gaze cut to Joy. It was one of the most intense looks he had ever witnessed and it wasn’t even directed at him. The male made his way through the desks, everyone following him with their eyes, until he sat down next to Joy. He didn’t talk or move in any
way, simply directed his attention to the teacher again.

Most of the class broke out of their reverie when Ms. Choi started reading again. Jaehyun and Johnny shared a look that only conveyed ‘holy shit’.

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Right after class Taeyong basically bolted out the door, managing to look completely composed and closed off. Johnny and Jaehyun looked after him before they started packing up.


They walked out of the classroom and they were completely quiet until they met up with Yuta, Doyoung, Ten and Taeil by their locker section.

“Guys,” Jaehyun exclaimed as they reached their friends. “The new senior is in our English class.”

“He’s fucking insane, I don’t even know how to explain it,” Johnny added excitedly.

“He’s an ice prince. Like for real,” Jaehyun said, eyes blown wide with excitement. Their friends looked at them with disbelieving expressions.

“O-kay,” Doyoung dragged the syllables out.

“Did you smoke something? What the hell are you talking about? Ice prince?” Yuta sputtered.

“Seriously, we swear on Taeil’s part time job,” Johnny said earnestly, Jaehyun nodding in agreement. The eldest of them scoffed disbelievingly.

“Don’t involve my job in this. My job is innocent okay?” He protested.

“Ugh fine, we’ll show you,” Jaehyun exhaled frustratingly. “He should have a locker close by, let’s see,” Jaehyun started scanning the halls, trying to spot Lee Taeyong, Johnny following his lead.

Turns out they heard before they saw, because every conversation around them died down in a matter of seconds, the anticipation and tension high in the air.

Lee Taeyong passed the corner, heading for the lockers on the opposite side of the friend group, every student nearby watching him curiously.

Doyoung’s eyes widened, the boy was beautiful.

Ten almost gasped at the gorgeous human, Taeil doing the same.

Yuta felt like he was hit with a lightning bolt. The new student was one of the most ethereal humans he had seen, even prettier than idols. He was positively gobsmacked.

They all watched as the new student put his books in his locker before closing it and walking off without as much as looking at anyone.

“I see what you mean. By calling him an ice prince,” Ten nodded.

“Told you so,” Johnny said victoriously.
Kudos if you liked it and comments make my day honestly <333
Chapter 3

None of them had another class with Taeyong before lunch. Although everyone was talking about him. Taeil had listened to some girls in his biology class gush about the new student’s otherworldly looks.

Doyoung had overheard some people discussing if he was mute or not and Jaehyun had heard some say he was so mysterious and hot since no one knew a thing about him.

At lunch they had all gathered at their usual table. It was what one would call ‘the popular table’, reserved for the sports teams, their partners and a select few extroverts and/or people of interest (Ten, Taeil, Doyoung, Minhyuk, Seungkwan, Jeonghan among others) who everyone knew.

Ten, Johnny, Jaehyun, Doyoung, Yuta and Taeil were currently trying to discreetly stalk the new senior.

“What if he’s a spy?” Yuta suggested.

“He wouldn’t be so obvious if he was a spy,” Doyoung countered.

“He might be shy, you know,” Ten said.

“Why would he be with a face and demeanour like that?” Jaehyun frowned in disbelief.

“He’s probably an asshole who thinks everyone is below him,” Doyoung haughtily stated. The others stared at Doyoung and then looked back to Taeyong. The student was currently eating his lunch calmly, putting grape after grape in his mouth and not bothering to look at anyone or listen to gossip.

“We should send someone up to him, to talk,” Yeri, a girlfriend of someone in the soccer team, suggested.

“He might punch that person,” Jackson (member of the basketball team) spoke up animatedly, fear flickering in his eyes.

“Aww come on, he won’t,” Amber (basketball team) scoffed.

“Okay, let’s Rock Paper Scissors this,” BamBam (extrovert) decided. Just as everyone at the table leaned forward to play, two people walked up to them.

“Oh, hey lil bro,” Johnny greeted Mark and the unfamiliar person beside him. They all stared at the boy, his looks gathering their attention.
“Hey hyung,” Mark greeted back, a small smile on his face. “This is Donghyuck, we have advanced math together. He’s the new sophomore,” the brunette explained. Everyone at the table ‘ooh’ed and gave various greetings. Donghyuck looked at them with a deadpan face.

“Well, as lovely as this conversation has been, I’m going to say hi to my brother real quick. I’ll meet you at the table Mark,” the eccentric boy winked cheekily and Mark felt his heart skip a beat.

“He’s interesting,” Yuta commented as they watched the young boy walk away. Mark sighed.

“He’s great,” he murmured. Johnny gave him a raised eyebrow and exchanged exasperated looks with his best friends before they all looked back at Donghyuck.

“Oh shit. He’s walking towards Taeyong!” Jaehyun hissed. They watched with bathed breaths as Donghyuck strolled up to Taeyong, throwing his arms around the senior’s neck. Ten gasped an ‘oh my god’, the dramatic tension at a high level.

Then Taeyong smiled.

He smiled.

He showed a human emotion for the first time since he came.

And his smile was beautiful. It was full of fond warmth, eyes crinkled and a pearly row of teeth peeking through.

Everyone looked in astonishment as he turned to hug Donghyuck properly, the younger smiling as well before they saw their lips moving.

“What are they saying?” Taeil whispered.

“We can’t read lips dumbass,” Doyoung hissed back earning a smack from the eldest.

They observed as Taeyong placed a grape in Donghyuck’s mouth, laughing as his little brother scrunched his nose at the taste.

Taeyong squeezed Donghyuck one more time before they separated and waved goodbye, the younger walking back toward Mark.

“Let’s go eat,” Donghyuck said with a small smile, ignoring the seniors at the table before grabbing Mark’s hand and dragging him away.

“Well he’s not mute at least,” Yeri said after they had gathered their wits.

Everyone turned back to Taeyong and saw him, yet again, calmly eating, features carefully schooled into an emotionless expression.

“I vote spy.”

“Dammit Yuta.”

~

Mark could admit that Donghyuck’s brother was ethereal but he preferred Donghyuck’s tan skin and warm chocolate eyes. They left Johnny and company at the table, walking towards Mark’s friends instead.
“Hey guys!” Mark greeted as they reached the table.

“Hello,” Jaemin smiled his blinding smile, looking curiously at Donghyuck.

“Hi, I’m Donghyuck, new student,” he raised his hand in a V-sign.

“Oh hello! I’m Jaemin,” the brunette greeted.

“I’m Jeno,” he flashed Donghyuck a sunny, eye crinkling smile, dragging a hand through his black hair.

“And I’m Renjun,” Renjun said with a huge smile, bright red hair falling into his eyes.

“Nice to meet you!” Donghyuck smiled back.

Mark couldn’t stop staring at him as they took a seat.

“Hey so Jeno is my boyfriend, do you have a problem with that?” Jaemin spoke up abruptly, smile intact as coldness seeped into his expression. Donghyuck simply raised an eyebrow and let a small smirk take place on his lips.

“I definitely don’t,” he assured.

“Okay so Renjun is our boyfriend. Do you have a problem with that?” Jeno spoke up next, linking hands with both Jaemin and Renjun. Donghyuck’s smirk grew into a big smile.

“Absolutely not,” he smiled. The coldness on Mark’s best friend faces thawed immediately.

“I’m keeping you,” Jaemin exclaimed and hugged Donghyuck around the neck, Mark smiling as they laughed together. He felt eyes prickling his skin and looked to see Renjun giving him a curious look.

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Yuta and Doyoung had one class with Taeyong after lunch but they didn’t hear his voice once.

After the last bell rang they walked outside to meet Johnny and Jaehyun. Taeil unfortunately had work and Ten had dance practice.

Johnny, Jaehyun and Mark were all leaning on Johnny’s car and waiting as they reached the parking lot.

“Hey squirt,” Yuta teased and flicked Mark on the forehead. The younger sputtered.

“I’m literally only one year younger than you,” he protested.

“Pfft,” Yuta dismissed him.

“Damn there’s Taeyong and your boyfriend,” Johnny said and nudged Mark. They all turned to the entrance to see Taeyong and Donghyuck walking together.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Mark blushed brightly as he followed the pair with his gaze.

Taeyong and Donghyuck walked up to a vehicle where another boy was standing.

“I did not expect Taeyong to drive a soccer mom car,” Jaehyun commented.
“Well not everyone is rich,” Doyoung argued distractedly, watching Taeyong giving the boy, who was leaning on his car, a hug.

“Who is that?” Yuta questioned.

“I think his name is Sicheng? He was in my English class,” Mark spoke up.

“He must be that new junior then. They’re all brothers I think,” Johnny said.

They watched Taeyong, Donghyuck and Sicheng get in the car before driving away.

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Taeyong exhaled loudly as they drove away from the school.

“You know they wouldn’t be giving you so much attention if you would just act normal and not like you’re some sort of mystical being,” Donghyuck commented. Eyes on his phone as he furiously typed with his thumbs.

“I’m not good at communicating neither am I extroverted,” Taeyong huffed. “I don’t get why they are hyping me. They’re just setting themselves up for disappointment.”

“Hyung,” Sicheng started. “Just be yourself like with us, doesn’t matter if you’re an extrovert or not. And they definitely won’t be disappointed, you’re you and you’re great. If they don’t think so then it’s their loss,” he nodded. Taeyong smiled despite himself.

“When did you grow up?” He murmured.

~

“Hyung! Hyung! Can we watch beauty and the beast?” Chenle called excitedly as Sicheng walked into the living room after washing the dishes together with Donghyuck.

“Yeah, sure,” he nodded and started rummaging through the DVDs until he found the right one.

“Movie!” Sicheng called.

“What are we watching!?“ Jungwoo screamed from upstairs, already making his way down.

“Beauty and the beast!” Sicheng shouted out for the whole house to hear.

“Yes!” He heard Lucas whoop from his room. Chenle screamed a laugh as Lucas came rushing inside, jumping on the couch and making it jiggle.

“Heck yeah I’m down for Emma Watson, she’s a queen,” Donghyuck appeared by the door, carrying sodas.

“Yongie hyung?” Jungwoo called from his seat next to Chenle, Jisung curled up on his lap.

“I’m on my way,” they heard the eldest moving about down in the basement where they had the washing machine.

After fifty seconds of waiting Taeyong appeared in the living room, carrying freshly washed cozy blankets.

“Alright,” Sicheng cheered before grabbing a blanket. They all got settled and turned on the movie.
Chenle, Lucas and Donghyuck sang along obnoxiously to almost every song but no one complained (because they actually sounded good on occasion).

Chapter End Notes

Kudos if you liked it :) comments make my day <3
“I’m leaving now,” Donghyuck called out the next morning, emerging fully dressed in extra tight jeans and a hoodie with the text ‘if you question my sexuality you’re not gonna get a straight answer’. His eyes lined with shimmering kohl, all of his nails painted black and his peach hair looking soft.

“Leaving?” Taeyong questioned confusedly.

“Yeah, Mark hyung is giving me a ride,” Donghyuck explained as he pulled his converse on.

“Ooh, who’s Mark Hyung?” Lucas wiggled his eyebrows obnoxiously. Donghyuck gave him an unimpressed look before grabbing his bag.

“Wait,” Taeyong exclaimed and rose from the table to grab Donghyuck’s hand gently, intertwining their fingers.

“Are you comfortable enough with this ‘Mark’ to wear that shirt?” Taeyong questioned worriedly, he did not want his little brother to get hurt. Korea was not the most progressive country regarding sexualities and gender roles so he had to make sure.

“Yeah. His best friends are gay and poly so I would hope he’s okay with it,” Donghyuck assured quietly, squeezing Taeyong’s hand. The older smiled brightly.

“Okay that’s great,” he said in relief. “Have fun, and be careful.”

“Thanks I will,” Donghyuck saluted him and opened the door. “Bye my dear brothers!”

“Bye!”

As Taeyong walked back into the kitchen he saw all his brothers crowded around the kitchen window. Jisung was being held by Sicheng, Chenle standing on his tiptoes to see properly. Curiosity got the best of Taeyong and he walked up to look behind them.

“He’s handsome,” Jungwoo commented with a nod as he saw Mark’s sincere eyes, light brown hair and slightly muscular build. “I approve.”

Taeyong hummed in agreement.

“Oh my gosh he’s giving him a ride on a moped. How lame,” Sicheng snickered, his younger brothers laughing. Taeyong gave him a slight smack on his upper arm, reprimanding him.
“At least it’s not a bicycle,” Lucas got out through giggles and Taeyong fought the smile on his lips. They watched as Mark helped Donghyuck put on a helmet before they sat down, Donghyuck’s arms tightening around Mark’s waist as they drove off.

When Donghyuck first saw Mark he definitely admitted that the boy was handsome, absolutely not denying that. He also determined that the boy was straight. Although he had to rethink that decision when he found out that Mark’s best friends were all some sort of queer, thus deciding that he actually might have had some sort of chance with the junior if he wanted to date him. Which he didn’t. Mark was just a handsome face to Donghyuck. Absolutely nothing else.

Until the boy asked if he wanted a ride to school, which Donghyuck found incredibly sweet. Of course he accepted, because who wouldn’t want a ride from a certified hottie.

When Mark arrived with his moped Donghyuck couldn’t help but smile.

“Nice ride, Lee,” he teased as he inspected the neon green spectacle. Mark furrowed his eyebrows adorably and looked from his vehicle to his passenger.

“What’s wrong with it?” He sincerely questioned. Donghyuck petted his chest with a laugh, which, big mistake, because muscles.

“Nothing. Nothing at all,” the younger assured as he put on the helmet, and then they were off. Donghyuck felt incredibly comfortable from his place where he was leaning on the older male’s back, the wind brushing his sides thrillingly.

As they arrived at the school Donghyuck was disappointed to let go of Mark, but he realized it would be incredibly weird to keep holding on.

“Thanks for the ride, hyung,” he said with a small smile. Mark gave him a bright one back.

“No problem, Hyuck,” the nickname made his heart jump. “I'll give you a ride whenever you want.”

And wow could this boy be any sweeter, Donghyuck gushed.

When they walked down the hallways of the school, Donghyuck noticed a lot of people giving him weirded out looks, which he figured came from the shirt. The instinct to curl up and hide was there as it always had been. It was an unavoidable feeling to have when you belonged to a sexual minority in a conservative society, but Donghyuck was proud to announce that he had always been good at suppressing that feeling and walk confidently, head held high.

“Yo Mark!” A male came up to them to give Mark a ‘bro hug’ as Donghyuck called it.


“Coach is gonna grill us today, like I swear, dude, he’s like on a warpath, since we like lost our last game,” the guy said animatedly.

“Aww man, he’s probably gonna make us run laps,” Mark sighed.

“For sure dude,” the guy seemed to finally notice Donghyuck’s presence. He eyed the younger up and down, eyes lingering on his shirt.
“Nice shirt,” he said mockingly. Then he turned to Mark. “Gotta go dude, see ya at practice.” Then he was gone.

Donghyuck scoffed.

“I like your shirt,” Mark piped up from beside him with a warm smile, and Donghyuck could feel his insides melting.

“Thanks,” he offered, grinning back. Then the bell rang.

~

He noticed throughout the following days that Mark was very well known across their school. Girls were always coming up with new ways to gain his attention and boys always came up to bro hug him in the hallway. Donghyuck assumed it had to do with Mark being on the basketball team, and having Johnny as an older brother.

Because of all this, being friends with Mark gained him some unwanted attention. Which made itself known as he was walking down a relatively empty hallway with his headphones in. He was heading to the cafeteria to meet up with Jaemin when some freshman girls stood in his way. He slowly pulled out his ear buds.

“Stay away from our oppa, you gay freak,” one of them hissed. Donghyuck blinked at them, dumbfounded. He had definitely not been expecting this attack.

“Uhm, what?” He questioned, disbelievingly.

The girls gave him disgusted expressions, and he kind of wanted to laugh because none of them were threatening in any way.

“I said stay away from Mark oppa, you freak. I will not let you taint him with your demonic intentions. We will be watching you,” the girl in the front spoke and he was simply speechless. They huffed loudly in chorus before turning and walking away. He stared after them, stunned. He kind of wanted to tell them that Mark’s best friends were all queer so if anyone would’ve tainted Mark it would’ve probably happened already.

~

When he reached the cafeteria he didn’t mention the incident and sat down instead with Jaemin.

“Hey, Hyuck,” the brunet greeted. “You okay?” He frowned worriedly at Donghyuck’s still slightly dazed state.

“Yeah I’m good,” the apricot haired male assured.

He looked up as the doors opened and Mark walked in together with Johnny and his friends. The junior was laughing loudly, his contagious laugh causing a smile to appear on Donghyuck’s lips. Mark’s head was thrown back as he tried to wheeze out some kind of sentence in between his laughter but he was unsuccessful. It was cute.

The junior calmed down when Johnny gave him a look and they parted ways. Donghyuck quickly looked away when Mark met his eyes only to find Jaemin staring at him, puzzled.

When Mark reached their table he sat down next to Donghyuck and slung an arm around the sophomore’s shoulders.
“What’s up?” He said with a smile, eyes sparkling as he directed his question at Donghyuck.

Donghyuck answered jokingly (and lamely) that it was the ceiling but it still made Mark laugh and the younger pretended like his heart didn’t pick up it’s already quick speed.

~

It had been almost a week, Friday rolling around, and no one had heard Taeyong speak. Sure they saw him talking to Sicheng and Donghyuck on occasion but no one had actually heard his voice or had it directed at them.

Doyoung observed the male from his spot on the other side of the classroom. It was their last lesson before lunch and Doyoung was starting to get excruciatingly hungry as he had overslept thus missing breakfast this morning.

Taeyong was doodling in his notebook as the teacher droned on with his monotone voice. No one was paying attention.

When the bell rang Taeyong was the first one out as usual. Doyoung would like to say that the hype around him had died down but that would be a lie.

He knew everyone still gossiped about the mysterious, broody ice prince. Doyoung stuck to his own opinion. Lee Taeyong is an asshole with attitude issues.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! Leave some kudos if you want and comments make me smile :)}
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I was supposed to add this in the last chapter but I forgot I’m sorry XD

Here are the ages of some important characters:

Seniors (18-19) - Taeil, Johnny, Taeyong, Yuta, Doyoung, Ten, Jaehyun

Juniors (17-18) - Mark, Sicheng

Sophomores (16-17) - Jeno, Renjun, Donghyuck, Jaemin

13 - Jungwoo
12 - Lucas
7 - Chenle
4 - Jisung

Hope that helped!!! Now enjoy this chapter :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mark, Donghyuck and Jeno were walking towards the canteen to meet up with Jaemin and Renjun. Mark had been giving Donghyuck rides every day to school and home after school when he didn’t ride with Johnny.

Today the orange haired boy was wearing a long sleeved black shirt and a pair of ripped blue jeans. Silver rings adorned his fingers, complimenting the midnight blue nail polish prettily and his eyes were piercingly pronounced from the eyeliner.

As Jeno was recounting a story from last year’s school trip someone gave Donghyuck a harsh shove, causing him to stumble into Jeno.

“Woah careful there pretty boy,” the guy who had shoved him taunted. Mark recognized him as a junior. The busy hallway stopped at the sound of an altercation. Mark saw that Johnny and his friends were looking at them confusedly from the back of the small circle that formed around them.

“Hey-“ Mark started and was about to throw a punch when Donghyuck grabbed his wrist to stop him.

“Aww your boyfriend is protecting you, how cute,” the guy sneered, beady eyes daring them to fight back.

“Firstly, thanks for the compliment, of course I’m pretty, unlike you,” Donghyuck sighed, bored and seemingly unfazed. “Secondly I also have a brain, unlike you. And two correctly pointed feet, unlike you who seem to have two left feet as I have experienced after you so clumsily bumped into me. And seeing as you are trying to think of a comeback, I’m going to end this now before you damage your impeccably small brain. Bye sweet cheeks,” Donghyuck gave the junior a small once over,
looking unimpressed, before turning and pushing Jeno and Mark in front of him.

“Yah you faggot,” the junior spat and grabbed Donghyuck’s wrist harshly, yanking him back. The sophomore cried out at the twisting grip and Mark knew both he and Jeno were ready to attack when suddenly a body pushed its way though the circle of students around them.

Mark recognized the body as Lee Taeyong. He was wearing a cold expression as he strode forward to Donghyuck and the bully. Mark noticed that both Jaehyun and Johnny had fought their way through the throng of students to stand behind Mark.

The bully seemed to have frozen as he didn’t move when Taeyong reached the pair, whipping out his right arm to forcefully grab the Junior’s forearm, making him lose his grip on Donghyuck. Taeyong twisted the bully’s arm behind his back and shoved him away.

Donghyuck was rubbing his aching wrist when Taeyong pulled him close and whispered lowly in his ear. Mark couldn’t hear what he said but Donghyuck nodded and Taeyong patted his brother’s hair gently before the younger walked over to stand next to Mark who immediately wrapped a protective arm around him, Jeno placing a comforting hand on Donghyuck’s lower back.

They all turned in time to see Taeyong deliver a scathing glare to the bully who was gulping nervously now.

The intensity of the alleged Ice Prince’s gaze was enough to make anyone cower. He turned his back on the junior and gave Donghyuck a soft look before walking off, the crowd parting for him like water.

“Next time pick on someone your own size,” Jaehyun broke the suffocating silence and therefore the spell. Everyone started murmuring and moving away, the bully hurrying off with his gaze lowered.

“Are you okay?” Mark asked worriedly.

“Yeah, nothing I haven’t heard before,” Donghyuck exhaled, voice slightly shaky. “My brother will always protect me,” he looked like he didn’t intend for that to be said out loud. “Let’s eat.”

“You gonna be okay boys?” Johnny asked, frowning. Mark looked up at his brother and Jaehyun.

“Yeah. Thanks for stepping forward,” he said with a small smile. Johnny returned it fondly.

“Always. Now go eat,” He shooed them away. Mark and Jeno sandwiched Donghyuck between them and walked to the canteen.

~

“That was intense,” Doyoung sighed as Johnny and Jaehyun returned to the group.

“Taeyong looked fucking livid. Who knew those frail looking arms had such strength,” Yuta said, eyes wide.

“Well. I think everyone knows not to mess with his brothers now,” Taeil shrugged. Ten nodded in agreement.

“Let’s eat, I’m starving.”

Taeyong didn’t show up for lunch that Friday.

~
With Saturday came a lazy morning.

Taeyong woke up first like always and laid in bed for a while, just enjoying the calm and quiet.

After half an hour the door opened softly, Jisung walking in with his teddy bear under his arm.

“Hyungie?” He called and Taeyong smiled.

“Hey baby,” he said.

“Hyungie, can I sleep here?” The four year old questioned cutely, eyes drooping already.

“Mmm, c’mere,” Taeyong slurred, tiredness taking over his body as well. Jisung climbed up on the bed and crept under the comforter, curling up to his eldest brother. Minutes later their breaths evened out and they were asleep again.

~

Lucas cautiously snuck into Taeyong’s room, seeing Jisung’s eyes blinking open. Taeyong was still sleeping soundly.

“Hey little brother,” Lucas smiled and opened his arms widely. Jisung rubbed his eyes and stood up slowly on the bed, falling into Lucas’ arms. “Hello there,” Lucas laughed, trying to be quiet as they snuck out of the room again. As they had descended the stairs Lucas set Jisung down and held his hand instead as they walked into the kitchen. Donghyuck and Jungwoo were trying to cook while Sicheng and Chenle tried to piece together a puzzle.

“My mission is accomplished! I retrieved the Maknae,” Lucas announced proudly. Jungwoo hummed distractedly while cracking eggs diligently.

“I wanna puzzle,” Jisung squealed and let go of Lucas, running over to Chenle. Chenle helped Jisung up on his own chair and they huddled together, trying to find the fitting pieces.

“Lucas you can mix this batter,” Donghyuck announced when Jungwoo finished cracking eggs. The blonde smiled happily and complied, whisking enthusiastically while singing obnoxiously.

“I whip my hair back and forth. I whip my hair back and forth,” he jammed to himself, throwing his head back and forth. Donghyuck rolled his eyes fondly, Chenle’s high pitched laughter sounding throughout the kitchen.

~

Taeyong woke up to the smell of food. He confusedly sat up in bed, eyes still closed.

After a minute he managed to open them and stand up, pulling on a pair of sweatpants and a black T-shirt before walking down the stairs.

“Good morning hyung!” All his brother’s chorused as he followed the enticing smell to the kitchen. A table packed full with food and drinks greeted him, everyone sitting around it already.

“You made breakfast?” He smiled in astonishment. “This looks so good wow!”

“Yep, we are awesome obviously,” Donghyuck grinned teasingly. Taeyong shook his head in exasperation and sat down.

“Okay, let’s eat now,” Lucas urged, eyes wide and expectant. Taeyong laughed.
“Yes let’s.”

~

“Hyung?” Donghyuck asked when they were doing dishes. Taeyong hummed, not looking up from the stain he was polishing. It refused to go away.

“I was wondering if I could have some friends over for a sleepover today?” Taeyong almost dropped the plate in surprise.

“Oh. Yeah I guess that’s alright, who are they?” He questioned, a small smile on his lips.

“Uhm it’s Mark. And Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun,” Donghyuck cleared his throat. Taeyong found the nervousness adorable.

“You really care about these friends,” he stated calmly. Donghyuck whacked him on the arm harshly causing his eldest brother to cry out and start pouting.

“You brat.”

Donghyuck simply stuck his tongue out.

They washed a few more plates in silence until Taeyong spoke up again.

“Do they know how to get here?” He questioned.

“Yeah I sent the address in our group chat.”

“And they just know where to go?”

“Well yeah hyung they have google maps. You’re really becoming old,” Donghyuck smirked. Taeyong gaped at his rudeness.

“I’m not old, Donghyuck ah! Hey come back here. I’m not old. I’m not.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like I’m torturing Hyuck too much XD

Leave kudos if you liked it and comments honestly make my day <333
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Here you have another chapter!!! Thank you so much for all the comments and kudos!
It makes me rly happy to read and see the response <333

Now enjoy :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chenle was bored. He didn’t want to watch a movie and he finished the puzzle. What else could he do? Solemnly he walked up the stairs to his brothers’ rooms. He peeked into Lucas and Jungwoo’s room and saw that both of them were sitting by their desks doing homework. He didn’t feel like disturbing them.

Next he went to his Sicheng hyung’s room where the older was also doing some kind of homework. Chenle pouted, no one had time to play. Lastly he went to Donghyuck’s room.

The sixteen year old was also doing homework, Chenle noted disappointedly. He was about to leave when Donghyuck noticed him hovering by the door.

“Hey Chenle, what’s up?” He smiled invitingly.

“No one has time to play,” he whispered, pouting. Donghyuck laughed and rose from his chair.

“I have some time to spare, why don’t we continue our kpop dances?” Donghyuck wiggled his eyebrows and Chenle squealed happily and grabbed his older brother’s hand before pulling him down the stairs. Learning kpop dances was something Chenle and Donghyuck made their tradition a few months ago as they both loved dancing and they had so much fun while doing it.

Taeyong was sitting by the kitchen table as they walked by, Jisung sitting on his lap as the oldest brother wrote a grocery list for next week.

Chenle and Donghyuck continued into the living room, the older setting up YouTube on the TV while Chenle stretched enthusiastically. Jisung wandered into the room and left the teddy bear he was holding on the couch so it could watch, then he walked up to Chenle and tried to copy his stretches.

“No Jisungie, your arm needs to be here,” Chenle corrected the youngest’ posture. Jisung whined in protest.

“I can do it hyung!” He insisted. Chenle only smiled at how determined the younger was.

“Let’s do Momoland’s Bboom Bboom first,” Donghyuck said and made sure Chenle was ready and Jisung was safe from any hard surfaces in case he tripped before starting the song.

~

Mark slowly walked up to the front door with his bag feeling heavy on his shoulders. He had been to Donghyuck’s house before, but he had never entered it. Honestly he was kind of nervous. What
would his parents be like? Would Taeyong be home? Did he have any pets?

Mark took a deep breath and ascended the three stair steps in front of the door. He stared soullessly at it. Music was playing loudly from the inside, he recognized it as Momoland.

Taking another deep breath, he raised his hand and rang the doorbell.

The music stopped abruptly, before one pair of feet approached the door. Mark’s heart was beating like crazy as it opened to reveal... a child?

The child reached up to Mark’s abdomen, his hair fluffy and black with big brown eyes staring imploringly.

“Hi? Is Lee Donghyuck here?” Mark questioned confusedly. Maybe it was the wrong house? But that wouldn’t make sense. The child broke out into a huge smile, eyes disappearing.

“Hyuckie hyung!” He shouted in a high pitched voice. Another set of footsteps came rushing towards the door.

Mark’s breath hitched at the sight that greeted him. Donghyuck was standing behind the child, wearing grey sweatpants and a huge T-shirt that fell off his shoulders. His face was void of makeup and his hair was ruffled, tan skin glowing with a sheen of sweat. Chipped black nail polish rested on his nails, one diamond earring glimmering in each earlobe and he was holding yet another child, younger than the one who opened the door.

The picture was so painfully domestic and casual in a way Mark had never seen Donghyuck look before that his heart pounded harshly in his chest. He was scared they could hear it.

“Mark! You’re early,” Donghyuck exclaimed.

“Mark hyung,” Mark corrected the younger male who simply ignored it.

“Come on in,” he said.

Mark walked inside the house, closing the door behind him.

“Uh yeah. These are my little brothers. This is Chenle and Jisung,” Donghyuck introduced a bit awkwardly, Mark wasn’t used to Donghyuck acting so differently. It was refreshing in a way.

“Hello, nice to meet you,” Mark said timidly. Chenle waved shyly and Jisung simply stared at him without blinking.

“O-kay, Chenle can you bring Jisungie to Taeyong hyung?” Donghyuck set the child down on the floor, Chenle taking Jisung’s hand to lead him away and wordlessly leaving them alone.

“Yes great, welcome. We can go up to my room so you can leave your bag,” Donghyuck smiled sheepishly.

“Okay.”

As they walked up the stairs Mark spoke up again.

“So you have four brothers?” He inquired. “That’s so weird. I’ve never known anyone who has had more than two siblings.”

Donghyuck chuckled nervously and Mark was yet again surprised by this newfound shyness.
“Uh I guess,” the younger said dismissively.

Donghyuck’s room was very vibrant. Colors everywhere and posters on every wall. It felt very homey, Mark liked it.

“I guess I’ll introduce you to the rest,” Donghyuck spoke up, having gathered some of his confidence again. Mark frowned.

“The rest?”

“Just come with me,” and with that Donghyuck took Mark’s hand in his, causing the Canadian boy’s poor heart to rush wildly. Donghyuck’s hand was delicate and warm, tan skin contrasting prettily with Mark’s own pale skin. Mark knew that Donghyuck was a very touchy person and he himself wasn’t that into skinship, but with Donghyuck it felt good to hold hands and bump hips and hug.

They walked down the corridor and Donghyuck knocked on the first door rapidly before opening it without waiting for an answer.

Inside they found Sicheng sitting by a desk, typing on his phone, abandoned coursework in front of him.

“Hey hyung, this is Mark, but I guess you already know each other,” Donghyuck introduced. Mark said a small hi, Sicheng waving with a smile before turning back to his phone. Donghyuck proceeded to leave the room, dragging Mark by the hand to the next room.

He didn’t knock this time, simply opened the door and waltzed inside. Two boys were sitting together on the bed furthest away from the door. They were leaning over a math problem.

“Mark hyung these are my two other younger brothers. Lucas and Jungwoo. Brothers, this is Mark,” Lucas and Jungwoo looked up at the pair by the door. Mark’s eyes widened slightly. Donghyuck had six brothers?!

“So you finally decided to bring Mark-ssi home?” Jungwoo spoke teasingly, looking at their joined hands. Donghyuck’s hold tightened imperceptibly. “We have heard so much—“

“Shut up Jungwoo, don’t get ahead of yourself Mark is simply early for our sleepover with all of our friends,” Donghyuck gritted his teeth at his little brother sourly. “We’re leaving now.”

“Nice to meet you Mark Hyung!” Lucas called after them as they left the room.

“So. You have six brothers?” Mark questioned quietly.

“Yeah is there something wrong with that?” Donghyuck spoke defensively.

“No! No. Of course not. It’s pretty cool actually,” Mark smiled sheepishly. He was rewarded with a gentle smile from Donghyuck that almost made his insides turn to mush.

“So what do you want to do now? We can hang in my room or watch TV? Are you hungry? We have some snacks in the kitchen?” The younger rambled.

“Maybe some snacks and then we can just hang in your room for a while?” Mark suggested. Donghyuck simply nodded and started walking down the stairs, dropping Mark’s hand to the older boy’s disappointment.

Mark almost froze when they entered the kitchen but managed to stay on course, gulping nervously.
Chenle and Jisung were sitting at the table, playing on an iPad while Taeyong sat next to them, monitoring. He looked up when he heard people enter. Mark took in the dangling piercings in his ear, the soft blonde hair brushing over his eyes; the unblinking eyes. Although he still looked intimidating as ever that was still the most casual Mark had seen him look, as the senior was wearing sweatpants and a hoodie.

“Hey hyung. This is Mark, as you know,” Donghyuck said on his way to the refrigerator. Mark was definitely not expecting Taeyong to open his mouth.

“Hello, I’m Taeyong,” his voice was soft and raspy, falling over the room like a comforting blanket.
Mark choked.

“Uh-I-hi-um.”
Donghyuck gave him a raised eyebrow but didn’t interfere. Watching Mark embarrass himself was fun.

Taeyong smiled amusedly causing Mark to stutter even worse.

“Uh-huh. We’re going up to my room now before Mark Hyung can make a bigger fool of himself,” Donghyuck said teasingly, grabbing the chips and drinks in one hand, pulling Mark by the wrist with the other. Mark was stuttering protests against the treatment. Taeyong’s melodic laugh followed them up the stairs.

“You should keep him Hyuck-ah!”

~

“Your brother actually speaks,” Mark said in disbelief as he had sat down on Donghyuck’s bed. The younger simply hummed as he fixed with the speaker, turning it on and connecting it to his phone. Soft music floated through the room.

“He’s just shy and not interested in making friends,” he took a seat next to Mark on the bed.

“Huh,” Mark was still shook.
After a few minutes silence, nothing but the music being heard, Mark spoke again.

“Where are your parents by the way?”
He could tell the topic was sensitive from the way that Donghyuck’s whole body went rigid and his lips twisted into a slight grimace before he schooled his features again.

“They’re not at home right now,” Mark decided not to push the topic and switched to complaining about the math test they were having the following week, effectively diffusing the tension.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! Comment your thoughts! I rly enjoy reading them <3
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Yay here’s a new chapter for you!!! Hope you’ll enjoy :) markhyuck is a precious ship, they’re probs my fave in NCT <3 I just wanted to let you know in case you couldn’t tell XD

Now enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Taeyong leaned his chin on his hand as he watched Chenle and Jisung continue to play on the iPad after Donghyuck and Mark left.


“Yes I would think so,” Taeyong smiled slightly.

“I have friends too! There’s Joohyun and Jeongin and Guanlin!” Jisung excitedly told him, Chenle taking over the game they were playing. “Even if Guanlin likes Superman more than Spider-Man.”

“No! He doesn’t,” Taeyong exclaimed, scandalised.

“Uh-huh, he does! But he can still be my friend because he shares his cookies with me.” Taeyong laughed.

“Of course he can still be your friend. You don’t have to like the exact same things to be friends,” he said gently and combed his fingers through Jisung’s soft hair. The youngest nodded in awed understanding.

Then the doorbell rang. Taeyong contemplated opening, but he wasn’t sure Donghyuck would like that so he settled for simply staying put. Chenle was occupied with his game and Jisung didn’t like strangers.

“Hyuck-ah! The door!” He shouted.

“Coming!” The answer was muffled. Soon footsteps rushed down the stairs, the doorbell ringing again impatiently.

Donghyuck and Mark rushed by the kitchen, the door opening right after they disappeared from Taeyong’s sight. He heard loud voices and laughter echoing through the hall. Chenle paused his game at the commotion, Jisung looking towards the hall with wide eyes.

Soon the sounds died down as the group moved toward the kitchen. Taeyong tried to keep a relaxed face. He knew his appearance intimidated people and he didn’t want Donghyuck to feel embarrassed.

Donghyuck, Mark and three new faces showed up in their line of sight. They were all dressed in casual clothes, carrying sleepover bags.
“So these are my brothers, Jisung and Chenle. You have probably seen Taeyongie hyung around,” Donghyuck introduced. “This is Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jisung said clumsily, having recently learned to use the phrase. The three boys smiled at him.

“Your little brother is adorable,” the one called Jaemin squealed with a blinding smile. Donghyuck smirked knowingly.

“Yeah I know right,” he nodded. “Now let’s go upstairs.”

“Wait Donghyuckie,” Taeyong cleared his throat, he saw some widened eyes on the new additions but none as bad as Mark. “Can you tell Jungwoo and Lucas to get down here, it’s their turn to help me with dinner.”

“You got it boss,” Donghyuck saluted him teasingly and Taeyong rolled his eyes, throwing a crumpled up piece of paper on the boy. It hit him on the nose before bouncing down to the floor. The younger smirked.

“You’re not going to tolerate that piece of paper on the floor. You’re gonna pick it up as soon as we leave,” he mocked good-naturedly. Taeyong scrunched his nose up in annoyance because of course he would.

“I should put you on dish duty,” he sniffed and Donghyuck laughed before taking the stairs two steps at a time, his friends following.

Taeyong got up from his seat to pick up the piece of paper.

~

“Your brother seems chill,” Renjun spoke as they ascended the stairs.

“He’s a big softie,” Donghyuck laughed. He stopped by a door and smacked it with his hand.

“Hyung wants you down in the kitchen!” He called through the wood. It opened seconds later to reveal two boys who Donghyuck introduced as Lucas and Jungwoo. They waved cheerily before hurrying down the stairs.

“I wish I had a younger brother,” Jaemin sighed wistfully. They proceeded into Donghyuck’s room.

“I would offer one of mine but I think I’d rather keep them all,” Donghyuck grinned. Jeno cooed.

“Aww you’re finally revealing your sappy side,” he mocked. Donghyuck sent him a glare before punching his shoulder harshly.

“Ow fuck!”

~

Dinner was a busy affair. It mostly was in the Lee house. With the addition of four rowdy teenage boys it doubled. Taeyong settled for conversing with Mark quietly while the others argued and laughed and were being generally childish, Lucas and Donghyuck were still the loudest though, Chenle’s screeching laugh sounding through the room frequently.

Taeyong and Mark managed a pretty decent conversation, Mark getting over his stuttering eventually. They found out that they had a common interest, which was rapping. Mark revealed that
he writes raps in the margins of his notebooks all the time and he would love to stand on stage someday. Taeyong smiled at the spark in his eyes as he talked about his passion. The younger made him feel like a very endeared older brother. Especially when Donghyuck managed to trick Mark into thinking Lucas was a natural blonde.

~

Taeyong helped the boys find the mattresses in the basement and brought them comforters and pillows from upstairs as they started settling the mattresses in the living room.

“Do you have everything?” He asked looking over the five teenagers on the floor, their snacks and the movie about to be played. He got an affirmative from all of them. “Okay, shout if you need anything.”

He was about to turn off the lights when Jisung came padding into the living room. The toddler walked up to Donghyuck and hugged him, the sixteen year old smiled and kissed Jisung’s cheek.

“Good night hyung,” the youngest smiled. Then he looked over to Jaemin and took it upon himself to hug the brunette. Taeyong smiled. Jaemin and Jisung had really hit it off during dinner.

“Good night Jaemin hyung.”

Jaemin smiled happily and returned the hug warmly. As they separated Jisung walked over to Taeyong who picked him up.

“Good night!” He said and turned off the lights.

~

The movie they watched was pretty good. Donghyuck thought the straight couple trope in the movie was cliche but he didn’t feel the need to complain as the movies’ main focus was action and he the straight couple wasn’t being entirely gender normative which he was glad for.

“I liked that.” Renjun commented as he stretched out on his and Jeno’s shared mattress.

“Me too,” Donghyuck agreed. He was lying next to Mark on his stomach, head pillowed on his arms. Jaemin was next to him, currently turning off the TV. The brunette turned on his phone flashlight so they could all see each other properly.

“It’s been really nice today. Your brothers are great,” Jeno gave Donghyuck his signature eye smile. And to the surprise of everyone Donghyuck blushed slightly at the words. They remained silent for a few minutes, yawning with fatigue.

“Hyuckie?” Jaemin put a hand in the apricot hair his friend was donning, carding it out gently. “I’m glad you’re our friend now.”

“I second that, it’s great having someone else who resents the painfully heteronormative culture at our school,” Renjun laughed. Donghyuck felt overwhelmed with friendship.

“I,” He started, Jaemin’s hand kept petting his hair. “I’m really grateful to have you guys. Thank you for accepting me into your group and not judging me,” he choked up and his cheeks burned with embarrassment. “I really appreciate it.” He couldn’t help himself as he turned his head into the pillow and screamed in embarrassment.

Mark delivers a comforting smack to Donghyuck’s hip, the younger yelping at the sting.
“Okay. We’ve had enough sappiness for a lifetime today,” Jeno huffed. “But same.”

Renjun hit his boyfriend on the head. “stop pretending to be cool when I know you love to cuddle and cry over sad Disney movies.”

Everyone laughed as Jeno protested vehemently.

A few more minutes passed until Renjun spoke.

“So I know this might sound stereotypical although I doubt it, -considering that shirt you wore this Tuesday, Donghyuck - but you’re not straight, right? You don’t have to answer.”

Donghyuck’s lips twitched upwards for a split second.

“I am not straight. I’m gay. As gay as they come,” he laughed, tiredness clouding his mind. Jaemin smiled his angelic smile and squeezed Donghyuck’s hand.

“Great! I just really had to know for sure,” Renjun’s smile could barely be seen in the faint light from Jaemin’s phone but Donghyuck could feel that the red head was beaming.

“I think we’ve had enough heartfelt talks for this month at least,” Mark sighed playfully.

“Aww poor straight boy being faced with actual feelings,” Renjun cooed teasingly. Donghyuck’s heart skipped a painful beat. He didn’t know Mark was straight. He honestly had maybe expected that but he was still shocked. Donghyuck breathed out in disappointment trying not to make his turbulent mind obvious to the others. His feelings were going haywire. The sophomore wasn’t in love, there was attraction, but not love. He just had to let it go before anything developed further.

They continued talking even though they were all tired.

~

That night Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun managed to roll themselves up in a boyfriend burrito (one comforter squeezing them together in a cozy embrace) and Donghyuck took a picture for blackmail material (and maybe because they were cute and he felt soft).

After taking the picture he carefully laid down again so he wouldn’t disturb Mark in his sleep.

Just as Donghyuck was starting to fall asleep Mark moved and two arms encircled Donghyuck. He gasped quietly at the unexpected touch, Mark drawing him close and cuddling up to him like he was a teddy bear. Donghyuck was grateful that they were both wearing pyjamas consisting of shirts and pants. His racing heart would definitely not have been able to take skin on skin.

Mark did not seem to be letting him go anytime soon so Donghyuck melted into the embrace, falling asleep quickly while feeling safe and warm.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!! Comments make me smile and I hope you enjoyed the chapter <333
Monday arrived too quickly. Donghyuck couldn’t stop smiling about his successful sleepover. They hadn’t pried about his parents and he felt closer to all of them after having been up all night talking about anything and everything.

He couldn’t help but think about how hard it would be to leave this time around. His heart contracted at the thought, he had never been this close to any of his friends in other towns. This time he knew he was going to feel it in his bones when he said good bye, because who really keeps contact after moving away.

Donghyuck was startled out of his thoughts when Mark stopped his moped and turned off the engine.

Donghyuck took off the helmet and got off, Mark following stealthily.

“I have basketball practice today so I assume you’re staying to watch?” Mark inquired as he stowed away the helmets. Donghyuck looked at the junior, his ruffled brown hair standing on end, eyebrows furrowing in concentration as he tried to close the seat, thin lips pursed. His heartbeat picked up the pace.

“No,” Donghyuck swallowed thickly. He had stayed behind to watch Mark’s practice twice last week (saying he was gonna study with Renjun and Jaemin on the bleachers but actually ending up messing around instead) and it only made the junior more attractive. “I think I’ll go home with my brothers.”

Mark looked slightly confused at the rejection but he simply shrugged it off.

“Okay then.” And that was it.

~

Taeyong didn’t feel like going to the canteen to eat, as he was only going to be ogled, which is why he ended up going to the yard in front of the school instead. He observed the tacky yard, some benches and bushes spread around on the grey dull pavement and then the parking lot, the school could really do some investing within gardening. Just as he was about to take a seat on a bench a voice called out.

“Taeyongie hyung!”
He looked around and spotted Sicheng sitting a few metres away on a patch of grass together with a brown haired boy. He slowly walked over.

“Kun-hyung, this is my brother, Taeyong,” Sicheng introduced. Mentioned brother smiled thinly and sat down next to Sicheng.

“Hello!” Kun greeted with a kind smile. “I don’t know if we have any classes together.” He tilted his head to the side as if he was studying the silver haired male.

“Kun hyung is a senior,” Sicheng explained around a mouthful of the sandwich Taeyong had made this morning.

Taeyong was slightly surprised to learn that Kun didn’t recognize him but he was also grateful.

“We might have. I’m sorry but I don’t remember,” he said nervously.

Kun simply smiled again. “That’s okay, now I know who to look for in my classes if I want to say hi.”

Taeyong smiled in return, he figured Kun was a good person and he was happy that the brown haired male was the first one at school to hear him talk.

Kun suddenly pulled out a deck of cards from his inner pocket.

“Do you want to see a magic trick?”

~

When school ended Taeyong breathed out in relief. He felt incredibly sick of people staring and he really wanted to get home and cuddle one of his brothers right about now.

Sicheng and, surprisingly, Donghyuck were waiting by the car when he walked out.

“Are you not riding with Mark today?” Taeyong asked, confused frown in place. Donghyuck sighed dejectedly.

“No,” he simply said. Sicheng and Taeyong shared a worried look but they got in the car nonetheless, heading for Lucas and Jungwoo’s school.

~

Jungwoo watched Lucas flirt with some girls on the other side of the school yard. He rolled his eyes fondly at the younger male’s attempts. The girls did seem to enjoy it though. Jungwoo chuckled and leaned back on the bench, pulling his phone out of his pocket.

A shadow blocked the sun, as two pairs of feet invaded his line of sight. He swallowed thickly and looked up slowly, not wanting to deal with them right now.

“All alone again, huh. You weirdo,” the boy with bigger build said tauntingly.

“I’m waiting for my brother,” Jungwoo defended himself, tone soft.

“What? I can’t hear you? Speak up, you little freak,” the smaller one mockingly called out. Jungwoo lowered his gaze to his hands, which were picking at his phone case. His pinkies were painted a dark blue since yesterday as he had went into Donghyuck’s room while the older was painting his nails, immediately getting roped in to get his own painted too.
“Is that nail polish? You’re such a girl, Jungwoo!” The bigger kid laughed obnoxiously. A crowd had gathered by now, curious middle schoolers watching the altercation. Jungwoo desperately hoped that Lucas would notice and walk over to help, but his brother was nowhere to be seen.

“Yah! Speak when spoken to you creep!”

A hand suddenly reached out to grab his phone and Jungwoo yelled out in panic when he saw the bully throw it down, hard, on the pavement, an ominous crack sounding through the tense air.

Jungwoo gaped at his phone that laid screen down.

“Hey kids! What is going on?” A teacher’s voice made the bullies eyes widen, both of them turning on their heels and dispersing. The crowd also managed to disappear in a matter of seconds, leaving Jungwoo, a shattered phone and a shattered spirit.

A warm hand, bigger than his own, enveloped his. He looked up from his phone to see Lucas’ concerned face. The taller boy leaned down and picked up the phone. Pieces of glass from the screen remained on the ground.

“I’m so sorry hyung,” Lucas said with a wobbling lip, eyes glossy. “I should’ve been faster at getting help.”

The teacher approached them with a pitying smile.

Just then a van pulled up to the parking lot, Jungwoo recognizing his brother’s car.

“Thank you seonsaengnim, but we have to go now,” Jungwoo bowed shallowly before picking up his bag and dragging Lucas away by the hand.

“Why didn’t you tell her?” Lucas asked incredulously.

“I can handle it,” Jungwoo said, vice wavering. Lucas frowned.

When they were seated Taeyong immediately picked up on their mood.

“What happened?” He asked, Sicheng turning down the radio.

Lucas looked at Jungwoo accusingly. Jungwoo stubbornly didn’t open his mouth.

“If you don’t tell them I will,” Lucas announced. Jungwoo shot him an incredulous glare, the younger’s eyes welling up with tears.

“What happened?” Donghyuck asked again, eyes wide at the emotional state of his younger brothers.

“Some boys are bullying Jungwoo hyung!” Lucas exclaimed, Jungwoo’s hand immediately shooting out to whack the boy on the head.

“You shouldn’t have told them! You’re so stupid, use your brain for once in your life!” Jungwoo shouted. Lucas’ tears precariously rested on his eyelashes before falling down his cheeks in streams.

“Jungwoo!” Taeyong gasped at the rudeness of his brother. “You can not say those things to your brother ever, I know you know better than this!”

Then Jungwoo’s own withheld tears finally made an appearance, he started sobbing and pulled his younger brother into a tight hug, Lucas crying harder as he hugged back.
“I’m sorry, Xuxi. I didn’t mean that! I love you,” the thirteen year old cried.

“I love you too!” Lucas managed to choke out.

Taeyong let them be for a few minutes so they could calm down, Jungwoo pulling away from Lucas slightly when they both stopped crying. He rested his head on the younger’s shoulder.

“Jungwoo,” Taeyong started. “I want you to be completely honest. Are you being bullied?”

Donghyuck and Sicheng looked at their little brother, concern swimming in their eyes.

Jungwoo nodded.

Taeyong took a shuddering breath.

“What did they do to you?”

Jungwoo was reluctant to answer so Lucas spoke instead.

“They have been calling him names and they push him in the hallways,” he animatedly shared.

“Today they broke his phone! Look! Look!”

A shattered phone was presented to the three oldest, Taeyong taking it from Lucas’s hand gingerly.

“Okay. I will come in tomorrow after you’ve finished school and talk to a teacher, Jungwoo you need to be with me then. They need to hear it from you,” Taeyong decided. Mentioned brother nodded tiredly, resigned.

Donghyuck reached out to stroke Jungwoo’s hair tenderly, smiling at his brothers.

“You know what? I think we’re having a bad day today,” Taeyong nodded in conclusion. “Let’s go to the mall.”

Cheers erupted in the van as Taeyong started the car so they could get the youngest brothers and go to the mall.

Chapter End Notes

And we finally got to meet Kun <3

Hope you enjoyed! Kudos if you liked it and comments makes my depressing life better <333
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Yay for quick updating <333 hope you’ll enjoy this chapter :))

The mall was big but cozy. Taeyong has learned over their time there that everyone knew everyone. And he assumed this was the cause for the homely familiar feeling the mall provided them.

Jisung was sitting in his wagon, Chenle holding onto Sicheng’s hand, while Donghyuck had one arm around Lucas and one around Jungwoo.

Taeyong knew Jisung was a bit old for the wagon, but he also knew that it was very hard to stop babying Jisung when the youngest was so cute and sweet and always wanting to be picked up.

“First we’re getting a new phone for Jungwoo,” Taeyong announced as they started walking inside the mall. The others nodded in agreement.

The salesperson looked shocked as they stepped inside the phone store, but he quickly composed himself.

“Welcome! How can I help you?” He greeted. Taeyong leaned on the handle of Jisung’s wagon and looked at Jungwoo with a smile. Then he turned to the salesperson with a smaller smile.

“We would like a phone.”

They basically went into every store at the mall, excited at the concept of new things. The wagon was filled up with bags of clothes and new quirky items. Jisung demanded that he could walk so Taeyong unfastened him from the wagon halfway through, the youngest instantly wobbling to Chenle.

“Lele hyung! Wanna hold your hand!” He said and Chenle giggled and grabbed his small hand securely.

“Be careful on the moving stairs Jisungie,” Chenle instructed as they reached the escalator, tightening his grip on Jisung’s hand.

Taeyong smiled at them. They continued walking through the mall until Jungwoo squealed at the sight of a make up store. Taeyong snorted in amusement.

“I’m hungry!” Donghyuck exclaimed as they walked out of the makeup store. All the brothers could relate to that statement.

“Let’s eat then,” Lucas yelled, excitedly bouncing up and down.

They found a decent fast food place on the second floor, Sicheng exclaiming his approval at the sight
of the Chinese food on the menu.

“Hyuck!” A loud voice startled them. Donghyuck furrowed his eyebrows in confusion, looking around. Then he spotted them.

Mark, Jaemin, Jeno, Renjun and mostly the whole basketball team including Johnny and his clique.

Mark was contemplating Donghyuck, eyebrows furrowed, as they walked through the mall, heading for the food court. The whole team decided to host a sudden Monday group gathering, which was code for eating a sh*t ton of food.

Some of the guys in the team had their girlfriends with them, some self proclaimed extroverts also tagged along and of course Johnny, Yuta and Jaehyun brought their clique.

Why did Donghyuck not stay behind for the practice, Mark didn’t understand. He always stayed. Even though it had only been one week.

Gosh he was starting to feel pathetic. He shouldn’t care so much, the boy probably had a family errand or something.

“You know your eyebrows make you look like a seagull when you do that,” Renjun piped up from next to him. Mark shook out of his thoughts and found his three best friends watching him.

“Sorry. I zoned out.”

“Is something wrong?” Jaemin questioned, a not entirely confused but not entirely sure look on his face.

“Nope. Everything’s fine,” Mark insisted, letting his eyes wander to avoid further questioning. That’s when he saw that familiar apricot hair.

“Hyuck!” He called loudly, cutting off the entire team’s conversations.

Everyone turned to look in the direction Mark had shouted.

The brunet simply smiled as he saw Donghyuck looking around confusedly until the sophomore finally located the big group of people. Mark saw his eyes widening, before he turned to Taeyong and said something. Then he was walking rapidly towards them.

“Hey people,” he greeted with a smile directed at Mark who had so graciously called him out.

“I didn’t know you were going to the mall,” Mark said, grasping for something to say as he stared into Donghyuck’s eyes, the brown color reflecting the golden hues from the lamps above them.

“It was a surprise development,” Donghyuck shrugged. Mark bobbed his head, not really knowing what to do all of a sudden, he usually wasn’t this stuck when he spoke to Donghyuck.

Suddenly he became aware of several pairs of eyes watching them awkwardly interact. He accidentally made eye contact with Johnny who raised an eyebrow at him.

“I guess I should head back,” Donghyuck broke the uncomfortable silence. He looked uncertain as he offered a nervous smile before turning on his heel.

“See ya tomorrow Hyuck!” Jeno called.
“I’ll text you later!” Renjun yelled.

“They stole my lines!” Jaemin exclaimed.

Donghyuck laughed and waved at them.

Mark’s mouth felt dry.

~

Ten watched as the sophomore, Donghyuck, walked towards them. His gaze moved from him to his friends. Jaehyun and Yuta looked back at him, both of them looking curious.

Johnny, Taeil and Doyoung were looking to the place Donghyuck had come from, so they followed their example.

There stood Taeyong with Sicheng and four, what looked to be, children around him and a stroller packed full of shopping bags. He was currently speaking to one of the taller boys with blonde hair, their hands holding each other and swinging back and forth between their bodies.

“Is he a babysitter?” Taeil mused quietly, only their group of friends hearing it.

“Might be,” Jaehyun agreed.

“That does not suit him at all,” Doyoung protested.

Suddenly Taeyong looked away from the blonde boy and over to them. His eyes first secured Donghyuck’s location, then his eyes flitted over to the friends who were staring at him. Ten met his eyes briefly before the silver haired male quickly looked away.

Ten swallowed nervously, a natural reaction to people with gorgeous bambi eyes looking at him. Holy fuck. Taeyong’s eyes were light brown, wide and imploring.

He took a deep breath before tuning into the awkward conversation happening between Donghyuck and Mark again.

~

Donghyuck hurriedly returned to his brothers and shooed them into the restaurant.

Taeyong wondered why his brother was acting so weirdly, but decided not to dwell on it, instead sending Jungwoo and Sicheng to get a table while they ordered.

Donghyuck would come around, he just needed time. And Taeyong would absolutely give that to him.

~

Sicheng was sitting on the lawn with Kun again the next day during lunch.

Sicheng has been settling in pretty well at the new school. He had found Kun and the older boy was a great friend. They never ran out of conversation material and since Sicheng had been taking Chinese classes for a long time they could converse in two different languages.

They texted everyday and Kun facetime when he found an adorable duck in the park because he wanted to show Sicheng.
Sicheng really treasured the friendship they shared, it was one of the most profound ones he had ever experienced in between all the moving around.

He slowly shook out of his thoughts and refocused his gaze on what was going on as a pair of fingers snapped in front of his face.

“Earth to Sichengie?” Kun was looking at him with a smile. “What are you spacing out about?”


“Okay,” Kun didn’t pressure him, which was another thing Sicheng really admired.

“Ducks or pigeons?” Kun asked. Sicheng contemplated. This was a sort of game they had started playing after they met. They would randomly give two options and make the other choose.

“Ducks.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Super short chap I’m so sorry :(
But I update quite frequently so I think it’s okay?

I bleached my hair today. It stung. But what’s new XD

Hope you’ll enjoy this short chapter

Taeyong was mad when he left the school. He shouldn’t be really, not when he knows that schools in South Korea aren’t as keen on students’ wellbeing as they are about forcing high grades out of their students.

The bullies who had harassed Jungwoo were getting one day’s detention and a warning. Taeyong was offended on behalf of his brother.

Jungwoo walked quickly, watching his brother quietly fume.

They reached the parking lot and got into the van. Donghyuck and Sicheng were playing Rock Paper Scissors with Lucas, using forehead flicks as punishment.

They stopped when Taeyong slammed the door close.

“How did it go?” Sicheng questioned gently.

“They got one day detention and a warning,” Jungwoo disclosed. Donghyuck looked shocked, Sicheng looked disbelieving.

“That’s ridiculous,” he voiced. “They should’ve at least compensated the phone, given a call to the parents, gotten them a week detention and held a lecture about bullying in every class!”

“I bet Jungwoo isn’t even the only one they’ve bullied!” Donghyuck agreed.

Taeyong simply started driving.

~

When they arrived home the oldest made everyone sit on the couch in the living room.

“I wanted to tell you something,” he started. “I know our life isn’t ideal, and I know we are different from most people. But I also know that you are all my independent, beautiful, confident brothers. You all are so unique and good in your own way. Don’t ever let anyone tell you otherwise, alright?”

Taeyong was tearing up slightly. “I’m sounding like a real cliché but I promise that you will always be more happy when being yourself than you will forcing yourself to be someone else. You can’t change how the world thinks. Sometimes life is unfair and we have to deal with that maturely. Be the better person, brush it off and stand up again even if you’re knocked down. Never forget that okay?”

His brothers looked very touched although Chenle and Jisung were definitely confused, but they
picked up on the mood and got the gist of it.

“Thank you hyung,” Jungwoo whispered. Taeyong smiled brightly.

“It’s all going to be okay,” he promised and stood up, opening his arms.

Immediately all the brothers got off the couch and leaned into a big group hug.

~

Thursday was one of the most boring days for Doyoung. His least favourite subjects were chemistry, history and English which he had long hours of on Thursdays. The only upside was that he actually had history with all of his best friends.

Which meant that the lesson was spent sending sneaky memes in their group chat instead of paying attention.

The teacher kept babbling on and on about something that would probably be irrelevant in their lives after high school. Doyoung looked around a bit to see most of the students hiding their phones in between their legs, texting and checking social media’s. Lee Taeyong was sitting in the back, not too far away from Doyoung and his friends. The proclaimed ice prince was staring, without blinking, at the front of the classroom, veiny hands fiddling with a pen delicately. His tongue poked out to wet his cherry lips every once in a while and Doyoung wondered if he even knew what he was doing. He probably did, that bastard trying to seduce everyone with subtle movements to later pounce on his victims. Doyoung held onto his opinion.

“Okay, wake up class!” The teacher suddenly spoke out of her normal unenthusiastic tone, causing most of the students to actually pay attention.

“Today we are starting a group project. It is a huge project which will end with a presentation that makes up for thirty percent of your grades!” A unanimous groan fell over the classroom, Doyoung wanting to slam his head on the table. He exchanged a look with Johnny - kill me now - before the teacher spoke again.

“I will call out the names of your partners and your subject, then you can leave, we will officially start working on the project next week, you can take this week to individually go through some light reading on your subject which you then will share with your partners next week,” she smiled widely, excited, because for the next five weeks she wouldn’t have to teach during any of her lessons. Lucky bastard, Doyoung bitterly thought in his head. He zoned out while she was calling names, not paying attention until she called his.

“World war two is going to be presented by Kim Doyoung, Seo Youngho, Jung Jaehyun, Ten,” most teachers had given up on trying to call Ten’s real name, “Moon Taeil, Nakamoto Yuta and Lee Taeyong.” A murmur rose in the room, Doyoung’s eyes widening impossibly. His gaze strayed to where Taeyong was sitting, the male looking unfazed by the teacher’s words. Jaehyun was gaping in the seat next to Doyoung, not believing what had been said.

“Okay class! That’s all for today! You can start your works next week!” With those words Taeyong was already out the door, leaving the best friends looking after him thoughtfully.

“Well at least we got an interesting subject,” Ten reasoned.
Donghyuck was sitting alone in the canteen. He saw Taeyong across the hall, munching quietly on an apple, the popular table being loud and excited as usual. Must be why all the people in the school gravitate towards them. It’s simple psychology that humans are drawn to everything they want to be which is usually attractive, funny and outgoing.

Donghyuck reasons that people who are the opposite can be just as beautiful and humans are too generic.

He slowly put some rice in his mouth while scrolling through his phone. Jaemin, Jeno and Renjun were running late from a class, but Donghyuck thought that was code for making out in a janitors closet, while Mark needed to change after his PE lesson, thus taking more time than usual.

He had been avoiding Mark avidly for three days, the older seemingly more agitated with each rejection Donghyuck threw his way. (“Sorry I can’t come to your practice today, family thing” and “no I can’t hang today I have to do homework and it’s not one of the classes we share so you can’t help, sorry.”) Although every time he rejected something Mark only seemed determined to try even more which made Donghyuck appreciate the boy and his passion and his sense of determination even more which was not good for his poor heart or his attempts of avoiding a crush on a straight boy.

A finger suddenly poked his shoulder. Donghyuck closed his phone and looked up with a deadpan face.

He felt his breath hitch at the sight. It was the junior bully from last week, two seniors flanking his sides. Donghyuck tried to look casual.

“Can I help you?” He said sarcastically, putting down his chopsticks. The bully narrowed his eyes menacingly.

“I see exactly what you’re doing you know,” he started speaking, voice disgusted. “I see how you prance around in your girly clothes and makeup and stupid shirts. I see how you hide behind confidence. But really you’re ashamed right? Why would anyone be confident when they looked like you? That’s probably why you hide behind all that makeup. You’re ugly. Inside and out.”

Donghyuck felt his lower lip quivering. He quickly stood up, the bully taking a step back. He noticed that the canteen had quieted down. He was about to open his mouth when the bully scoffed. His voice raised when he spoke again.
“Why would anyone be confident if they’re ugly, fat and stupid like you, and a homo. You’re disgusting!” He spat. Donghyuck’s eyes were slowly tearing up. He noticed Taeyong getting up from his table in his peripheral vision, along with a lot of other people who moved closer to hear better. Those girls who had cornered him last week looked very satisfied.

“Yah! You fucking faggot! Don’t you have one of those comebacks you had last week?” The bully taunted. “Of course you don’t, because you know I’m right.”

Donghyuck tried once again to open his mouth, but he was interrupted by the door to the canteen opening, Mark, Renjun, Jeno and Jaemin walking in together. Their cheerful conversation immediately ended when they noticed what was going on. Donghyuck met Mark’s eyes briefly before resuming his stare off with the bully.

“Hah! I see exactly what’s going on! You’re crushing on Mark Lee,” the bully laughed like it was the most pathetic thing he had ever heard. Donghyuck was speechless.

Just then a hand grabbed his securely, pulling him slightly back. Taeyong was standing right there, staring at the younger bully who stopped laughing. Taeyong menacingly glared at the offender, inducing a chilled silence to the canteen. The bully swallowed roughly before speaking with false bravery.

“You don’t scare me you mute creep, I have backup too this time. Because I think two against one would be a little unfair.”

Taeyong was vibrating with anger, Donghyuck could feel it as he was cowering slightly behind his brother.

“Three against two is just as unfair, don’t you think?” A gasp fell over the canteen because holy shit. Lee Taeyong just opened his mouth and spoke.

~

Jaehyun was completely at a loss for words. First that junior throwing insults at Donghyuck that were downright cruel and then now Lee Taeyong opening his fucking mouth.

“Three against two is just as unfair, don’t you think?”

His voice was calm, soft and raspy but contained, like a gentle breeze with the promise of a storm.

Jaehyun almost dropped his jaw at that. He could see the people at his table looking equal amounts of gobsmacked. Amber smacking Johnny’s shoulder thrice in excitement and surprise and not knowing what else to do with herself. Johnny didn’t even realize as he was too busy intensely studying the exchange.

The bully had dropped his jaw at the words that flowed smoothly from the senior’s mouth.

The seniors who were flanking him fidgeted uncomfortably on their spots. Taeyong opened his mouth again, the whole school sucking in a breath collectively.

“And attacking a younger boy? That’s what’s disgusting,” Taeyong was fuming, eyes burning with heat and fingers clenching into a fist. He was small, as tall as Donghyuck was if not shorter, and he looked fragile physically but his stance and the way he held himself made him look like the strongest person in the canteen at that moment.

“I think you should leave right now, and if I catch you looking my brother’s way again you will
regret it,” he spoke loud and clear. The bully huffed, albeit a bit nervously.

“You can’t scare me. You’re like tiny. I think I can take you,” he proclaimed. Taeyong’s eyes narrowed.

“Try me.”

The bully looked even more shocked. Jaehyun knowing exactly how that felt. He was honestly scared for Taeyong now. He was going to get crushed. The bully was built and brawny. Taeyong was thin and lean. It was like a lion attacking a gazelle.

Hesitantly the junior stepped forward and swung his fist. Jaehyun cringed, waiting for the impact. But it never came. Taeyong swiftly deflected by grabbing the bigger male’s hand, overthrowing his balance and sending him flying into the table Donghyuck had been eating at. The bully looked dazed, food staining his clothes. He got up and swung again, this time aiming for Donghyuck who was closer, Taeyong quickly pulled the boy out of the crossfire landing a right hook on the bully’s face with a resounding crack, sending the male to the floor. Jaehyun gaped. Damn that man could punch.

“Don’t look at my brother, don’t talk to him and don’t ever touch him. Or there will be hell to pay,” Taeyong hissed at the writhing male on the ground. His backup had quickly retreated when he was thrown into the table, leaving him alone.

“Whatever, your brother’s disgusting, so I wouldn’t wanna get close to that in my darkest nightmares,” he spat, blood dribbling down his chin.

That’s when Jaehyun saw Donghyuck’s first tear slowly make its way down his face. He felt really bad for the sophomore.

Everyone else seemed to notice too as the bully grinned victoriously.

“Hah! Now he’s crying too, what a pussy,” Taeyong didn’t even dignify that with a response. He simply grabbed Donghyuck’s hand tightly and started pulling the boy away from the situation, an angry frown in place. Donghyuck didn’t lift his head from the floor once, especially avoiding it when they passed Mark, Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun by the door.

Johnny, Doyoung, Taeil, Yuta, Ten and Jaehyun exchanged incredulous looks.

“What the fuck just happened?” Ten managed to utter.

Chapter End Notes

Waaah I hate this but I love angst. I’m sorry for torturing Hyuck again :( (Hope you enjoyed! Share your thoughts in the comments <333

And Ten with those ending one liners tho XD
Gosh I got so many comments on the last chapter guys!!! Thank you so much <3

I just left my sister’s baby shower and it was exhausting. Kids are loud and somewhat annoying (but adorable) and I feel left out because I don’t have a baby which is just weird. I’m definitely not old enough to be thinking about having a baby and I don’t want one jeez

I am happy for my sister though XD

ANYWAYS hope you’ll enjoy the chapter!!!

Taeyong could feel his heart pounding so hard in his chest that it was literally hurting. He could hear Donghyuck sniffling and he knew they needed to get out of there.

He quickly steered the younger towards the secluded spot Kun and Sicheng usually occupied. The sky was grey as they exited the building, clouds covering every bit of the sun as if to imitate their emotions. The air was moist and hot, rain waiting to fall.

As expected Kun and Sicheng were sitting on the lawn when they arrived.

Sicheng looked up with a smile that quickly diminished when he noticed Donghyuck.

“What happened?” He asked with a gasp. Taeyong couldn’t bear himself to speak yet so he simply sat down and dragged Donghyuck with him, immediately pulling the younger into a tight embrace. Donghyuck gripped him back just as tightly, sobs wracking his body. Kun looked concerned and Sicheng crept closer so he could join the hug. Donghyuck continued sobbing heartbreakingly, Taeyong whispering comforting words while rocking the sophomore slowly, Sicheng petting his younger brother’s hair. Taeyong could feel Donghyuck’s tears soaking through the fabric on his chest, fingers tightly gripping his shirt as if they were searching for something to keep them grounded.

Eventually Donghyuck managed to calm his breathing and his grip on Taeyong slackened slightly. He slowly pulled away from his eldest brother but he didn’t remove himself from the embrace entirely.

“I look like a mess,” he said, voice distorted from his clogged nose. His face was red and makeup was smeared. Taeyong frowned. Kun simply moved a bit closer and smiled slightly before he started pulling a handkerchief from his sleeve. A never ending handkerchief.

Donghyuck started laughing at the ridiculousness of the situation, his brothers joining in. When Kun finally pulled all of it out they had stopped laughing, and he handed it to Donghyuck who thanked him before wiping his face. Sicheng helped him remove the spots of mascara he couldn’t get off himself and then he looked relatively okay.
“What happened?” Sicheng then questioned gently.

“Just a stupid bully in the canteen,” Donghyuck sighed. Taeyong had a hand on his nape, stroking it gently.

“Hyuck,” he started. “Do you like your makeup?” Donghyuck looked slightly confused.

“Yeah, I love it, why?”

“And your clothes?”

“Of course hyung, you know this.”

“And you know that every body is different and every body is beautiful, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know that you should not ever think about anything that bully told you again,” Taeyong made sure to maintain eye contact so his message would get through. “You should never doubt yourself and your choices because of something one person has said to you which is probably just an outlet for his own insecurities that probably had nothing at all to do with you. And he was being a Neanderthal which is never a good trait and they should be ignored at all costs,” okay so Taeyong was salty. Donghyuck nodded with a small upturn of his lips.

“You are beautiful Hyuckie,” Sicheng smiled happily. “My favourite thing about you is that you are you. You just know yourself and I’m really proud of you for always being true to yourself.”

Donghyuck smiled shyly.


“I’m Donghyuck, Sicheng hyung’s little brother.”

“I’m Kun,” the brunet smiled serenely. A short period of silence fell over them. Taeyong knew Donghyuck would still be insecure and uncertain but that was inevitable after an event like this. They would just make sure to appreciate him a lot more.


Taeyong managed a genuine smile for his brothers and Kun. He was glad Donghyuck could understand his point and he dearly hoped the younger wouldn’t crumble under the bad thoughts.

After a short period of silence Taeyong brought up another problem.

“Do you want to go back to school today? We can go home if you’d like,” he carefully offered. Donghyuck groaned and slammed his head into his hands.

“Oh no. I can never face Mark Hyung again! He’ll hate me,” Donghyuck whined miserably. Sicheng looked confused.

“Why?”

“Because that stupid bully announced to everyone that I have a crush on him!”
“Do you have a crush on him?”

“I don’t know,” Donghyuck admitted. “But I do know that he’s straight.”

“You said his friends are gay though,” Taeyong pointed out. “I’m sure he won’t hate you. It’ll just be awkward for a few days and then you’ll be back to normal.”

“I guess... I’m just feeling too drained to deal with it today,” Donghyuck admitted with a meek voice.

“Then let’s go home for the day, I’ll call us in sick,” Taeyong decided. “We can deal with it tomorrow.”

Sicheng decided to also go home with his brothers, apologising to Kun who waved him off with a genuine smile and told him family was more important than school. Sicheng promised to call him later.

Then they went home.

~

Donghyuck rushed into the bathroom as inconspicuously as he could when they got home. He immediately picked up the makeup removers and started scrubbing his face. It stung like hell but the pain felt comforting somehow, taking his mind off the emotional pain for a while.

He scrubbed until he felt clean, seeing that his face was red in the mirror and tender to touch. He sighed deeply as he looked at himself. His face was round, his lips thick, eyes sad and moles dotting his cheek down to his neck. His brothers always liked to say it was a constellation on his face. Donghyuck pulled on his cheek, feeling the fat. He was a bit chubby...

No. No. NO. He was not going down that road. He had had enough self esteem issues in his life and he didn’t need to fall down that hole again.

After washing his face with some water gently, Donghyuck grabbed a shirt from the dirty laundry pile in the bathroom. It was one of Taeyong’s over sized white T-shirt’s. It smelled like febreeze and cherries. It smelled like his brother. Donghyuck pulled it on, feeling small and cozy in the soft fabric. He inhaled shakily, not looking at the mirror as he left the bathroom and headed for his own room.

The peach haired boy kicked off his jeans and switched them for basket shorts, before climbing into bed. He laid on top of the covers, curling up into a fetus position. He didn’t feel like doing anything but wallow in his thoughts, which was not a good idea. He knew it wasn’t, but he couldn’t help himself.

The door to Donghyuck’s room slowly opened with a gentle creak, he didn’t look up, as he knew quiet tears were dripping gently from his eyes, making a path over his nose and down onto the pillow.

He could hear the person rummaging around, and soft music started floating through the room. Classical music. No voices or hard beats. Soft calming and soothing classical music.

Then the bed dipped behind him, a body laying down. An arm found it’s way to his waist, holding it comfortingly, a face nuzzling his hair and a warm body pressing up to him.

Donghyuck knew it was Sicheng. He was a bit bigger and he smelled differently than Taeyong. Quickly the younger turned in the embrace, diving into Sicheng’s chest and curling up close, feeling safe and small in the position. Sicheng held him close, kissing his forehead gently and wiping his
tears before hugging him close, the thumping of his heartbeat calming Donghyuck down immensely.

Sicheng was quiet, calmly laying down. No talking. No moving. No reassuring whispers. Just solid comfort. Donghyuck eventually fell asleep, breathing soundly, Sicheng following him to dreamland soon afterwards.

Taeyong had just finished calling the school and gathering his wits as he walked upstairs. He was removing his earrings with a sigh, heading for Donghyuck’s room to check up on the younger who had stormed off as soon as they got home.

He ruffled his hair and gently pushed the door open. He smiled fondly at the sight he was greeted with. Sicheng and Donghyuck together on the bed, breathing slow and steady, with soft music filling the room assuringly.

Taeyong noticed that Donghyuck was wearing his shirt, which the younger often did if he was feeling down or stressed. He also noticed the dried tear tracks on his younger brother’s face. His smile fell a little, but Taeyong simply pulled the door close and walked away to do some cleaning instead. Donghyuck was going to be fine. It might take time, but it was all going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos if you liked it and comment your thoughts! I’m curious ^-^
Chapter Notes

So. School started today. Which means I didn’t fulfill my goal of finishing this before summer ended. Fml.

This means it’s gonna be harder to update which I am so sorry for! I will definitely not be able to keep up with the every other day updates. I don’t know how frequent they will be but we’ll have to wait and see

Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter though!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Taeyong decided to stay home with Donghyuck the next day too because the younger had almost had a panic attack in the morning as they were getting ready about going to school and facing his problems. Thus them staying home.

Taeyong stayed simply because he had to make sure Donghyuck wouldn’t fall down the hole of self hate and self deprecation.

He took both their phones and turned them off, informing their brothers to call the landline if they needed anything before settling down on the couch with Donghyuck to watch Riverdale all day long.

~

Monday arrived and Donghyuck managed to get to school with some coaxing from both Sicheng and Taeyong. He was getting more stares than usual but he simply kept his earphones on and didn’t look at anyone. No one commented anything. And if they did he couldn’t hear it. He sat far away from his friends during classes and ran away when they tried to talk to him.

He finally got caught during lunch. He was eating in a bathroom stall, wanting to be alone when someone walked inside.

“I can recognize those worn down converse anywhere Hyuck!” Jaemin’s voice echoed through the bathroom. Donghyuck sighed quietly, heart racing in from fear and nerves.

“I’m getting Jeno and Renjun!” Then he was gone. Donghyuck took this as his cue to try and make a run for it, quickly packing his lunch. Sadly he only managed to open the outer door before three bodies were blocking the way and pushing him back into the bathroom.

He determinedly refused to look any of them in the eye, keeping his gaze on their shoes instead.

“Hyuck,” Renjun spoke. “Why are you ignoring us? We’re your friends.”

Donghyuck didn’t answer. Renjun frowned sadly.
“We don’t care about what that bully says you know, especially when he was lying,” Jeno desperately tried to assure him.

“You’re not fat or ugly or disgusting. You’re great, and we know that because we know you! That stupid bully doesn’t. Would you rather listen to him than us?” Jaemin shared his thoughts, with a wavering smile, because he wasn’t sure if Donghyuck had been beaten down enough mentally not to believe them.

The silence descended upon them like a stuffy blanket. Donghyuck still refusing to look up. His hands felt clammy and his heart was clenching painfully. But he felt better. He felt reassured hearing those words from someone who wasn’t related by blood or biased. From someone he cared about a lot.

So without speaking he took a small step forward and threw his arms around Renjun who was in the middle. The Chinese boy was stunned for a second before reciprocating strongly. Jaemin jumped on them, hugging from the side, pulling Jeno in too.

They were going to be okay.

~

Mark was sitting on the bench by the basketball court. He was early, and waiting for the team to arrive. And Jaemin and Renjun who were going to sit on the bleacher like always.

He was biting the end of a pen, fiddling with the hem of his basket shorts, his brain trying to come up with words for the new rap he was working on.

Nothing.

His mind was blank.

With a sigh he packed his notebook and pen again, aimlessly staring at the door to the locker room while tapping his foot nervously.

He couldn’t stop thinking about the incident that went down. He had gotten the full story from Johnny about what else the bully had said and done which had made him furious. How could anyone dare make such vile suggestions about Donghyuck? It was repulsive in his eyes honestly. And then that comment about Donghyuck having a crush. On him.

Mark didn’t know how to feel about that. He assumed the bully was lying about that because Donghyuck had been acting distant and cold with him last week, which was the opposite of what he would expect from someone who had a crush. It must’ve been a lie. Mark felt a blooming ache in his chest as he thought of Donghyuck.

Donghyuck, with his chipped nail polish, clear almond eyes, tan skin and intense makeup. His wit and his caring side. Those small moles that dotted his cheek, resembling a constellation in all the sunshine that Donghyuck was. He was very pretty. Mark could admit that.

But he was straight. He didn’t like Donghyuck like that. He could appreciate a pretty human without having a crush on them. Like with Lee Taeyong and Koeun from his class.

He did miss having Donghyuck around him as a great friend though.

The door opening pulled him out of his thoughts, the rest of the basketball team trickling inside.
Jeno was nowhere to be seen though.

“Hyung?” Mark directed himself to Yuta who was closest. The Japanese male looked up with a small hum. “Where’s Jeno?” Yuta furrowed his eyebrows.

“I don’t know. He wasn’t in the locker room.”

Just then the main door to the gym swung open, Jeno rushing in, his jersey haphazardly thrown on. Behind him came Renjun and Jaemin who were holding onto something or someone. Mark frowned. What was going on? Then they finally walked all the way in, revealing Donghyuck. Mark’s eyes widened because Donghyuck was back?! He felt that fluttery feeling in his stomach that he usually gets around Donghyuck. He assumed it was nerves, probably because he hadn’t seen Donghyuck since the incident.

Jaemin, Renjun and Donghyuck walked up the stairs and took a seat in the middle of the empty bleacher. Jeno walked up to Mark, dropping his bag with an exhale of relief.

“Gosh coach would’ve killed me if I was late!” He huffed, sitting down on the bench next to his friend who couldn’t tear his eyes away from Donghyuck who looked happy and content sitting with Jaemin and Renjun, the dingy lights in the hall lighting up his tan skin beautifully, eyes sparkling with life and looking so vibrant compared to the tearful expression he’d worn in the canteen.

“Mark hyung?” Jeno snapped his fingers in front of the brunet’s eyes finally pulling the elder out of his admirations.

Mark waved him off with some incoherent words before looking up again, this time meeting Donghyuck’s eyes right on. The younger looked hesitant, a bit scared too if Mark could read it right. He didn’t know why Donghyuck seemed worried, there was nothing to be worried about. The bully only told lies and everyone knew that.

Mark offered the peach haired male the beginning of a smile. ‘Are you okay?’

Donghyuck bit his lower lip in contemplation before slowly smiling back widely, revealing a perfect row of pearly teeth, ‘yeah’.

Mark started smiling more because Donghyuck’s smile was so infectious, ‘you sure?’

Donghyuck rolled his eyes teasingly, ‘YES. Now go play you nerd.’

Mark scoffed, trying to look offended but the big smile on his lips prevented it. The younger was way too cute for his heart. He reluctantly broke eye contact to walk with Jeno towards the centre of the basketball court where coach had gathered the team.

That was a step forward. A small step. But a step nonetheless.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comment if you feel like it!! It makes my day when I read your comments <3
Taeil walked into history with Ten and Johnny, finding Doyoung and Jaehyun already in their seats and Yuta running slightly late. They sat down as well when they reached Doyoung and Jaehyun.

“So?” Ten questioned, leaning forward in curiosity.

“He still hasn’t talked,” Jaehyun relayed. They all swiveled around to look at Lee Taeyong who was calmly writing in his notebook. His outburst in the cafeteria had made him the talk of the school yet again. As if he ever stopped being the talk of the school. The girls were even more interested in the guy because ‘he’s so sweet to protect his brother and he’s so strong and he’s so hot can he sit on me?’ and all the students were even more curious about his background and his mysterious exterior and behaviour. Because how come he can throw a punch like that and do defence moves like those without looking like someone who works out. The rumours were going wild too. They said Lee Taeyong was a street fighter, an exconvict or a spy most commonly.

The silver haired male seemed to sense the eyes on him though as his head was slowly raised. The friends immediately swiveled around in their chairs, avoiding him and trying to look casual.

“He’s just been broody and quiet like always, as if Thursday didn’t happen,” Doyoung told them.

“Do you think he’s gonna say anything today? We have to work on the project with him,” Taeil shuddered slightly in anxiousness. He didn’t like scary things. And Lee Taeyong was scary in his eyes. The boy literally never smiled and he was cold as hell. But like, a frozen hell.

“I don’t even know anymore. Lee Taeyong is giving me a fucking headache,” Doyoung groaned in misery.

Yuta arrived just as the bell rang and the lesson commenced.

“Okay class! You may now sit in your groups and start working on your project,” their teacher was standing by the whiteboard, smiling excitedly. “As this will be our lesson plan for the five coming weeks, you may choose where to sit. I’d recommend the library. Now good luck.” That was their cue to start working.

Everyone started packing their things, probably heading to the library. Johnny looked over at his friends.
“Let’s stay here then, I think almost everyone will be at the library,” he suggested. They agreed and started moving their desks together. Taeil sneaked a peek at the back where Lee Taeyong was gathering his things, picking them up in his arms and walking towards them. A wave of panic washed over the eldest, Lee Taeyong was actually walking towards them. The silver haired male was wearing a black hoodie and black jeans, earrings dangling from his ear and bracelets peeking out from the sleeve that rode up just a bit. He looked like the model example of a troublemaker.

Taeil did not like troublemakers.

They managed to arrange chairs around a makeshift table made up of their desks, leaving one seat empty. Taeyong reached them just as Yuta sat down. The male didn’t look any of them in the eye, simply taking the seat and putting his things on the table.

Taeil looked around to see his friends stiff and rigid, no one daring to speak which was so unusual for them. Normally they could talk their heads off.

Lee Taeyong must have that effect on people. The aura that makes them speechless.

“So,” Johnny finally decided to break the tense quietness. “Anyone who actually studied the subject?”

Various replies of no arrived except for Doyoung who rolled his eyes at them all, used to their antics. And Taeyong of course, who remained expressionless.

“Well, Taeil and I did borrow a book on the subject. We read a bit of the first chapter but I guess that’s much better than any of you jocks did,” he sassed.

“Hey! I’m actually not a jock, I’m a dancer. There’s a big difference,” Ten protested with a scoff because he was nothing like the brawny basketball jocks.

“You compete, you practice and you sit at the popular table. What’s the difference again?” Doyoung retorted, Ten huffed indignantly.

“At least I have something to do in my spare time, unlike you Doyoungie. All you do is bothering Taeil at work or lying in your bed miserably alone since all your friends, us, are busy being ‘jocks’,“ Ten dramatically said, although a smile broke through his facade. Doyoung snorted.

“I think studying is important unlike all of you, and that’s why my grades are higher than yours combined,” he dropped, Ten laughing by then, the others joining in. It wasn’t their best acts but it helped lessen the tension.

Taeyong remained still though.

After laughing for a minute they managed to calm down and start writing down what they knew.

Johnny had a lot of input for someone who didn’t study beforehand. But they all knew that he liked to watch a variety of YouTube videos and you actually do pick up some facts occasionally while doing that.

They all snuck frequent glances at Taeyong who was fiddling with his sleeves, not looking up even once.

Yuta and Jaehyun were stuck arguing about which year Winston Churchill died, although it wasn’t very important, they still wanted to be right.
“I’m like ninety nine percent sure it was 1960,” Yuta argued snootily. Jaehyun scoffed.

“Ninety nine percent isn’t a hundred percent,” he protested. “It was 1955! I swear I read that somewhere.”

“Ninety nine point nine then. It was 1960!”

“No! 1955!”

“No-“

“Guys-“ Taeil tried to stop the impending verbal fight.

“1955!”

“1960!” Yuta and Jaehyun were glaring at each other, almost standing up from their seats by now. Johnny was about to stand and tell them it was a ridiculous argument they were having.

“It was actually 1965.”

A soft voice stopped all of them from doing anything. Taeil whipped his head around to the male at their table who had not said a peep before. He was sure his friends were staring too.

Lee Taeyong looked up from his lap, meeting Jaehyun’s eyes, then Yuta’s, unblinking.

“Winston Churchill died 1965,” he repeated. His voice was completely different from what it had been in the canteen, it was soft, a bit high pitched, calming and unhurried, warming their ears and soothing their tiredness. He then lowered his gaze slightly so he wasn’t staring at anyone, simply directing it at the paper Taeil was taking notes on.

“Do you wanna write that down or is it irrelevant?” It was a simple question, not an ounce of accusation or arrogance in his tone, simply endless softness and a hint of bashfulness.

“Uh,” Johnny tried to speak. Taeil swallowed nervously and offered a small smile before gathering the courage to speak.

“Sure, I’ll write that down. I think it might be useful.”

Taeyong looked up to meet his eyes briefly lips tilting up almost unnoticeably.

“Okay.”

~

Taeyong actually knew of everyone he was working with. He had heard their names a lot around the school and sometimes from Donghyuck. He also noticed them staring at him more than any of the students at the school, which led him to think they were either sizing him up or genuinely curious about his selective silence.

Taeyong knew Johnny was Mark’s big brother, Doyoung was a chatty, sassy individual, Ten was one of the best dancers the school had ever seen, Yuta was a Japanese exchange student with a healing smile and witty speech, Jaehyun was the handsome guy every girl swooned over with a great athletic sense and polite charms, and Taeil was the quiet supportive best friend.

He knew a lot of people didn’t understand why the popular kids were friends with Taeil who was rather introverted compared to all the other popular people at the school. But Taeyong could see it. Taeil cared. He cared about all his friends and even people he didn’t know. He was kind and he
always listened to their troubles and concerns, taking good care of the people around him and offering advice.

Taeyong liked Taeil. Taeil seemed like a genuine and good person. For the rest he wasn’t really sure yet.

The conversation started flowing again after he had spoken. He felt embarrassed after their reactions, seeing how stunned they were, thus not speaking up again until the lesson was almost over.

“Okay, so if I know us. Which I do,” Yuta started. “I know we’re going to need to work at home to be finished on time. Who’s offering their home?” He smiled the so called healing smile, but Taeyong could detect the mischief behind it.

“Not me. After last time my parents won’t allow it,” Johnny huffed with a laugh as if thinking off a fond memory.

“Well Taeil and I have close to no space at our apartments,” Yuta shrugged, knowing they were out of the equation.

“My brother and his fiancé are home for the upcoming weeks. Which means my niece is home,” Doyoung said with an eye roll. Yuta raised an eyebrow at that. Doyoung made an exasperated face back. “She’s one. She cries all the time.” A collective ah fell over the group.

Ten and Jaehyun looked reluctant in Taeyong’s opinion and he gnawed on his lip anxiously because could he really offer his own house to be their study spot? He didn’t know them. And he wasn’t sure if he trusted them. But he assumed they weren’t serial killers at least.

“I have a pretty big house,” he cleared his throat slightly. Yet again everyone was staring and he was so sick and tired of it. It took a few moments for the words to sink in with the people at the table.

“So, we’ll study at your place then Taeyong-ssi?” Yuta finally spoke offering a hesitant smile. Taeyong simply nodded and everyone looked at him like he was unbelievable. He forced back an eye roll and instead ripped off a piece of paper from his notebook, scribbling his number on it in a surprisingly neat handwriting.

“Text me when you want to study,” he calmly said and stood up just as the bell rang, leaving the piece of paper for anyone to pick up on the table.

Unbeknownst to him the people at the table collectively exhaled in relief before simultaneously diving for the paper.

Chapter End Notes

That’s a long chapter, hope you enjoyed XD kudos and comments if you liked and I’ll see you next time <3

Edit: no it wasn’t that long I just have terrible estimation skills lol XD
By nighttime they had made a group chat with everyone who was working on the project.

Doyoung laid in bed, typing out a message.

He didn’t believe Lee Taeyong’s innocent act for a second. The boy was definitely trying to do something illegal or generally bad to the school, he was using reverse charms to win people over. Being all harsh and tough against a bully and then being all soft and shy when speaking to important popular people. Doyoung was not falling for it. Though almost everybody else seemed to. Doyoung needed to expose Lee Taeyong before something bad happened. But that would have to be plotted another day, because the project was super important for his grade and therefore his number one priority at the moment.

He finally sent the message he had written.

‘So maybe if we study on Saturday if everyone’s free?’

He knew for a fact that everyone in his friend group was. Basketball practice was on weekdays, same with dance and Taeil didn’t work Saturdays.

Soon a row of agreements popped up on his screen, all of his friends confirming what he already knew. They were free on Saturday. Now they only needed to wait for Taeyong’s response. Which came a second later.

‘Ok. I will send my address.’

Doyoung snorted at his use of punctuations. The text was followed by another text with Taeyong’s house address. Doyoung sighed through his nose. They were actually going to Lee Taeyong’s house. That was his perfect opportunity to snoop.

Kim Doyoung was not going down without a fight. He was going to find out what Taeyong’s secrets were.

~

Tuesday and Wednesday passed without incidents. Jungwoo wasn’t bothered at school by the bullies anymore. Donghyuck had stopped getting stared at as much, Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun keeping him company at all times. Sicheng was much happier because he had Kun who was a great friend. Lucas was popular at the middle school and Chenle had made several friends. Jisung was also adjusting well to the new town and his new friends.

Taeyong was ignoring everyone who stared or talked as usual and everything felt good. He hadn’t spoken to his project mates again after Monday and he was glad they didn’t suddenly think they were friends or something because his introverted heart would not be able to take that.
Trouble came as Taeyong woke up in the middle of the night to someone screaming. He jolted up in bed, looking around dazedly.

The screaming wasn’t a real scream, it was more of a cry really. And it continued going. Taeyong could identify that it was Jisung. He hurriedly got out of bed and rushed into the smallest brothers’ room. Chenle was awake, looking at Jisung’s bed with confused tears in his eyes.

“Hyung!” He cried out. “What’s wrong with Jisungie?”

By then Sicheng had arrived at the room, looking around blearily.

Taeyong didn’t answer and instead went straight to Jisung. The child was crying in pain, tugging at his ears, his face was red and puffy. Taeyong reached down carefully and felt his forehead which was hot to the touch.

“Sicheng, Chenle can sleep in your room tonight.” Taeyong turned to his two other brothers and gave them a reassuring smile. “I think Jisung has an ear infection.”

Sicheng nodded and picked Chenle up, hugging the seven year old boy close.

“Is Jisung going to die?” Chenle questioned, eyes wide and lip quivering.

“No no absolutely not. It just hurts a lot right now. Some medicine should make it better,” Taeyong assured. Chenle seemed satisfied with that answer and Sicheng left the room with him. Taeyong picked up Jisung in his arms and started rocking the child soothingly.

Jisung’s cries simmered down to small whimpers as Taeyong rocked him steadily, starting to walk down the stairs gently.

“Does your ears hurt baby?” Taeyong whispered softly, not wanting to disrupt the house or Jisung’s calm state.

“Uh huh,” Jisung sniffled, fingers holding onto Taeyong’s sleep shirt tightly.

“Some medicine will make the pain go away for a while,” Taeyong told him and finally entered the kitchen.

He cradled the child close as they reached the medicine cabinet and took out a small bottle. It was liquid ibuprofen, since Jisung couldn’t manage to take pills just yet.

He set the child on the counter and took out a table spoon, measuring the medicine precisely.

“Open wide,” he prodded and Jisung obeyed.

“The pain will be gone real soon I promise. Let’s try to sleep some more now,” Taeyong said as he picked the child up again after putting away the used items, carrying his youngest brother up the stairs and into his room.

Taeyong put the child on the big bed and crept down next to him, cuddling his brother in his arms. Jisung sighed in relief as the ibuprofen set in, falling asleep almost immediately. Taeyong was mentally going through a check list.

He needed to take Jisung to the doctor for a proper checkup.

He needed to get the antibiotics.
He needed to call in sick for school and call Jisung in sick.

He needed to buy ice cream because Jisung wanted ice cream when he was sick.

Eventually, exhaustion overtook his brain and the eldest Lee brother fell into a fitful sleep.

~

After explaining the situation and driving his brothers to school the next day, Taeyong took Jisung to the doctor.

It was indeed an ear infection and the child needed to take antibiotics for five days at the least. Taeyong got some more precautionary information from the doctor before they could leave to pick up the medicine at the pharmacy.

After that Taeyong drove to the grocery store to buy ice cream. Jisung cheered happily as he picked between all the exciting flavours.

The rest of the day Taeyong simply let Jisung lie on the couch with a cozy blanket and watch cartoons while he switched between cleaning, studying and cuddling Jisung regularly.

~

By Saturday Jisung was feeling much better, he told all his brothers during breakfast. Taeyong smiled fondly at the child who was much more energetic compared to Thursday and Friday.

Friday had basically gone the same, cuddling, watching TV and taking medicine. Taeyong was worried about all the school hours he was missing, but his brothers always came first.

He was even more worried about the upcoming day though. People from his school were coming over. Popular people. People from his class. Oh gosh it was such a stupid idea to invite them. What was he thinking?!

“So there are gonna be some people here today,” he cleared his throat awkwardly, gaining his brothers’ attention. They all looked at him wide-eyed.

“Why?” Lucas questioned confusedly.

“I invited some people over from my school to work on a project,” he mumbled, pushing his breakfast around on the plate.

“You spoke to people at school?!” Donghyuck was in complete disbelief.

“Well yeah. I kinda had to. We’re doing a group project,” he grimaced.

“Who did you talk to?” Sicheng asked, more curious than anything.

“Just Johnny, Jaehyun, Doyoung, Yuta, Ten and Taeil,” he shrugged indifferently.

“What?!” Donghyuck was properly scandalized. “They’re coming over? To our house? Wah this is like a freaking rom com or something,” he rolled his eyes. “Typical tropes. Hot new kid gets put in a group with hot popular kids and eventually falls in love.” Taeyong choked on his bite.

“Who said anything about falling in love?!” He sputtered. Donghyuck sighed sufferingly.

“Remember what I said today and we shall see in the future,” the boy simply returned to eating his
breakfast as if nothing happened.

Taeyong was still reeling from the words Donghyuck had spoken.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Im so excited for the Dream comeback!!!!! Who’s with me? XD (everyone probably)

Hope you’ll enjoy this long awaited chapter <333

Btw, completely unrelated, but I just love Holland so? Much??? Like he’s beautiful!
Stan Holland everybody <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The doorbell rang exactly one pm. Taeyong scrambled nervously to open it. He had spent the morning reading up some more on the world war and playing a game with Jungwoo and Lucas.

Now all his brothers were in their rooms doing whatever they did there while the doorbell rang.

Taeyong took a deep breath before brushing a shaking hand through his hair, putting on his steely facade.

He was wearing jeans and a tank top, earrings in place, although he skipped makeup completely, leaving his unblemished face bare. His hair was also unstyled although it was newly washed.

After putting his facade on he finally opened the door.

They were all standing on the other side, most likely having come there in the same car.

Johnny was standing tall, rust colored hair styled up and away from his forehead, kind brown eyes looking around curiously.

Yuta had his caramel hair down, parted slightly over the forehead, his so called healing smile in place.

Taeil had his dark hair slicked back, several strands falling over his forehead stylishly, earrings dangling from his ears.

Jaehyun had his brown hair in similar fashion as Yuta’s, flashing his dimples as he smiled. Taeyong had never noticed those before.

Doyoung had his black hair unruly, looking good but rugged. His eyes immediately zeroed in on Taeyong as the door was opened.

Ten stood out with his short teal hair, even though he was the shortest, almost on par with Taeyong. He was wearing a stylish billowy shirt that Taeyong’s inner fashion diva squealed at the sight of.

He moved aside so they could enter the house.

Nobody spoke as shoes and jackets were discarded. Taeyong cleared his throat awkwardly.

“I think it’s best if we sit in the kitchen,” he said, avoiding their eyes and walking towards mentioned place. They followed wordlessly and eventually settled at the kitchen table.
Taeyong sighed noiselessly at the atmosphere. This was going to be harder than he thought.

~

Jaehyun was fidgeting in his seat. They were never quiet for so long, it was unnerving him. He could see that his friends were also feeling quite uncomfortable.

They had to do something.

“Let’s start working maybe?” Johnny finally spoke, breaking the delicate silence. Jaehyun saw his friends exhale in relief.

“Yeah. Let’s start with gathering what we have and structuring the essay,” Doyoung nodded along, pulling notes out from his backpack, the others following his example.

And they started.

World War II was a big subject to cover. They had to cut out a lot of parts as they wanted to go more in depth rather than shallowly explaining the events.

“How about we cut out this section instead?” Taeyong eventually managed to speak comfortably, which Jaehyun absolutely adored, although keeping a formal tone and speech pattern, much like a robot, which Jaehyun frowned at.

“Yeah that’s a good idea,” Taeil agreed and crossed it off the notes.

“I think we have a solid introduction at least,” Ten nodded as he looked over Taeil’s shoulder. The seniors had gotten slightly more comfortable at Taeyong’s home, now moving around more freely in the kitchen.

“I’ll set up a document on my laptop,” Taeyong decided and stood, walking over to the kitchen island that reached his waist, opening his laptop and turning it on.

The silver haired male stood there, back arched slightly, ankles crossed and leaning his upper body on his arms. Jaehyun observed him casually. Taeyong was honestly beautiful. It was the first time seeing the other so up close and Jaehyun was enjoying the view.

All of a sudden they heard a commotion from the hallway. Someone was descending the stairs at a rapid pace. All the seniors looked up, except for Taeyong who was clicking away on his laptop. Donghyuck showed up in the doorframe, his clothes fashionable and makeup on point. He looked around the kitchen with a raised eyebrow, finally resting his gaze on his brother.

“I’m going to the mall with Renjun, Jaemin and Jeno, I won’t be home for dinner,” he said and disappeared into the hallway.

“Okay,” Taeyong said without looking away from the computer screen, “do you have money?” He asked then, raising his voice slightly to be heard.

“Yup!”

“Good,” Taeyong nodded, finally looking up and toward the doorframe where Donghyuck once again showed up, shoes and jacket on. “Call me if you need to be picked up later, I don’t want you to take the bus late at night,” he said sternly. Donghyuck rolled his eyes, but Jaehyun could see the slight upturn of his glossed lips.
“As you wish my brother,” the sophomore jokingly spoke. “See you later, bye!” Then he was out the door. Taeyong simply shook his head in exasperation and returned his gaze to the computer. Jaehyun hadn’t noticed his eyebrows raising until then, silently exchanging miffed out looks with his friends, Doyoung looking especially disturbed with narrowed eyes.

“Okay, what’s first?” Taeyong’s voice broke them out of their staring. Taeil hesitantly licked his lips before reading off the notes. Jaehyun squinted at Taeyong, seeing no emotion on his face yet again, all precious expressions cleared off his face when Donghyuck left.

Lee Taeyong was an interesting creature indeed.

~

After Donghyuck left the seven seniors got real focused on their subject, because the world war was actually a pretty interesting subject to have. For once Doyoung was not thinking about what kind of evil plans Taeyong might have, instead just pouring over all the information they had.

They had finished the introduction when another interruption arrived. A person entered the kitchen stealthily, everyone looking up at the intruder. Doyoung recognized Sicheng, Taeyong’s other brother.

The brunet walked up to the fridge, not minding the eyes on him, fiddling with his necklace as he looked into the refrigerator.

He closed it with a gentle sound, not grabbing anything from it.

“Hyung,” he spoke. His voice was strangely cutesy. It had a slight lisp to it Doyoung noticed.

“Hmm?” Taeyong who had been busy typing looked up from his screen, still bent over the kitchen island.

“We’re out of chocolate milk,” Sicheng informed him matter of factly. Taeyong frowned.

“Oh yeah. I didn’t have time to shop yesterday,” he sighed slightly. “Just put it on the list,” he finally shrugged and turned back to the computer. Sicheng nodded slightly and turned to the fridge where a magnetic block of papers sat. He took the pen and scribbled something on the first page, Doyoung assumed it was ‘chocolate milk’, then the junior left the kitchen calmly.

They resumed working diligently, Ten and Taeil reading off the notes for Taeyong to type while Johnny and Yuta goofed off while looking for what kind of media they could use for the PowerPoint.

Jaehyun and Doyoung simply scrolled through their phones, looking for additional information on some unclear topics. Time passed quickly as they were immersed, the sun setting slowly, leaving an alluring orange glow on the sky.

Chapter End Notes

Hope it was somewhat good XD kudos if you liked it and comment your thoughts :) It makes me happy to read what you have to say <3
They were halfway through writing the draft and Jaehyun’s brain felt fried to a certain extent. Taeil and Doyoung being the studious people they are seemed perfectly fine, even Ten kept his energy. Meanwhile Johnny and Yuta were leaning on each other’s eyes closed and looking bored to death. Jaehyun could relate, but somehow he didn’t want to seem like a slacker in front of Taeyong who had been working hard all day on the assignment.

Jaehyun was just about to slam his head on the table in frustration when footsteps once again thundered down the stairs. The six friends looked up in confusion, Taeyong being used to the sound and not bothering to look.

A small boy rushed into the kitchen, stopping halfway to stare up at the strangers in the kitchen, eyes wide and curious. Another pair of footsteps followed shortly, another boy, who was taller, bumped into the smaller boy as he entered the kitchen.

“Jisung-ah, what are you~” the boy spoke before following the younger’s gaze, immediately averting his eyes as they met Jaehyun’s. Jaehyun assumed he was intimidated by them.

The boy took ‘Jisung’ by the hand and dragged him to Taeyong, the seniors watching them intently because this was getting ridiculous.

The older one tugged on Taeyong’s tank top gently.

“Hyung? We’re hungry,” he whined cutely. Taeyong stopped typing and looked down at the children, frowning and then looking up at the clock.

“Oh shoot, it’s super late,” he sounded genuinely shocked. The children nodded, pouting, because apparently they were hungry. “I’ll make something quick,” he promised. Jaehyun thought he was mishearing things. Taeyong could cook?

~

“Do you want to stay for dinner?” Taeyong inquired, eyes shifting between all of them. Yuta was still confused as to why there were children in the kitchen but he was hungry and tired of homework.

“Sure,” he answered for all of them, Doyoung shooting him a warning look from his left side which Taeyong fortunately didn’t notice.

“Okay,” Taeyong nodded, saving the document on his computer before shutting it. “Chenle-ah, I’m gonna make some ramen and sausage quickly. Does that work?” He turned to the oldest child with a slight smile, leaving Yuta reeling because his smile was so pretty, what the hell?
The child, Chenle, nodded enthusiastically. Jisung humming in agreement.

“Good, go upstairs and play with your brothers for a while then, I’ll call when it’s ready,” Taeyong shooed them off gently and turned around to the stove, putting it on before pulling out pans and pots.

“Do you want some help?” Jaehyun hesitantly asked, exchanging looks with Yuta who raised his eyebrows at the other male.

“Uh,” Taeyong hesitated and looked like he was about to say no, when his eyes flicked upwards as if thinking of the hungry children. “Yes please.”

Jaehyun looked shocked himself at the answer but collected himself to go and wash his hands at the sink.

“Where do you want me?”

“You can make the noodles, thank you,” Taeyong said, not looking at Jaehyun. The other nodded and moved over to the big pot.

As Taeyong and Jaehyun cooked side by side, the others observed excitingly. When Taeyong and Jaehyun accidentally brushed shoulders and apologized quickly to each other Ten gaped at his friends, Johnny wiggling his eyebrows. Doyoung looked generally sour, Yuta rolling his eyes at him. Taeil observed everyone with a fond smile.

~

When Taeyong called for dinner Ten didn’t know what to expect really. Four kids and Sicheng definitely wasn’t it.

Was Taeyong babysitting at the moment? He frowned as the two children from before, and another two children (looking a few years older) took their seats. He recognized all of them from the mall. When they were all seated everyone stared at each other awkwardly.

“Wassup!” A voice suddenly laughed, a blonde boy smiling at them excitedly. “I’m Lucas! This is Jungwoo hyung!” He gestured to the other boy they hadn’t seen before. “I’ve never met you before! What’s your names?”

“I’m Johnny,” the tallest spoke with a warm smile. “This is Jaehyun, Taeil, Yuta, Ten and Doyoung.”

“I’m Chenle! I’m seven!” The boy from before spoke, this time more confident before grabbing the youngest child. “And this is Jisung, but he doesn’t speak to strangers. Only Jaemin hyung. Sorry,” the boy frowned but hugged the smallest child close.

“Cool,” Ten smiled at the young boy who smiled back hesitantly.

And dinner started. Ten observed as Lucas started up a conversation with Johnny, excitedly gesturing as he ate. Taeil gave Jungwoo a smile as they passed the noodles and Yuta was smiling widely at the two youngest children. Ten saw Taeyong reach over to feed Jisung at times, smiling as he got food on his mouth before wiping it off with a napkin. Then he was suddenly talking to Jungwoo and Sicheng about what they’d done today, keeping eye contact and listening attentively, looking genuinely interested and offering a laugh ever so often.

Ten could barely believe his eyes. How could Lee Taeyong - Ice prince rebel Taeyong who beat up a bully - be such a sweetheart?
The Thai male saw how much Taeyong cared.

“So Taeyong-ssi,” suddenly Doyoung cleared his throat to speak, conversations dying slightly. “Are you a babysitter or?” Ten saw that on the outside Doyoung looked perfectly neutral and politely interested, but he did notice the slightly critical tenseness in Doyoung’s body. Ten almost rolled his eyes.

“No! We’re his brothers!” Lucas laughed, Taeyong nodding along and giving Doyoung a certain look. A decisively cold look. Ten was properly surprised. He looked around the table, counting. If he added Donghyuck then that meant Taeyong had six brothers!

~

They left soon thereafter, finishing their meals quickly before bidding goodbye.

Doyoung was feeling conflicted. He had seen the care in Taeyong’s eyes when the ice prince had interacted with his brothers. (Wow six brothers. All younger. Doyoung could barely handle Gongmyung who was older and technically didn’t live at home.)

“That was crazy. He has so many brothers!” Johnny gestured widely with his hands as they got into the car.

“They were cute though,” Ten smiled, nose scrunched up cutely. “He took care of them so much. He must be soft at heart.”

“Soft!? But he’s the ice prince! It’s such a huge difference,” Doyoung argued. “Why would he put on such a look at school and then come home and be ‘soft’. It’s weird.”

“He can’t change his face. People automatically assumed he was a cold person just because of his looks,” Taeil said, calm even though there were raised voices. Doyoung saw Jaehyun and Johnny exchange guilty looks as they had sort of done the same.

“But still! Didn’t you see how he was acting like their mother? - which by the way where the hell are their parents? - Like older brothers aren’t supposed to like their younger brothers,” Doyoung was straining his voice to get all of his thoughts out in one breath. “It’s an unspoken rule! You’re supposed to fight over petty things all the time, especially if you have more than one brother,” he finally exhaled, feeling his face calming down from its redness. Everyone was used to him being overly passionate about getting his points across though, so no one blinked an eye for his well-being.

“It makes me curious though,” Jaehyun spoke. “I kind of want to know more about him.”

“Oh yeah,” Yuta drawled with a teasing smile. “We all saw you bumping shoulders with the ice prince in the kitchen,” he wiggled his eyebrows, Jaehyun scoffed and punched his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed!!! Comment your thoughts and leave kudos if you liked it <3333
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I’m tired. That’s about it.

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On Sunday Taeyong decided he could spare some time for his brothers. He made them breakfast as usual and brought up the idea when they were seated.

“I was thinking, maybe we could do something today, together?” He smiled slightly at them.

“Sorry hyung. I’m meeting up with Mark, Renjun, Jaemin and Jeno,” Donghyuck said and gave them an apologetic smile.

“I have an assignment to do,” Sicheng admitted.

“I’m helping Xuxi with his math homework,” Jungwoo offered an angelic smile. Taeyong nodded in recognition.

“I don’t have anything to do hyung! Can we go to the park!?” Chenle screeched with a big smile. Jisung nodding seriously next to him. Taeyong laughed.

“Alright. The park it is then.”

~

When Taeyong made sure Jungwoo and Lucas had their snacks and Sicheng assured him they would call if anything happened Taeyong dressed Jisung and Chenle up in their jackets and sneakers before taking one of their hands in each of his as they walked towards the closest park.

Chenle was skipping through the street, Jisung clumsily trying to keep up on his short legs, holding Taeyong’s hand tightly so he wouldn’t fall.

The park was big with huge constructions of slides, swings and play material. It was all situated on sand so the fall wouldn’t be too hard in case of accidents.

Chenle immediately ran off to the biggest slide, while Jisung dragged Taeyong over to the swings.

“Do you want me to push you on the swings Jisung-ah?” He smiled at the youngest who nodded seriously.

Taeyong pushed until his arms ached but he kept going, because Jisung’s delighted screams made him happy and he didn’t want them to stop.

Eventually Jisung tired of the swings and went to Chenle who was still on the slide. Taeyong puffed out a huge breath and sat down on one of the benches around the area, pulling his legs up to his body. He noticed that most of the other benches were occupied by mothers and nannies.
He pulled out his phone and scrolled through it, occasionally looking up to see that his brothers were okay.

Taeyong locked his phone when he ran out of things to do on it and looked around the playground lazily, chin resting on his knees. A frown made its way onto his face when he caught sight of a little girl being crowded by two men and a woman that were probably in their twenties. Taeyong stood up and pocketed his phone before quickly walking over to the group. The girl looked scared and cowered closer to the ground where she was sitting and holding tightly onto a toy car.

Taeyong installed himself in between the child and the twenty year olds.

“I think that’s enough, you should leave the child alone,” he said, eyes narrowed. The twenty year olds shared weirded out looks before muttering something incoherent and walking away rapidly. Taeyong watched them walk to an unoccupied bench and sit down, still whispering.

He turned around and crouched down low to try and face the girl.

“Hello,” he started gently, relaxing his face. “What’s your name?” He coaxed. The girl looked up at him with wide eyes and Taeyong smiled even wider. The child had one icy blue eye and one black eye, heterochromia, if Taeyong remembered correctly. It now made sense why the people had cornered her.

“Hello there,” he waved slightly. “What’s your name?” He repeated his question. “I’m Taeyong.”

“Hayoon,” the girl’s voice was quiet and timid, most likely as he was a stranger.

“Hello Hayoon,” Taeyong cooed. “How old are you?”

Hayoon used the hand that wasn’t holding the toy car to hold up five fingers.

“Five years? You’re a big girl now!” Taeyong theatrically gasped. Hayoon gave him a shy smile. Suddenly a loud voice could be heard.

“Who’s hurting my baby!” A female was running towards them, looking ready to attack. She had studs in her ears and two piercings in her bottom lip, black hair that reached below her shoulders and intense makeup on. Her attire was wholly black. Black leather jacket, black boots, black T-shirt and black jeans. Taeyong immediately stood up in alarm.

“Who are you and why are you near my baby?” The girl panted as she reached them, her arms up in a karate like position.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean any harm. I saw some people staring at her and walked over to tell them off,” he tried to explain.

“Staring?! Who was it? I’m gonna karate kick them into next Friday,” she glared at everyone in the near vicinity and readied herself to attack.

“I don’t think that’s quite necessary,” Taeyong was overwhelmed at the least by the woman’s aura.

“I’ll get them next time. Watch me,” she conceded with a huff. “Thank you for running them off. They should be glad I wasn’t here,” she turned to Taeyong then. He smiled awkwardly back.

“You’re welcome?”
She grinned and hugged the girl in her arms closer.

“Are you here with your children?” She asked and scanned him up and down. He shook his head.

“No I’m with my brothers.”

“Huh. Okay. Then what’s your name?”

“I’m Taeyong.”

“I’m Max,” she introduced herself graciously, smirking at him.

“Mama,” Hayoon spoke from the embrace she was in, her voice having more strength in it now.

“Mm baby?” Max smiled at the child.

“I wanna play,” she pouted slightly, waving her car toy around slightly.

“Of course, I’m so sorry for keeping you for such a long time,” Max dramatically said and let the girl down again.

“Shout if you need something,” she said and started walking away, grabbing Taeyong’s wrist. The male stared at her incredulously. What was going on?

He was dragged to an empty bench where Max pulled him down to sit.

"Don’t look so scared. I just think you’re more interesting to hang out with than all the middle aged moms around here,” Max scoffed and Taeyong felt slightly in awe of the woman.

“So how old are you?” She asked.

“I’m eighteen, soon to be nineteen,” he said, fiddling with his hands.

“Gosh you’re so young. I’m twenty five,” she smiled at him. They were quiet for a while until Taeyong spoke.

“Is Hayoon your daughter?”

“Yeah,” Max nodded. “I got her when I was young. A bit too young. But I wouldn’t trade her for the world.”

Taeyong only nodded in recognition, opting to stare at the playground instead for a while. He noticed Jisung walking up to Hayoon who had been playing by herself. He sat down next to her and stared at the car she held in her hand. She stared at him, perplexed. But she noticed him looking at the car intently and quietly offered it to him. Jisung smiled at her and took it, driving around with it for a while until he gave it back to Hayoon.

“That’s my brother,” Taeyong commented as he noticed Max observing the exchange intently. She looked slightly more relaxed at that.

Chenle ran over to grab Jisung’s hand excitedly, trying to drag his brother somewhere while speaking of something. He seemed to notice the girl sitting in the sand and beamed at her too while offering his unoccupied hand. Hayoon smiled back before taking it and letting Chenle drag her away.

“That’s my other brother,” Taeyong smiled. Max smiled as well.
“She’s usually lonely you know. People don’t like to play with her because of her eyes,” Max confessed. Taeyong smiled sadly in sympathy.

They sat there for a while in comfortable silence until Max’s phone sounded with a message. She read it quickly before standing up.

“That was my partner. She’s almost done with dinner and wants us home,” she said, smirk in place again. Taeyong beamed at her. Max walked off to the playground where Hayoon was playing with Chenle and Jisung, picking the girl up and the boys protested. Chenle and Jisung saw her point towards Taeyong and stood up to go with her.

And they reached the silver haired male Jisung immediately jumped up into his lap.

“Can we play with Hayoon again? Please?” Chenle begged and tried for his best puppy eyes. Taeyong chuckled.

“Sure you can, if Hayoon wants that,” he said and glanced at the girl to see her nodding enthusiastically.

“I’ll give you my number then,” Max said with a smile at her daughter before grabbing Taeyong’s phone and typing into it before offering it back.

“Text me,” she said. Taeyong smiled.

“Thank you Max ssi,” he bowed politely.

“Oh please, call me noona,” she laughed. “I’ve always wanted to say that,” she snorted and waved before walking off. Taeyong heard Hayoon ask if ‘umma had cooked her favourite meal since she had said she would.’ And Taeyong couldn’t help but be fond.

He left the park with his brothers, a new friend and a new contact labeled Maxie noona.

Chapter End Notes

Leave kudos if you want and tell me your thoughts in the comments!! <3
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Sort of a long chapter this time XD
Hope you’ll enjoy <3333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mark looked at Donghyuck across the table. The younger was making a stack of French fries, trying to beat Jeno’s record. He had his tongue poked out in concentration, his eyebrows furrowed. His painted nails, contrasted greatly against the boring color of the potato fry. With lean fingers he delicately held the French fry, placing it down gently. He stopped licking his lips to bite them instead, white teeth holding onto pink soft flesh and wow Mark should really stop staring at Donghyuck’s lips.

“Oh!” The apricot haired male cried out in triumph. “I beat you!” He stuck his tongue out mockingly at Jeno who dropped his head on the table with a miserable groan. Mark couldn’t help but smile when Donghyuck did.


“You owe me a milkshake,” Donghyuck smirked smugly and pulled Jeno up, holding his raven haired friend by the arm tightly as they got in line. Mark watched them, and seeing Donghyuck being so close to Jeno, whispering in his ear and clinging to him, gave him a bad feeling. He didn’t know what it was so he tried to just ignore it by looking away only to see Jaemin and Renjun staring at him with identical knowing looks.

“What?” He asked indignantly.

“You’re frowning again,” Jaemin noted teasingly. “Maybe it is because you’re thinking about our Hyuckie,” he singsonged, innocently smiling. Mark knew there was nothing innocent about Na Jaemin. The boy was a devil.

“Shut up,” he muttered grumpily, sipping his milkshake.

When Jeno and Donghyuck returned Mark brightened up.

“Hey Hyuck,” he said. Mentioned boy looked up at the brunet, raising one perfect eyebrow. “Do you wanna study for math next weekend. We have a test coming up soon?” Mark sounded more hopeful than he liked to admit.

“Sure. You can come over on Saturday,” Donghyuck nodded and sipped his milkshake. Mark’s insides were doing flips.

~

Donghyuck didn’t know why he agreed so easily when Mark suggested they study together. He had made such great progress in rejecting the junior, but Mark had sounded so hopeful and he couldn’t resist the older boy’s wide puppy eyes.
He felt like he was back to square one all of a sudden.

Donghyuck watched as Mark laughed loudly (Jeno saying something that was actually funny unlike his usual no-fun personality) and he couldn’t help but admire the handsome basketball player. Mark’s jaw was pronounced and his skin was healthy tan, not as tan as Donghyuck but still. His eyes sparkled with mirth and his nose was cutely scrunched up. His laugh was loud and genuine which Donghyuck loves about Mark. His laugh. His honesty and his kindness. His habit of laying his hand on Donghyuck’s thigh and fiddle with his jeans, his concerned eyes when Jaemin looked tired and his reassuring smile when Jeno missed a basket at practice and him tutoring Renjun since the Chinese male had problems with his English homework.

Donghyuck was only falling deeper into his hole of crushing on Mark. Which was awful. Mark did not like him and he was straight. Donghyuck really needed to stop spending time with the older but it was so hard. Especially when they were friends and their friends were each other’s friends.

No. Donghyuck needed to get a grip, he was going to study with Mark next weekend and after that he needed to start saying no. No matter how much it hurt him or Mark. If he fell deeper in love it would hurt more than just cutting himself off immediately.

~

Ten had a free hour on Monday so he decided to spend it in the dance studio to polish their choreography slightly. He wasn’t entirely satisfied just yet and their first competition was coming up soon.

As he entered the basement he could hear faint music drifting rough the hall. Frowning, the Thai male followed the enticing sound. It was a bass-filled hip hop song, a good choice for some hard core dancing.

He cautiously stuck his head into the room and his jaw dropped. Inside the dance room was Lee Taeyong, wearing a grey hoodie, black jeans and a black cap, dancing like a pro.

His moves were sharp and precise, not repetitive and the joy on his face could be seen clearly. Ten was surprised to find such open emotions on Lee Taeyong’s usually stoic face. He figured dancing must be something Taeyong really enjoyed for the emotions to show so easily.

Eventually the song ended, to Ten’s dismay, and Taeyong stopped moving, heavy breathing resounding throughout the almost empty room. Ten remained in the doorframe, watching the silver haired male walk over to his phone to pick it up before getting ready to leave, only to squeal and jump in surprise when he sees Ten blocking the door.

The Thai male could objectively say that the gesture was adorable and he couldn’t help but grin.

“Hello there Lee Taeyong,” he said, knowing that his expression resembled a cat’s.

Taeyong was still trying to gather his wits and put on his facade, not quite succeeding. Ten reveled in the emotions displayed on the ice prince’s face and in his body language.

“Don’t try to hide yourself,” Ten gently quipped, taking a step inside the room.

Taeyong looked up, still out of breath, meeting Ten’s eyes straight on. The teal haired dancer could see the emotions swirling in Taeyong’s light brown eyes. Defiance, confusion, wonder, and even a little spark of hope.

Ten kept his eyes open and inviting, trying to convey trust. It seemed to work slightly seeing as
Taeyong didn’t close his face off entirely when they broke eye contact.

“Please don’t run away,” Ten pleaded, keeping his smile intact, although tense, feeling like he was dealing with a wild, unpredictable animal. Taeyong seemed to consider making a run for it but eventually backed up a bit, allowing Ten to step inside fully. Ten relaxed his shoulders and gracefully accepted the unspoken offer.

“Can we sit?” He asked and gestured towards the cold floor. Taeyong simply followed his hand before sinking down on his butt, legs drawn up to his torso.

Ten followed suit, sitting on his knees. They were quiet for a while as he observed Taeyong, the other sitting and gently biting his nails unconsciously, not looking at Ten. Ten saw how his nails were bitten down to the skin.

“Do you do that a lot?” He inquired. Taeyong looked up in mild surprise, catching himself biting his nails, immediately pulling away and drawing his hood-sleeves down over his hands, giving him cute sweaterpaws. Overall he just looked. Soft.

“Only when I’m nervous,” Taeyong quietly admitted. He seemed to have a hard time conversing his feelings after such a long time of solitude at school. Ten smiled at the progress. He was getting through to the other slowly.

“Why are you nervous?” He asked curiously. Taeyong looked him up and down before shrugging. Ten scoffed in amusement.

“You know,” he started again after a minutes silence. “You’re really good at dancing.” Ten made sure to look Taeyong straight in the eyes when he said it.

Taeyong searched his eyes imploringly, presumably looking for any sign of lies. When he didn’t find any he quietly offered a thank you.

“How long have you been dancing?” Ten questioned then, finding himself more and more curious about Taeyong. The other sighed slightly before answering.

“I started dancing when I was six, but I stopped when Chenle was born,” he timidly revealed a fact about himself, Ten seeing the discomfort in his eyes. The Thai male fleetingly noted that Taeyong sounded like a mother who gave up her dreams for her baby. The thought made his brain halt in its tracks. That’s exactly what Taeyong sounded like! He couldn’t help but wonder why? He didn’t want to impose the question immediately though, as Taeyong would most likely not answer and all trust would be eradicated. Instead he went for something more lighthearted to say.

“You should join the dance squad,” Ten dropped the idea that had popped into his mind when he first saw Taeyong dance. The other widened his eyes impossibly, nervousness clearly displayed.

“No,” Taeyong started. “I couldn’t possibly just do that- no- I don’t think that’s- why?”

Ten was once again shocked by Taeyong’s flustered state and he was completely thrilled about the slight blush spreading on Taeyong’s cheeks. He was starting to think that Lee Taeyong was simply a misjudged being, trying to get through life like everyone else.

“You’re good! We always need good dancers. Think about it at least,” Ten appealed before swiftly getting up and starting to walk away.

“It was nice talking to you, Lee Taeyong,” Ten bid his goodbye with a polite albeit slightly teasing grin before exiting the room.
Hope you liked that, the markhyuck tho ;))

Btw I’m sort of curious about something, how old do you guys think I am? And how old are you guys? XD I was wondering yesterday about this so if anyone wants to take a guess or let me know your age leave a comment :)!
(and even if you don’t you can ofc leave a comment anyways XD)
Taeyong didn’t know why he had felt comfortable (or as comfortable as one could be with a stranger) when Ten has sat down to talk with him. Ten had an aura that Taeyong enjoyed though, inducing him with a sense of security.

He didn’t know what to do about the offer Ten had given him. Joining the dance squad? He hadn’t danced for ages. He had just stumbled upon the room during free hour and gotten the urge to dance for the first time in a long time.

Ten caught him at a bad time. He would never be able to dance in a team like that, he had to take care of his brothers and himself first hand. He didn’t want to join if he felt like he couldn’t give it a hundred percent.

Sighing, Taeyong made his way up from the basement to lunch. He weaved in between all the students milling about, eventually ending up on the patch of grass where Kun and Sicheng were sitting as usual.

“Hey hyung,” Sicheng greeted with a smile.

“Hi Sicheng-ah,” he greeted casually, turning to nod at Kun in greeting with a smile. The Chinese male smiled back.

“What’s wrong?” Sicheng immediately picked up on Taeyong’s mood as the older picked at his packed lunch. The eldest brother hesitated before exhaling roughly.

“Ten wants me to join the dance squad,” he shrugged robotically.

Sicheng’s eyes widened. He turned to Kun, giving the senior a happy look, Kun returned it confusedly.

“Hyung this is great! Now you can start dancing again! I know how much you loved it!” Sicheng excitedly clapped, his voice high pitched. Taeyong looked at him helplessly, before looking at Kun helplessly, the senior shrugging back at him.

“I don’t know... I don’t have time,” he tried to protest.

“Hyung! Jisung is four and Chenle is seven! And you have several capable brothers! I think you have time,” Sicheng argued, looking at Kun for confirmation, the senior confusedly nodding in agreement.

“But you all have your own lives. I don’t want to you to babysit and not be able to do what you want,” Taeyong said, looking at Kun for support. The senior nodded dutifully.

“So do you,” Sicheng’s voice was much softer now, Taeyong’s fight dying a tad. “You deserve to
do what makes you happy too. You deserve to do what you want hyung.”

The silence was a tension filled one, the gravity of Sicheng’s words settling on Taeyong’s heart heavily.

“I think you should at least consider it,” Kun timidly spoke for the first time, voicing his own actual opinion. Taeyong sighed again, nodding once.

“I’ll think about it.”

~

That afternoon Johnny sat down on the bench in the gym, sweat soaking through his clothes from the intense drills they had just done. Yuta was lying flat on the floor, limbs spread out to soak up the coldness of the tiles. Mark and Jeno leaned on each other, exhausted. Jaehyun drank greedily from his water bottle, hair still looking good even while sweat soaked. Amber was sitting on the bench next to Johnny, panting lightly.

“Great job people!” The coach praises and gave them one of his uncharacteristic rare smiles. “Let’s end today with a practice game!”

The members of the team sighed quietly in unison, not having the energy to even do a practice game which they usually jumped at the chance of.

“Come on! Up you get,” Amber said and leaned down to drag Yuta up from the floor with overwhelming strength. Johnny huffed a laugh at Yuta’s indignant response, before following the team on to the court again.

He saw Mark looking back at his friends on the bleacher. Johnny noticed the smile on his face and turned to look as well. Donghyuck was completely ignoring his homework, balancing the math book on his head instead while Renjun and Jaemin keeled over from laughter.

Johnny looked back at the lovestruck expression on Mark’s face and smiled secretly.

The game proceeded smoothly. Turns out they still had some energy left in them after all.

Jaemin, Renjun and Donghyuck cheered them on obnoxiously, embarrassing Jeno when he scored and yelling loudly at Mark when he made a good pass.

Yuta had the ball, running down the centre of the court swiftly, looking for someone to pass the ball to. Johnny ran alongside the very end of the court, parallel to Yuta, calling out for his teammate.

Yuta finally noticed his fellow teammate and faked a right before sending a hard pass his way. The ball proceeded in slow motion, sailing smoothly over the members of the other team, flying in a projectile heading for Johnny who jumped up to catch the ball. Only. He missed it completely. The ball continued soaring through the air, heading straight for the bleacher, Donghyuck’s eyes widening a fraction before the ball hit his head harshly.

Johnny gaped at the scene, seeing Jaemin and Renjun immediately tend to the boy clutching his head, Mark’s wide eyes looking at them worriedly. Then a horrible thought struck Johnny. That was Donghyuck. Lee Donghyuck. Little brother of Lee Taeyong. Lee Taeyong. The senior who beat up a bully for hurting the very same brother. He gasped in horror.
“Oh no.”

Johnny winced as they observed the nurse dabbing Donghyuck’s forehead with a soothing gel. Jaemin and Renjun sat on each side of the boy, hugging him comfortingly. Mark paced worriedly across the room, standing on his toes to see what the nurse was doing. Jeno was standing next to Jaemin, arm around his shoulder.

Johnny, Jaehyun and Yuta stood as inconspicuously as possible on the far right corner of the room.

The door burst open with force, Lee Taeyong walking inside, concerned eyes finding Donghyuck immediately. The nurse turned around and looked him up and down.

“Lee Taeyong?” She questioned. Mentioned male nodded impatiently and gave a shallow bow of respect in his haste.

“Okay then, we just finished applying a soothing gel, there is no apparent signs of a concussion or other injuries sustained,” she explained, putting away the gel and washing her hands. “You’re all free to go.” The nurse smiled slightly before leaving the room, giving all of them time to gather themselves and leave as well.

Taeyong hurried to Donghyuck as soon as the nurse was gone, taking a hold of his head gently.

“Does it hurt?” He asked, eyes swimming with concern. Johnny marvelled in the soft airiness of Taeyong’s voice. Donghyuck snarked with a teasing smile thrown at the senior trio. Johnny gulped nervously when Taeyong’s head whipped around to look at them, Yuta shrinking closer to the tallest male in fear while Jaehyun simply let his eyes stray in avoidance.

Taeyong didn’t say anything but his narrowed eyes were conveying enough.

He turned back to his little brother, tensely inspecting the injury, fingering it lightly with care, before carding a soothing hand through Donghyuck’s hair. Johnny noticed the gesture was familiar and full of affection.

“Let’s go home, we’ll pick up takeout on the way,” he softly spoke, Donghyuck nodding in assent before getting off the examination table, saying bye to his friends.

Taeyong slung an arm around his narrow shoulders as they walked out, pulling his brother close.

Johnny let out the breath he didn’t know he’d been holding, feeling relieved.

“That could’ve gone better,” Renjun laughed at the seniors’ harrowed expressions.
Chapter Notes

I’m kind of rushed so I don’t have time for a long note but I hope you’ll enjoy <33333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Donghyuck’s head was aching as they got home. He knew he was red on the forehead and probably looked like an idiot but he couldn’t care less. Basketballs were hard as fuck.

“What happened hyung?” Chenle immediately questioned the sophomore when they stepped through the door, having run over when they announced their presence and the food.

“A minor accident, Lele, nothing to worry about,” Donghyuck tried to sound unaffected although his head was pulsating with pain.

Chenle frowned and stepped forward to throw his hands around Donghyuck’s stomach, resting his chin on the older’s torso, big imploring eyes looking up at the older.

“I can kiss it better! Yongie hyung always say kisses take away the hurt,” Chenle declared. Jisung who had been wobbling over nodded in excitement.

“I wanna kiss too!” He declared, happy to participate in something if Chenle came up with it.

Donghyuck scoffed fondly.

“Okay. You can kiss it better,” he consented, Chenle smiling widely before leading the peach haired male into the living room and pushing him down on the couch.

Chenle climbed up into Donghyuck’s lap and leaned forward, steadying himself by putting his hands on Donghyuck’s shoulders, before kissing the hurt spot on his forehead with a loud smack.

Jisung followed clumsily, climbing up and settling on Donghyuck’s other leg, holding onto Chenle for balance as he kissed the hurt spot too.

Donghyuck laughed in glee, hugging them both close because his brothers were truly the best ones in the world.

“Thank you! I feel better now,” Donghyuck admitted, glad to see Chenle’s satisfied face and Jisung’s cute little smile.

~

The next day after History class Yuta was feeling awful. Taeyong had been cold and distant the whole lesson as usual but Yuta couldn’t help but think it was his fault for hitting Donghyuck with the basketball. Ten had told them about the encounter he’d had with Taeyong yesterday and Yuta hoped he hadn’t screwed up enough so that Taeyong wouldn’t consider being his friend in the future. He nervously wrung his hands as Taeyong left the classroom when the bell rang. Biting his lip in contemplation, Yuta decided he had to fix it.
“I have to go, I’ll text you later,” Yuta rushed out, gathering his notes quickly. The others looked confused at his sudden departure.

“Why?” Doyoung questioned.

“I’ll tell you later, bye!” He exclaimed and ran out the door.

Yuta saw Taeyong round a corner and he started dashing through the corridor to catch up, dodging people left and right.

He finally got close to the silver haired male as the corridor started clearing up.

“Taeyong!” He called out for the boy who turned around in surprise. The corridor was empty by then. He saw the other frown confusedly.

“Um hi. I just wanted to apologize for yesterday! I’m so sorry for hitting Donghyuck with that ball, I didn’t mean to! My aim was off so it was a complete accident I promise! And Johnny was just not quick enough so you could really say it was his fault! If you want to beat someone beat Johnny, like for real, it’s all his fault. How is Donghyuck by the way?” Yuta rambled nonstop trying to justify his actions. He could see the crack slowly forming in Taeyong’s facade, the hint of amusement present in his eyes causing Yuta to smile widely.

“He’s fine,” Taeyong admitted. “And I don’t understand why you’re apologizing to me when you hit him in the head?”

Yuta opened his mouth to answer but nothing came to him immediately.

“Well. I mean. You’re the one who punched that bully who harassed him. And I don’t want my face punched in by you, even though your face is gorgeous. It’s just not a kink I have,” he winked teasingly and smiled even wider when Taeyong’s cheeks flushed red.

“You’re very provocative, aren’t you?” Taeyong retorted, lips curling slightly. Yuta laughed. He couldn’t help but appreciate the small bursts of emotions Taeyong’s cold face presented to him.

“That’s my charm.”

Taeyong rolled his eyes, and Yuta was almost vibrating from ecstasy because of Taeyong’s responses to him.

“I kind of have to go now,” Taeyong admitted after checking the time. Yuta nodded.

“Sure. Me too,” he agreed.


“Bye!” Yuta waved and left the way he came from. He had held a conversation with Taeyong that wasn’t about their history assignment, the beginning of his journey to becoming Taeyong’s friend was officially accomplished.

~

Donghyuck was walking around, trying to find the music classroom. His home room teacher had designated him the task of handing out some apparently important papers to the music teacher during their study period.

When he finally found the room with some help from an eccentric senior he was surprised to find it
occupied. He stood restlessly in front of the door, listening to the soothing guitar riff sounding from the other side. The tune was familiar and he knew quite a bit of the song lyrics actually.

He figured dawdling wouldn’t do him any good and determinedly pushed the door open. The music room was spacious and allowed great acoustics, instruments lining the walls and cluttered across the floor surfaces.

In the middle of the room sat the culprit of the guitar playing. Donghyuck’s eyes widened when his eyes met the guitarists’.

“Hyung?” He was pleasantly surprised, which is bad. No. He should not be excited to see Mark. He’s getting over that crush, remember?

“Hyuck,” Mark smiled minimally, laughing timidly.

“I didn’t know you could play guitar,” Donghyuck continued the somewhat dying conversation, walking inside the room properly, papers still in his hands.

“I can’t really, I’m just trying some chords and stuff,” Mark tried to explain himself, scratching his neck uneasily.

“Well it didn’t sound like you were just trying some chords,” Donghyuck lamented, walking over to the desk at the front of the room, putting the papers down. “You were playing billionaire,” he jokingly accused, all while walking closer to the junior and daintily taking a seat across from the older. Mark laughed awkwardly.

“You caught me,” he smiled, embarrassed. The silenced descended upon them, comfortable and Mark glanced up at Donghyuck with imploring eyes. Donghyuck traced the junior’s features, the shape jawline cutting through his vision, thin lips pressed together and those wide eyes looking right back at him.

Suddenly Mark raised his hand, fingers gently brushing away Donghyuck’s bangs from his forehead to caress his bruise. It didn’t hurt at all but Donghyuck almost flinched away, cheeks feeling warm.

“Does it hurt?” Mark asked, finding Donghyuck’s eyes and staring unblinkingly. The younger could’ve sworn he saw glinting adoration in Mark’s eyes, but it must’ve been a trick of the light.

“No,” his voice was barely above a whisper. Mark hummed, a small frown on his face. He stroked the bruised area for a few more seconds before finally removing his fingers. Donghyuck almost sighed in disappointment.

“Can you play for me?” He asked Then, looking down at the worn guitar in Mark’s lap. Mark grimaced slightly, mulling it over before finally removing his fingers. Donghyuck almost sighed in disappointment.

“Can you play for me?” He asked Then, looking down at the worn guitar in Mark’s lap. Mark grimaced slightly, nulling it over before looking up at Donghyuck’s pleading eyes and sighing.

“Sure,” he consented, starting to strum shyly on the strings.

Donghyuck recognized it as billionaire once again, bobbing his head to the melody. The younger suddenly got the urge to sign along, not hesitating to open his mouth and do just that.

~

Mark looked up in surprise as Donghyuck’s sweet voice filled the room, sounding lovely together with his guitar. Mark was astonished that Donghyuck knew all the lyrics for the song, but he was especially floored because of the other’s beautiful voice. He could feel the smile starting to form on his lips.
As the rap part approached, Mark readied himself and swiftly picked up when Donghyuck stopped singing, still playing the guitar with ease. Donghyuck’s wide smile as he heard the rap made Mark’s heart pound.

He finished it and stopped playing, already feeling a blush spread across his face. He laughed nervously, fiddling with his jeans.

“You’re so good at rapping!” Donghyuck exclaimed, smile still intact. “Although your guitar playing could use a little tuning. Just a bit.” His smile turned teasing and Mark couldn’t help but laugh at the jab.

“Well you’re singing is beautiful,” he finally looked up from his lap to meet Donghyuck’s eyes straight on, seeing a delicious flush make its way onto the younger’s face.

“Pfft,” Donghyuck scoffed, but he did offer a thankful smile.

Mark continued staring at the boy until the younger clears his throat.

“I have to get back to class now though,” he said sheepishly, getting up from his seat. “See you later, Mark hyung!” He waved and Mark waved back. When Donghyuck was gone he looked down at his guitar pensively. Why was his heart beating so quickly?

Chapter End Notes

Kudos if you liked it and comment your thoughts :))
Taeyong pulled Jungwoo close, hugging the boy to his chest. Lucas sat next to Taeyong, Chenle lying on his lap, head pillowed on Taeyong’s thigh. Jisung was sitting in Jungwoo’s lap, dozing off, his head falling back on his older brother’s shoulder constantly.

They were watching a kids movie about a dog who could play sports. Chenle was looking star eyed at the concept.

“Yongie hyung?” He said, looking up at the eldest, who’s eyes were falling shut regularly. He had been juggling more responsibilities lately than he was used to. The bills were yet to be paid, his homework was piling up, all his brothers needed care every day, he woke up early and went to bed late, he cooked the meals and he did laundry and cleaning. He knew it was too much but he couldn’t bring himself to ask his brothers for help. Taeyong didn’t want them to have to do chores and all those boring stuff that no kid should have to do. He was the oldest and he should be shouldering the responsibility.

“Yes Lele?” He murmured, trying to wake himself up.

“Can we get a dog?” Chenle looked so excited with his eyes lighting up at the thought. Lucas looked away from the movie expectantly to hear his answer. Taeyong internally grimaced. A dog? A dog would be yet another responsibility. It needed to be walked, fed and petted very often.

“Lele, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” he treaded carefully, beware of any sort of temper tantrums. The seven year old frowned.

“Why not?” He questioned, pouting. Lucas joined him in his pouting.

“We won’t have time for a dog, sweetie. It can’t be left alone all day during school. It wouldn’t be fair,” he tried to reason. Thankfully Chenle seemed to recognize the issue and dejectedly nodded. Taeyong sighed quietly, feeling like a bad brother.

“I’m sorry Lele,” he ran a hand through the boy’s hair lovingly.

Chenle looked up again and smiled.

“It’s okay hyung. I can make Jisung play my dog instead!” He brightened up at that idea, Taeyong smiling fondly at him before looking at the youngest brother who was sleeping in Jungwoo’s lap.

When the movie ended almost all his brothers had fallen asleep, and Taeyong didn’t have the strength to move. He knew they all had school tomorrow and he really should do something, but he
was too tired.

His phone vibrated on the table, indicating a message having been sent to him. Maneuvering around Jungwoo’s sleeping form, Taeyong reached forward to take the device. He sighed at what he saw.

It was the transaction of the month.

“Fucking finally,” he muttered bitterly, immediately feeling relief at the aspect of being able to pay the bills.

“Hyung?” Jungwoo’s soft voice reaches his ears, Taeyong shutting down his phone and turning around swiftly, plastering a smile on his face.

“Jungwoo-yah.”

“Can we go sleep now?” The boy sleepily yawned. Taeyong chuckled.

“Sure, let’s get you all into bed.”

Johnny didn’t expect to stumble upon Lee Taeyong in the bathroom during class, but here they were.

Johnny had gotten a bathroom slip from his teacher with much persuasion, but he did really need to pee and he wasn’t actually trying to skip the class.

When he finally reached the destination he was met with Lee Taeyong sitting on the window sill of the bathroom’s only window. He had his earphones in, head leaning on the cool glass surface, frowning with his lips turned down. Johnny didn’t know how to feel about the display of a human emotion. He was feeling giddy but also concerned because Taeyong looked pretty disturbed.

The other senior must’ve felt the tall male’s presence as he turned his head toward the door, eyes finding Johnny’s round ones. The rust haired male still felt minimally afraid that Taeyong would extract revenge for the basketball incident even though it technically wasn’t his fault.

The silver haired senior pulled out one of his earphones seeing as Johnny didn’t move from his position yet.

“Are you skipping class?” Johnny bluntly asked what had been nagging him since he saw Taeyong.

The other didn’t respond, he simply sighed and started unconsciously biting his nail. Johnny found himself walking closer to the other.

“Ten said you do that when you’re nervous,” he stated, posing the words in a gentle questioning tone.

Taeyong sighed again and pulled his hand away from his face, sticking both his hands under his butt to sit on them.

“Yes, I’m skipping, okay? Go ahead and report me,” he coldly threw at Johnny, eyes narrowed. But the tall senior could actually see behind the exterior coldness this time. He saw the turbulence in Taeyong’s eyes, the tiredness in his dark circles and the anxiousness in his fidgeting. Johnny frowned.

“I won’t report you, and you don’t have to tell me why you were skipping or anything,” he shrugged, because Taeyong really didn’t. Johnny saw that the other didn’t want to talk about it right
now. “I was just wondering what song you were listening to?” Johnny offered a tentative smile and sat down across from Taeyong on the spacious window sill. The silver haired male looked shocked at his question, searching Johnny’s eyes curiously.

He eventually picked up the discarded ear bud and turned it around with his fingers gently.

“1-800 by Logic,” Taeyong spoke in a wispy tone. Johnny’s eyes widened. He honestly had expected some kpop or something more hardcore. He couldn’t help but wonder why Taeyong would listen to that song in particular.

“Can I listen?” Johnny held his breath in anticipation. He feared the rejection that would inevitably come. Taeyong looked up in surprise again, expression looking almost vulnerable to Johnny’s perceptive eyes and the senior noticed that he really enjoyed seeing so many emotions on Taeyong’s face. He knew exactly what Yuta and Ten had meant when they described their experiences with the ice prince.

“I guess,” Taeyong’s hesitant voice drew him out of his thoughts, Johnny smiled at the acceptance, inwardly surprised that it wasn’t a rejection.

They scooted a bit closer together, Taeyong handing Johnny his earbud. Then soft music filtered through them, the cord stretched between the two seniors as Taeyong leaned back on the window again. Johnny observed he other male’s sharp features again, the sunken cheeks, the downtrodden lips and the tired eyes. He didn’t like the sight of Taeyong’s beautiful features being so haunting.

When the song faded out Johnny gathered his courage.

“May I?” He gestured towards the phone lying next to Taeyong, the silver haired boy eyeing him curiously before nodding his consent.

Johnny picked up the unlocked phone and went to the Spotify search bar.

When he got what he wanted he pulled out the cord connecting the earbuds, Taeyong’s brows furrowing in confusion, Johnny turning the volume up to the loudest.

Gangnam style filled the room up, exciting beat echoing across the walls.

“You cannot not smile when you hear this!” Johnny said with an already wide smile as he stood up from the window sill. Taeyong looked on incredulously, jaw gone slack.

Johnny started jumping around like he was at a club, shaking his head like crazy as the build up for the chorus came on.

Then he broke out in the actual choreography, singing along obnoxiously. And he was right. Taeyong couldn’t contain the laughter bubbling out of him. It was silent, his shoulders shaking from the force of it. Johnny reveled in the amusement in Taeyong’s eyes, continuing his charade until the song ended, panting moderately.

“Well?” He huffed out.

“Well,” Taeyong answered, the laughter lingering in the upturn of his lips. “Your dance was very on point,” he concluded. Johnny laughed at the critique.

The mood was lighter, more uplifting and promising.

“I guess I should head back to class,” Johnny said apologetically. Taeyong nodded.
“I’ll see you around,” Johnny gave a charming smile as he offered his goodbyes, Taeyong giving him a minimal wave. He couldn’t help but be giddy about having cheered the ice prince up, as well as actually talking to the other properly for the first time. He had been having such an interesting encounter, he even forgot to pee.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Here’s the new chapter :) hope you’ll enjoy it and thank you so much for all the support on the story so far <33333

Sicheng frowned as he observed the oldest brother from the living room. He had Chenle in his lap, playing with his fingers excitedly while watching the cartoon on the TV. Taeyong was simultaneously making their dinner, walking up and down the basement with laundry and trying to keep an eye on Jisung.

Sicheng felt guilt pooling in his chest. He had just recently told Taeyong that they were all capable of taking care of themselves but he now saw that he was all talk no action.

The brunet made Chenle sit on the couch and got up, walking briskly towards the stairs. After ascending the stairs he walked into Donghyuck’s room without knocking, finding the younger on his phone.

“Hyuck,” he said, face set in a determined frown. “Taeyong hyung is literally drowning in responsibilities,” Donghyuck looked at him, shocked at the revelation. “We need to help.”

The younger still looked shocked but Sicheng saw the creeping guilt in his eyes.

“Let’s do it.”

~

Lucas hadn’t noticed how much Taeyong did for them until he had to do it himself.

They had marched down the stairs, Sicheng in the lead, walked right up to Taeyong and grabbed him by the shoulders, steering the confused eldest up the stairs and into his room.

“Take a nap hyung,” Donghyuck ordered as they had steered him to the bed.

“But, what about dinner? And I need to finish the laundry, and vacuum and-” Sicheng held up a hand to stop Taeyong’s worried rambling.

“We will take care of everything and call when dinner is done. Now sleep. Please,” the second oldest pleaded, giving Taeyong his most wide eyed look, begging the older to trust them. Taeyong sighed deeply and Lucas hadn’t noticed how dark his brother’s eye bags were. Or how exhausted he looked.

“Fine,” he conceded, laying down on the bed gingerly.

Sicheng smiled in satisfaction and marched them out of the room, closing the door.

“Okay, Hyuck, you and Jungwoo do food and check up on our youngsters,” he delegated. This was one of the few times Lucas had seen their second oldest being authoritative. “Lucas, you and I will do laundry and vacuuming.”
“Let’s do it!” Lucas cheered, garnering shouts of agreement.

~

Laundry was hard to understand. There were so many buttons and settings and you had to sort by color and types of fabrics. Lucas was officially confused. Sicheng was reading through all the buttons and tags thoroughly, trying to make sense of the machinery. Lucas gave up. He simply sat on the machine and kicked his legs in boredom.

Taking responsibility was hard.

“Ah!” Sicheng suddenly exclaimed. “I got it!” He triumphantly held up the detergent and the measurement cup.

“Wooho!” Lucas cheered, happy at the aspect of getting to leave the laundry room.

They finally figured out the buttons and colors and degrees, starting the machine after filling it up. When it jumped on Sicheng and Lucas high fived excitedly.

“Nice!” Sicheng smiled, proud of their effort presumably. Lucas smiled too because they were done. Finally.

“Now vacuuming!” Sicheng sounded all too happy with that sentence. Lucas immediately dropped the smile and groaned. More cleaning?!

~

When Jungwoo fetched their oldest brother he was feeling giddy. The food had turned out well and the cleaning too. No one was hurt and nothing was broken. It was a win.

When he cautiously entered the room he saw Taeyong sleeping deeply, curled up on the bed. It made him happy to see his brother getting some proper sleep.

“Hyung,” He started out by whispering, not wanting to scare the sleeping figure.

It moved and made a humming noise.

“Yongie hyung,” Jungwoo said, this time louder. The oldest brother sat up in bed, blearily looking around and finding Jungwoo standing in the room. Jungwoo thought his oldest brother looked cute with his bed head and over sized hoodie hanging off his narrow frame.

“Hey,” Taeyong rasped, voice heavy with sleep.

“Dinner’s ready!” Jungwoo announced proudly. Taeyong smiled.

“That’s great. Thank you,” he said, voice dripping with gratitude.

“No problem hyung!” Jungwoo assured with an angelic smile, taking his brother’s hand when the older got out of bed.

Together they walked downstairs, all of the other brothers already seated.

Taeyong marveled at the sight in front of him. Arrays of food put out on the table, candles lit to attempt a cosy atmosphere, the big smiles on his brothers faces. He couldn’t contain the grin spreading on his face.
“This is beautiful. Thank you so much,” he said, taking a seat carefully as to not disturbed the mood.

“It was fun, hyung! No problem,” Donghyuck assured with a smile rivaling the sun. Jungwoo couldn’t stop his own smile either, seeing everyone so happy.

They enjoyed dinner thoroughly, laughter ringing across the room frequently, the atmosphere feeling as light and loving as ever.

~

Taeil departed from his friends, walking towards the library serenely, greeting all the teachers and students he passed with a gentle smile.

He had to find a book to read for his Korean lit class, therefore leaving the canteen early.

When he entered the library he immediately took a deep breath, inhaling the intoxicating smell of new books and drowning in the sound of silence. The library was one of his favourite spots, except for the cinema he worked at. He really did love his job. His boss Heechul was really kind even though the man acted very crazily every so often. Taeil always enjoyed it when Heechul got together with his best friends for movie night, proving that there are people more crazy than him.

When Taeil had properly absorbed the library he ventured further inside the huge hall, smiling at the sight of all the books.

He pulled them out of their slots and read the description before slotting them back in again. He couldn’t really find anything that fit his assignment.

As he was pulling out another book that looked especially interesting a figure in his peripheral vision caught his attention. The senior turned his head slightly and saw that the figure was Lee Taeyong.

The ice prince was scouring the shelves, piercing eyes roaming over every row. Taeil’s breath hitched.

Should he say hi?

He should right?

Yes. Yes he should.

Determined, Taeil put back the book he had been holding, walking over to the supposedly ice prince.

Taeyong didn’t notice him as he was reading on the back of a book, but he jumped when Taeil cleared his throat.

Taeyong’s startled gaze found his and for a while they simply stared at each other. Taeil was very bad a socializing and it had been pure luck when his band of friends had picked him up and decided he was their best friend several years ago. But making new friends? That was a whole other story.

“What are you reading?” Taeil awkwardly asked, offering a cringing smile.

Taeyong looked down at the book and contemplated the cover for a second, then put it back in the correct spot.

“Not this at least,” he murmured, not looking up to meet Taeil’s eyes.

The senior laughed at his response moderately, aware that they were in a library.
“Are you looking for something in particular?” Taeil questioned kindly, feeling curious. Taeyong shrugged.

“I just need a book to analyse for my lit class,” he stated.

“Oh right, I’m looking for one too,” Taeil smiled, remembering that Taeyong was, in fact, in his Korean lit class too. Taeyong simply nodded in acknowledgement.

“Why don’t we look together?” Taeil bravely leaped and suggested. Taeyong mulled it over, looking up at the other senior, scanning his small smile and politely folded hands. Then he nodded.

“Great!” Taeil felt abnormally happy with that piece of interaction and set off quickly to try and find some good books.

They didn’t speak at all, simply looked at the covers and read some of the descriptions. Taeil found a book he had already read and suddenly felt the urge to have Taeyong read it.

“Um, Taeyong-ssi?” He called awkwardly. The other looked up from the row he as been scanning. “I think I found a good book for you, unless you’ve already read it?” Taeil held up the book, Taeyong looking at it wide eyed.

“No I haven’t,” he admitted.

“Then you should read it,” Taeil decided handing the book to the senior. Taeyong took it gingerly. “I think you’re going to love it. And you can also watch the movie afterwards, that might help your analysis.”

Taeyong looked at Taeil with imploring eyes, eventually offering a small smile. Taeil grinned back. Taeyong’s smile just made him look more like a cartoon character than ever before and Taeil adored it.

“Thank you,” he said, nodding his head in gratefulness slightly. Taeyong then looked behind him at the shelf, quickly locating a book with his eyes. He picked it up and smiled wistfully.

“I think you should read this,” he said offering the literature piece to Taeil. “I’ve read it and I really liked it. I think you’d enjoy it,” his cheeks flushed lightly and Taeil felt an incredulous smile pulling at his mouth.

“Thank you,” he said earnestly, holding the book close. Taeyong offered another smile before walking off to borrow the book Taeil had suggested to him.

Taeil looked down at the one he had been handed and found that it was the very same book he had been holding when he saw Taeyong scanning the shelves.

He felt a speck of awed disbelief as he looked up at the other senior who was walking out the doors of the library, the silver haired male tightly clutching ‘the fault in our stars’ in his delicate hands.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

It’s kinda short. I’m so sorry :((

Hope you’ll like it at least <3333

The next day their history lesson had been cancelled and they all decided not to study during the free hour. Taeil was content with that, knowing that they were on par with their schedule. Besides, they had another study session the upcoming Saturday which was another reason not to overdo it at the moment. Instead they had spent the time goofing around in the cafeteria.

Taeil was now at his work, idly tapping the counter with his nail. His coworker, Sehun, was sitting next to him, while their other coworker Baekhyun handled the snack station.

“Why is literally no one here?” Baekhyun mourned over the lack of people. They had seen one couple, a few loud middle schoolers and an elderly lady but other than that the cinema was unusually empty.

Their cinema was somewhat different than other cinemas. They did show new movies, but they also screened a lot of movies that weren’t as new for a cheaper price (the movie of the night happened to be ‘the fault in our stars’ which was just bizarre) and paired with that they had a broad selection of movie genres being screened. It was one of a kind really.

“They’re probably tired of seeing your annoying face every time hyung,” Sehun drawled, drawing with a marker on his wrist. Baekhyun gave the younger a deadpan expression.

“Very funny Oh Sehun,” he spat, huffing.

The sound of the entrance doors opening brought them out of their stupor.

Taeil was stunned to see Lee Taeyong walk in.

He didn’t properly manage to close his mouth until Taeyong was at the ticket counter.

“Oh, hello Taeil-ssi,” Taeyong greeted politely, no facial expression betraying his emotions.

“Hi,” Taeil managed to choke out, wanting to smack himself for his awkwardness. “How can I help you?” He finally remembered to do his job.

“One ticket for the fault in our stars please?” Taeil swore he could see the stains of a blush spreading on Taeyong’s pale cheeks. He was awed to find out that Taeyong had actually read the book and even wanted to watch the movie.

After taking the money and giving Taeyong his ticket Taeil desperately tried to start another conversation.

“So, I’m assuming you already finished the book?”
“Yeah, I had some extra time during the day. It was very good. I really enjoyed it,” he admitted bashfully. Taeil nodded awkwardly, not knowing how to continue the conversation.

“Oh gosh aren’t you just a doll!” Taeil was acutely reminded of Baekhyun and Sehun having been there all the time to witness his socially awkward behaviour. Taeyong looked startled at the words Baekhyun had spoken.

“I mean look at you,” Baekhyun was leaning as far as possible over the snack counter, trying to get a good look. “Your complexion is spotless, you’re just the right size and your hair is gorgeous!”

Taeil felt the second hand embarrassment kick in after that statement.

“Oh,” Taeyong didn’t seem to know what to do about that. “Uh-“

“Huh look at the time,” Sehun suddenly spoke, looking far more amused than appropriate. “The movie’s about to start.”

“Oh. I-“

“Gosh I am so sorry, we won’t hold you anymore. Here take some popcorn! It’s on the house,” Baekhyun smiled widely and grabbed a big size popcorn to hand it to the startled boy. “Enjoy your movie!”

“Thank you,” Taeyong sputtered, a blush coloring his cheeks. Taeil was feeling strangely detached from the situation.

“I’ll see you Taeil-ssi,” Taeyong politely bowed his head.

“Yes. See you,” Taeil forced out, actually smiling genuinely as he bid goodbye.

Then Taeyong was gone.

“He was adorable. What a beautiful specimen,” Baekhyun gushed, a teasing glint in his eyes. “So, Taeil-ah, how do you know him?” Sehun looked just as interested, leaning forward to listen properly, marker forgotten. Taeil wanted to hide his face in his hands.

“We’re just working together on a history project for school,” Taeil told them truthfully.

“Ugh, how boring,” Baekhyun complained. “We need to spice your life up a bit Taeil-ah,” he nodded. Taeil dreaded the plan Baekhyun seemed to be thinking of.

Sehun simply sighed and went back to drawing on his arm.

~

The next afternoon they were all sitting at the diner, sipping milkshakes and sharing fries. Doyoung was pondering about the week. From what the others had said about their encounters with Taeyong he had drawn a conclusion. Lee Taeyong was evil.

He was slowly worming his way into the hearts of his friends. He was going to completely disintegrate them from the inside like a nasty virus eating at your insides before infesting everyone around you.

“I think we should try and get him to like actually loosen up tomorrow,” Ten said, referring to the study session they were going to have at Taeyong’s house the next day.
“Yeah, we should start integrating him into our group,” Yuta nodded, sipping his milkshake. “He needs some friends and we’re the perfect choice!”

“Who says he needs friends?” Doyoung interjected. “He seems fine to me on his own.” The others rolled their eyes in exasperation, having heard one too many of his rants about how Taeyong was evil incarnate.

“I want to be friends with him though. And I think everyone could use a friend,” Taeil reasoned.

“We should start operation ‘integrating Taeyong’ tomorrow,” Johnny decided, waving a fry around excitedly. “We just need some sort of plan that will get him to loosen up and talk a bit more about himself.”

“Wait a second here,” Doyoung scoffed. “You cannot just decide to integrate someone without even discussing it properly just because you guys had some moments with him!”

“You’re right,” Yuta nodded mournfully. “This is a democracy after all. Everyone who wants to integrate Lee Taeyong raise a hand.”

Everyone raised their hand except for Doyoung who glared at the Japanese male.

“See?” Ten smiled devilishly. “We took a vote, you lost fair and square. Issue settled.”

“Oh come on,” Doyoung complained, almost knocking over Jaehyun’s milkshake with his exasperated gestures. “Isn’t it weird that you all happened to be at the same place as him throughout the week?”

“It must be fate,” Yuta chirped teasingly.

“Oh,” Doyoung held up a pointed finger, “he’s up to something.” Jaehyun groaned and slammed his head down on the table.

“Seriously, you need to stop,” Ten deadpanned. “He’s not evil!”

Doyoung stubbornly crossed his arms and refused to speak.

“Whatever, you can sulk all you want,” Yuta chided. “We are going through with operation ‘integrating Taeyong’ anyway,” he turned to Johnny.

“So. What’s the plan?”
Chapter 25

Donghyuck was wandering around the house, trying to find a prey to use his newly arrived beauty products on.

He arrived at the living room and found Lucas playing video games. Donghyuck smirked.

“Xuxi-ah,” he called Lucas lovingly, eyelashes fluttering as he walked closer. Lucas hummed but didn’t look away from his game. Donghyuck opted to use force instead, so he grabbed Lucas’ arm, promptly disrupting his game. Lucas whined loudly.

“Hyung-“

“Lucas I need some help, come with me,” Donghyuck didn’t listen to his brother’s whines. Lucas was being dragged away from the living room, struggling to at least finish the round.

“My game! Hyung!”

Eventually the screen was out of sight. Lucas whined even more but started walking properly instead of being dragged along. Donghyuck smiled with satisfaction.

~

“Now hold still,” Donghyuck ordered, dabbing Lucas lip. He had put on the base and eye makeup and was currently applying the lipstick. His newly ordered beauty products were all cohesively glittery. So Lucas’ lip was sparkling like nothing else under the light of the lamp by Donghyuck’s desk. He was standing over Lucas lap, trying not to miss a spot. The younger looked calm even though it was his first time trying makeup, he complained about not being able to finish his game but otherwise he was compliant which Donghyuck smiled at.

“Okay, now we’re done,” he said and backed off to view his masterpiece. Lucas blinked his eyes open and stood up to look in the mirror next to Donghyuck’s closet. His eyelids were shimmering, his cheekbones were accentuated with a glittery shine and his lips looked huge with the glitter lipstick on. He gaped at the reflection.

“I look so different,” he said in disbelief.

“Yes. You’re officially a glittery princess,” Donghyuck said proudly. “Let’s do nails now.”

Lucas groaned.

~
Jisung had come into the room while Donghyuck unpacked his new nail polishes, the youngest looked curiously at Lucas. His little mouth set in a determined line he crossed his arms stubbornly.

“I want glitter too!” He decided and sat down on Lucas lap, the older already sitting on the floor.

“Okay Jisung,” Donghyuck placated him and shook his head in exasperation. The youngest really did love imitating what his hyungs did. Donghyuck assumed he didn’t want to feel left out. The doorbell rang downstairs and he was waiting to hear if Taeyong would call his name in case it was Mark. When the eldest didn’t he assumed it was Johnny and his gang who had arrived.

He took the nail polish and sat down across from his brothers on the floor.

“Silver glitter, gold glitter or pink glitter,” Donghyuck presented the different polishes and Lucas chose silver to match his makeup while Jisung picked gold. Donghyuck decided he’d use pink then.

He started off by painting Lucas’ nails, the twelve year old chattering excitedly while obediently holding his hand still, Donghyuck making agreeing noises at the right places in the chatter. When Donghyuck finished he sternly told Lucas not to move or use his hand for anything until Donghyuck told him it was okay. He then did Jisung’s small nails, cooing at how small his hands were. He decided only to paint two nails on each hand as it was his youngest brother’s first time doing it.

Last he did his own nails.

Donghyuck made them both hold out their hands so he could take a picture.

A fresh post on Instagram was made by Donghyuck only a minute later, featuring three sets of shimmering nails. Mark Lee was the first one to like it.

~

Lucas walked back to his shared room with Jungwoo touching the nail polish on his nails with his fingertips. It did sparkle really nicely.

Jungwoo looked up when Lucas entered, eyes widening comically when he noticed the makeup on his younger brother.

“Are you wearing makeup?” Jungwoo stood up from his bed, putting away the book he’d been reading and walking closer to Lucas.

“Yeah,” Lucas grinned. Jungwoo inspected it closer, taking note of the sparkly eyeshadow and subtle mascara and the base which was almost perfect.

“It looks really good Xuxi!” Jungwoo smiled happily. “Was it Taeyongie hyung or Hyuckie hyung who did it?”

“It was Donghyuckie hyung,” Lucas confirmed. “He wanted to try some new makeup on me.” Lucas brandished his nails. “And nailpolish.”

Jungwoo laughed at the younger’s exasperated look.

“So how does it feel?” He asked then.

“It’s itchy and weird. It looks good but I don’t think I could handle wearing it for a longer time!” Lucas dramatically gestured. “What if I get an itch? On my nose? It’ll rub off the cream thingy. And what if I get something in my eye? What if I eat?” Lucas seemed to get more and more distressed
with every thing he was mentioning. “How do you do it, hyung?” Jungwoo couldn’t help but snort.

“Practice. And I really love the feel of makeup. And being able to look the way you want. That’s why I wear it. To express what I’m feeling and to feel good about myself, in my own skin,” Jungwoo frowned, trying to explain it properly. “I love how I look with makeup but I also love how I look without it.”

Lucas looked at him for a few long moments before grinning.

“Then you should continue wearing it hyung. If it makes you happy.”

Jungwoo smiled back.
Jaehyun was excited to go to Taeyong’s house again. He had been nothing short of obsessed during the week. Every time he caught sight of Taeyong in school he couldn’t help but linger with his eyes, tracing the lines of his face and the curves of his body. Taeyong always seemed peculiarly delicate to him which was a surprise since he had seen the male punch another boy. Very harshly. After throwing said boy around like a rag doll. Twice.

Jaehyun also noticed that Taeyong often looked drained. Sunken cheeks and red-rimmed eyes a constant in his facial features just the last few days. It made him worry. But he also knew Taeyong probably wouldn’t appreciate him walking up and asking why he looks like death warmed over.

They were currently seated at Taeyong’s kitchen table, silently pretending to work. Jaehyun made eye contact with Johnny before looking at Taeyong who was the only one actually studying. He was biting his lip in contemplation, scratching something from his notebook and rewriting it again. Jaehyun wondered why he didn’t use the eraser when it was right next to his hand.

He glanced around the table fleetingly. Ten was watching Taeyong as well, wearing a small smile. Taeil was trying to read in his history book but Jaehyun noticed that he hadn’t turned the page the whole ten minutes he’d been staring at it. Doyoung was leaning back in his chair, looking around gloomily and waiting for them to initiate their supposedly ‘stupid’ plan. Yuta just chilled in his seat, playing with his pencil.

Johnny seemed to be gathering the nerve to start their plan. Really, Jaehyun thought, it wasn’t a plan at all. It was the only thing they could think of to get to know a person. It was common sense.

Talking.

Taeyong finally seemed to sense that they weren’t doing anything to help the assignment along and he looked up hesitantly, forcing Johnny to start operation ‘integrating Taeyong’.

“Yuta!” He called out excitedly. “I was reading this book the other day!”

Yuta looked up in mock surprise, sly smile on his face.

“You read?” He faked a surprised gasp. Johnny threw him an unimpressed look and the Japanese male rolled his eyes subtly before playing along.


“I think it was called something along the lines of stars?”

Taeil initiated phase two.

“Oh! You mean ‘the fault in our stars’? Yes I’ve read that too,” he awkwardly spoke. Jaehyun could see Ten face palming across the table.
“Taeyong-ssi, you read it too right?” Taeil turned to the silver haired male who looked as confused as ever about the turn of events.

“...Yeah.” He looked reluctant to answer and Jaehyun knew their plan was a bust.

“Really!” Johnny said like he didn’t already know that. “What did you think of it?”

“It was good.” Taeyong almost looked pained. Jaehyun was cringing from the second hand embarrassment.

“What did you like about it?”

Taeyong’s eye were flicking around the table, reluctance and confusion clear as day.

Just then the doorbell rang. Jaehun saw Taeyong’s expression change to one of relief. He almost laughed at the vivid reaction.

The lithe male immediately rose from his seat and headed for the kitchen.

Johnny dropped his fake smile as soon as Taeyong exited the kitchen.

“That was a disaster,” he complained.

“It was hilarious!” Doyoung was shaking from laughter, probably happy to have seen their plan fail if Jaehyun could guess.

They could hear light conversation from the hallway and then Taeyong’s voice called out.

“Hyuck! Mark’s here!” All the friends’ eyes widened.

“Mark?” They mouthed in unison, just as two figures entered the room. Mark stopped dead in his tracks, smile falling off his face.

“Hyung?” He asked in disbelief.

“Mark,” Johnny greeted with a smile.

“Why are you here?” Mark asked, looking over all of them.

“We’re working on a history project,” Ten defended them. “Why are you here?”

“I’m studying maths with Donghyuck,” Mark pursed his lips, expecting an onslaught of teasing remarks. Jaehyun knew his friends wouldn’t do that in front of Taeyong though. The silver haired male had been watching the exchange curiously until they went quiet.

“Mark-yah,” he said then, shocking the other seniors with his casual tone. “Do you want something to drink? We have soda.”

“No, I’m good hyung, thank you,” Mark smiled and Jaehyun once again turned to his friend to mouth ‘hyung?!’

“Okay, let me know if you want anything,” Taeyong brushed a hand through Mark’s hair teasingly. “I’ll go get Donghyuck, I don’t think he heard me properly.”

When Taeyong disappeared up the stairs the remaining seniors turned to Mark with scrutinising expressions.
“What the hell.” Yuta whispered, looking so shell shocked, Jaehyun felt like laughing again.

“What the hell just happened? How do you even know Lee Taeyong?” Ten looked betrayed.

“I told you guys we were going to sleep over at Donghyuck’s?” Mark looked confused at their almost offended voice tones.

“We didn’t think you’d sleep in Lee Taeyong’s house!” Johnny exclaimed. Mark was perplexed.

“They’re brothers?”

Johnny pouted.

“Still.”

Two figures made their way down the stairs rapidly then, Taeyong and Donghyuck quickly slipping into the kitchen.

“Hey Mark hyung,” Donghyuck greeted with a sunshine smile, the sun kissed boy wearing no makeup which was a new look for Jaehyun to see.

“Hey,” Mark’s smile was dopey. Jaehyun scoffed in amusement. Mark was so whipped.

“Let’s go up to my room and study,” Donghyuck said and started walking upstairs again, Mark following rapidly.

“Shout if you need anything!” Taeyong’s voice cut through the haze the seniors had been in while watching Mark and Donghyuck interact. The ice prince was sitting in his chair, writing notes once again.

“Okay, thank you hyung!” Donghyuck called back before a door slammed shut upstairs.

The silence rested over them uncomfortably. The group of friends still trying to process Mark being on ‘hyung’-terms with Taeyong.
“I need a break,” Yuta whined, banging his head down on the kitchen table. Doyoung rolled his eyes in exasperation. Jaehyun looked up at the clock on the kitchen wall, seeing that they’d been at it for one hour already.

“Let’s stop for like ten minutes, then we’ll reconvene,” Ten decided, putting his pencil down with a tired sigh.

“Taeyong-ssi?” Johnny said after closing the book he was looking through. Taeyong looked up, surprise evident on his face from being addressed. “May I borrow the bathroom?” Jaehyun almost snorted at Johnny’s attempt to be courteous.

Taeyong nodded and stood up, indicating for Johnny to follow him.

Jaehyun saw Taeil and Doyoung continuing to read while Yuta and Ten resorted to playing a hand slapping game.

Jaehyun felt sore and decided that he should stand and walk around for a bit.

No one blinked an eye when he did just that, curiously walking around the downstairs floor of the house, passing the hallway and into the living room.

He liked the atmosphere of the Lee residence. It was very lived in but kept clean and neat. The walls were lined with photographs. He stepped closer to the frames and studied them.

He could make out a younger Taeyong holding an infant tightly. He wondered which one of the brothers it was.

A noise made him startle in his place, Jaehyun turning around rapidly to be met with the very Lee Taeyong standing in the doorframe.

He smiled nervously at the stoic expression on the others face.

“Sorry, I just needed to stretch my legs a bit,” he sheepishly excused himself. Taeyong looked unconvinced but he made no move to talk. Jaehyun felt compelled to speak instead.

“Is this you?” He immediately grasped onto the last thoughts he’d had before Taeyong appeared. The photos.

Taeyong hesitantly stepped closer and leaned forward to look at the photo Jaehyun was pointing at.

“Yes,” Taeyong confirmed. Jaehyun already knew that of course but he really wanted Taeyong to talk.

“And you’re holding your brother right?” Jaehyun prodded curiously.
“Yes,” Taeyong nodded once again, but Jaehyun could see the gentle set of his face. “It’s Jisung.” The ice prince elaborated, taking a tiny step closer to the other senior. Jaehyun felt his heartbeat accelerate in excitement.

“And who’s this?” Jaehyun pointed to another photograph of a young boy sitting in a bathtub, looking discontent. Taeyong’s lips drew up into fond smile.

“That’s Lucas. He really hated bathing, he would only do it if I bribed him with ice cream afterwards,” Taeyong fondly rolled his eyes, Jaehyun found himself incredulously smiling as well because Lee Taeyong had a really nice smile.

“And here?” Jaehyun pointed at another photograph on the far left of the wall. He noticed it was a depiction of a small black haired boy who was smiling widely while holding onto a baby that was sleeping soundly.

“That’s Donghyuck and Jungwoo,” Taeyong explained, steeping even closer to Jaehyun so he could look at the photo properly. “It was a few days after Jungwoo was born. Donghyuck was thrilled not to be the youngest anymore,” Taeyong huffed a laugh.

Jaehyun felt his smile grow wider at the adoration Taeyong displayed while talking about his brothers.

“Oh look,” Taeyong suddenly sounded excited, as if he was rediscovering the photographs. Jaehyun followed his line of sight and was met by a picture of a boy in full on ballet outfit. Tights and all. The boy couldn’t have been more than ten. The photo had been taken while he was laughing, giving it a genuine warm glow.

“That was when Sicheng still did ballet. He was so good at it!” Taeyong recalled, seemingly lost down memory lane. “He always got the big parts in their productions.”

Jaehyun nodded along to show he was interested. And honestly he was. It was very interesting to hear Taeyong openly talk so vividly and show so many emotions.

So they continued looking. There was Chenle playing the piano, Lucas at a soccer game, Jungwoo in a Halloween costume that was supposed to be a ghost. Donghyuck and Sicheng sitting together on a couch, Donghyuck kissing his cheek while Sicheng leaned away with a grossed out expression that was secretly endeared. At some point Taeyong had grabbed his bicep in excitement while talking about a photo of Jisung, Chenle and Sicheng at the entrance of an amusement park. Jaehyun almost gasped at the contact, Taeyong’s hands cold on his skin, his grip gentle and his proximity too close. Too close for Jaehyun to handle.

Taeyong seemed to catch himself and abruptly removed his hand to put some distance between them, a blush coloring his cheeks:

“Uh,” Jaehyun intelligently started, desperately trying to gather his scattered brain and stop Taeyong from putting up his facade again. “What about this?” He said, pointing to the first picture in his vicinity. Taeyong cleared his throat awkwardly and leaned forward to see what Jaehyun was referring to.

It was a photo of all the brothers, looking pretty recent. Taeyong was closest to the screen, probably holding the phone taking the picture, his brothers lined up a bit behind him, arms around each other and a beautiful sea in the background.

Taeyong smiled wistfully.
“That was this summer. We went on a trip to Jeju,” he explained. Jaehyun nodded in understanding. Just then he heard footsteps approaching the living room.

“Jaehyun?” A voice called out and he turned to the doorframe, Ten standing there, eyebrows furrowed. They widened when he saw Taeyong there as well.

“We were just talking for a bit,” Jaehyun pointedly said, keeping his smile intact. Ten’s mouth opened in surprise, but he gathered himself quickly.

“Can I join?” He asked then, Jaehyun understanding then that this was their opportunity to start integrating Taeyong for real.

“Sure,” Jaehyun said and Ten stepped closer to them, smiling genially at Taeyong.

“What about this?” Jaehyun continued their earlier trail, pointing at another photo.

Taeyong continued talking brightly about his brothers and the stories regarding each photograph. Ten inserted some question here and there, smoothly running the conversation along while Jaehyun stared at Taeyong with a smile as the senior spoke freely for the first time.

~

Eventually Yuta, Doyoung, Taeil and Johnny seemed to get impatient when they didn’t turn up within ten minutes to reconvene. They decided to walk into the living room and see what was taking so long. They were surprised to find Ten, Taeyong and Jaehyun on the couch, animatedly chattering.

“No,” Taeyong exclaimed while looking at Ten. Yuta was surprised to see the smile teasing at Taeyong’s lips as he spoke without restrictions.

“Yes!” Ten argued, a smile in place on his face too, his eyes looking sparkly as he spoke with Taeyong. Jaehyun was laughing at them already. Yuta could hardly believe that Taeyong was being so open.

“What’s going on?” Doyoung finally decided to announce their presence, causing the three seniors on the couch to turn around. Taeyong’s eyes caught onto Yuta’s immediately.

“Yuta-ssi!” He called out, the Japanese male startling at the mention of his name. “Do you add spice before or after your ramen is boiling?” The silver haired ice prince asked, eyes wide in curiosity. Yuta choked on his spit.


“That’s awful!”

“I agree,” Taeil said and he looked close to laughing at the vivid reaction from Taeyong. “You can’t add the spices before it’s cooking!”

“It soaks in better that way!” Ten protested and then Yuta understood what they’d been talking about in the first place.

“Are you crazy?” Doyoung argued, “you add them after! It’s common sense!”

Yuta, Taeil, Doyoung and Johnny silently migrated closer to the trio on the couch, still arguing until eventually they had all settled around the couch.
“Okay!” Johnny got out between laughs. “I think we'll just agree to disagree,” he placated. Yuta watched as Taeyong turned to the tall male.

“What about you then? Spice before or after?” The ice prince’s eyes were teasing as Johnny looked back and forth between all the people in the room, scared that they would attack when he answered.

“After,” he admitted, immediately gaining Ten’s displeased arguments.

The conversation kept going back and forth between them all, eventually migrating into other foods and finally movies. Their homework laid forgotten in the kitchen.

Taeyong was talking to them casually and without inhibitions, Yuta really loving the silver haired male’s participation in the conversation. He was thrilled that Taeyong was letting loose, not upholding his facade so strongly and Yuta felt that he fit in perfectly in their friend group. He observed the ice prince laughing cutely, hiding his mouth behind his hand, or hiding his face in either Jaehyun’s or Ten’s shoulder. Yuta watched Taeyong observe fondly when Johnny and Jaehyun got stuck on an argument about an English phrase and Yuta watched when he shared an exasperated look with Taeil, or when Yuta himself shared a little smile with the ice prince. It was phenomenal and Yuta was so happy to see their plan become a success.

It was all going well and they were all feeling happy until thundering footsteps raced down the stairs, hurled past the living room, the hallway and finally out the door.

“That was Mark,” Johnny commented, eyes wide from shock. The others shared incredulous looks.

“I think you should go after him,” Taeyong commented, still looking at the door.

“Yeah. I probably should. Do that,” Johnny nodded, dazedly, getting up to gather his things from the kitchen.

“We should go as well,” Ten said, eyebrows furrowed in concern. Taeyong nodded in understanding and they all got up to gather their things and put on their shoes.

“Thank you for having us, Taeyong-ssi,” Taeil politely said, smiling.


Yuta watched Johnny smile. “Thank you, and you can drop the honorifics if you’d like.”

Taeyong laughed slightly. “Okay. I will. You can do that too if you’d like, all of you.” Johnny smiled wider. Yuta saw everyone else looking slightly thrilled at the development. Doyoung was the only one who frowned.

“Alright,” Yuta brightly said. “Bye Taeyong-ah!” Taeyong waved at them cutely.

“Bye.”
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

It’s kinda short but here it is <3

Donghyuck bit the end of his pencil in contemplation. Mark was sitting across from him on the bed, leaned over his mathbook in concentration. The older was looking very nice today in dark washed jeans, a white t-shirt and a big hoodie thrown on. His caramel hair fell softly in his eyes and Donghyuck really wanted to reach out and brush it away.

Mark had been so kind to him this week and he didn’t know how to feel about that. It certainly didn’t help his crush go away when Mark gave him rides and told him to hold on tight or laughed loudly at every joke he made. Or every time he complimented Donghyuck’s makeup or his shirts. Or every time he sat close enough for them to be touching and didn’t seem bothered at all.

As Donghyuck thought about it he could feel the frustration growing. He was mad. Mad at Mark for being so perfect. Mad at himself for falling in love. Mad at the world for always unconsciously bringing them closer together.

He sighed slightly and turned his eyes back to his book, huddling up in his shirt because it was actually kind of cold in his room.

“Are you cold?” Mark’s voice brought his eyes up to the junior yet again. Donghyuck saw the concern in Mark’s eyes and felt his fingers twitch with annoyance. Why did Mark have to be so fucking perfect.

“A bit,” he admitted, trying to stay calm. Mark frowned and started shrugging off his hoodie.

Donghyuck’s mouth fell open

“What are you doing?” he asked incredulously. Mark offered the piece of clothing.

“Here. Take it. I don’t want you to be cold,” he said and smiled bashfully. Donghyuck stared back in disbelief. Here Mark was, being perfect again, offering his hoodie without a thought and Donghyuck couldn’t handle it.

“No,” he suddenly said, Mark drawing his hoodie back in surprise. “No!” Donghyuck repeated again, feeling the emotions in his chest spilling over. “You have to stop doing that! Giving me your hoodie and complimenting me, giving me rides and smiling at me like that. You need to stop being so nice and smart and good at sports. You need to not speak English because it’s hot as fuck and you need to stop playing guitar because that’s just too good to be true. Just stop! I know you don’t like me so you don’t have to make it harder for me when I’m trying so damn hard not to like you!”

His heart was beating rapidly in fear and shame. Because fuck, he just confessed.

Mark sat in shock, staring with wide eyes at the younger male, his hoodie still clutched in his hands. Donghyuck could see the confusion, hurt and perplexity in Mark’s expression, his eyes swirling with thoughts Donghyuck couldn’t decipher. Donghyuck breathed out loudly in annoyance.

“Just get out,” his voice was cold. Colder than it had ever been before. Mark stared for three more
seconds before getting up hastily and gathering his things, hurrying to run away from Donghyuck.

The sophomore didn’t even bother to look at the older as he departed, instead sinking into his own shame. Out of anger he grabbed his mathbook and flung it on the floor. He was so close to breaking down.

A few minutes later the door opened gently. Donghyuck tried to breathe properly and looked up to see Taeyong sticking his head inside.

“You okay?” The eldest brother asked concernedly. “Mark seemed pretty adamant to leave.”

“Yeah,” Donghyuck answered, trying to plaster a smile on his face. “I’m good.”

“You know I’m here if you want to talk,” Taeyong offered a sincere smile before closing the door once again. Donghyuck knew that Taeyong knew something was up. He also knew that Taeyong knew he had to give Donghyuck time when the younger was like this.

Donghyuck crept down under his comforter and burrowed his face into his pillow, trying to muffle his tears. His mathbook lay forgotten on the floor.

~

Mark had gone straight to bed when he got home, pretending to be asleep when Johnny had knocked on his door and opened it to check if he was there.

Mark couldn’t rest easily with all the turmoil going on in his head, loud shrill voices and painful emotions blending together, creating a perfectly disruptive harmony.

He must’ve fallen asleep from exhaustion at some point. Because when he woke up it was to an armful of peach hair and soft lips and tan skin. Mark looked at the human in his arms fondly, nosing at the peach hair resting on his chest. The person mumbled incoherently before scooting up, face close to Mark’s. The brunet smiled and traced his finger across the constellation on his lovers cheek, down to his neck before blowing on it softly, earning a breathy laugh in return.

Their foreheads touched gently, every point on their bodies where they touched buzzed with loaded electricity, Mark shivering from the sensations. The person was just too beautiful and he felt so comfortable in that positon, he didn’t want to leave ever. Then his lover leaned closer, full pink lips parted slightly as they came closer. And closer. And-

Mark shot up from his lying position, panting slightly. He felt the sweat on his back, glueing his shirt to his skin. His eyes darted around unseeingly, lips parted in surprise.

He just had a dream about Donghyuck.

Holy shit.

He didn’t know what to do with the onslaught of feelings he suddenly had in his chest, so he quickly leaned forward to his nightstand and grabbed the notebook he kept there. Then he started writing.

About moles and pretty sparkling eyes and full lips and tan skin. About beautiful singing, about laughing together, about childish banter and longing glances. About admiration and self love and respect.

About Donghyuck.

Mark didn’t know what to feel about all the overwhelming feelings he was suddenly attacked with,
the thought of being in love was nerve wrecking. Was he in love? He couldn’t think of anything else it could be. Mark thought Donghyuck was beautiful, he thought the younger was kind and funny and affectionate. He wanted to kiss Donghyuck, just like he had been about to do in his dream. The mere thought of his dream brought a blush to his cheeks instantly. He still felt dazed and comfortable from the phantom feeling of holding Donghyuck, his hands itching to touch the boy for real, stroke his hair and caress his cheeks, right over his moles.

Mark tried to calm down his still beating heart, lying down again and breathing deeply. He didn’t have the energy to even think about anything at the moment, his brain felt drained and his heart ached.

But most of all, he felt the warming sensation of being in love.
Taeyong woke up early Sunday morning. He always did but this time it was different. This time he had a bad feeling in his stomach. He frowned concernedly and got out of bed, white T-shirt hanging off his frame and checkered pyjama pants loose on his hips. The floor was cold against his bare feet as he tiptoed down the hall. A suspicious sound could be heard and his heart clenched worriedly when he identified it. It was the sound of someone crying.

And he knew exactly who it was.

Taeyong sighed slightly, feeling awful about Donghyuck always being on the receiving end of heartbreak these last few weeks.

He didn’t knock before pushing the door open, stepping into a dark room. The sun had not risen yet and Taeyong could barely make out the lump on the bed. Donghyuck’s breath hitched at the sound of his bedroom door opening and he fearfully tried to stop his tears.

Taeyong closed the door behind him and walked over to the younger, lifting the covers.

“Scoot,” his raspy voice whispered into the fragile silence. Donghyuck sniffled but obliged. Taeyong got under the comforter and immediately drew Donghyuck into him, squeezing them together on the single bed. Donghyuck clutched his shirt tightly, burying his face in Taeyong’s chest as he sobbed harder.

“It’s going to be okay,” Taeyong hushed him gently, stroking his hair. “I promise it’s all going to get better.”

Donghyuck shuddered a shaky breath and cried harder. Taeyong continued holding him close, his own eyes stinging with tears from hearing Donghyuck’s heartbreaking cries and feeling the small desperate fingers clutching at his shirt.

Eventually Donghyuck calmed down and fell asleep from exhaustion. Taeyong held him as close to his heart as ever, kissing the soft peach hair that tickled his nose.

He knew something had happened with Mark, and he had a pretty good idea of what it was, and he really hoped they could figure it out eventually. Because, seeing Donghyuck so sad broke his heart. Seeing his little brother suffering was something he would never want and he really hoped it wouldn’t happen again because Donghyuck deserved better.

“You deserve better,” he whispered, breath catching on the silent words floating out into the room, disappearing into the walls and falling upon sleeping, unhearing ears.
Mark managed to get back to sleep quite quickly after emptying out all his emotions in writing. His mind was exhausted from all the thoughts that had whirled around his head. His sleep was blissfully dreamless and when he opened his eyes the next morning the sun was shining through his blinds beautifully, casting a nice glow throughout the room. It reminded him of Donghyuck.

When he regained consciousness completely new thoughts immediately came flooding. Am I gay? Am I bi? Am I queer in any way?

He questioned himself in every way he could think of. Have I had a crush on a girl before? Yes. Have I had a crush on a boy before? No. (Not counting Donghyuck though, because holy fuck that was definitely a crush, Mark concluded.) Have I had a crush on a non binary person? No.

He didn’t know what to make of his thoughts at all, struggling to label himself. Mark groaned in despair as he turned and tossed in his bed, comforter kicked down on the floor amidst his misery.

“Johnny,” he suddenly whispered, eyes widening in excitement. He quickly got up and started cautiously walking toward his older brother’s room. Mark’s heart was beating fast from fear. He had never discussed sexualities or LGBT+ matters with his brother before. He wasn’t sure of what Johnny would think but he hoped it wouldn’t be bad. He didn’t think it would, but still. Things like that were nerve wrecking.

As Mark finally stood in front of Johnny’s door he took in a deep breath before knocking lightly.

“Come in,” Johnny’s voice was raspy with sleep and when Mark opened the door he saw Johnny sitting on his bed, leaning against the bed frame, phone in his lap.


“Hey lil bro.”

“Can I talk to you?” Mark managed to get out. Their conversation transcending into English.

“Sure,” Johnny’s eyebrows furrowed in concern at Mark’s forced words. The younger mechanically turned around to close the door gently before walking closer to his brother. Johnny moved in a bit, patting the space beside him invitingly. Mark sat down and took a few deep breaths to calm himself. Johnny waited patiently.

“I think I might be...” Mark trailed off, cheeks warm already as he avoided Johnny’s gaze at all costs. “I think I like-” he cut himself off again, feeling tears building in his eyes. Johnny frowned in concern and put a comforting hand on Mark’s thigh.

“It’s okay, baby brother,” Johnny assured. “Take your time.”

Mark gathered himself again and took some more deep breaths, trying to calm his racing heart. He had not expected the feat of basically coming out to his brother to be so full of fear and nerves.

“I like boys,” he choked out, voice quiet, “or one boy. Donghyuck specifically.”

Johnny smiled, he wasn’t shocked to hear that, but he also kind of was. Mark had never shown interest in boys before and Johnny had just assumed he was straight.

Mark was blushing wildly, eyes averted and hands fidgeting nervously. Johnny huffed a fond laugh and withdrew his hand from Mark’s thigh, throwing it over his shoulders instead, pulling the younger close.
“Thank you for telling me, that’s really brave of you,” Johnny admitted and smiled when Mark looked up at him incredulously.

Mark didn’t know what he’d been expecting. He’d been scared, sure, but he hadn’t expected a bad reaction. He also hadn’t expected such a supportive one either. He had expected maybe some awkward back slaps or uncomfortable conversing but not this.

“And you’re okay with that?” Mark asked again, trying to be completely sure. Johnny nodded.

“Of course. Of course I’m okay with you being yourself.”

Mark’s heart warmed at the comment, a grin spreading on his lips.

“Thank you hyung,” the Korean honorific slipped in naturally.

“So did you just realize you like boys or have you just not told me until now?” Johnny asked curiously, not accusingly.

“I don’t know,” Mark sighed. “I don’t know if I’m gay or bi or something else. I’ve never had a crush on a boy before.”

“You don’t have to put a label on anything,” Johnny squeezed him for emphasis. “You can just do your own thing, like Donghyuck and be okay with that knowledge. You don’t have to label it.” Johnny made sure to make eye contact with his younger brother. “But if you really want to know you can try making out with some guys, that would probably help.”

Mark sputtered indignantly, his face turning beet red.

“I’m not gonna go around and make out with some random guys!” Mark protested. Then he paused. “Wait a second. Have you made out with random guys?” Mark’s eyes widened impossibly when he saw Johnny’s small smirk.

“Only once. At a party. And it was with Ten so no random guy.”

Mark choked on his own tongue.

“You made out with Ten?!” He screeched.

“Yes,” Johnny rolled his eyes. “Anyways, not the point.” The mood turned serious again as Johnny’s eyebrows furrowed in thought. “Is that why you left yesterday? Did something happen?”

Mark sighed sadly.

“Yeah. Donghyuck confessed to me. And then he told me to get out.”

“Why would he tell you to get out?”

“...Because I didn’t respond to his confession?”

Johnny almost facepalmed. Instead he took Mark by the shoulders and shook him in exasperation.

“Okay, Mark Lee, you need to straighten this out,” Johnny backtracked. “Or Gay it up?” He rolled his eyes when Mark blushed. “You know what I mean. You need to march over there and profess your undying love for him!”

Mark stared at his brother wide eyed. This is it. Johnny Seo has officially lost it.
“Mark!” Johnny dragged him out of his daze.

“Yes?”

“Did you hear me? You need to confess back. You want to be with him right?” Mark nodded frantically. “Then you need to hurry up and go there! Think about what he might be feeling. You basically silently rejected him! He must be feeling awful. You need to straighten this out. Or,” Johnny groaned at his own incompetence. “You know what I mean.” Mark hadn’t thought about it before. How Donghyuck might be feeling. He didn’t even consider how badly he must’ve hurt the other boy when he walked out without a word. Johnny was right. Donghyuck was probably feeling embarrassed and sad about Mark’s ‘rejection’! He needed to fix it.

“Okay! I will!” He leaned forward to hug his brother tightly. “Thank you hyung.” Johnny smiled into Mark’s shoulder.

“Always.”
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

It’s finally here!!!!

I think you guys are going to like this. Yes. Yes.

Enjoy <3333

Mark’s palms felt sweaty as he reached out to ring the doorbell. His heart was once again pounding in his chest, a normal occurrence when he was close to Donghyuck or even thought about the younger boy. The feeling was worse than his first basketball game. And he’d been nauseous with nervousness then, although it was a good kind of nervous, an excited kind of nervous.

The door opened, Jungwoo sticking his head out.

“Hey,” Mark greeted with a shaky smile. “Is Donghyuck home?” Jungwoo eyed him up and down for a few seconds, chewing on his lip.

“Yes,” he finally answered although he seemed reluctant. Mark felt relief wash over him.

“Can I please talk to him?”

“I’m not sure,” Jungwoo hesitated, rightfully so, Mark knew he’d been irrational yesterday when leaving like that. Donghyuck had every right to be upset.

“Please,” Mark begged desperately. Then the door opened a bit wider to reveal Taeyong’s frowning face. The older must’ve come over when Jungwoo hadn’t returned from opening the door yet and heard Mark’s latest sentiment. The older gave him a once over with calculating eyes, noting his puffy eyes and desperate stance, before pursing his lips slightly.

“Ten minutes,” he said and put an arm around Jungwoo’s shoulders, pulling him away from the door slightly to allow Mark entrance. Mark bowed slightly in thanks and rushed up the stairs.

He hesitated only a second as he reached Donghyuck’s door, taking a deep breath before knocking.

“Come in,” a muffled voice called from the other side. Mark inhaled deeply once again before pushing the door open, stepping inside and closing it behind him.

Donghyuck looked at him with wide caramel eyes, lips parted in surprise. Mark nervously gulped and walked closer to the boy who was sitting on the bed, laptop in front of him.

“Hi,” he managed to push out, hands clasped together anxiously. Donghyuck averted his gaze, opting to stare at his hands fiddling with the comforter instead.

“What do you want?” He whispered, voice uncharacteristically weak.

“I’m sorry,” Mark blurted out, “I’m so sorry for basically running away yesterday. That was stupid of me.”
“It’s not stupid,” Donghyuck retorted. “You don’t like me back, so why would you stay after a confession like that. It’s only logical that you would listen when I tell you to get out.”

Mark exhaled fearfully, hands sweating profusely.

“That’s just the thing,” his voice was barely above a whisper, and here we go. He’s gonna say it. He’s actually going to say it. “I do. Like you back.”

Donghyuck’s head whipped up in surprise, eyes widening impossibly, his bare face looking beautifully youthful.

“What?” He choked out.

“I like you back,” Mark’s voice was regaining strength. “I like how you smile at me so widely when I laugh at your dumb jokes. I like how you hug me because you’re warm and it feels nice. I like how you always try to make people smile. I like how you stand up for yourself and I like-” Mark cut himself off, blush prominent. “I like so many things about you. I just like you so much.”

Donghyuck was searching his face, eyes flicking about uneasily. His own cheeks were deliciously red and he couldn’t seem to get a word out.

“Say something,” Mark pleaded.

“So you like me,” Donghyuck carefully started, Mark nodding frantically. “And I like you.”

Mark stared imploringly as Donghyuck was trying to process their current situation.

“And two people who like each other, should be together, right?” Mark laughed nervously. Donghyuck was staring right back at him.

“You actually like me?” He said again, standing up from his bed, taking small steps closer to Mark.

“Yes,” Mark confirmed without hesitation. Donghyuck exhaled faintly in disbelief.

“Are you completely sure?”

“Yes.” Mark laughed incredulously. He saw the smile starting to form on Donghyuck’s face, the sophomore’s eyes lighting up gradually.

When he finally reached Mark they stared into each other’s eyes for a few seconds, Mark too scared to even breathe as he searched Donghyuck’s glittering pupils.

Then the younger broke out into the widest smile and threw his arms around Mark’s neck. Mark felt his whole body tense up for a fraction of a second, until eventually his hands found their way to Donghyuck’s waist, hugging the younger close, his whole body relaxing.

“I like you so much,” Mark whispered into the non existent space between them, feeling Donghyuck burrowing closer.

“I like you too,” he breathed into Mark’s neck, causing shivers to run up the junior’s spine.

They held each other close, simply enjoying the proximity. Donghyuck was warm and nice, like the sun shining on Mark’s skin during a cold day. He fit perfectly in Mark’s arms, face slotting into his neck like it was meant to be there.

“Does this mean we’re boyfriends now?” Donghyuck teasingly asked although an underlying tone
of hopefulness could be easily heard. Mark laughed.

“I would like that.”

Donghyuck squealed happily and pulled back to face his, now, boyfriend. He bit his lip happily before leaning forward again and pressing a light kiss to Mark’s cheek. The older gasped at the contact of pillowy lips on his cheek, fingers gripping at Donghyuck’s hips unconsciously.

“I would really like that,” he breathed out dazedly and Donghyuck’s beautiful laugh echoed throughout the room.

They were officially boyfriends and Mark couldn’t be happier.

~

“So you think it’s hot when I speak English?” Mark broke the nice bubble they were currently in, sitting on Donghyuck’s bed close together. Donghyuck had his head on Mark’s shoulder, his leg thrown over the older’s knee.

Mark felt the sophomore tense up.

“What?” He laughed forcefully, feigning ignorance. Mark poked his rib teasingly, causing Donghyuck to startle.

“I remember every word you spoke yesterday, don’t even pretend,” Mark smiled through his exasperation. Donghyuck buried his face in Mark’s shoulder.

“I didn’t say anything,” Donghyuck adamantly insisted. Mark kissed his hair.

“So you don’t want me to call you babe?” Mark whispered, trying to hold his laughter. Donghyuck whined. “Or baby?” He continued in English. Donghyuck threw himself away from the older, lying flat on his back instead, dragging up a pillow to cover his face. Mark laughed and laid down beside Donghyuck.

“Cutie,” he murmured. “Babe.” He could see Donghyuck’s ears turning red. “Do you like my English, baby?” Mark managed to pull the pillow away, hovering over the sophomore with a teasing smile. Donghyuck promptly pulled him down to hide his face in the older’s t shirt.

“Oh my god,” Donghyuck whined in English. Mark laughed and hugged him closer.

The door was flung open and Mark’s eyes widened comically. He noticed just how suggestive their pose might be. Him hovering on top of Donghyuck, the younger hugging him tightly.

Taeyong raised a single eyebrow at them, but Mark could’ve sworn he saw the senior’s mouth tensing up as if holding laughter.

Mark scrambled to get up, Donghyuck pushing himself into a sitting position as Mark awkwardly shuffled to his feet.

“I think I’ll go home,” Mark decided, cheeks red. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” he added breathlessly, looking at Donghyuck. The younger smiled devilishly and jumped up to kiss Mark’s blushing cheek.

“Sure thing, babe.”

Mark choked on his own tongue, offering something similar to a goodbye before rushing out the door.
Taeyong gave Donghyuck an exasperated look but he didn’t comment further.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Wow there were so many comments last chapter, I guess everyone rly ships markhyuck XD

Thank you so much for your support and I hope you’ll like this chapter <333

Taeyong smiled fondly as he watched his younger brother across the canteen. Donghyuck was chatting excitedly with Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun while Mark looked on in endearment. Taeyong could see their hands intertwined under the table and his heart swelled with happiness for his little brother.

He was so happy that Donghyuck had found someone who liked and accepted him for being who he was. And Taeyong did like Mark so that was a plus. The boy was polite, kind and confident. Perfect for his little brother. Taeyong caught himself smiling uncontrollably and schooled his features.

Calmly, he looked down at his lunch box and started unpacking it. He was looking forward to eating it actually, he had skipped breakfast this morning.

Just then he noticed the canteen quieting down, the uncomfortable feeling of being watched prickling his skin. He frowned and looked up in slight confusion, eyes immediately finding the source of the canteen’s sudden silence. Johnny, Ten, Taeil, Jaehyun, Yuta and Doyoung were all walking towards him. He felt his eyebrows rise impeccably. Ten met his eyes and smiled teasingly, Taeyong shrinking in on himself. Why were they walking towards him? Why?!

“Hey Taeyong-ah,” Yuta said with a smile as he sat down at Taeyong’s table. At. Taeyong’s. Table. His table was always empty. What the fuck was going on.

They all sat down, starting to pull out their lunch. Taeyong watched them with wide eyes, until he was finally reminded of everyone in the entire canteen watching them. He glanced around rapidly, seeing various nameless faces staring at them in disbelief, whisperings travelling throughout the room.

His eyes caught Donghyuck’s and the younger sent him a questioning look, although Taeyong saw the smile teasing at his lips. The little brat. He shrugged in return.

“How are you today?” Johnny smiled at him encouragingly. Taeyong tried to unwind his tense shoulders.

“I’m fine,” his voice was low and only the people at the tables closest to his table could hear it, judging from the surprised gasps that fell from them. He almost rolled his eyes. Almost.

“That’s good,” Johnny’s eyes were sparkling with mirth.

“Hey, Taeyong, do you want some chocolate cake?” Ten suddenly spoke, a smile on his face as well. Taeyong looked at the inviting treat Ten was holding forward, delicious chocolate making his mouth water and he felt himself forgetting about the people staring at his table.
“Yes please,” he said, a small smile making its way to his face as he eyed the cake excitedly. He unconsciously leaned his upper body towards the Thai male. Ten chuckled and picked up a generous piece of cake on his fork, leaning forward to put it in Taeyong’s mouth. The silver haired male complied eagerly and opened his mouth so the teal haired dancer could feed him.

“Mmm!” Taeyong exclaimed happily. “That’s so good.” Ten smirked.

“I know right?” He cockily wiggled his eyebrows and Taeyong hit his shoulder gently. The canteen had gone back to being noisy but people were constantly sneaking glances at them. They were probably talking about them too. But Taeyong couldn’t find it in him to care at the moment. There was chocolate cake at his table after all. And possibly, maybe, hopefully, some new friends.

~

When Donghyuck walked into school on Monday he found that his steps were lighter and his mouth was smiling unconsciously.

He couldn’t believe that Mark actually liked him back, the thought was almost absurd. Hot, popular, jock falls for outcast, bullied, norm breaker. Donghyuck cringed at the cliche thought, but he honestly couldn’t be more happy about it.

A group of bodies blocked his path as he made his way down the hallway and he found himself looking at the girls from a few weeks ago who had threatened him.

“I can’t believe Mark is still hanging out with you,” the ring leader spat in distaste. Donghyuck grimaced subtly. “I literally cannot believe how anyone would wanna hang out with you after finding out what a freaking fiasco you are.” Donghyuck almost scoffed at the implications the girl was making. He knew she was referring to the showdown in the canteen and he was really over all that shit by now.

“Okay honey,” Donghyuck started. “I think it says a lot about you if Mark is still hanging out with me, when he’s never hung out with you.” He stepped closer to her, maintaining eye contact. “If I am a freaking fiasco, as you so kindly put it, what does that make you?” Short but lethal.

The girl sputtered indignantly, rapidly turning redder by the second.

“Well-“ she said, her voice high pitched. “Well - well - your makeup sucks!”

Donghyuck actually scoffed.

“You wish honey,” he knew his makeup was on fleek, he’d sent Mark a selfie the same morning and the response had been an overwhelming amount of hearts and praises.

With that statement he sidestepped the girl and walked straight through the cluster of them, no one daring to speak to him. He smirked.

~

When Donghyuck arrived at the cafeteria he saw Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun already there, Mark sitting opposite them.

Donghyuck felt his heartbeat pick up at the sight of his - oh my fucking god - boyfriend. Mark seemed to sense the other’s presence as he turned in his seat. They locked eyes and Mark instantly broke out into a huge grin. Donghyuck offered him a warm smile in return, walking over to the table.
“Hey there,” Mark said, love struck eyes tracing Donghyuck’s facial features.

“Hello yourself handsome,” Donghyuck huffed a laugh and sat down next to Mark, the older immediately catching his hand and intertwining their fingers under the table. Last night the older had left almost instantaneously after Taeyong found them in their compromising position, both of them taking the time yesterday night to process the implications for their new dynamics. Donghyuck had called all his brothers to the living room as soon as Mark was out the door and basically shouted that he had a boyfriend. The responses were huge at the least. Lucas roared in happiness, Jungwoo clapped his hands like mad while Chenle screamed in dolphin pitch, Jisung smiling widely. Taeyong and Sicheng watched the madness unfold.

Now when he was seeing his boyfriend again he was reminded that they hadn’t discussed any details of their relationship. Where they open about it? Could he tell people? Donghyuck instantly felt anxious when Renjun spoke suspiciously.

“I am sensing a change in auras around you two,” he narrowed his eyes at them, scanning them up and down. Donghyuck nervously tried to lock eyes with Mark but the junior only smiled at their three friends.

“We’re together,” he said with a slight blush. Jaemin gasped dramatically.

“Bitch!” He exclaimed, aghast, looking at Donghyuck accusingly. “You didn’t text me about this development the second it happened! I will never forgive you!” Jaemin crossed his arms defyingly but Donghyuck saw the happiness through his facade.

“Aww Nana!” He pouted. “Don’t be sad!” He used his very best aegyo voice, which he knew Jaemin was weak for. Just as predicted Jaemin immediately broke down and smiled at them widely.


“I called it,” Renjun nodded his head, “I knew it from the start.”

“Were we obvious?” Mark asked, wide eyed.

“Yes,” Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun answered in unison.

“You were. Painfully so,” Jeno said.

“But anywho!” Jaemin cut through. “We are so fucking happy for you!”

Donghyuck rolled his eyes with a fond smile.

“Thank you,” he said earnestly and leaned his head on Mark’s shoulder, the older smiling down at him.

“Yuck, they’re adorable,” Renjun complained.

“We’re more adorable,” Jaemin argued and put his arms around Jeno and Renjun, hugging them tightly.

“Oh no,” Jeno sighed when he noticed the competitiveness in Donghyuck’s eyes. “They’re gonna make a thing out of this, aren’t they?”
Taeyong felt content with the new additions to his table. He was confused about the coldness Doyoung exuded but otherwise eating with them was pleasant.

“Why is Mark holding Donghyuck’s hand?” Jaehyun suddenly spoke up during a lull in the conversation, causing everyone to turn their eyes to the table that Mark and Donghyuck were holding hands under.

“They’re boyfriends,” Johnny spoke first with a proud tone, Taeyong smiling at hearing the words. Jaehyun’s eyes widened impossibly.

“What!” He almost threw his sandwich. “Mark got himself a boyfriend and he didn’t tell me?!” Jaehyun looked betrayed. Taeyong chuckled at his silliness. “I am his other half! How could he keep this from me?!”

Johnny rolled his eyes.

“Relax, it happened yesterday,” he placated. Jaehyun still frowned.

“Wait,” Ten spoke. “Is that why Mark rushed out this Saturday?”


“But then he came over and fixed it,” Taeyong added, sharing a small smile with Johnny.

“Huh,” Yuta seemed impressed. “I’m happy for them.”

“Me too,” Taeil nodded in agreement. “I think they’re a perfect combination.”

“Well, they’re definitely the embodiment of opposites attract,” Doyoung nodded and bit into his apple.

They ate silently for a little while until Ten seemed to remember something.

“Oh!” He exclaimed, chewing quickly to swallow his food. “Taeyongie.” Taeyong looked up in question. “Have you thought about joining the dance team?” Ten was smiling eagerly, definitely hoping for the other to say yes. Taeyong bit his lip in thought. Should he trust what Sicheng said? He trusts his brother, but he doesn’t want to burden them. Though it is a passion of his to dance, he’s always loved doing it.

Maybe it’s time to do something for himself. Like Sicheng said. It can’t be so bad right? He’ll still have time for his brothers and chores.
“I think I would like that,” he slowly got out, Ten squealing in excitement.

“Yes! Oh yes! It’s going to be so much fun,” he smiled happily at the alleged ice prince. “I’ll text you the details.”

Taeyong smiled back and nodded. He felt excited to join the dance team, and he instantly knew it was the right choice to make.

~

That afternoon Taeyong decided to text Max, asking to arrange a play date. They had texted regularly since their first encounter, but this would be their first time meeting up. The response arrived only a few minutes later and they officially had a play date planned.

“Jisung-ah, Chenle-ah,” he gently called out to the boys in the living room. They were playing with LEGO blocks, Chenle placing a Barbie doll in the castle they’d built. They both perked up as he called their names.

“How about going to the park and seeing Hayoon?” Jisung gasped loudly at the suggestion, Chenle lighting up with a wide smile.

“Yes!” Jisung agreed eagerly. Then he grabbed Chenle’s hand. “Hyung let’s get dressed!” He pulled the seven year old up the stairs forcefully, Taeyong laughing at their antics.

While he waited for them to get ready he packed a water bottle, his wallet and two extra hoodies in a bag, just in case they got cold. He also checked his phone again, finding a barrage of excited messages from Ten about him joining the dance squad, a meme from Jaehyun and a message complaining about how love sick Mark was from Johnny.

Taeyong laughed and answered all of them enthusiastically. For the first time in a long time he felt so included and surrounded by genuine people, he could feel the friendship blooming in his chest and the feeling was foreign but not unwelcome. He had more friends than he’d ever had before in this town. And it felt safe in a way. Reassuring.

Jisung and Chenle basically tripped down the stairs, skidding to a halt in front of their eldest brother.

“We’re ready!” They announced in unison. Taeyong rolled his eyes in endearment.

“Let’s go then!”

~

Max waved with a smile when they entered the park, she was sitting on a bench close to the centre of the playground, Hayoon on her lap. Max was wearing a leather jacket and ripped black jeans. Her piercings in place and hair pulled up into a ponytail.

Taeyong smiled back, following Jisung and Chenle who ran as soon as they saw Hayoon. By the time he reached Max, the children had already run off to play.

“Hello stranger,” Max teased as he sat down.

“Hey noona,” Taeyong chuckled and smiled some more because he felt happy and warm and it was a good day today.

“You seem happy,” she commented, picking up on his obvious mood.
“I think I am, today,” he nodded to himself. “I’m not feeling so lonely, you know?” He tried to explain. How could he be lonely when he had seven brothers you might wonder? Well sometimes people needed friends outside their immediate family to depend on and be with, which Taeyong felt he might’ve found some suitable candidates for.

“That’s good,” Max smiled at him, black lipstick emphasizing her white teeth. She didn’t pry which is something Taeyong really appreciated, and also one of the reasons as to why Max was so easy to talk to. She didn’t pressure him.

“I asked my girlfriend to marry me,” she admitted then, looking down at her lap. Taeyong’s eyes widened.

“Really?” He knew of Max’s plans to ask her girlfriend for marriage but he didn’t know she was going to do it so soon. “What did she say?”

“She said yes,” Max laughed, a genuine sound of happiness and Taeyong revelled in the sound, enjoying seeing such pure emotions on another human being’s face.

“Noona! This is so great!” He couldn’t help but squeal in happiness for his friend. “When are you getting married? Where are you getting married? Have you told Hayoon?”

Max held up a hand to stop his rambling, eyes narrowed fondly.

“Easy there hotshot. I don’t know when, but I think we’re going to Canada for the wedding, and yes Hayoon knows, she helped me with the proposal,” Max told him, looking over at the playground where Hayoon was chasing Chenle, Jisung sitting on a swing since he’d already been caught. Taeyong smiled at the sight.

“I’m so happy for you. I think today is a good day, a really good day” Taeyong murmured through his grin, eyes sincere and open. Max smiled back in thanks.

“Me too.”
When the kids had exhausted themselves Taeyong and Max took them to an ice cream parlour close by. Jisung jumped in excitement as he saw the array of flavours presented. He ultimately decided on vanilla flavour because he was too scared to try anything else. He did get Taeyong to buy watermelon flavour for himself since Jisung wanted to taste. Chenle got strawberry, while Hayoon and Max both chose chocolate.

They settled at a table in the middle of the crowded parlour, Hayoon chattering away while Jisung was trying for figure out how to lick his ice cream so it wouldn’t melt onto his fingers. Chenle sat in contentment while eating his own ice cream easily.

Taeyong listened in on Hayoon’s chattering and offered his input every once in a while.

Max nudged his ribs lightly and he looked up to see three elderly ladies looking at their table and whispering in between themselves. They did not look especially friendly.

“They probably think we’re teenage parents,” Max whispered and smirked slightly because she knew they were having the wrong ideas. “And I guess our attires attract attention.”

Taeyong tried to suppress his amused smile, knowing just how judgmental some people could be and especially in such a conservative country.

“If only they knew,” he said with a roll of his eyes. Max hummed in agreement.

“It’s always like that isn’t it?” She said, still observing the three ladies who looked surprised at being caught staring. “When you don’t understand something you automatically judge it, they don’t ask and you don’t correct them, furthering the prejudices and stereotypes. It’s all just an issue of understanding and many misunderstandings.”

Taeyong observed the three ladies once again, letting the thoughts flood his mind. His first impression of them? Old, probably hard workers, strict, conservative. And it was all just stereotypes wasn’t it? Because that’s how people work. A first impression by sight is printed in your mind within the ten first seconds of seeing a person.

“Yeah, you’re right,” he said and turned to Max who was already looking at him with a knowing gaze.

“I always am,” she teased with a laugh and leaned forward to wipe away some ice cream from Jisung’s chin. Chenle and Hayoon were laughing happily about something and not noticing the judgmental looks thrown at their table, not caring about what other people thought because they were
children and didn’t know better. Taeyong smiled. It was a good day.

~

The first dance practice was nerve wrecking. Taeyong hesitated in front of the door, not daring to knock. What if they were awful people? What if they hated him? What if they didn’t speak to him because they thought he was a freak? What if.

Taeyong inhaled deeply. Yes, what if. What ifs doesn’t matter, he matters. What he does with it matters. He can change the what ifs. So he didn’t think twice before opening the door gently, not looking up until he’d walked inside and closed the door behind him. The room quieted down and he swallowed dryly before finally lifting his head.

There were several people in the room, Ten at the front by the mirror wall, and the rest Taeyong didn’t recognize.

“Taeyongie!” Ten exclaimed in glee, hurrying over to him excitedly. Taeyong kept his gaze on Ten but he did know that everyone was watching him as usual. “Come meet the team!” Ten hooked their arms together, pulling Taeyong with him to the front of the room. Taeyong mustered the strength to look at his new teammates. There were four boys and four girls. Taeyong noticed that they weren’t staring with fear or contempt, mostly curiosity.

“Guys this is Taeyong, he’s joining the team,” Ten introduced him. “Let’s do a name round.”

“I’m Soonyoung but you can call me Hoshi,” a boy with brightly colored hair and a wide smile that made his eyes disappear introduced himself.

“My name is Lisa,” the girl had a cute smile and bangs, looking incredibly thin. Taeyong immediately wondered if she ate enough.

“I’m Jonghyun, or JR, it’s up to you,” the guy who spoke had a charming smile and sparkling eyes, Taeyong liked him.

“I’m Seulgi,” her smile was small and cautious, Taeyong figured she needed some time to warm up to him. He would need a lot of time to warm up to all of them.

“And I’m Yugyeom and this is Jungkook,” the boy spoke with a high pitched voice, black hair hanging in his eyes and a pretty mole right under his eye. The boy he called Jungkook looked tall and handsome, brown hair falling into his eyes as well. He reminded Taeyong of a bunny.

The final two people were two girls, one blonde and one brunette. The blonde was clinging onto the brunette’s arm.

“I’m Momo,” the blonde introduced herself in a cutesy voice.

“And I’m Chungha,” the brunette said, voice calm and soothing.

“And I’m Ten, great to have that out of the way,” Ten scoffed and hugged Taeyong close to himself. “So we are currently preparing for the biggest dance competition we’ve ever participated in. The choreography is finished but we are making some changes as we go,” Ten explained to him, Taeyong knowing what competition he was talking about. It was an annual tradition for Korea National University Of Arts to host a dance competition for some of the most prominent dance squads made up of high school students. A win gets you ten million won and consideration for a full scholarship to the school when entering university. Only the best teams in Korea got to participate. Taeyong was impressed at the least.
“Yes I know we’re great,” Ten joked and smiled. “So I was thinking we could show you the choreo and then teach you the moves. Next week we can focus on formation changes and continue practicing, sound good?” Taeyong nodded meekly, feeling a bit overwhelmed. But it was nice, a nice kind of overwhelmed.

He sat down on the floor in front of the mirror facing them as they got into formation. The song started off slow, Momo and Ten dancing with fluidity, almost like ballet. Then the song gradually turned to something more rough and pronounced, a hard hitting beat and fast pace. The dance was impeccable, Taeyong couldn’t tear his eyes away from them. All the members had such outstanding specialties and individuality that it made for a great unity. He thought the words ‘unity in diversity’ fit right in.

When the song finished, everyone seemed happy with the outcome.

“What did you think?” Jonghyun asked with a white teeth smile. Taeyong couldn’t hold his own smile.

“I loved it.” The members cheered at the feedback. Ten smiled widely and walked over to pull Taeyong up from the floor and closer to the other members. Then he spoke.

“Okay, Let’s start teaching you some moves.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!! Btw the dance competition is made up by me XD
By the time their dance session finished Taeyong was aching and sweating all over. He liked the feeling though. It was nice to feel like he had accomplished something. He had around half the choreography down and it felt great. Taeyong collapsed on the floor in a heap, grabbing his water bottle. A body fell down next to him, he recognized it as Jonghyun. The other was a senior just as him and incredibly kind, with sharp remarks. The whole team had been incredibly inviting and understanding while helping him with the choreography which Taeyong was very grateful for. Jonghyun had been especially helpful in guiding him through the moves and providing proper critique.

“How are you feeling?” Jonghyun asked with a laugh.

“I’m hurting all over but it’s great,” Taeyong answered with a stunning smile. Jonghyun returned it.

“So I take it you’re enjoying it? You’re not quitting right?”

“I am not quitting that’s for sure,” Taeyong said, gulping down his water. Jonghyun reached out and grabbed it from his hand to drink some himself. Taeyong watched with a smile. It felt nice to have someone be so comfortable with him just like that.

“That’s good, you’re a great dancer,” Jonghyun complimented. Taeyong blushed slightly and nodded in thanks. Lisa plopped down on the other side of him, leaning her head on his shoulder.

“Wah that was tiring,” she huffed, out of breath. Taeyong petted her hair in comfort. Lisa smiled and closed her eyes in exhaustion. “But you were really good by the way.”

“Thanks,” Taeyong laughed and let his head fall back on the wall he was leaning on. Ten and Momo were chatting about something heatedly, Chungha and Soonyoung were still going over one part in the choreography where they disagreed while Yugeem and Jungkook were laying on top of each other, playing something on Jungkook’s phone. Seulgi walked over to sit down next to Lisa. Taeyong nodded at her in acknowledgement and she smiled back, genuinely this time.

Taeyong really enjoyed this, he couldn’t help but think that deciding to join the dance team was the best thing he could’ve possibly decided.

~

When Taeyong got home he felt anxious, he had been away for at least two hours, leaving Sicheng in charge. He hoped they hadn’t starved in his absence. Nervously he opened the door only to be met by silence. He frowned and took off his shoes carefully, discarding his jacket neatly.

As he ventured further inside the house he noticed the kitchen was clean and devoid of any traces six young boys might’ve left after a crazy dinner. This only worried him further.

When he reached the living room he found the reason for the silence. Sicheng and Donghyuck laid on top of each other on the couch, asleep. Jisung was cradled in Sicheng’s lap, also asleep. Lucas
sprawled across the arm chair, long limbs spread out awkwardly, snoring soundly. Chenle and Jungwoo were on the floor, the younger in his brother’s lap, watching the movie playing on the TV. They looked up when they noticed his presence.

“Hey Yongie hyung,” Jungwoo greeted with a whisper. Chenle waved, eyes drooping from tiredness.

“Hey,” Taeyong smiled at them, being just as quiet when getting down on the floor and crawling over to them. He pulled them both close and hugged them cozily. “Did you eat?” He asked and snuggled into Jungwoo’s hair.

“Yeah, Hyuckie hyung and I made hamburgers,” Jungwoo told him proudly.

“That’s sounds good,” Taeyong agreed. Jungwoo smiled widely at him. Chenle was dozing off in Jungwoo’s lap and Taeyong chuckled at him.

“We should probably put you guys to bed,” he said teasingly. Jungwoo nodded in agreement. It wasn’t particularly late, but Taeyong assumed school had been hard for them that day, probably every other day too, but today it must’ve tumbled over.

He proceeded to wake all his brothers, Jungwoo carrying Chenle up to the youngest brothers’ room, Donghyuck leaned on Sicheng the whole way up to their rooms, Lucas sleepily holding Taeyong’s hand when the older led him upstairs. The oldest held Jisung in his arms too and laid him to bed without waking him before going around and putting everyone to bed, saying good night.

All in all it had been a successful day and he wanted nothing more than to crash in bed and sleep. Which is exactly what he did.

~

Thursday arrived and Sicheng was once again sitting with Kun for lunch. They were enjoying their lunches in silence until a thought popped into Sicheng’s head.

“One Direction or Justin Bieber?” He smugly asked, wiggling his eyebrows. Kun looked at him with a dead pan expression. Sicheng couldn’t help but smile widely at him, excited to hear his answer.

“Big Bang,” Kun finally uttered and Sicheng pouted.

“Aww Kun-ge!” He whined causing the older to laugh at him. Sicheng rolled his eyes in exasperation but he couldn’t help his smile.

~

After lunch Sicheng had Korean which was one of his least favorite subjects. Language was just not something he enjoyed that much.

A finger tapped him on the shoulder, the brunette turning around confusedly. A girl was looking at him, her dark hair cascading down her back and a skirt paired with a button up shirt sat snugly on her body.

“Hey there,” she said, smirk in place. “You’re Sicheng right?” He nodded confusedly. “I’m Ara,” her bright red lips were glistening from gloss. “You wanna hang out tomorrow?” He was even more confused. Why would she invite him? He asked her just that. She laughed.

“Because you seem cool silly, I think you could be a great friend,” her brown eyes searched his and
he frowned. This was suspicious. “I promise there’s no funny business, I think you seem like a good person,” she swore. He pondered. Well it couldn’t hurt could it?

“Okay,” he consented. She smiled widely in happiness.

“Great! So it’s just a simple gathering at my house, not a lot of people,” Ara reached for her phone and held it out to him. “Here, press in your number and I’ll text you the details,” Sicheng did as she asked and handed the phone back to her. Ara smiled again, she did that a lot.

“Thank you! I’ll talk to you later,” with that she turned and walked back to her desk. Sicheng nodded thoughtfully.

She seemed nice.
Friday found Taeyong sitting in the living room, studying for his upcoming math test next week. He was biting his pen, eyebrows furrowed as he reread the question. Math was not one of his favourite subjects.  

Chenle was at a friend’s house, playing. Apparently they were ‘so cool’ and ‘really nice’ and their name was ‘Daehwi’. Taeyong only smiled fondly while Chenle had ranted about his new friend.  

Jisung was sitting on the floor, quietly playing with a Barbie and a toy car. He seemed content while making soft humming noises to himself. Taeyong smiled uncontrollably. Jisung has been the most calm one out of their bunch of brothers, except for Sicheng. Donghyuck and Lucas had been incredibly rowdy when they were younger and even now. Jungwoo has thrown a lot of tantrums and Chenle was generally loud. Taeyong really appreciated that Jisung didn’t run around like crazy or cried a lot.  

Donghyuck was upstairs studying as well. He had spent the afternoon with Mark and their friends, but ultimately decided to stay home that night, trying to focus on his studies and he also claimed to be missing his brothers which is why Taeyong assumed he was in Lucas’ and Jungwoo’s room, pestering them, instead of actually studying.  

As he had figured out the equation Sicheng came bounding down the stairs, a nice shirt and tight jeans on. Taeyong recoiled in surprise.  

“Are you going somewhere?” He asked, definitely surprised. Sicheng had cleaned himself up nicely, looking handsome.  

“Yeah, I’m going to a friend’s house,” he said dismissively and started pulling on his shoes. Taeyong frowned. He wouldn’t push but it concerned him slightly to be provided such non-extensive knowledge.  

“Okay... But keep your phone on please,” he knew Sicheng was responsible and he didn’t want to discredit the boy. But he would feel much safer if the younger had his phone on at all times.  

“I will, bye hyung! Bye Jisungie!” And then the brunet was out the door. Taeyong rapped his pen against his mathbook in thought. Something felt off.  

His phone noisily made its presence known and Jisung jumped in surprise. Taeyong laughed a little before answering.  

“Hello?”  

“Hey Taeyongie!” It was Yuta. “What are you doing right now?” Taeyong frowned.
“Just studying, why?”

“We need a favour...” Yuta sounded apologetic.

“We?”

“Yes, or mostly just Doyoung, but anyway, do you think you have time to help?”

“What’s the favour?” Taeyong was intrigued. What could Doyoung possibly need his help with?

“Well, Doyoung is babysitting his niece and he has literally no idea what to do and he says she keeps crying so I was wondering if maybe you could help him? Please?” Taeyong did remember him mentioning a niece.

“Uh, I guess...” he hesitated slightly.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to! It’s just he really sounds like he could use some help and we’re all busy at the moment,” Yuta sounded incredibly apologetic and understanding and Taeyong felt a warmth spread in his chest.

“I can help, it’s no problem,” he assured then with a smile.

“Oh really?! Thank you so much! I’ll text you his address,” Yuta sounded immensely relieved at his response, the smile could almost be heard through the phone.

“Okay, talk to you later!”

“Absolutely! Bye Tae!”

Taeyong immediately gathered his math materials and ran up to his room. He didn’t bother switching out of his sweatpants and t-shirt, only pulling on his shoes before shouting to Donghyuck.

“Hyuck! I need to go out for maybe an hour or so! Can you keep an eye on Jisung?” He waited for a response patiently.

“Yeah sure!” Came the answer, Donghyuck already bounding down the stairs.

“Thanks! See you later!”

“Bye hyung!”

~

Doyoung dragged a hand through his hair. She just would not stop crying. He had already called all of his friends and no one was available. Hwayoung was laying in her crib, face contorted and red from crying, tears still flowing down her cheeks. He had tried picking her up and walking around and rocked the crib but nothing worked. It had been a mistake of his brother to leave him home alone to babysit. A big mistake. He had begged and tried to convince them that he couldn’t but they promised that it was easy and he would do fine. They had turned off their phones as they wanted to focus solely on themselves during their date. Which Doyoung thought was code for having sex and he really didn’t want to know what they were up to. His parents were away at a retreat and also had their phones off so that left him no choice.

None of his friends were available and now he had to figure out a way to stop Hwayoung from crying all by himself before the neighbours called the police.
Just then the doorbell rang, causing her to cry even more. He sighed noisily. Maybe it was the police. The neighbours probably already called them. Traitors.

Doyoung hurried downstairs to open, eyes widening in surprise at seeing Lee Taeyong on his doorstep. It was already dark outside and the boy looked casual in sweatpants and a shirt.

“What are you doing here?” Doyoung blurted out in shock. The silver haired male looked confused.

“Yuta called me...?” He trailed off uncertainly. Doyoung gaped. That traitor! Yuta called Taeyong? What the fuck.

“Oh,” Doyoung unintelligibly uttered. What was he supposed to say even. ‘Get out you lying bastard’?

Hwayoung’s crying intensified and he sighed once again. Taeyong frowned.

“May I?” Taeyong suddenly asked and gestured inside. Doyoung realized he hadn’t let the other in yet. And he really didn’t want to. Taeyong was sneaking his way into his life, already having taken over his friends. And now he wanted to take over his family too? Nuh uh.

But then Doyoung tuned into Hwayoung’s crying again and he felt so tired. Taeyong did have six brothers. Two of them being smaller children. Maybe the ice prince could help?

So he stepped aside, grudgingly, Taeyong offering a tight lipped smile before kicking off his shoes and hurrying upstairs. Doyoung followed. He was still suspicious of the other’s intentions.

Taeyong walked into the room his brother and fiancée (and Hwayoung) were staying in, stepping close to the crib. Doyoung listened as the other cooed softly before reaching down to pick her up with practiced ease. Doyoung wanted to scoff because he already tried that and-

What.

The cries suddenly stopped, Hwayoung held gently against Taeyong’s chest, her head on his collarbone and her face finally looking peaceful again. Doyoung gaped at the other. Taeyong was rocking her softly, a small satisfied smile on his lips.

“How did you do that?” Doyoung managed to say, tone whispering as if he would disturb his niece otherwise. Taeyong looked up at him in surprise.

“She likes being held, it’s not rocket science,” he said gently and Doyoung felt like screaming because Taeyong sounded so soft. He was the ice prince. He wasn’t soft! He was cold and frozen.

“But I tried that and she never stopped crying,” he felt like exploding honestly. Controlled rage. Yes. That’s what he was exuding.

“I guess she didn’t like your energy,” Taeyong bit back. “You’re very hostile you know. Or maybe that’s just against me,” the ice prince was trying to keep his voice controlled but Doyoung saw the frustration in his eyes. “I have noticed how cold you are towards me. But I don’t understand why? I never did anything to gain your distaste.”

Doyoung huffed and gestured with his hands. He wasn’t the cold one! Taeyong was!

“Fine, I don’t like you,” he conceded. “You never smiled or talked to anyone. Like you were above everyone. And when you found out my stupid best friends wanted to be friends with you, you jumped at the chance to be friends with them because you, what? You want to be popular or what?”
Doyoung’s voice was getting gradually louder. “I think you’re suspicious and it’s even more suspicious that you’re taking care of like six brothers! Where are your parents, huh?”

Taeyong’s face had gradually been darkening while he was speaking and he looked almost livid.

“Where my parents are is none of your business!” He said furiously. “And for everything else,” he took a deep breath to calm himself. “I don’t have any ulterior motives.” Doyoung narrowed his eyes. “I seriously don’t. I didn’t talk or smile because I’m shy and awkward and I feel uncomfortable with people I don’t know,” Taeyong looked away in desperation, blinking his eyes quickly. Doyoung frowned. “I wasn’t trying to be rude or above everyone else. I was just trying to melt away, I didn’t want anyone to take interest in me and I ended up with everyone questioning me and my motives. There are no motives. I was just trying to get through school okay?” Taeyong’s eyes were glistening with tears and Doyoung started to feel bad. Was he really wrong? Did he misjudge the entire situation?

“It’s so hard to just exist,” Taeyong continued. “There is so much responsibility and judgement and obstacles. It’s overwhelming! Just look at everyone who has depression. Everyone who’s being bullied. All the bullies. It’s all pressure that society bestowed upon us. From parents, school and social media. I was just trying to not get drawn into it and mind my own business. There are no evil master plans,” Taeyong sounded despaired and Doyoung felt himself understanding what the other was saying which was awful because Taeyong was supposed to be evil. Fuck. But he didn’t sound evil, he just sounded tired and like any other person trying to go on with their lives.

“I’m sorry,” Doyoung found himself saying. Taeyong looked up from where’d he’d been watching Hwayoung dozing off on his chest.

“What?” He asked incredulously.

“I’m not repeating myself,” Doyoung looked away fleetingly, before forcing himself to meet the other’s eyes. “But I think I might have misjudged you.”

Taeyong still looked shocked from what he was hearing.

“I am willing to give friendship a chance,” Doyoung managed to force out. He would have to get used to the thought but somehow it didn’t seem too bad. “On one condition.”

“What?” Taeyong questioned, still looking surprised.

“You need to help me babysit Hwayoung until my brother comes home because fuck if I’m doing it myself. No way,” he shuddered in fear and Taeyong laughed. It was a nice sound. Doyoung could, maybe, get used to it. Taeyong looked incredulously at him, Doyoung understood his apprehension.

“Okay. I’ll help, that’s why I’m here in the first place after all,” the ice prince offered him a tentative smile. Doyoung found himself smiling back.
Sicheng had never been a party guy. He simply didn’t go to a lot of parties. He wasn’t popular and he hadn’t stayed long enough in one place to establish himself at a school and get invited. This was all very new.

Ara’s house was big, wealthy and similar to his own. There wasn’t any pounding music or flashing lights coming from inside. The neighbourhood was peaceful.

He straightened his shirt out before knocking on the wooden door softly. A few seconds later it swung open to reveal Ara. She smiled widely when she saw him. The girl was wearing a short dress with a plunging cleavage and high heels. Her makeup was heavy and she smelled like smoke.

“Hey!” Ara enthusiastically greeted him and reached forward to grab his hand, pulling the brunet inside and closing the door. Sicheng grimaced slightly at the heavy smell that reached his nostrils upon entering.

“I’m so glad you could make it!” Ara was still smiling. “The others are in the living room.”

She led him through the hallway and they eventually reached a huge gathering room with a big screened tv and several couches spread around. There looked to be around ten other people sitting around and seemingly chilling. He did notice people smoking something. He couldn’t really tell what. And suddenly he felt out of his comfort zone. Ara pulled him towards one of the sofas where three other people where hanging out. Two boys and one girl. The boy on the right had cropped black hair and a mean glare. The boy on the left was lean and slim, hair buzzed on the sides and colored a vibrant blue. He had his arm around the final girl, who was small and petite, eyes blue (probably from lenses) and brown hair tied up into a bun as she shared a cigarette with the blue haired boy. Her lips were vibrantly red. Ara let his hand go in favour of falling into the lap of the glaring boy. He gingerly took a seat in the armchair across from the sofa.

The guy with black hair eyed him up and down.

“Who’s this?” He said with a dismissive head gesture towards Sicheng. The junior raised an eyebrow.

“This is Sicheng, he’s a junior. Like us,” Ara explained and reached over to take the cigarette from the girl with red lipstick. “This is Seokyung,” she said gesturing to the girl who waved lazily. “This is Minchan,” the boy with blue hair gave him a nod. “And this is Joe.” Lastly it was the guy with cropped hair. Sicheng smiled tightly at them all.

“Is that your real name?” He asked politely. Joe sneered.

“No, but I don’t think names given by our parents are really ours. We should have that decision
ourselves don’t you think? We live with it for the rest of our lives, right?”

“Calm down babe,” Ara laughed at Joe, Sicheng wondered if they were together.

“So why is he here?” Minchan then asked. “He looks too good. Like a choir boy,” he turned to Sicheng. “No offense.” The latter smiled through his teeth.

“None taken.”

“Yeah, he doesn’t seem very cool,” Seokyung threw in.

“He is cool. Right Sicheongie?” Ara insisted and leaned forward to offer him the cigarette. He recoiled. She wanted him to smoke.

“No thanks,” he said with a forced laugh. Ara pouted.

“Don’t be such a wuss,” Joe jeered at him, glaring eyes looking amused.

“Yeah, c’mon take it!” Seokyung pressured.

“Are you scared or what?” Minchan scoffed.

“I thought you were cool,” Ara said with an eyeroll and started retracting her hand. Suddenly Sicheng felt something weird wash over him, a weird feeling of not belonging, of urgency to be approved and liked. So he swiftly reached forward and grabbed the cigarette from her, bringing it to his mouth and inhaling. He almost choked but managed to keep it down, coughing slightly while his eyes watered. Ara looked oddly proud.

“See. I told you,” she turned to the other three, all of them looking impressed as Sicheng took another drag before handing the blunt back. It tasted awful and he really regretted doing that now.

“I guess you can hang with us,” Minchan smirked. Sicheng didn’t really want to, not anymore.

“Yeah,” Ara agreed. “We can hang at school, you know all the juniors who’s anyone knows us, we rule the junior classes. You’ll be just as known as your brothers.” Sicheng frowned. Known? Popular? Him? A bad feeling started blooming in his chest. He could stand out. He could be recognized for once in his life.

It was always Donghyuck and Taeyong who got the fame and the popularity. He had often envied their good looks and personalities. His appearance and personality didn’t even come close to them, but now he had a chance to be someone special.

“I’d like that,” he said with a small smile, something awful tugging at his guts.

“Oh yeah, your brother’s Lee Taeyong right?” Joe asked suddenly. Sicheng nodded. Joe didn’t say anything further, Sicheng frowning. Why did he even ask?

Ara lit up a new blunt and they quickly lost interest in him.

The rest of the night was spent in similar fashion. They shared cigarettes and other sorts of drugs. He only took one more drag of, what was apparently, marijuana after those cigarette drags, but mostly he spent the night in silence, listening to his new ‘friends’ talking.

When he saw how late it had gotten he decided to head home. Ara followed him to the door to say goodbye.
“Sicheng, now that you’re going to be hanging with us you can’t hang with that weird Chinese guy,” she sounded oddly serious. Sicheng frowned. He couldn’t spend time with Kun?

“What?” He argued.

“He’s not cool; he’s a nerd. We don’t hang with nerds. If you’re one of us then you don’t hang with nerds either,” she told him. “He’s weird. I don’t understand why you hung out with him in the first place.”

“But he’s my friend,” Sicheng protested. Ara raised an eyebrow.

“Is he really? Have you been to his house, have you done anything together outside of school, have you hugged?” She questioned. He frowned.

“I didn’t think so,” Ara scoffed. “He’s not a real friend. We’re your friends now. Right?” She offered a blinding smile. Sicheng hesitated. He really didn’t know what to make of this and his head was aching. But she had said he would be known. He could be popular. He could stand out and be special for once.

“Yeah,” he agreed. With that they said bye and he started trekking home. He made sure to sneak inside when he got back, trying desperately not to wake Taeyong up. The oldest brother was sleeping on the couch, probably having stayed up waiting for Sicheng. The junior felt guilty but he also felt good. He was not following rules and directions like he always did and it felt oddly freeing. Ara, Joe, Seokyung and Minchan were right. He was too good. Now it was time to rebel a bit.

Chapter End Notes

I do not condone smoking or doing drugs in any way. It is really bad for your body and your health, this is merely fiction but I do know that this happens in real life and I think it’s really important to talk about it and know it is not something to take lightly. It can really mess with your mind when doing drugs so I hope everyone stays safe.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Donghyuck was lazing about in bed the next day. It was Saturday and officially the weekend and he was done with all his homework. Donghyuck felt happy about his life at the moment. He couldn’t help but smile to himself. He had a boyfriend. He had great friends. He had his brothers and he was not behind in school for once.

His phone pinged with a message and he opened it eagerly.

From: Mork
Hey babe
What you up to?

Donghyuck giggled at the words written in English. He was so in love it was crazy. It was a nice feeling though, welcomed.

To: Mork
Nothing, why?

From: Mork
Let’s do something?
Just us.

Donghyuck bit his lip to try and control his blooming smile.

To: Mork
Name a time and place

From: Mork
I’ll pick u up in twenty

To: Mork
<3

From: Mork
<3

Donghyuck proceeded to squeal and jump out of his bed. He hurried to his closet and started choosing an outfit. When he finally found something suitable, consisting of a long sleeved shirt and extra tight jeans, he did some light makeup and brushed his teeth.

By then it had already passed fifteen minutes. Donghyuck decided to go downstairs and wait instead, greeting his brothers cheerily when he entered the living room. Taeyong was playing a game with Lucas on the tv, Jungwoo was on the floor, not moving but simply resting. Chenle and Jisung were building with LEGO on top of his chest.
Donghyuck figured that Sicheng was still in his room. He hadn’t come down for breakfast but Donghyuck didn’t think too much of it.

His phone made a loud noise, indicating a message.

From: Mork
I’m here :)

Donghyuck grinned and got up quickly.

“Where are you going?” Taeyong asked, looking away from the game for one second and immediately dying. They were playing Super Mario Bros.

“Mark’s here, he wanted to hang,” Donghyuck explained while tying his shoes. Jungwoo opened one eye.

“Alone?” He questioned and started smiling knowingly. Donghyuck blushed.

“Yes.” Jungwoo raised an eyebrow. Donghyuck sighed.

“Okay I think it’s date,” he carefully said, not looking at his brothers.

“Aww Hyuck it’s your first date!” Taeyong exclaimed proudly. Donghyuck blushed harder.

“Whatsoever, I’m leaving,” he scoffed playfully but he couldn’t contain his happy grin.

“Have fun on your date hyung!” Chenle called after him, all his brothers echoing the sentiment. Donghyuck closed the door after him with a fond sigh and hurried down the front steps, looking up to see Mark and his stupid moped.


“I saw you yesterday,” he protested, Donghyuck walking close and throwing his arms around Mark’s neck, hugging him.

“But that was so long ago! Like several hours,” Donghyuck said through a smile, nuzzling Mark’s neck. The other laughed again and hugged him tightly back. They were still for a moment until Mark squeezed him one last time.

“If we wanna make it we should go now,” Donghyuck’s curiosity was peaked. Where were they even going? He decided not to ask because Mark was a terrible liar and would end up telling him if he did. And he kind of wanted the surprise.

“Okay,” he said instead and smiled.

~

Mark was almost vibrating from excitement, Donghyuck’s hands around his stomach sending tingles down his spine. They were officially having their first date and he was incredibly thrilled but also nervous. He hoped Donghyuck would like it. He had asked his brother last night, already panicking, because he really wanted to take Donghyuck out for a date but he had no idea what to do. Johnny had been his awesome supportive self and pondered for a few seconds before lighting up with an idea. Like the light bulb going off on top of his head. And suddenly Mark had a plan. He would be nowhere without his brother.

“Is that what I think it is?” Donghyuck said, voice raised to be heard over the wind. Mark smiled and
confirmed his question. They were almost there, the tall colorful constructions standing proudly, revealing their destination to Donghyuck.

It was a town fair.

Happy screams and cheers could be heard, the loud music already invading their ears.

Mark pulled up to the parking lot and found a good spot close to the entrance. Donghyuck looked in awe at the inviting festival of colors and the nice smell of fast food. He smiled gleefully, almost jumping in his spot while Mark put their helmets away.

“Do you like it?” He asked when the helmets were stored. Donghyuck turned to him with sparkling eyes.

“I love it!” He assured and rushed forward to hug Mark tightly. The junior smiled into his neck and laughed at the excitement Donghyuck was exuding.

“Let’s go inside,” Mark said and Donghyuck let go of him. As they were walking Mark shyly reached out to grab his boyfriend’s hand. Donghyuck didn’t look down at their joined limbs but he held on tightly, intertwined their fingers and smiled.

The fair was crowded, but not disturbingly so. Donghyuck was sucking it all in, Mark enjoying the joy on his boyfriend’s face.

“Let’s do a roller coaster first,” Donghyuck decided and dragged Mark by the hand towards the huge construction.

The day continued on happily, Mark allowing Donghyuck to pick rides and then dragging the younger over to the game booths, winning a teddy bear in the basketball game. Donghyuck smiled brightly when Mark handed him the bear. Mark blushed brightly when Donghyuck pecked his cheek in thanks.

They went on some more rides before deciding they needed food.

“This day has been so great,” Donghyuck said, a satisfied sigh leaving him. Mark nodded in agreement, munching on his snack.

They were sitting next to each other on a bench by the food truck they’d bought their food from. Donghyuck was burrowing into Mark’s side, shivering from the cold. Mark frowned concernedly, switching his snack to his other hand and putting his, now free, arm around Donghyuck’s shoulders. He pulled the younger close and tried to transfer some heat. Donghyuck smiled into his jacket and sniffled slightly from the chilliness in the air. Mark offered his snack, Donghyuck taking a sizable bite. Mark growled playfully.

“You brat,” he laughed. Donghyuck cheekily grinned after swallowing his bite before diving down into Mark’s jacket and his warmth once again.

~

“Oh my god is that Mark Lee?”

“What? Oh my god yes it is!”

“And he’s with Lee Donghyuck!”
“Aww cute, they have the same last name!”

“No, not cute. They look like a couple or something, it’s disgusting and wrong!”

“We should take a picture, she’ll want to know this!”

“You’re right.”

*click*

~

Mark was the one leading Donghyuck this time. It was getting late and he figured it was time for their last attraction of the day.

Donghyuck gasped when he saw the Ferris wheel. The line was short so they eagerly stood in it. Donghyuck was hugging Mark, still feeling cold, his boyfriend holding his waist and letting the younger lean on him.

In no time, they had reached the front, an attendant helping them inside a pod. Donghyuck was wide eyed as he looked at the stunning view once they started moving. Mark was amazed himself. They could see almost the entire city at the top, a calm washing over him. It felt so right to just sit in their own little world, watching the city and enjoying the quiet. The sky was a warm shade of pink and orange, the sun about to go down on the horizon, the city was serene, the buzz of the day still under Mark’s skin. He reached out to take Donghyuck’s hand in his own, the younger looking at him with sparkling eyes when he felt the touch. Mark stared back at him with an equal amount of wonder.

The ride ended all too soon, Donghyuck’s smile remaining on his face all the while. Mark felt his heart swell with happiness. Their date had been a success after all.

Chapter End Notes

We needed some fluff don’t you think :))
Sicheng had re-emerged from his room the next day, joining his brothers for breakfast and ignoring the worried looks Taeyong was sending him.

He ate slowly, listening to his younger brothers’ excited conversations, but keeping quiet. He still felt weird from the events of Friday evening. He didn’t really know what to think. He could have friends. A lot of friends. He’d never had many friends before. And he could be popular. That was so unthinkable.

Sicheng had never been the special one. Not like Taeyong, the oldest brother with a superior appearance and a great personality. Not like Donghyuck, the wit and the uniqueness smothering him. Not like Jungwoo, sweet and kind Jungwoo who stays true to himself. Not like Lucas who was popular and liked by everyone at his school. Not like Chenle who was sociable and bright. Not like Jisung who was the youngest and more mature than most other kids his age.

Sicheng was average. He was the boring second oldest. He didn’t have individuality or likable social skills. He was inferior to all his brothers.

He needed Ara and her friends; he could be special with them. She promised.

“I need someone to do the grocery shopping,” Taeyong’s voice entered his hazy mind. Sicheng was fiddling with his necklace pendant, he did that a lot when thoughts weighed him down.

Taeyong’s sentence registered in his mind and he jumped at the opportunity.

“I’ll do it,” he volunteered and Taeyong smiled widely at him. Sicheng was brought back to his previous thoughts. Of course Sicheng didn’t hate him. Or any of his brothers. He loved all of them. He just didn’t love himself.

“Great thank you, I’ll give you the list later.” Sicheng offered a tight lipped smile in return and resumed eating his yoghurt.

~

The sight of the grocery store calmed him, the familiar building and the big signs displaying the super good prices for their chosen groceries. Sicheng walked inside and grabbed a basket gingerly. He decided to take his time walking around. He didn’t know why he liked the grocery store so much. What’s there to like really?

He just enjoyed the shining new products, the colorful vegetable selection and the rows upon rows of things to choose between.

While he was standing over the cucumbers someone tapped his shoulder. Sicheng almost dropped his vegetable in surprise, turning around.
There stood Yuta Nakamoto. Sicheng’s eyes widened. Yuta had a big smile plastered on his face, an empty basket on his elbow.


“Yeah.”

“I’m Yuta.”

“I know,” Sicheng felt lame right after he said that but what could he do about it now really. Yuta only smiled wider.

“Do you like cucumbers?” Sicheng suddenly asked, feeling like the conversation was drying up. Yuta laughed incredulously.

“Um. Not really,” he responded. “They’re basically just water.”

“Exactly my point, but my brother likes it so I guess I’ll have to buy it,” with that he put the cucumber in his basket. Yuta grinned.

“I like your attitude, Sicheng-ah,” he said, eyes sparkling with mirth. “Wanna walk with me?” Sicheng smiled.

“Sure.”

They commenced their walk throughout the grocery store.

“Why are you buying so much ramen? That’s like meals for weeks.”

“I’m a starving student, Sichengie, I need to feed on something to get through the harsh invention that is senior year.”

“And I bet you can’t cook for shit.”

“... I mean. That too.”

/ 

“Okay, you did not just forbid me from buying chocolate.”

“You’re already eating all that ramen, chocolate is gonna give you a heart condition.”

“I’m a starving student, Sicheng-ah. We need sugar to survive, you’re too young to understand.”

“Age is a social construct.”

“Oh come on that line is so old! Now give me my chocolate!”

/ 

“Your basket is way too healthy, you need to buy some junk food. Your brothers cannot live without sugar highs and stomach aches.”

“You do know that junk may refer to trash or male genitalia. I’d rather not eat any of that.”

“... what the fuck.”
“Who cares if it’s vanilla or strawberry? Just pick one.”

“You can not rush me! I’m a starving student and-“

“And you have a serious case of indecision, just take the strawberry flavour.”

“Fine... oh wait look there’s banana flavour too!”

“Oh my gosh.”

“Are you seriously buying bandaids with dinosaurs on them?”

“Don’t judge me Sicheng. Dinosaurs are awesome.”

“How can you be older than me?”

“It’s not my fault that you’re so mature! Besides you were the one who lit up like a child when you saw the discount on soda.”

“It’s for my brothers!”

“Uh huh sure. I believe you. One hundred percent.”

~

Sicheng was smiling when they exited the grocery store. Yuta had been such great company and he felt genuinely happy to have shopped for groceries with the senior.

Yuta was also smiling when they left the store, eyes sparkly.

“I like you, Sicheng. You’re cool,” he said with amusement. Sicheng felt a weird sense of fulfillment in his chest. It was such an unusual feeling, hearing such words come from a person that wasn’t his family. Especially from someone like Yuta Nakamoto who was a part of the popular crowd at their school.

“Thank you, I had a good time,” he said. Yuta pulled out his phone. Sicheng’s heart started pounding in his chest, eyes widening. Was Yuta actually going to ask for his number? Him? A nobody? A loser? He couldn’t comprehend why someone like Yuta would want to be friends with him.

“Enter your number, I’ll text you sometime. Maybe we can go grocery shopping again,” Yuta suggested with a wink and a grin. Sicheng rolled his eyes but complied, entering his number into Yuta’s phone.

“Sure,” he agreed, smiling back at the Japanese male. He noticed how white Yuta's teeth were.

“Great,” Yuta nodded. “I'll see you around.”

“See you.”
When Monday arrived Taeyong felt excited. Doyoung and him had cleared the air and they were officially giving friendship a try.

The evening of their babysitting had been strangely nice. Doyoung had been listening attentively when Taeyong showed him how to handle Hwayoung so she wouldn’t cry, and then when Taeyong teased him for it Doyoung scoffed. They had settled into some sort of bantering phase, Doyoung arguing with him about the proper snacks and Taeyong disagreeing. They also argued about which film to watch and then if they should have the lights off or on.

It was nice. Taeyong liked the new found dynamics.

As he walked into lunch he saw Yuta, Ten Johnny and Doyoung already sitting by his table, so he naturally walked over to join them.

“Hey Taeyong,” Yuta greeted with a smile.

“Hi Yuta,” Taeyong said as he sat down next to Doyoung. Yuta looked expectantly at them but Taeyong disregarded his interest. “Where’s Taeil and Jaehyun?” He asked instead.

“They’re cramming for a biology test,” Johnny explained. Ten shuddered.

“Yuck I fucking hate biology,” he complained. Yuta nodded in agreement.

Taeyong started opening his lunch, immediately diving for the desert, because yeah he liked to eat the desert before the meal.

Doyoung looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“You’re seriously eating your cookies first?” He said with a scoff. Taeyong rolled his eyes playfully.

“Why not?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all,” Doyoung said nonchalantly. Taeyong scoffed this time.

“Uh huh, mr. fruits-are-the-best-snack,” he teased, referring to their verbal food fight last Friday.

“Fruits are superior,” he argued. Taeyong shook his head and took a bite of his cookie, waving the delicious treat in front of Doyoung.

“I mean you do have bunny teeth so it makes sense,” Ten added into their conversation. Taeyong looked over to see Johnny and Yuta looking at them incredulously. Ten only looked mildly surprised.
“Shut up Ten,” Doyoung hissed, bunny teeth prominent. “And stop waving that in front of me,” he then looked at Taeyong. The other only smiled innocently. Doyoung rolled his eyes. “Fine, give me a bite then.” Taeyong laughed and offered the cookie he’d eaten off already, Doyoung taking it and throwing it into his mouth. Yuta almost choked, Taeyong looking over in concern and question.

“What the hell,” he said.

“Since when are you guys friends?” Johnny added. Doyoung smirked.

“Since we babysat, of course,” he said and reached over to steal another bite of Taeyong’s cookie stash. “Did you bake these?” The silver haired male nodded.

“Jungwoo helped.”

“Guys,” Yuta snapped his fingers thrice to gather their attention.

“What do you want me to say,” Doyoung inquired. “We came to a mutual understanding, nothing world changing.”

“But-“


“Just don’t question it.”

~

The week proceeded smoothly. Their project was basically done, dance practices were awesome (he had all of the moves down) and Taeyong managed to keep up with his brothers, his coursework and the chores. He did notice Sicheng being oddly distant which worried him, but something else almost immediately occupied his mind when the thought popped up.

What had really worried him was when Taeyong walked past the designated lunch spot for Sicheng and Kun, finding only Kun. He couldn’t help but frown at the scene, about to go over there just as Jaehyun called his name and he was once again occupied with something else, forgetting the sight of Kun being all alone.

Friday arrived soon enough and Taeyong had been informed that he would be driving home alone, Donghyuck having plans with Mark and Sicheng having plans. Taeyong was once again confused at the lack of explanation from his younger brother. But he still didn’t want to pry, more often than not his brothers came to him when they had problems and issues. He knew they didn’t like being pressured, but this was a new level of worrying.

He was intercepted on his way to the parking lot, an arm dropping down on his shoulders. Johnny smiled at him when they met eyes.

“Hello Taeyongie,” he greeted. “I was wondering if you wanted to hang out with us?” Taeyong looked at him imploringly. Then he smiled.

“Sure, I don’t have plans.” Johnny’s grin was blinding.

~

Apparently hanging out meant going to a homey diner across town, with crazy discounts.
“Welcome to discount day, my dear,” Ten said grandiosely. Taeyong laughed.

“Hey,” Yuta protested. “This is no laughing matter! This is a rite of passage! We are officially making you a part of our group,” he said proudly. Taeyong could feel the butterflies running wild in his stomach.

“Really?” He asked, eyes wide. An arm was once again slung around his shoulders. This time it was Jaehyun, Taeyong felt his heart flutter when those dimples dented Jaehyun’s pale skin.

“Of course,” the other assured and led Taeyong towards the counter.

“Now we order,” Yuta decided. Taeyong listened happily as his friends bickered about which meals to order and which items to share, Jaehyun’s arm warm around his shoulders and Taeil’s small smile directed at him.

When they finally managed to order and sat down he couldn’t help but keep a constant smile on his face. Doyoung was arguing with Jaehyun and Yuta butted in, Johnny sipped his milkshake quietly and Taeil was asking Ten about a test they’d had. It felt so right to be in the middle of the chaos, adding his own input to Ten and Taeil’s conversation, tasting Johnny’s milkshake and teasingly fueling the ongoing argument.

He felt, indescribably, content with his life.

~

Slowly Sicheng had started cutting off Kun from his daily life. He didn’t answer to texts and he didn’t sit with him at lunch. He did see Kun’s confused looks when they walked past each other in the corridors and Sicheng didn’t make eye contact or even attempt to say hello.

He felt so fucking guilty for not acknowledging the other male. But he had other friends now. Better friends. Ara was reckless and awesome, always coming up with new ideas and trying crazy things. She walked the halls like a queen and everyone in their junior year greeted her when they walked past, she hadn’t been joking about the fame. Minchan was calm, he kept them in line and teachers loved him. If only they knew how much pot he smoked and how often he was high during school hours. Seokyung was quite silent and kept her thoughts to herself. She loved getting high though. Joe was brutal. He was honest. He had no filter. He voiced his opinions a lot and Sicheng thought they were cruel more often than not. Sicheng also had suspicions that Joe was dealing within the school.

Sicheng could almost hear Donghyuck’s voice in his ear, calling all of them walking cliches.

Mostly when they hung out Sicheng stayed quiet and didn’t participate in the smoking and sometimes drinking. He only took a drag once in a while to stay in their good graces.

After two weeks of his new routine that consisted of ignoring Kun and spending all of his time with Ara and her friends - his friends - Kun had stopped trying to reach out to him and Sicheng couldn’t feel anything. He felt numb. He felt like he was going through life without living and it sucked. He had thought the fame would feel better. He thought it would make him more confident and he thought his friends would be better. He was starting to doubt.

Sure Ara was sweet and nice, she spoke with a bubbly tone and smiled a lot. But it wasn’t the same. Not like Kun. Sicheng missed him. But he understood, he couldn’t be friends with someone who had such low popularity. He never saw his brothers with friends that weren’t known by the entire school. Of course he needed popular friends to be special.

“Yah,” Ara’s voice pulled him out of his reverie. They were currently sitting on a bench behind the
school, Joe and Minchan smoking. “Are you listening to me?”

“Yeah,” Sicheng confirmed, his fingers were fiddling with the feather pendant on his necklace. Ara rolled her eyes.

“We’re going out tonight, you coming?” She smiled because she knew he would say yes. Which he did.

“Good, we meet at my house at nine,” she told him and that was that. She turned back to her conversation with Seokyung and Sicheng went back to wallowing in his thoughts.
The night was disastrous. Sicheng had not been expecting to end up in a police cell.

It all started when they got to Ara’s house. She was fully dressed in a jacket and dark jeans, a bag slung over her shoulder.

Sicheng was confused but he followed when they started walking, eventually reaching a skateboard park. It was late and it was empty, the dark providing them protection that turned out to be completely useless in the end.

Apparently the bag Ara had with her was filled with spray cans. Sicheng had gasped at the sight. Seokyung had only told him to shut up and pick a color. He had watched as all of them got their cans and started spraying the concrete constructions. Hesitantly he hovered over the bag until Minchan picked up a can and forced it into his hand.

Sicheng didn’t want to vandalize the skatepark. He really didn’t. This was bad. This was so bad. And illegal. Like the drugs and alcohol. But worse because this was in public.

Then bad had turned worse as police cars sped into the park, sirens starting to blare. They didn’t have time to register anything before the police had already detained them.

Now Sicheng was sitting in a police cell with his friends.

“I can’t believe this,” Ara was mumbling, biting her nails anxiously. It reminded Sicheng of Taeyong. “I am so fucked, my parents are going to kill me.”

“At least your parents care enough to kill you,” Minchan scoffed. Sicheng knew his home situation was bad but he didn’t question it. Prying wasn’t something Sicheng did because he knew how it felt to be scrutinized like that.

“Yeah, sucks to be you guys,” Seokyung laughed humorlessly. Sicheng knew she didn’t have a guardian so she had to be detained for a whole 24 hours before they were willing to let her go. Joe didn’t say anything. He sat quietly on one of the benches and stared out into the air.

Sicheng himself felt more nervous than anything. He hadn’t called his brother, no. And the person he had called was unpredictable at the least. Sicheng hadn’t even been sure he would’ve agreed to pick him up, but fortunately he had.

The door to their cell opened with a smack and a female officer entered, stern face scanning them all.

“You can go now,” she told them and then turned to Seokyung. “Not you.” With that she moved, allowing them to pass her and exit the cell, the door closing again, leaving Seokyung in there alone.

Sicheng was the last one walking in their little line. He saw Ara go up timidly to her parents, both of
them looking pissed off. Minchan tiredly dragged himself over to a bored looking woman. She didn’t even look at him when they left.

Joe, to Sicheng’s surprise, walked over to an elderly couple, probably his grandparents. They looked so resigned and disappointed, Sicheng felt guilty just seeing them.

He shuddered and turned to the last person in the waiting room.

“Hey Yuta-hyung,” he whispered guiltily. The Japanese male frowned at him.

“Hi Sicheng,” he greeted back, eyeing the younger up and down for a few seconds before turning on his heel and walking outside in silence. Sicheng followed quietly.

They reached the older’s car, getting in and sitting still for a few seconds. Yuta didn’t indicate wanting to start the car any time soon. Sicheng bit his lip anxiously, restless fingers tampering with his feather pendant.

“Why?” Yuta asked then, looking at Sicheng. He didn’t look disappointed or judgmental, he simply looked confused and curious. “How did you end up here?” His tone was almost incredulous. Sicheng swallowed dryly.

“Vandalizing,” he managed weakly. Yuta frowned.

“But why?”

Sicheng shrugged. Yuta stared at him. And he continued staring. Sicheng fidgeted uncomfortably, sweaty palms and dry lips making an appearance. He felt the prickling sensation of eyes on his skin and it only made him feel worse.

“Okay,” Yuta said, stopping his intense staring and instead turning the key, the car jumping to a start.

“Okay?” Sicheng mumbled confusedly.

“Okay, I won’t force you to tell me, it’s not my place to tell you what to do. And I won’t tell your brother. But I am really hoping that you’re going to tell him yourself,” Yuta gave him a pointed look. Sicheng exhaled in relief. He was safe. “Sicheng,” Yuta said, voice grave. “I really need you to tell Taeyong. If there’s an issue I’m sure he would help you.” Sicheng nodded noncommittally, Yuta frowning at him.

The senior didn’t press it further and the ride continued in silence. Sicheng’s head was spinning. He was safe. Yuta wouldn’t tell Taeyong and he wouldn’t either. He was safe. He wouldn’t be a disappointment.

When they finally reached Sicheng’s neighbourhood he inhaled deeply for courage.

“Thank you Yuta hyung,” Sicheng quietly spoke. The Japanese male looked at him in question. “Thank you for picking me up and thank you for not telling Yongie hyung.” Sicheng shyly managed, voice shaking. Yuta offered a genuine smile.

“Of course,” he said. “I care about you Sicheng. I want you to be okay.” Sicheng could feel his chest tightening and he nodded breathlessly. Yuta cared. Yuta, who was not his family, cared. Why? Sicheng wasn’t likable. He wasn’t lovable.

With a tense smile he nodded in parting and got out of the car.
Taeyong looked at him with those wide imploring eyes when he entered the house. Sicheng lied, saying that he’d been at a friend’s house. Taeyong looked like he wanted to say something but just then Lucas was asking something and the eldest’ attention was diverted. Sicheng hurriedly snuck upstairs and into his room.

He fell down on his bed with a great sigh. Today had been exhausting. Mentally draining.

He could feel the tears pressing against his eyelids, a sob burning his throat.

He hated himself.

Sicheng couldn’t help but clutch his sheets tightly, knuckles turning white, thoughts running haywire in his head. He had been arrested. He was such a bad person. He had ditched Kun for people who got him arrested. For fame. For the feeling of being known and recognized. For the feeling he was still chasing, the validation that would tell him he was enough. It wasn’t there. He was not enough. He was a disappointment, always making his brother worried, going to Ara’s parties when he knew there would be alcohol and drugs.

Sicheng sobbed quietly.

He hated it. He hated the constant pressure he was feeling, the suffocating weight pressing down on him. He was never enough. He would never reach up to his brothers levels. He would always be the quiet, reserved, boring one that no one liked. The one that disappeared in the shadows, the one that blew away in the midst of the whirlwind that was life.

Sicheng wasn’t enough.

And he hated himself for it.

But he could be better? Right? With Ara. He could become enough when people recognized him. He could become like his brothers. He could be enough. He just needed to stay with Ara. She promised.

Quiet sobs echoed throughout the dark room, eventually evening out into shallow breaths.

The door creaked open quietly, Taeyong sticking his head inside with a frown, finding that his brother was asleep. He pondered on his decisions. He could wake the younger and ask him in more detail about where he’d been, but he didn’t want to pressure an answer out of his brother, knowing it would have a negative effect, so he didn’t.

Instead the door closed, leaving the room in complete darkness once again.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorrrrryyy :’(
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Wahaha this became a long chapter! Hope you’ll enjoy it :))

Unnecessary but: My day has been long and boring and I want to sleep

Taeyong was determined to get his whole family together for a day. So he made a plan. He got up early Saturday morning and made a delicious breakfast buffet. Then he proceeded to pack a bag with his portable speaker, some snacks, water bottles and extra hoodies since there was always someone complaining, he also readied some lunch packs before walking upstairs and waking his brothers.

Taeyong frowned worriedly when he noticed the dark bags under Sicheng’s eyes, as he was waking the younger. Sicheng didn’t say much, simply walked downstairs without a glance backwards.

When they finally settled at the table his brothers looked at him with happy eyes as they saw the wide array of food. Taeyong smiled and motioned for them to start eating.

Breakfast went by gleefully, Donghyuck joking around loudly, Chenle constantly laughing while Jisung struggled to eat his yoghurt without spilling. Lucas didn’t care if he spilled anything. Jungwoo was talking quietly with Sicheng who tried to look engaged in the conversation, but Taeyong saw clearly how his eyes went out of focus frequently.

“So,” Taeyong started to garner their attention, when all the plates were empty. “Today we are having a family day, and if you have plans cancel them.” He made sure to look at them intently, leaving no room for an argument.

None of his brothers seemed to be bothered so he smiled.

“Great. We leave in twenty,” Taeyong announced and they all nodded in consent.

Twenty minutes later everyone had loaded into the van, ready to leave.

“Where are we going?” Lucas asked curiously, looking out the window as Taeyong started the car. The eldest smiled playfully.

“You’ll see.”

~

Donghyuck raised an eyebrow when he noticed their environment. Green forest on every side. He looked beside him to make horrified eye contact with Jungwoo.

“Hyung!” Jungwoo called out, “why are we in the forest?”

Taeyong innocently widened his eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Hyung,” Donghyuck whined, joining the conversation. Taeyong simply raised a confused eyebrow,
but Donghyuck could see the glimmer in his eye. He rolled his eyes.

They pulled into a pebbled clearing, turning the car off. Taeyong got out, the others following hesitantly.

Their oldest brother opened the trunk and pulled out a big backpack, slinging it onto his shoulders.

“Let’s go,” he said with determination after slamming the trunk to a close.

“How are we even going?” Sicheng questioned, looking tired.

“You’ll see,” Taeyong smiled secretly. Donghyuck groaned. Why was he being so cryptic all of a sudden.

With Taeyong in the lead they started walking. It was a narrow path, Donghyuck holding onto Jisung’s hand tightly while Jungwoo grabbed Chenle. The nature was honestly beautiful. The air was crisp, the birds chirping happily and the sun peeking at them from behind the tall and proud trees. Lucas chatted animatedly as they walked.

“Hyung did you see the bug?”

“Hyung! Look! It’s a paw print!”

“Chenle-ah! Look at that snail! It’s huge!”

Donghyuck found himself enjoying their little trek. It wasn’t steep or wet or gross. It was nice. Really nice to experience some fresh air and listening to his brothers talking.

Jisung kept holding his hand until they eventually stopped for a water break. Jungwoo whined about being cold; Taeyong magically producing a hoodie from the backpack. Donghyuck scoffed a laugh. His brother was always prepared.

After they’d all gulped down some water Taeyong started walking again, chirpy as the birds with a lightness to his steps.

Donghyuck whistled happily while swinging Jisung’s hand back and forth between their bodies. The youngest smiled minimally, eyes focused on the path so he wouldn’t fall.

They walked for around half an hour until Taeyong shouted out in awe.

“We’re here!”

Donghyuck exhaled in relief, a sheen of sweat forming on his forehead already. He stepped closer to his other brothers, looking at the sight in front of them.

It was a cliff’s edge, facing the city, green grass covering the clearing. Donghyuck nodded in appreciation at the pretty view, rows of neat houses, explosions of colour, warm sunlight beating down on them, the sky a pretty cool shade of blue. Taeyong smiled and walked further into the clearing, shrugging off his backpack.

“So?” he said, turning to his brothers. Sicheng smiled widely in return, Chenle nodding in appreciation together with Donghyuck while Jungwoo and Lucas offered thumbs up. Jisung simply followed a soaring bird with his gaze, eyes wide and curious.

Taeyong started unpacking the bag while they explored the view and surroundings. He pulled out a sizable picnic blanket, several containers of food and drinks.
Donghyuck let go of Jisung when the youngest tugged out of his hold, trudging over to a section on the ground where a worm was crawling around. Donghyuck walked closer to the edge, mouth drawn into a seed smile at the bustling movements of the city. This viewpoint was even higher than the Ferris wheel.

Lucas had rushed off into a denser part of the woods, Jungwoo and Chenle following him.

“Chenle-ah!” Lucas called excitedly. The seven year old ran over to the tall middle schooler, holding his arm tightly. “It’s a hedgehog,” Lucas said with a hushed voice, pointing to the animal in front of them.

“Woah,” Chenle’s eyes widened. The creature was small, black eyes peering up at them.

“Can we feed it, Jungwoo-hyung?” Lucas asked, the implication lighting up his face with joy. Jungwoo nodded.

“Let’s get some food from Taeyong-hyung,” he decided. Chenle nodded with enthusiasm, grabbing Jungwoo’s hand to drag him back to where they came from.

“I’ll make sure he stays here,” Lucas called after them, determined.

“Okay, But don’t touch it Xuxi,” Jungwoo cautioned.

Chenle was panting excitedly, giggling, when he reached Taeyong who was sitting on the blanket, sorting out their meals.

“Hyung!” He called. “We saw a hedgehog! We wanna feed it!” Taeyong looked up from the containers, raising an eyebrow.

“Okay,” he consented. “I have no idea why they eat but try some fruit,” he said and pulled out a banana. “And make small pieces.”

“Thank you hyung!” Jungwoo let Chenle hold the banana while they hurried back into the woods.

Lucas was exactly where they’d left him, crouched down on the ground. He was staring intensely at the animal, black eyes looking back at him.

“Hyung,” Chenle spoke softly. He lifted the hand holding the banana. “We got food.”

“Cool!” Lucas smiled, white pearly teeth on display. “Let’s give it to him.”

“Are you sure it’s a boy?” Jungwoo questioned when they walked closer. Lucas frowned at the animal, looking closely, tilting his head to and fro.

“Nope,” he decided. “Lets give it to,” he stopped to think. “Fluffle.”

Chenle giggled. Jungwoo parted his lips in surprise.

“How does that even work. It’s not fluffy in the slightest.”

“Yes it is! Everyone is fluffy on the inside.”

Jungwoo sighed but crouched down next to his brother, Chenle almost crawling on the ground.
They peeled the banana and broke off a small piece, Chenle throwing it to the animal who curiously sniffed it before eating.

“*It worked!*” Chenle said with a happy smile. Lucas nodded vigorously.

“Yeah! Let’s give it some more!”

~

Taeyong sorted out the food before pulling up his portable speaker from the backpack, connecting it to his phone. Soft music played from the device, not too loudly. Taeyong nodded in satisfaction and breathed out in relief. The air and surroundings made him relax after the hectic weeks he’d had. He realized that he really needed something like this.

Taeyong took a couple of more deep breaths, eyes slipping shut. He made sure to exhale all his stressing thoughts and inhale the good air.

After a few seconds he decided to open his eyes again, feeling relaxed and well, and looked for his brothers. Lucas, Jungwoo and Chenle were nowhere in sight, probably feeding the hedgehog. Donghyuck was forcing Jisung to pose in front of the pretty view, getting down on his knees to take some pictures. Sicheng was standing alone, looking down the edge of the cliff, shoulders slouching. Taeyong frowned. Something was severely wrong, and he really needed to know what. Now he had no one to disturb him. No one to divert his attention. Now he could approach the subject properly.

So the eldest got up, stretching his sore limbs before walking over to his brother. Sicheng didn’t look up until Taeyong bumped their shoulders together. The younger was slightly taller. Taeyong gave him a small smile. Sicheng offered one back, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“How are you?” Taeyong said, looking at Sicheng who kept his eyes stubbornly focused on the distance from the edge to the ground below.

“I’m good,” Sicheng said, soullessly. Taeyong chewed his tongue in contemplation. He needed to approach this carefully.

“So were you with Kun yesterday?” That seemed to his a nerve. Sicheng frowned deeply, lips tugged down.

“No.”

“You’ve not been eating lunch together lately, is there something wrong?” He asked cautiously. Sicheng clenched the ground below his hands, gripping the grass.

“Nothing’s wrong.” Taeyong suppressed a sigh.

“So, what did you do last night?”

“I was with some friends.”

“Which ones?”

“You don’t know them.”
Taeyong frowned at the lack of response he was getting.

“Sicheng. I can see that something is wrong. Why won’t you tell me who you were with?”

“It’s nothing, hyung,” The younger finally looked him in the eyes, his brown pupils swimming with desperation. “Please drop it.”

“Sicheng-“

“Hyung,” he interrupted. “It doesn’t matter, okay. Nothing is wrong and who I hang out with is none of your business.”

Taeyong recoiled slightly at the harsh tone that was being used. Sicheng wasn’t usually like that at all, raising his voice or evading questions. Taeyong knew the younger didn’t mean it. He could see the guilt swarming his brother. But he also knew this conversation would continue going in circles if they kept this path.

“Okay,” he conceded. “It’s okay.” Sicheng looked abnormally relived with that answer. Taeyong simply scooted closer and put an arm around the other’s shoulders. Sicheng tensed up for a solid ten seconds before finally forcing himself to relax and putting his head down on Taeyong’s narrow shoulder. The oldest could feel the tension draining out of Sicheng at the comforting position, both of them looking out at the pretty view instead of down the cliff, facing forward instead of downward.

~

The day was spent in joy, all of them forgetting their stress and enjoying some fresh air and great company, laughing and keeping the mood happy. Even Sicheng seemed to fall into a good mood, smiling genuinely at Jisung and joking teasingly with Lucas. Taeyong felt like he had accomplished his mission.

Although now he knew he needed to pay more attention to Sicheng. The younger showed clear signs of distress when he’d been talking to Taeyong, which confirmed Taeyong’s theory that something was very wrong. He needed to find out exactly what and come up with a plan to fix the issue.

He needed to help Sicheng feel better. He needed to fix the problem so his brother could be happy.

Because that’s what Taeyong did. He always tried to keep his brothers happy and healthy, giving them all the love and care he could possibly conjure within his body. And now one of them looked to be neither happy nor healthy.

He had to fix it.
Taeyong made sure to spend all his break time the upcoming Monday wandering around the junior year’s halls. He was sure some of them were confused about him lurking, but he didn’t care. He was determined to see who Sicheng was hanging out with lately.

Johnny sent him messages, asking where he was, he responded that he had a family issue to deal with.

After walking around aimlessly, he finally gained sight on Sicheng. He pulled his cap down and tried to stay behind the corner, not wanting to be noticed. He saw that Sicheng was hanging out with some people he’d never seen before. They were standing around, leaning against some lockers. Every junior that walked past them greeted the girl standing next to Sicheng. She was wearing tight jeans and a revealing tank top. There was another girl on the other side of Sicheng, she wore a skirt and a haphazardly tucked in shirt. The two boys wore baggy jeans and T-shirts.

Taeyong frowned at the fake smile Sicheng was wearing while they spoke. He was clearly unhappy. Taeyong needed more information about these people.

Suddenly he saw Lisa walking down the hall, a girl with vibrant red hair next to her. Lisa was wearing a bright smile, keeping eye contact with the girl intensely. Taeyong remembered that Lisa was indeed a junior as well.

He stuck his head out the corner, trying not to be seen while calling out softly.
“Psst! Lisa!”

The blonde junior turned her head around with a confused expression, caramel coloured eyes landing on Taeyong and widening in surprise. She turned to the red head she’d been walking with and offered her a ‘I have to go but see you later!’

The red head looked slightly disappointed and confused but she nodded nonetheless. Lisa watched her walk away for a few seconds until she turned and snuck over to Taeyong, obviously noticing that he was trying to hide.

“What’s up, oppa?” She said quietly. Taeyong smiled sheepishly at her.

“Sorry for interrupting your flirting~” She rolled her eyes. “But I need some help.”

“With what?” She asked curiously. Taeyong looked left and right, seeing that no one was paying attention to them, and leaned around the corner to point at Sicheng and his companions.

“Who are those people with my brother?” He asked her urgently. Lisa leaned over and took a look, eyes widening. She stared for a few seconds before eventually leaning back in. Her pupils flitted
between the wall and his face for a couple of nerve wrecking seconds. Carefully she started speaking.

“The girl in the jeans is Ara. She’s like the queen bee of the junior classes. She’s really nice and kind, everyone loves her. Plus she’s pretty,” Lisa pondered. “The others are her friends. I don’t know much about them but...” Lisa trailed off uncertainly. Taeyong widened his eyes.

“But what?”

“I know they smoke, uh, stuff. And drink. Alcohol.” Taeyong stared at her incredulously. He leaned around the corner to stare at his brother before leaning back and staring at her again.

“Smoke.” He deadpanned. “Like cigarettes?” Lisa chewed her lip anxiously, nodding.

“And other stuff.”

“Stuff.”

Taeyong could barely begin to comprehend the situation. His brother was hanging with drug users?

The bell shrilly made its presence known, signaling the start of classes. Lisa looked torn.

“Oppa, I have to go. But let’s talk later during practice okay? Don’t do anything drastic.” Taeyong nodded, trying to look composed. Lisa hesitated before she slowly started walking away, worried gaze burning on his face.

Taeyong tried to look composed when he started walking out the school, completely disregarding the shrill bell, instead hurrying outside, collapsing on an empty bench. The school yard was empty, classes having started. Taeyong tried to breathe deeply, head pounding. Sicheng is involved with drugs and alcohol. Has he been using? Or drinking? Has he been doing something illegal? The thoughts were overwhelming and Taeyong felt like crying. He was such a failure. He had failed to keep his brother safe and happy. He had failed to notice in time and he had failed to help.

He had failed his brother so fucking bad.

And it was one of the worst feelings he had ever experienced.

His phone was vibrating. Probably Johnny or Jaehyun, wondering where he was. He was supposed to have class with them right now. But he couldn’t. He couldn’t deal. He couldn’t think. He couldn’t breathe.

He was a failure.

A failure.

A failure.

~

Jaehyun worried when Taeyong didn’t show up for English class. Johnny made up some shitty excuse about the silver haired male feeling sick and visiting the nurse. Ms Choi looked suspicious but she didn’t question them further.

Jaehyun couldn’t concentrate during the lecture, instead checking his phone under the desk and tapping his pen.
Halfway through the lesson Johnny nudged him in the side and he looked up to see the whole class staring. Ms Choi looked unimpressed when he couldn’t answer her question, as he had not been listening. She quickly noticed his phone and confiscated it.

This only made him more anxious.

What if something bad had happened? What if Taeyong was hurt?

The bell rang soon enough, signaling the end of class. Jaehyun and Johnny rushed out of the room, heading for the canteen. When they arrived the table was empty. Jaehyun frowned worriedly.

“Do you think something happened?” He asked Johnny. The tall senior sighed.

“I have no idea.”

They sat down at the table, deciding it was best to wait. Eventually the rest of their friend group trickled inside, looking confused at the absence of Taeyong.

“Where’s Yongie?” Ten asked.

“We don’t know,” Johnny answered. “He isn’t answering our texts or calls.”

“Did something happen?” Taeil asked, frowning.

“We literally have no idea,” Jaehyun emphasized. “He didn’t come to class. The last text we got was before class and it said he needed to take care of a family emergency.” They all fell silent. What could’ve happened?

A few minutes later they still hadn’t started eating and the canteen was almost full when the doors swung open. Jaehyun’s eyes widened at the sight. It was Taeyong. He looked slightly rushed, hair ruffled and eyes wide. His cap was in his hand. The senior smoothed a hand through his hair, inhaling deeply and putting the cap on before walking towards them.

“You okay?” Yuta asked as soon as the other reached their table. Taeyong looked at him with Bambi eyes.

“Yeah. I’m fine. I just needed to help one of my brothers,” he said and took a seat.

“With what?” Doyoung asked curiously. Taeyong blanched.

“I’d rather not talk about it right now. I’ll tell you later,” he quietly stated and pulled out his lunch, shoulders looking even more narrow than usual. The occupants at the table exchanged worried looks. Doyoung seemed like he was about to say something further but Jaehyun quickly pinned him with a look. They decided not to press further. Taeyong would tell them soon enough.

So instead they pulled out their own lunches and started eating, chatting like normal while trying to ignore the gloominess radiating from Taeyong.

~

Ten frowned when he walked together with Taeyong to the dance halls. The other senior had a crease in his eyebrows, eyes looking downcast and mouth pinched. His whole posture screamed of exhaustion and forlornness.

Ten opened his mouth to speak just as they reached the halls, not having the chance to say anything when Taeyong urgently disappeared inside. Ten followed with a sigh. He saw the silver haired male
walk quickly over to Lisa. She looked distressed as well, eyebrows furrowed as she saw Taeyong. Ten was about to go over there when Momo intercepted him. He threw on questioning glance Taeyong’s way before falling into conversation with Momo.

~

“Oppa,” Lisa said, voice unsure. Taeyong tried to smile, he failed apparently, judging from Lisa’s frowning face.

“Hey Lisa,” he offered. He needed some more information about Sicheng’s new friends. He gestured towards the floor, dropping down and pulling his bag off of his back. Lisa plopped down next to him. “Lisa, what more can you tell me about Ara and her friends?” The Thai girl looked despaired.

“This is a bad idea,” she mumbled before sighing. “I don’t know much. Just that she’s very popular. I know that sometimes they go to college parties.” Taeyong was trying to hold onto his stoic facade but he could feel the cracks in his carefully crafted mask. “Her friends are really something. There’s the guy, Joe. He’s like her boyfriend but not really. There were rumours that they had gotten pregnant and she had aborted the baby, which caused like a rift in their relationship or something.”

Taeyong could feel his eyebrow twitching. Lisa seemed to notice his distress. “Um.. Are you okay?”

“Yes. I’m completely fine,” Taeyong tried to sound upbeat. “By the way. Who was that girl you were talking to this morning?”

Lisa smiled involuntarily. A small crease remaining between her brows at the abrupt change of subjects. But she figured Taeyong needed a change not to break down. And she was absolutely right.

“Rosé. She’s my friend.”

“Uh huh.” Chungha who had recently entered the room walked over to them and sat down. “She’s your crush more like it.” Lisa scoffed and hit the brunette’s shoulder.

“We’re friends,” she insisted. Jonghyun had migrated towards them by then.

“Okay kids, let’s not fight,” he placated with a teasing smile. Taeyong tried to focus but his mind kept drifting off to Sicheng. Was he with his friends now? Was he doing drugs? Was he smoking?

“What, I’m only stating the truth,” Chungha insisted, a teasing smile on her face as well. Lisa groaned loudly, dropping her head in her hands.

“I hate you guys,” she complained albeit with a smile.

“Love you too,” Seulgi joked, having heard the last bits of their teasing and now sitting next to Taeyong.

“Okay!” Ten called out loudly. “Let’s start practice!”

Excitedly, all the members of the team migrated towards the centre of the room, Taeyong sighing anxiously, hands shaking. He knew the practice would be hell since he wouldn’t be able to focus with the thoughts he was having. What if Sicheng would end up hurt or dead? What if he got addicted to drugs? What if he got alcohol poisoning? So many possibilities and Taeyong didn’t know what to do.

He needed a plan.
But first he needed to get through practice. So he rose from his position on the floor, took three deep breaths, and joined the others.
When Taeyong got home the first thing he did was to look for Sicheng. Luckily he found the older in the living room, playing with Jisung and smiling happily when Jisung laughed.

Taeyong bit his lip raw as he looked at his brothers. He couldn’t believe he had missed such a crucial change in Sicheng’s friend circle. He felt crushing despair gripping at his heart, making his throat tighten. His brother. His little brother who was so young yet mature. His little brother who used to have a bright smile, now dimmed with sadness.

“Hey hyung,” Sicheng suddenly noticed his presence. “How was practice?” He asked then, handing Jisung a Barbie dress for the youngest to put on a doll. Taeyong tried to muster a smile.

“It was great. Did you eat?” He hoped they wouldn’t notice the hitch in his voice.

“Yeah, Hyuckie left food in the fridge if you want some,” Sicheng relayed, focus wavering between Jisung and Taeyong. The oldest was glad that the focus wasn’t entirely on him. Sicheng would surely notice that something was wrong then.

“No thanks, I already ate,” he lied through his teeth, feeling his stomach lurch at the thought of food. Sicheng looked at him with a raised eyebrow but didn’t question further. “I’m going upstairs,” Taeyong decided. Sicheng shrugged.

“Okay hyung,” then he went back to playing with Jisung.

Taeyong exhaled shakily before hurrying up the stairs as calmly as he could. When he reached his room he closed the door and collapsed on his bed.

What was he supposed to do? He couldn’t just tell Sicheng to not be friends with Ara and her group. He could technically ask if Sicheng had been doing drugs or alcohol. But somehow he felt like that wouldn’t be a good idea.

Maybe he could talk to Kun?

Or should he just wait it out?

So many thoughts were swirling in his head and he didn’t know how to make sense of any of them.

Taeyong felt a single tear escape his eye, quickly wiping it away with his finger.

He couldn’t cry now. He needed to help Sicheng. He needed to figure out a way to make his brother happy again and make sure he was safe.

Still, the tears stubbornly made their way down his face. Taeyong swallowed a sob and tried to gather himself again, but the voices were saying the same thing over and over again.
Johnny worried when he saw Taeyong the next day. The ice prince looked worse for wear, eyes downcast, shoulders drooping and frown permanently attached to his forehead. The tall senior decided that they should cheer him up somehow.

He wrote in their old group chat, the one without Taeyong, and made sure that everyone had a free hour at the same time. Luckily all their schedules matched up.

So when the time came, Johnny marched up to Taeyong, threw an arm over his shoulders and smiled charmingly.

"Hello there mr. Lee," Johnny said. Taeyong raised an eyebrow.

"Uhm-" "It is I. Johnny. Your designated driver." "Wha-" "Just follow me."

Johnny pulled Taeyong along, steering him out of school and towards the parking lot. Doyoung, Taeil, Ten, Jaehyun and Yuta were all there by the pickup truck, waving when they noticed Johnny and Taeyong.

"What’s going on?" Taeyong questioned gently as Johnny ushered him up at the very back, Ten, Jaehyun and Yuta following him up.

Doyoung, Taeil and Johnny took their seats inside the car.

"We’re going to the mall," Yuta said with a blinding smile, creeping close to Taeyong and putting his head down on the other’s shoulder. Ten was scrolling through his phone.

"We all have free hour right now so why not?" He said mischievously. Jaehyun had taken the spot on Taeyong’s other side, their shoulders and knees bumping occasionally. Taeyong looked at all of them with some doubt but he didn’t protest.

"Okay I guess," he simply said, causing Ten to laugh.

"Oh Yongie, it’s more than okay. It’s gonna be fucking awesome."

Jaemin lit up every time they walked past a food court. Mark sighed.

"I want hot dogs!" The brunet basically squealed and hit Mark’s shoulder excitedly. Mark rolled his eyes.

"C’mon Jaemin-ah, we’re already late let’s hurry," he tried to remind the younger that they had a
purpose with being at the mall.

Jaemin pouted but hurried nonetheless.

Mark found himself smiling when he noticed the others.

Jeno, Renjun and Donghyuck were sitting on a bench in the centre of the mall, looking at something on Donghyuck’s phone. Renjun had a hand on the peach haired sophomore’s shoulder, while Jeno was leaning his head on his other shoulder. They were laughing loudly at whatever was playing on Donghyuck’s phone, Mark’s boyfriend throwing a leg over Jeno’s knee.

Jaemin cheered happily at the sight of his boyfriends, running towards them. Mark snorted when Donghyuck got up instead and Jaemin ran into his arms.

“Hyuckie!” The brunet shouted happily. “I missed you!”

“I missed you too Nana!” Donghyuck laughed. Renjun and Jeno looked on incredulously as the exchange occurred, trading gazes full of mirth with Mark.

“Hey!” Renjun protested teasingly. “We’re your boyfriends!”

“Aww poor babies,” Jaemin cooed and let go of Donghyuck to peck his boyfriends’ lips. Donghyuck was still smiling happily when he turned to Mark. Mark smiled back and happily caught Donghyuck when the younger threw himself into his arms.

“Hey,” Mark whispered, lips pressing lightly on Donghyuck’s forehead.

“Hi,” Donghyuck laughed and snuggled closer.

“Okay lovebirds!” Renjun burst their bubble. “Let’s get going! I want food.”

~

Taeil laughed for, probably, the hundredth time during their mall visit. They had been going into almost every store and trying silly outfits or accessories. Johnny had looked especially ridiculous in a grandma dress and huge sunglasses. Taeil was reminded of the Harry Potter boggart scene. Johnny did make a good Snape with his dark hair.

Taeil also noticed that Taeyong had been having fun. He figured their little trip had actually helped and not been a complete bust.

Their last destination for the day was a café. More specifically ‘Décalcomanie Café’. Doyoung suggested it, saying that he knew the owner and the food was actually pretty good.

From the outside it looked like a stylish modern café, the exterior screaming luxury. Inside, mirrors lined the walls to a certain extent and clean tables paired with proper chairs took up the space. A stage was placed in the far right corner, the counter being placed right at the entrance. A performance was going on, four women harmonizing beautifully and dancing.

Taeil couldn’t help but smile, they were really good.

Doyoung led them to a big booth, grabbing Taeyong and pulling him into the middle first, the others slid in after them.

“This place looks great,” Jaehyun said with awe, looking around curiously.
“I agree,” Taeyong nodded and offered a genuine smile.

“Good day my dear customers!” A waitress had approached them. She was wearing a suit, hair in a ponytail and cut bangs falling down across her forehead. Her cheeks were chubby and her smile was blinding. “I am your waitress Wendy! Here are your menus,” she distributed the menus. “Let me know when you’re ready to order!”

“Thank you,” they chorused and she left with a smile.

“Wah this looks good!”

“No look at this!”

“They have dessert too!”

Taeil listened to the chaos going on around him while scanning the menu. His eyes couldn’t help but drift towards the stage, the four women still performing avidly. The cafe was moderately crowded and the audience was definitely immersed with them.

“Taeil,” Doyoung spoke. Taeil whipped his head around. “What are you getting?”

“Oh,” Taeil pondered, looking down at the menu again. “Pork belly I think.”

“Ah! Me too!” Taeyong called out happily. Taeil laughed at his enthusiasm. Wendy had migrated back towards their table.

“May I take your orders?” She said, pen ready. They all told her their orders and drink preferences, the waitress diligently writing it down before leaving with another smile.

The four women had stopped performing and was making their way over towards their table. Doyoung was waving like crazy at them.

“Hey Yongsun noona!” He greeted the first women who reached their table, she had long cascading blonde hair and a dimpled smile.

“Doyoungie! My favourite dongsaeng!” She exclaimed.

“You did great up there!” Doyoung said with an assuring expression, addressing the other three as well.

“Thank you!” They all chorused in various forms.

“Guys,” Doyoung then said. “This is Yongsun noona. She’s the owner. And these are her best friends and group members Hyejin, Moonbyul and Wheein noonas.”

Taeil greeted the four politely together with his friends.

“Nice to meet you all,” Wheein said, grinning at them. “Anyone up for an open mic?” Taeil’s eyes sparkled in interest and he turned to face Doyoung who smiled back teasingly.

“Sure! Let’s go!” The bunny like smile made its appearance, Doyoung leaning over and slapping Jaehyun’s shoulder to get him to join them. The other looked embarrassed but eventually got up after encouragements from Ten and Johnny.

The three made their way over to the stage and got situated. Johnny, Yuta and Ten were whopping loudly, Jaehyun laughing from embarrassment as they stared out at the sizable crowd. Yongsun and
Hyejin made fighting motions with their hands and Doyoung laughed at them. Taeil picked up a guitar from the corner do the stage. He exchanged looks with Doyoung and Jaehyun right before he started strumming on the guitar. Taeil smiled happily, earning smiles back from his friends. And then they sang.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my day and leave a kudos if you liked it 😊
Taeyong sat with a wide smile on his face throughout the whole performance. He didn’t know his friends were so good at singing. They had been perfectly harmonised and their high notes were out of this world. He couldn’t even describe everything he was feeling. His heart was fluttering.

When they returned to their seats they got a whole round of applause from Yuta, Ten, Johnny and Taeyong. Jaehyun scratched his neck awkwardly. Taeyong laughed.

“You were great,” the silver haired male assured once the other had taken his seat next to him. Jaehyun looked at him with sparkling eyes and a dimpled smile. Taeyong felt his heart skip a beat.

“Thank you,” Jaehyun said bashfully.

Their food arrived shortly after and they all dug in.

Taeyong was feeling much better than he had before. It had taken his mind off Sicheng’s situation for a while and let him just enjoy some time with his friends.

Halfway through eating a loud shout reached them.

“Hyungs!” Taeyong looked up and saw Mark coming towards them, Donghyuck’s hand clutched in his, Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun following after them closely.


“Hey, he’s *my* literal little brother!”

“Well he’s my other half.”

“Well I raised him.”

“And I taught him everything you forgot to mention.”

“Guys!” Taeyong laughed and stopped the argument before it escalated. The newcomers had reached them by then, Donghyuck enthusiastically climbing across the booth to hug Taeyong, pushing Jaehyun to the side.

“Mark! You should hug me too!” Johnny opened his long arms widely. Jaehyun protested.

“No! Hug me instead!”
Mark looked completely lost and sort of fondly disgusted.

“I’ll give you a hug hyung!” Jaemin exclaimed frantically and threw himself into Johnny’s arms. The senior laughed and hugged Jaemin back. Mark still looked torn between disgust and fondness.

Donghyuck was casually stealing Taeyong’s food, the older not doing anything about it.

“Let’s make room!” Yuta said with a grin, causing them to huddle up close together, trying to find space to fit in Mark, Jaemin, Jeno and Renjun. Somehow Renjun ended up next to Ten, Jeno with Jaehyun and Mark next to Donghyuck, on the other side of Jaehyun. Jaemin stayed close to Johnny.

They all chatted happily and ordered a few more dishes to have enough for everyone.

“Great! I’m starving,” Jaemin complained and eyed the food hungrily.

Taeyong happily participated in conversations going on around the table, his mind filling up with warmth and comfort as he saw Donghyuck lean his head on Mark’s shoulder. When Doyoung flicked Jeno’s nose teasingly. When Yuta fed Ten some pork. Jaemin and Johnny ganging up on Jaehyun.

Taeyong felt safe and comfortable.

When they were done eating they didn’t leave. Rather they ordered some drinks and dessert.

While they were getting served Donghyuck pulled something out of his pocket.


“Those look awesome Hyuck,” Taeyong nodded in awe.

“Let me read you!” The younger demanded and started opening the package. Taeyong fondly smiled and waited while Jaehyun helped Donghyuck pull out the instructions and directions.

While they were getting sorted Johnny and Ten sipped their drinks.

“Hey hyung?” Mark said, “What’s the place where they produce a lot of bananas again?” Johnny looked up from his drink and raised an eyebrow.

“Ama...” Mark caught on quickly.

“John!” They erupted in laughter, Jaehyun snorting from where he was sorting cards.

Ten looked between them confusedly. He frowned.

“I don’t get it,” he said in English. “Can you repeat that please?” Mark laughed as he tried explaining the joke, luckily Ten caught on quickly.

“Oh! John’s banana?” Jaehyun started laughing hard at that, Johnny processing for a second before his head fell down on the table with a groan. Mark was turning red because he knew that Ten, for a fact, had made out with his brother.

“Oh my god,” Mark exclaimed and covered his face with his hands, laughing.

The Non-English speakers at the table decided not to question it.
Donghyuck had finally sorted out his cards and started shuffling the deck.

Taeyong leaned his head on his palm while he waited patiently, listening in on Renjun, Taeil and Doyoung discussing a book they’d all read.

Just then a chorus of notification sounds made their way through the table, all the sophomores and Mark looking confused. Jeno picked up his phone to check and his eyes widened impossibly. Jaehyun and Johnny both leaned over to see the cause of Jeno’s expression. Johnny’s eyebrows immediately furrowed.

“What happened?” Donghyuck questioned confusedly as Jaehyun gave him a hesitating look.

“Mark hyung, you should check your phone,” Jeno said worriedly. Mark looked between everyone at the table questioningly, mostly everyone looking clueless.

He slowly fished his phone up from his back pocket and swiped it open. His eyes grew shocked and his mouth parted slightly. Donghyuck frowned and leaned forward to check his screen. A gasp left his glossed lips.

“What the hell!” He cursed and grabbed Mark’s phone, scrolling. Jeno was showing his phone to the rest of the people at the table and Taeyong finally understood what the fuss was about.

It was a picture, sent out to probably every junior and sophomore at school, of Mark and Donghyuck at the town fair. They were cuddled up together, Mark looking at Donghyuck affectionately, the caption reading:

MARK LEE IS GAY

Taeyong frowned angrily and looked at Mark who seemed to be in a state of disbelief.

“Who sent that?” Doyoung demanded, looking indignant. Jeno shook his head helplessly.

“It’s an unknown number.”

“We got it too,” Renjun and Jaemin had checked their phones as well. Donghyuck gave Mark’s phone back to him and pulled out his own, confirming that he also got the photo indeed. He looked crushed.

Mark still hadn’t spoken. Johnny worriedly reached across the table to face his little brother better.

“Mark.” The junior shook out of his stupor.

“I’m fine,” he assured quickly. Taeyong pursed his lips in concern.

Johnny’s mouth opened to say something more but Mark cut him off.

“I promise hyung. I’m okay,” the junior mustered a smile and looked to Donghyuck instead, grabbing his hand under the table.

“We should head back,” he said, Donghyuck searching his eyes for a few seconds before nodding. The youngest people tangled themselves out of the booth and started to leave. Taeyong felt at a loss for words. Of course he felt bad for Mark, but he also felt bad for his own little brother. He knew it was different for someone like Mark to be exposed like that, being a popular kid and a jock. But Donghyuck was also affected.

“Hyuckie, we’ll talk later,” he called after them and Donghyuck nodded at him before they left the
~

Taeyong couldn’t help but let his mind wander as they left the café to head back to the pickup truck.

He walked at the back of their group, eyebrows furrowed and biting his nails absentmindedly. Donghyuck and Mark has basically been outed to the school. Who would even do such a thing and why? He couldn’t wrap his head around it. He knew their school wasn’t used to people of other sexualities and he knew they would not be precisely okay with it. This was South Korea after all. The progression was slow.

And then Sicheng. How was he going to approach that. He needed to try and talk to his brother. Yes, that’s probably the best way to move forward with the issue.

Yuta sidled up to him, bumping their shoulders together gently.

“What’s up,” Yuta said with a hesitant grin. Taeyong looked at him with worry-filled eyes.

“Just thinking,” he answered, feeling immensely tired.

“Is this about today or yesterday?” Yuta asked then, searching Taeyong’s eyes earnestly.

“Both,” Taeyong sighed.

“What happened yesterday? You said you would tell us?” Yuta quickly backtracked though. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but we’re worried.”

Taeyong inhaled deeply. He could trust Yuta. He felt assured in that knowledge. He trusted Yuta.

“You remember Sicheng, my brother?”

“Of course,” Yuta affirmed.

“I found out he has been spending time with some people,” Taeyong said, voice shaking slightly. “And I think it’s a really bad idea. He’s just been looking so unhappy lately, and he ditched a very good person for these people. It feels wrong. So wrong. And I don’t know how to fix it.”

Yuta felt his insides flipping. Sicheng had not told Taeyong about the arrest. Of course Yuta had had a feeling that he wouldn’t, but he wanted to believe he would. He was wrong apparently.

Guilt tore at his heart. He couldn’t keep this from Taeyong. He just couldn’t. Seeing how worried and exhausted Taeyong looked, Yuta just couldn’t keep it a secret. Not even for Sicheng.

“Hey,” he softly gathered Taeyong’s attention. “Come with me.” Taeyong looked confused when Yuta grabbed his hand securely, pulling him away from the group. Doyoung looked back at them, questioning.

“We’ll meet you at the car,” Yuta mouthed at the other. Doyoung opened his mouth to protest but ultimately decided against it.

Yuta pulled Taeyong over to a secluded bench in the corner between two stores. The silver haired male looked at him expectantly.
“Taeyong, I know I probably should’ve told you this earlier and I’m so sorry for not doing that,” Yuta took a deep breath to calm himself. “Sicheng was arrested, for vandalism.” Taeyong’s mouth fell open.

“He-he was what?!” Taeyong hissed.

“Arrested. Yeah, I picked him up from the police station.”

Taeyong’s eyes were flickering.

“How did I miss this! How did I not notice him being arrested?”

“If he didn’t tell you then of course you wouldn’t notice,” Yuta tried to comfort the other who seemed to be in despair.

“He used to tell me everything,” Taeyong’s voice lost all strength. “I don’t understand.” The senior ran a hand through his hair, gripping at the strands. Yuta scooted closer and wrapped the other up in his arms, holding on close as Taeyong trembled from the overwhelming thoughts. Guys noticed just how thin Taeyong was, his bony shoulders coming in contact with Yuta’s arms.

“You haven’t done anything wrong. I think he’s just trying not to be a burden? Maybe he’s ashamed to tell you.” Taeyong nodded in defeat against his chest.

“Maybe,” his voice cracked.

They took a couple of minutes to just sit and let Taeyong process. Yuta kept holding him close, trying to induce some sort of comfort in the other. Tension slowly drained from Taeyong’s shoulders.

Eventually he breathed in deeply, gathering himself.

“How come you picked him up?” He asked into Yuta’s shoulder.

“He called. We met at the grocery store a few weeks ago and exchanged numbers,” Yuta explained. Taeyong smiled against his shoulder.

“That’s nice.”

Yuta nodded wistfully.

“Yeah.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok the banana joke was so bad I apologise >_< I’m cringing sm rm ahhh
But I remember someone requesting it some chapters ago and I thought it was a fun idea so here it finally is lol kill meee
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

This is getting so long I can’t believe it >_< I’ve never written this much of anything and we’re obviously not close to done yet XD
Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter !!!

Mark parted with them as soon as they reached the school, Donghyuck watching him go with a worried frown. Classes were about to start in ten minutes and Mark was walking right into the chaos emerging from the school. Their popular, kind, friendly, polite and handsome star junior basketball player had just been outed. Donghyuck had seen numerous posts and discussions happening online while they’d taken the bus back to school. The junior classes were going crazy. And not positively.

Mark didn’t look back as he walked into school, keeping his head low. Donghyuck sighed softly, Renjun coming up and putting an arm around him. The Chinese male eyed him worriedly, squeezing his hip supportively.

“You know Mark hyung puts a lot of pressure on himself,” Renjun started speaking carefully. It was one of the rare occurrences where Huang Renjun was actually sincerely concerned. “He always thinks of other people and their needs. Of their views on him. He isn’t used to people disliking him. He always tries to be his best for everyone, because that’s what’s expected of him.”

“I know, Injunnie,” Donghyuck said, feeling sad and angry at the whole situation. He had to find out who had posted the photo.

“You know he’s really in love with you right?” Renjun said with a small genuine smile. Donghyuck felt his heartbeat accelerate. “So you shouldn’t worry about him blowing this out of proportion and you shouldn’t worry about any backlash. We’ve got your back.”

Donghyuck nodded, head leaning on Renjun’s, cheeks pressed together. Renjun allowed the contact for a while until he split them up.

“Let’s get to class.”

Donghyuck smiled at him.

“Thanks Injunnie.”

“That’s what friends are for.”

~

Sicheng gulped as he looked at the photo Ara presented to him. She looked almost euphoric after receiving it. Joe was sitting next to her, studying the very same picture on his own phone. Sicheng couldn’t believe this. His brother had been outed and he was not happy about it. Who would be so impeccably petty to do such a thing?

“Ha!” Ara huffed. “I can’t believe someone actually outed Mark Lee. He’s the school’s sweetheart,”
she cooed mockingly, typing on her phone. Sicheng felt helpless. She apparently didn’t seem to care that someone’s life might’ve just been ruined. And Joe kept stubbornly quiet.

“Sorry about your brother though,” Ara nodded at Sicheng, eyes still on her phone. “Although I doubt anyone would care about him. It wasn’t really a surprise. Mark Lee though. That’s gonna descend into hell.” She looked oddly satisfied.

“He deserves it,” Joe finally spoke. His eyes were narrowed. “If he’s a fucking homo then he should go to hell. Both of them.” Sicheng felt anger bubble up in him, but also fear. Joe sounded positively venomous. His eyes darkening and lips set in a thin line. Ara simply shrugged, still on her phone. Sicheng felt like screaming. And he also felt like crying.

He was so pathetic that he couldn’t even defend his own brother. He was a horrible person.

~

As Yuta laid in bed that night, his finger hovered over Sicheng’s number in his contact list. He contemplated calling the younger but decided against it. It was sort of late after all.

A text then. Yuta hesitated as he opened a new conversation.

hiii sichengie my favourite dongsaeng. it’s your favourite hyung ^_^ lol your imagination truly runs wild Yuta hyung there is nothing wrong with my imagination excuse you i beg to differ you can beg all you want and I’ll still remain awesome ;)

wink faces are so outdated how old are you again? ouch that stung, wink faces are superior my dear sicheng suuuure leave me alone you demon child

ok sicheng sichneh sichneg sichengaaa

wow hyung you already want me back? you’re such a pain seriously ;)

~

That same night, Taeyong entered Donghyuck’s room stealthily. The younger was sitting at his desk,
shuffling through his new tarot cards, face freshly washed and void of makeup, an old ratty T-shirt on which was Taeyong’s. Taeyong closed the door behind him gently, walking in to sit on Donghyuck’s bed. The younger looked up after a few seconds of silence. Taeyong smiled tenderly, patting the space beside him. Donghyuck’s lips were fixed into a pout, eyes glossy as he moved to his bed, burrowing into his thin older brother.

Taeyong scooted them backwards so he would be able to lean on the wall.

“How was school?” The older asked.

“It wasn’t that different, some people gave me looks. But otherwise it was fine,” Donghyuck sighed. “I don’t know about Mark hyung though. All the answers I’ve gotten when I texted are variations of ‘I’m fine’ which I do not believe for a second.”

Taeyong hummed thoughtfully. “I could ask Johnny, if you want?”

“Actually that would be nice, would you please?” The pout intensified, puppy eyes staring up at Taeyong. The older laughed and plucked his phone from his pocket, still embracing Donghyuck while texting his tall friend.

The response arrived seconds later.

“He’s okay, and he’s sleeping apparently,” Taeyong relayed. Donghyuck frowned and sighed.

“I’ll try and weasel it out of him tomorrow,” he decided.

“Just don’t push to hard. You know that this sort of topic is very difficult for some people, try to stay by his side and support him instead of pushing,” Taeyong advised. Donghyuck made an affirmative noise, burying his face in Taeyong’s sweater.

“How are you feeling? About this whole ordeal.”

“I don’t know,” Donghyuck’s voice was muffled. “I’ve been so busy thinking of Mark hyung that I didn’t even have time to feel anything.”

“Then feel now. What are your feelings saying?” Donghyuck was quiet for some time before finally answering.

“I feel hopeless, hyung. I can’t help Mark hyung. I can’t figure out who sent the picture and I can’t even figure out how Mark hyung is even feeling.”

“You shouldn’t dwell on things you cannot change baby,” Taeyong’s voice was hushed as Donghyuck’s voice grew teary. “What are you feeling for yourself? Focus on your emotions. Forget everybody else for a second.”

“I... I feel exposed.” There it was. What Taeyong had been looking for. “We were outed. And I guess most people knew about me, or suspected it. But we still lost our right to decide when we wanted to go public. We weren’t offered a choice. I feel awful.” Donghyuck’s voice was gradually losing strength and stability. Taeyong clutched him closer.

“That’s good. It’s good to put words on your feelings, honey.” Taeyong soothed. “It must be really upsetting to be outed like that. And it is so unfair towards you and Mark. Frankly it sucks. But you’ve got to make do with what you have. You and Mark are still together. You have your best friends and a lot of supportive brothers. And hyungs. Try to focus on the good things.”
Donghyuck nodded in agreement, sniffling slightly.

“I promise it’s going to calm down and be fine soon enough. There is always sunshine after rain.”

Donghyuck snorted at his cheesy metaphor. But he smiled nonetheless. “Thank you hyung.”

“Of course,” Taeyong assured. They sat still for a few minutes, chatting softly about whatever popped into their minds until Taeyong decided they should sleep.

“I love you, my sunshine,” Taeyong said cheekily and kissed Donghyuck’s dyed hair as he got up. The younger scrunched his nose but laughed in response.

“Love you too, hyung.”

~

Taeyong popped his head into Lucas and Jungwoo’s room, finding both of them in their beds. He walked over and kissed them good night, before treading over the hallway to Chenle’s and Jisung’s room. The younger was fast asleep in Chenle’s bed, a book fallen onto their laps. It was one of the easiest read ones. Taeyong assumed Chenle had practiced reading on their maknae. He kissed both their foreheads and removed the book before turning off the light.

Lastly, he headed for Sicheng’s room. The second oldest was already in bed, staring at the ceiling thoughtfully, his pone lying on his nightstand. Taeyong knocked on the open door, Sicheng jerking slightly before looking at him.

“Hey hyung,” he offered quietly, voice raspy. Taeyong smiled and walked inside.

“Scoot,” Taeyong ordered and Sicheng obeyed, making room on the bed. Taeyong crept under the comforter, turning to face Sicheng. This was something they’d often did when they were younger, sleeping in the same bed and talking while facing each other in the dark. Taeyong had done that with all of his brothers at least once before.

“What were you thinking about?” Taeyong asked softly. Sicheng fiddled with the pillow case nimbly.

“I don’t know,” he dismissed the question easily enough. Taeyong reached out a hand to grab his fidgeting one.

“I talked to Yuta today.” Sicheng’s eyes flickered nervously at Taeyong’s words.

“Oh?” His voice sounded choked.

“He told me...” Taeyong had to take a deep breath. “That you’d been arrested?” He managed to catch his brother’s eyes, seeing the guilt, the betrayal, the shame. So much shame.

The younger remained quiet, avoiding his gaze.

“I’m not mad.” Taeyong did not like the silence. “I am just so worried. And I’m so sorry.” At that Sicheng finally looked up.

“Why are you sorry?” He asked incredulously.

“I should’ve paid more attention to you. I’m so sorry,” Taeyong felt his eyes watering.

“No no,” Sicheng frantically tried to tell him. “It’s not, hyung. It’s not. I promise I’m fine. I’m great
even, it was just a mistake. The arrest.”

“Sicheng, you’re not okay. I know you’re not. Be honest with me, please,” Taeyong was almost begging. Sicheng’s eyes hardened with determination.

“Hyung. I’m fine. There’s nothing to worry about. I promise.”

“Sicheng-“

“Hyung you need to sleep, and I’m really tired. Can we continue this some other day?” Taeyong felt speechless. He had absolutely no clue how he would get through to his brother. Talking wasn’t working. At all.

“But-“

“Good night hyung!” The cheery tone was so incredibly fake, Taeyong felt like crying again.

“Sicheng-“

“Hyung seriously.” The look in Sicheng’s eyes was downright desperate, like he was hurting. Taeyong swallowed thickly and let go of his brother’s hand, gracefully slipping out from underneath the covers. He stood by the bed for a few seconds, eyes worried, before he leaned down to kiss Sicheng’s forehead.

“Good night. Love you,” he said, sincerity dripping from him in riveting amounts. Then he headed for the door.

“Love you too,” Sicheng whispered just as Taeyong closed the door behind himself.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me your thoughts in the comments ^_^
Mark walked the halls on autopilot. He could feel all the eyes of his fellow peers following him as he went on with his day. No guys came up for a bro hug, as Donghyuck would call it, and no girls said cheerful hellos when he walked past them. All he got was avoidance.

Mark didn’t know how to cope without people greeting him and being friendly. He felt completely shut out, he felt isolated. And so alone. He felt like a criminal. Like he’d done something bad to deserve all of the resentful looks he was receiving. To deserve the cold shoulder he was dealt. As if loving a boy was wrong and dirty.

At the same time he couldn’t help but be mad. Someone had outed them. Someone had caused this whole mess. And he wanted to know who it was.

Anger was also directed at the students at his school. For being ignorant, bigoted and homophobic. He was reminded of all the times he’d seen Donghyuck being treated badly or with contempt, even before the picture was leaked, and he felt a new sense of respect for his boyfriend. Donghyuck was so strong. Mark felt proud. He couldn’t believe Donghyuck was his boyfriend. They were so vastly different yet they were attracted to each other. Like magnets, if Mark could use the most cliche comparison ever which would’ve earned him a smack from Donghyuck had he said it out loud.

The thought brought a small smile to his face, and suddenly he felt just a bit lighter. He had Donghyuck, he had his best friends. He had his brother and his hyungs. He wasn’t alone. Not really. But it still sucked.

The looks had been fine to endure though, he figured they would calm down eventually. What really got him was the locker room.

He was the first one there, about to change into his basketball uniform, when the door opened roughly. He tensed slightly, basketball jersey halfway over his head. Several footsteps sounded, Mark quickly pulling the shirt over his head, about to leave the room and head into the gym instead when a body blocked his path.

“Where you headed, Lee?” It was the exact same junior that had been tormenting Donghyuck a couple of weeks ago. Mark felt his heart drop at the sight of him. Mark tried to give him a polite smile.

“The gym,” he explained, although he knew that they knew that. The junior smirked and walked closer to him, forcing Mark to back up. The other people, team members, who had come in with the junior started crowding him.

“You going out to your boyfriend?” The junior spat. “And your freaky friends?” Mark’s eyes narrowed.
“Cmon, don’t talk about my friends, man,” he protested.

“Why? Huh? It’s true. I’m only stating facts here. Your friends are fucking freaks. With their gay shit, all three of them. It’s disgusting and wrong,” he was spouting venom.

“Shut up,” Mark’s voice was quiet but dripping with contained rage.

“At least they stay quiet. Not like your boyfriend. He’s got a fucking blabbermouth. Running around and wearing those ugly ass clothes. And makeup. Is he a fucking girl or what?” Mark’s fists curled up tightly.

“And you? You a faggot now or what? You should prance around in dresses, right? What the hell you doing on a sports team huh? Go join your disgusting friends on the bleachers instead.”

Mark hit him first.

The chaos that erupted was noisy and overwhelming. They grabbed Mark by the arms and flung him into the lockers, causing him to fall to the ground. The junior that had been talking shit laughed maniacally and walked over to him. He delivered a harsh kick to his ribs, Mark choking on the pain. The junior started pummeling him with his fists, Mark holding his arms up to try and protect himself.

He managed to kick with his leg and hit the junior in the shin, dragging himself up so they were at the same level. Then Mark punched him in the face, his stomach throbbing and his vision blurry.

So of his team members grabbed him by the arms and kept him still while his attacker gathered himself from the blow. Mark was panting harshly as the bully looked up, eyes dark and beady.

“You’re gonna pay for that, Lee,” then they started dragging him, towards the showers. Mark struggled, trying to free himself from his captors. He couldn’t believe they were his team mates. People he’d known for years, people he was on good terms with.

A shower was turned on, water icy cold and they pushed him under, causing him to slip and fall to the floor. Mark gasped at the iciness that hit him, vision obstructed by the water as he tried to crawl away from the cold.

Hands held him in place and he was shivering like mad, trying to jerkily break out of the offending grip.

Just then the hands were gone and the water turned off. Mark’s hearing slowly tuned back in to Yuta’s loud voice, Johnny backing him up. Gentle hands landed on Mark’s cheeks, a finger tapping his bruised cheekbone carefully. Mark shivered and curled up from the cold, slowly blinking his eyes open. Jaehyun was kneeling in front of him, eyes worried and mouth set into a frown.

Johnny and Yuta were approaching them, the bullies nowhere to be seen.

“Mark,” Johnny choked out, eyes wide. Mark’s lips trembled as he spoke.

“Hyung,” he managed to stammer, feeling strangely detached. Johnny hurried to kneel in front of his little brother, hands landing on his shoulders carefully.

“Let’s get you out of these clothes,” Johnny called softly in English, Mark nodding soullessly. Yuta cleared his throat anxiously.

“I’ll go tell coach what happened, I’ll make sure no one is let in,” he told them, offering Mark a smile before leaving. Johnny and Jaehyun helped Mark to stand and got him out of his soaking freezing
Jersey and shorts. They left his underwear on.

“Shower warmly,” Johnny emphasized, still speaking English. “We’ll wait by the lockers.” He grabbed Jaehyun’s elbow and dragged the senior out of the shower room. Mark sighed shakily and turned on the shower, warm water cascading down his body and covering him in heat.

He remained under the water for several minutes before deciding that he was warm enough. His skin looked raw and his body was aching, mostly from the abuse he’d received.

He made his way out to his brother and Jaehyun, the latter offering him a clean towel.

Mark didn’t say anything as he dried himself off, wordlessly taking the sweatshirt and shorts Johnny offered him. They were too big and probably his brother’s.

Mark sighed softly and sat down on the bench by the lockers. Johnny and Jaehyun sat down on each side of him. Mark was frowning, head hung low.

“What did you say to them?” He asked then, a bit curious while also feeling nauseous.

“Yuta got real pissed,” Jaehyun explained in English. “He was yelling and cursing in Japanese. Johnny just told them to get the hell out. They obviously obeyed.”

Johnny put a comforting arm around Mark’s shoulders, pulling him close.

“What happened?” He asked.

“They talked about some stuff. They insulted Hyuck. And Jaemin. And Renjun and Jeno,” he told them. “I got mad and I hit him first.”

“Still though. It was provocation. It wasn’t your fault. And they were like five people against you, it was not right,” Jaehyun was adamant. Mark shrugged.

“Mark,” Johnny was using his stern voice, causing Mark to look up. “You’re not doing anything wrong. You’re not a bad person and you do not deserve this okay? You haven’t done anything wrong. They’re the ones who are wrong,” Johnny made sure to maintain eye contact. Mark felt a smile make its way onto his lips. He felt relieved after hearing such words from his big brother, suddenly the looks and treatment he was getting didn’t seem as serious.

“Mark!” A voice suddenly called, the door to the locker room opening. In flooded Donghyuck, Yuta, Jaemin and Renjun. Donghyuck rushed over as soon as he saw his boyfriend. Mark got up automatically to envelop the younger in a hug.

“Are you okay?” Donghyuck’s voice sounded shrill.

“It hurts,” Mark whispered in his ear. Donghyuck leaned back to look at him, gentle manicured fingers stroking his bruised cheek.

“I knew you weren’t okay! I knew it,” he scoffed at himself, eyes flitting worriedly across Mark’s form, searching for injuries.

“Hey, it’s okay. It hurts. But I feel better,” Mark told him with a genuine smile. Donghyuck raised both eyebrows.

“What? I’m failing to see your logic here? Did they hit your head?”

“Hyuck, I feel good. I feel better now. I can accept that some people do not accept us. Us being
together. And us being ourselves. It doesn’t matter what they think. Only people who matter have opinions worth hearing.” Donghyuck blinked at him several times.

“Wow Mark, you’re such a poet,” Jaemin suddenly said in a high picture voice, teasingly.

“Yeah. It’s really making me hot and bothered,” Renjun smirked at them. Yuta burst out laughing, Jaehyun and Johnny soon following. Mark blushed. Donghyuck simply smiled.

“Don’t listen to him. Poets are hot. For real,” Mark could see the mischievous glint in his caramel eyes.

“Ha ha,” he sarcastically rolled his eyes.

The room laughed once again at his expense. And it was great. Mark felt good. He wasn’t burdened by everyone’s opinions on him at school. He could enjoy his own friends company and disregard what others thought about him. It felt exhilarating.

“Jokes aside though,” Donghyuck decided. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

Mark’s cheeks were hurting from smiling.

Renjun made retching sounds a few meters away. Donghyuck stalked over to swat at his Chinese friend. Johnny stood up to throw an arm around Mark’s shoulder.

“See, it’s all going to be okay,” Johnny said with a satisfied tone.

“I talked to coach and he’s suspending the team members who were involved,” Yuta told them, walking closer. “He said you could go to the principal about the other dude though.”

“Okay, thanks hyung,” Mark smiled at the Japanese male who ruffled his hair.

“No problem.”

Mark looked back at Renjun, Jaemin and Donghyuck who all wore smiles on their faces as well. Then the door swung open to reveal Jeno with his bag slung over his shoulder. His eyes widened in confusion at seeing them.

“What did I miss?” He asked incredulously. It was quiet for a second before everyone burst out laughing. Mark especially.

And everything felt okay.
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

I have a break now I am so freaking happy. Sleep. I finally get to sleep properly. And I can write more !! Yay

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <3333

Sicheng was once again sitting behind the school with his friends. He felt so incredibly tired, not having slept well. He felt awful having rejected his brother so harshly. He couldn’t believe himself. He didn’t defend Donghyuck when Joe made remarks. He disregarded Taeyong’s worry to what? Not worry him? It obviously made the older even more worried. Sicheng didn’t know what to do with himself. He just wanted to disappear.

“Hey,” Minchan called for their attention. “There’s this party on Friday, at the college.”

“Ooh let’s go! Their parties are always lit,” Ara said happily. “Lots of hot guys. And alcohol.”

Sicheng wrinkled his nose slightly at that, seeing Joe throw Ara a look filled of jealousy after hearing those words. He was not up to another party. Especially not one full of college students.

“And they always bring the best weed,” Seokyung agreed, lazily, not looking up from her phone.

“It’s decided then, Seokjung, you can get us a car right?” Minchan turned to the girl. She nodded with a lazy smirk.

“Sicheng?” Ara suddenly spoke, the brunet looking up, eyes wide. “You’re coming right?” Her tone left no room for arguments, so he simply nodded wordlessly, a bad taste in his mouth.

He wanted the ground to swallow him whole and suck him down into the pits of hell. Anything would be better than where he was at the moment, mentally and physically.

~

Mark sat alone by his desk, texting Donghyuck. They were planning to have a sleepover on Friday, just the two of them, at the Lee residence. Taeyong had already said yes. Now the conversation mostly consisted of heart emojis.

Mark could feel the prickling sensation of being watched, and he knew it was basically everyone in his class looking at him judgmentally. He tried to shake it off, focusing on his phone instead, when it was ripped out of his hand.

“Aww, you texting your boyfriend?” He recognized the guy. His name was Joe.

“Give me my phone,” Mark said, rolling his eyes.

“No,” Joe said with an infuriating leering face. He started scrolling through the text messages. Mark swiftly stood up.
“Give it back,” he demanded then.

“Make me,” Joe threw back venomously. Mark was about to do just that when small fingers ripped the phone out of Joe’s hands. A girl with bright red hair, bangs and high cheekbones stared at Joe, unimpressed.

“I’m assuming this doesn’t belong to you?” She said, tilting her head mockingly. Joe frowned and scoffed before turning on his heel and walking to the back of the class, falling down into an empty seat. Mark nimbly sat down again, looking at the girl with red hair. She was wearing a striped dress and a long sleeved crop top over it, gracefully slipping into the seat next to Mark which had remained empty most lessons lately.

“Here,” she said with a kittenish smile, handing the phone back. Mark knew his eyes were wide in surprise.

“Thanks.”

“I’m Suhyun,” she introduced herself, sticking her hand out. Mark shook it.

“I’m Mark.”

“Great, now can I copy your homework because I totally forgot to do mine,” she didn’t even look sheepish. Mark laughed incredulously but offered his notebook anyway.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

~

Sicheng stared at his phone intently, lying on his bed. His text conversation with Yuta was open and his fingers hovered above the keys. Yuta had basically snitched on him, telling Taeyong about the arrest. But Sicheng couldn’t find it in himself to be mad about it. Taeyong hadn’t even reprimanded him for it and it just made him feel awful. Besides he and Yuta had only met like three times. It’s not like he could tell the other he was cancelling their friendship when it didn’t exist in the first place?

A sigh left Sicheng’s lips. He eventually locked his phone again. He was too tired to deal with it.

The door creaked open carefully, revealing Chenle holding a teddy bear. The seven year old looked at Sicheng with wide eyes and a pouting lower lip.

“Hyung I can’t sleep,” Chenle said quietly, “can I sleep here?” Sicheng looked at the time and saw it was close to midnight. He looked back at his brother and nodded, holding the covers up for him. Chenle crept down next to Sicheng and snuggled close to him, the teddy bear stuck between them. Usually Sicheng didn’t like skinship but it was different with his brothers.

“Why didn’t you go to Taeyong hyung?” Sicheng asked out of pure curiosity. The youngsters almost always went to Taeyong. Chenle shrugged.

“I missed you,” he whispered, voice slurred from tiredness. Sicheng felt his heart warm at the words, an uncontrollable smile blooming on his face. He pulled Chenle close to his side, leaning over him to turn off the lights.

“I love you hyung,” Chenle yawned. Sicheng rolled his eyes fondly. Saying I love you before sleeping was something Taeyong had taught them all early on to do all the time. It’s supposed to
strengthen the bond between them and it also reminds them that they are loved.

“Love you too, Lele,” he whispered into the younger’s hair.

Sicheng slept soundly that night.

~

Johnny demanded that Mark go to the principal the next day. He also told Donghyuck to go with him and tell the principal about the issues he’d had with the same guy a few weeks back.

“Hyung, what if he doesn’t care? He probably sides with the bully,” Mark protested, really wanting to avoid conflict. They were standing outside the office of the old man, looking at the tinted class windows.

“We will make him care, c’mon,” Johnny put an arm around Mark’s shoulder, his other hand resting on Donghyuck’s back as he lead them into the office.

“Ah! Mr Seo!” The secretary was a nice looking older lady, her hair tied up in a bun and glasses sliding down her nose.

“Mrs Kim,” Johnny greeted her with a charming smile. “Regrettably I’ve no time to chat, we really need to see the principal.”

“Oh of course I understand! Did you book an appointment?” She asked then, sounding just as cheery.

“No sadly, it is an urgent matter, Mrs Kim.”

“You know it’s against the rules Mr Seo. But I guess we can make an exception, just this once,” she winked at him and Mark resisted the urge to gag.

“Thank you, ma’am,” Johnny said and dragged them both with him when Mrs Kim opened the door to the principal.

He hadn’t changed a bit since Mark saw him last. He was wearing a suit, still bald and still stereotypical as Donghyuck pointed out several times.

“Hello Mr Seo,” he greeted. “What can I help you with today?” His voice was monotone and his eyes looked bored. Johnny nudged Mark encouragingly, gesturing to the principal.

“Hello sir. We would like to, um, like, uh-“

“We want a student to be expelled.” Donghyuck cut in. The principal’s eyes widened.

“Expelled?”

“Yes. He has been violent and offensive towards us,” Donghyuck told the man, walking forward to grab Mark’s face.

“Look at the bruises, the student caused these and several more,” Donghyuck’s voice was dripping with emphasis. The principal raised an eyebrow at the sight of Mark’s bruised cheeks and the cut on his lip.

“It is against the school’s very strict bullying policy and I suggest you do something about it,” Johnny backed Donghyuck up, meeting the principal’s eyes straight on. Johnny could look very
determined when he wanted to. The old man considered them for a few seconds before nodding slowly.

“Give me his name. I will talk to him and see what I can do considering the nature of the bullying,” the man agreed. “Now tell me exactly what happened.”

The very next day news spread like wildfire about a junior having been suspended for three weeks on the basis of bullying.
By Friday Mark couldn’t care less about who gave him looks. His friends stayed with him every time they could, Donghyuck texted frequently and his brother was always checking in with him. And he had Suhyun. She had become a good acquaintance, someone that didn’t treat him any differently that she would anyone else. Not like he was fragile, nor disgusting, nor more cool than anyone else. She was a breath of fresh air in the dullness of his junior classes.

Mark decided Suhyun should meet his friends, therefore taking her with him to their usual table in the canteen during lunch.

Jeno and Renjun occupied the space currently, sharing food and Renjun bickering while Jeno eye smiled.

They both looked up when Mark approached, eyeing Suhyun with slight apprehension.


“Who’s this?” The Chinese male then asked. Suhyun raised an eyebrow at him.

“I’m Suhyun,” she introduced herself, pushing closer to the table and sitting down. “Pleasure to meet you.” Her tone was borderline sarcastic.

“Likewise,” Renjun haughtily returned.

“I’m Jeno and this is my boyfriend, Renjun,” the sophomore introduced them, smiling brightly at Suhyun. She nodded at him in return and took her food out.

“So what were you discussing?” She asked then, a small smile playing at her lips when she met eyes with Renjun. He pursed his lips.

“Our teacher is extremely heteronormative and it is pissing me off,” he told her eventually. Mark observed the interaction curiously.

“Is it Mrs. Ahn?” Suhyun guessed. Renjun raised an eyebrow.

“Yes,” he curtly confirmed.

“I have her twice a week. It is torture. We were reading a poem and while analyzing she, naturally, gendered the writer as a male because the poem was about a female,” Suhyun looked completely offended and Renjun seemed to be as well.

“Yeah she does that a lot,” he agreed. “We were divided into pairs and she walked around fawning
over the boy-girl pairs, basically labeling them with romance while same sex couples were merely friends,” Renjun said with fire. “It’s such a small thing but it annoys me so much,” his hand gestures were wild. Suhyun nodded strongly in agreement.

“I know exactly what you mean. My brother and I agreed to always be extremely annoying during her lessons, it drove her mad.”

“Does your brother go here?” Jeno jumped into the conversation.

“He used to, he’s in the army now,” Suhyun explained while finally taking a bite of her food. Mark frowned at that.

“I’m sorry,” he said. Suhyun raised a confused eyebrow.

“Why are you sorry for? I’m glad to be rid of him for a while. Gives me so much more space,” she said with mirth. Renjun laughed incredulously. “Besides, he’s doing a good thing and I visit him often so it’s okay. He’ll be back soon enough.”

Mark couldn’t help but smile at that. Renjun gave him a look across from the table, and it was approving. Suhyun had been accepted. Mark only shrugged a bit. He knew they’d like her.

“Hey guys,” a voice suddenly called from behind them. Mark turned to see Jaemin and Donghyuck heading towards them. The later looking elated. Jaemin walked over to Jeno and Renjun, giving them a peck on the forehead each. Suhyun didn’t even bat an eyelash.

Donghyuck settled next to Mark, looking questionably at their new addition. Suhyun felt eyes on her and looked up from the food she’d been inhaling.

“Hey,” she greeted. “I’m Suhyun. Mark’s acquaintance,” she said mockingly, rolling her eyes slightly at the other junior. He scoffed.

“I’m Donghyuck, his boyfriend,” the sophomore said, looking amused.

“And I’m Jaemin, awesome best friend. Welcome to the cool table,” the brunet said excitedly with a wink. Suhyun stared at him, a deadpan expression on her face.

“The cool table,” she repeated. “Keep dreaming dude. You guys are way too - for lack of better word - woke to be the cool table.”

Jaemin made an offended face while Renjun simply laughed.

“Okay guys focus for a second,” Donghyuck snapped his lean fingers.

“I love that color,” Suhyun said, noticing his black nail polish.

“Oh you like nail polish?” Donghyuck promptly lost his focus, looking excited to have found a comrade.

“I do. Especially black. It’s my favourite color, and apparently guys don’t like females who wear black nail polish which is a happy coincidence.”

“I like her,” Donghyuck decided with a nod. Mark nodded in agreement, taking his boyfriend’s hand under the table.

“Anyway, What did you want to say Hyuckie?” Jeno brought them back on track.
“Right!” The boy exclaimed, eyes lined with kohl and shimmering under the canteen’s murky lights. Mark loved the look of his boyfriend on that particular Friday, and he couldn’t wait for their sleepover that night, wanting to spend time with Donghyuck. The younger took a deep breath before looking Mark straight in the eyes. “I know who leaked the photo.”

When Donghyuck was pulled aside by his brother he was honestly a bit surprised. Sicheng grabbed his arm and dragged him out of the flow of the students through the hallways, pulling him into a secluded spot between locker rows.

They usually didn’t talk in school because of schedules and friend circles, which is why Donghyuck was startled when he was faced with his brother.

“Hey hyung,” he greeted nonetheless, Sicheng looking around them uneasily.

“Hyuck,” Sicheng returned, finally meeting his little brother’s eyes. His plump lips pouted out almost imperceptibly. Donghyuck raised a questioning eyebrow.

“What’s wrong?” He asked curiously. Sicheng’s chestnut hair was flopping into his eyes and his face looked tired and chased.

“I know who leaked the photo of you and Mark,” he said gravely, a slight lisp shining through. Donghyuck’s mouth fell open.

“What.”

“I know who it was,” Sicheng repeated, putting his hands on Donghyuck’s shoulder to emphasize his point. “And I’m going to tell you.”

“Tell me,” Donghyuck breathed, eyes wide and imploring.

“Her name is Lexie, she’s a freshman,” Sicheng whispered, eyes still shifting about worriedly.

“I think I know exactly who that is,” Donghyuck said with realization clear in his voice. “It makes sense.” He thought back to those times he’d been cornered by a group of freshman girls, telling him to stay away from Mark. It must be the ringleader. Then he frowned. “But how did you know, hyung?”

“I overheard it. There’s a girl in my class, she Lexie’s big sister,” Sicheng explained, avoidance clear in his tone. Donghyuck eyed him curiously, Sicheng sounded very suspicious.

“Anyway, I’ll see you later at home,” Sicheng quickly made his way out of the situation and started leaving. Donghyuck grabbed his wrist and pulled him into a hug. The older’s arms came to rest around Donghyuck’s neck, the younger burrowing his face into Sicheng’s shoulder.

“Thank you hyung,” Donghyuck whispered. Sicheng smiled into his hair before they let go and went their separate ways.

Donghyuck hurried towards the canteen, wanting to tell his friends and boyfriend the good news immediately. He found Jaemin on the way and linked their arms, pulling his fellow sophomore towards lunch.

~
“She’s Ara’s little sister,” Suhyun spoke right after Donghyuck had finished telling them what happened. Mark perked up at that, knowing exactly who Ara was.

“Who’s Ara?” Renjun asked with a frown.

“Only the queen bee of the junior classes,” Suhyun said and rolled her eyes.

“But she’s nice,” Mark protested. Suhyun gave him a deadpan look.

“She is not. It’s all fake. Like her hair. Extensions,” Suhyun said with a shudder. “She hangs with some really mean people. They all get together and drink or smoke, which I guess isn’t that bad but the drugs are though. And she’s a total bitch. How haven’t you noticed this Mark?”

Mark’s eyes simply widened in horror.

“Okay, so basically evil runs in the family,” Jaemin concluded. Suhyun nodded, taking a bite of her food.

“Evil older sisters aside, what do we do about Lexie?” Mark said, looking at Donghyuck quizzically.

The sophomore sighed, puffing his cheeks out.

“I mean, it’s up to you I guess. You were affected the most because of this,” Donghyuck told his boyfriend. Mark frowned and squeezed his hand.

“No. I’m asking you. You were affected by this too. I want to know what you want to do,” he firmly stated. Donghyuck’s eyes widened in slight surprise.

“I think you should let her be,” Suhyun spoke instead. They shifted to look at her. “You can’t do anything about it anyway. The photo is sent, everyone knows, Mark is a fellow outcast now. What good will it do if you confront her?” She continued eating away at her food while talking.

Donghyuck smirked.

“A very good point my friend. What good will it do if we confront her? Nothing,” he said. “The best way to get revenge is to flaunt it. Our relationship. She’ll hate that. We should not give her any attention, we shouldn’t care about her. Because her opinion doesn’t matter right?”

“Right. Let’s do that. I don’t even know the person,” Mark said with a fond smile tugging at his lips. Donghyuck looked so pretty when he was determined.

“Great to have that settled. Now let’s discuss Mrs Ahn,” Renjun clapped his hands and they all laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Comments give me strength :)) and who was expecting that person to be the culprit? XD
Sicheng paced his room anxiously. He was wearing a black turtleneck with skinny jeans and his usual necklace. He had put on light makeup and styled his hair. Donghyuck and Jungwoo were rubbing off on him.

The nerves from telling his little brother about Lexie were still there. When he’d walked towards the back of the school this morning he had found Ara and another girl involved in a heated conversation. He figured they didn’t want to be disturbed so he was about to leave when some interesting words caught his attention.

“Mark still hasn’t paid attention to me! Even when I leaked the photo! He’s still hanging with his loser friends!” The stranger said with a whiny tone to Ara. Sicheng crept close and peeked around the corner.

“Just be patient. He’s getting a lot of shit. He’ll realize soon that he needs to ditch his friends. Popularity is much more important,” Ara told the girl with a smirk. Which made Sicheng mad because why would Mark ditch Donghyuck and his friends for popularity. He didn’t need to do that. He was a great person without it. Unlike Sicheng. He needed the fame. To be good. To be worthy. He needed Ara’s help.

“Fine. I’ll wait then,” the girl was pouting.

“Aww Lexie. My dear little sister,” Ara said with a mocking tone. “You’ve a lot to learn. A lot.”

Sicheng gulped at that and left the scene. He did feel some sort of determination bloom in his chest. He needed to tell his brother. He deserved to know! To make sure they knew who was really to blame. Which led him to searching up Donghyuck. And the rest is history.

Now he was still nervous that Ara would find out he snitched on her little sister. And on top of that he didn’t know what to tell Taeyong.

Seokyung was headed to pick him up in a couple of minutes and he still didn’t have an excuse for Taeyong. He didn’t want his brother to worry. He wasn’t worth it.

His phone chimed and he knew they were here. With shaky hands he adjusted his clothes and was about to head for the bedroom door, that’s when an idea popped into his head. He peered behind him and saw the window. It was a sizable window. He licked his lips and turned on his heel, instead heading for the window. He looked down at the ground below and saw the drain pipe situated right next to the window.
He hastily threw on a robe and hid his fancy clothes, hoping that Taeyong wouldn’t notice the makeup. Then he walked out of his room and into Taeyong’s, keeping his face down.

“Hyung,” he said, Taeyong looking up questioningly from his homework. “I’m not feeling well, I have a headache,” Sicheng said, trying to make his voice sound weak which wasn’t hard with how anxious he was actually feeling.

“Oh,” Taeyong said, eyebrows furrowed in concern. “We have some medicine downstairs and I can make some soup—”

Sicheng stopped the older from leaving his seat with frantic hand movements.

“No no, it’s fine hyung. I’ll just sleep it off. I think I’ll skip dinner.”

“I’ll bring you something after we’ve eaten then,” Taeyong hesitantly said.

“No it’s fine. I’m good hyung, I really don’t have an appetite,” Sicheng assured.

“Okay then,” Taeyong conceded with a frown.

“Thanks hyung,” Sicheng smiled minimally and retreated back into his room, closing the door and throwing the robe off. With a heavy heart he headed for the window again.

Sicheng opened it nimbly and crawled through it. He was glad he’d taken ballet classes when he was little, it made it so much easier as he slid down the drain pipe, taking care not to rip his clothes. His feet landed on soft ground and he stealthily left the premises, finding Seokyung’s car parked outside the house.

“Your house is fancy, dude,” she said as he settled in the back. Minchan and Joe were already there.

Sicheng only shrugged in response.

“Okay, let’s get Ara and then we’ll head for the party,” Minchan said, music blasting loudly when Seokyung started the car. Sicheng sighed unnoticeably, and let his head fall back on the seat. He had a bad feeling about this.

~

Mark rapped on the door excitedly, his backpack slung over his shoulder. Quick footsteps could be heard arriving and the door opened with force. Chenle stood on the other side, smiling toothily at him.

“Mark hyung! Come on we’re playing cards!” He exclaimed and reached out to grab Mark’s hand. The junior stumbled inside and quickly got rid of his shoes, jacket and threw the bag on the floor. Chenle led him to the kitchen and he was greeted by the sight of almost all the Lee brothers. Donghyuck, Lucas, Jungwoo and Taeyong with Jisung in his lap. They were all holding a hand of cards each. Donghyuck smiled brightly when he saw his boyfriend. Mark couldn’t help but smile back. Donghyuck was void of makeup, eyes bright and hair soft, his moles creating a constellation on his skin. Chenle slipped over to the table and took his place next to Jungwoo.

“Mark,” Taeyong greeted. “Come and play! Do you want something to drink?”

“No thanks hyung,” Mark chuckled and sat down in between Donghyuck and Taeyong.

“We’ll just finish the round and then you can join,” Donghyuck told him, a frown adorning his face a
he thought about what to ask for. Mark noticed they were playing Go Fish.

“Lucas! All your sevens!” Donghyuck exclaimed dramatically. Lucas groaned and handed over two sevens, causing Donghyuck to gain a point.

Mark observed his boyfriend as he played, the sophomore was sitting with his legs folded under him on the chair, wearing casual pants and an oversized hoodie. Mark himself wore similar clothes. He felt oddly fond about their matching clothing garments.

“Ha! I win!” Donghyuck said and slammed his cards down, showcasing another pair. Lucas whined and pouted, Jungwoo laughing timidly as he often did, Taeyong only smiling at them. Chenle looked disturbed.

“Let’s play again!” The seven year old exclaimed and gathered the cards clumsily. Taeyong helped and then he shuffled them expertly causing Mark to raise an eyebrow.

“He must’ve worked at a casino in a previous life,” Donghyuck decided, sharing a look with Mark who laughed. Taeyong rolled his eyes at them.

They continued playing for quite a while, Chenle screaming with joy when he won and Jisung frowning confusedly as he tried to understand the cards from Taeyong’s lap. Mark even won one time. Jungwoo was secretly a great player and Lucas whooped excitedly every time he picked up a card he liked even if it didn’t match one of he cards he already had.

An hour later Donghyuck grabbed Mark’s hand, intertwining their fingers gingerly.

"Let’s go upstairs now,” he said, smiling slightly. Mark nodded.

“I’ll call you down when it’s time for dinner,” Taeyong told them, shuffling the cards again at Chenle’s demand.

“Okay, thanks hyung,” Donghyuck said and dragged Mark up by the hand.

“Have fun,” Jungwoo called after them suggestively. Donghyuck scoffed. He shouted back, voice falsely sweet;

“We will!”

~

Sicheng didn’t like it. His friends had abandoned him and left in different directions. The music was loud and pounding, there were all these bodies smashed together in one big moving, sweaty mess. And almost all of them were older. He looked around, eyes wide, as he tried to find an opening to escape the dancing mass of bodies. He managed to squeeze his way into the kitchen which was considerably less crowded. Joe and Ara were in there, chugging drinks as others, college students, egged them on. Sicheng was about to escape when Seokyung entered, saw him and held his upper arm firmly.

“Sichengie! You need to loosen up!” She called as she felt him tensing up. “Let’s grab some drinks!” From her relaxed tone Sicheng could tell that she was most likely high. He marveled at her ability to find the drugs so quickly.

He reluctantly followed her closer to the crowd of college students chugging drinks. Seokyung whistled and grabbed their attention, Sicheng gulping nervously.
“Hey! This guy here needs something strong,” she told them with a smirk.

“Uh-actually I really - uhm,” Sicheng tried to get the words out but under their scrutinizing gazes he couldn’t.

“I know exactly what he needs,” one of the college students said with a laugh. He reached over to grab a bottle of clear liquid and poured it into a big cup, filling it.

“Sweep it in one go and you’ll feel great. Promise,” the student said, holding the cup out to Sicheng who took it hesitantly. A pungent smell reached his nose and he knew it was some strong liquor.

“Chug,” Joe started to chant with a daring smirk. The other people in the kitchen joined in.

“Chug! Chug! Chug!”

Sicheng felt his heart race, palms sweaty and eyes flickering nervously. He really didn’t want to, but looking at all the expectant faces, all the people who wanted him to do this. All the people who would be disappointed or mad if he didn’t.

How bad could it be?

So he held the cup to his lips, stopped for a split second before tipping it back, gulping the alcohol down. The crowd cheered excitedly and he felt a strange sort of happiness. He’d proved himself.

He drained all the liquid in the cup and set it down with a satisfying smack.

“Nice going Sicheng,” Ara said and smiled at him. Sicheng felt himself swell with pride.

“Another one!” Someone called and his cup was once again filled. Sicheng grabbed it quickly and chugged it all down again, gaining more addicting cheers.

“You’re awesome dude!”

“Wow you’re truly something!”

“Jeez you’re great!”

Sicheng felt nausea hammer away at his stomach, a pressure rising in his head. But the praises were too addicting. He was finally proving himself. He was worthy.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos if you liked it and comment your thoughts!
Wow guys. We are officially on chapter 50. This is crazy. I never expected the story to become this long and elaborate. Thank you so much for all the support these last fifty (50) chapters! I am so grateful to every person who comments or leaves kudos or just reads the story. Thank you!

As a little gift I have compiled some songs if anyone is interested, songs that I have listened to during the making of the fanfic :)

Here they are:
You - Keaton Henson
Hey Brother - Aviciii
Brother - Kodaline
Brother - Matt Corby
Brother - Gavin DeGraw
My My My - Troye Sivan
Insomnia - Stray Kids
Let Me Live - Anne-Marie
My Pace - Stray kids
Timeless - NCT
We go up - NCT
Drippin - NCT
Whiplash - NCT
Dear Dream - NCT
Mad City - NCT
White noise - Amber
Home - Zayde Wolf
Baby - the Rose
To Build a Home - The cinematic orchestra
More - 5 Seconds of Summer
1-800 - Logic
Will last forever - AKMU
Beautiful feeling - Day6
Heroes - David Bowie
Smooth Criminal - Michael Jackson
Home - The chipmunks
New Americana - Halsey
Keep holding on - Glee cast

Whew that was long XD hope you’ll enjoy the songs and thank you again so much for all the support!

Here we have chapter fifty (50)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The night went. Sicheng didn’t drink anything else. He felt drunk enough already, his head pounding and his stomach turning uncomfortably. He set himself down on a couch and leaned his head on the soft cushions. He felt like he was spiraling downwards, everything moving too quickly and the music being too loud. He closed his eyes, the lights flashing on his eyelids.

A body suddenly settled in his lap, delicate hands landing on his neck. Sicheng looked up confusedly and saw a petite girl looking back at him. She was wearing a lot of makeup and she looked completely out of it.

Sicheng was about to say something when she started kissing him. His eyes widened in horror as her tongue licked his frozen lips, her body pressing close to him. He did not like that. Not at all. Absolutely not. So, as properly as he could while being drunk off his ass, he pushed her away, really hating the feeling of lips on his own and a body against his.

She shrieked as she fell to the floor and then started laughing maniacally. Sicheng extracted himself from the couch and escaped the room, heading for the stairs.

He felt very violated and very disgusted after that. The sticky feeling of her lipstick stained his own lips and he scrubbed his hands against them frantically, trying to erase the memory.

He stopped dead in his tracks in front of the stairway. A couple of bodies were blocking his way. He recognized both Minchan and Seokyung in the mess. They were all either rolling papers with some substance in it or smoking cigarettes, or snorting powder from each other’s bodies. Sicheng almost gagged at the sight, combined with the alcohol that was consuming his body. Minchan looked up as he noticed the junior.

“Hey Sicheng! Try this,” he said and held out a blunt. It was not a cigarette, that much Sicheng could tell. He hesitated.

“What is it?” He asked cautiously. Minchan scoffed.

“It’s doesn’t matter. Just try it. You trust me right?” The smirk he was wearing was not trust-inducing at all. Sicheng really didn’t want to. But when Minchan raised a daring eyebrow he felt compelled.

So he grabbed the blunt and took a deep drag. The taste and feeling was not pleasant and he felt the bile rising in his throat. Hurriedly he gave it back to Minchan, coughing, before rushing past them, up the stairs. He could hear a scoff.

“What a wuss.”

Sicheng felt the tears forcing themselves out of his eyes as he looked for a bathroom. When he found one he threw himself to the toilet and started throwing up. Tears still trickled down his cheeks and his hands were shaking uncontrollably.

His head was still pounding and his throat ached from the acids. He rested his head on the seat and fished his phone out of his pocket gingerly, his hands feeling detached from his body. His vision blurred with tears as he opened the texting app, writing something out clumsily before pressing send. His phone dropped to the floor as he lost strength in his hands, a pained sigh leaving his lips. He wanted his brothers. He wanted Taeyong to hold him and tell him it was alright.

He wanted to go home.
“How about a fake ID. Clubs would spice your life up properly,” Baekhyun was leaning halfway out of the snack station, head in his hand as he contemplated.

“I think Taeil would rather go to book clubs,” Sehun scoffed, sorting through the money he’d received before putting it in the cash register. Taeil huffed a laugh, rolling his eyes at his coworkers.

“Boring. Oh I know! He should have sex!” Baekhyun looked like he had just solved all the world’s problems.

“Hyung!” Taeil protested, cheeks red.

“What? Sex is perfectly natural and normal. It’s instincts. And it’s really good,” Baekhyun said with a boxy grin. Taeil felt the urge to slam his face down on the counter.

“Fine! Be boring! At least I tired. I’ll have you know sex is amazing,” Baekhyun said, throwing his arms up.

“I hear you’re being very productive here,” Heechul emerged from the staff door behind the snack station, giving Baekhyun a deadpan look. The other smiled innocently.

“Of course boss, we wouldn’t dare do anything else,” Baekhyun said, voice sickly sweet. Heechul rolled his eyes at them, amused.

“Uh huh. Sure,” he said, starting to head for the door. “I’m meeting up with Hani, I’ll see you next week,” Heechul had decided to leave work early so he could meet with his best friend, leaving the responsibility to Taeil because Baekhyun, even if he was the oldest, could not be trusted.

“Tell her hi from me,” Baekhyun said and waved at Heechul who waved back. Hani worked together with Baekhyun’s friend, Kyungsoo. Taeil often wondered how those two could even manage being friends with how different they were.

Thankfully they had a flow of customers right after Heechul left so Baekhyun couldn’t bug Taeil about his life which was apparently not spicy enough. Taeil was spicy. He even had a job. Was that not enough?

The flow started to die down, the last customer in the line coming up to him. Taeil jolted when he realized he knew the person.

“Oh! Hey Kun,” Taeil said with a kind smile. He knew Kun from the library. They often studied at the same time and they had some classes together. The Chinese male looked up at him and smiled back.

“Hi,” he greeted. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, there’s been a lot of customers today,” Taeil explained.

“Understandable. It is Friday after all,” Kun nodded. “Can I have one ticket for Spider Man?” Taeil smiled. Spider Man was their special for the night. While he pulled out the tickets and tapped in the numbers in the cash register Kun’s phone played a tune, apparently indicating a message. The Chinese male extracted his phone from his jacket and unlocked it with slight confusion in his gaze.

Taeil frowned when Kun’s eyes widened in worry.

“Something wrong?” He asked. Kun opened his mouth hesitantly, scanning the message over and over.
“I might have to cancel my ticket, sorry,” he said, disbelievingly.

“That’s fine, are you okay?” Taeil asked then. Kun bit his lip, contemplating. Then he looked up at Taeil with a grave expression.

“Do you happen to have Lee Taeyong’s address?”

~

Taeyong had just finished helping Jungwoo with the dishes when the doorbell rang. He quickly rinsed his hands and dried them, walking towards the door. Lucas was playing with Chenle and Jisung in the living room while Donghyuck and Mark had retreated up to the former’s room.

Taeyong curiously opened the door, wondering who would be there at such a time unannounced.

He was properly surprised to find Kun on the other side of the threshold.

“Hi,” he greeted cheerily nonetheless. Kun was one of his favorite people after all, even though he hadn’t spoken to him for a while. Taeyong’s smile faded slightly when he saw Kun’s grim expression.

“Is Sicheng home?” Kun asked, brown eyes swimming with concern.

“Yeah? He said he wasn’t feeling well so he was gonna sleep?” Taeyong said, his tone making it sound like a question.

"Can you check?” Kun asked, sounding rushed. Taeyong frowned and hurried up the stairs without responding. He knocked on Sicheng’s door, but got no response. With his heart racing he opened the door, finding an empty room and an open window.

Taeyong gasped at the sight, eyes widening. Sicheng wasn’t at home. He wasn’t there. He wasn’t at home.

Taeyong tried to breathe deeply as he stalked down the stairs again heading for Kun.

“He’s not here,” Taeyong said, voice sounding breathless. Kun simply sagged in resignation. Like he knew.

“Where is he?” Taeyong demanded, feeling the panic grip at his lungs.

“I’m not sure,” Kun said uncertainly, instead he handed Taeyong his phone. The latter took it and saw that it was a text.

kun ge im sprrrt pls forgive me i miss u a lot ge help med please i don want tis more help

“Oh no. Oh no. We need to find him,” Taeyong said, feeling the panic rising within him. Kun nodded in agreement, sadly frowning at the text when he was handed his phone back.

“I don’t know, what are we supposed to do?” Taeyong despaired, feeling like his whole life was crashing and burning. His brother wasn’t at home. He didn’t know where his brother was. He couldn’t keep him safe. Because he didn’t know. Just then Kun’s phone started ringing. Sicheng’s name flashing across the screen.

~

Sicheng tried to breathe as he leaned against the toilet, head spinning and stomach churning. His
phone had fallen to the floor and through his blurred vision he could see nothing. He wanted his brothers. He wanted to be at home. He wanted to text Kun and ask if he preferred lemonade or soda.

He wanted out. Out of everything. He didn’t like this. Parties and drinking and smoking and the drugs. He didn’t even like the people. But he needed it, right? He sobbed miserably as his head ached with conflicting thoughts. Just end the pain. Please.

The doorknob twisted, startling him. He didn’t have the energy to move or do anything about it when the door opened. He had absolutely forgotten to lock the door in his haste.

He tried to focus his vision on the newcomer, making out blonde hair with lilac hues, pale skin and several piercings. Like five in each ear. Sicheng gulped down the urge to puke again and tried to properly sit up, failing completely.

“Oh wow,” the girl said, frowning. “Are you okay dude?” Sicheng shook his head minimally, not feeling strong enough to form words. She walked a bit closer. He saw that she was wearing high waisted jeans, what seemed to be a black sports bra top and a military green bomber jacket which was orange on the inside.

Sicheng liked her clothes.

The girl kneeled in front of him, her black converse looking new.

“What can you speak?” She asked. Her voice tone was low and soothing.

“Mmm,” Sicheng said, not wanting to open his mouth too much, afraid of what might come out.

“Can you at least tell me your name?” She said.

“Sicheng,” he managed in a whisper. She nodded cordially.

“I’m Jiwoo,” she introduced herself. “You’re not a student at the college right? You look a bit young.”

“High school, junior,” he said, confident that he wouldn’t throw up at the moment.

“Yup,” she said with a roll of the eyes. “That’s what I thought. I’m a high school student too, a senior,” she explained. Sicheng pondered if he’d seen her at school, since there was only one in town.

“Now, how come you’re at a college party?” She asked curiously, sitting down on the cold tile floor next to him.

“I came with my friends,” he whispered.

“Really? Some friends you have,” Jiwoo scoffed. “They just left you all alone?”

Sicheng shrugged.

“That’s just unethical,” she pursed her lips. Sicheng didn’t say anything. Jiwoo continued talking.

“My friends would never. That’s why I’m here by the way. My friend is the host of the party. Don’t know if you’ve met him? His name’s Matthew,” she told him. Sicheng shook his head. He did not recall meeting a Matthew. Shaking his head proved to be a bad idea as he had to lean over the toilet and expel more fluids. Jiwoo winced in sympathy. Sicheng felt like he was floating outside of his body.
“Oh wow, yeah, doesn’t matter really. I think what matters here is getting you home.”

No words had ever sounded more harmonious in Sicheng’s ears.

Chapter End Notes

Yikes It’s gonna be interesting to see how this turns out
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

Back to school today. Ugh. It sucked as usual XD we got forty pages to read til Wednesday and I read them immediately when I got home because I hate homework and it’s better to get them over with. So proud of myself lol

Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter though <3333

Kun fumbled as his phone vibrated. He hastily pressed the green button and took the call.

“Hello?” He answered, eyes wide.

“Hey, uh, my name’s Jiwoo and I have Sicheng here? I hope you know who he is because he isn’t feeling well and he needs to get home. Like now.”

Kun could hear the retching sounds in the background followed by Jiwoo’s soothing voice.

“Uh okay, yeah I know Sicheng. We’re friends,” he couldn’t help but hesitate at that word. He hadn’t spoke to Sicheng for quite a while and it honestly made him sad to think about so he tried not to.

“Okay good, so can you like pick him up?”

“Yeah, where are you?”

“Down by the local college, it’s the building where there’s a party. You literally cannot miss it. We’re in the second floor bathroom.”

“Okay, we’ll be there soon.” And with that Kun hung up. He looked up to meet Taeyong’s eyes. The ice prince looked on the verge of tears, panic clear in his expression.

“I know where he is,” Kun announced, biting his lip anxiously.

“Okay great. That’s great. Let pick him up,” the relief was clear on Taeyong’s face. Kun couldn’t help but feel apprehensive. Sicheng was at a college party. Why would he go to a party in the first place? Kun knew he disliked them. He couldn’t help but feel sad as he thought of his friend. He still didn’t know why Sicheng had cut him off so coldly, it had honestly hurt him. He thought he’d gained a friend. An honest to god friend. And then he left. Suddenly Kun didn’t feel like going with Taeyong to pick Sicheng up at all.

But he still would. Because Sicheng had asked for help. Had asked him for help. And he was going to help his friend.

~

Donghyuck laughed loudly as they played songs. Mark was vibing with the pumping hip hop song as Donghyuck jumped to the rhythm. They’d turned off the lights and lit some smaller lamps instead, connecting Mark’s phone to Donghyuck’s speakers as they danced around in their sweatpants. Mark
laughed as well, eyes sparkling and bright as he looked at his boyfriend.

The song changed into something slower, both of them stopping to catch their breaths slightly. Donghyuck bent at he knees, panting harshly. He couldn’t help but smile, adrenaline pumping him full with energy. Mark walked close to him and grabbed his hand, pulling Donghyuck into him, so they were chest to chest. The song was not only slow, but quite intimate as well, causing Donghyuck to giggle before burying his head in Mark’s shoulder, arms around the junior’s neck. Mark placed his own hands high on Donghyuck’s waist.

Then they swayed and spun, enjoying the calm and cozy atmosphere. Donghyuck could feel Mark’s rapid heartbeat against his chest, hiding a smile in Mark’s neck.

The song ended soon enough and they separated, looking at each other for a split second before laughing together. Donghyuck pulled Mark down on his bed and they laid there laughing as a new song came on, fingers intertwined and still out of breath.

The door opened rapidly and they both sat up, seeing Taeyong coming in with a hurried expression. Mark immediately lowered the volume on the speaker.

“Hey guys, sorry to disturb but I need to go for a while, can you make sure the kids go to bed, teeth brushed and stories read? Again, sorry to put this on you,” the silver haired male said, shallow breaths escaping him. Donghyuck could sense the gravity of the situation.

“Sure hyung. Are you okay?” He asked worriedly.

“I’m fine, Hyuck, I’ll be back soon okay, I promise. Call if you need anything, I’ll be home instantly,” he said and smiled at them reassuringly.

“Okay,” Donghyuck agreed.

“Great, thank you,” Taeyong said and left quickly. Donghyuck looked after him with a frown and then turned to Mark who looked equally surprised. Donghyuck shook his head and tried for a smile.

“Let’s put my brothers to bed?” Mark smiled at the domestic nature of the sentence.

“Sure.”

~

Jiwoo patted Sicheng’s back soothingly as he retched again. She smacked her lips together in sympathy.

“You should try and drink some water, you’re losing a lot of fluids right now,” she said and stood up, walking to the sink. There was a glass in the cabinet, holding the toothbrushes. She took it and emptied the contents before rinsing it off, filling it with cold water. Jiwoo brought it back to Sicheng and let him drink small sips.

“You don’t wanna take too much, that’s a recipe for disaster,” she told him. “I have had my fair share of hangovers, which has not been fun.”

Sicheng perked up minimally after drinking the water, breathing in deeply as he regained some of his mobility. Then his nose wrinkled.

“Do you smoke?” He asked Jiwoo. She nodded as she returned the glass to the sink.
“Yeah,” she admitted. “And I have done some drugs before but my friends helped me quit. Do you?”

“I don’t want to,” Sicheng almost whispered, eyes falling shut. Jiwoo sat down next to him again. “It’s my friends. They want me to.”

“Then don’t,” she chuckled.

“It’s not that easy.”

“Sure it is. Tell your friends no,” Jiwoo said as if it was that simple. Sicheng’s heart began racing at the thought of saying no. Of gaining their distaste and disapproval. He shuddered in fear, shaking his head slightly. Jiwoo looked like she wanted to say something else but instead she picked his phone up again from where it had been lying on the floor.

“I’m gonna put my number in your phone,” she decided and did just that. “Let’s hang out sometime.”

Sicheng looked confusedly at her. She was a senior, and she was cool. She was fashionable and uncaring of other people’s opinions. Why would she want to hang with him? This felt like deja vu, Sicheng’s mind going immediately to Yuta.

“I think we could be good friends,” she nodded with a smile, eyes sincere. Sicheng didn’t know what to say, so he simply closed his eyes and leaned back, head pounding still. He wanted to go home.

~

Taeyong fidgeted nervously during the whole ride. He could barely focus on the road as he drove, knowing it was a hazard. He was too worried. Too worried that something bad would happen or something had already happened or, what if his brother was hurt.

Kun seemed calm though. Taeyong glanced at him and saw the other serenely looking out the window as sped down the roads, not minding his crooked driving.

He figured stress was something Kun could handle better than himself.

Kun read the directions as they drove, reaching the local college quickly with the speed Taeyong was going at.

They did see exactly which house Jiwoo had meant. There was only one house with flashing lights and pounding music that could be heard through the windows of the car. Taeyong parked and they hurried out. He assumed they looked ridiculous, Taeyong in sweatpants and a T-shirt, with a jacket thrown on while Kun wore a button up shirt and jeans.

They entered the house, party in full swing, heat suffocating them, humid air penetrating their senses.

Kun looked exceptionally uncomfortable with the party as Taeyong grabbed his arm so they wouldn’t lose each other in the crowd. They ventured further inside, looking for any sort of stairs. Taeyong could feel the urgency in his whole being, his brother senses prickling with worry and anxiety. He really needed to find Sicheng.

Kun tugged his arm harshly, Taeyong turning to him and seeing him pointing towards a staircase. Taeyong exhaled in relief going with Kun in the direction he pointed.
When they reached the stairs a collection of bodies were in the way, Taeyong frowning at the smells reaching his nose. Smoke. And most probably other substances.

“Excuse me,” he said loudly as he pushed past them, dragging Kun with him. A boy with blue hair was in the mess of bodies, looking familiar. Taeyong saw how the boy looked at him as they passed, something unreadable in his eyes before he looked away. Taeyong didn’t ponder though, instead dragging Kun up the stairs at a rapid pace. Taeyong’s heartbeat was pounding in his throat, fear creeping up his neck and giving him shivers. He let go of Kun slowly as he observed the doors in front of them. Most of them were closed, so hesitantly he started pulling on the doorknobs, finding most of them locked, which was a relief because he did not want to walk in any sort of ‘funny business’. Kun followed him quietly.

At the end of the corridor he found a door that was unlocked, pushing it open gently. And then he exhaled shakily. Because there he was. Sicheng was on the floor of the dingy bathroom, back leaning on the bathtub, sweat lining his forehead and his hair a mess. Opposite him a girl sat, her eyes finding Taeyong’s as they entered. She looked sober and rational so he smiled at her hastily before walking inside. The girl, Jiwoo he presumed, got off the floor and walked back a couple of steps to give them space.

“Hyung,” Sicheng croaked, a sob caught in his throat. Taeyong frowned and murmured under his breath as he kneeled by his brother.

“I was so worried, oh my god,” Taeyong made sure to gather Sicheng up in a hug, being careful not to jostle him too much. “Oh honey. It’s okay now. It’s gonna be okay.”

Sicheng burrowed into his brother’s soft shirt, inhaling the familiar scent as his fingers gripped Taeyong’s arms desperately.

Jiwoo walked toward the threshold, smiling kindly at Kun.

“Hey, I’m Jiwoo,” she introduced herself, sticking out her hand. Kun tried to smile back but the state Sicheng was in made it hard for him to do so. He shook her hand.

“I’m Kun,” he told her. Jiwoo nodded and looked back at the brothers on the floor.

“I guess I’ll go then,” she told him. “Get home safely now.”

“Thank you,” Kun said.

“Sicheng,” Jiwoo then said, “text me if you feel like it.” She told him and waved briefly, Sicheng nodding at her minimally. Taeyong smiled at her as well before Jiwoo left them.

“Okay, let’s get you home now,” the oldest brother said and kissed Sicheng’s damp forehead gently, feeling much safer knowing that his little brother was in his arms.

Sicheng smiled back at him weakly.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Yayyy new chapteeeeeerrrr

I think there is going to be an unexpected scene in this one. Tell me in the comments if you thought so too when you’ve read it :))

Enjoy!!!

Kun and Taeyong managed to haul Sicheng up, having one arm each around their shoulders, supporting the wasted junior.

“Kun ge,” the younger spoke, looking about ready to cry. “I’m so sorry. I am so sorry.”

“We can talk more tomorrow Sicheng-ah,” Kun interrupted him gently with a genuine smile. He knew the younger wasn’t feeling well and he needed to rest before they could have a proper conversation. Sicheng nodded tiredly and let his head hang as they tried to walk down the stairs. The drug-users had dispersed thankfully so they didn’t have to maneuver through them. The party was nowhere near to dying down, the music was still deafening and the partygoers were still dancing wildly, heat suffocating the entire building.

Taeyong and Kun attempted to get them through the mess while keeping Sicheng safe, pushing away people firmly so they could pass. Their plan was interrupted when a hand grabbed Taeyong’s arm, pulling him away from Sicheng, leaving Kun to hold his whole weight. The Chinese male looked back worriedly, turning them both to see Taeyong being held tightly by a guy with cropped black hair. The silver haired senior was looking at his perpetrator with wide confused eyes. He ripped his arm away from the offending hold.

“What are you doing?” He asked with a stunned huff.

“Sorry,” the guy said, smirking. Kun did not like that. “You’re just too pretty to ignore.” Taeyong’s jaw dropped as he sputtered.

“Do I know you?” He asked incredulously, red creeping up from his neck.

The guy walked close and draped an arm around Taeyong’s waist, dangerously low. The senior started struggling.

“You know it’s so much better if you stay still, pretty things don’t need to speak, they should just be pretty.”

“Let go of my brother Joe!” Sicheng had grasped the situation and found the strength to speak in a raspy voice. Kun looked at the guy, Joe apparently, and saw how his eyes narrowed. Taeyong broke free of the offending hold, trying to walk back to Kun and his brother when Joe grabbed his upper arm harshly.

“You know Sicheng, you really are nothing. You would be nothing without us. And certainly without your brothers. Why would Ara have taken an interest in you otherwise huh? You’re nothing
special. You’re nobody,” Joe spat at them, venom in his voice. Taeyong looked between his brother and the boy holding his arm, seeing the struck look on Sicheng’s face. So when Joe pulled him close Taeyong swung his fist up and hit Joe in the jaw. Surprisingly the grip on his upper arm didn’t loosen, rather it tightened, which threw Taeyong off.

“You’re not as strong as you think, princess,” Joe glared at him. Taeyong was feeling so incredibly stunned he didn’t even resist. Usually his strength was categorized as above average. This guy must have jaws of steel.

A girl had found her way to them, Taeyong recognized her as Ara. The cause of this whole mess. Plus Donghyuck’s and Mark’s mess from what he’d heard.

“What’s happening Joe?” She said, looking between all of them.

“Just having a nice chat with our friends here,” he said with a roll of the eyes. Ara smirked and Taeyong saw only darkness in her eyes. No life and no happiness. Only a smile full of contempt and misguided intentions.

“Oh really,” she purred and walked closer to Joe and Taeyong, running a finger up the latter’s chest. Taeyong recoiled in shock.

“Okay that’s enough, you guys are delusional,” he said, using maximum force to rip himself out of Joe’s grasp, turning and walking to Sicheng and Kun. “Stay away from my brother or there will be consequences.” He glared at them with his icy features set in a stone like expression. Joe and Ara stood side by side, looking amused at the implications of his statement and it made Taeyong disgusted. The oldest grabbed Sicheng’s arm and started walking out the door, Kun following by default, the door closed behind them with a slam.

~

Mark watched fondly as Donghyuck kissed Jisung’s forehead and his cheeks and his neck, causing the youngest to squeal. Chenle laughed with a screech and Donghyuck dove for him too, delivering more kisses.

He finally seemed satisfied with all the love he’d spread, hugging them both tightly before offering a goodnight and I love you. Jisung and Chenle both echoed the sentiment and closed their eyes with smiles on their faces. Donghyuck closed the door.

They’d already tucked in Lucas and Jungwoo, Donghyuck giving them both a loud kiss on the cheek each and both of them giving him protests. They all said I love you though. Mark did notice some worry on his boyfriend’s face seeing as Taeyong wasn’t back yet. Quietly they walked back to Donghyuck’s room, closing the door after themselves. They had both already brushed their teeth, Mark having helped Jisung do it while Donghyuck prevented Chenle and Lucas from squeezing out all the toothpaste literally everywhere. Now they quickly changed into pyjamas, sneaking glances at each other, cheeks red.

Mark felt nervous for some reason, his heart was already racing. They were going to sleep in the same bed. And they had sort of done that before, but now it felt different. He laughed nervously as Donghyuck laid down first, creeping close to the wall so Mark would fit. Donghyuck’s Michael Jackson poster was staring at them judgmentally. The older got down next to Donghyuck and pulled the comforter over them. Donghyuck laid on his side so he was facing Mark. He wore a small grin. Mark returned it, reaching out to brush a hand through Donghyuck’s fluffy peach hair. They stayed silent for at least a minute, the darkness of Donghyuck’s room creating an air of suspense. The sophomore’s smile slowly diminished, his eyes downcast. Mark frowned. But he waited. Because he
could see that Donghyuck wanted to say something.

“Remember when you first came over here. For our first sleepover?” Donghyuck started, his voice almost trembling. Mark nodded.

“And remember how you asked about, uh,” Donghyuck had to breathe in deeply before continuing. He knew what he wanted to talk about. He knew. It was just very hard for him.

“It’s okay,” Mark told him quietly.

“You asked about, um, our parents?” He finally managed. Mark was definitely surprised at that statement. He did ask that, he remembered. It just wasn’t something he’d expect Donghyuck to bring up. It had honestly slipped his mind.

“I think I’m ready to tell you about them,” Donghyuck told him, eyes finally meeting Mark’s. The junior saw the dampness in them, offering a nervous smile.

“And I will listen, promise.”

“Good. Okay,” Donghyuck said, chuckling nervously. “Oh wow I don’t know where to start.”

Mark gave Donghyuck all the time he needed and then he prepared himself to listen attentively when Donghyuck opened his mouth again.

“Our parents work. They work a lot. They work all the time and that’s why they’re never home. They spend all their nights and days at work, renting apartments and hotels. They’re incredibly rich. That’s why we have this house and whatever we could wish for. Every month they transfer money to Taeyongie hyung’s account so he can pay rent and groceries and any necessities,” Donghyuck was speaking rapidly, but seemed to be settling into a tempo. Mark’s eyes rapidly widened.

“I have met my parents twice in my life. Once when I was six and in the hospital for an appendicitis surgery that my parents apparently had to approve - otherwise I would’ve died - which they reluctantly did. And once when I was nine and my mother dropped by the house we lived in then to leave Chenle in Taeyong’s arms. Chenle who had just been born.” Donghyuck’s voice gained some anger as he kept going.

“Since our parents are never around Taeyong has been taking care of us since forever. We had nannies until he turned ten, that’s when my parents decided it was an unnecessary expense to hire nannies, wanting Taeyong to take care of everything. He learned how to cook, clean and fixed all our school papers. When he got older he learned how to forge our parents’ signature if we ever had any school trips. But of course schools get suspicious. When our parents never pick us up or come to meetings. That’s why we move around. Partly because of their job. But also because we cannot stay too long in one place since people will get suspicious.” Mark could feel the complete shock on his face. The complete disbelief to the whole situation. “Our parents threaten us by saying that we will be taken away by social workers and separated if a teacher ever catches us. If anyone ever finds out. And we don’t want to risk being separated.” Donghyuck gulped down tears, shuddering in discomfort.

“I don’t have any feelings towards our parents. I have no love and no hate because I don’t know them. I only know the love Taeyong hyung has given us. The advice and the time he spends on us, he dedicates his whole life to us. He might be the only one to know the actual story of why our parents disregard us but he refuses to tell us. He teaches us early on that if anyone asks at school we just make something up or, preferably, we don’t talk about parents at all. Because then we can stay just a little longer. Even if it’s just for a little,” Donghyuck’s voice was on the verge of breaking but
he kept on going.

“He has given us so much love. We don’t even miss having parents. He makes sure of that. And it sucks so much because I know how much he must’ve missed out on, being a child. He had to grow up so quickly and it really sucks. But I’m so grateful to have him. And I wouldn’t trade him for any deadbeat parents ever.” Donghyuck finished off strongly. Mark felt overly proud and scared and disgusted simultaneously. He couldn’t believe people like that existed. He watched as Donghyuck’s eyes softened into something fragile. “It’s the first time I tell someone this Mark Lee. Someone who’s not family. You can’t tell anyone.”

Mark inhaled, shuddering. His heart was aching for the brothers. Having grown up under such conditions, something revealed itself to him. The Lee brothers are so strong. So incredibly strong.

“Of course Hyuckie, I won’t tell anyone. I promise,” he said, eyes locking into Donghyuck’s.

“Thank you for telling me.”

The younger offered a tentative smile. After holding eye contact, his smile turned into slightly parted lips, a tongue lapping at them gently. Donghyuck scooted closer, their noses bumping together gently. Mark automatically held his breath. Donghyuck moved his body even closer, tilting his head slightly, his eyes fluttering close. Mark felt his own do the same. Then there was a soft pressure on his lips. Fleeting and featherlight, retreating after two seconds of contact. Mark could feel his breath hitch.

“Thank you,” Donghyuck breathed. And then he surged forward again, this time applying more pressure, Mark finally moving from his frozen position to reciprocate the gesture. His hands landed on Donghyuck’s waist, the younger gently placing a hand on his cheek. They kissed languidly, warm pressure and smooth pillowy lips, meshing together and creating tiny sparks of sensation all along their bodies. They eventually pulled away, smiles painting their faces with a certain glow. Mark pulled Donghyuck closer to hug him to his own body. He thumbed gently at the boy’s enticing moles.

“Is this okay?” He asked, voice a mere whisper. Donghyuck nodded and relaxed in the hold. They were breathing peacefully, content and waiting for sleep to overtake them as their nerves burned with electricity. Mark heard a door open downstairs.

“Hyung’s home,” Donghyuck mumbled, sleep overtaking him with intensity. Mark simply hummed in response, feeling his own eyelids close, eyelashes fluttering.

Sleep came easily. The remnants of their kiss lulling them into sweet dreams.
Taeyong dropped Kun off at his apartment on the way home, Sicheng not having spoken a word at all during the ride. Taeyong felt anger bubbling in him because of those people. He couldn’t believe they’d managed to get into his brother’s head and manipulate him. He felt so angry. He also felt conflicted about not having noticed. He couldn’t believe Sicheng had been hanging out with such awful people. He felt so disgusted after what Joe had done, grabbing him like he had a right to do so. And on top of that he said some really mean stuff to Sicheng. Taeyong had a bad feeling in his stomach about the situation. He did not feel comfortable knowing they went to school with his brothers.

They reached the house, Taeyong seeing all the lights were off, and he was confident Donghyuck and Mark had successfully put their younger brothers to bed. He also knew he’d been gone longer than he was supposed to, but hopefully that hadn’t caused any problems. He turned off the car and walked around to the passenger seat, helping Sicheng out. The junior leaned on Taeyong as they walked into the house, not feeling stable enough to walk by himself. His head was hung low and Taeyong could see the weariness, the shame, the confusion, the betrayal on his face. Taeyong’s heart was aching for his little brother.

Quietly they made their way to Sicheng’s room, Taeyong sitting him down on the bed and walking over to close the window, which he had apparently forgotten to do in his haste. Taeyong breathed in the remaining night air deeply to gather himself. This night had been one of the most distressing ones of his life.

With a tired smile he turned back to his brother who was watching him already.

“Okay, sweetheart. Can you try and take off your clothes for me, change into pyjamas. I will get some water, a towel, some makeup wipes and some crackers. And aspirin,” Taeyong told him in a hushed voice. The younger nodded and Taeyong set out to finish his tasks. He changed his own clothing into pyjama pants and a clean shirt, before getting a damp towel, a bucket just in case of any throwing up, a bottle of cold water and makeup wipes and the aspirin. Of course. He also brought crackers because Sicheng needed something in his stomach.

He returned to his brother’s room, seeing the younger had changed into some warm and cozy clothes, still sitting on the edge of the bed, arms around him, self consciously. Taeyong frowned and closed the door behind him before walking over to his brother. He put the bucket by the bed, the crackers and water on the nightstand before sitting down next to his brother delicately, reaching out to nudge the younger gently on the shoulder. Sicheng sighed, shivering, before he scooted up slightly, turning to face Taeyong. His head still hung low. Taeyong put two fingers under his chin and lifted his head up. He smiled comfortingly and pulled out some makeup wipes. Meticulously he swiped over Sicheng’s face, removing the light makeup that had been applied. Sicheng closed his eyes and relaxed into the administrations, the gentle motions and cool wipe making him feel slightly better.
Taeyong deemed him clean enough and stood up to throw away the used wipes. He made sure the younger drank some water, small sips, and ate a cracker before telling Sicheng to lie down, putting the damp towel on his forehead. From the way Sicheng had been sweating before he figured the cold of the wet towel would be nice. He seemed to be right from the way Sicheng unwound his stiff shoulders marginally. Taeyong went about the room, putting away discarded clothes and arranging messy spaces, trying to keep busy. He felt jittery and frazzled. He couldn’t help but shiver as his mind fleetingly thought back to that guy, Joe, grabbing him. His skin felt clammy and disgusting, the words sexual assault creeping by him speedily. But it wasn’t. He could handle that. It wasn’t too bad.

Sicheng suddenly called his name timidly, Taeyong breaking out of his mind and turning to the bed, hurrying over.

“What’s wrong?” He asked, minding the volume of his voice.

“Can you lie down with me?” Sicheng asked, still lying with the towel cooling his face, body on top of the covers. Taeyong frowned but nodded, lying down next to his little brother.

“You should try and sleep,” Taeyong said, reaching out a hand to brush away some stray strands of hair from Sicheng’s forehead. Sicheng bit his lip.

“I can’t sleep. Not without those voices talking to me,” he breathed. Taeyong scooted slightly closer.

“Which voices?” He questioned, still stroking Sicheng’s hair. The only source of light was the bed lamp, providing a darker atmosphere, the obscure light encasing them roughly. Creating lines on their faces.

“The ones I’ve been listening to for the past few weeks.” Sicheng’s eyes slipped close, he didn’t want to face his older brother.

“What are they saying?” Taeyong felt like he knew what it could be about, remembering what Joe had said earlier that night to Sicheng.

“I’m not good enough, hyung.” And the words were out. “I hate it. I am such a nobody. I will never have the looks or personality that you do. I will never be good enough or live up to anyone’s expectations. No one will love me like they love you guys,” Sicheng had tears silently making their way down his cheeks. “I feel like there’s this dark cloud surrounding me, telling me I should hate myself and I do. I hate myself for hating you. Sometimes. I really hate you for being so great. Even though I love you hyung. I really do. It just keeps telling me you’re handsome and kind and lovable. And it tells me to hate you for that. And I hate me for thinking like that on first place. But the shadow takes over. I couldn’t even defend Donghyuck! I feel like I’m suffocating in darkness, it’s like I’m under water. I can’t breathe.”

Taeyong listened, not allowing his turbulent emotions to show on his face. He stroked his brother’s hair. And he listened.

“There is a weight on my chest, preventing me from being with Kun or calling Yuta. Or doing anything I want because I don’t deserve it. I hate myself hyung. So much. I’m nobody, and I thought popularity would fix that. Ara said she’d help. Hyung I’m so sorry.” He sobbed. Taeyong immediately pulled the other close, Sicheng’s face burying itself in his chest, Taeyong kissing his hair and rocking them lightly.

“It’s gonna be okay. I promise.”

On the inside. Taeyong was breaking.
That night, when Sicheng had fallen asleep, Taeyong laid awake. He couldn’t believe how he could’ve missed something so major happening in his brother’s life. All the feelings he had. All those thoughts. How had Taeyong missed that? He could feel a stray tear leaving his open eyes.

How could Sicheng not see how good he was? How kind and responsible. How beautiful and respectful. How his smile was so bright and his eyes were so full of happiness. Taeyong always thought Sicheng enjoyed not being popular. How he took pride in doing what he wanted to do. And now Taeyong wasn’t sure. His brother had fallen down a black hole and Taeyong wasn’t sure of how to pull him up. How to bring him back to the light.

And then those people. Those disgusting and awful people who lured him into the hole. Ara, Joe and their friends. Taeyong felt the anger simmering in his chest, making him warm all over. He also felt fear at the thought of Joe, his rough hands grabbing Taeyong and holding him in place, holding him down and breaking him down. Taeyong felt more tears leave him, and he hoped that Sicheng who was sleeping with his head on Taeyong’s chest, wouldn’t wake up from how he was shaking.

The night was dark. Too dark for the thoughts in Taeyong’s head.

~

Taeyong had managed only two hours of sleep before he had to get up, his whole being whirring. Sicheng slept on, the exhaustion from the night before leaving him knocked out for another few hours.

Taeyong made sure to tuck him in properly, refilling his water and steadily walking down into the kitchen with his laptop. The sun wasn’t up yet and he was sure everyone was sleeping. But he couldn’t. He needed a plan first.

He needed help. He couldn’t fix Sicheng by himself. So he researched. He sat by his screen for two hours, reading through the links and webpages he found, scribbling on a paper. His eyes were threatening to close but he pushed through. Taeyong needed to help his brother. Priority number one.

By the time the sun was peeking through the closed blinds in the kitchen Taeyong decided to finally stop. He’d found good information and knew roughly what to do for now.

So he cooked. He decided to cook a high quality breakfast, making all different sorts of delicacies and sweets. He decided they could have a day where you get dessert for breakfast. He was probably sleep deprived to think like that.

Taeyong shook his head at himself, chuckling. He was definitely sleep deprived.

A couple of hours later he had set the table with fancy silverware and a wide array of breakfast items. He decided to lie down for a few minutes on the couch after he was done, just closing his eyes for a bit. Just a bit.

Before he could prevent it, he was sleeping.
Donghyuck woke up with his head on Mark’s arm, the older facing him, still asleep. Mark’s mouth was open and his eyelashes fluttered as he dreamed. Donghyuck giggled and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He didn’t really feel like getting up just yet. It felt too nice.

He had felt like a big weight had lifted off of him when he told Mark about their parents. Donghyuck had discussed it with Taeyong the day before as well, making sure that it was okay for him to tell Mark. Taeyong seemed reluctant but he had agreed anyway.

Donghyuck had stirred up some emotions he didn’t often let himself feel. His immense gratefulness was one of them. For everything Taeyong sacrificed for them. He did know that Taeyong did a lot for them, but talking about it so blatantly suddenly made it seem like so much more. And Donghyuck was so grateful.

He couldn’t help but smile as Mark wrinkled his nose in his sleep. He also felt grateful to his boyfriend. For being understanding and listening to him without questions or judgment. Donghyuck was so in love. And that kiss. The kiss had been perfect, the tension being at its peak and their emotions being so close to the surface. It had been really good. Donghyuck didn’t believe in cliches like fireworks and such, because it wasn’t true. It was a kiss. It wasn’t out of this world but it was really nice. And he would like to do it every day from now on.

Mark stirred, eyes fluttering open lazily. When he caught Donghyuck already looking at him, he scoffed.

“You’re watching me sleep?” His voice was deep and raspy and Donghyuck was blessed.

“Yeah. Just admiring how ugly you look.” The younger smiled cheekily. Mark rolled his eyes and smacked Donghyuck’s thigh teasingly, letting his hand linger.

They laid still for a while, staring at each other. Donghyuck saw that Mark was wearing earrings, small studs. He must’ve forgotten to take them out the night before.

The older started leaning closer and Donghyuck smiled, knowing he wanted a kiss. But no. Not this time. Donghyuck put his hand on Mark’s face, pushing him back.

“Don’t you know anything Mark Lee?” The younger gasped dramatically.

“What?” Mark laughed incredulously.

“No kissing before brushing our teeth. It’s cliche movie rule number one!” Donghyuck faked a scandalized expression, causing Mark to laugh even harder.
“Fine. I won’t kiss you, I’ll just hug you instead,” Mark threw his arms around Donghyuck’s body, squeezing him tightly. The younger sputtered, wheezing at the tight grip.

“Fine,” he choked out. “One kiss.”

Mark let him go and smiled cheekily, much like how Donghyuck had smiled, then he leaned forward and pecked Donghyuck’s warm lips daintily, the pressure almost nonexistent.

“That’s it?” Donghyuck whined.

“No kissing before brushing our teeth. Rule number one Donghyuck-ah!”

The sophomore groaned miserably as Mark’s loud laugh rang throughout the room.

~

Taeyong stirred when he felt a weight on his chest. He could feel the pain in his neck from sleeping on the couch and the fatigue still lingered as he had most probably not slept for so long.

His eyes fluttered open tiredly and he was met with Jisung’s cute face. The youngest was pouting slightly at him, hands on his chest, gripping his shirt and body on top of Taeyong’s torso. He must’ve climbed onto the couch. Taeyong yawned slightly and put his arms around Jisung to keep him in place. The younger was looking at him intensely, eyes searching his face and features, Taeyong let the maknae look.

Jisung’s nose scrunched up minimally before he put his head down on Taeyong’s shoulder as well, relaxing into the grip. Taeyong leaned back as well, closing his eyes again, hands stroking soothing circles into Jisung’s back.

His mind wandered yet again to all the things Sicheng had told him last night. After the research he’d done he felt very confident that he knew, now, how to help. But there was some hesitance as well. It wasn’t an ideal solution, but definitely the best one. He would have to figure it out.

He could hear footsteps descending the stairs, Chenle trotting into the living room quietly. He gasped when he saw them.

“You’re doing morning cuddles without me!?” He asked, outraged. Taeyong scoffed playfully.

“Come here then,” he said and held his hand out. Chenle smiled brightly and skipped over, folding himself onto the couch and into Taeyong’s side. The eldest was surprised that they all still fit as easily as they had done when the two youngest brothers were even younger.

They laid there for quite a while, enjoying the quiet morning chill and the sun peeking through closed blinds.

When the house seemed more alive, Lucas and Jungwoo moving around upstairs, Donghyuck’s laugh being faintly heard and various different noises, Taeyong decided it was time for breakfast.

He hoarded Chenle and Jisung into the kitchen, their eyes widening excitedly at the sight. He let them start eating as soon as they had settled themselves.

Soon enough Lucas and Jungwoo arrived, exclamations of wonder leaving their mouths.

“This is awesome hyung!” Lucas shouted as he ate like there was no tomorrow.

Eventually Mark and Donghyuck also joined them, Mark looking at the table with wide eyes.
“Is this your breakfast everyday?” He asked incredulously. Taeyong laughed in disbelief. He would never have time for that.

“It’s not,” he assured the younger, ruffling his messy hair lightheartedly. They continued on eating, pleasant conversation exchanged across the table. Taeyong saw that Jungwoo continuously glanced upwards at the second floor. He assumed the younger was wondering where Sicheng was. Eventually Donghyuck got concerned too and Chenle was frowning.

They finished the hearty meal, Lucas helping Taeyong to put away all the dishes and leftover food. Jungwoo watched curiously as Taeyong assembled some of the foods on a plate, putting it on a tray and also pouring a glass of juice.

“Why didn’t Sicheng hyung come down for breakfast?” Jungwoo finally asked the question lingering in the air. Taeyong tried to smile but it was more of a sad grimace.

“He’s not feeling well right now,” Taeyong said, trying to be as vague as possible.

“Is he sick?” Lucas asked, sorry in his eyes.

“Not exactly.” Taeyong tried to explain but he really couldn’t. Not yet. “I’ll tell you more later, he just needs to stay in bed for now.”

They all looked like they really wanted to know more now, but Taeyong simply gave them an apologetic look and proceeded to walk up the stairs with the food.

He opened Sicheng’s door gingerly, balancing the tray expertly. His brother was laying in bed, eyes open and staring emptily at the wall in front of him.

“Sichengie,” Taeyong said, closing the door behind him. “How are you feeling?”

“My head hurts,” the younger said, sitting up slowly, eyes regaining their focus as Taeyong sat down next to him with the food. Taeyong let the other eat for a while, seeing Sicheng nibbling carefully on the food and sipping his drink slowly. He saw that the water was almost gone and the aspirin as well.

Taeyong sat, legs folded under him as he fiddled with his fingers, a hand coming up to his mouth until he was biting his nails.

“What is it hyung?” Sicheng asked eventually, seeing that the other wanted to say something.

“Sicheng, I did some research this morning,” Taeyong started, lips dry. It felt incredibly hard for him to present his thoughts at the moment. “I think you have depression.”

Sicheng stared at him, mouth parted. Taeyong searched his eyes for something, he didn’t know what, and found a turmoil. Sicheng held his gaze, eyes eventually fading out of focus. As if he was reflecting the statement.

“I think you’re feeling this way because you have depression and I think you should meet with a professional psychologist,” Taeyong continued. “I think they can help you understand how to change the voices into something more positive. Maybe make you feel better about yourself and about your life.”

Sicheng was listening, but his eyes were still unfocused.

“South Korea has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, Sicheng-ah. And we all know how many kids suffer from depression all over the world today. And a lot of them succumb to the
darkness,” Taeyong tried to breathe deeply. “And I don’t want you to end up like that.”

“So,” Sicheng finally spoke. “The voices in my head aren’t me. The voices telling me all these bad things. They’re depression?” His eyes were watering and his lips trembled. But it felt right. Taeyong could see that Sicheng felt like something might’ve fallen into place. That they knew what was wrong and could actually fix it. He wasn’t lost.

“They might be. I think a therapist could honestly help you figure it out. Would you want to try?” Taeyong kept a small encouraging smile on his face, voice low and soothing. No pressure.

“I think so,” Sicheng said, a small tearful smile spreading across his lips. Taeyong returned it.

“I’ll give them a call then.”

~

When Taeyong had left Sicheng had broken down in tears. He felt so immensely guilty and terrible for having the thoughts he did, and now he had a chance at bettering them. At a new perspective. It felt like a piece fell into place.

When he had gathered himself he decided to shower and change into clean clothes, leaving his room and feeling refreshed. Some rawness still lingered on his own self, probably reflected as red eyes and dark bags and fatigued movements. He was mentally exhausted. And his brothers could pick it up. They were more careful than usual, making sure to talk gently and play quietly and hug him tightly a lot of times. All the time. He basked in the affection he was receiving, trying to keep his mind off of the dark thoughts and that black hole threatening to swallow his mentality.

The day proceeded. After Mark had left, Donghyuck sat next to Sicheng on the couch for a while, them sharing earbuds while listening to some music and discussing it. Mostly Donghyuck talking though.

Taeyong made sure to send reassuring smiles Sicheng’s way all along, telling him that he’d managed to fix an appointment for tomorrow which was Sunday.

Chenle offered all of his favourite toys to Sicheng and Jisung refused to leave his lap when they watched a movie. Lucas challenged him to play a game on the younger’s phone, Sicheng trying to beat Lucas high score. Jungwoo grabbed his hand and smiled his angelic smile, chatting softly about nothing and everything. He also texted Kun and asked to talk to him that Monday, hoping to be able to apologize. Kun’s response was filled with well wishes and hearts, confirming that yes they could meet up on Monday.

Sicheng felt so incredibly soft. His insides felt gooey and warm.

He wished every day could be like that. He wished he could feel that joy everyday. And maybe he could, soon enough.
Sunday came with a late morning. Taeyong who’d slept badly the night before accidentally slept for too long that night, since he was not as anxious. Chenle had joined him in bed during the night complaining about a nightmare which had made his sleep even more peaceful, as he got to cuddle his brother.

He made a less fancy breakfast and they all ate together, Lucas convincing Taeyong that they eat in front of the TV. The oldest rolled his eyes but allowed it. He felt rebellious.

After breakfast Donghyuck and Jungwoo cleaned up the dishes as the others continued watching TV.

Taeyong eventually had to break away from his brothers, tapping Sicheng’s knee.

“We have to get ready,” he told the other, getting up from the couch. Sicheng nodded and followed, making his way up the stairs. Taeyong walked into the kitchen.

“Donghyuckie, Sicheng and I have an errand to run in town, could you keep an eye on the little ones?” He said with a small smile. Donghyuck looked back at him with a confused expression as Taeyong didn’t tell him what they were going to do in town.

“I guess yeah. Is it okay if Jaemin comes over? He wanted to study together for a test.”

“Yeah that’s fine, thank you so much. Please remember to feed them something before we get home at least,” Taeyong said and Donghyuck scoffed playfully.

“Of course my dear brother.”

“Great,” Taeyong laughed as well, heading upstairs to change.

When they left he reminded Donghyuck once again to feed them lunch and to call if there was anything at all. All of the brothers shouted excited goodbyes at him and Sicheng when they exited the house, heading to the car.

Then they left for town.
Sicheng felt his palms sweating as they approached the city. He felt weirdly nervous about the whole thing, meeting a therapist. He felt reluctant to do it, the voices in his head telling him not to. But he also trusted what his brother said. This could help him feel better. Taeyong was tapping his finger to the beat of the music as he drove, Sicheng fiddling with his necklace pendant.

They eventually arrived at their destination, parking the car. The building had several floors, the grey exterior not reassuring Sicheng in the slightest. He sighed quietly as he looked up at the construction. Taeyong fortunately grabbed his hand and started leading him towards it. He was afraid he might’ve run away otherwise.

The elevator ride was quiet, Sicheng feeling his heartbeat pick up, nerves increasing drastically. Taeyong told the lady at the front desk when they had their appointment and she politely told them to sit in the waiting room until the psychologist called for them.

Sicheng couldn’t stop fidgeting in his seat while they waited, he could feel the sweat forming on his brows.

“Sicheng-ah,” Taeyong said quietly. Sicheng looked up at him questioningly. “You know that you don’t have to tell them anything you don’t want to. And if asked about our parents,” Taeyong stopped to bite his lip. Sicheng could see a dark flash in his eyes as he mentioned them. “If you’re asked about them, you can tell the truth. If you feel it’s necessary.”

Sicheng’s eyes widened. Taeyong had always told them not to do that. It was the one thing he was always clear about. Don’t tell anyone about their parents. Sicheng knew it could get them separated and taken from each other, which was the last thing he wanted.

“I won’t hyung. I’ll just say that they work a lot. I don’t want to risk anything,” he firmly stated. Taeyong smiled slightly, his expression dejected but still relieved.

“Okay.”

“Sicheng?” A voice suddenly called out, both of them turning in their seats to be met with an older woman. She was wearing baggy jeans and a T-shirt, a flannel shirt thrown on top. She looked approachable and kind, her face smiling and her eyes bright, her glasses perched on her head. Sicheng stood up to greet her. He bowed at the waist.

“Nice to meet you,” he told her, voice wavering.

“Nice to meet you too, I’m doctor Song,” she replied and inclined her head back before she looked at Taeyong. “Are you the brother?” She asked, voice light and inquiring. Taeyong nodded and bowed slightly.

“Nice to meet you. I do believe it would be best if you wait here during the session, is that okay?” She asked. Taeyong nodded with a smile. “Great, right this way then,” she started walking, Sicheng throwing a scared look his brother’s way. Taeyong smiled reassuringly and Sicheng gathered himself enough to follow her.

This was fine. He tried to convince himself. This would help. Help him breathe again.

~

Taeyong exhaled nervously as Sicheng left with the therapist. He took a few moments to breathe before he pulled out his phone, trying not to think too much about what might be going on during the
session. He texted Max back and forth, Max complaining about wedding related stuff while Johnny was sending him memes periodically and Ten was sending him different dance clips to check out.

Doyoung had sent a picture of his niece looking into the camera with wide eyes, a popsicle in her mouth that was melting. Taeyong laughed quietly and sent a row of emoticons back.

He hoped Sicheng was doing okay, hoped she understood his thoughts and feelings properly. He really didn’t know how to help his brother if this therapist couldn’t. Her reviews were the best ones he’d found.

Eventually the hour-long session was over, Sicheng walking back to his brother with a genuine smile on his face. Taeyong put away his phone quickly and stood up in anticipation.

“How did it go?” He asked, not being able to contain his words. Sicheng nodded slightly.

“It was good,” he answered. “I would like to come back.” Taeyong nodded.

“Of course, yeah,” he smiled widely, relieved that it had worked out. “Perfect.”

They walked back to the car in silence, both being content and comfortable. When they were seated, Taeyong tapped the steering wheel with his finger for a while before making a decision.

“How about we go for lunch in town, just us?” He turned to his younger brother with inquiring eyes. The junior smiled and nodded.

“I would love that, hyung.”

~

“Honey I’m home!” Jaemin’s obnoxious voice called throughout the house, Donghyuck rolling his eyes fondly as he heard the door close with a thump. Jaemin had made it a habit from the start to simply waltz in whenever he was supposed to come over. He said it was good for breaking barriers. Donghyuck was currently sitting on the floor with Lucas and Chenle, playing a board game. Jaemin walked into the living room, falling down on the couch like he belonged there.

“What’s up?” Jaemin said with a grin, looking at the brothers. Jisung had been sitting on the floor, playing with legos until Jaemin came. Then the maknae stood up and walked over to climb onto the couch. Jaemin opened his arms and pulled the four year old into an embrace.

“I’m kicking butt in this game!” Lucas cheered, rolling the dice and getting the highest number. Chenle pouted as Lucas passed the finish line.

“I don’t like this game,” he declared and got up, walking over to Jaemin and Jisung on the couch instead. Donghyuck scoffed quietly as Lucas cheered obnoxiously.

“Okay let’s clean this game up and then we can eat,” Donghyuck said, tone light. Then his smile dropped abruptly. “Ugh. I sound like Taeyong hyung.”

“Food!” Jaemin cheered, picking Jisung up and heading for the kitchen, Chenle trailing after them as he was apparently hungry too. “What are we having?”

“I don’t know, you decide,” Donghyuck called back, still upset about sounding so much like his brother.

“Let’s order pizza!”
“Yes Nana let’s do that. Will you pay with your college funds?”

“Very funny Duckie!”

“Let’s just make pizza instead,” Donghyuck said as he entered the kitchen. Jaemin nodded excitedly, agreeing to the idea. As they set out to make a dough - they being Donghyuck - Jungwoo trampled down the stairs, having been upstairs and doing homework. Thankfully, he immediately started helping to cook. Jaemin was being useless, pacing around with Jisung and Chenle instead. Donghyuck snorted a laugh at them, particularly at the laziness of his friend.

“Jaemin-ah stop playing around and help with this,” Donghyuck said teasingly, Jaemin giving him a pout before dragging his feet over slowly and actually helping. Donghyuck really should’ve known better.

The kitchen ended up covered in flour and the pizza ended up burnt. And at the end of the day neither Jaemin nor Donghyuck had actually studied for the test.

~

Taeyong sat across from Sicheng as they ate their lunch. They’d chosen Italian food, Sicheng getting lasagna and Taeyong eating pasta.

The younger talked lightly about what he’d done during the meeting. Mostly talking about Ara and her friends as well as his own toxic thoughts. Taeyong listened attentively to what he had to say, offering input where it was needed and nodding along as Sicheng tried to explain.

He felt relieved that the appointment had worked out. He wanted the absolute best for his brothers. Always. And thankfully he had managed to get it right this time.

The topic delved into other things eventually, Taeyong talking about his friends, Sicheng asking about Yuta and then both of them talking about how good the food is.

It felt really nice to do something just the two of them, Sicheng was Taeyong’s first brother after all. They were close in age and sometimes he forgot that Sicheng also needed attention and care like all of his other bothers. Therefore, it felt really good to just enjoy each other’s presence. Just the two of them.

“Hyung?” Sicheng said as he swallowed his last bite. Taeyong hummed around his pasta. “Can I change my hair color?” Sicheng had a darker brown color right now, his roots very visible as he hadn’t colored it for a year or so. “I feel like doing something new. Making a new beginning, you know?”

“Sure,” Taeyong nodded with a smile. “I think I could use a coloring as well,” he said, pulling at his bleached strands, knowing that his roots were very much on display. “Let’s get the dye on or way back.”

Sicheng smiled bright, eyes forming crescents. “Great, thank you hyung.” Taeyong smiled back softly.

“No problem. No problem at all.”

~

Choosing colors turned out to be incredibly hard. Sicheng felt so incredibly indecisive as they stood in front of the shelf with all the hair-dyes. Eventually Sicheng managed to narrow it down to a
pinkish strawberry blonde and black. Two distinctly different colors. Taeyong pondered. Both looked good.

“Let’s ask Yuta!” He suddenly said, Sicheng looking startled at the suggestion. Taeyong pulled his phone out and snapped a quick picture of Sicheng’s confused face, making sure that Sicheng’s hands were in the shot as they held the boxes of dye.

“Hyung,” he whined. “Why are we asking Yuta hyung this?”

“Because we can’t decide by ourselves and we need help,” Taeyong told him matter of factly as he typed on his phone. A few seconds later a ding was heard from said phone. “Oh look he replied.” Taeyong held it out to show Sicheng. The younger cringed at the response Yuta had sent.

both looks great but do pink
it would look so cute on our cutie sichengie

“It’s strawberry blonde,” Sicheng sighed quietly and rolled his eyes. But he did feel his heart flutter at the words. It felt nice to be complimented.

“Okay, then it’s settled,” Taeyong clapped his hands excitedly. Sicheng couldn’t help but smile at the childlike gesture.

“Yeah, now you need to pick your color,” Sicheng told him. Taeyong considered the colors for a while before humming approvingly. He walked forward and grabbed a box.

“I’m gonna do red,” he decided. Sicheng nodded in approval. Red would suit his brother perfectly.

They left the store after grabbing some candy and soda, heading for the car that would take them home.

~

“Wow hyung,” Donghyuck exclaimed as Sicheng emerged from the bathroom later that night, walking into the living room. His hair was freshly washed and dried, now a pinkish strawberry blonde. “It looks great!” The younger assured him and walked forward to run a hand through the soft locks.

“Thank you,” Sicheng said and smiled at him.

“It suits you,” Jungwoo agreed as he walked into the living room, Lucas trailing behind him. Chenle and Jisung were both already in there, settled on the couch. They were going to watch a movie all together, they were just waiting for Taeyong to finish his hair.

In the meantime they got settled, Jungwoo next to Donghyuck, hugging the sophomore tightly while Chenle snuggled with Jisung and Lucas sprawled out on the armchair. Sicheng settled himself between Jungwoo and Chenle.

Taeyong finally descended the stairs, his hair a rich shade of red.

“You went from ice to fire hyung!” Donghyuk whistled at the eldest who rolled his eyes.

“I like it,” Chenle stayed with finality. Taeyong laughed at them before turning off the lights for a more cozy atmosphere. He then sat next to Sicheng, hugging his brother gently. Sicheng melted into the embrace and smiled slightly. The movie was started and they quickly got immersed.
Sicheng felt like it had been a really good day. He felt fresh and renewed after changing his hair color. He also felt good about doctor Song. Her vibes were good and she felt very understanding. There were of course some dark lingering in his mind. Like Taeyong looking much better with his new color than Sicheng did. And maybe Yuta calling him cute was just some sort of joke. Or maybe Donghyuck just lied about his hair looking great.

But he tried his best to push those thoughts away for now. He wanted to stay in this state of joy just for a while. Because it felt nice. He felt like he could handle his thoughts. He hoped that feeling would stick with him until tomorrow. Because he needed all the control he could get when talking to Kun.
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

I had a math test today and I think it went pretty well I think
How was your day?
Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter :))

Sicheng had been mulling over what to say all night, his sleep uneasy. By the time his alarm rang he felt slightly queasy and nauseous from lack of sleep and nerves. He really wanted Kun to forgive him and he didn’t know how to ask for that. He had avoided the senior for weeks, pretending that he didn’t even exist. He still loathed himself for letting Ara convince him into doing that.

But it gave you value. That treacherous voice whispered with a cackle. A value. Validation.

Sicheng shuddered as he rolled out of bed. The morning air was crisp and cold, his bare feet meeting a freezing floor.

Sicheng tried to breathe deeply as thoughts flooded his mind. Ara would have him back. He could still go to her. He could still be worth something in the eyes of others.

Sicheng groaned in frustration and decided to focus on anything but his thoughts. He went on with his routine, brushing teeth, choosing clothes, packing his school supplies and walking downstairs for breakfast. All of his brothers were up and running around busily as they usually did during mornings.

“Where’s my shoe? Hyung!”

“Watch out Lucas! My eyeshadow got smudged.”

“Hyung I promised to trade lunches with Daehwi today and he doesn’t like this flavour.”

“I can’t find my shoe!”

Sicheng rolled his eyes and walked into the kitchen, grabbing the lunch pack that had his name written on it. He made a sandwich and ate it serenely as he watched the chaos unfold.

Taeyong walked around helping all of the younger brothers, his shirt only halfway on and his newly dyed hair ruffled.

Sicheng decided that he should probably help. So he gulped down the last bits of his breakfast before he efficiently found Lucas’ shoe where he left it as usual, in the cupboard above the kitchen counter. Then he went on to helping Chenle remove the item of offense from his lunchbox, packing it in Donghyuck’s instead since he knew the younger liked it.

Then he calmly helped Jisung put on his shoes and jacket.

“Hyung we need to leave,” he said as he clothed himself as well.

“I’ll be right down,” Taeyong called from upstairs, as he was getting his own bag. Chenle was
dressed and ready, Lucas tying his shoe and Jungwoo adding finishing touches to his makeup. Donghyuck lazed about on the sofa with his phone while waiting.

Taeyong finally made his way downstairs and put his shoes and jacket on swiftly before they finally set out.

Just another regular morning in the Lee household.

~

Sicheng didn’t get the chance to talk to Kun before lunch, therefore, he nervously set out for the usual spot where he knew Kun would be. This was it. This was his chance to become a better friend and a better person. Popularity isn’t value. Remember. Doctor Song had said so. His breathing got heavy as he finally caught sight of the senior. Kun was sitting with his lunch in his lap, a calm little smile on his face as he unpacked the food. His chestnut hair was glowing in the sun, his clothes consisting of a T-shirt and jeans. Casual. Nothing out of the ordinary. Except Sicheng knew that a deck of cards hid in his pocket and that he had actually put a lot of thought into his clothes. Because he always did.

Sicheng wet his lips anxiously as Kun noticed him, waving a delicate hand gently. Sicheng tried to smile back. He really tried.

Carefully, he took a seat next to the senior, folding his legs timidly.

“I like your hair,” Kun told him kindly, Sicheng laughing awkwardly.

“Thanks,” he managed, his throat closing off. Kun nodded and simply continued unwrapping his lunch. Sicheng tried to gather up the courage.

“Kun ge,” he eventually started. “I am so sorry.” His words were followed by a shuddering inhale. “I am sorry for ignoring you these last few weeks and for not seeing how good of a person you actually are.” Sicheng managed to look up and found Kun already looking at him. “I didn’t realize. And I am truly sorry. I didn’t realize that I wanted to be your friend all along. Because you’re a good person, ge. And I should’ve seen that. I should’ve known that you’re one of the best people at this school. You’re real and you’re true to yourself. You’re you, and I should’ve known. I’m sorry.” The junior could feel the spirit flow out of him as he meekly stopped speaking. He felt so insufficient and lacking in why he was saying, so frustrated at himself.

“Sicheng,” Kun said, voice wavering with emotion. “Do you know why I’m alone? Why I never spend time with people other than you?”

Sicheng shook his head, the thought entering his mind for the first time. He tried to focus enough to dispel the bad thoughts creeping up on him.

“It’s because people think I’m weird. They think magic tricks are stupid and they think I’m a lame person for enjoying studying and they don’t like that I’m naturally optimistic. I have heard several different reasons. And none of them made me change myself,” Kun told him, a smile creeping onto his face. “I’m proud of who I am. I do all that because I enjoy it, and if someone can see me as a great person without wanting me to change, then I think I should hold onto that person.”

Sicheng felt the beginnings of relief bloom in his chest. Kun seemed positively positioned toward his apology.

“But you not talking to me really hurt me. And I don’t want to become your friend only to be ditched again. It’s not fair,” Kun’s usually light tone turned serious. Sicheng’s expression fell slightly. “So I
really hope you mean what you’re saying, because I think you’re a good person too.” Sicheng felt himself smile.

“I do,” he assured. “I really mean it. Me not talking to you was a great mistake, I feel terrible about doing it and I wish I could turn back time, which is probably a really typical thing to say.” He said, desperation in his tone because he really wished he could turn back time, no matter how typical it was.

Kun met his eyes dead on, holding his gaze for several moments. Sicheng hoped dearly that he could gain his friend back. He’d missed Kun so much when he hung out with Ara, not allowing himself to entertain the thought of being friends with the senior again, but now it seemed almost possible. Except you’re a terrible person. The voices started filling his head. He was awful, he’d rejected the only real friend he’d ever had and here he was wanting him back? Sicheng felt ashamed. His inner conflict was halted when Kun reached his hand out.

“Friends?”

One simple word. Such a small word, giving Sicheng many emotions. So many thoughts just dissipating and turning into new ones, so many feelings, so much relief. Relief. And most prominently, a sneaking feeling of joy. So he grabbed Kun’s hand securely.

“Friends.”

~

Taeyong felt incredibly stressed. He didn’t know why, he had just woken up late, he had forgotten his notebook at home, people were staring at him as per usual. Probably because of his new hair color.

He found it most peculiar that students at school still paid attention to him after they’d heard him talk and seen him behave like a normal person. He even asked Ten during one of their slower classes.

“Why are people still paying attention to me?” He asked, almost pouting. Ten’s hand was combing through his hair gently. The Thai male really enjoyed his new color.

“You’re still a mystery Taeyongie. They don’t know anything about you,” he told the other, not looking up from his notebook. “They’re curious.”

Taeyong huffed moodily and tried to focus on his own work, leaning into Ten’s administrations.

At the end of class he barely managed to finish the assignment and it was time for lunch.

Ten and Taeyong walked together through the corridors, chatting about a teacher they both disliked. He was extremely judgmental and targeted them especially because they had vivid hair colors.

“It’s serious discrimination,” Ten said vehemently as they sat down. Jaehyun, Johnny and Yuta were all by the table.

“What is?” Johnny asked curiously, munching on a piece of salad.

“Nothing, just a teacher,” Ten told him dismissively.

“Wow,” Jaehyun suddenly uttered, looking at Taeyong’s new hair color, causing Johnny and Yuta to look as well.
“Damn TY,” Yuta exclaimed. “Looks great!” Taeyong smiled at them, cheeks heating up.

“Thanks.”

“We are officially the two people with the hottest hair in school,” Ten announced and threw an arm around Taeyong’s shoulders. Taeyong laughed and grabbed his lunch from his bag.

As he was unpacking he felt a prickling sensation, someone watching him intently. He couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable, his skin crawling.

Subtly, he lifted his head, glancing around the cafeteria. His eyes flew over hundreds of faces, none of them appearing to be the right one, until his eyes caught a figure in the far left corner, a bulky figure, with a dark smirk on his face. He shivered involuntarily and averted his gaze. It was Joe.

Taeyong gulped and tried to seem unaffected. Joe was watching him. And not the usual way where students regarded him with curiosity. No, this was something else. He could still feel the burning, toxic touch on his waist.

“Taeyongie?” Ten called, voice concerned. Taeyong broke out of his mind and looked at his friend, finding worried eyes. “You okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine,” Taeyong told him, keeping his voice controlled. Ten gave him a once over before deciding to drop it. Taeyong inwardly exhaled with relief.

Taeil and Doyoung both approached the table at that time, sitting down graciously.

“Oh nothing, just your ego,” Doyoung greeted, smiling teasingly.

“Oh nothing, just your ego,” Yuta sass ed back, with one of his healing smiles. Taeyong rolled his eyes fondly at them. Doyoung growled, resembling a bunny more than anything really. Yuta cooed at him teasingly. Taeil simply ignored them and turned to Taeyong.

“Hey Taeyong?” Taeil addressed him. “What happened this Friday? Kun asked me for your address? It seemed urgent.” Taeyong paled. Should he tell his friends? He should. He trusted them enough. They deserved to know didn’t they? They were genuine people.

“Oh,” he uttered intelligently. “My brother. Sicheng. He was at a party, a college party, and it didn’t go so well. He texted Kun who told me and we went there to pick him up.” Taeyong explained.


“I’m glad,” Yuta said and smiled at him understandingly. Taeyong smiled back. Yuta was the only one who was aware of the majority of what had been going on. Taeyong felt grateful to have him there.

“Yeah that’s great,” Johnny nodded. “Friends like that are not worth keeping.”

“No,” Taeyong smiled sadly. “No they’re not.”
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

Ugh I’m sorry, this is sort of a filler. I don’t like it.

But I promise we will pick up speed soon with the plot :))

Hope you’ll enjoy <333

Mark sat in the music room, strumming on a guitar. He couldn’t help but smile slightly. He still felt giddy from Donghyuck and him having shared their first kiss. Heat found its way to his cheeks as he thought about it, the sensations still lingering in his mind. A few months ago he would’ve never expected to have a boyfriend, especially not one like Donghyuck. He started pulling on the strings with more vigor, the tune of Billionaire filling the room.

Even though people at school ignored him vehemently and his teammates were cautious in the locker room, Mark couldn’t help but feel happy. He liked where he was in life and he had his brother, his pseudo-brothers and his friends. His awesome friends. He could honestly say his life was good, which he knew was a privilege in today’s society.

The door opened gently and Mark looked up, question clear in his eyes. A girl entered, one he’d never seen before. Her hair was long and styled, her makeup was very pretty and her clothes were perfectly aligned. A small smile graced her lips as she noticed him.

“Mark oppa,” she said, voice high pitched. Mark raised an eyebrow and smiled politely.

“Uh hi?” He said confusedly. She smiled even wider.

“I thought I heard someone playing guitar,” her voice was somehow annoying. “You’re really good.”

“Thanks,” he trailed off uncertainly. “I’m sorry, but, who are you?” The girl’s smile fell slightly, her eyebrows furrowing.

“I’m Lexie,” she introduced herself. Mark’s eyes widened. Lexie. That was the girl who’d leaked the photos. The girl who had apparently cornered Donghyuck several times. This was her. Mark couldn’t help but stare at her intensely.

“You’re Lexie?” He asked incredulously and weirdly enough she seemed happy that he knew of her.

“Yes! Yes I am,” she responded happily, almost giddy. Mark’s own giddiness had disappeared long ago, leaving him with annoyance. He couldn’t believe this girl, standing in front of him and looking happy, after she’d intentionally leaked that photo.

“So you’re the one who leaked the photo?” He said, voice strained. Her happiness was gone instantly, her eyes widening in surprise. “You’re the one who outed us.” He felt the beginnings of anger in his chest.

“Ho-how, how, I don’t? How did you know?” Lexie stuttered, retreating backwards slightly. Mark
carefully put his guitar down, standing up.

“It doesn’t matter how I know. I just know that you did it. And it doesn’t even matter why, I’m happy with my life right now and I don’t need you to destroy it even further,” he spat. Her expression was clouded with indignation.

“I don’t understand!” She cried. “How can you be happy with that freak?! He’s disgusting!”

“He is not disgusting! Are you crazy? He’s beautiful and funny and so fucking kind. He’s everything you could never be with a personality like that,” Mark scoffed. It was one of the only times in his life where he felt true anger bubbling within him, so much rage. “I am in love with him. And it would do you good to leave us alone.” Lexie seemed vexed and disgusted by his words, her eyes not looking like they understood what he was on about.

“I thought you would come to your senses when I posted the photo, but I guess not,” her voice was filled with venom. She turned on her heel and walked away, not looking back. Mark couldn’t help but feel frustrated, he wanted her to see the pain, the wrong and the disgust of what she did. Of how wrong she was and how truly awful it is to do something like that, but he knew there wasn’t much else he could do other than be happy himself and stop thinking about her. Holding onto his anger would do no good.

Therefore, he sat down again, picked up the guitar and started playing.

~

Donghyuck startled when Mark came up behind him, putting a hand on his neck and pulling him in. Their lips touched fiercely, Donghyuck letting out a sound of surprise as Mark kissed him. One of his hands came up to Mark’s cheek, the other gripping his boyfriend’s blue sweater. Their lips moved together, warm and sweet. Mark broke off the kiss and sat down next to Donghyuck who stared at him incredulously. Mark’s hand stayed on his neck, stroking it as Donghyuck’s own hand fell away from his cheek.

Mark Lee just kissed Donghyuck. In the cafeteria. The crowded cafeteria.

“Well,” Suhyun said, shrugging slightly.

“What the actual fuck?” Renjun spoke with surprise although a smile was making its way onto his lips.

“What happened to the awkward, shy Mark Lee we used to know?” Jaemin exclaimed. “He would never do something like that,” Jaemin turned to Jeno as if he needed the other to explain it to him.

“I just felt like it,” Mark shrugged, a blush staining his cheeks slightly.

“Are you sick? Do you need to go to the nurse?” Jaemin asked with wide eyes. “Blink twice if you’re being blackmailed.” Mark rolled his eyes.

Donghyuck was still staring at him, speechless, a bashful smile on his lips. Mark was always the one being teased. Mark was the one he usually left speechless or blushing. This was not normal. But Donghyuck liked it.

He really did.

“Oh wow I think you’ve broken Donghyuck,” Suhyun suddenly spoke, a smirk on her lips. Donghyuck broke out of his thoughts and scoffed.
“Never, I am unbreakable,” he declared and winked at her. Jaemin rolled his eyes. Mark smiled at him, looking infatuated. A memory of their late night conversation floated through his mind. Of a hushed conversation and proof.

Proof that Donghyuck was truly one of the strongest people he’d ever met.

Unbreakable.

~

Taeyong sat quietly in English class, twirling a pen. Johnny was right next to him, while Jaehyun stood at the teacher’s desk, getting feedback for his latest essay. Taeyong was waiting for his turn, his heart beating rapidly. Because of everything that went down this weekend he hadn’t had time to properly write the essay and he knew it was going to come back and bite him in the ass.

Jaehyun was nodding along mindlessly from where he was standing, perfectly styled hair bobbing along. Taeyong laughed at the look in his eyes. Jaehyun was usually the most polite and cordial person in their little friend group, but it seemed like this teacher was the only one he couldn’t stand. Taeyong giggled quietly when Jaehyun’s eyes caught his and the other mouthed along playfully to whatever she was saying. Taeyong continued playing with his pen and broke eye contact, a smile lingering on his face.

“Hey Taeyong,” Johnny called quietly, Taeyong turning to look at him. “How did you get that scar?” Taeyong froze. The scar. The scar right next to his eye, something he never discussed. That scar.

“Oh,” he breathed. Johnny was studying the mark curiously. “I fell when I was little, nothing special really.” He explained, trying for a smile.

“Oh okay,” Johnny did seem a bit confused but he didn’t object. “It’s really pretty though.” He smiled. Taeyong’s cheeks heated up, but the painful memories that came with the scar didn’t disappear from his mind.

“Thank you,” he managed to say.

Jaehyun was just finishing up his feedback when ms Choi called Taeyong’s name. The red haired senior stood up and walked towards the front of the classroom. Jaehyun smiled at him comfortingly as they passed each other. Taeyong nodded at him thankfully.

“Well Taeyong,” Ms Choi started when he reached her. “This is not up to the standard of the assignment.” Taeyong started biting his nail anxiously. He knew she would say that. “I’m sorry but I cannot grade this. You missed the mark with this one.” Ms Choi sounded disappointed and Taeyong couldn’t help but feel his stomach twisting. He wasn’t getting a grade on this, that would make it harder to achieve a high final grade.

“I understand, thank you Ms Choi,” he said breezily, trying to keep his composure. She nodded in dismissal, Taeyong walking back to his seat. Jaehyun and Johnny were playing amongst themselves, folding paper planes and chatting cheerily. Taeyong sighed and tried to look like he wasn’t dying on the inside.

“How did it go?” Jaehyun asked him, kind smile in place. Taeyong answered earnestly.

“It went well.”

~
Sicheng sat in a daze as they drove home that day. He felt really happy about Kun having accepted his apology. They’d spent the rest of lunch catching up and getting reacquainted, getting used to each other again. Sicheng had really enjoyed spending his time with Kun, not having to feel suffocated and trapped like when he hung out with Ara. Although, hanging out with Kun evoked other emotions. Like anxiety. Anxiety because he wasn’t hanging out with Ara. Anxiety that this would make him invisible and insignificant, since he wasn’t Ah going out with Ara. He tried to calm down and ignore the thoughts but they kept creeping back. He hadn’t even seen Ara at all during the day, or Joe, Minchan and Seok jung for that part. Sicheng was a bit surprised that they hadn’t searched him up. Some part of him felt like they should’ve. But he was also relieved that they hadn’t, as he was not ready to face them at all, since it could very possibly result in him succumbing to his darker mind.

He tried to get out of his thoughts, tuning into the world again, slowly hearing the blasting music, Lucas and Chenle’s loud laughter, Taeyong talking animatedly with them and Jungwoo protesting. This was okay. This was normal. This was good. Doctor Song had told him to focus on other things when he felt his mind taking over, which is exactly what he tried to do.

He inhaled deeply, and then exhaled all the bad thoughts, like doctor Song told him. Then he pulled out his phone and searched up the number he had not ever used before.

He talked about a new start yesterday with Taeyong, he talked about wanting a fresh beginning. Kun was the first step, regaining a friend. Now he needed to gain some new ones.

*hi jiwoo, it’s sicheng from the party? I was wondering if you wanted to eat lunch with me and kun tomorrow?*

He pressed send before he could regret it. Kun hadn’t objected when he brought it up at the end of their lunch break, so he figured why not. This was a way to start over and do it right. Surrounding himself with positive influences and stepping out of his comfort zone. Also something doctor Song had recommended.

His phone lot up seconds later with a reply. Sicheng looked down at it anxiously.

*sure! i’ll bring my friend as well, where do you wanna meet up?*

Sicheng exhaled in relief. Good. That’s good. That’s really great. He could do this.

He could start over. And do it right this time.

~
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

My cat is sick. It's been a hectic weekend. Typical.
Hope everyone’s doing okay <3
Enjoy the chapter!!

“You ready?” Doyoung asked as he sorted their papers. Taeyong sighed quietly and nibbled on his pen. Jaehyun was sorting out the PowerPoint with Ten while Johnny and Taeil practiced their parts.

It was finally their turn to present their project for History. The project that had basically started their friendship in the first place. They were finally ready and finished. Taeyong could easily say that it was a good presentation, it calmed him down slightly to know that this project was at least good, unlike his English essay.

“Yeah,” he nodded and smiled at Doyoung. Yuta was trying to intercept the other as he tried to sort their papers, but Doyoung snarled at him menacingly.

“Guys,” Johnny said, “let’s go to the mall after school, I want to buy a hoodie.” The tall boy was wearing a hoodie as he said this but Taeyong also knew that Johnny loved the cozy oversized look.

“Sure, after dance practice,” Ten said and winked at Taeyong.

“Done, we’ll wait for you guys.”

Taeyong tried to make a functioning schedule for his afternoon. Lucas and Jungwoo would pick up Chenle and Jisung after school, Donghyuck rode with Mark and Sicheng usually waited for Taeyong to finish dance before they rode home together. If he went to the mall he would need to make sure the youngest brothers were taken care of, mainly Jisung and Chenle. So if he asked Sicheng to watch them until he got home and then if Donghyuck could possibly start making dinner it would all be fine. Great. Perfect.


“I’m in.”

~

Sicheng arrived at their usual spot for lunch, Kun already there like always. Sicheng waved and smiled in greeting, sitting down next to the older.

“Chocolate or vanilla?” Kun asked then, a glint in his eye. Sicheng raised an eyebrow.

“Chocolate.”

Kun pulled out two packages from his bag. They were ice cream. Sicheng’s eyes widened in
“Wow, ge, where did you get ice cream?” He asked and grabbed the chocolate one Kun handed him.

“The cafeteria, they were on sale,” he laughed, so carefree and serene. Sicheng smiled at the sound and started unwrapping his ice cream. He did feel slightly jealous that Kun could be so calm and at peace with himself while Sicheng still struggled to think properly without drowning. He didn’t want to feel so jealous of Kun, it didn’t sit right with him. He wanted Kun to be happy and he wanted to be a good friend, so why was he feeling that way?

“Sicheng!” A slightly raspy voice called, Sicheng looking up to see Jiwoo and another girl walking towards them. The blonde waved her hand at them. She was wearing a crop top, ripped jeans and an oversized jacket. Sicheng smiled and waved back.

“Hi, stranger,” Jiwoo greeted as they sat down. “It’s been three days.” She teased, crossing her legs.

“Tragic indeed,” Sicheng rolled his eyes and started licking his ice cream.

“Oh sweet, can I have a bite?” Her eyes lit up as she noticed the treat. Sicheng shrugged and held forward the sweet delicacy. Jiwoo bit off a chunk and melted it on her tongue with a satisfied look.

“By the way, this is Somin, she’s my friend and she’s a senior as well,” Jiwoo said, patting the girl on the thigh. Somin was pretty, hoops in her ears and brown hair let down. She was wearing a red crop top similar to Jiwoo’s and wide legged pants.

“Hello,” Sicheng greeted shyly. She was intimidating, especially as she hadn’t spoken quite yet.

“This is Sicheng and that’s Kun,” Jiwoo introduced and Kun smiled in their direction.

The conversation trailed off and Sicheng was eating his ice cream while Somin pulled out a lunch box, opening it and handing Jiwoo a pair of chopsticks. Together they ate from the lunch box, murmuring quietly between each other.

Sicheng shared a quick look with Kun who had scarcely finished his ice cream. The senior pondered before he eventually pulled a deck of cards from his sweater pocket.

“No you guys wanna see a magic trick?” He asked them, a smile on his face. Somin lit up with excitement, nodding.

“Of course,” she told him and Jiwoo nodded in agreement. Sicheng laughed.

Kun always knew how to break the ice.

~

Taeyong exhaled in relief as Sicheng sent him a message, confirming that he could watch the kids while Taeyong was out, before pocketing his phone. Apparently he could get a ride from Jiwoo. Taeyong vaguely remembered the girl from the night of the party. He knew she was genuine at least so he wasn’t worried.

Dance practice had went by in a flash, their choreography almost completely done. The competition was closing in on them, only leaving them with a few weeks left to practice.

“Nice work today everyone!” Ten said, out of breath as he dismissed the team. Taeyong waved at
Lisa and Momo, Seulgi even sending him a smile as they all left. Jonghyun went up to give Taeyong a small hug before leaving as well, only Ten and Taeyong remaining.

“Let’s shower and then meet up with the others,” Ten told him and drank from a water bottle greedily. Taeyong nodded and tried to catch his breath as well, bending at the waist to put his hands on his knees.

They swiftly made their way to the locker rooms and showered hastily, Ten splashing water on Taeyong as they did, the other shrieking from the coldness of it.

They hurried out to the parking lot where Taeil and Doyoung were already waiting in the car, blasting music.

“Yes!” Ten cheered, startling Taeil. “We made it Taeyongie!” He said and jumped up on the back of the truck. “We’re first! Johnny Seo can suck it!”

Taeyong laughed and jumped up on the car as well, dancing around lightly with Ten. Soon enough a collection of voices could be heard when the basketball team exited the school, Johnny, Jaehyun and Yuta breaking out from the cluster. Taeyong could see Mark and Donghyuck heading for the moped stand. Jeno, Renjun and Jaemin were walking towards the bus stop.

Johnny, Jaehyun and Yuta reached the car quickly.

“Get in the car losers!” Ten shouted, still excited. “We’re going shopping!”

~

The mall wasn’t too crowded, Tuesday wasn’t a typical shopping day after all. They walked around easily, looking into interesting stores and eyeing the different foods they offered.

The store Johnny wanted to go to was on the opposite side of the mall, but it didn’t take too long to get there since they had fun on the way.

“I love this store,” Johnny sighed happily when they entered. The store had some mainstream K-pop songs playing over the speakers, the clothes modern and youthful. The prints were edgy and the jeans were ripped. Definitely Taeyong’s kind of store. The red haired senior smiled as he looked at the racks of clothes.

“I’m going this way,” Johnny said and grabbed Yuta, dragging the Japanese away. Ten followed them and pulled a grumpy looking Doyoung with him. Taeil hummed in thought before walking over to the shoe section.

Taeyong glanced at Jaehyun and saw the other already looking at him.

“Let’s head this way?” Taeyong suggested and motioned for the shirts he wanted to look at.

“Lead the way,” Jaehyun told him with a dimpled smile.

So Taeyong did just that.

As they walked down the rows of neatly folded clothes, Taeyong kept glancing Jaehyun’s way, studying the other. Jaehyun’s complexion was so pale and so unblemished, his eyes forming crescents while he looked at the garments, a dimple popping forward when he purses his lips.
Jaehyun was very handsome. Taeyong wasn’t used to people talking to him in school from previous experiences and now to have someone that handsome next to him, calling him a friend, it was all very new.

Jaehyun was different. He was the first one that genuinely cared for the photographs on the wall, when asking about them with interest. It warmed Taeyong’s heart to think about that day. Jaehyun was also so kind and polite, always smiling and looking at him reassuringly. With those gentle brown eyes and dimples.

He was special.

Taeyong averted his eyes, trying not to look at Jaehyun too much. He probably thought it was creepy. But it had been a while since Taeyong had friends. Genuine friends.

“You know, I think this would look good on you,” Jaehyun said and picked a purple hoodie from a rack. Taeyong peered over and hummed in agreement.

“I like it,” he admitted and grabbed the garment. They checked a bit more until Taeyong stopped. “This would look good on you,” he held up an oversized t-shirt and measured it against Jaehyun’s torso. Jaehyun’s heart raced from their close proximity.

He took the shirt and nodded. It was a nice shirt after all.

“You know what,” Taeyong started, a rare speck of mischief in his eye. “Let’s pick outfits for each other,” he suggested. Jaehyun’s eyes widened. He could pick an outfit for Taeyong? Yes please.

“Sure,” he agreed and smirked. Taeyong rolled his eyes and disappeared through the aisles.

Jaehyun looked after the other with a longing look. Taeyong was so beautiful, Jaehyun could dress him in anything and it would look good.

With that thought in mind he started searching through the racks of clothes.

~

Taeyong stared at his reflection, the outfit Jaehyun had picked looked really nice. A form fitting black turtle neck together with a trench coat and tight, ripped, black jeans with a shiny belt.

“Come on TY, let’s see the goods,” Yuta called from outside, Taeyong snorting. He ran a hand through his hair one last time before he opened the curtain to the changing booth.

“Damn!” Ten gaped, a smile forming on his face. “You look great,” he nodded. Johnny, Taeil and Doyoung all made thumbs up while Yuta looked like a proud mother.

“Give us a spin,” the Japanese senior ordered and made a spinning motion with his finger. Taeyong rolled his eyes but complied.

“It looks great. And it also displays your non-existent ass,” Doyoung spoke like a true critic. Taeyong reached out and whacked him on the shoulder as Johnny chortled with laughter.

“He’s right though, honey,” Ten tutted with a teasing grin. Taeyong raised his fist threateningly.

“Okay enough, Jaehyun come on out,” Yuta shouted although he was holding in giggles.

Taeyong smiled immediately when he laid eyes on the pale senior. The clothes he’d picked for Jaehyun looked great on the other. It was a silky dark grey shirt, tucked into the dark washed jeans
he was wearing. A white turtle neck was under the almost completely unbuttoned shirt.

“Aww!” Ten mockingly exclaimed. “You’re matching!”

Taeyong looked down at his own black turtle neck and then at Jaehyun’s. They were indeed matching.

“Great minds think alike,” Taeil quoted and Doyoung snorted. Taeyong wanted to whack him again but decided against it.

“You look really good,” Jaehyun’s soft voice reached his ears and Taeyong turned to the boy.

“You too,” he threw back.

“And so do I, great to have that established,” Yuta scoffed, “now let’s hurry up and buy our shit so we can leave, I need coffee.”

~

Maybe Taeyong had decided to try a new flavour of coffee that he decidedly did not like. And maybe Jaehyun nudged his side, asking him if he wanted to switch. And maybe Taeyong nodded yes before graciously switching their drinks. And maybe he smiled when their fingers brushed. And maybe he pretended like he couldn’t see Ten’s waggling eyebrows.

But only maybe.
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

It’s kind of late, sorry, but I had an extra curricular activity for school today so I didn’t have time until now XD

But here it is, enjoy!! <333

“Hey TY,” Yuta said as they drove, nudging the other. Taeyong hummed and looked the Japanese senior. “Can I stay at your place tonight? My apartment is under construction and I’ve already crashed Johnny’s place too long,” Yuta’s smile was wide and his eyes bright, Taeyong’s eyes widening a bit. The red haired male was a bit surprised that Yuta wanted to stay at his place but he didn’t object. Because after all, Yuta was great and Taeyong didn’t mind cooking for one more.

“Okay,” he agreed.

“Thanks,” Yuta reciprocated.

They arrived at Taeyong’s house first. They got out of the car and waved bye to the others before they headed inside. Yuta was practically shaking, buzzing with energy from the coffee they drank at the mall. Taeyong still felt slightly excited to have the other at his house, the longing for a proper friendship aching in his heart. This was something he’d never allowed himself before, and now he was feeling it tenfold.

“I’m home!” Taeyong called when they’d shrugged off their jackets. He could smell something delicious, probably Donghyuck’s cooking.

“Hyung!” A shout came and a small body barreled into his, Chenle hugging the life out of Taeyong. Taeyong swept the other up and hugged him properly.

Yuta cooed teasingly and walked further into the house, Taeyong rolled his eyes and followed.

“Sichengie!” He heard Yuta exclaim excitedly and he entered the living room, seeing Sicheng on the couch, looking immensely shocked.

“Yuta hyung,” he greeted quietly, Yuta smiling and skipping over to sit next to Sicheng. Taeyong smiled, seeing the pair together, and decided to check on the food. He set Chenle down, the boy running into the kitchen before him.

“Hey hyung,” Donghyuck greeted, chopping vegetables. The table was being set by Lucas and Jungwoo who bickered back and forth about the placement of the glasses. Jisung sat in his chair already, waiting for the food. “You’re right on time, dinner is finished,” Donghyuck said, sweeping his arms out grandly, the knife still in his hand.

“That’s great, thank you Hyuck,” Taeyong said with a laugh and helped Chenle into a seat.

“Dinner!” Lucas called loudly and excitedly. Sicheng and Yuta had apparently heard as they entered he kitchen.
“Oh. Hi Yuta hyung,” Donghyuck greeted while he was putting food on Jisung’s plate. As if everything was normal. Taeyong rolled his eyes and sat down, Yuta taking the seat next to him.

Dinner was fun with Yuta around, the Japanese male was smiling and joking his way through it, causing Lucas to almost choke on his food from laughing.

The night went on, bedtime approaching. Yuta was sitting on the couch, Sicheng next to him and Donghyuck next to Sicheng. Taeyong was curled up in the armchair, watching the kids play with toys in front of them. Lucas and Jungwoo were playing a game on their phones, apparently competing.

Donghyuck was playing Rock Paper Scissors with Sicheng and every time he won he leaned forward to kiss the older on the cheek.

“No, no, no,” Sicheng whined as Donghyuck smacked his lips. Yuta laughed and put his arm around Sicheng who rolled his eyes and tried to shake it off.

“He loves me more,” Yuta teased Donghyuck. “Right Sichengie?” Sicheng looked mildly disgusted.

“No he loves me more,” Donghyuck scoffed and tried to kiss his cheek again. Sicheng managed to fight his way out of the love sandwich and hurried over to Taeyong instead. He perched on the armrest of the armchair, smiling at them innocently.

“No, I love Taeyongie hyung most,” he said matter of factly and laughed, Taeyong tsk’ing.

“Hey! He wasn’t an option!” Yuta protested. Sicheng simply leaned back and pretended not to hear the other.

“Not fair,” Donghyuck complained, but there was amusement in his tone.

“Definitely not,” Yuta agreed with a smile and winked at Taeyong.

Taeyong couldn’t contain his happiness as he laughed freely, no worries consuming his mind for once.

~

Yuta was a really nice sleeping partner. They decided that both of them could sleep in Taeyong’s bed since it was a pretty big bed after all. Yuta didn’t hog the blankets and he didn’t snore or sleep talk. He did reach out to cuddle in his sleep, but Taeyong didn’t mind.

“Hey Taeyong,” Yuta spoke when they’d gone to bed, both under the cover and checking their phones, Johnny had sent a bunch of memes and Max had sent a photo of her girlfriend and her, holding Hayoon and smiling with genuine happiness. Taeyong hummed.

“Let me see your phone,” Yuta told him, looking serious. Taeyong frowned and looked at his phone confusedly, was there something wrong with it? He handed the device over to Yuta and scooted closer to see what the other was going to do. Yuta started looking through his apps.

“Oh my god, you have like no fun apps,” Yuta complained, Taeyong pouted.

“I do,” he insisted. Yuta glanced at him.

“You have like no social media and only three gaming apps,” Yuta laughed as Taeyong tried to get his phone back, to no avail.
“I don’t use my phone that often,” Taeyong defended himself.

“How are you like this in today’s social climate?” Yuta teases and continued snooping on his phone. “Oh let me look at your playlists.” He decided and opened Spotify. Taeyong simply let it happen, resting his head on Yuta’s shoulder as the other scrolled through his numerous playlists.

They laid like that for a while, Yuta looking through his notes and photos as well, after Taeyong gave him permission to do so. There were mostly pictures of his brothers or screenshots of recipes.

“Oh let me look at your playlists.” He decided and opened Spotify. Taeyong simply let it happen, resting his head on Yuta’s shoulder as the other scrolled through his numerous playlists.

“Wow,” Yuta said and shook his head. “This won’t do.” Quickly he opened up Snapchat, their faces showing up on the screen. Then he applied a filter. Taeyong laughed when their eyes were now covered by glasses and leaves fell around them. He laughed even harder when they were both adorned with short haired wigs.

Yuta continued messing with the filters, snapping pictures of them and saving to the camera roll. Taeyong decided to send a select few of them in their group chat and to Max. They stopped eventually, a smile lingering on Taeyong’s face as he settled down into the bedding again. Yuta handed his phone back.

“It’s nice,” Yuta said. Taeyong looked at the other. “Sleeping at someone’s place. The apartment can get very lonely.” He admitted.

“It must be hard,” Taeyong agreed. “Being in another country like this. By yourself.”

“Yeah, sometimes. It’s hard being away from my parents but I’ve adapted, I’ve been here for a few years now after all,” Yuta shrugged.

“You have,” Taeyong agreed, seeing everyday how Yuta conversed flawlessly with almost everyone and how he acted around them, within their group.

“What about you?” Yuta then asked. “You’ve only been here for a while, how has it been?” Taeyong stared at the other, seeing his bright eyes, his ruffled hair. The sincerity in his features.

“It’s hard, adapting to a new place and a new routine, but I really like it here,” Taeyong concluded. “It’s a really good place for my brothers, and I have you guys,” he cringed when he said it, but he didn’t regret it. Yuta laughed. Teasingly he said:

“Indeed you do. Your life must be awesome.”

Taeyong simply smiled, lips pursed gently. His brothers were all happy, Sicheng well on his way, and he had genuine friends for the first time in a long time. He did worry a lot, and he was stressed, but he managed. Everything around him felt good, so he managed.

He would survive. He always did.

~

The very next day, after school and dance practice. After driving Sicheng to doctor Song, picking him up, and then dinner, Chenle crept up in Taeyong’s lap, the older boy sitting on the couch, trying to read the book they had been told to read for English class.

Taeyong was exhausted. He had slept so well, Yuta providing him with warmth all night, calming him down. Then he went to school and couldn’t help but see Joe. Or Ara. Or that blue haired kid.

Joe with his looks and smirks, a ghastly feeling always running through Taeyong when they
accidentally met eyes. Ara who simply snuck glances at him, not looking away when he caught her eye. And then the blue haired kid. He didn’t even look at Taeyong. He was just there. All the time.

On top of that dance practice had not gone well and one of his tests came back with a low score.

Taeyong was not having a good day.

“Hyung?” Chenle gently nudged him and Taeyong broke out of his reading to look at the child in his lap.

“What’s up?” He tried to sound chipper. But really, he failed.

“I gave out the cards today,” Chenle said, looking excited. “They all said yes.” Taeyong blanked. Chenle’s birthday party. Oh no. He’d completely forgotten. Thankfully he already had all the presents ready. But the party. He wasn’t prepared.

“That’s great, baby,” Taeyong smiled, trying to hide the panic in his eyes.

“It’s going to be perfect,” Chenle gushed and started babbling about the kids he’d invited. Taeyong attempted to listen, but his mind was racing. They’d scheduled the party for Saturday. It was now Wednesday. He had to fix decorations, sweets, games and candy bags. Taeyong could feel the headache approaching.

“And Daehwi said his present is going to be the best! I’m so excited hyung!” Chenle looked so awed, Taeyong couldn’t help but smile through his inner turmoil.

“Me too,” Taeyong ruffled Chenle’s soft black hair, his book forgotten on the couch.

English wasn’t that important anyways. It could wait.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

This is one of the longest chapters in a while I believe XD

It is finally the weekend and I am so excited because I am going to do absolutely nothing! His week has been hectic so finally I can sleep XD

Now hope you’ll enjoy this chapter <333

By Friday Taeyong was officially freaking out. He had not been able to fix anything for the birthday party and he had not kept up with his homework at all in between dance practice, being with his friends, spending time with his brothers, cleaning, cooking and even keeping track of the days was a difficulty in itself. He barely found time to sleep. Especially finding it hard when thoughts of Joe and Ara rolled around in his head and haunted his mind. His brothers were all busy with their own lives as well. Donghyuck spent time with Mark, Jaemin, Renjun and Jeno, Suhyun apparently tagging along often as well and Taeyong didn’t want to take that away from Donghyuck in favor of babysitting and doing chores. And Sicheng. Taeyong was trying not to pile any responsibilities on him at the moment. He could see that the junior was feeling better these days and he didn’t want to compromise anything.

Taeyong was currently in the library, during lunch, trying to study. He decided to not eat, he didn’t have time. His phone was being bombarded with messages currently, probably Johnny, Ten or Yuta trying to get a hold of him. He just didn’t have the energy to really respond. He felt so tired.

Jaehyun was one of the people in their group that seemed to notice something was up. He had bought Taeyong coffee, the kind he really loves, in the cafeteria several times that week, and he also kept helping Taeyong with hard words when the red head was reading his book for English during lunch yesterday.

He was being so kind and helpful, Taeyong felt like crying. But he wouldn’t, not now. He needed to focus on studying.

He ignored the messages.

~

Jaehyun was frowning. Taeyong was not at lunch. Johnny kept sending messages and the other was not responding at all. They were getting worried.

“I’m sure he’s okay. This happened when Sicheng needed help as well,” Yuta said, but he still kept his phone close in case the other would respond.

Jaehyun was getting very worried. Taeyong had seemed off the entire week, distant and looking gaunt, his face tired. He looked so thin as well. Jaehyun knew he was naturally skinny but he looked especially starved, usually Taeyong loved food, lunch was his favourite time of day, Jaehyun noticed. Because Taeyong looked carefree and calm when they had lunch, inhaling the food he brought with a satisfied face and enjoying every moment. Jaehyun noticed. He noticed that Taeyong
was always looking over his shoulder when they walked down the halls. He noticed that the other’s eyebrows always creased when he caught sight of one of his brothers, watching to see if they were okay. He noticed that Taeyong always did his best to listen to people and offer advice. Always showed up on time. Always smiled genuinely and always with warmth. Nothing like the cold the whole school had first seen. Or believed to have seen. Taeyong was so warm.

Jaehyun’s foot was bouncing up and down in anticipation. All of these thoughts in his head, and one of them stood out.

Taeyong didn’t speak of himself. He didn’t lean on anyone, he didn’t seek help, instead, he was always offering himself and always, there was someone taking from him. Taeyong always listened. He always offered support. He always took care of everything. But who was really taking care of Taeyong?

~

Sicheng was having a bad day. He woke up with a bad feeling in his stomach that morning, full of toxic thoughts and fragility, the dark of his room before the sun went up, reflecting the dark in his mind. He was seriously considering getting Taeyong to call him in sick, but eventually dragged himself out of bed, skipped breakfast and went to school with his brothers. He was so caught up in his own mind that he didn’t even notice Taeyong struggling to get lunches done, kids dressed and schedules put together.

Sicheng wasn’t feeling any better throughout school either, lessons drawn out and classmates being rowdy. He was sitting quietly during lunch, making Kun glance at him worriedly while Jiwoo and Somin told them about a party they had gone to last night. Apparently it was the same guy who had the party Sicheng went to, Matthew, who had thrown this party as well.

Eventually Somin picked up on his mood which was a surprise, because she didn’t really know him that well yet.

“Are you okay?” She asked, eyes sincere. Sicheng looked up from his untouched lunch and opened his mouth to respond. But what could he say. He hadn’t told them about his depression yet. But he could. Maybe it would make it easier. Maybe they would understand him better if he did. Maybe he would feel better, knowing that they know.

“I have depression,” he said, breath rushing out of him, leaving his words weak. He didn’t dare look at their reactions, he didn’t want to see the disgust, resentment, didn’t want to see them leaving and never coming back. Instead, Kun looked at him with smiling eyes, reaching out a hand to put on his.

“Thank you for telling us,” he told the junior. Sicheng looked up hesitantly, seeing Somin and Jiwoo smiling as well.

“Yes. It isn’t easy to do that. I’m proud of you,” Jiwoo said. Somin nodded in agreement. Sicheng smiled in relief.

“I’m just having an off day,” he explained further. “It’s usually not like this all the time.”

“Maybe you need to be cheered up?” Somin suggested, pondering. Then she lit up with a smile. “I know just the place!”

~

Jaehyun was hurrying out after class, determined to catch Taeyong before the other left school. He wanted to know what was up. He wanted to help Taeyong.
The parking lot was almost empty, he was early, having rushed. A few people started trickling out of
the exit after him, but he continued towards the car he knew was Taeyong’s. The soccer mom car as
they had dubbed it all those weeks ago. When he arrived he stopped and tried to breathe deeply,
slightly winded. He pushed his hair out of his eyes and straightened his clothes. Then he waited. He
knew something was wrong because Taeyong had declined discount Friday. That was the last puzzle
piece. Something was definitely up. Taeyong had never declined discount Friday, even if he hadn’t
been a part of discount Friday for long, Jaehyun just knew that Taeyong wouldn’t reject it like that
without reason.

He managed to convince the others that he would also skip it this time, not exactly telling them what
he was going to do, but Doyoung seemed to understand somehow and Yuta also didn’t protest as
much as he usually would have. Jaehyun felt grateful for that. He startled when he noticed Taeyong
drawing close to the car, looking at him with confusion. Jaehyun inhaled deeply to calm himself and
then he smiled slightly.

Taeyong looked tired, dark bags under his eyes. His bag looked heavy and stuffed with school
books. Jaehyun reached out and grabbed it from him quickly, Taeyong giving him a look and
reaching for it again, but Jaehyun held on tightly and simply smiled at the other.

“What are you doing here Jaehyun?” The words weren’t angry or accusing, simply confused and a
tad curious, he did seem properly surprised to see Jaehyun there. Jaehyun shrugged.

“Thought we could hang,” he said, looking unfazed. Taeyong looked torn.

“I actually have a lot of homework to do,” he started.

“We can do them together. I can help you with English. I’m pretty good you know,” Jaehyun said,
lighthearted.

“Oh no,” Taeyong declined, “you really don’t have to. I’m sure you have better things to do. Like
discount Friday?”

“Nah. I’m not going. I’d rather help you,” Jaehyun told him, sincerely. Taeyong’s eyes widened, he
looked like a deer. A manga character with bright and animated eyes, unnaturally beautiful.

“Oh,” the redhead sounded shocked at his admission. “Thank you.”

“Of course. Now let’s go to your place. Where’re your brothers?” Jaehyun said then, trying not to
jump from happiness at Taeyong accepting his help.

“Hyuck is going somewhere with Mark and Sicheng is going with his friends somewhere as well,”
Taeyong explained as he unlocked the car. Jaehyun nodded and jumped into the passenger seat
graciously.

“We’re going to pick up my brothers first and then we can get home and study,” Taeyong told him,
starting to back out of his parking spot.

“Cool,” Jaehyun nodded. His thoughts were running, trying to observe anything Taeyong did, trying
to see if he could figure out the cause of Taeyong’s fatigue and distant behaviour.

He was going to figure out what was wrong and he was going to help.

~

Donghyuck held tightly onto Mark’s shirt, his arms around the older’s torso. The cold wind was
whipping his body and he tried to curl up into Mark as much as possible. Autumn was definitely upon them.

Eventually Mark pulled up to a convenience store. Donghyuck shivered as he got off the moped, pulling the helmet off. Mark grabbed it from him and stored it away, securing the moped to the rack of bikes with a lock. Donghyuck looked at the small store, taking in the inviting exterior and bright signs announcing sales.

“Fancy date you’re taking me on,” Donghyuck teased and started walking towards the entrance. Mark rolled his eyes and followed, gently catching Donghyuck’s lean and tan hand in his own pale one. Donghyuck laced their fingers together, enjoying the warmth and breathed out in relief when they got inside. It wasn’t freezing. Thank goodness.

“Let’s get chocolate,” Donghyuck decided and dragged Mark along through the aisles, looking for a candy section. There was a young, bored looking girl at the checkout desk, twirling a strand of her hair in between long fake nails.

Mark laughed when Donghyuck stopped in front of the candy aisle, looking like a child on Christmas opening gifts.

“Let’s get this,” he said, excitedly. Mark protested.

“No that one is so bitter, let’s take this instead.” They were still holding hands.

“Just because your taste is like that of a child doesn’t mean you can whine like one. Just take this one come on.”

“I’m whining? Listen to yourself on a daily basis Hyuck,” Mark snarked with a smile and Donghyuck pouted.

“Wow, I’ve been insulted by my own boyfriend. What has the world come to?” He agonized. Mark simply laughed and grabbed the chocolate he wanted as well as the one Donghyuck was holding.

“Let’s get both then,” he concluded and walked toward the cash register. Donghyuck whooped a ‘yes!’ And followed obediently. Mark put the snacks on the counter and had to let go of Donghyuck’s hand to get his wallet. The girl at the register still looked bored as ever.

After they (Mark) had paid Mark handed Donghyuck his chocolate bar and they walked out, heading for the park a few meters away instead of the moped.

“Next time, I want it fancy,” Donghyuck said matter of factly. “Luxury restaurant, lit candles, the whole thing,” he said. “You have to wear a suit Markie.”

“Oh yes. And then we can ride off on our unicorn into a rainbow, a trail of flowers following us,” Mark continued the scenario jokingly. Donghyuck nodded seriously though.

“Great choice. Unicorns are more luxurious than horses anyway,” the younger was smiling so mischievously, his golden skin glowing in the afternoon autumn sun. His moles clear on display for Mark to count and poke all he wanted.

“Oh definitely, unicorns are a must have,” Mark agreed gravely, barely able to hold his laughter. Donghyuck smiled and gestured toward a patch of grass surrounded by trees that hadn’t yet lost all their leaves. They crossed onto the grass and walked to it, sitting down, close together.

After eating their chocolate and complaining about their math teacher, looking through some new
shades of lipstick Donghyuck had wanted to try and sending a cute selfie to their group chat with Jeno, Jaemin, Renjun and Suhyun, they laid down on the grass. Donghyuck scooted close, their arms aligning. Mark was breathing softly, eyes trailing the sky above them. Donghyuck smiled to himself, reaching with his hand to lace their fingers together.

“That one looks like a cat,” Mark suddenly spoke, pointing upwards. Donghyuck looked and noticed the clouds, seeing exactly which shape Mark was referring to.

“Maybe. A really chubby cat with half a tail,” Donghyuck agreed. Mark laughed, doing that cute little sound where he sounded high pitched and breathy. More of a giggle really.

“But don’t discriminate,” Mark admonished jokingly, mostly imitating what Donghyuck told him every day at least once.

“Oh shush,” the sophomore complained and wiggles closer, partly for warmth, partly for other reasons.

“That one looks like Renjun,” Donghyuck then commented, pointing towards a, questionably, shaped cloud. Mark laughed loudly again, his cute little giggle laugh, Donghyuck joining him.

And everything was pure happiness in that moment.
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

Hope you’ll enjoy :))

Sicheng looked around with bright eyes. Jiwoo had driven the car which had carried them into town. The square was busy and crowded, people going about their days and not minding everyone else around them. Sicheng was drinking in the sight, having only been there once before. He really liked the atmosphere of the city, the smell of fast-food, the colorful shops, the noisy streets. It was very therapeutic.

“Let’s go!” Somin announced and linked arms with Jiwoo who looked around lazily, a half smile on her lips. Kun smiled and followed them, glancing back at Sicheng who smiled as well and started walking. They started by getting snacks, sharing a large drink, walking while trying to fit all of them in a row on the fairly narrow street. Sicheng laughed when they bumped shoulders and fought for space.

Eventually Somin made a noise of excitement and pointed at a store ahead of them, a book store. Sicheng also felt excited when he noticed it, already sending the smell of new books and unread stories waiting for him. Somin pulled him by the arm, pointing at different books. He actually didn’t read much, but when he did, he always made sure it was a really good book that he would enjoy.

Jiwoo and Kun got stuck by the pens, ooh’ing at the different types.

They left the store, Kun with a new red ink pen, Somin with two books, Jiwoo with a notebook and Sicheng with a new book as well.

The sun was on its way down when they exited the store, autumn making way for a cold afternoon with no sun to warm them up. Surprisingly, Sicheng hadn’t thought of Ara or Joe while spending time with his friends, and when he did, it didn’t feel as bad as that morning, which was a huge step forward. Doctor Song had said that his friends could be good diversions if he’d ever feel down, and she was right.

Jiwoo dragged them all with her into a clothes store, seemingly a pretty mainstream one that you would find in most countries. But they did have nice clothes. Sicheng walked around, looking curiously at the different garments. It was an all girl’s store, but he didn’t mind. The clothes were very pretty. Kun trailed after Somin who wanted help to pick out a new beanie, the cold nipping at her ears incessantly. Meanwhile Jiwoo piled clothes into her arms, intending to try them all out. Sicheng himself, stopped gently by a mannequin doll which was wearing a knitted, striped crop top. He studied the top, a smile spreading over his lips unconsciously.

“Try it on,” Jiwoo had sidled up to him quietly, noticing his stare. She was smiling softly when he turned to her. He opened his mouth, no words coming out. Should he? Could he? Could he really?

“Okay,” Sicheng hesitantly agreed. Jiwoo turned immediately and grabbed one of the crop tops from the rack next to the mannequin, putting it on her pile of clothes.

“Sweet, let’s go to the changing rooms,” she decided and started walking, Sicheng followed. He was
glad that the store was relatively empty, no one there to see him trying on a women’s shirt. He felt guilty for thinking that way, knowing that Taeyong always encouraged doing whatever they loved without caring what others thought. But living in today’s society made it especially hard to do so.

Jiwoo handed him the top and left for a changing room, Sicheng taking the one across from her.

When he had removed his shirt and slipped the new one on he felt indescribably happy. He really liked the feeling of the garment, the color suiting him well and the length was really nice. He loved it. He stood there for several minutes, admiring the look, eventually pulling out his necklace from underneath it and completing the look.

“Sicheng, come and show us,” Jiwoo’s voice travelled through the curtain, separating him from the outside world. Sicheng inhaled deeply, gently pulling the curtain away. Kun and Somin were there, sitting on the chairs provided, Jiwoo standing in the threshold of her own changing room, a new outfit on.

“It looks really good,” Somin looked awed, smiling as she looked him up and down.

“I like it,” Kun grinned.

“I love it. You look awesome,” Jiwoo stated like it was nothing special. Like he always looked good, like it was something perfectly normal. Sicheng’s heart warmed.

“Thank you,” he accepted their words.

“Are you gonna buy it?” Somin said, Sicheng’s face falling slightly. Was he? He might never use it outside of his home but he did love it. But he didn’t want to go out there and buy it. It was a women’s garment after all and it was really not something people looked kindly upon, a man dressing like a woman.

“I’ll buy it for you and you can pay me back later,” Jiwoo told him, as if reading his mind. His heart lightened and he smiled and nodded.

“I would like that. Thank you,” he said.

“There is nothing to thank me for,” Jiwoo shook her head. “You like it. Nothing else matters, really.”

Sicheng smiled.

~

Donghyuck sprinted as soon as he saw the playground, the park pretty empty after the autumn dark had fallen over them. Mark shouted in protest and hurried after his boyfriend, laughing while he tried to catch up.

“You cheated!” Mark screamed, Donghyuck laughing loudly when he reached the swings. Huffing, he sat down on one of them and started swinging lightly. Mark caught up swiftly and settled on the swing next to Donghyuck’s.

“I did not. I simply felt like running,” Donghyuck said, defensively. “And I totally won.”

Mark rolled his eyes, not protesting, it didn’t matter anyway. Running had released happy pheromones in his body, his mind feeling refreshed and completely in love with the boy next to him. Donghyuck in his hoodie, ripped jeans and eyeliner, Mark’s jacket on him after he’d stolen it from the older. Mark didn’t mind.
“Let’s get on the slide!” Donghyuck exclaimed and jumped off the swing, rushing for the construction in the centre of the playground, that was holding up a curved cylinder slide. Mark shook his head in disbelief but he followed the younger, climbing the stairs graciously, unlike Donghyuck who collapsed when they reached the top.

“The staircase is too cramped,” he complained, eyes closed.

“It’s made for kids, what did you expect?” Mark scoffed and sat down next to the sophomore. Donghyuck waved his hand dismissively and breathed deeply, trying to find enough oxygen to stand up again. When he finally did he headed immediately for the entrance to the slide. Mark followed suit.

“I’ll sit and you can sit behind me,” Donghyuck instructed and got on. Mark complied and settled behind Donghyuck, legs on either side of the other’s outer thighs, his chest to Donghyuck’s back.

“Here we go!” Donghyuck cheered and Mark pushed them forward, the speed a bit too much, Donghyuck screaming in joy as they descended while Mark laughed loudly. The speed caused them to land with a thud on the ground, Mark falling back with a laugh, Donghyuck still in between his legs. The younger was still making noises of joy, turning and lying down on top of Mark. The older looked at him with spiraling eyes, still high from rushing down the slide.

Donghyuck grinned and leaned down, catching Mark’s lips in a sweet kiss, their lips cold from the chilly weather, red noses bumping together. Mark panted into the kiss, mouth opening lightly, hot breaths flooding in between them.

Donghyuck pulled back, breathless, his cheeks flushed as he put his head down in the crook of Mark’s neck, breathing heavily. Mark’s arms came to rest on his hips, his eyes looking up at the dark sky, heart racing from the kiss.

He wanted to freeze that exact moment and never loose the feeling he was experiencing right then. Sadly he couldn’t.

~

Jaehyun loved being at the Lee residence. The house was big and homey, kids’ laughter filling empty silences that so often filled his own home. The sound of the TV comforting in the background while the smell of febreze filtered through his nose mixed with cherries. Taeyong had taken him to the kitchen when they got home, telling him that they could study there before he helped his brothers, making sure they had everything they needed, that their toys were out, the TV was on, the snacks were made, until he finally joined Jaehyun again.

The brunet smiled when Taeyong sat down at the table with a sigh, having already pulled out his books and notes, pen and laptop.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” Taeyong apologized, a grimace on his face as he sat down.

“No problem,” Jaehyun assured with a smile. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Taeyong said, voice breezy, movements mechanic. Jaehyun knew that he was lying. He had heard from Ten that Taeyong had misstepped during dance practice and was probably sore, causing the fidgeting he was performing. Taeyong’s answer made him question, how much did they actually know about Taeyong? Not much, because he never told them, he never talked about himself and he didn’t respond truthfully to questions like this one for example. They knew of his brothers. He talked about them often. But what about Taeyong?
“Can we start with English?” Taeyong asked then, breaking Jaehyun out of his thinking. The other nodded.

“Sure,” he took out his book, the one they were reading for English, and moved closer to Taeyong. He had finished it a week ago, actually finding it interesting.

“Let’s read out loud and go over any confusing words,” Jaehyun suggested. Taeyong nodded in agreement and opened his book, finding the page he was on. Jaehyun took initiative and started reading, Taeyong nodding along all the while. The red head seemed to enjoy the real live reading as he smiled every so often. When Jaehyun felt his throat becoming dry Taeyong took over. Taeyong was very good at pronouncing words and understanding them, but he lacked confidence. Jaehyun assumed Taeyong was one of those people who would stumble their way through an improvised conversation in English, not necessarily lacking words but lacking the confidence.

After reading for a while they decided to stop and drink some water before moving onto other subjects. They wrote on essays they’d gotten assigned today, they practiced some math and worked on reviewing notes from their history classes that week, having started with a new subject after the presentations were done.

All in all they actually got work done, until Jaehyun heard the padding of feet heading for the kitchen.

“Hyung,” Jungwoo had entered, looking apologetic. “We’re hungry,” he announced. And just like that Taeyong’s focus broke. Away from studying, away from learning, immediately entering his caretaker bubble.

“Okay, I’ll start dinner,” he said with a tired smile, Jungwoo smiling back before leaving the kitchen. Jaehyun frowned at the fatigue in Taeyong’s features as the senior got up to presumably start dinner. Jaehyun was brought back to something Doyoung had said the first time they had been at Taeyong’s house.

Where are their parents?

Jaehyun wanted to ask, he was so curious, and also worried, but he figured this would also be something Taeyong wouldn’t tell him, like so many other things. So he kept quiet. He needed to build trust first.

“Do you want some help?” Jaehyun asked, using his most encouraging tone. Taeyong looked at him, dark eyes locked onto Jaehyun’s lighter ones.

“Yeah sure,” Taeyong agreed with a small smile, Jaehyun getting up and joining him by the kitchen counter. Jaehyun was taller by a few centimeters, looking down just a tiny bit when facing Taeyong.

“Where do you want me?”
Dinner was made swiftly, Taeyong telling Jaehyun what to do and the other complying obediently. When they settled at the table, Lucas and Jungwoo whooped in excitement, apparently having been very hungry, while Chenle and Jisung toddled along, smiles on their faces.

“Hyung,” Chenle said, food still in his mouth. Taeyong reached over to wipe the seven year old’s chin, telling him to swallow before speaking, which Chenle hurriedly did. “Daehwi keeps talking about my birthday, he’s excited! It’s gonna be so much fun, hyung, right?” Chenle’s smile was bright and contagious, Jaehyun smiling as well. Taeyong seemed to flicker, his hands shaking slightly.

“Of course,” he assured nonetheless, smiling tightly. Jaehyun noticed the tension in his voice and movements. Something was up with this.

“Wahh! I’m so excited!” Chenle squealed, Jisung looking at his older brother weirdly.

Dinner proceeded smoothly, the younger brothers vacuuming up their food before thanking Taeyong and leaving the table to play. Jungwoo made sure that they were all washed up as well, before ushering them into the living room. Taeyong was sitting, frown on his face while he poked around the food on his plate. Jaehyun observed him curiously.

“What’s up with Chenle’s birthday party?” The brunet decided to jump right into it. Taeyong startled, pretty eyes widening in surprise, as if he had forgotten about Jaehyun.

“Oh. Nothing,” Taeyong answered absentmindedly, attempting to get up from his seat. Jaehyun was quick to grab his wrist gently, feeling the other flinch from his touch. Jaehyun frowned and let go carefully.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, retreating backwards. Taeyong was frozen in his spot, looking like he was far away from the current situation. “Taeyong?”

“It’s fine. Um.”

“I’ll help with the dishes,” Jaehyun insisted, not wanting to agitate the other, and did just that, gathering all the dirty plates and going over to the sink.

“Thank you,” Taeyong softly spoke, getting up from his half seated position and gathering up the leftovers, putting them in the fridge before helping Jaehyun with the dishes. They were quiet all throughout the process. Jaehyun was trying to figure out what to do. Taeyong needed to understand that he wanted to help, that he wanted Taeyong to feel better.
After silently washing everything they went back to the table, deciding not to study anymore, leaving them in silence. Jaehyun wasn’t used to being alone with Taeyong, always having other people in between them or next to them. Yuta and Johnny, who were good at conversations, Ten with his outgoing personality, Doyoung with his banter, Taeil with his books. They always had something to say to Taeyong. Jaehyun didn’t really know where to start.

“What’s your favourite color?” So he pulled out the basics. Taeyong looked up from his fingers, which had been fidgeting with a crumb on the table.

“My favourite color?” He asked, looking confused. Jaehyun nodded.

“Yeah.”


“Cool, mine’s white, we’re like yin and yang,” he smiled, showcasing his dimples. Taeyong nodded, lips curving gently, looking amused. “What’s your favourite food?”

“I like sweets more,” Taeyong said, sitting upright. “Like strawberries. And macaroons. But I think, meat, if I have to choose a food.”

“I love pork belly. I just love food,” Jaehyun enthusiastically shared.

“You’re good at cooking,” Taeyong commended him, Jaehyun smiling bashfully.

“Thanks. You’re really good too.”

“Yeah, I kinda have to be. I almost always cook for my brothers.”

“That’s really nice though, I don’t cook a lot at home.”

“That’s a shame,” Taeyong was pouting. Jaehyun felt his heart beating like crazy at the cute gesture. He changed the subject.

“What’s your favourite season?”

“Fall. It looks beautiful, it’s not too cold and it’s not too warm.” Jaehyun saw the gleam in Taeyong’s eyes when speaking, admiring the red head’s beauty. He would never get tired of looking at Taeyong.

“I like spring. It’s a promise of something new. Everything blooms and nothing looks the same as it did before. Because it’s grown more and changed with its experience.” The look Taeyong was giving him was making his heart race even more, the other senior looking absolutely ethereal with a small half smile, eyes wide and attentive.

“I like your reason. New beginnings.”

“Yeah. New beginnings.”

~

“Taeyong,” Jaehyun spoke. They had migrated to the living room, half sitting on the couch, arms pressed together. Jaehyun hoped Taeyong couldn’t feel how hot his skin was. Jungwoo was doing a puzzle with Jisung while Lucas and Chenle played superheroes, running around with blankets around their shoulders.
“Hmm?” The red head said, not turning his gaze away from his brothers.

“What’s up with Chenle’s birthday party?” Jaehyun treaded carefully, asking the question he’d asked earlier that evening. Taeyong frowned at the question, still not looking at the brunet. “I saw how you reacted when he talked about it, so what’s up?”

“It’s really nothing,” Taeyong breathed quietly, wary of his brothers being close by.

“So nothing is the cause of your fatigue this week? Your loss of appetite? Sunken cheeks? Taeyong I can see that you’re not feeling well,” Jaehyun felt like he was gonna explode as Taeyong kept denying what was so clear, right in front of his eyes. Taeyong’s head whipped around to meet his eyes, the other looking shocked. Jaehyun stared right back, not wanting to pull away, not wanting to let it go.

“Come with me,” Taeyong said, words a mere whisper. Jaehyun gulped and stood up, Taeyong’s lean fingers closing around his wrist gently. The red haired senior led him up the stairs and into a room, probably Taeyong’s own room. It was plain, no photos or posters, no gadgets or colorful covers. It looked lifeless.

“Will you tell me now?” Jaehyun said when Taeyong let go of him, the brunet making eye contact with the redhead who was biting his nails.

“It’s not special,” Taeyong insisted. “I just have a lot of things to do and take care of for the party,” he shrugged.

“Like what?” Jaehyun inquired.

“Bake. And I need to clean up. And buy decorations, and plan games. I need to take care of the kids that are coming, make sure no one gets hurt and that they’re all having fun,” Taeyong was rambling, Jaehyun’s eyes widening. Taeyong sounded very frazzled. “I’m just really tired. It’s been a long week.”

“I’ll help,” Jaehyun exclaimed hurriedly, not wanting Taeyong to spiral into further thoughts. The other looked at him, incredulous.

“What?”

“I’ll help. And Johnny, Yuta and Doyoung. Ten and Taeil. We’ll all help,” Jaehyun told him, stepping closer. “We’re your friends. Why don’t you make use of us?” He jokingly said, smiling sweetly. Taeyong was looking at him with confused eyes, like it was something unthinkable.

“It’s on Saturday. I’m sure you guys have something better to do on a Saturday?”

“No. I really don’t think we do,” Jaehyun assured.

“Are you sure?” Taeyong still looked hesitant.

“Yes. Completely. We want to help.” Jaehyun hoped his pleading eyes were enough to convey his true intentions, that he actually wanted to help and get to know Taeyong better. The other considered him for a few seconds of tense silence, his eyes unblinking. “I promise.”

“Okay. Thank you.”
Jaehyun smiled.
“You really need to learn not to say thank you. Of course we’ll help.” Taeyong chuckled gently, more like a giggle, and Jaehyun’s heart almost stopped. How could such an intimidating appearance hold such soft giggles. It doesn’t make sense.

“I really mean it though. Thank you,” Taeyong insisted, Jaehyun trying to calm himself. He rolled his eyes.

“And I really mean it. We just want to help you. Because we’re your friends. Remember that.”

Taeyong smiled.

“I will.”

~

Sicheng came home late, but found all his brothers still up. A movie was playing on the TV. His mind felt clear and calm for once, letting him enjoy the sight of his brothers all curled up together, Donghyuck half laying on the couch, Lucas head on his stomach and Jungwoo as his backrest. Chenle and Jisung snuggled together on the armchair and Taeyong took up the remaining space on the couch next to Jungwoo. Sicheng didn’t know when they started watching so many movies but he didn’t complain.

“Hey hyung!” Jungwoo called, voice joyful. Sicheng waved.

“Hi guys,” he greeted as he stepped inside, shoving himself in between Lucas and the arm rest of the couch. “How was your day?”

“Really cool! We didn’t get any homework so we just played all afternoon! And Jaehyun hyung was here too! He left like twenty minutes ago,” Lucas told him immediately, eyes wide in excitement and arms flopping about. Sicheng nodded along, shoving his interest.

“How was your day?” Jungwoo then asked, smiling at his older brother. Sicheng hummed in thought.

“It was really good,” he glanced at the paper bag he had left in the hallway, containing his new shirt. “Actually,” looking at the paper bag gave him confidence. Thinking back to how his friends had reacted at lunch when he told them also gave him comfort. His brothers would never hate him. “I have something to tell you.”

Taeyong seemed to sense what he was going to say, pausing the movie and giving him his full attention. Donghyuck sat up properly to look at his brother as well, hearing his tone.

“Remember last weekend when I wasn’t feeling well?” Lucas and Jungwoo nodded in confusion, Chenle and Jisung looking at him curiously. “It’s because I have depression.” The silence felt heavy, Donghyuck’s realization settling in, Jungwoo also looking understanding while Lucas frowned in confusion.

“What’s that?” Chenle broke the quiet, looking adorably lost.

“It’s an illness. It’s in my head,” Sicheng explained, trying to smile in reassurance. Chenle looked even more worried.

“Does it hurt?” The seven year old asked. Sicheng bit his lip.

“It doesn’t hurt me, but sometimes it makes me really sad,” he tried to explain as best as he could.
Chenle still looked confused but he didn’t ask further. Lucas was being unusually quiet, studying Sicheng’s features.

“Hyung,” Donghyuck said, pouting unconsciously. “I love you.” Sicheng was a bit taken aback by the words, seeing as they seemed out of context, but his heart warmed nonetheless, a smile blooming on his face.

“We all love you,” Taeyong chimed in, looking proud. Jisung crawled off the armchair and into Sicheng’s lap, sensing the somber mood. The junior smiled.

“I love you too.”

He looked at the bag in the hallway. That could wait another day.

~

Sicheng startled lightly when the door to his room creaked open. It was very late, everyone already having been put to sleep, but Sicheng still laid awake, going over the events from today. Exploring the town, eating junk food, buying things. Being with his friends. All he had felt was relief. Relief and joy. Even if it was just for a while. He doubted the joy would stick. But soon enough, he might learn how to make it stick.

Lucas head popped inside, the dirty blonde hair on his head thoroughly ruffled. Sicheng gestured for him to come in and close the door. The twelve year old complied and walked over to Sicheng’s bed, looking down at the older.

“What’s wrong?” Sicheng asked, voice raspy from lack of use in quite a while and trying to stay quiet. He was getting worried, seeing Lucas so subdued.

Lucas didn’t answer. The tall boy simply fit himself into the bed, under the covers, long limbs tucked against his body.

“I’ll help you keep the ghosts away,” Lucas told him. “I’m very good at ghost busting.”

Sicheng chuckled quietly, reaching out to fluff Lucas’s hair further.

“Thank you,” he said and relaxed down into the bed, Lucas snuggling into his body heat, the younger was already warm, but somehow still needed more warmth. Or maybe he just wanted to show Sicheng that he was there for him. The thought made Sicheng smile fleetingly, eyes slipping closed. Sleep overtook him quickly and led him into peaceful dreams along with his younger brother.

Maybe Lucas really did keep the ghosts away.
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

Yay new chapter :) I had a test today, think it went okay XD How has your day been?
If it’s been a drag hope this chapter will lighten up your day <3

It’s a long one jeez

Enjoyyyyy!!!

“Oh jeez,” Renjun complained when Donghyuck shuffled his tarot cards. “Are you still doing that?” He complained, slamming his head on the table. Donghyuck didn’t pay him any mind, shuffling away.

“I’m gonna give readings during Chenle’s birthday party tomorrow. I’m going to be the highlight of his whole damn party,” Donghyuck declared and asked Jeno to pick his cards. The black haired male did so with a genial smile.

Mark was running late due to a class and Jaemin was studying last minute for a test. Suhyun walked into the cafeteria, looking around, spotting them at the far corner. She walked over and took a seat, eyeing the tarot cards curiously. Donghyuck was reading on the instructions, trying to decipher Jeno’s cards.

“I don’t get it,” he announced, clicking his tongue. Suhyun rolled her eyes.

“Give it to me,” she demanded and held out a hand, Donghyuck handing her the instructions. Suhyun started reading through them, occasionally glancing at Jeno’s cards.

In the meantime Mark had entered the cafeteria and headed immediately for his friends and boyfriend. Donghyuck brightened when he caught sight of his boyfriend. Mark was wearing a dark blue hoodie and dark jeans, his glasses on, which was a rare occasion.

“Hey babe,” Donghyuck greeted cheekily and pulled Mark down by the hem of his shirt, the older rolling his eyes. “I like the glasses.”

“I ran out of lenses,” Mark explained and looked down at the cards, amused. “How’s it going?”

“Perfectly fine Lee Mark,” Donghyuck insisted and saw Suhyun flipping through his cards, looking at the instructions with a frown.

“I can see that,” Mark scoffed, Donghyuck shoving his elbow in the junior’s ribs.

“Oh really. You must be wearing real good glasses if you can see that,” Renjun sarcastically spoke and raised his head from the table. Jeno didn’t complain when Renjun’s head landed on his shoulder instead.

“I got it!” Suhyun exclaimed, shocking the people at the table next to theirs. She didn’t even apologize. Donghyuck eagerly scooted forward.
“Great. Now tell me because I’m confused as fuck.”

Chenle woke early Saturday morning. There were literal butterflies in his stomach. He was turning eight! It was such a big number. He jumped out of bed, careful not to wake Jisung who was snoring lightly. He then dressed himself in the outfit he’d picked the day before, a pair of jeans, a light green button down shirt and a black bow tie. He also wore his super happy socks. They were a mismatched pair of a pink and a blue sock, his absolute favourite pair. He used them on very special occasions and this was one of them.

When he was done dressing, Chenle sat down on the floor, pulling forward a puzzle he’d been working on with Lucas last night. He was buzzing with so much energy but he didn’t want to wake any of his brothers, so he played quietly, giggling softly every once in a while.

Eventually noise could be heard downstairs, signaling that someone was awake. Chenle decided to not rush down just yet, he wanted to finish the puzzle, he was so close. Only a few pieces left.

After approximately ten minutes he finally laid the last piece in its place, letting out a silent cheer. His ears perked at the sound of doors opening in the corridor, telling him that more of his brothers were awake. Time to go downstairs. So with light steps, Chenle went over to Jisung’s bed and looked down at his little brother. Jisung was so adorable when sleeping, his little nose scrunching and eyes fluttering. Chenle cooed before reaching out to nudge the younger awake. Jisung was a light sleeper and opened his eyes almost immediately.

“Come on now Jisungie,” Chenle coaxed. “Wake up!”

Jisung sighed through his nose, whining as he climbed, clumsily, out of bed. Chenle grabbed his hand tightly and led the younger downstairs, barely able to walk properly without bouncing forward in excitement.

“Happy birthday!” A chorus of voices called, Chenle gasping in surprise. In front of him, on the kitchen table, was a gourmet breakfast, pancakes and sweets, all his favourite foods and a cupcake with a candle in it. Taeyong, Sicheng, Donghyuck, Lucas and Jungwoo were standing there, in all their pyjamas and bed-hair glory, smiling widely at their younger brother. Chenle grinned back, teeth on full display, eyes crinkling.

“I love it!” He announced, rushing towards the food, taking in all the delicious smells and sights. Jisung followed curiously and wobbled his way into a chair, eyes wide.

“Well, dig in then!” Taeyong told him and Chenle obliged happily.

“Best birthday ever,” he exclaimed around a mouthful of cupcake after he’d blown out the candle. Taeyong simply smiled.

Taeyong had set up the living room with games and movies, intending to keep his brothers occupied while he fixed the foods, decorations and game plans for Chenle’s party that would occur later in the evening. Donghyuck took it upon himself to be game-master and promised to keep the brothers away from the kitchen while Taeyong worked. Sicheng promised to actually do that because he knew Donghyuck wouldn’t.

Taeyong started prepping his baking tools, glancing at the clock. Jaehyun had texted the night before, saying he would be there at noon with everyone else to help. Taeyong still felt bad for
making them help him even though it was actually Jaehyun’s idea.

The doorbell rang, Taeyong hearing footsteps rushing to open. He heard cheerful voices exchanging words before it fell quiet and all his friends filed into the kitchen.

Ten, Doyoung and Johnny all sat down at the kitchen table lazily, smiling. Taeil hesitated slightly but he remained standing. Yuta wandered over to the fridge and grabbed an apple. Jaehyun smiled at Taeyong, leaning on the kitchen counter.

“Why are you stealing my food?” Taeyong huffed at Yuta who smiled cheekily.

“I didn’t eat breakfast, let me live,” he dramatically complained and bit into the red apple. Taeyong simply smiled, he could never bring himself to be angry at Yuta.


“Well, we need to bake. We also need supplies to make goody bags, and we need to plan the evening, decide on games and get any supplies we might need for that as well,” he listed off.

“Sounds reasonable enough,” Doyoung nodded. “I’ll volunteer to plan games.”

“Me too!” Johnny chimed in, looking like an eager puppy. Taeyong nodded in approval.

“I’ll do the shopping,” Ten decided, smirking. Taeyong felt uneasy about the expression on his face.

“I’ll go with Ten,” Yuta suddenly spoke, causing Taeyong’s uneasiness to reach a new level.

“And I will go with you because otherwise you won’t get anything done,” Taeil finalized their groups with a scoff and a smile, making Taeyong’s uneasiness disappear.

“Great, I’ll help Taeyong then,” Jaehyun grinned, dimples out and Taeyong’s heart skipped a curious beat.

“Awesome, let’s do it,” Ten clapped his hands and got up.

So they did.

~

Taeyong had fun baking with Jaehyun, Doyoung and Johnny sitting at the kitchen table and chiming in every now and then, mostly teasing them.

The cake ended up having five layers and cream cheese frosting with a nice filling. Doyoung whistled when he saw the finished product.

“You guys could open a bakery,” Johnny nodded to his own words, using a spoon to scrape out some remaining frosting from the bowl, Doyoung opening his mouth to get a taste.

“Oh yes,” Jaehyun agreed jokingly. “TaeJae’s amazing baked goods.”

“Or JaeYong,” Johnny suggested. Taeyong simply rolled his eyes, endeared.

They went on to make some chocolate chip cookies and then cut up some fresh fruits to balance all the sweetness.

Jaehyun and Taeyong ended up sitting at the table with Johnny and Doyoung, only waiting for the
cookies to finish baking in the oven. Doyoung and Johnny were diligently scribbling on a piece of paper, coming up with ideas for fun games.

“What’s your favourite song?” Jaehyun asked, voice quiet and intimate.

“I don’t have one. It’s impossible to choose,” Taeyong told him earnestly.

“I guess you’re right, I can’t make up my mind either. What about favorite number then?”

“Eight.”

“I like seven.”

“That’s such an unlucky number,” Taeyong exclaimed, laughter bubbling in his tone.

“Don’t judge me,” Jaehyun said, holding back his own laughter. “Favourite movie?”

“The Lion King. It’s a classic.”

“Mine’s Beauty and the Beast.”

“I respect that,” Taeyong said, a smile playing at his lips.

“You’re totally judging me.” Jaehyun protested.

“Me? I would never.”

“I can see it, you-“

“Guys?” Doyoung’s voice cut Jaehyun off, the senior looking at them with a deadpan expression. Johnny was trying to hold back his laughter. “You may take your flirting elsewhere.”

“We weren’t-“

“Fine, mating ritual, whatever, just not here, we’re working,” Doyoung emphasized, Taeyong blushing furiously. Jaehyun was used to Doyoung saying shit like that so he wasn’t as affected, simply rolled his eyes at the other.

“We’re home!” A loud voice announced itself, the front door opening and then slamming shut. It was definitely Ten.

Taeil, Yuta and Ten came into the kitchen, carrying three plastic bags that were filled to the brim.

“Wow,” Johnny uttered, looking at the bags.

“We decided to get some decorations as well, this place looks terribly drab,” Yuta told them. “It’s gonna be a party, let’s liven it up people.”

“I tried to stop them,” Taeil said, looking very regretful.

“Don’t act like you’re better than us, you practically jumped at the chance to pick balloons!” Yuta pointed at Taeil, voice accusing. Taeil frowned at him disapprovingly.

“Okay let’s stop pointing fingers, I’m sure the decorations are gonna be great,” Taeyong assured them, diffusing the situation.

“Obviously,” Ten agreed, smirking.
Just then the timer made its presence known with a loud ‘ding!’

“The cookies are done!” Taeyong cheered and hurried to take them out. They looked delicious, the smell teasing at his nostrils.

“It’s smells so good!” Doyoung exclaimed, sounding almost reluctant. Yuta nodding vigorously in agreement.

“Let’s take some, just to taste,” Taeyong felt weak as he saw the sweets. He grabbed four, distributing them between his friends, sharing his with Jaehyun.

“Cheers to friendship!” Johnny said, holding his cookie piece up. They all echoed his sentiment.

“To friendship!”

~

Soon enough it was time for the party to start. Taeyong, Jaehyun, Ten and Yuta had all walked around, spreading the decorations all over, putting up banners and throwing glitter everywhere. Taeyong knew it was gonna be hell to clean afterwards but he didn’t even care. They also made some goody bags and decided on some prizes for winning in any of the games.

The guests started trickling in, Taeyong finally being able to meet the famous Daehwi. There was also Somi, Jinsol, Olivia, Kyla, Seunghyun, Gaon and even more kids that Taeyong couldn’t even remember the names of. He greeted all their parents politely and promised to take good care of their children. Some of them seemed hesitant at the lack of adults, but most of them recognized Johnny or Taeil or Doyoung as their friend’s friend’s son or their friend’s neighbor’s son which made it slightly easier.

When all the guests had arrived Taeyong let Johnny take over. The tall senior was really good with kids, he kept them entertained with games and even dragged the Lee brothers, Doyoung, Taeil, Ten, Yuta and Jaehyun into the game playing. They were rolling from laughter during the Mafia game, and also while playing musical chairs. All in all, everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, especially Chenle which made Taeyong very happy.

They took a break from playing to eat the cake, sing for Chenle and open presents. Chenle seemed extraordinarily happy about every single one of them, making sure to thank everyone individually and thoroughly.

After playing even more games parents started to pick their children up, making all the kids whine. They wanted to stay. They wanted to play more. It’s so much fun, can’t I stay?

Taeyong felt strangely proud that the party was such a success.

Chenle hugged Daehwi tightly, the other boy being the last one to get picked up.

“I’ll see you on Monday!” Daehwi shouted, waving as he walked to the car with his mom.

“Bye Daehwi!” Chenle screamed back.

When Daehwi’s car was out of sight, Taeyong closed the door and was almost tackled by an armful of Chenle, burying his face in Taeyong’s torso.

“It was so much fun. Thank you hyung,” the younger told him softly, smiling.
“Of course, baby,” Taeyong smiled back, ruffling Chenle’s soft hair. “Go join your brothers in the living room now.” Chenle did as he was told.

Taeyong exhaled slightly, the adrenaline rush he’d experienced dying down slightly, then he headed to the kitchen where his friends had stationed themselves, eating the leftover cake.

“Thank you so much for helping today,” Taeyong told them, voice dripping with sincerity. He still couldn’t believe he had such good friends.

“You need not thank us, it was fun!” Ten assured him, munching on the cake. Taeyong nodded and took a seat on the kitchen counter, feeling slightly exhausted.

“Hey,” Yuta called, Taeyong turning his attention to him. “I’ll crash here tonight, help you clean up tomorrow.”

“Oh, you really don’t have to,” Taeyong insisted, feeling guilty.

“I want to,” Yuta assured him. “I’m too tired to go home. Besides, I know that you make awesome breakfast. I would never miss an opportunity to have free breakfast. I am a struggling student.” Taeyong laughed.

“Okay. Thank you,” he agreed, glad that Yuta wanted to stay with him.

“Great. Now let’s devour this cake,” Johnny told them, grinning and holding up his spoon. Taeyong laughed again.

“Yes, let’s.”
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

Okay here we have it :)) a new chapter ^_^

Hope you’ll enjoy it <3

Having Yuta around was really nice. He always provided a healing smile, a teasing remark, hugs or holding hands. Taeyong enjoyed the other talking his ear off about whatever was on his mind, he enjoyed Yuta clinging to Sicheng every chance he got and he enjoyed Yuta taking the time to actually talk to him before they went to bed.

“How’s dance?” Yuta asked, facing Taeyong while lying on his side.

“It’s going okay,” Taeyong told him. And it was. Their choreography was completed and all of them had it down to perfection. “The competition is approaching though. I’m so nervous,” Taeyong found it hard to admit what he was actually feeling, not used to having to talk about himself. Especially not with someone who isn’t his brothers, someone who wants to know what he feels. Someone who cares. It’s a hard concept to wrap his head around.

“It’s gonna be fine. It’s the same before big basketball games,” Yuta told him with a reassuring grin. “And we always end up slaying the competition.” Taeyong rolled his eyes.

“It’s just so important. The winners get prize money and consideration for scholarships to the school. And it’s a great school. I know Ten dreams of going there,” Taeyong sighed, feeling the pressure of being in the team, wanting to do his best for his teammates.

“What about you? Do you want to go to the school?” Yuta asked, voice barely above a whisper. His eyes were a caramel brown, hair falling onto his forehead. Taeyong frowned. Him? Him. He hadn’t even thought about that. Did he? He couldn’t. He had to take care of his brothers, he refused to give that up. And with their constant moving it would be impossible. He would have to live in Seoul for it to happen. It would never work.

“Taeyong?” Yuta then said, voice worried as he noticed he turmoil in Taeyong’s eyes.

“Huh?” The other snapped out of it, dazed.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Yuta didn’t prod further but the worry didn’t leave his eyes. Taeyong hated that he made his friend worry.

“What are we making for breakfast tomorrow?” Yuta asked instead, switching topics because he could sense Taeyong’s distress. The question eased some tension in the red head’s shoulders.

“I have no idea,” he admitted earnestly. Yuta scoffed a laugh.
“We’ll have to improvise then,” he concluded. Taeyong nodded.

“Yes we will.”

The thoughts of his future stayed on his mind for the rest of the night, making it hard to sleep even when Yuta hugged him warmly and induced some sort of drowsiness in his already fatigued mind. Taeyong couldn’t stop running over it again.

What do I want?

~

Taeyong walked down the halls, hurrying towards his history lesson. It was Tuesday, he was feeling content, having studied yesterday with Jaehyun’s help. The brunet had been so helpful, Taeyong managing to finish his English essay which turned out pretty okay. His teacher had been pleasantly surprised. The immense pressure he had been feeling was lifted, if only for a while, no more homework having been given this week at least. Now he could focus on dance practice and spend more time with his brothers.

The bell had rung already, Taeyong quickening his step as the corridors emptied around him. He was late, which was entirely his own fault for checking out books in the library between classes.

A sudden pressure on his arm stopped him in his steps, his body jerking backwards and all his books falling to the floor. Taeyong gasped when he was pushed against a row of lockers. He regained his senses and looked up to see an unwelcome face. Joe was smirking down at him, eyes narrowed. Taeyong frowned.

“Let go of me,” he demanded, not trying to get free but also not relaxing his posture.

“I don’t want to,” Joe sneered, hands wandering upwards to wrap around Taeyong’s biceps, grip tight. Taeyong hissed in pain. He started to struggle, trying to break away from the offending hold. Joe rolled his eyes, looking genuinely angry, before pulling him forth and slamming him back into the lockers again. Taeyong sucked in a deep breath, his vision swimming from hitting his head on the hard surface.

“You want me to go for your brother instead,” Joe leaned in close, his breath smelling of cigarettes. Taeyong’s expression faltered, fear flickering in his eyes. “You want me to go to Sicheng? He’ll crawl back in a minute. Or that other brother of yours, what was his name?” Joe stopped to ponder. “Donghyuck?”

“Leave them alone,” Taeyong almost growled, feeling intensely scared. Sicheng would fall off his recovery road, he would dive back into that dark place and have an even harder time coming back.

“I will, if you do as we say,” Joe’s eyes were nearly black, pupils expanded. He looked positively demonic.

“What do you want?” Taeyong whispered, losing his strength. Joe smirked. Taeyong had given up.

“I’ll find you when the time comes,” Joe simply said, his right hand coming off Taeyong’s bicep in favour of stroking his cheek, Taeyong trying to move his face away from the touch. “Soon you’ll see.”

With those words Joe pulled away and disappeared down the hall. Taeyong stayed against the lockers until the junior was out of sight, before sinking down to the floor, pulling his knees close to his chest and resting his head on them. He was heaving, trying to breathe properly. Joe had
threatened him. Joe would go after his brothers. Taeyong had to listen. He had to. It would be okay if he listened to them. Okay. Okay.

Taeyong slowly gathered up the air in his lungs, forcing himself to breathe slowly, to stop panicking. It was okay. Then he stood up and gathered his books and supplies, continuing on his way to his class.

It was okay. As long as he did what they told him to do.

Okay.

~

Sicheng was sitting with Jiwoo and Somin, Kun having class. They occupied a table at the far corner of the cafeteria, Jiwoo sipping on a drink she bought and Somin reading a book for her English class.

“Can I have some?” Sicheng asked Jiwoo, the senior nodding and handing over the drink gingerly. Sicheng smiled and grabbed it, taking a small sip. It was a sweet taste, something fruity about it. But it was good. So he sipped some more before handing it back.

A group of people welled into the cafeteria, Sicheng seeing his eldest brother in the mix. Taeyong caught his eyes and smiled, waving gently. Sicheng waved back. Taeyong looked unusually anxious, the smile falling off his face and his eyes flickering across the room in what looked like panic. Sicheng frowned. Somin started talking about a section she’d read in her book, distracting the strawberry blonde as he listened to her rant about the incompetent protagonist of the story.

When Jiwoo asked about it, Sicheng took that chance to glance at Taeyong’s table. He saw Yuta and Ten sitting on either side of his brother, Jaehyun and Johnny across from them. Sicheng pressed his lips together in thought. Yuta reached out to his brother and grabbed his upper arm, laughing about something, and Sicheng’s eyes widened when Taeyong flinched from the grip. Yuta didn’t seem to notice, still talking, but Sicheng saw how Taeyong’s face momentarily filled with dread before he schooled his features. Something was off.

Suddenly a hazy memory floated to his mind. The night of the party. Joe had been there when they were leaving. He’d been there, and he’d grabbed Taeyong. Sicheng’s mouth opened in a silent gasp. The incident had been forgotten in between his drunkenness and his mind spiraling into dark thoughts, only focusing on himself and his feelings. He’d completely forgotten about it.

He felt the creeping guilt in his chest, his stomach churning. Taeyong might’ve been more affected by the incident than he usually would when something happened. Sicheng chewed on his lip as he turned back to Jiwoo and Somin who were still discussing the protagonist of the book, not noticing his inner spiraling thoughts. He had to talk to Taeyong.

~

Later that day, after dinner, when all the brothers had left the table save for Sicheng and Taeyong who were on dish duty, Sicheng decided to ask his brother about it. Sicheng was drying dishes while Taeyong washed.

“Hyung?” Sicheng started, trying to formulate himself properly. Taeyong hummed, acknowledging that he was listening. “Remember that night at the party, when we were leaving?” Sicheng didn’t know if he imagined it, but he could’ve sworn that Taeyong tensed up.

“Yeah, why?”
“Joe grabbed you, inappropriately,” Sicheng had almost ceased his movements of drying a plate to gauge Taeyong’s reaction. The older paused momentarily in his washing before continuing. “Is he still bothering you?”

Taeyong continued, albeit more vigorously as he scrubbed away at a glass. He took his time - Sicheng letting him - before finally opening his mouth.

“No. I haven’t even seen him since that night,” Taeyong assured, turning to look at Sicheng. The younger frowned. Taeyong sighed lightly and reached for the towel to dry his hands. Sicheng didn’t move when Taeyong grabbed his hands, holding them carefully.

“It was an intense night, and he might’ve grabbed me but I can defend myself, you know that,” Taeyong smiled slightly. “I can deal with him if he ever turns up again.” Sicheng still felt anxious, but Taeyong was capable of handling himself, he had seen that several times. At the same time, he also knew that Taeyong would never want to burden him, especially since he was mentally unstable. Honestly he didn’t know if he could handle it, should Joe or Ara ever approach him again. He could feel his heartbeat speeding up in fear, only thinking about them. He still avoided them profusely, never looking at them if they had classes together, never going even close to any of their places where he knew they hung out sometimes. He tried his best to avoid them to the best of their abilities, Doctor Song also recommending that, because he was trying to get better and he wasn’t ready to meet them yet. It would throw him back to square one.

“Okay,” he acknowledged. He knew his brother could defend himself. And he also knew that he, himself, wasn’t in the right state of mind to even be thinking about them too much.

So, he conceded, and continued drying the dishes.
Donghyuck felt distant. He was currently sitting at the kitchen table, studying. Weirdly enough he didn’t feel the usual lightness in his chest, the joy in his smile, the warmth in his eyes. He felt confused and, distant. It all kind of made itself clear to him when he saw Taeyong sitting down, staring into space. When he heard Jungwoo talk about his friends. He noticed that he didn’t know. He was lost. He spent so much time away from his brothers, it felt like he didn’t know what was going on anymore. He had been so elated, being together with Mark. Seeing Jaemin, Renjun, Jeno and Suhyun. He was rarely home.

He tapped his pencil against his notebook, not making sense of anything when his mind was wandering uncontrollably. With a sigh, Donghyuck dropped his pencil and got up from the table, heading for the stairs. He went straight for Sicheng’s door, opening it without knocking. The junior was currently at his desk, typing on his laptop. Sicheng looked up when Donghyuck entered and threw himself on the bed.

“Hyung?” Donghyuck started, staring up at the ceiling.

“Yeah?”

“How’s life?” Donghyuck sat up, folding his legs. Sicheng closed his laptop and spun in his chair.

“I’m doing okay,” he responded with a nod. “You?”

“I’m fine, but I meant more specifically,” Donghyuck clarified. “Anything new happen recently?”

Sicheng raised a single eyebrow at the other. Donghyuck grinned back. Something seemed to click in his older brother’s mind.

“You know what, yeah,” Sicheng told him, sounding almost scared, he was chuckling nervously.

Donghyuck raised his eyebrows this time.

“Oh really? Tell me,” he said excitedly. Sicheng got up and headed for his closet, disappearing behind the door. Donghyuck watched curiously as he heard the rustling of clothes. After a few seconds the door closed and revealed his brother in a crop top. Donghyuck lit up.

“Wow hyung! That looks so good!” His eyes were close to sparkling as he got up from the bed, getting closer to his brother. Sicheng smiled, nervousness hiding in his features.
“You think?”

“Yeah! The color really suits you and the length is perfect,” Donghyuck told him.

“Thank you.”

Donghyuck looked up from observing the shirt to see his brother looking at him tenderly. He understood the other must’ve been scared to show him a new side to his personality. Something he most likely hadn’t told any of their brothers yet.

“I love it,” he assured, moving forward to hug his older brother tightly. Sicheng exhaled into the embrace, hugging him back fiercely. It was a rare moment of skinship for this specific pair.

Donghyuck felt infinitely better.

~

Taeyong scrolled through the photos Max had sent. They were from the wedding that had occurred only two days ago. He couldn’t help but smile as he looked at them. Max wore a white tuxedo while her girlfriend had opted for a shorter dress with a button up on top, matching bow ties completing their looks. Hayoon was dressed in a blue tuxedo, Max’s text saying she picked it herself which Taeyong found incredibly precious. She wore a similar bow tie.

The pictures showed the ceremony, the kiss, the beautiful venue, the reception, the huge cake, the fairy lights twinkling as Hayoon grinned happily. It was truly beautiful.

“Who’s that?” Taeyong startled when a voice appeared next to his ear, turning his head to see Johnny eyeing the photos. His gaze wasn’t judgmental nor accusing, simply curious, and a small smile played at his lips. They were currently in the library, Johnny helping Taeyong with English, after hearing from Jaehyun that the other wanted help in that subject.

“That’s Max noona and her girlfriend. And their daughter Hayoon. They recently got married,” Taeyong explained, pointing out the people in the photo.

“It looks beautiful,” Johnny said, reaching out to swipe the photos, leaning over Taeyong’s shoulder. The other smiled at the gesture and let Johnny swipe the photos.

“Do you see yourself getting married?” Taeyong asked, suddenly feeling curious. Johnny hummed.

“I’m not sure. I mean marriage isn’t that important to me, I’m not religious and I’m not adamant on marriage being as important, as it is to many Koreans,” he tried to explain. “I think I would consider it if my partner wants to, but I’m not feeling a need to. You can have love without marriage.”

“I understand what you mean,” Taeyong said in agreement. Johnny looked at him, inquiring.

“What about you?” He asked. Taeyong frowned. “Do you want to get married?” Taeyong almost sighed. He found such questions incredibly hard to answer. He had never thought about marriage, or love for that part. He had never considered his life like that. Mostly his life consisted of thinking about his brothers. Schedules, meals, wellbeing.

“I don’t know,” he answered truthfully, sighing through his nose quietly. Johnny shrugged.

“We still have time. We don’t have to figure out our whole future now,” he said, continuing to scroll through the photos. Taeyong nodded in agreement, feeling a growing sense of fear in his chest. He never thought about his future. He never considered his options. He never thought about what he
wanted. He was a senior. What was he going to do about university? Did he want to get married? Did he want kids? He tried to ignore the thoughts whirling in his head, instead focusing on what Johnny had said. We don’t have to think about it now. We have time. So he inhaled deeply, letting his words out breathily.

“I guess you’re right.”

~

Ten smiled as he looked at Taeyong. The senior was sitting in the corner of the dance room, Jonghyun right up next to him while Lisa chatted with them. Seulgi and Chungha were doing stretches, or more likely, competing in doing splits.

Jungkook and Yugyeom both sat on the only bench in the room, looking into their phones. Ten rolled his eyes. Kids these days. Momo and Soonyoung had gone to drink water. Ten slowly made his way over to Taeyong, sitting down next to his friend. Taeyong didn’t look as Ten reached out to thread his fingers through Taeyong’s fiery red hair, slowly raking through it and massaging. Taeyong’s eyelids closed with a fluttering while leaning into the touch. Ten continued gently putting pressure on Taeyong’s scalp, smiling when he heard the redhead let out a satisfied sigh.

Slowly he made his way down, pressing on his forehead with nimble fingers, tenderly brushing over the scar by his eye, thumbing at his lip. He noticed that Lisa had trailed off from her story, looking at them curiously. Taeyong was going limp, his whole body relaxing into the touch. Ten bit his lip to stop himself from laughing when Taeyong’s head fell onto his shoulder, the senior asleep.

“Wow,” Jonghyun commented, eyes wide. Ten wiggled his eyebrows.

“How the hell-“ Seulgi was at a loss for words, looking at them incredulously. Ten smirked.

“Magic fingers honey. Magic fingers.”

~

Sicheng was nervously fidgeting with his fingers. It was Wednesday evening and Jiwoo had convinced Kun and him to meet Matthew and J. Seph, who were apparently Somin’s and Jiwoo’s best friends. They were in Jiwoo’s car, darkness falling across the sky because of the early winter weather. Kun was next to him, humming along to the song playing on the radio.

They drove for another five minutes before stopping in front of the house where Sicheng had basically had the worst night of his life. The house of the party. Where Matthew lived. It was a pretty house, the lights on in every window and a lit up porch greeting them when they reached the front door. Thundering footsteps were heard as Somin rang the door bell.

The door opened to reveal two very attractive males. The taller had light brown hair, and highlights that were even more of a lighter brown. His eyes were small and framed by glasses and Sicheng could see the muscles hiding under his T-shirt. The shorter had darker brown hair, pushed back away from his forehead. He smiled gently at them.

“Yo wassup!” The taller said, fist-bumping Jiwoo and hugging Somin. “Nice to meet you!” He then exclaimed, smiling widely at Kun and Sicheng. They returned the gesture. “Come on in!”

Sicheng liked the interior of the house as well, tasteful and sleek. Something he hadn’t noticed during the party. The male who had greeted them led the way into the living room. Three pizzas and several drinks were on the table already, a collection of movies next to the food.
“Welcome to mi casa,” the taller said, which meant he was Matthew, Sicheng supplied to himself. The other must be J. Seph.

“I like your house,” Kun commented, Sicheng nodding in agreement. Matthew laughed it off.

“Thanks.”

“Are we sitting down or what?” Jiwoo complained playfully and took initiative, walking over to the couch. Sicheng frowned slightly when more memories floated to his mind, memories of lips on him, hands on him, a body on him. A shiver of disgust crept its way throughout his body. He tried to ignore it and sat down, Kun sitting down right next to him.

While they looked through the movies Sicheng gathered some courage and started asking questions. Matthew and J. Seph were both freshmen in college, J, Seph’s real name was Taehyung, Matthew was originally from LA and was a dance major.

Sicheng slowly loosened up to the older males, laughing when Matthew argued for his choice in movies, smiled when J. Seph handed him the last slice of pizza and hid his face in Matthew’s shoulder when a scary scene arrived, making him jump out of his skin, although he retracted himself almost immediately. Kun seemed to warm up to them as well, chatting quietly with J. Seph during the movie, asking about terms he didn’t understand and scenes he especially liked.

All in all it was a great night, and they had gained new friends, which Sicheng really treasured.

Now he just needed to stop thinking. About lips on his, hands on him, body pressing against him. Disgusted. Violated.

The sheer emotion of being unfazed.
Chapter 66

Chapter Notes

This is an interesting chapter. It was interesting to write at least XD

Hope you’ll enjoy it <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taeyong set himself on his bed, hesitantly letting his finger trace the ridges of his notebook. It had been months since he’d had time or will to even bring it out. But now, today, he just got an urge to do exactly that. Sicheng was with friends, Jungwoo and Lucas were studying. Donghyuck was playing with Chenle and Jisung, practicing their dancing which was rare nowadays.

And Taeyong. He was in his room, door closed for once. He carefully opened the notebook, flipping through worn down pages and thumbing at the faded lyrics from so long ago. He had started writing when he was thirteen. A way to empty his thoughts and feelings into words, a way to have an outlet for all his worries as a thirteen year old, taking up so much responsibility already.

It was a notebook he had gotten from his brothers. They had made a joint effort to buy it when his thirteenth birthday had arrived. It was one of his most precious gifts that he held dearly to his heart.

Smiling slightly, Taeyong read some of his old stuff, laughing at his wording and attempted rhymes and flows. When he had heard about Mark writing lyrics he’d felt really excited for some reason, finding companionship in the junior. It was partly why he warmed up so quickly to the other. He felt like they connected on some level.

Maybe they could even write lyrics together someday.

But today was not that day.

So Taeyong gently picked up his pen with trembling fingers, and started writing.

Nothing serious, nothing heart wrenching, just whatever was on his mind. Or whatever he saw in his room. A movie case, a mug with hot cocoa, during lunch when Jaehyun had flashed his dimples. Doyoung’s bunny teeth.

And he continued writing, feeling unexplainably lost in his own mind.

But it was a good feeling. He didn’t have to think about the future, his future, or his dreams. He could focus on here and now.

Which was exactly what he needed to do.

~

Sicheng was fiddling with his necklace. He was also wearing his crop top which was exhilarating and scary, but in a really nice way. He may be at home, the safety of knowing that only his brothers
might see, but it still felt like a step. A step forward. Because even if they were his brothers and he knew that they would be supportive in his heart, his mind couldn’t think the same way. Because humans are in base irrational, even when knowing the rational response.

He couldn’t stop thinking about the night of the party. It had been awesome yesterday, meeting Matthew and J.Seph but it also brought back memories, being in Matthew’s house. Memories of that girl.

He couldn’t shake it off. He knew he had been violated, touched without consent, yes, but he also felt confused because he hadn’t reacted. That stood out prominently to him, how he was unfazed. From what everything tells him; social media, movies, tv-shows, sexual education, he is supposed to be a hormonal boy as it is so skillfully called. But he didn’t feel anything. He didn’t feel aroused and there was no, so called, natural response. After coming home yesterday, in pure curiosity, he had searched up some, honest to god, porn. Which was just not comfortable at all for him. He didn’t like any of it, not the men nor the women.

Maybe he needed to experiment more. With both genders. With all genders. It just didn’t appeal to him; kissing or making out.

Sicheng sighed quietly and closed his eyes. He felt exhausted.

And then his door opened gently. He tensed up completely, aware that he was wearing his crop top. Licking his lips, he opened his eyes and glanced towards the door. Jungwoo was there, face bare and cozy clothes on.

“Hey hyung,” the black haired teenager smiled, soft spoken as always, making Sicheng smile as well. “We’re going to watch a movie.”

“Movie night on a Wednesday?” Sicheng chucked. Jungwoo nodded.

“It was Hyuck hyung’s idea,” he explained. Sicheng snorted, Donghyuck was really trying to bring them all together.

“Okay, I’m coming,” he said and got up, noticing Jungwoo’s straying eyes. And he remembered. The crop top.

“Oh. Uh-“

“It looks really good hyung,” Jungwoo said, grinning with all his teeth.

“Thanks,” Sicheng bashfully accepted. Jungwoo walked forward to grab his hand.

“Keep it on,” the younger told him and started pulling Sicheng with him. The strawberry blonde felt reluctant but also excited to show his garment to his brothers. He felt like there was a war in his head which was immensely tiring.

Jungwoo intertwined their fingers and smiled up at the taller brother.

When they reached the living room, Jungwoo’s hold on Sicheng tightened. Lucas was sitting with Chenle in his lap, Jisung sitting with Donghyuck while Taeyong took up he armchair. They looked up at the entrance of Jungwoo and Sicheng. Lucas was the first to speak, with a smile.

“I like your shirt hyung,” he said, voice tone being his usual aegyo one. Chenle and Jisung looked up at that comment and made thumbs up, Chenle also grinning excitedly. Donghyuck have Sicheng a knowing wink and a smile as well.
“It’s beautiful,” Taeyong added, Sicheng feeling the pressure around his heart lift, replaced by love and support. Taeyong seemed to sense his relief and spoke again. “Being different is not being wrong. You know that right?” He asked, a smile playing at his lips. Sicheng exhaled slightly in his relief, relishing in the resonating lightness of his previously heavy thoughts and fears.

“Wow hyung, breaking out the inspirational speech,” Donghyuck hit his hand against his chest as if in pain. “Truly beautiful. This is the real stuff.”

Taeyong only rolled his eyes.

Jungwoo hurriedly dragged Sicheng onto the couch and sat down with him, cuddling up to the strawberry blonde male.

“Okay,” Donghyuck clapped his hands. “Now, let’s watch the movie.”

~

The next day, Thursday, when Taeyong was walking out of dance practice, being the first one to leave as he had promised to buy take out on the way home, he was finally cornered.

He had been waiting for it to happen all week, only relaxing when at home, but still often haunted by the thoughts of it. Now it was happening.

A calloused hand grabbed his bicep, pulling him away from his car and dragging him across the parking lot. Taeyong was about to protest when he saw the build of the person, the cropped hair. The muscles. The smell of smoke.

It was Joe.

Taeyong shut his mouth tightly, frowning as he was being forcefully led toward a black van. His heart was beating like crazy and his mind was running through all possible scenarios. Kidnapping. Killing him. Drugging him. Raping him. Oh no no no.

Taeyong so badly wanted to escape and run, get home to his brothers and never go back to school. But he didn’t.

Instead he jumped into the van when Joe pushed him forward, and was met by three people. Two girls and the blue haired boy. The same one he’d seen at the party and at school. One of the girls was Ara, he recognized her, the other one, he’d never seen before.

“He is pretty,” the unknown girl spoke, looking him up and down, Taeyong grimaced. Joe reached out a hand to stroke his cheek, which Taeyong slapped away.

“Yeah he is,” Joe agreed and sneered at him. Taeyong kept his composure.

“What do you want?” He asked them instead, feeling tired of their games. Ara snorted.

“Right to the point then,” she nodded, a lit cigarette in her mouth. “We need you to make a trade,” she said, exhaling the smoke. Taeyong refused to cough.

“A trade?” He asked, raising an eyebrow. “What does that even mean?”

“We have a contact in the city who has some goods we want. But personally we wouldn’t want to compromise our identities. It would be the talk of the town. Everyone knows everyone,” Ara spat her words, like they were poisonous. “But you. You’re new, you’re secretive, no one would question it.”
“What are the goods?” Taeyong definitely knew that something was off. Ara smiled, a devilish smile, and flicked her cigarette, the embers flickering and dying out.

“What are the goods?” Taeyong definitely knew that something was off. Ara smiled, a devilish smile, and flicked her cigarette, the embers flickering and dying out.

“Cocaine.”

~

Taeyong almost dropped his jaw when he heard the word. They wanted him to deal cocaine for them. What the actual -

“No,” he firmly stated. He couldn’t believe this, it was so absurd. Ara rolled her eyes, as if his opinion was that of an irrational child’s.

“I think you’re missing the point. You don’t have a choice. We will disintegrate your brothers if you dare refuse,” Ara hissed at him, Taeyong narrowing his eyes. Considering they were dealing with drugs and alcohol. What they had done to Sicheng. How Joe acted toward him.

He didn’t doubt their ability to actually do that.

Which is what frightened him so much.

“No,” he still persisted, although more gently this time.

“Jungwoo,” Taeyong startled at the name spilling from Ara’s mouth. “Lucas. Chenle.” Her eyes were almost completely black, pupils dilated, her mouth twisted into something that could be likened to a smile. “Jisung.”

Taeyong felt his heart pump even harder. She knew of them. She knew their names. She knew. Joe who’s hand was currently creeping forward to hold the back of his neck, calloused fingers gripping tightly, making Taeyong arch his back in silent pain. They knew. They could do so much with that information, they probably knew where he lived as well.

“I’ll do it,” he huffed, trying to breathe. “I’ll do it.”

Ara smirked, licking her lips and taking another drag of the cigarette. Joe was smiling as well, at Taeyong, making the other shiver in discomfort. Joe looked truly crazed, eyes raking over him and Taeyong nearly gagging in disgust, before Joe let his neck go. Taeyong sucked in a deep breath, regaining the oxygen he’d lost. Ara spoke her last words before they pushed him out of the van again.

“I knew you would. They always do.”

~

Taeyong felt numb as he got into his car and left school. He had just agreed to deal drugs for some snotty juniors. He couldn’t believe himself. They were younger than him, he was strong, he could fight them off. But he also knew he wouldn’t be able to. They had an aura around them. An aura promising devilish acts. Like Ara’s pure professionalism, her calculated speech and her expressions. They didn’t reveal anything. It scared Taeyong to see such an emotionless person, like she had no concept of wrong. And Joe. Joe was a downright creep, touching him and looking at him a lot. A whole lot.

Taeyong wanted to scream out his frustration at the situation. He didn’t dare defy them in case there would be consequences. They knew of his younger brothers. He figured Ara must’ve heard from Sicheng; and now it was coming back to bite them in the ass. Taeyong would be screwed if he got
caught doing this, ultimately resulting in his brothers being taken away and separated by social security. He could feel bile rising in his throat at the thought. He could not let that happen. He couldn’t. His brothers were his most precious aspect of life. They were what he dedicated his whole self to. He couldn’t be the cause of their demise. It would ruin their lives, the lives which Taeyong had fought so hard for them to live properly and fully. He couldn’t.

Thus, he would just have to avoid getting caught.

Chapter End Notes

Yes I quoted Stray Kids in there XD
Chapter 67

Friday is finally here hell yeah :D

I have just started driving and it is terrifying but also so much fun :))

Christmas is approaching and we had snow which is nice ^_^

Now hope you’ll enjoy this chapter <3333 it’s gonna be a bumpy ride

When Taeyong showed up to school the next day he felt incredibly jittery. He hadn’t been able to
sleep, only thinking about the encounter he had with Ara and her gang, repeating every word several
times in his head. He couldn’t comprehend how he had ended up in that situation, what he’d done to
deserve it. He sighed through his nose as he entered the classroom and sat down next to Jaehyun
who smiled at him, Taeyong tried to smile back but he was pretty sure that he failed. Jaehyun
noticed. Of course he did. Taeyong had also noticed how perceptive Jaehyun really was.

“What’s wrong?” Jaehyun questioned gently, voice lowered as to not gain the attention of curious
ears. Taeyong knew people still sought after him, after hearing him speak, and it only annoyed him
further.

“I didn’t sleep well tonight,” Taeyong admitted softly, licking his lips nervously. Jaehyun pursed his
lips.

“You wanna nap for a few minutes? We still have awhile before we start,” Jaehyun suggested.
Taeyong huffed an incredulous laugh.

“Oh no, I’d never be able to,” Taeyong protested. Jaehyun rolled his eyes playfully.

“Sure you can,” then the brunet reached out gently to bring Taeyong’s head down on his shoulder.
Taeyong felt a shiver run through his spine as he tried to unwind, slowly sinking down into
Jaehyun’s hold. Jaehyun had a reassuring arm behind his back, numerous bracelets around his wrist,
his shoulder being warm and muscular which Taeyong hadn’t thought about before; Jaehyun’s build
was really attractive. Taeyong was facing Jaehyun’s neck, his skin pale and flawless. Taeyong felt
his breath hitching as he really looked at the other. The small indent in his cheek. Kind eyes. Pink
lips.

And Taeyong felt safe. Being held by Jaehyun. Same when the other had asked him, that very first
time, about his brothers. Jaehyun felt comforting and safe.

So Taeyong relaxed and let his eyes flutter closed, ignoring the hard beating of his heart and hoping
that Jaehyun couldn’t feel it. Then he drifted.

~
Sicheng laughed when J.Seph missed his pass, Jiwoo whooping triumphantly. They had left school during lunch to hang out with J.Seph and Matthew, going to a park and finding a ping-pong table where they ultimately decided to play head-ball. It was a back and forth game where you had to pass a foot ball with your head. Jiwoo had won against both Matthew and J.Seph.

“Sicheng, let’s play!” Kun called then, Jiwoo handing the ball over to him. Sicheng inhaled deeply and got up from the bench he’d been seated on, walking to the ping pong table.

The game started with Sicheng’s serve that barely grazed his head, Kun yelled out in protest, laughing all the same. Somin tried to be a peace maker while Jiwoo defended Sicheng playfully, J.Seph fighting her to defend Kun. Basically it was a laughing mess.

Just how Sicheng liked it.

~

After they stopped playing, Sicheng having lost basically every time, they decided to get lunch at a food stand nearby. Kun and Sicheng remained at the bench while Jiwoo, Somin, J.Seph and Matthew bought food.

Sicheng tapped his finger against the hard wood in thought. Kun was shuffling the deck of cards he always kept in his pocket.

“Kun-ge,” Sicheng called for his attention. Kun looked at him in question. “Have you ever had a partner?” Kun frowned slightly.

“No, why?” Sicheng didn’t answer, he asked another question.

“Have you ever kissed anyone?” Kun looked lost.

“Yes I have, why are you asking?” Sicheng, again, didn’t answer his inquiry.

“What does it feel like?” Kun exhaled quietly, leaning back on the bench and bringing his knees up to his chest.

“I don’t know. It’s hard to explain. It feels like my heart is going to beat out of my chest. And I feel lightheaded, it’s a good feeling,” Kun tried to explain. “Why, Sicheng? Why do you want to know?” Sicheng furrowed his eyebrows.

“A girl kissed me at that party,” he told Kun. “I didn’t like it. Is that wrong?” Kun frowned again.

“It’s definitely not wrong. It sounds like she initiated it. And from what I saw you were pretty gone, which makes it a violation of your personal space. That’s what’s wrong. She didn’t have your consent,” Kun started, calm and serene as he often was. Sicheng felt the clam wash over him as well. “Regarding you not liking it, that’s also not wrong. You have your own preferences and likes. You have a right to feel what you feel and to not like it. That’s what’s right.” Kun’s smile was sincere and reassuring, Sicheng feeling slightly better after hearing that.

“Thank you ge,” he said and grinned back. Excited shouts and protests were heard and Sicheng knew that their friends were coming back, turning in his seat to see them, smiles on their faces and food in their hands.

Sicheng felt good, for the first time in a long time. Okay with his situation and his friends and his brothers. With a smile he started pulling on his necklace.
He felt okay.

~

“You look dead,” Doyoung commented when Taeyong and Ten settled at their table in the canteen. Taeyong grimaced at him.

“Well you look like a bunny,” he shot back weakly. Doyoung snorted.

“Come up with something new, tomato head,” Doyoung munched his salad. Taeyong frowned in defeat. Johnny laughed and leaned forward to pat Taeyong’s head in comfort.

Taeil looked up from the book he’d been reading and frowned at Taeyong’s exhausted state.

“Seriously though,” he spoke. “Are you okay?” Taeyong’s response was muffled and brief, Taeil leaning forward slightly. “What?”

“I’m fine,” Taeyong voiced, lifting his head and offering them a smile. Ten looked completely unconvinced. Taeil sighed internally. They all knew he wasn’t.

“Aww Taeyongie,” Johnny exclaimed. “What are we gonna do with you?” Taeil almost laughed at the tone of Johnny’s voice, Taeyong staring with wide eyes. Johnny didn’t elaborate further, leaving Taeyong in confusion, Taeil knew that Johnny was just overly concerned and couldn’t contain himself.

Jaehyun entered the canteen, approached the table and sat down next to Doyoung. He looked content as he opened his lunch and started eating, although his eyes did flicker with worry when he noticed Taeyong only pushing around his own food.

“You okay?” He asked.

“I’m fine,” Taeyong practically singsonged with sarcastic undertones, which made Taeil sad. What wasn’t he telling them?

~

Donghyuck was blasting Michael Jackson in the car as they headed for Lucas and Jungwoo’s school. Taeyong had decided to stay out of discount day again to avoid more uncomfortable questions. He felt like he was letting his friends down even if he was buzzing to just tell them.

Sicheng was bopping his head to the music as he typed on his phone, Taeyong tapping the steering wheel stressfully, he was jittery all over.

When they reached the middle school Taeyong parked close to the entrance, sighing discreetly. He felt like he did that a lot these days.

“Oh wow look,” Donghyuck suddenly exclaimed, pointing out his window. Taeyong and Sicheng both turned and Taeyong felt his blood run cold.

It was Joe.

The junior was prowling around the corner of the school building, disappearing out of sight. Taeyong felt the panic grip at his heart.

“That guy is such a creep. He harassed Mark once for being gay. Plus he hangs with Ara which is just not something a good person would do,” Donghyuck shook his head. “A bigoted, mean creep.”
“Yeah,” Sicheng agreed. “He said some nasty stuff when he saw the photo that got leaked.” Donghyuck frowned.

“How do you know that?” Taeyong could see Sicheng’s eyes widening in panic. They hadn’t told Donghyuck about that yet. Whoops.


“Okay, you better be serious. I’m gonna come to your room tonight,” Donghyuck told him gravely. “Then we’ll talk.”

Taeyong felt sorry for Sicheng, his brother having to explain all of that again, so he silently got Sicheng’s attention. With a look, he asked if Sicheng wanted him to be there. Subtly, the junior shook his head. I can do it.

Jungwoo and Lucas came bounding towards the car just then, breaking the silence that had fallen upon the three brothers.

“Hey hyungs!” Jungwoo greeted cheerily, Lucas shouting his hello’s.

“Hi,” Taeyong smiled in the rear view mirror. “How was school?”

“Really good!” Jungwoo said and started going off about something they did in English while Taeyong started driving. Unfortunately, Taeyong’s mind started drifting away from the conversation, his thoughts going to Joe. The guy had been at his brothers’ school. And apparently he had harassed Mark for being gay which didn’t make sense to Taeyong since Joe gave him such looks and touched him in such ways that would suggest him being gay as well. And also he, apparently, had made nasty comments about the photo that got leaked of Mark and Donghyuck. Taking into account that Lexie, who was Ara’s little sister, leaked said photos, Taeyong could easily feel that the whole group of friends were destroying his and his brothers’ lives. Them deceiving Sicheng. Coercing Taeyong himself into drug dealing. Ripping apart Mark’s social life and making nasty comments. Creeping around Jungwoo’s and Lucas’ school. Taeyong felt the crippling fear washing over him. Ara and her gang was slowly making their way through all the Lee brothers. Corrupting them, deceiving them.

Destroying them.

And Taeyong was so fucking scared.

~

The weekend passed slowly, the brothers focusing on spending time together. When Donghyuck had been told the whole story of Sicheng’s situation he had cried, which had completely flustered Sicheng. Taeyong simply let Donghyuck go around and hug all the brothers tightly after coming out of Sicheng’s room after their talk, all of them accepting the affection even if they were slightly confused. Donghyuck had basically told them that the weekend was a family one and they needed to be together at all times.

Taeyong didn’t mind. It meant he wouldn’t have to deal with his friends asking questions he didn’t know how to answer. He did text Johnny a couple of times for the memes, but otherwise he avoided non-family interaction. They played board games, TV games and watched movies. They even came together and baked cupcakes with lots of colored frostings and ornaments on top.

All in all it was a great weekend, except for Taeyong. Taeyong laid awake in bed. Not being able to sleep at all, his thoughts keeping him awake. It was Sunday, he hadn’t been able to sleep for the entire weekend and he knew that he would look like a zombie walking into school in the morning.
Frustrated, he threw his covers off of himself and tried to change his positioning to something more comfortable. Nothing worked. He felt like crying, sleep deprivation getting the best of him, but instead he got up and walked downstairs to grab a glass of water.

Taeyong sighed in relief when the cool liquid entered his throat, relishing in the feeling. It was cold, him only being in a T-shirt and pyjamas pants, but he enjoyed it. The cold numbed him.

He startled when the doorknob rattled, almost dropping the glass in his hand. With frightened eyes he turned to the kitchen entrance that was facing the hallway leading to the front door. The doorknob rattled a bit more before it fell quiet. Taeyong quietly put the glass down and started tiptoeing towards the kitchen entrance, peeking at the, now visible, front door. His heart was beating wildly and he assumed it must’ve been his imagination, from sleep deprivation, but then he heard it. Something being inserted into the lock, the telltale click and then the doorknob being pushed down. Taeyong breathed in sharply when the door was pushed open. He frantically hurried back into the kitchen, grabbing a vegetable knife from the kitchen counter. He held it high as footsteps walked down the hallway, the door closing gently. There were more than one person.

Taeyong feared that his heart was gonna jump out of his chest and he wanted nothing more than to run away. But he couldn’t. His brothers were upstairs. He had to protect them.

Then, two hooded figures appeared in the kitchen entrance, one small and lithe, the other tall and burly. Taeyong could feel his hand shaking.

The figures shrugged off their hoods and stepped closer. A woman. Dyed blonde hair, shape eyes, makeup thickly applied, a red dress. A man. Dark eyes, dark hair, sharp jawline, a black sleek suit.

Taeyong felt his heart race in fear for an entirely different reason. He hesitantly lowered the knife. He would’ve much rather kept it up honestly. He really wished he could keep the knife up. He falconers when the man sneered at him.

“Put the knife down, boy. I sure as hell hope you’re not planning on killing your own parents.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry
The tension was nearly unbearable, Taeyong sitting, back straight, eyes closely watching the people in front of him, his hands in his lap, fingers fidgeting and foot tapping the floor anxiously.

The Lee parents sat equally stiff opposite him, looking like they would rather be anywhere but there.

“Why are you here?” Taeyong asked, voice soft as to not rouse any of his soundly sleeping brothers. His father raised an eyebrow.

“We have every right to be here, this is our house,” he said, sneering. Taeyong scoffed internally. He knew the only plausible reason for them being here was because of one of their assistants. Taeyong had met her when he was younger, only once, and she was the only one to know about them having kids. And he didn’t really know how it happened but he assumed she would persuade them to actually meet with their kids, at least once a year, and they did, at night, where they knew that none of them would be awake except for Taeyong who was an incredibly light sleeper.

Taeyong wanted to spit on them.

He was the only one of the brothers to have regular contact with them and that little time was usually spent in tense silence or with biting remarks from his parents.

“How are the others?” His mother spoke, voice uncomfortable. Taeyong frowned.

“The others are fine,” he managed to grit out between his teeth.

“I really don’t like your tone,” she said and pursed her lips. Taeyong tried to keep calm.

“And I really don’t like your non-existent parenting.” He obviously failed. His mother looked offended at his remark, huffing angrily through her nose.

“And you think you’re so good?” She threw back, red colored lips pressed together in a fine line. “You’re not. You think you’re so righteous, taking care of your brothers and acting high and mighty. You’re eighteen years old, what are you doing with your life?” She spat, looking so disappointed. Taeyong kept himself composed, as he had learned to do at a young age. He was breaking on the inside.

“And who’s fault is that!? You forced me to do this! By not taking care of us like you should!”

“I think you should calm down, boy,” his father was seething.
“No!” Taeyong threw back. “You two are awful parents. You’re never here and you don’t even care! I bet you don’t even know all of our names!”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” his mother said, voice dangerously low and menacing. “It’s not our fault. It’s yours.”

Taeyong scoffed at her, speechless. How could it be his fault? He voiced as much.

“Because you were the very first,” his mother started. “You were the first mistake we made in our entire lives. Do you think the others would’ve been mistakes if you convinced us by being a good baby? If you wouldn’t have been such a waste of space we might’ve wanted more babies, and not just all these failures we have now,” she was basically shouting now. Taeyong felt numb. “We always wanted a daughter. And you ruined it. You all did. You were the only chance to prove us wrong. To prove to us that a son could be just as good as a daughter. But you failed. And now we have all these sons to deal with,” he couldn’t believe the words his mother was saying. If he could even think of her as his mother.

“And now? Now you’re just a glorified babysitter. Is that what you want in life? Be a babysitter? You’re such a disappointment. A failure,” the hatred and disappointment in her eyes was clear as day in the night light.

“You ruined everything.”

Taeyong felt a single tear escape his eye. He couldn’t even look at them. He simply sat stock still, arms crossed, eyes downcast. His mother had stood up during her speech, towering over him.

“I think we should leave now,” his father said, the harsh disappointment so prominent in his voice as well. Taeyong heard the sound of chairs scraping against the floor, the footsteps walking away, the door opening and closing, the lock clicking into place and finally. Silence.

Taeyong felt completely empty.

It was all his fault. He was the cause. He was the mistake. He was the start of all this.

All the memories of his parents came to mind. All the times when they’d yell at him for talking about them being gone so often at school. All the times they’d punished him when a school called in concern about him and they had to move. When they burned him, scarred him, for expressing his sexuality and encouraging his brothers to do the same. He never did that again. When he made sure his brothers would never make the same mistakes as him, faking signatures for all their field trips, baking for their cookie sales, faking being their dad if the school ever called, giving them all the love they deserve and need.

And all the time it was his fault. Because they wanted a daughter.

A daughter.

And now they were going home, to their luxurious apartment, their CEO jobs at their own company with numerous staff and assistants. No guilt, no remorse. Only disappointment.

While Taeyong stayed here, and took care of his brothers. With love, with everything he has.

Because that’s what he does.

~

Taeyong had spent the night fighting off his own emotions, trying to stop the inner turmoil he was experiencing, the glaring presence of failure and disappointment.
In the morning he had plastered a whole fake smile on his face, concerning all his brothers, and tried to quickly get them ready for school.

Because he knew.

He was on the verge of breaking. And he didn’t want them anywhere near him when that happened.

The conversation with his parents, the pressure of Joe and Ara, the thoughts of drug dealing.

His insides were shattering, his mind falling apart under the pressure.

So, he moved on with the day, drove everyone to school and walked inside his own school while taking deep breaths.

Deep breaths.

Inhale. Exhale.

The first lesson went by fairly quickly even if Taeyong spent the whole time out of focus, out of himself, out of his mind. It was after the first lesson when he knew. Because after the first lesson, walking to the lockers to get his things, he saw Joe. And Joe was walking right towards him. Taeyong felt his heart speed up irregularly, his palms sweating.

“It’s happening tonight. We’ll pick you up at midnight,” Joe hissed in his ear as they passed each other in the crowded noisy hallway. Taeyong heard him loud and clear. And felt the hand tracing his hip before disappearing. Taeyong swallowed the disgust.

He knew. He needed help. Right now.

With shaking hands, he quickened his step, stunning several people in the hallway by barreling through them in a rush, trying to find a safe space. Blood was rushing in his ears, his eyes blurring with tears and he couldn’t breathe.

That’s when he saw them, by the lockers. His safe haven.

Johnny and Doyoung.

He sprinted the last metres forward and crashed, right into Johnny’s chest, throwing his arms around the tall senior. Johnny gasped in surprise, looking down at him.

Taeyong cried.

He broke down completely, all the responsibility, all the thoughts, absolutely and infinitely breaking him down.

Flustered, Johnny’s arms tightened around him, the grip strong and reassuring nonetheless, mumbling soft assurances in English. Doyoung walked forward to shield them slightly from prying eyes, seeing as the whole hallway was taking an interest to the interaction.

“Let’s go somewhere private,” Doyoung said, hushed. Taeyong was shaking, heaving with tears. Johnny nodded to Doyoung and wrapped Taeyong up as good as he could in his arms, maneuvering the other to his side so they could walk.

Johnny swiftly led them to the locker rooms, knowing that they were empty at the time. When they were finally away from curious students, Johnny embraced Taeyong more properly and held him.
Taeyong was still crying, shaking breaths leaving him and his mind feeling overwhelmed beyond belief. Doyoung whipped out his phone and texted in the group chat quickly before walking over to the hugging pair and rubbing comforting circles on Taeyong’s back. Doyoung shared a concerned look with Johnny over Taeyong’s fiery hair.

A few minutes later the door opened and a horde of bodies flooded inside. Ten, Jaehyun, Yuta and Taeil hurrying over to them. They assessed the situation warily, seeing Taeyong crying. Which had never happened before. Yuta cast a look at Doyoung who shrugged. He had no idea what was going on.

“Taeyongie,” Johnny spoke softly, careful not to be too loud or startling. “Let’s sit down.”

The senior in his arms inhaled deeply, before nodding against his chest. Johnny smiled gently even though the other couldn’t see.

Taeyong broke away from the embrace, turning his back on them and walking over to sit on the bench in the centre of the room, his head hanging low. He didn’t dare look at them, his shoulder still shaking while trying to hold back tears.

Jaehyun frowned and walked over as well, their friends following suit, before sitting down next to Taeyong. He carefully placed a hand on the other’s back, rubbing it calmingly.

“It’s okay to cry,” he told the red haired male. Taeyong still refused to look up, but Jaehyun could see fresh tears making their way down his cheeks.

Quietly they all waited, taking seats at different positions around the room. No one spoke. No one disrupted the fragile tension spread across the room. No one got up to leave for their second class when the bell rang.

No one questioned it when Taeyong turned to hide his face in Jaehyun’s neck, the brunet putting his arms around the red head gingerly.

Eventually Taeyong’s crying simmered down to the occasional snuffle.

“Do you want to tell us what happened?” Ten broke the fragile silence, a small smile on his face as he looked at Taeyong who slowly lifted his head from Jaehyun’s shoulder and revealed his face, tear tracks on his cheeks, red rimmed eyes which he raised up to meet Ten’s eyes right on. Still so beautiful. Then he spoke, voice rough and soft.

“I do. I want to tell you,” he inhaled deeply to compose himself. “I need your help.”
Chapter 69

Chapter Notes

Okay it’s kinda meh but I think this is a necessary chapter so we will deal with that XD

Hope you’ll enjoy <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So Taeyong told them. He told them about his fucked up life, his absent parents, all the responsibility he carried since he was ten. He told them about getting yelled at, getting burned - about the real truth behind his scar - getting reprimanded, about moving away all the time. He told them about the terrible discussion they’d had last night and he told them about how he made sure his brothers never made the same mistakes as he did and how he always tried to give them as much love and comfort as possible, because their parents failed in doing so. He told them everything.

And it felt so good. It felt so fucking good to expel everything. To get it all out in the open and finally being able to breathe.

Taeyong exhaled deeply when he finished telling them, telling them things his brothers didn’t even know. And he looked up, meeting their gazes head on, surprised to find them all varying between emotions. Johnny looked so incredibly sad, Taeil was wiping at his eyes, Yuta had his mouth open in disbelief at what he’d just heard while Ten looked so incredibly angry. Doyoung’s brows were furrowed, his eyes bubbling with rage. And Jaehyun. Jaehyun was looking at Taeyong. Really looking at him. Seeing him, which made Taeyong tear up again. But he wouldn’t cry. He didn’t have the strength.

“That’s so terrible,” Taeil suddenly spoke, breaking out of his daze. “I don’t even know what to say.”

Taeyong shrugged lightly. He felt exhausted, too tired to talk.

“I fucking hate them,” Ten suddenly spoke, seething. “They can go die for all I care.”

“Ten!” Johnny hissed at the other, looking scandalized. Ten looked at Johnny with so much anger in his eyes, Taeyong almost recoiled.

“This is child abuse. Child negligence! It’s not humane!” He was shouting. Taeyong had never seen Ten so angry.

“Calm down,” Yuta said, stern, which was something very foreign to Taeyong. Ten stood abruptly from the bench he’d been sitting on and started pacing.

“This is child abuse. Child negligence! It’s not humane!” He was shouting. Taeyong had never seen Ten so angry.

“Calm down,” Yuta said, stern, which was something very foreign to Taeyong. Ten stood abruptly from the bench he’d been sitting on and started pacing.

“I won’t calm down! This makes me so pissed!” Ten looked near a breakdown himself which was something Taeyong definitely didn’t expect to happen. He hadn’t anticipated such strong responses from his friends.

Therefore, Taeyong gently got up, took the one step needed to reach his friend, and grabbed Ten’s
hand, interlocking their fingers gingerly.

“Please don’t be mad,” he pleaded, voice soft and raspy from crying. Ten seemed to run out of air, exhaling all the anger he’d inhibited and looking at Taeyong’s wide eyes. In them, there was sadness and resignation.

“Ah Taeyong,” he whispered, holding the other’s hand tightly.

“I agree with Ten,” Doyoung said. “I am really pissed off, but that’s not what’s important here,” Doyoung concluded.

“Exactly,” Taeil nodded firmly, still trying to regain himself. “What’s important is that you need our help, you said so yourself. So what’s the plan?” Taeyong felt the apprehension lining his features.

“What is it?” Yuta said, raising an eyebrow before it seemed to dawn on him. “There’s something else. Isn’t there?” Taeyong sighed. Ten moaned in misery at the information that there were even more bad news. Both the dancers made their way back to the bench Taeyong had been sitting on and took a seat, yet again.

“I’m being blackmailed,” Taeyong told them, straight up.


“By who?” Jaehyun demanded, Taeyong turning to look at the brunet who was already looking at him with imploring eyes. Taeyong could detect the empathy, the anger, the righteousness, the comfort. So many different emotions in such a complex pattern for him to decode.

“Remember when I told you my brother was hanging out with some bad people and then he stopped?” They nodded affirmatives.

“Well, those people came to me and they want me to make a trade for them,” Taeyong’s voice trailed off into a whisper, “involving cocaine.”

“What!” Yuta was on his feet instantly.

“Wait wait wait,” Johnny put his hands up, squinting at Taeyong. “They want you to deal cocaine?” Taeyong nodded.

“And if I don’t do it they’ll go after my brothers,” he added.

“This is not acceptable!” Doyoung seemed to finally submit to his rage.

“Guys,” Taeil shouted. “Calm down!”

Taeyong could feel the headache coming, a familiar throbbing making him close his eyes in pain. He felt the touch of Jaehyun’s fingers on his upper arm, gently stroking it. A touch so different from Joe’s. So vastly different, so filled with comfort and safety. Taeyong scooted slightly closer and put his head on Jaehyun’s broad shoulder gently. The brunet smiled into his hair.

“Fine,” Yuta conceded. “We’re calm. Completely fucking calm.” As if to prove his point he sat down again.

“Getting mad will not solve the problems, okay?” Taeil said, matter of factly.

“Yes.”
“Exactly.”

“Totally.”

Came the chorus of voices. Taeil rolled his eyes at them. Taeyong sighed internally, but there was also happiness blooming in his chest. These people. These wonderful people, being mad for his sake and wanting to help him to the best of their ability. His friends.

“Okay, good. Now that we can all think clearly,” Taeil said, a warning clear in his voice. “Who are these people coercing you into doing this?” Taeyong opened his eyes, but he felt so heavy, so tired, he didn’t lift his head from Jaehyun’s shoulder. Ten squeezed his hand softly.

“Her name’s Ara. She’s the big sister of Lexie who was the one to leak Mark’s and Donghyuck’s photo,” he told them tiredly.

“Okay, yeah I know who you mean,” Doyoung said, most of the others nodding in agreement. “I’m not surprised honestly.”

“And Joe,” Taeyong sighed heavily. Johnny tensed.

“The same Joe who went after Mark?” He asked in concern.

“Yeah,” Taeyong confirmed reluctantly.

“Who’s Joe?” Ten quipped, curious.

“He’s a buff guy. A junior. He harassed Mark after the photo had been leaked,” Johnny told them. They didn’t know much about Joe really, Taeyong knew he was creepy as hell and that was enough for him.

“There are two others as well, but I don’t know them,” Taeyong relayed.

“Okay then,” Yuta nodded in thought. “So what are we going to do? Can’t we report them?”

“No!” Taeyong protested immediately, lifting his head with effort. “If we report them the school will have to call my parents. And if we call the police they will also do that which could lead to a whole investigation and I refuse to have my brothers taken away,” he told them, face set.

“Okay, then what?” Yuta sighed through his nose. Taeyong was right but he didn’t like it.

“Telling their parents?” Taeil suggested.

“Ara’s family is really influential, they would no doubt believe her over us any day, or they might not even care,” Doyoung said.

“I guess we’ll have to handle it ourselves then,” Johnny huffed. “When is the délél going down, Taeyong?”

“Midnight. Today,” Taeyong felt the heaviness wearing him down, his head still throbbing.


“Okay. That gives us time,” Johnny disregarded everything Yuta said. “Let’s make a plan for tonight. We’re gonna help you through this Tae. One step at a time,” Johnny assured, Taeyong managing a genuine smile.
“Thank you,” he breathed, feeling so incredibly relieved.

“That’s what friends are for, remember?” Jaehyun said, dimple denting his cheek.

“Game plan,” Yuta said, standing up. “I will stay here with Johnny and Doyoung. Ten, Taeil, you guys go back to classes, offer some excuses where they’re needed and then switch with us after lunch,” Yuta delegated. “And Jaehyun, take Taeyong out of here. Skip the rest of the day.”

Taeyong sat up in protest.

“No,” Yuta stopped him. “You look like you’re going to collapse any minute now. Just go with Jaehyun and meet up with us at your house after school.”

“I can’t just let you handle my problems!” Taeyong protested although he knew Yuta was right about his condition.

“Yes you can and you will. Now go,” Yuta shooed them. Jaehyun took initiative, grabbing Taeyong’s hand and pulling him up from the bench. Taeyong looked back, following Jaehyun blindly, eyebrows creased in concern. He didn’t stop looking until the door closed behind him.

~

Yuta had to breathe deeply to gather himself, trying not to explode with anger under the thoughts of what Taeyong’s parents had done. He could never imagine his own parents doing anything like that. They called almost everyday to see how he was and sent him money whenever he needed it. It felt so absurd that parents could act that way.

He looked at the door that Jaehyun and Taeyong had disappeared through. He knew Jaehyun would take good care of the red head.

“How could we not notice?” Taeil suddenly spoke, looking ridden with guilt.

“I did say so the first time we were at his house,” Doyoung commented. “I wondered where his parents were.”

“We couldn’t have known!” Ten protested. “For all we knew they were on a business trip or something.”

“Well Yuta was at his house serval times, sleeping over,” Doyoung then turned to the Japanese male. Yuta narrowed his eyes.

“We’re not blaming anyone,” Johnny told them, placating. “We really couldn’t have known guys. We had suspicions but the Lee brothers are happy. It didn’t alarm us because Taeyong takes care of them. He does it really well. So we couldn’t see it,” Johnny said, standing up to gesture with his hands. “But we did see that Taeyong wasn’t feeling well. And we couldn’t pressure him because we know that doesn’t work with Taeyong. Which means, that this is really good. By waiting, he told us himself. He trusts us.”

Doyoung stared at Johnny with wide eyes, mulling over the words he’d spoken. Yuta started smiling because yeah, Johnny was actually making sense.

“You’re right,” Ten agreed, looking oddly joyful. “He trusts us.”

“Yeah he does,” Johnny confirmed, smiling himself. “Which is why we need to come up with a great plan to help him.”
“Yes,” Taeil agreed. “We need a foolproof plan. We can’t let him down.”

“Great, then let’s do it,” Yuta grinned.

Finally, they had broken through Taeyong’s shell. And now, they were going to do their very best to help their friend.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it :) there will be more happening next time, promise ;)}
Taeyong felt drained, walking on autopilot, Jaehyun’s hand on his wrist guiding him and steadying him. They left the school and headed for the parking lot, Jaehyun bringing them to Taeyong’s car.

“Let me drive,” he said, flashing a gentle smile. Taeyong raised an eyebrow.

“Do you even have a license?” He protested. Jaehyun rolled his eyes, looking amused.

“Of course I do, don’t you trust me?” Jaehyun wiggled his eyebrows. Taeyong scoffed but handed over his keys nonetheless. They got in the car and with a sigh of relief Taeyong leaned back in his seat. Jaehyun glanced at him as he drove out of the school parking lot.

“Did you sleep at all tonight?” Jaehyun questioned, worried. Taeyong shook his head, exhausted. Jaehyun frowned.

“Okay, first things first, I’m gonna drive and you’re going to sleep,” Jaehyun decided. Taeyong widened his eyes.

“I can’t just fall asleep on you,” he protested. Jaehyun huffed.

“Sure you can, you’ve done it before,” the brunet teased, eyes sparkling with mirth. Taeyong groaned.

“I was tired!” He protested.

“Yeah, and you’re even more tired now. Go to sleep.”

“I can’t just do it like that,” Taeyong told the other. “You should sing me a lullaby,” he joked, completely sarcastic.

“Sure, what do you wanna hear?” Jaehyun agreed so easily. Taeyong turned to look at the other. He wasn’t serious, truly. But when the offer was suddenly on the table, it was hard to resist.

“Whatever you want is fine,” Taeyong meekly told him, not having expected Jaehyun to agree with his purely sarcastic statement.

“Okay,” Jaehyun nodded and pondered, biting his lip. Taeyong stared. Jaehyun’s lips were a light pink, very kissable.

What.
Taeyong frowned at his own thoughts, turning his eyes to the road instead. Then a voice entered his ears. Jaehyun was singing.

Taeyong smiled.

Jaehyun’s voice was sweet, a rich tone and a nice song choice. Taeyong liked it. It had a nice ring to it.

He relaxed back into his seat, listening to Jaehyun’s gentle singing, feeling the exhaustion in his body, watching the peaceful scenery passing through the window, feeling the gentle hum of the car, which eventually lulled him to sleep.

~

Taeyong awoke to gentle hands stroking his face, fingers carding through his hair. With a smile he opened his eyes. They were still, standing in an empty parking lot, the surroundings telling Taeyong that they must be close to a park. Jaehyun smiled when Taeyong turned to look at him.

“Where are we?” The red head asked, voice raspy. Jaehyun shrugged.

“Honestly I don’t know. I just randomly chose some interesting looking roads and we ended up here.” He looked so carefree and calm, Taeyong felt himself relaxing in the presence of Jaehyun.

“Let’s explore,” Jaehyun said, excited, as he exited the car. Taeyong followed suit, walking right next to Jaehyun, trying to keep warm. The weather was getting colder by the day.

“What’s your favourite drink?” Jaehyun asked as they walked, tall trees rising over them, the winter sun peeking through the skinny, leaf-less branches. Taeyong hummed.

“I like yoghurt smoothies,” he decided. “It’s been a while since I had one but I remember loving them when I was little,” he reminisced, smiling softly. Jaehyun peeked at the male, drinking up his appearance. The big doe eyes, his fiery hair in the midst of winter, his lips.

“I like americano. I always drink it,” Jaehyun said, breaking his gaze away from Taeyong, as the other had caught him staring. “What about favourite accessory?”

“Snapbacks,” Taeyong answered almost immediately. “I always wear them when I dance.”

“Bracelets,” Jaehyun responded in turn. “That’s my favourite.” Taeyong looked at him for a second before reaching out to take his wrist, pulling up his jacket sleeve to peer at his bracelets. Jaehyun felt his heart racing as they came to a stop.

“They look really good,” Taeyong commented with a small smile, tracing the jewelry with his finger.

“Thank you,” Jaehyun breathed, feeling all too close to the boy and all too far away at once.

Taeyong lingered for another few seconds before letting go of his wrist. Jaehyun followed as the redhead started walking again.

Eventually they reached the entrance of the park, a couple of signs pointing in different directions, benches at every turn and food stands placed methodically. There were some people there, but it was by no means crowded.

“Look,” Jaehyun sais and pointed towards one of the food trucks. “They have frozen yoghurt.” Taeyong gasped in excitement, the mention of sweets making his eyes sparkle.
“Let’s get some,” he insisted, pulling on Jaehyun’s sleeve. The brunet chuckled and followed obediently when Taeyong dragged him over.

They purchased one frozen yoghurt each, following one of the numerous paths at random, enjoying their treats in silence.

“Isn’t it too cold for this?” Jaehyun asked, referring to his frozen yoghurt. Taeyong rolled his eyes.

“It’s never too cold for sugary goods,” he decided, eating another spoonful. Jaehyun smiled fondly and asked if Taeyong wanted to taste his, which the other agreed to eagerly. They switched between the yoghurts, eating from each other’s as well as their own.

Taeyong laughed loudly when Jaehyun managed to get it on his nose, and Jaehyun retaliated by smudging some on Taeyong’s cheek.

“Yah!” Taeyong protested through laughter. Jaehyun grinned cheekily.

When they finished their ice cream they decided to sit down. It was a nice spot, a frozen pond in the near vicinity, some trees sheltering the area and a couple of statues spread around. A non-functioning fountain was placed beside them. Silence surrounded them, no other people in sight, no looming expectations or societal views. Simply Taeyong and Jaehyun.

“This is really nice,” Taeyong admitted. “Just being able to walk around and not think too much about things. It feels much easier to breathe out here.”

“It’s very nice,” Jaehyun nodded in agreement. He looked over to Taeyong and saw the other twirling his hands in his lap from the cold. Without a thought he reached over to take Taeyong’s hands in his, gently rubbing them. Taeyong smiled shyly.

“You’re warm,” he commented gently, Jaehyun feeling his cheeks heat up.

“And you’re cold,” he countered. Taeyong scoffed. “I guess we compliment each other perfectly then.” Taeyong choked at his words, Jaehyun feeling the tips of his ear turn red from embarrassment. Why did he say that. Stupid.

Luckily, he was saved form further misery when something cold landed on his cheek. With wide eyes Jaehyun looked up from his and Taeyong’s joined hands. His lips automatically pulled themselves into an adoring smile.

It was snowing.

Pure white flakes of snow, falling down from the sky gently, like feathers, hitting the ground and melting almost instantly.

Jaehyun looked to his side and saw Taeyong looking equally wondrous and exhilarated.

“It’s snowing,” Taeyong breathed in awe. The childlike sparkling of his eyes was beautiful. Taeyong let out a laugh, then another and then he was up, spinning and spinning and spinning, his face full of joy as the snow flakes twirled with him, creating a graceful dance.

Jaehyun started laughing as well, feeling so strangely happy with this new development. He also got off his feet in a swift movement, reaching his hands out to catch the snow, watching it melt rapidly. Taeyong spun even more, radiant as he stumbled right into Jaehyun.

“C’mon,” he urged and grabbed Jaehyun’s hands, pulling the brunet forward and into a swirl of
movements, their fingers interlocking.

Somehow, they ended up tightly together, smiling and laughing and holding each other, eyes caught onto one another’s.

Jaehyun felt so comfortable and content right there, right then. And he could see it in Taeyong’s eyes as well. He felt safe.

Jaehyun wouldn’t want it any other way.

~

Sicheng gasped when a hand grabbed his collar, pulling him into a secluded area behind a row of lockers. Sicheng’s eyes widened when he saw Yuta smiling at him.

“Hey stranger,” Yuta greeted. Sicheng rolled his eyes.

“We saw each other a few days ago?” Sicheng complained, pulling Yuta’s wandering hand away from his arm. The Japanese male groaned dramatically.

“A few days is too long. Too much time spent away from you my dear,” Yuta told him seriously. Sicheng rolled his eyes again; a normal occurrence when dealing with the Japanese senior.

“Ew gross,” he said. Yuta scoffed at him.

“Fine be that way,” Yuta conceded. “This is not why I needed to talk to you though,” he admitted. Sicheng raised a questioning eyebrow.

“Really? Then what is it?”

“I need you to take care of your brothers today. And not be at home,” he said. Sicheng furrowed his eyebrows, confused. “We’re planning something for Taeyong, please do as I say?” Yuta was giving him some serious puppy eyes. Sicheng was still suspicious. “It’s something good for him. He needs it,” Yuta tried appealing. Sicheng sighed slightly.

“Okay. Sure. But where do I even take them if we can’t be at home?”

“Johnny’s place; Mark’s place,” Yuta offered. “Their parents are away on a business trip, so there will be no questioning,” Yuta promised. “We already talked to Mark and Donghyuck. They’re in.”

“Okay good, when can we come back home then?” Sicheng was struggling to trust all of this, but it was Yuta. And Yuta was a really good hyung and one of Taeyong’s best friends.

“Tomorrow?” Yuta said, sheepish.

“You want us to spend the night?!” Sicheng hissed.

“Please Sichengie, I promise it’s worth it,” Yuta was almost begging. “It’s for your brother.” Sicheng’s resolve dropped significantly. It’s for Taeyong. They’re doing something good for his brother. Taeyong who deserves everything in the world and even more. Sicheng couldn’t be salty when they were doing something to help his older brother. Especially not when he’d noticed Taeyong’s mood that morning.

“Okay,” he finally agreed fully. “I’ll do it.”

“Great! Thank you Sichengie!” Yuta smiled in relief, hugging the junior before disappearing quickly
down the hall.

Sicheng sighed. He really hoped his brother was getting something good out of this. Preferably something relaxing, something nice and something to make him feel better.
Chapter 71

Chapter Notes

Im in a bit of a rush but here it is :))

Monthly reminder that my chapters are barely proofread and I apologize for any mistakes XD

Hope you’ll enjoy <333

“This is stressing me out!” Doyoung complained, massaging his forehead tiredly. They had barely made any progress in the last hour, trying to come up with a decent plan.

“Relax. We’ve already made sure that the Lee brothers won’t be home, so that’s one factor out of the way,” Yuta said, fiddling with a loose thread in his sleeve. Johnny was banging his head against a locker, gently. To bring forth the ideas, he said.

“We need to come up with something. Taeyong will be in serious trouble if we cannot find a solution for the drug situation,” Doyoung emphasized. As if Yuta didn’t already know that.

“What do you suggest then?” Yuta mumbled sarcastically. Doyoung frowned.

“The police is out,” Johnny said from his spot in the corner of the locker room. “Too many unreliable factors. Ara’s influential family, the need for a testimony from Taeyong which will definitely call for a background check on him and parental supervision, the fact that we do not have any physical evidence.” They had already discussed it, several times, trying to come up with some way to go around the unreliable factors. There were none.

“The school won’t help. Even if we manage to get them expelled they’re not going to disappear. They live here. They will go after Taeyong anyhow,” Doyoung added onto their list of non-functional plans.

“And telling their parents might work for the other kids but not for Ara,” Yuta finalized their list.

“That’s it,” Johnny said. “We’ve got nothing.”

“We can’t give up,” Doyoung protested, standing up to pace around the room, trying to get his brain working.

“And we won’t,” Yuta fiercely told them. “We just need some more time to think. Maybe we should switch with Taeil and Ten and let them try?”

“Yeah,” Johnny sighed, defeated. “Let’s text them.”

~

Donghyuck had an ominous feeling in his stomach, uneasiness clear on his face as they drove to Mark’s place after school. Sicheng had managed to get his friends to drive the rest of their brothers. Some loud guy named Matthew, and Jiwoo.
Donghyuck had been hesitant when Johnny approached them and asked a favour. He was going to question it but Johnny promised that it would help Taeyong and for Donghyuck, that was enough.

When they arrived at Mark’s house, Donghyuck’s nervousness turned to giddiness. He’d never been at Mark’s house before. The longest he’d gone was the hallway, when waiting for Mark to grab a jacket in his room before they left for the mall to meet up with Suhyun and Renjun.

But besides that, never.

The house was very homey, Donghyuck knew Johnny and Mark loved their parents and told them mostly everything. He knew for a fact that they knew Mark had a boyfriend and were okay with it. Donghyuck couldn’t relate.

Mark parked the moped and got off swiftly, helping Donghyuck take his helmet off. The younger beamed at his boyfriend, waiting for the cars to arrive as well.

When they did, Lucas and Jungwoo were the first ones off, rushing over to Mark to say hi. Then Sicheng, helping Chenle and Jisung out of Matthew’s car. Lastly Jiwoo and Matthew.

“Let’s go inside?” Mark inquired when everyone got close enough to hear him.

The inside of the house looked very lived in. You could tell that people actually lived there, papers scattered on the hallway drawer, shoes out of place and a smell of home.

“I like it,” Chenle announced, nodding with a grin.

“Thank you,” Mark chuckled, kicking off his shoes. They followed him into the living room, where several couches resided, and took a seat. Donghyuck was right next to Mark, the older fiddling with the hole in his jeans absentmindedly. Donghyuck tried to hide his smile.

“Now what?” Matthew asked, lounging on the couch closest to the window, Lucas and Jisung next to him.

“Do you have any games to play?” Jungwoo suggested, voice soft as always. Mark hummed and furrowed his eyebrows in thought.

“Oh yeah,” he remembered then. “I do have one game.”

With that Mark disappeared, away from the living room, footsteps rushing upstairs, only to sprint back down, until Mark finally arrived at the living room again. Chenle gasped in excitement when he saw the game.

Donghyuck smirked. He could definitely play that.


“Yes, let’s.”

Taeyong was enjoying himself so much, he didn’t even notice the time running away like sand between his fingers. Jaehyun seemed equally reluctant when he announced it was time to go back and meet their friends at Taeyong’s house.

They spent the drive singing along to the songs on the radio, Taeyong smiling whenever he heard Jaehyun’s voice. He must’ve been sleeping for quite a while when Jaehyun had been driving around
that morning because the ride home took at least an hour and lots of GPS consultation.

When they finally approached a familiar neighbourhood Taeyong almost sighed in disappointment. He wished he could stay with Jaehyun in that park, in the snow, talking about their favorite things, forever. But reality was catching up.

“Time to get you out of this mess,” Jaehyun said as they pulled up to park, turning off the radio. Taeyong grimaced subtly.

They got out of the car and Taeyong felt Jaehyun’s eyes lingering on his back when they walked toward the front door. He really wanted to turn around and hug the other, tight, and never let go. But he didn’t.

Ten flung the door open before they could do it themselves, smiling widely at the two.

“Welcome back, did you have fun on your date?” Ten teased them, an impish tint to his wide smile. Taeyong felt himself turning red. He simply ignored Ten, pushing past the Thai male, not looking at Jaehyun who was rolling his eyes at the remark.

Taeyong left them at the entrance, embarrassed, and walked into the kitchen where the rest of his friends were gathered. Yuta stood up to greet him and Taeyong found himself walking into the other’s arms. It wasn’t much different from when they cuddled during their sleepovers, but this felt much more emotional. Taeyong melted into the embrace, both of them equally tall so he could put his chin on Yuta’s shoulder.

“Thank you,” he murmured, feeling grateful that Yuta had told him to leave with Jaehyun. He got to stop for a while and not think about anything for the first time in quite a while, it was really nice.

“No problem,” Yuta said and Taeyong could practically hear his smile. The redhead broke away and smiled as well, then he turned to the other occupants of the room. Jaehyun was looking at them with a confused expression. Taeyong didn’t question it though.

“Where are my brothers?” he asked instead, noticing their absence.

“They’re at Johnny’s place, Donghyuck and Sicheng promised to watch the younger ones,” Doyoung told him.

“Okay, good,” Taeyong nodded before walking over to sit on the kitchen counter. “Now, what’s the plan?”

~

Mark found out that Jiwoo was absolutely not flexible, while Donghyuck actually did pretty good and he himself was very flexible which was a surprise. Sicheng was extremely flexible and won almost every time. The kids were naturally good at it which was no surprise.

After Sicheng won against Matthew and Donghyuck, Chenle decided that he didn’t want to play anymore. Mark had to smile in amusement. Kids had such a short attention span. It was sweet.

“Then what are we gonna do?” Sicheng asked, falling down on the couch, next to Chenle.

“Let’s go Christmas shopping!” Lucas exclaimed, eyes blown wide. Mark felt Donghyuck peeking up from his position, where their shoulders were touching.

“Yes!” The peach haired male agreed. “Let’s do that.”
“I’m down,” Matthew said, smiling.

“Let’s do it then,” Sicheng decided and they were off.

~

The mall was pretty empty, it was only Monday after all. They had broken off into smaller groups, Matthew walking around with Chenle and Jiwoo. Sicheng taking Jisung and Lucas while Mark and Donghyuk grabbed Jungwoo.

“I know exactly what we should get for Sicheng hyung,” Donghyuck exclaimed and dragged Lucas by the hand. Mark followed with a fond smile. They entered a familiar clothing store. Mark saw Donghyuck hurry over to the crop tops. He frowned slightly.

“Aren’t you getting something for Sicheng?” Mark asked gently.

“We are,” Donghyuck confirmed, iciness slipping into his tone. Jungwoo was sifting through the different garments with a big smile on his lips. Mark didn’t question it, he simply offered Donghyuck an apologetic smile. He understood now.

“This is a great idea,” Jungwoo agreed and gasped in excitement when he found one he liked. “This one is gonna look great on him,” he said, showcasing the crop top. It was long sleeved, loose fit and black with some pattern on it.

“Oh I love it,” Donghyuck decided. “Let’s take that one.”

They found one in the right size and then paid for it, asking the cashier to wrap it as well.

After that Donghyuck decided they should get smoothies which they also did and then he dragged them into every possible store, getting gifts for all the brothers. Mark even picked something out for Johnny.

And when Donghyuck slid his hand down to Mark’s, intertwining their fingers gently, Mark smiled and felt his cheeks heat up slightly. But he didn’t let go and he didn’t feel ashamed when people threw looks at them.

Because Donghyuck was his boyfriend, no matter what other people thought of them.

~

Taeyong occupied himself with making food after his friends told him about the plan. He felt so incredibly anxious, barely able to focus on the task at hand, almost chopping a finger off.

“Careful,” a voice startled Taeyong so bad he almost dropped the knife. He turned around to see Jaehyun leaning against the doorframe. Doyoung, Taeil, Johnny, Yuta and Ten were finalizing the last details of their plan.

“Can I help?” Jaehyun asked with a small smile, dimples popping out. Taeyong nodded, eyes blown wide. His hands were shaking slightly. Jaehyun walked further into the kitchen and washed his hands before grabbing the knife from Taeyong’s hand. He gently bumped Taeyong with his hip so the other would move. Taeyong blushed and turned his head but moved, Jaehyun starting to chop the vegetables.

Taeyong fiddled with his fingers, biting at his nail. Now when they’d returned to reality he couldn’t stop thinking. About everything. And it was driving him crazy.
“Hey,” Jaehyun called. Taeyong looked up at the other. “You’re biting your nails.” Jaehyun commented calmly. Taeyong sighed and stopped doing it immediately. He had barely noticed.

“It’s going to be fine,” Jaehyun said, skillfully chopping the cucumber on the cutting board. “You’ll be safe.” Taeyong inhaled deeply.

“Yeah,” he unconvincingly agreed. Jaehyun finished up the cucumber and then turned to face the redhead.

“We’re going to there as well. Please don’t overthink things. It’s really not good. You’ll get wrinkles.” Taeyong snorted. He looked Jaehyun up and down, eyes landing on his hands. Jaehyun’s hands were bigger than Taeyong’s but not by much, his fingers long and slender, the skin pale and calloused. Carefully Taeyong reached out to grab it, hesitating for a second before interlocking their fingers. Jaehyun’s cheeks turned red, Taeyong could see it.

With a slight smile Jaehyun squeezed his hand.

“It’s gonna be okay.”
Chapter 72

Chapter Notes

This is gonna be a wild ride XD Buckle up

Hope you’ll enjoy <3333

The darkness of the night was rapidly descending upon them. Midnight was only thirty minutes away and Taeyong couldn’t stop fidgeting in his seat. They were all squished together on the couch, the TV playing on low volume, none of them actually paying attention to it. Taeyong was leaning heavily on Jaehyun, feeling tired to his bones. He was so incredibly nervous about the plan and how it would play out, but weirdly enough the night was serene. Jaehyun’s calm breathing pulled him into light slumber as he waited for the time to arrive, his head pillowed on Jaehyun’s shoulder, fingers intertwined with the brunet’s loosely.

“Let’s get everything ready,” Johnny broke the fragile silence that had descended upon them. Taeyong knew they all were tired, but they still stayed. Still helped him through it. He was so grateful.

He nodded minimally against Jaehyun’s shoulder before getting up and following Johnny into the hallway. Leather gloves, a black hoodie that was Johnny’s (which meant it was huge on Taeyong), a bomber jacket that was actually Ten’s and a black face mask. Taeyong also pulled on a white SnapBack, to cover his hair.

“Okay,” Taeyong concluded, exhaling the nervous energy. Or trying to at least. Johnny nodded.

“Okay,” he agreed.

~

They could all hear the car pull up to the driveway. They had turned off the lights and the TV, so they wouldn’t be seen through the windows, and gathered in the hallway to see Taeyong off.

“Don’t forget the phone,” Doyoung told him, sternly.

“And be super careful,” Yuta frowned. Taeyong nodded.

“We’ll see you there,” Jaehyun promised, giving him a comforting smile. Taeil did so as well, inducing some sense of safety for Taeyong at least. Ten was chewing his nails.

“Come on,” Taeyong huffed. “You can’t just take my habit like that,” he joked, Ten rolling his eyes slightly, although he looked amused. Taeyong offered his friends one last smile before he opened the door and made his way out.

The van was right there, in front of his house. Johnny had moved the pickup truck to the sidewalk earlier as to not rouse any suspicion when they arrived.
Taeyong jogged over and got in when the back door opened. Joe was right there, smirking at him. Taeyong rolled his eyes and pushed past the creep, taking a seat. The girl, Seokyung, was driving while the blue haired boy, Minchan, was in the passenger seat and Ara was in the back with Taeyong and Joe. Ten had been asking around school for their names and succeeded pretty well in nailing down the exact people who had the right information. Taeyong felt better, knowing all their names.

“I knew you’d come,” Ara scoffed and took a drag from her cigarette. Taeyong’s hand was in his pocket, holding his phone.

“Well you didn’t give me a choice, did you?” He seethed, voice hushed. Ara simply smirked. Taeyong frowned.

Joe’s disgusting hands were creeping in places they shouldn’t be. Taeyong jerked when he felt calloused fingers tracing his jean clad thigh.

“Hands off,” he hissed and pushed away the offending limb. Joe scoffed with that infuriating smirk. Ara didn’t pay them any mind. Taeyong tried to keep calm.

“I thought you two were together,” he forced out, not being able to keep his curiosity at bay. Joe scowled. Ara looked very angry for some reason.

“We’re not,” Joe insisted, “she’s a slut. Wouldn’t wanna go near her damaged goods.”

“Fuck you Joe. You’re the damaged one,” she seethed. “Fucking homo.” Taeyong felt his eyes widening. Especially seeing Joe’s ears turning an angry shade of red. He noticed Seokyung and Minchan shifting uncomfortably in the front.

“What did you call me?” Joe scoffed. Ara breathed out the smoke in her mouth, turning to him with a devilish glint in her eyes.

“You know why I said what I said,” she left it at that. Taeyong felt like Ara knew something other people didn’t. She always seemed to have the upper hand.

“I’m confused,” Taeyong voiced his thoughts. “You gave Mark shit for that photo, and you were apparently rather explicit about it,” Taeyong tried to not sound as angry as he actually was. Joe rolled his eyes.

“It’s disgusting. And wrong,” he said. “Ara is just a lying bitch. Wouldn’t believe her if I were you.” Ara didn’t refute him which Taeyong found interesting. But he also had more to say, and he couldn’t quite keep it in.

“Yet you keep touching me?” He inquired, trying to sound composed, and unaffected. Joe licked his lips, then he smirked. That bastard.

“If you’re as pretty as a girl then it’s okay,” the junior’s voice was sleazy and Taeyong tried to contain his raging emotions, gripping the seat tightly.

They continued driving in silence for a couple of minutes. Taeyong knew he had to do something. He had to set their plan in motion.

“How about we go to some of the places we’ll be going to on Saturday?” Ara asked. “Something new and exciting.” Taeyong sighed. He would
“Why didn’t you make Sicheng do it? Would’ve been much easier,” Taeyong said, feeling his stomach twist at the way he just used his brother. He felt like a terrible human being.

“When we targeted Sicheng, we only picked him because he’s your brother,” Ara leaned forward in her seat to speak. “We thought he’d be more like you. But you’re unique. We could tell he wasn’t strong enough for this,” she looked him up and down appreciatively. Taeyong gulped unnoticeably. “It had to be you.”

Taeyong was not getting what he was looking for.

The car came to a stop abruptly, Taeyong jerking forward slightly. Joe reached out a hand to grab his bicep, but Taeyong quickly shrugged it off.

“I can sit by myself, no need to grab anything,” Taeyong hissed, Joe sneering at him. Ara leaned forward to the front, looking outside. The night was dark, the empty streets illuminated by the tall streetlights. A light pattern of snow fell, a thin layer already covering the ground.

Taeyong loved snow.

“Okay. We’re here. See that alley?” Ara said, pointing. Taeyong leaned forward slightly. And yeah. He did see it. “That’s where the person will be, they will ask for Red. That’s you. Don’t even think about mentioning any of our names.” Ara cautioned him, a clear warning in her tone. Taeyong was really getting pissed off at these people, thinking they could boss him around when they were in fact younger than him. It didn’t stop him from also being terrified of her.

“What’s stopping me from just walking away right now and not getting those drugs for you?” He threw out there, hoping, hoping, that she would bite.

“If you don’t get us that fucking cocaine we will literally kill your brothers,” Ara was completely agitated, fed up with everything. But Taeyong got what he wanted. “I swear to god, you will be destroyed. And your precious little brothers too. They will be hurt so bad they wished they would die.”

“I think that’s enough,” Taeyong had to stop her before he physically pounced. “I’ll do it. Let me out.”

Joe sneered as he opened the door for Taeyong, handing Taeyong a stack of money before the redhead pulled his face mask up and exited the van. With a thumping heart he hurried over to the alleyway Ara had pointed out, hands in his pockets. He saw a silhouette in the far back of the alley and carefully approached. As he got closer he saw that it was a female, her hair up in a ponytail, half black, half blonde. Her eyes were green. Lenses probably. And she was fairly short, wearing a ratty hoodie and sneakers. She looked to be in her twenties. Taeyong came to a stop a meter away.

“Red?” She said, voice low and raspy. Taeyong nodded. “You got the money?”

Taeyong pulled his hand out of his pocket and showcased the stack of bills in his hand. She nodded in appreciation and walked closer, pulling a package wrapped in brown tape out of her hoodie pocket. It was the size of her palm, shaped like a rock. Taeyong gently handed over be money and got the package in return, holding it securely in his gloved hand. She counted quickly before looking up at him and nodding again.

“Pleasure doing business,” she winked and Taeyong inclined his head slightly before she disappeared up a fire escape ladder that was placed on the left wall. Taeyong watched her as she
arrived at the roof of the building and disappeared out of his sight. He felt so drained when he turned
to walk back to the van, feeling like he could collapse any minute. But adrenaline kept him going. It
kept his blood pumping.

With a swift movement he pulled out his phone and sent a message to Johnny who responded
immediately with a thumbs up. They were going in.

Taeyong put his phone back in his pocket before he exited the alley, not wanting Ara to see that he’d
been on his phone.

The door opened when he got close enough and he threw the package in, Joe catching it. Ara was
looking at it with a manic smile, Minchan and Seokyung turning in their seats to look as well. Joe
smirked.

“Nice going, Red,” Joe laughed. Ara nodded in agreement, then she noticed Taeyong’s still stance,
noticed that he was not getting back into the car.

“You coming?” She asked, suspicious. Taeyong pulled his face mask down to reveal a knowing
smile.

“I’m not,” he announced. Ara looked around, eyes landing on three shapes arriving from the
previously empty street they’d been parked by.

“What’s going on?” She questioned sounding very cautious. Taeyong backed away from the van.

“From now on, you will leave me and my brothers alone,” he said. Joe walked forward, jumping
down on the pavement in front of Taeyong.

“What the fuck are you on about?” The junior demanded.

“I just recorded everything that happened from the moment I got into the car, until after the trade,” he
revealed. Ara’s eyes widened in horror. “If you go after me or my brothers. I will send this recording
to the police.”

By then, the distant figures had become visible. Johnny Seo. Nakamoto Yuta. Jung Jaehyun. Ara
eyed them all in panic as they sided up to Taeyong. Joe took a step back.

“And don’t worry. There is a copy on probably every single one of my friends phones,” Taeyong
promised. Ara looked completely at a loss for words, trying to gather herself.

“Wait,” she said, voice breathy. “You’ll go down too if you send that recording.”

“No I won’t. I was coerced. Besides my fingerprints are not on the package,” Taeyong wiggled his
gloved hands, “the dealer won’t be able to identify my voice. And if you out me, I can absolutely
have some people speak in my favor. I have some pretty loyal friends,” he backed up, close to
Johnny, Yuta and Jaehyun. Ara was starting to look pissed, clutching the package in her hand. Joe
looked livid, apparently not able to control himself as he lunged forward. Jaehyun was quick to step
up, grab Joe’s wrist tightly and twist it.

“Don’t even think about it,” he growled, eyes narrowed. Taeyong’s stomach flipped with
overwhelming sensations. Jaehyun was hot.

Joe growled back and rolled his arm out of the senior’s grip.

“Don’t worry,” Taeyong spoke again, holding Jaehyun’s hand loosely in thanks when the other
backed up again. “We won’t leak anything unless you try to approach me or my brothers, so just stay in your line and we won’t have any problems.” He promised. Ara sighed quietly and narrowed her eyes at him.

“Fine. Deal. We won’t bother you. You don’t bother us,” she confirmed.

“Deal.”

With that, Ara grabbed at Joe’s collar to drag him back into the van, the guy looking completely betrayed. The doors closed and they drove, Taeyong finally being able to exhale in relief. Johnny patted his back gently.

“Nice job,” he commended. Yuta huffed a disbelieving laugh.

“Nice?” He exclaimed. “It was fucking bad ass! We listened to the whole thing! You really knew how to handle them. And now this. You have such a poker face Tae. It’s awesome,” Yuta rambled, adrenaline probably pumping through his veins. Taeyong chuckled, shy.

“Thanks.”

Taeyong was finally feeling relieved and lighter than he had in quite a while, letting himself relax from the tension that had been consuming him. Standing there, gentle snowflakes falling around them, holding Jaehyun’s hand, Yuta’s blinding smile, Johnny’s happy eyes, Taeil, Ten and Doyoung waiting for them at home.

It felt so incredibly nice.

And they actually managed to succeed with the plan.

As they started walking towards the car parked a couple of hundred meters away, Taeyong thought back to that afternoon, when he’d sat down at the counter and Taeil, to his surprise, started talking, telling him about the plan. Taeil had apparently been the one to come up with the whole idea. Taeyong felt hesitant at first, to actually go through with the trade. How would that make anything better? But Taeil was adamant. And Taeyong trusted him with all his being.

“We know that going to the police will compromise you and your brothers. We do.” Taeil had said, Taeyong biting his nails. “But they don’t.”

And he was completely right.
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

A bit calmer this time XD hope you’ll enjoy <333

Donghyuck woke up early the next day, his body feeling cramped from sleeping on the couch. Especially squished together with Lucas and Jisung. The night before had been really nice. They made food together, Mark being banned from cooking after burning eggs and exiled to play with the kids instead. After a delicious meal they watched a movie and eventually set themselves up to sleep, Jiwoo and Matthew leaving to go home. Donghyuck worried a tad since none of them had heard from Taeyong or Johnny or anyone else involved, not even a quick goodnight call. But Donghyuck supposed it was simply to lay off electronics and relax. Probably that. Yeah.

He stretched out, careful not to wake his brothers. Mark had offered Donghyuck to sleep in his bed but the younger opted to stay and sleep on the couch with his younger brothers. Sicheng was on a mattress with Chenle while Jungwoo slept on the other couch. Donghyuck listened to the even breaths of all his brothers, the room dark in the winter morning. It wasn’t cold, Lucas was like a heater, so Donghyuck simply basked in the warmth. Jisung’s little hand clenched his sleeping shirt that he’d borrowed from Mark and Donghyuck smiled while cooing.

Eventually time drifted away, an alarm blaring upstairs, definitely Mark’s, so Donghyuck got up, managing to not wake Jisung nor Lucas. He smiled when they huddled together in their sleep, pulling on his socks before padding into the kitchen. He started pulling out ingredients for breakfast, nothing fancy, simply some noodles. He heard someone entering the kitchen but he didn’t look up. When the person got close enough he could smell the heady scent. It was Mark. He had placed his nose in Mark’s neck enough times to know.

“Morning,” he greeted, voice slightly breaking from sleep. Mark chuckled and leaned on the counter next to where Donghyuck was making breakfast.

“Good morning,” he greeted in English which he knew Donghyuck liked. Dammit.

Donghyuck bit his lip to hide a smile and quickly finished what he was doing to face the older. Mark’s hair was a bird nest, glasses perched on his nose while his eyes were opened narrowly. Donghyuck could tell he had just woken up. With a small fond smile he leaned in closer, leaning forward to peck the other cheekily. Mark’s eyes widened when the younger pulled back. Donghyuck teasingly licked his lips and leaned in again, Mark being ready this time.

The junior caught his hip and angled their faces to fit perfectly. Their lips moved languidly, soft and gentle. Donghyuck’s hand came up to rest on Mark’s cheek.

“Ew.”

Mark broke off the kiss, pulling back. Donghyuck scoffed, amused and turned to Jisung who’d entered the kitchen. The four year old was currently pouting. Donghyuck growled playfully and made grabby hands for the youngest.

“You little brat,” he teased and picked up the child, putting him on his hip. Jisung laughed quietly,
putting his arms around Donghyuck’s neck.

“I’m hungry,” Jisung uttered, voice soft. Donghyuck nodded and went over to stir the food he was cooking. Mark was looking at them, cheeks a tad red.

Donghyuck blew him a kiss, and laughed when his cheeks turned even more red.

~

Donghyuck was pleasantly surprised when Johnny was the one to pick them up after breakfast to bring them to school, Yuta in the front seat next to him. Mark opted to not use his moped because of the snow covered ground.

To fit, they (illegally) had Jisung sitting in Sicheng’s lap while Donghyuck sat in Mark’s. Lucas, Chenle and Jungwoo were in the back.

“This is what we did in the old days,” Johnny reminisced dramatically as he started driving, Yuta nodding in faux agreement. “The laws on seat belts weren’t as strict.”

“Were you born during the Middle Ages?” Donghyuck scoffed.

“Stop acting like you’re old,” Mark agreed, hands on Donghyuck’s waist to keep him steady as they hit a bump in the road.

Johnny didn’t dignify them with an answer, simply kept driving. They dropped off Chenle, Jisung, Lucas and Jungwoo before heading towards the high school. Donghyuck stayed in Mark’s lap, leaning back into his chest. It was quite a comfortable position.

When they arrived at school Donghyuck saw his oldest brother leaning against his car. Donghyuck smiled at the sight and eagerly got out when they had parked.

“Hyung,” he excitedly called, waving. Sicheng followed suit, getting out of the car and heading towards Taeyong.

“Hey,” Taeyong greeted them with a tired smile and Donghyuck frowned.

“I thought they were going to give you a relaxing time?” Donghyuck questioned, worried. Taeyong shook his head lightly.

“They helped me. Can’t say it was very relaxing,” he admitted. Donghyuck felt even more confused.

“Helped you with what?” Sicheng inquired, looking worried as well. Taeyong snuck a glance at his friends. Johnny, Mark and Yuta had joined Ten, Doyoung, Taeil and Jaehyun who were standing by his car as well.

“I can’t tell you right now,” Taeyong told them gently. His eyes were sincere, Donghyuck could tell. “I will tell you soon, I promise.”

“Is it hurting you?” Sicheng demanded to know. Frankly, Donghyuck really wanted to know as well. Taeyong was shaking his head.

“No. Not anymore. I promise,” he said. Donghyuck pursed his lips, seeking his brothers’ eyes. Not a trace of nervousness or lies. Donghyuck believed him.

“Okay,” the sophomore agreed and walked forward to give his oldest brother a big hug. Taeyong reciprocated, smiling when Sicheng joined in as well.
“Thank you,” he breathed gently, squeezing them tightly before letting go.

Taeyong went through school on autopilot. He felt so incredibly relieved to have the stupid blackmail business over with. He could finally breathe easier and he felt so much closer to his friends. They actually cared for him. He could hardly believe it but it was true.

His teacher barely reprimanded him for not paying attention. The break was coming soon anyways. Which reminded him, he had not done his Christmas gift shopping, so with a smile he sent a question in the chat he shared with his friends, asking if they could do some shopping that weekend.

All answers were affirmative so that was taken care of nicely.

Taeyong had a small smile on his lips during the remainder of the lesson.

During lunch he ate his food with gusto, sharing cookies with Doyoung and absentmindedly playing with Jaehyun’s fingers when Ten told them about some crazy party Jackson was having that Friday.

“He’s invited like, everyone. It’s like a Christmas celebration party. Which is a sad excuse for getting drunk as hell and using mistletoes to lure kisses out of innocent poor, drunk, kids,” Ten ranted.

“Kids?” Taeil rolled his eyes at Ten’s dramatic use of the word. “They’re all high schoolers.”

“Well they’re still young,” Ten defended.

“Isn’t he only inviting junior and senior classes though?” Jaehyun inquired. “Most of them are of age.”

“They’re still babies,” Ten insisted. No one bothered to question the Thai male anymore.

“Are we going?” Yuta asked then, looking around the table. Taeyong frowned in thought. Did he really want to go to a party where he would be gawked at, forced to socialize and drink alcohol which sounded like a bad combination.

“Honestly, let’s not,” Taeil said, sounding tired just hearing about a party. Taeyong related strongly.

“I’d rather not,” he agreed.

“Okay, let’s just hang at someone’s place then,” Johnny said, nodding.

“Sounds like a plan,” Yuta agreed.

Mark was by his locker, sorting through books when he heard them from miles away.

His friends.

They were chattering loudly as per usual, Suhyun’s voice ringing the loudest at the moment. She was apparently arguing for something, debating Jaemin fiercely while Renjun mediated. Mark didn’t even want to know.

Donghyuck was walking, his arm around Jeno’s shoulders as they looked at something playing on Jeno’s phone. Donghyuck was giggling, making Mark’s heart jump in his chest. He tried to stop his lips from smiling but he probably failed.
They came to a stop by his locker and continued doing whatever they had been doing as they waited for him.

When Mark closed his locker after sorting it out, they started walking towards the canteen.

“Mark!” A loud voice called out, raspy, and with an English pronunciation.

“Jackson!” Mark greeted when the excited Hong Kong male came up to him for a bro hug. Jackson was one of few people who didn’t judge Mark after the picture leaked, simply treating him as before without prejudice.

Mark also saw Jooheon, one of Jackson’s closest friends, behind the Chinese senior.

“I’m having a year end party on Friday, you coming?” Jackson asked, smiling brightly. His blonde hair made him look even more bright. Mark’s eyes widened a bit in surprise. He’d completely forgotten about that. He was a junior now so technically he was allowed. Johnny might kill him though.

“Yes we are,” Donghyuck suddenly spoke up, coming up next to Mark. Jackson frowned.

“Sorry, no sophomores allowed. There’s gonna be alcohol,” he apologized, looking genuinely sad.

“Fine,” Jooheon responded in Jackson’s stead. “But if we catch you even tasting one drop. We’ll tell Johnny.”

“Who will tell Taeyong,” Jackson nodded, trying to sound determined. Donghyuck brightened up.

“Thank you!” He cutey said, voice high pitched. Jackson nearly shouted in adoration, Jooheon pulling the Chinese male away before anymore damage could be done.

“Nice going Lee,” Renjun praised, high fiving Donghyuck.

“Thank you Huang,” Donghyuck returned primly.

“I guess we have a party to go to,” Suhyun smiled, looking almost smug. Mark laughed, marveling at how incredible his boyfriend was.

“I guess we do.”
Chapter 74

Chapter Notes

It’s quite short :(( I originally planned for it to be longer but time betrayed me XD I have things to do now, right before Christmas so that’s why

Hope you’ll enjoy <3333

Taeyong was casually lounging on his bed, tapping his pen against his lyrics book. A small smile was worn on his face, his thoughts lingering on the last few days. He felt so incredibly at peace with his life at the moment, he didn’t even know what to do with himself. His friends knew everything. There was no need to hide himself or his history from them. He knew they didn’t judge, instead they accepted him and embraced him.

It felt so incredibly relieving.

Also with the dance competition coming up in January, he also held a lot of good energy. Dance practices were almost the highlight of his day, except for cuddling his brothers of course, and his grades weren’t dropping to the bottom of the ocean.

He felt okay.

With that in mind he started writing, pen racing over the paper in messy scribbles, eventually making some sort of sense in a way. Taeyong was broken out of his lost mind when the door was thrown open. It hadn’t been closed, so Taeyong looked up startled to see a figure whirr past him in favour of getting under his bed. Taeyong frowned.

That was Lucas.

The eldest Lee slowly put his notebook on his nightstand and scooted to the edge of his bed. Lucas was hiding under his bed.

When he heard sniffles coming from underneath him, Taeyong immediately worried. Lucas wasn’t one to cry easily. Lucas was that baby who hit his head and simply looked confused about it. Lucas was that baby who tripped on his face and got back up without sound.

Lucas was that baby who laughed and smiled more than he ever cried.

So Taeyong got down on his stomach and rolled under his bed as well, grateful that he enjoyed cleaning because there was not a speck of dust on the floor. Lucas was on his stomach, head pillowed on his arms as his shoulders shook with barely concealed tears. Taeyong scooted closer, also on his stomach, frowning in concern.

“Xuxi?” He called gently, reaching a hand out to pet Lucas’s back. “What’s wrong?”

Lucas shook his head.

Taeyong scooted closer, putting his arms around the middle schooler as best as he could, trying to
comfort him.

“Hey, please tell me what happened?” Taeyong prodded, voice soft. Lucas sniffled and shrugged. His blonde hair was a ruffled mess and Taeyong reached out to smooth it down.

“Please,” the eldest pleaded. Lucas inhaled, shuddering, before turning his face up. His big eyes were red-rimmed, his lips trembling and nose red.

“We got our grades for this term today,” he explained, voice scratchy. Taeyong frowned. “And I flunked three classes. Please don’t be mad.”

Taeyong’s eyes widened. This was his first time hearing about this. He thought all of his brothers did well in school. Immense guilt flooded him. How could he not notice?

“I’m stupid. Just like Jungwoo hyung said,” Lucas murmured, his eyes watering again. Taeyong shook his head firmly.

“No. You’re not stupid. And I’m not mad at you nor am I disappointed. I could never be,” he said, determined. “Now please let’s get out from under the bed so I can hug you properly,” he scolded teasingly. Lucas scoffed in amusement and rolled out swiftly. Taeyong felt very ungraceful as he tried doing the same.

When he was on his feet, he grabbed Lucas arm and pulled the younger down on his bed, wrapping them up in a tight hug. Lucas was tall, but Taeyong a managed to embrace him anyway, Lucas head pillowed on his chest.

“You are not stupid,” he said again.

“Yes I am. I failed my classes hyung.”

“Just because you failed classes doesn’t mean you’re stupid. Some people have it more difficult when learning. Maybe you need to come up with a new study technique, or a new way of managing your workload. People learn differently and at different paces,” Taeyong explained.

“I tried telling the teacher that I didn’t understand but she didn’t care. She said I just didn’t study enough but I did!” Lucas exclaimed. “Jungwoo hyung even helped me!” Taeyong frowned, thinking. He needed to help his brother somehow. But what could he do?

Then it clicked.

A big smile spread on his lips as he squeezed Lucas tightly. The blonde yelped in surprise.

“I know what we’re going to do,” Taeyong decided. “I’m getting you a tutor.”

~

Taeil flinched when a hand slammed down in front of him on the table. He looked up to see Taeyong and rolled his eyes fondly.

“Hey,” the red head greeted happily. Taeil smiled back.

“Hello.”

“You needed some extra credits right? Your teacher said so?” Taeyong got straight to the point. Taeil frowned, suspicious.
“Yes?”

“Well I have an extra curricular that I think you’re going to like,” Taeyong smiled. Taeil was intrigued.

“What is it?”

“My little brother, Lucas, has been failing some classes and he really needs a tutor, pretty please?” Taeyong’s hands were clasped together. Taeil’s eyes widened in surprise. He was indeed looking for an extra curricular. His teacher said it would look good on college applications. And he really wanted to be accepted to the college he was applying for. Besides, he would be getting those points by tutoring Taeyong’s brother which would be really nice.

“Sure,” he agreed easily. Taeyong jumped in happiness and went around the table to hug him tightly.

“Thank you so much!” Taeyong laughed. Taeil rolled his eyes fondly yet again.

“No problem. I’m getting extra credits after all.”

Taeyong didn’t let go of him, instead peeking at the book he was reading. It was a fantasy book. He found it very interesting.

“Oh that looks good,” Taeyong commented, turning the book around and looking at the cover, his hands touching Taeil’s. They were ice cold.


“My blood circulation is poor,” he sighed, now reading on the back of the book. Taeil gingerly held his hands and tried to warm them as well as he could.

None of them noticed all the stares.

~

Friday arrived quickly, Donghyuck twirling around his room, trying to find something good to wear. He wasn’t satisfied no matter what he tried on. So, desperate, he walked over to Taeyong’s room, finding the oldest brother on his laptop by the desk.

“Hyung?” He asked. Taeyong hummed. “Can I look through your closet for something to wear?”

“Sure,” Taeyong nodded, clicking away.

Donghyuck whooped quietly and walked into Taeyong’s closet. It was pretty huge and his brother had some seriously good looking clothes. Donghyuck happily looked through all the different shirts, searching for an appropriate one. He already had the pants. He just needed something with more flair.

And he found exactly what he was looking for, thrown in the very back of the wardrobe. A mesh flower patterned shirt. It would look great with a choker and a white unbuttoned shirt on top.

“Hyung I’m taking this!” He announced as he walked out, Taeyong looking up, eyes widening.

“Whoa. What would you need that kind of clothing for?” Taeyong frowned, suspicious.

“I’m going to a party tonight,” Donghyuck explained as he walked back to his room. Taeyong
scrambled to follow him.

“A party? What party?”

“Jackson hyung’s,” Donghyuck elaborated, awaiting the impact.

“Jackson’s. The one where only juniors and seniors are allowed?” Taeyong deadpanned.

“I managed to convince him to let me go,” Donghyuck said with a cheeky smile. “And Renjun, Suhyun, Jeno, Jaemin and Mark are also going.”

“You’re a bad influence,” Taeyong blankly stated.

“Oh dear brother,” Donghyuck tsk’d. Then he turned serious. “But please let me go. We promised Jackson hyung that we wouldn’t drink and if anyone catches us doing it, they’ll tell Johnny.”

“Does Johnny know that you’re going?” Taeyong skeptically asked. Donghyuck nodded his head yes. He knew Mark had told the other. And Johnny had let him. But Johnny wasn’t as protective as Taeyong. Especially seeing as Mark was an actual junior. “Do you promise not to drink? Remember what happened to Sicheng.”

Donghyuck nodded earnestly. He honestly wasn’t planning to drink. He knew it would be stupid to do it.

“Okay then,” Taeyong sighed. Donghyuck squealed with happiness and went over to hug his brother tightly. “And promise to have your phone on you at all times,” Taeyong said, hugging back tightly.

“I will! Thank you hyung,” Donghyuck smiled. Taeyong couldn’t resist smiling as well.

“You’re welcome”.
Chapter 75

Chapter Notes

Here is the long chapter I wanted last time :))

Hope you’ll enjoy this one <3

An hour later and Taeyong was on his way to Johnny’s with Donghyuck. Johnny’s parents were still on a business trip so they had decided to hang at his place. Sicheng was in charge of babysitting and Taeyong had been happy to see that Sicheng had invited Kun to help.

Donghyuck was playing Michael Jackson on highest volume, getting himself hyped for the party he was about to go to.

When they finally arrived at Johnny’s house Taeyong saw Mark leaning against the pickup truck, clad in skin tight jeans and a button up, his hair swept back handsomely. Donghyuck got out of the car and ran to his boyfriend. Taeyong could see Mark’s eyes widening, eyeing his little brother up and down. Taeyong scoffed in amusement. He knew Donghyuck looked good. The younger had thick glittery eyeliner, fluttering long lashes, glimmering cheeks and glossy lips. Taeyong almost felt proud at Mark’s inability to form words when seeing his little brother. Taeyong got out of the car and walked over to the youngsters.

“Close your mouth Mark, you look like a fish,” Yuta appeared in the doorway, running over to Taeyong and sweeping him up in a cozy hug. Johnny followed swiftly after, holding the keys to the truck. Mark blushed like crazy, scratching his neck. Taeyong buried his face in Yuta’s shoulder, hiding his amused smile.

“You look great,” Mark finally managed to get out, Donghyuck grinning at him teasingly. He did a swift spin to show Johnny and Yuta who whooped and made thumbs up.

“Thank you thank you. Applause are accepted,” Donghyuck joked. “Are we going?” He then turned to Mark.

“Yeah,” the junior nodded, looking at Johnny who was smirking at him. “Johnny hyung?”

“Fine, Fine,” he conceded, holding the keys out. “Be careful now, this car is fragile. It has feelings you know.” Mark stared. And then he stared some more. Before he snatched the keys and grumbled that yes they’ll be careful because of course the car has feelings.

Donghyuck giggled and skipped over to the passenger seat which made Mark smile as well before he got into the drivers seat.

“Have fun kids. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!” Yuta called with a huge grin.

“Oh we won’t hyung!” Donghyuck sarcastically replied back, turning on the radio. “See you later!” Then they were off.

Taeyong looked after them, not being able to shake his feeling of worry. It was probably because of his experience when Sicheng went to that god forsaken party, and it would probably not happen
again. He couldn’t help but worry though.

Although, he knew Jackson, Joohoen and Amber would contact Johnny if Donghyuck drank one sip. Which was actually reassuring.

“I’m freezing,” Yuta shuddered, huddling into Taeyong. “Let’s go inside and wait for the others.”

Taeyong nodded and smiled.

So they went inside into the warmth and waited.

~

The party was in full swing when Donghyuck and his friends entered. They had picked up Suhyun, Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun on the way and here they finally were.

It was pretty late and it was already pitch black outside. Jackson’s house was lit up like a beacon though. The music wasn’t obnoxiously loud and the party didn’t seem too out of control. People were dancing, no grinding though, there were several cups of different liquids standing on the tables and surfaces available, while a game of spin the bottle was being played in the lounge area.

“This is so exciting,” Jaemin exclaimed while grinning, gripping Jeno’s bicep tightly.

“Let’s hop right in,” Donghyuck smiled and grabbed Mark’s hand, pulling him towards the dance floor. Mark looked embarrassed as Donghyuck pulled him close, arms circling Mark’s neck. Gently, the sophomore started swaying his hips. Mark was still stiff.

“Your hands are supposed to go around my waist,” Donghyuck rolled his eyes fondly, Mark gulping, looking into Donghyuck’s light brown eyes, before placing his hands high on the peach haired sophomore’s waist.

Slowly but surely, Mark started loosening up, smiling as he spun them around to the beat, Donghyuck laughing in glee.

He noticed Suhyun dancing with Renjun while Jaemin and Jeno made their way into the kitchen, probably to get something to drink. Donghyuck knew that they wouldn’t grab alcohol.

Mark pulled him even closer, their bodies flush against each other and Donghyuck felt his cheeks heating up for once, avoiding Mark’s gaze. He was glad most of the people in the room were too busy dancing or too intoxicated to apprehend their situation, because he knew most people from their school were, in fact, homophobes.

Donghyuck buried his face in Mark’s neck, enjoying their proximity. He saw Suhyun waggling her eyebrows at him from the other side of the room and rolled his eyes at her.

He felt completely content, being able to feel Mark’s rapid pulse from his neck vein, the sweat on his skin, the way his hands gripped Donghyuck’s waist tighter.

Donghyuck felt intoxicated, in the best way possible.

~

When everyone had arrived, they settled on Johnny’s couch. Taeyong was squished between Taeil and Ten, pulling his legs to his chest, cozy yellow socks on his feet and Taeil’s warm hands holding his cold ones.
Taeil had taken it upon himself to be Taeyong’s personal heating device, at least for his hands, as they were always cold.

Jaehyun was glancing at them from the other side of the couch, which made Taeyong’s cheeks warm up.

“We’re not watching an action movie,” Doyoung protested against Yuta’s suggestion. “We have to watch a Christmas movie!”

“Let’s vote on it,” Yuta decided. “Everyone who wants to watch an action movie,” he was the only one to raise his hand. The Japanese male pouted. “Christmas movie?” He grumpily said.

Everyone raised their hands.

“Told you so,” Doyoung singsonged, looking smug, gums showing as he smiled. Reluctantly, Yuta grabbed a Christmas movie instead, The Grinch.

Ten was looking at Taeyong with a thoughtful gaze. Taeyong raised an eyebrow at him. Ten tried to hide a smirk.

“Hey Jaehyun,” the Thai male called, “Can we trade places? I want to be closer to the kitchen.” Jaehyun looked confused but complied anyway, switching spots with Ten, ending up pressed against Taeyong’s side completely. The red head felt his breath hitching from the warmth Jaehyun was emitting and cautiously moved closer to the other male, trying to soak up that warmth. Jaehyun seemed to sense him doing that and couldn’t help but smile, trying to be inconspicuous when he placed and arm over Taeyong’s shoulders, pulling the other into himself.

The movie started, and Ten was grinning teasingly at them.

~

Donghyuck and Mark eventually moved away from the dance floor, going into the kitchen instead. They found Jeno and Jaemin chatting with Jackson and Amber excitedly.

“Mark!” Jackson called, holding his cup up in greeting. Mark waved, chuckling. Jackson was so exuberant, no one could resist the boy’s charms.


“You’re so cute!” He exclaimed. “Our Mark really lucked out,” he snorted, drinking from his cup. Mark could feel his ears blushing when Jaemin looked at him teasingly. He saw that Donghyuck was blushing as well, which he kind of loved. So he grabbed the sophomore’s hand and pulled him over to the counter where Jackson and Amber sat.

“What would you like to drink?” Amber asked, her blue hair gelled back, her eyes sparkling with intoxication. But her smile was all the same.

“Simple coke please. No funny business,” Donghyuck winked at her and Amber clicked her tongue, grabbing a glass and the Coca Cola bottle, pouring him a decent amount before sliding it over the counter.

“Your drink, good sir,” she said, teasingly. Donghyuck smiled and grabbed the glass.

“Thank you, madame,” he answered, sarcasm lacing his tone.
“Mark?” Amber asked then, after laughing. Mark furrowed his brows in thought.

“What do you recommend?”

“I know exactly what you need,” Jackson butted in, reaching behind him to grab a bottle of something. It was probably alcoholic by the looks of it. “It’s very good, not a high alcohol percentage so I think you’ll be fine. And you can definitely not share with any of your sophomore friends,” Jackson cautioned, handing over the bottle. Mark took it with a smile, carefully sipping it. Donghyuck saw the way his face lit up. It must have been really good.

“I like it,” Mark said, nodding his head.

“Knew you would,” Jackson singsonged and sipped from his cup once again. Donghyuck smiled and gripped his cola, drinking from it.

~

Taeyong was basically on Jaehyun, his leg over the other’s muscular thigh. His head in Jaehyun’s neck. His back halfway on Jaehyun’s chest.

And he was so comfortable. He was so incredibly at peace with being exactly there. He didn’t want to move. Not even when the movie ended.

“I love that movie,” Johnny exclaimed as the credits rolled. "We watch it every Christmas. Classic.”

After turning off the TV and clearing away some trash from the table, Yuta and Ten went to refill all their drinks while Johnny and Doyoung discussed the aspects of the movie. Taeyong was near falling asleep in his current position, breathing deeply.

“Let’s play truth or dare!” Ten decided when they entered the lounge area with their drinks.

“Sure,” Johnny agreed, Taeil nodding as well. Jaehyun did thumbs up, trying not to jostle Taeyong too much.

“Great. Let’s go. You can pass anytime you’re not comfortable, no judgment,” Yuta said and put down the drinks before taking a seat again. “I’ll start. Ten, truth or dare?”

And so it began. Taeyong observed as crazy dares were dealt in between highly personal truth questions. Ten was dared to drink a concoction of something he didn’t even want to know. He found out Taeil would date Yuta if he had to choose and Doyoung had apparently shoplifted some candy when he was younger.

All in all it was chaotic.

He loved it.

“Taeyong, truth or dare?” Was Johnny’s next move. Taeyong looked up lazily from his position, where he was practically on Jaehyun. This was his first time getting asked.

“Dare,” he chose, feeling brave. They wouldn’t make him do something too and right?

“Sit on Jaehyun’s lap for three rounds,” Johnny instructed. Taeyong blushed to his neck, tensing up inevitably. He could hear Jaehyun making a choking noise.

He gulped slightly before standing up, a shiver running through him from the lack of warmth. Sitting on Jaehyun’s lap couldn’t be too bad, it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary.
So he gingerly sat down, as far out as possible, barely on Jaehyun’s knees. He sat, stiff as a board, when Jaehyun reached out to pull him by the hips, causing Taeyong to actually properly sit on his lap.

He could feel all the edges and ripples of Jaehyun’s toned chest, his muscular thighs shifting beneath Taeyong’s own legs. His hot breath on Taeyong’s neck. His hands on Taeyong’s hips. Holy hell.

Slowly, Taeyong relaxed back into the hold, leaning his head back on Jaehyun’s shoulder and smiling slightly. It was a really nice position. He liked it. And he didn’t get up after three rounds.

He stayed right where he was.

~

Donghyuck had migrated back into the lounge area, finding Suhyun on an empty couch. He strolled over to sit next to her, Mark having stayed in the kitchen to drink more of that alcoholic beverage. Apparently he really liked it.

“Hey there,” Suhyun greeted with a smile. She was wearing a red dress, sleeves reaching just below her shoulders and a golden necklace dangling on her chest. She looked really pretty, Donghyuck noted, feeling proud to be friends with her.

“Hey,” he greeted, crossing his legs comfortably, observing the people on the dance floor. His eyebrows rose when he spotted a familiar face. Two actually.

Ara and Joe.

They were dancing together, both looking bored out of their minds. Donghyuck frowned upon seeing them.

“She’s such a bitch,” Suhyun suddenly spoke, also looking towards the dancing pair. Donghyuck turned to her. She seemed to have such a hostile tone when speaking of Ara. He wondered why.

“Did she ever do something to you?” He asked, not able to contain his curiosity. Suhyun frowned.

“You can’t tell anyone. I’ve never told anyone about this before,” she said, looking into his eyes. Donghyuck frowned, but he nodded. “Ara and I used to be friends,” she explained. “More than friends actually,” that did surprise Donghyuck. He never would’ve thought Suhyun could have ever been friends with Ara. Let alone more. “We always did everything together and we shared some of our deepest secrets. But then Joe came to town. Apparently something had happened to him, and he had been sent to his grandparents who live here,” Suhyun’s voice was hushed, cautious of the people around them. “Ara changed. She befriended him and something shifted. I’m not sure what exactly but she stopped being the girl I knew. The girl I fell in love with,” Suhyun’s voice was down to a whisper. Her tone dejected. “She made me do some fucked up shit. And I listened. Because I thought she would stop. She didn’t. And when I found her kissing Joe one time,” Donghyuck’s eyes widened. “I just stopped. I cut all ties with her.” Donghyuck was frowning even more. He never would have guessed. Ara had destroyed more minds than he’d thought. He didn’t know what to say after hearing that.

“I’m glad you’re my friend,” he settled for. “And I’m so glad you told me. That you trusted me with this. Thank you.” Suhyun smiled timidly, which was a first, and Donghyuck reached out to hug her tightly, trying to display his emotions. He was really glad to have her as a friend. She melted into the hug, he could sense that she was smiling.

Suddenly he felt Suhyun tensing up in his embrace. He pursed his lips, confused, and pulled back.
“What’s wrong?” He asked, seeing Suhyun staring at a spot on the opposite side of the room, he followed her gaze steadily. He felt like his heart was about to combust, sinking despair settling in his stomach.

He gulped, tears burning in his eyes.

On the other side of the room, he saw them.

Mark, falling back onto a couch, and Lexie, climbing on his lap, dirty hands pawing at Mark’s chest.

Then they were kissing.

And Mark wasn’t pulling back. He leaned into it, kissing with fervor. Like a starved man. Donghyuck felt the tears escaping his eyes, the disbelief painting his features. Suhyun’s hand on his shoulder, her distant voice calling his name.

He shrugged her off, standing up and storming out of the house. Away from the party.

He couldn’t believe Mark would do something like that. His chest was burning like his heart had been thrown into the deepest pits of hell.

He wanted his brother. No one else. He wanted Taeyong.
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

Sorry for super late update but I think you understand why.

It’s christmas people! Hope you’ve gotten the presents you wished for and hope that you’ve had a nice Christmas <3

Here’s my gift for you ~
Enjoy!!’

Taeyong nearly jumped out of Jaehyun’s lap when his phone started its shrill ringing. His heartbeat picked up in the fear of the moment and he almost laughed at himself after noticing that it was only his phone. His startled state made Jaehyun jump back to life as well, the brunet having been so comfortable and sleepy with Taeyong sitting in his lap.

“Hello?” Taeyong answered the call, Ten interrupting their game of truth and dare while Taeyong spoke.

“Hyung,” it was Donghyuck and Taeyong was immediately alerted. “Hyung please get me, please.” He was right out sobbing, his voice sounding wrecked.

“Hyuck what’s wrong? Did you drink alcohol?” Taeyong asked, getting up from Jaehyun’s lap completely to walk towards the hallway, getting his jacket and shoes.

“No. I didn’t drink anything,” Donghyuck sobbed. “Can you please come get me?”

“I’m on my way, where are you?” Taeyong asked, noticing his friends crowding the hallway, looking confused and concerned.

“I don’t know,” Donghyuck said, voice breaking. “I don’t know.”

“Okay, just send me your location and stay where you are!” Taeyong hung up after getting an affirmative from Donghyuck, and turned to his friends.

“Something is wrong. Donghyuck is hurt, I’m going to get him, sorry to leave so abruptly,” he said, feeling truly apologetic, he really wanted to enjoy the night but now he had a brother to take care of.

“No worries. Let us know what happened when you have time,” Johnny assured.

“And if you need help don’t hesitate to text,” Jaehyun sternly told him. “I’ll text you later to remind you,” he threatened teasingly, giving Taeyong a comforting smile. The red head smiled back as best as he could before leaving.

~

He found Donghyuck quickly, the younger boy sitting on the side walk, legs pulled up to his chest, crying uncontrollably, makeup smudged and clothes ruffled. He looked like a downright mess.
It was dark outside, and terribly cold, snow on the ground still, which was not good. Donghyuck could easily get sick. Taeyong drove up to him rapidly, leaning over to open the door, which shocked Donghyuck out of his lost state. The sophomore looked up with tear-filled eyes, seeing his brother and immediately getting in the car.

Taeyong frowned when Donghyuck leaned over to hug him, sobbing into his shoulder. Taeyong held the other, as much as possible from the position they were in.

They stayed like that for a while, letting the snowflakes fall around them, the car on and heat blasting their ice cold bodies. Donghyuck eventually managed to stop crying, taking shuddering breaths and breaking away from the hug.

“Hyuckie what happened?” Taeyong questioned lightly. Donghyuck was shaking his head.

“I can’t. Not now. Please get us home,” he pleaded instead. Taeyong frowned but complied.

~

The car ride home was quiet and tense, Taeyong dying to know what went wrong while also feeling exceptionally concerned for his brother.

When they got home, Donghyuck stormed upstairs, Taeyong walking inside more calmly and greeting Kun and Sicheng who were watching a movie in the living room.


“I’m not sure, I’m gonna go upstairs. I bet he’s crying again,” Taeyong told the younger. Kun looked concerned as well, leaning over to pause the movie.

“I think I’ll go home then. Leave you to it,” he said with a serene smile. Taeyong smiled back, going upstairs hurriedly. Sicheng gave Kun a quick hug before the other was gone. Then the junior followed Taeyong upstairs.

“Are the others sleeping?” Taeyong asked, hushed, Sicheng nodding in confirmation.

They made their way into the hallway, hearing sniffles coming from Taeyong’s bedroom. The eldest walked inside and saw Donghyuck curled up on his bed, sweatpants and a hoodie that was Taeyong’s on.

Sicheng immediately went over and climbed in together with Donghyuck, Taeyong following suit. The sophomore sat in between them as they hugged him, his head leaning on Sicheng’s shoulder while his hand gripped Taeyong’s arm tightly.

“What happened?” Taeyong prodded yet again, looking at the mascara based tear tracks making their way down Donghyuck’s cheeks.

“It was Mark,” Donghyuck whispered, looking pained. “He kissed someone else.” Taeyong could feel his eyes widening, sharing a concerned look with Sicheng. “And I don’t even know why. I just saw them making out on a couch all of a sudden!” Donghyuck’s voice was gaining its strength back, making way for anger.

“Did he have anything to drink?” Taeyong asked.

“Yes. But not enough to be so gone, that he would be making out with Lexie of all people!”
“He made out with Lexie!?” Sicheng exclaimed, genuinely shocked. “Dump him.” He dead panned. Donghyuck made a noise between a laugh and a sob.

“Let’s not jump to conclusions,” Taeyong sternly warned them. “I am almost positive that there’s an explanation for this. Let’s wait til tomorrow, maybe even further and then you need to talk to Mark. So he can explain,” Taeyong rationally told Donghyuck. The younger frowned.

“I don’t want to,” he said, new tears making their way down his cheeks. “I should. But it hurts.” Then he was sobbing again.

Taeyong exhaled shakily, feeling so much compassion for his brother who never seemed to catch a break. When he had his bout of happiness, it was suddenly snatched away, replaced by sorrow and tears and betrayal. Like always.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Taeyong promised. Almost trying to convince himself. Because, he wasn’t so sure anymore.

Donghyuck sniffled and gathered himself again, wiping at his eyes. Sicheng smiled minimally and reached out to pluck an eyelash from Donghyuck’s cheekbone.

“It’s an eyelash,” he said. “Make a wish Hyuck.”

Donghyuck managed a small smile and closed his eyes, breathing in deeply, before blowing all the air out.

The eyelash flew away, bringing Donghyuck’s wish with it into the abyss.

~

Donghyuck laid awake all night, agonizing over the happenings at the party. Tears stung his eyes constantly, always on the verge, but not falling. Donghyuck wonders if he had gotten his heart broken.

Is this what it feels like?

Was it his looks? Lexie was pale. He was tan. Lexie had long black hair. He had short peach colored hair. She was super skinny and short. He still had his baby fat and he was fairly tall, only slightly shorter than Mark.

Lexie was a girl. He was a boy.

Donghyuck couldn’t make sense of anything. Was Mark bi? Was he not even gay? Maybe he wasn’t attracted to boys, maybe Donghyuck was just an exception. A fluke. A mistake.

The tears still burned in his eyes, although this time, they found their way down his cheeks.

~

Taeyong cancelled the Christmas shopping with his friends, not wanting to meet them at the moment. Instead he brought Donghyuck with him and tried to cheer the young boy up, buying him ice cream and food. But nothing worked. And he refused to contact Mark, even though the older had called him several times.

They did manage to fix presents for everyone and Taeyong snuck off quietly to buy one for Donghyuck.
The rest of the weekend was spent in similar fashion, the brothers trying to cheer Donghyuck up after hearing what happened at the party. At least the ones who could understand it, Chenle and Jisung mostly sensed the mood and went with it.

When Christmas did arrive it was gloomy. Donghyuck didn’t seem to be able to cheer up, his smile turned into a frown, even when opening his gifts. Although Taeyong did see that he was happy about the gifts and he tried to smile sincerely when thanking the brothers. Taeyong was happy to see his other brothers gleefully opening their gifts and playing with them. Especially seeing Sicheng’s touched smile when opening his crop top. The food they cooked turned out great and the Christmas movie they watched was superb. But it wasn’t enough to make Donghyuck feel happy.

That night, Taeyong saw Donghyuck in his room, cradling a small gift, and crying.

It must’ve been for Mark.

Taeyong felt so angry about the whole situation, hating that Donghyuck was feeling so down, especially during Christmas. It was atrocious.

And he didn’t know how to help. His only solution would be for Donghyuck to actually talk to Mark, so he should probably try and make that happen. Although he knew the younger said he wasn’t ready.

Taeyong sighed quietly and pulled the door closed before leaving and going to his room.

He did manage to send a Merry Christmas text in the group chat he had with his friends and one to Max.

The Christmas wasn’t merry, but hopefully he could help and fix the situation somehow, so Donghyuck could feel better.

He just needed to make it happen.

~

Donghyuck sighed as he got another text from Suhyun. She was the only one to know what had happened that night and she kept texting him, just like Mark kept calling and texting.

Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun also sent their fair share of messages and snaps, sensing that something was up. Donghyuck didn’t reply to any of them, knowing that Jaemin would be pissed at him for not upholding their snap days.

He felt guilty for ignoring them but he didn’t want to deal with it at the moment. He would have to some time. But now he just wanted to lay down under the covers and sleep. Just as he had laid down and put away Mark’s gift the door flew open. Taeyong was rushing inside and throwing himself down on Donghyuck’s bed.


“Give me your phone,” Taeyong said, holding his hand out firmly. Donghyuck did so. Taeyong unlocked it and went into his messages.

“Hyung?” Donghyuck said, wary. “Why are you doing?”

“I’m texting Mark for you,” Taeyong told him firmly. “I’m sorry but you need to do this as quickly as possible. Otherwise your hate and resentment will grow and you’ll never be able to get over it.”
Donghyuck pouted, feeling betrayed. He knew Taeyong only wanted his best, but he really didn’t want to face his boyfriend. If they were even together anymore.

“You’re meeting at the park tomorrow,” Taeyong told him, his eye softening a bit. “I’m sorry. But I think this can help.” Donghyuck didn’t say anything. He felt petulant as he averted his gaze, but he felt betrayed! Taeyong sighed slightly and petted his knee before getting up and leaving.

Donghyuck picked up his phone and saw the text conversation still open, saw Mark’s excited answer to the text Taeyong had sent, thinking that Donghyuck was on speaking terms with him again.

He didn’t want to. But he was going to meet Mark anyways.

Because no matter how much he despised admitting it, Taeyong was right.
Donghyuck could feel his hands shaking as he walked to the park the next day. It wasn’t far. Mark even texted to ask if he wanted him to pick him up, but Donghyuck declined. He wasn’t quite ready and he didn’t want to meet the other earlier than necessary.

When he arrived he immediately spotted his boyfriend. Mark was pacing around the swings, pushing them every once in a while to occupy himself. He was wringing his hands anxiously. His chestnut colored hair was a mess and he looked like he hadn’t been sleeping for days. It had only been half a week since the party and it felt like an eternity. Donghyuck inhaled deeply to calm himself before strolling over to the junior.

Mark looked up with wide eyes, noticing Donghyuck. His whole body seized up and his eyes swam with emotions. Donghyuck wanted to turn around and run.

“Hyuck,” Mark started carefully, walking close to him, only stopping when Donghyuck instinctively stepped back. Mark looked hurt. “Please let me explain,” he begged. Donghyuck huffed.

“What is there to explain? I saw you kissing Lexie!” He accused, feeling the anger simmer and boil under his skin.

“I know I’m going to sound like a downright jerk, but I was drunk,” Mark desperately said. “It was a mistake, I swear I didn’t mean it. I don’t know what happened in my mind.”

“You know, they always say alcohol brings forth your true feelings,” Donghyuck whispered, looking at the ground. Mark looked speechless.

“No,” Mark protested. “I did not want to kiss Lexie! There was no underlying desire or anything! My true feelings...” Mark trailed off, stepping forward and gently grabbing Donghyuck’s hand, “my true feelings, they’re for you.”

Donghyuck looked up to see Mark’s reddening cheeks. His heart was aching.

“I don’t believe you,” he almost choked on his words, feeling the tears clogging his throat. “I left you for three minutes!” He yelled then, tears making their way down his face. “You couldn’t have gotten wasted in three minutes! It doesn’t make any sense!” He was nearly sobbing, seeing Mark’s own eyes watering.

“Please, Hyuck, I don’t know what to say. I’m so sorry,” Mark choked out, trying to swallow the lump in his throat.

“Just leave me alone!” Donghyuck screamed and ripped his hand out of Mark’s. He was glad he wasn’t wearing any makeup, it would’ve been ruined by then. “Go to Lexie! Pale, beautiful, skinny Lexie! I don’t care!” He shouted, storming off.
Mark called his name, but Donghyuck didn’t turn back, he simply continued to walk, even going as far as running when he heard Mark going after him.

He didn’t turn back.

~

Mark felt destroyed.

His heart had been shattered into pieces. He cried quietly as he walked home. And as if to spread salt in his wounds, it started snowing up a storm. He was soaking wet when he made it to his house. His parents were in the living room, watching TV. He had told them about him having a boyfriend, and he knew they were fine with it, but he didn’t feel like talking to them about this particular instance. He needed Johnny.

So, quietly, he went upstairs, sniffling pitifully as he opened Johnny’s door and saw the elder by his desk.

“Hyung,” Mark said, cursing himself when his voice broke. He hadn’t told Johnny about what had happened but he knew the older sensed that something was up. Especially after seeing him being very down during Christmas.

“Mark?” Johnny sounded concerned, turning in his seat to see his little brother, soaking wet and tears running down his cheeks. Johnny immediately got up. “What happened?” He asked. Mark sniffled, going over to sit on Johnny’s bed. The older sat down next to him, putting an arm around him comfortably.

“Remember that we went to Jackson’s party?” Mark started. Johnny nodded.

“Yeah. That’s why Taeyong had to leave so suddenly. He still hasn’t told us why,” Johnny said, Mark nodding affirmatively.

“I kissed someone,” Mark blurted out, “and it wasn’t Donghyuck. It was Lexie.” He buried his face in his hands, feeling so ashamed.


“I don’t know! I didn’t have a lot to drink but everything just got fuzzy and I felt lost! I barley remember doing it!” Mark mourned. Johnny frowned.

“That’s why Taeyong hasn’t been contacting anyone, he’s comforting Donghyuck,” Johnny concluded. Mark nodded.

“Probably yeah, Donghyuck is really mad. He wouldn’t answer any of my calls or texts and when he did we agreed to meet up, which did not go well,” Mark sighed. “He stormed off. He was really mad. But mostly hurt. Hyung, how do I fix this?” Mark desperately asked, looking at Johnny with huge teary eyes. Johnny was at a loss.

“I don’t know,” he said, biting his lip. “Maybe I could try and talk to Taeyong? To see if he can help?”

“Yes, that would be really good,” Mark said, sounding incredibly tired. “I doubt he’d talk to me after today. He probably hates me because of what I did to Donghyuck.” Johnny frowned and petted his back gently.
Just thinking of losing his boyfriend and a great hyung made Mark’s heart break all over again.

~

Donghyuck rushed straight into his room after getting home. He slammed the door and felt slightly apologetic because it probably startled all his brothers. He had stopped crying on the way home, only left with anger.

He was so mad.

Mark couldn’t have been wasted, he had only been out of Donghyuck’s sight for three minutes at most. It must’ve been a conscious decision to make out with Lexie. Meaning Mark liked her either because she was a girl with attractive features or because of her personality which Donghyuck severely doubted. Therefore, Mark was obviously attracted to her looks. Which were the opposite of Donghyuck’s.

He really needed to stop thinking about it, it was only making him feel worse.

So what if she was pretty in Mark’s eyes? Donghyuck liked how he looked. He liked his features, he didn’t care if Mark was too blind to appreciate them.

With a determined gaze he turned his phone on and called the first person he thought of.

“So,” Jaemin huffed. “You finally decided to call? Only after several days of us worrying to death!”

“I’m sorry, Nana,” Donghyuck whispered, feeling guilty. “Something happened during the party,” he explained.

“What? What was it?” The accusing tone was gone, replaced by concern.

“Mark made out with Lexie,” Donghyuck sighed. Jaemin was quiet for several seconds, then.

“HE DID WHAT?!”

~

After explaining everything to Jaemin, and after Jaemin ranted about all things wrong with the whole situation, he told the boy why he called in the first place.

“I want to get a nose piercing,” he said.

“Oh huh, okay, and how is that gonna help?”

“It won’t. I just want one. Will you come with me?”

“Of course. I’ll meet you at the mall in twenty.”

“Okay, thanks Nana. See you!”

~

Jaemin was gripping his hand strikingly tightly even though Donghyuck was the one getting pierced.

“Oh god I’m gonna hurl. It looks painful,” Jaemin whined, pouting. Donghyuck narrowed his eyes.

“It’s fine,” he assured, flinching when the needle went through his skin. Jaemin squealed which
made the piercer laugh. She was a young woman, several piercings lining her ears and one adorning her nose. Her name tag said Hyuna.

“I’ll put in the jewelry,” she warned, doing just that. “There, all done.”

Donghyuck smiled in thanks and got up to inspect his new accessory. Jaemin was smiling as they looked at the mirror.

“You look hot,” he said, laughing when Donghyuck winked at him. It did look nice. It was a simple silver ring on the right side of his nose and it glimmered pleasantly in the lights of the studio they were in.

“Thank you,” he said to Hyuna, having already paid beforehand, bowing as she smiled and waved, dragging Jaemin with him out of the store.

“I want ice cream,” Jaemin decided, Donghyuck nodding in agreement. They quickly located the nearest ice cream parlor and sat down after choosing their flavors. They sat in silence for a while until Jaemin broke it.

“How are you feeling? About this whole ‘Mark’ deal?”

Donghyuck sighed through his nose, munching more aggressively on his ice cream.

“He’s an asshole,” he settled on saying. Jaemin frowned.

“It feels so out of character,” the brunet exclaimed. “Mark hyung wouldn’t do something like that.”


“Okay,” he conceded. “So, how about that English homework we got for the break.”

Donghyuck groaned.

~

The next day, (after scolding Donghyuck for not telling him about getting a nose piercing and then complimenting him on it) Taeyong had gotten the full story about what happened from Donghyuck, feeling very confused. He’d genuinely thought Mark had a probable cause for doing what he did, but no. Taeyong was starting to think that Mark wasn’t as genuine as he’d originally thought.

He had gotten a call from Max however, his noona wanting to meet up and get some coffee. He agreed eagerly, hoping to get his mind off things for a while.

They met up at the mall, Max practically glowing with happiness, even though she was still wearing her all black attire and dark makeup, she still looked so light. Taeyong couldn’t help but feel happy too.

“You look great!” He said, hugging her. Max laughed.

“Well thank you, you don’t look too shabby yourself,” she teased him. Taeyong rolled his eyes and scoffed, amused.

“I take it you’ve had a good honeymoon?” He questioned as they entered the cafe. Max nodded enthusiastically.
“It was awesome. The wedding was great and the honeymoon was just us chilling and relaxing. Couldn’t have been better,” she said dreamily. Taeyong chuckled at her positivity.

“That’s great,” he sincerely told her.

When they got their order and sat down, Max sipped her coffee and leaned forward, excited.

“So. What’s been going on in your life?” She inquired with a smile. Taeyong sighed.

“Oh not much,” He then proceeded to tell her all about it. Sicheng’s situation, the drugs, the party, school, Donghyuck and Mark.

He told her everything, within reasonable limits. He didn’t want to completely lay it all out.

“Well fuck,” Max swore, sipping her coffee with wide eyes. Taeyong gave her some time to process while digging into his cake. “That sure is eventful.”

He nodded vigorously in agreement.

“I just wish we could catch a break,” he sighed sadly. Max frowned.

“I completely understand that,” she sympathized. “Maybe try and get away for a weekend or something, take a day off school, go to some hotel and chill?” She suggested, looking lost. He did just drop a lot of information on her.

“Yeah, maybe,” he sighed again.

“It’ll get better someday. You’ll see,” she promised. Taeyong pursed his lips, resisting the urge to sigh again.

“I guess.”

~

“Taeyong!” Johnny shouted as he saw the red head about to exit the mall. He’d just arrived with Yuta and Ten, when he saw the senior. Taeyong turned around, confused, and then he spotted them. Johnny hurriedly walked over, Ten and Yuta following.

“Hi,” Taeyong greeted softly when they reached him.

“You’ve been ghosting us,” Ten accused, furrowing his eyebrows. Taeyong bit his lip.

“I’m sorry, there’s been a lot going on,” he said, sighing.

“Like what?” Yuta asked. Taeyong opened his mouth hesitantly, looking at the exit longingly before looking back to them.

“You know what, can we just get everyone here so I can explain?” He decided, finding that approach way easier.

“Sure,” Yuta agreed and Ten whipped out his phone to send a text. Taeyong led them to a small gathering point with several benches and sat them down.

It didn’t take long for the others to arrive, Taeil, Jaehyun and Doyoung all looking concerned as they entered the area. They had apparently been in town, eating lunch when Ten had texted.
“So,” Doyoung started. “What’s up?”

“Donghyuck has been going around, miserable, because of Mark,” Taeyong glanced at Johnny, “at Jackson’s party, he kissed Lexie.”

They all looked various sorts of shocked. Although Taeyong saw that Johnny didn’t seem as surprised. He probably knew.

“Mark cheated?” Jaehyun questioned, looking disbelieving. Taeyong sighed.

“I don’t know, it all seems so very complicated. They talked and Donghyuck did not like Mark’s explanation very much,” Taeyong said.

“What did he say?” Ten asked, curious.

“That it was because he was drunk, although Donghyuck had only seen him drink one alcoholic beverage before leaving for three minutes and then found him making out with Lexie,” Taeyong explained. “It doesn’t add up.”

“What a jerk,” Doyoung said, looking offended.

“Hey,” Johnny sternly called. “That’s my little brother.”

“Well he couldn’t very well have gotten wasted on one drink, could he?” Doyoung snarked. Johnny frowned, pursing his lips.

“There’s something fishy going on,” Ten said.

“Yeah,” Jaehyun agreed. “It doesn’t sound like something Mark would do at all.”

They all nodded in agreement at that, Taeyong biting his nails anxiously.

“Wait a second,” Taeil suddenly spoke, gathering their attention. “Lexie is Ara’s little sister!”

“Yeah?” Yuta deadpanned. “So?”

“So, Ara,” Taeil stood up excitedly. “Ara who’s known for drug use and being a bitch.” Taeyong almost recoiled, hearing such harsh words from Taeil of all people. “What if she spiked the drink with something?”

Taeyong’s eyes widened. That sounded like something Ara would do.

“You’re a genius!” Doyoung exclaimed, eyes round with excitement. They figured it out. “It makes perfect sense. Why Mark would behave out of character, and do something he would normally never do. And why he would be completely gone after like one drink. Drugs.”

“Mark said it himself,” Johnny confirmed. “He said he was feeling dizzy and everything was fuzzy that night. He barely remembers what happened.”

“We need to confront Ara about it before jumping to wild conclusions. We need to be sure,” Jaehyun rationalized. Taeyong nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, you’re right. I’m gonna get Sicheng to give me her address and go there tonight,” he decided, nodding.

“I’ll go with you,” Jaehyun said, offering Taeyong a small smile when the other looked at him.
“Thank you,” the red head said, smiling back.

“Great. Report back to us tomorrow and we’ll see what we can do about the situation,” Ten finalized. And so; they had a plan.
Taeyong and Jaehyun set off immediately after leaving the mall, heading for Ara’s house after getting the address from Sicheng over text. Taeyong drove, Jaehyun drumming his fingers against his thigh in beat with the music playing on the radio.

“What if her parents are home?” Jaehyun asked, curious.

“Doesn’t matter, we just ask her to step out, to talk in private,” Taeyong shrugged. He didn’t like the idea of going to Ara but they didn’t exactly have a choice. They had a deal; she would leave his brothers alone and he wouldn’t bother her or turn her in to the police. By spiking Mark’s drink she effectively ruined that deal.

They pulled up to a nice house. It was very fancy, even bigger than Taeyong’s, and looked expensive. Taeyong parked and got out of the car, Jaehyun following closely. They walked right up to the fancy wooden doors, ringing the bell.

Quickly, the door swung open, revealing Ara herself, standing in sweatpants and a low cut shirt. Taeyong pursed his lips. Ara seemed surprised to see them, but maintained a poker face.

“Oh,” she exclaimed softly. “So you’ve come crawling back?” Her little smirk was insufferable. Taeyong narrowed his eyes.

“You broke the deal,” he stated, voice low. Ara arched a perfectly symmetrical eyebrow.

“I don’t think I did,” she said, shrugging her shoulders slightly. Jaehyun scoffed.

“Were you at Jackson’s party?” He inquired. Ara looked Jaehyun up and down, a teasing smile pulling at her lips.

“I was,” she confirmed. “Does it matter?”

“So you might be aware that your sister, who is a freshman by the way, was there as well?” Taeyong sternly said. Ara nodded.

“Sure, I brought her there after all,” she said, crossing her arms.

“Of course you did,” Taeyong muttered under his breath. Ara obviously didn’t care that Lexie was underage and not supposed to be at a party like that. But so was Donghyuck after all so he couldn’t exactly blame her.

“And you know that Lexie made out with Mark Lee?” Jaehyun continued, ignoring Taeyong’s mumbling.
“Yes, now why are you interrogating me?” She said, unimpressed.

“Did you spike Mark’s drink?” Jaehyun’s statement seemed to catch her by honest surprise, her eyes widening slightly in confusion. Taeyong frowned. They seemed to be wrong after all.

He waited for Ara to process before inquiring, again, repeating the question. This time she seemed to have cleared her head, eyes lighting up in recognition.

“No I didn’t,” she said, a big smirk starting to take over her face. Taeyong wanted to yell in her smug face.

“You know something,” he stated, trying to sound calm. “If you were involved I will send that recording straight to the police office,” he threatened. Ara laughed.

“I did not break our deal, if anyone did it was you, by coming here,” she spat. “I didn’t go near Mark or your brother that night, so I didn’t break it. But Lexie was never part of the deal.”

Jaehyun’s eyes widened, Taeyong’s confusion clear on his face.

“Are you saying Lexie drugged Mark? She’s fifteen!” Taeyong exclaimed. Ara laughed again.

“I’m saying I didn’t. You have your answer,” she said, winking at them. “You can leave now.” With that, Ara slammed the door in their faces. Leaving Taeyong feeling baffled.

It wasn’t Ara who had spiked the drink. It was Lexie.

~

Ara smirked, walking upstairs quickly. Her sister was finally taking some initiative. She opened the door to Lexie’s room and waltzed inside.

“Oh dear little sister, what a genius plan,” Lexie looked up as Ara settled on her bed, question in her eyes. “Seducing Mark Lee,” Ara clarified. She couldn’t believe that her sister was all grown up.

“Oh that,” Lexie laughed. “I think it worked pretty well. They seem to have finally broken up. About time,” she looked giddy. Oh sweet innocent child. Ara barely remembered how that felt.

“That’s good, now you actually have a chance with that Mark Lee,” she almost rolled her eyes. She may be proud of her sister’s plan but her taste in men was horrendous. Lexie squealed in excitement. Ara did roll her eyes then.

“Where did you even get the drugs?” Ara asked, genuinely curious. Lexie shrugged.

“Got them from Joe, he said he knew of some sort of disorienting pill that would basically confuse Mark oppa enough to the point of literally going with whatever anyone told him,” Lexie explained, going back to her homework. Ara was already done with all of her school work for the break.

“And exactly how did you manage to slip that past Amber, she’s usually impenetrable,” Ara said, thinking back to the times she had gotten Joe to try and spike drinks. Amber always caught them.

“Easy, I put it in _after_ Mark oppa got the drink. He was so busy chatting with his little friends that he didn’t even notice me slipping the pill into his unattended drink,” Lexie scoffed. Of course, Lexie only wanted to spike one drink. That’s easy enough, Ara thought.

“Nice job lil sis,” she praised, getting up from the bed. “I’ll take my leave then.”
Ara left the room in favour of heading to her own room. She grabbed her phone from the charger and threw herself down on her bed, scrolling through Instagram. She had a lot of followers but she didn’t follow a lot of people. She simply scrolled through the few updates that had been made, liked some stuff and then grew bored.

A sudden urge crept up on her so hastily she didn’t even register it until it was already done.

She was on Suhyun’s Instagram.

It had been more than a year when she unfollowed, and she hadn’t looked at it since then. Suddenly she felt hesitant. She didn’t particularly feel like digging all of that up again, but she couldn’t resist.

Carefully she scrolled through Suhyun’s latest updates, wryly smiling whenever there was a selca or a shitty quality clip of Suhyun singing. Ara could even feel her heartbeat speed up.

Her relationship with Suhyun had been one of her most treasured things in life and it had only been interrupted when Joe came to town.

She grew up. She changed. She left Suhyun behind. She stopped feeling.

Suhyun started hating her.

Ara bit her lip harshly, willing away the waves of emotions as she gripped her phone tightly. She wasn’t the same person as before and she was fine with that. She didn’t need Suhyun.

She had Joe, Seokyung and Minchan now. Better friends. Together they built what they had today. They made themselves popular. They made themselves strong.

Suhyun wouldn’t have done that.

She detested popularity and stereotypes. She wore black nail polish and spoke whenever she felt like it, often with a sharp tongue.

Ara didn’t need her. Ara had built herself an empire.

Yet she couldn’t help herself as she continued scrolling.

Suhyun was so beautiful, Ara couldn’t tear her eyes off a particular selca.

She was reminded of Joe’s disgust, finding out about the nature of Ara and Suhyun’s relationship. She remembered his words. How it was wrong and disgusting, how it wouldn’t help them gain anything and she would go to hell for it.

She remembered thinking that he was right. That she needed to stop being with Suhyun. Start being with Joe instead. It would make everything better. Make them popular. Remembered the betrayal when she found gay porn on his private tabs.

Remembered thinking, they could go to hell together.

A shrill tone ended her train of thought, a message popping up on her screen. Ara read it, feeling a wicked smile form on her lips.

Joe wanted them to use up the cocaine tonight. She answered with a thumbs up.

“I’m going to hell anyway,” she muttered, going back to Instagram and taking a screenshot of Suhyun’s selca.
“That’s crazy,” Johnny said, eyes wide. “So Lexie is the culprit,” he shook his head, sipping the hot chocolate in his cup. “We have to tell Mark.”

“Yeah,” Ten agreed. “If we tell him he can talk to Donghyuck again and they can confront Lexie about it.”

“Is that a good idea?” Taeil said, hesitant. They were currently at Taeyong’s house, Chenle and Jisung at the park with Sicheng and Jiwoo while Donghyuck grabbed Lucas and Jungwoo for a day at the mall with Suhyun and Jaemin.

“Why not?” Doyoung protested. “Let them teach her a lesson not to mess with people’s boyfriends.”

“If she drugged Mark she might be more cunning than we thought,” Taeil countered.

“I doubt she’ll be able to do anything if she’s alone,” Yuta skeptically spoke, sipping his hot chocolate. Taeyong sighed through his nose. It was all very confusing.

“Look,” Johnny said. “Our main priority now is to get Mark and Donghyuck back together. They’re both heartbroken because of a stupid girl who does not deserve that type of response. We need to help them.”

“Johnny’s right,” Taeyong agreed.

“Yeah. Let’s focus on that first,” Jaehyun nodded. “Let’s tell them both and then we’ll leave them to do whatever they want with the information.”

“Great, sounds like a plan,” Ten said, slumping back on the couch, obviously tired.

“I feel like we’re way too hung up on making plans,” Doyoung sighed loudly.

“Yeah, let’s lay off that for a while,” Yuta agreed. Taeyong couldn’t help but feel relieved. He honestly felt the same, they were involving themselves in way too many messes.

“Let’s just watch a k-drama instead and laugh at the stupid decisions the characters will inevitably make,” Yuta continued, reaching for the remote. They all nodded in agreement, feeling way too tired to do anything.

Taeyong quietly moved further into Jaehyun, leaning on his muscled shoulder, a smile pulling at his lips when Jaehyun’s arm came to rest on his shoulders. The other smelled like spices and Taeyong really enjoyed it.

The friends sat, watching the k-drama and, indeed, laughed and complained whenever the characters made stupid decisions. Which seemed to be the case more often than not.
Chapter 79

Chapter Notes

Happy New Years! Hope you’re having a good day :))

I have been reading a book, like an actual physical book, these last few days and I can honestly say it’s been so great to be away from the screen for a while XD

Now let’s hope that you’ll enjoy this chapter <3333

PS This is so not proofread so if there are any mistakes I’m sorry XD

Taeyong sat down with Donghyuck the very next day, looking grave and worried. Donghyuck raised an eyebrow at his brother, wondering why he had been summoned to Taeyong’s bedroom.

“What’s up hyung?” Donghyuck asked, fiddling with his fingers. Taeyong frowned.

“I spoke to Ara yesterday,” he started, “and I know why Mark did what he did.” Donghyuck could feel his heart pounding like crazy.

“How?” He breathed, eyes wide.

“Remember how Ara and her friends have been involved in drug use and other possibly illegal stuff?” Donghyuck nodded, Sicheng had told him all about that. “A couple of days ago she got me involved as well,” Taeyong proceeded to confess and relayed the happenings of the drug trade to Donghyuck who looked shell shocked. Donghyuck barely knew how to respond when Taeyong finished, grasping for words. He felt incredibly stunned that he had missed Taeyong getting involved in a drug trade. It did explain the anxiousness and fatigue he had been displaying. And he’d done it all for his brothers. Like always. Donghyuck felt a strong sense of pride, being reminded yet again of how strong his brother is and of his ability to do whatever needed to protect his brothers. He finally managed to make some sense of his thoughts.

“That’s really badass,” he said, smiling, Taeyong rolling his eyes. Although, Donghyuck could see a small smile pulling at his lips as well.

“Good to know I have your support to pursue my dream of being a drug courier,” Taeyong sarcastically stated. Donghyuck huffed, pouting playfully. Then he turned serious.

“You should really tell Sicheng about this as well,” he insisted. “I think the younger ones might be too young for this.”

“I will,” Taeyong assured. “Promise.”

“Wait,” Donghyuck said suddenly. “What does this have to do with Mark?” Taeyong bit his lip. Here it goes.

“That’s exactly it. Lexie spiked his drink,” he carefully told the younger. Donghyuck’s frown turned
into a surprised expression, eyes wide and glistening. He didn’t seem to be able to structure any coherent sentences. “Hyuck, it may sound stupid, cliche even, but he honestly didn’t mean it.”

“Mark was drugged?” Donghyuck croaked. Taeyong nodded and reached his arms out to catch Donghyuck when the younger fell forward.

“It wasn’t his fault,” Taeyong assured. “And it definitely wasn’t your fault, so don’t you dare think that for even a second,” he reminded the sophomore, stroking his hair tenderly. He felt a stray tear escape Donghyuck’s eye and rocked him gently.

“I need to talk to Mark,” Donghyuck decided, backing away and wiping at his cheeks. Taeyong smiled.

“Yes. You should do that.”

~

“He’s very pissed,” Suhyun said, barely keeping the anger out of her tone. Mark dragged his hand through his already tousled hair. He gripped the phone tightly. He had called Suhyun, having been cooped up for days without any of his friends to talk to. He felt too ashamed, but he had to get it out somehow. Suhyun seemed like a reasonable option.

“I know,” he despaired. “I don’t know what to do, I apologized and I tried to explain but it doesn’t even make sense to my own ears.”

“Honestly,” Suhyun sighed, “maybe give him some space to calm down? At this point I’m not sure if it’s gonna make him simmer in the anger or if it’s gonna make things better.” She seemed just as clueless as he was.

“I guess,” he buried his face in his pillow, lying face down on his bed in basketball shorts and a hoodie. He felt gross and sad and heartbroken.

“Mark?” His door opened gently, Johnny sticking his head in. Mark lifted his head from the pillow to look at his brother who seemed hesitant. “I need to talk to you.” Mark frowned.

“Suhyun I need to go, call you later?”

“Yeah sure,” she agreed, hanging up. Mark tossed his phone somewhere on his bed.

“Mark?” Johnny swiftly went inside, closing the door securely behind him and walking over to sit on Mark’s bed.

“Suhyun I need to go, call you later?”

“Yeah sure,” she agreed, hanging up. Mark tossed his phone somewhere on his bed.

“What is it, hyung?” He questioned in English, the honorific sticking. Johnny swiftly went inside, closing the door securely behind him and walking over to sit on Mark’s bed.

“I talked to Taeyong,” he started. “And I’m not even sure how to say this properly so I’ll just throw it out.” Johnny sucked in a deep breath, Mark’s brows furrowing in confusion. “At Jackson’s party, Lexie spiked your drink with some sort of drug that would make you more compliant and disoriented.” Mark’s eyes widened impossibly, the shock numbing him completely. He tried to recall the night. Tried to make sense of the information he had just been given. Lexie had drugged him.

He remembered getting the drink, Donghyuck leaving for a while, chatting with Jeno about their coach, getting caught up with Jooheon and his friend from the dance team, Soonyoung. And then it was all a big blob of confusion and hands all over him. Too soft, too sickly sweet, too much perfume. He didn’t like it. It wasn’t Donghyuck. He was sure, but it still felt good, so he went with it. His body reacting to the increase of hormones that came with the buzz of alcohol and to the touch. So much touching.
He felt himself going beet red, breaking out of the thoughts. He’d woken up the next day, feeling his head throbbing, figuring it was just a hangover.

Now he understood. He never would’ve done it if it weren’t for drugs. He felt so incredibly ashamed. Johnny was grabbing his shoulder.

“Mark?” He said, worried. “You okay?”

“No,” he breathed. “It’s not okay. It’s so not okay,” he said, laughing. It wasn’t happy. It was hollow and despairing. Johnny didn’t know what to say. “I need to speak with Donghyuck.”

“Go do that then,” Johnny encouraged softly. “Just remember. This is not something to get yourself hung up on. Stuff happens, it’s just a part of life. So please don’t beat yourself up over this.”

Johnny’s eyes were making sure to stare right into his soul, glimmering with fondness. Mark bit his lip, nodding his head.

“Okay. Thanks hyung,” he said and then he was gone, grabbing his phone, running down the stairs, yanking on his shoes and then exiting the house.

~

Donghyuck was almost running, breaths coming out in short puffs, creating a white cloud in the startling cold. His hands were freezing and his cheeks were rosy.

He needed Mark.

He wanted to tell him that it wasn’t his fault. That they could work it out. That he was in love with him.

Donghyuck felt his steps quickening as he noticed a figure up ahead, running towards him. The person was wearing shorts in the cold winter and a hoodie. Who was stupid enough to not wear proper clothes? He thought, huffing.

When the person grew closer he couldn’t help but smile. Of course. No one but Mark Lee.

“Hyuck!” The junior called out in surprise, his signature wide eyes lighting up. Donghyuck laughed and started sprinting toward him, their bodies colliding into a warm embrace; even though Mark’s teeth were practically clattering and Donghyuck’s fingers felt frozen on the other’s neck. It was still the warmest hug anyone could have wished for.

Mark buried his face in Donghyuck’s shoulder, breathing him in. Donghyuck smiled. The pain in his heart was alleviated, if only a bit. He felt at peace.

“I’m so sorry,” Mark whispered. Donghyuck shook his head.


“Oh,” he uttered, his brown hair sweeping in the cold winds, eyes still wide as he sucked in everything he could, from Donghyuck’s flushed cheeks to his moles. “I’m still sorry, for letting myself get drugged.” He avoided meeting Donghyuck’s gaze, instead staring at a mole on his cheek.

“Don’t be stupid,” Donghyuck scoffed gently. “It’s not your fault. Don’t think like that. I was hurt. And it was awful, but I know it wasn’t what you really wanted, right?”
“No of course not,” Mark assured, because it really wasn’t. “I much prefer your tan skin and peach hair over her pale ass everyday.” Donghyuck laughed, loudly, covering his mouth. Mark couldn’t help the wide smile on his face. “I am serious though,” he continued. “I am in love with you. No one else.” Mark’s cheeks flushed with the admission.

Donghyuck had a fond smile of his own on his lips.

“I’m in love with you too, Mark Lee.”

Mark bit his lip to stop from laughing with glee. He felt so incredibly happy. His eyes suddenly caught sight of something on Donghyuck’s face, his whole expression turning into one of shock. Donghyuck’s smile fell worriedly. But Mark couldn’t even think properly, his throat felt dry and his blood was rushing in his ears. Because, fuck-

“You got your nose pierced?” He said on an exhale. Donghyuck suddenly perked up, smiling again. His fingers played with the strands of hair on Mark’s nape.

“Yeah. Do you like it?” Mark nodded, dumbfounded. It looked so incredibly good. Crazy good. He was so gone.

So instead of talking he leaned forward to capture Donghyuck’s lips. They were soft and chapped, a pleased noise rising in his throat when Donghyuck kissed him back fiercely. This felt right. So right.

They kept kissing until they ran out of air, leaning their foreheads together. Suddenly it wasn’t as cold anymore.

And Donghyuck also realized that they were standing in the middle of a street in winter, kissing like there was no tomorrow. Donghyuck was glad that it was a mostly empty neighbourhood, hoping that no one was peeking at them from their window.

He suddenly felt a buzzing coming from his pocket, sighing as he broke away from Mark reluctantly to pluck his phone from his jeans. According to the caller ID it was Renjun. Mark kept holding on to his waist lightly, not wanting to let him go as they leaned over the phone together, Donghyuck accepting the call and putting it on speaker.

“Hyuck,” Renjun exclaimed as soon as the call went through. “Where are you?”

“I’m with Mark hyung, we’re taking a walk,” Donghyuck said, favoring that over ‘we are just making out on some random street’.

“What? You and Mark hyung? I thought you guys were fighting,” Renjun sounded confused.

“We were,” he considered, “but not anymore.”

“Oh my gosh, I don’t have time for this,” Renjun moaned. “Did you hear about what happened?” Donghyuck frowned, looking up at Mark to see him looking equally confused.

“No?” He answered. Renjun sighed.

“Jeez,” he muttered. “You know that Ara chick? The ‘queen bee of the junior classes’?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, her on-and-off boyfriend, Joe, overdosed on cocaine.”
Chapter 80

Chapter Notes

This is officially the first update of 2019 :))

Hope you’ll enjoy it ^_^ I really liked witting this one so I really hope it’s good <3

Word had spread like crazy in their little town. Everyone had heard of Joe’s unfortunate cocaine overdose, the whole community alight with gossip.

Taeyong sat, frowning, trying to focus when Chenle spoke of Daehwi after recently coming back from a play date with mentioned friend. Taeyong was biting his nails unconsciously, Chenle talking as if nothing was wrong. And to the eight year old; nothing was.

Taeyong couldn’t help but feel so incredibly guilty.

Johnny had been the one to call him after the news broke, telling him that Joe had overdosed on cocaine and was officially hospitalized. They had pumped his stomach but he had apparently not woken up yet and they declared that he was comatose. The newspaper was filled with photos of his grandparents, crying in a hospital waiting room, that had obviously been taken without their consent. Taeyong’s stomach churned. He had caused this. He was the one to deliver the drugs into their hands.

“Hyung?” Sicheng came into the living room, interrupting Chenle’s ranting. “Sorry Lele,” he apologized, sheepish. Chenle shrugged, carefree.

“It’s fine hyung,” he said and smiled brightly. “I’ll go play with Jisung.” The young boy got up and excitedly rushed up the stairs, screaming for Jisung. Sicheng smiled and walked over to sit next to Taeyong who tried to muster a smile as well.

“You okay?” Taeyong asked, knowing that Ara and her associates still made a touchy subject for Sicheng. Sicheng nodded minimally.

“I think so,” he said. “I have a meeting with Doctor Song tomorrow, so I’ll talk about it more with her.” Taeyong smiled, reaching out to pull Sicheng toward him, the younger melting into his side.

“You’re doing so great,” Taeyong said on an exhale. Sicheng felt his heart warm at the praise. He understood exactly what Taeyong meant. You’re so strong. You’re so mature. You’re so beautiful. I love you. I’ll always be there for you.

“You’re doing great too,” Sicheng said hoarsely. Thank you for taking care of us. Thank you for being understanding. Thank you for giving up your life for us.

Taeyong chuckled wetly, feeling overwhelmed with emotion.

“There’s something I have to tell you,” he said, squeezing Sicheng’s shoulders. The other angled his head so he was looking at Taeyong. And then Taeyong told him, about Ara threatening to hurt the
brothers. Of the drug trade. Of the recording. Of Lexie spiking Mark’s drink. Sicheng grew teary eyed with every word. He couldn’t believe Ara had gotten to both his big brother and his little brother. She was truly something.

Sicheng felt so guilty. Taeyong had done all of it for his brothers. No one else. He did everything for them. And Sicheng hated it. He despised that Taeyong couldn’t have his own life or his own choices because he was bound by them. By taking care of them. All because of some low life parents they hadn’t even met. Parents they couldn’t remember. Parents who never called or cared to contact them in any way.

They sent money, they kept a roof over their heads, but did it really matter? No.

They weren’t parents. They never were. The closest thing any of the brothers would get to a parent is Taeyong.

“I’m so sorry,” Sicheng croaked, eyed watering. Taeyong hugged him tightly.

“Why? Why are you sorry?”

“Because you’re giving up your life for us Sicheng managed to get out in between uneven breaths. Because you even dealt drugs for us. I’m so sorry.”

Taeyong sighed quietly, Sicheng could feel it.

“I know you’re still going to feel sorry even if I say it isn’t your fault, which it isn’t, because that’s just how it is,” Taeyong spoke. “Guilt. There will always be guilt within us, for one thing or another. For loving someone we’re not supposed to. For wearing clothes we’re not intended to. For speaking without being permitted to. For existing when it’s not even our choice to exist.”

Sicheng felt his breath hitch. Because Taeyong was right. There would always be guilt. No matter what.

“But with enough determination we can make it go away, if only to become a buzzing noise in the background, barely noticed,” Taeyong continued, sounding lost in his thoughts. His grip on Sicheng was still very much present though. “Like Hyuck and his makeup. He still feels ashamed sometimes when people stare too hard, but he doesn’t let it control him, he pushes it back and focused on the positive things. Guilt only brings misery, so please try to feel less sorry. Because you know I love you, all of you. And I never regret giving my life to you. I would do it over again if I would have to,” Taeyong vowed.

Sicheng’s tears were running freely now, a small smile gracing his lips.

“I love you too hyung,” he managed, voice barely a whisper. But Taeyong heard him.

And he understood.

~

Suhyun sighed through her nose. She was sitting at a café, waiting for Renjun and Jeno. She was scrolling through her phone, seeing the coverage of Joe’s overdose taking over her timeline.

It had been everything everyone was talking about the last two days. Suhyun didn’t like that the family was being so closely monitored. They should be given their privacy, but media sharks will do anything for the sake of gossip.
She couldn’t help herself from thinking about Ara. Everyone knew Ara and Joe were involved, yet no one had heard anything about the queen bee of the junior classes. So even though Suhyun really didn’t want to think about her she couldn’t stop herself.

Her fingers hovered over the phone number she had pretended to delete one year ago. Should she really send a message?

Suhyun sighed again, red lips smacking together in exasperation. No, she shouldn’t.

Just then, a body landed in the chair opposite hers, she looked up expecting it to be Jeno or Renjun, only to gawk at the sight in front of her.

Ara.

She hadn’t changed. Her hair was still the same, long, flowing and smooth. A hoodie hugged her frame, jeans accompanying the look. Usually Ara wore dresses or skirts, feminine garments, but Suhyun knew she liked oversized clothing. Sometimes the only thing she wore when they used to spend time together at home was a huge T-shirt. Her lips were still full and pouty, exactly like it used to be. Yet so different.

Ara had changed. Suhyun knew that. She had changed so much. Her face wore a haunting shadow, her fingers fiddled with whatever they could reach. Ara never used to fiddle before. Her mouth was a tense line, not smiling like the Ara Suhyun used to know. She had changed.

“Hi,” Ara said, quietly. Suhyun frowned. She didn’t answer for quite a while. Ara was shifting uneasily in her chair.

“What are you doing?” Suhyun finally said, tone cold. She found herself twirling her hair in her fingers, the red strands catching on her numerous rings.

“I’m leaving, tomorrow,” Ara blurted out, sounding rushed. Suhyun was confused. It was unlike Ara to be so unorganized. Maybe it wouldn’t have been one year ago, but now it certainly was. Ara always spoke with confidence and determination, that’s how she convinced her victims as Suhyun liked to call them. That’s how she convinced Minchan to try smoking. How she convinced Seokyung to vandalize a car. How she convinced Lexie that popularity was the key to a successful life. How she convinced Suhyun that she still loved her even though they both knew it was a desperate attempt to keep Suhyun in her clutches.

At least Suhyun got out of it.

“Leaving?” She questioned.

“My parents are sending me to a private school in Seoul. They think it would do me good to get away from town. Especially after last night,” Ara clarified. Suhyun could feel her eyes widening, so Ara’s parents finally found out that their daughter is a drug addict. About time. “I’m not supposed to be outside, but I had to talk to you.” Suhyun grew suspicious.

“Why? Why talk to me? We haven’t spoken for a year,” Suhyun couldn’t wrap her head around it. Ara sighed.

“I just needed to tell you,” Ara started hesitantly, quietly, looking around anxiously, “that I’ve never stopped thinking about you. About how happy I was when we were friends,” she looked down at her lap. “When we were more than that.”

Suhyun inhaled deeply, steeling herself.
“I’m sorry things turned out the way they did,” Ara sighed.

“Would you quit drugs if I had asked?” Suhyun’s tone was icy. Ara frowned. “Would you have stopped manipulating people into joining your scheme. Do you even care about any of the people you’ve caused pain. Do you even feel sorry for them. Do you feel sorry that your sister almost ruined a relationship? Did you feel indignant when Joe bashed some of my best friends for being gay?” Suhyun fired. Ara didn’t say anything. “That’s just it. You can’t feel anymore. I know your parents didn’t care when you were little. They probably still don’t. They’re probably just sending you away because of the shame that comes with admitting that their daughter is a manipulative drug addict,” all the emotions were just pouring out of her.

“You only care about me because I was the last person you felt real emotions for. I was the last one you were capable of caring for. That’s why you feel sorry and you feel remorse about losing me, but not about the terrible things you’ve done to so many people. You’ve ruined lives. Because after you changed, you stopped feeling. And now you barely remember how to do it,” Ara looked so incredibly lost, Suhyun felt her heart clench.

“I feel sorry for you,” she whispered. “The twisted way you see the world, the way you believe that popularity will give you everything. The way you taught Lexie how to be so she would be just as cunning as you because you think that that’s what she needs to be. I don’t know if it’s because of Joe or because of you or your fucked up parents but I still feel sorry for you. Because look where you’ve ended up,” Suhyun gestured towards Ara. “You got the popularity you praise so highly, you got the grades, you got the guy you thought would be right, you got the ‘respect’, but you’re miserable.”

Ara’s eyes were starting to fill up with tears. Suhyun powered through.

“You’re miserable because your friends aren’t really your friends. They’re just scared of you. Your parents don’t care for you, your sister only cares for her own selfish goals, like getting Mark. And your boy is hospitalized because of an overdose. And you don’t know how to feel real emotions. Your trapped in your own thoughts and prejudices, your very own hell. So I feel sorry for you. I pity you, Ara.”

Ara was gripping the table so harshly that her knuckles turned white, her perfectly manicured nails a stark contrast against her pale skin. She kept her tears at bay though and Suhyun regarded her supposed indifference with a cold expression. Because like Suhyun knew, Ara didn’t feel anymore.

Sicheng sighed as he laid in bed, messing around on his phone. It was late and he had a meeting with doctor Song the following day but he felt restless.

Joe’s overdose had made him feel very uncomfortable. He didn’t even feel sorry for the junior which only made him feel worse because it felt very heartless of him to not even care that someone was currently hospitalized and possibly dying.
He knew that with Joe in the hospital and Ara having seemingly disappeared, Seokyung and Minchan wouldn’t try anything. No one would have to feel scared of being coerced by Ara or harassed by Joe. And Sicheng felt happy.

But he also felt guilty about feeling happy.

That damn guilt again.

Just like Taeyong had said. It’s always there.

His phone lit up with a message and Sicheng opened it eagerly.

sichengieeeeee

Sicheng smiled. Yuta was truly something.

what do u want?

ur love, give it to me pls

what do i gain from that?

my eternal love and respect :)

hmm doesn’t sound like anything id want

you can inherit all my fortune when i die

like your life time supply of ramen and some dusty chocolate? I thought you were a broke student?

just take my heart then

pass

:(

i told you to stop using smileys

and I told you to accept my love, but I guess we can’t all have what we want :)

ugh

Sicheng couldn’t stop smiling at his phone. He found Yuta so incredibly nice and easy going, it comforted him to know that he had such a good hyung to rely on.

Yuta responded with a heart and Sicheng snorted, locking his phone. Sleep seemed to catch up to him and he yawned involuntarily before finally getting himself comfortable and ready to sleep. His guilt had steadily been pushed to the back of his mind, to be dealt with another day. For now, he would focus on the positive things.
Jungwoo was quiet by nature. He didn’t speak much and when he did, it sounded soft and gentle. He didn’t care for raised voices and shrill tones, much like the ones most of his brothers used. Like Donghyuck being outspoken about every opinion he had, or Lucas exclaiming his every thought or Chenle always talking about everything he does in a day. Sicheng was more like Jungwoo, Jungwoo found that Sicheng was also more quiet and observant than he was outgoing. Same with Jisung. They knew he was unusually quiet for a four year old even though they knew he can speak very well if he needs to. Taeyong stayed somewhere in the middle. Jungwoo found it interesting when observing his eldest brother, finding that he spoke excitedly but he also observed just as diligently.

Since Jungwoo was a quiet person he also had a nick for thinking a lot. His mind was always full of fleeting thoughts and him pondering the ways of life. When you didn’t speak, it all piled up in your mind instead. Jungwoo knew and accepted that he didn’t talk a lot and people might find that hard to approach, but he also knew that friends he gained would always be true ones.

Dami and Soyeon were great people. They had approached Jungwoo only a couple of weeks ago during lunch one day when he was sitting alone as usual. Lucas and Jungwoo didn’t have the same lunch hours, causing Jungwoo to always eat alone, although it also made him happy because then Lucas wouldn’t make dumb excuses to sit with him when he had actual friends to sit with which would make Jungwoo feel awful.

When Dami and Soyeon first sat down at his table he was prepared for scathing remarks and glares, but found himself pleasantly surprised when they simply introduced themselves and asked how he was holding up, having seen that one encounter of him and the bullies. Jungwoo found himself talking comfortably with them during the remaining lunch time.

Ever since, they’d been hanging out during school hours. He could safely say that they were friends. Which is why they were the first ones he called when Taeyong announced that they were having a New Years party.

Donghyuck’s jaw had dropped when Taeyong said those words, because why on earth would they have a party?! Although it had been cleared up pretty quickly when Taeyong said it was only for close friends. That they could invite some people of their choice, preferably their closest friends, and they would have a dinner party with games and a movie while hopefully being able to stay awake until the new year. Nothing fancy. After all it wasn’t actually the Korean New Year, so they didn’t want anything crazy.

Jungwoo had been eager to invite his friends. He hadn’t seen them outside of school except for one visit to the convenience store during a break and he was excited to introduce them to his family.

“Sure, I’ll come!” Soyeon accepted, sounding cheerful. Jungwoo’s beating heart calmed slightlyw as
he wasn’t rejected. He was so used to not having friends. It felt nice to actually have some.

“Great,” he breathed, laughing slightly.

The same positive response came when he asked Dami and Jungwoo was overjoyed.

He really hoped New Year would be much better than Christmas was.

~

Donghyuck invited Jeno, Renjun, Jaemin and Suhyun. While doing that he also told them that he and Mark were back together which garnered some cheers and some rage when they heard what had actually happened. Donghyuck felt incredibly giddy when he called Mark and asked him to come as well. The hurt wasn’t completely gone, it still buzzed in the depth of his heart and he would need to talk some more with his boyfriend. Mark accepted his invitation and gladly agreed to come earlier so they could talk.

Donghyuck felt uncharacteristically nervous when the time came for Mark to arrive. Taeyong had invited Jaehyun over early as well to help with preparations of the food so Mark wasn’t the only one coming through the door when Chenle opened it.

“Hey,” Donghyuck greeted the junior who was dressed up in a blue sweater and fancy jeans. He looked like boyfriend material if Donghyuck could say so himself. Mark smiled when he saw the younger.

“Hi,” he breathed, walking forward to grab Donghyuck’s hand. They accidentally caught each other’s eyes and held the gaze. Until Jaehyun cleared his throat. They turned to see him standing with Taeyong in the doorframe, a suggestive expression on his face while Taeyong smiled at them.

“Don’t at me Jaehyun hyung,” Donghyuck whined and dragged Mark upstairs instead where they could be alone.

They settled on Donghyuck’s bed together, silence filling the air. Mark was fiddling with his fingers, biting his lip. Donghyuck exhaled a sigh.

“Honestly, I still feel hurt,” he started quietly. Mark frowned but didn’t look up. “I just can stop thinking about it and it’s eating away at my mind.”

“Please,” Mark breathed, cutting him off. “Please don’t break up with me.” He pleaded, voice weak. Donghyuck could feel his eyes widening.

“Why?” He asked, curiosity getting the best of him. He obviously wasn’t planning to but now he wanted to know why Mark thought so. Mark did look up then, clearly not expecting that response thus his wide eyes. His wider than normal eyes.

“Because I like you,” he said, desperate, afraid that Donghyuck was actually going to break up with him. “Because I can’t bear the thought of not seeing your smile or holding your hand or talking to you. Please Hyuck.”

“I’m not breaking up with you,” Donghyuck said, smiling slightly. Mark looked incredibly relieved and Donghyuck’s heart warmed when the junior grabbed his hand loosely, carefully. “I just want you to know, that I might seem a bit hesitant for a while, until I stop seeing the image of you and Lexie every time I see you,” he said. Mark looked so sad at that, Donghyuck felt his heart hurting for the boy. It really wasn’t his fault. “But I still like you too hyung. Promise.” Donghyuck held out his pinky, teasingly wiggling it. Mark scoffed but smiled and linked their pinkies together.
“Cross my heart and hope to die,” Mark said sincerely in English, voice low. Donghyuck shivered at the words, understanding the meaning even though he couldn’t exactly understand the words.

~

Jaehyun enjoyed spending time with Taeyong a lot. The other was so quirky and fun and cute and hot and beautiful all at the same time. Jaehyun could feel his heart going at a constant high pace when being in the same room as Taeyong. Especially when Taeyong playfully bumped their hips together while cooking. Jaehyun didn’t know what to do with himself.

Preparations took about an hour, and guests started pouring in when they were done.

Doyoung and Taeil arriving together, then Yuta, Johnny and Ten. Dami and Soyeon who were apparently Jungwoo’s friends. Daehwi and Somi, Chenle literally squealing when greeting them. Doyeon, Rocky and Yuqi for Lucas. Jeno, Jaemin, Jeno and Suhyun. Some kids named Guanlin and Jeongin for Jisung and finally Kun. Sicheng had opted to invite only Kun as he knew Jiwoo and Somin were on a trip to Seoul, Matthew was visiting his family in the US and J. Seph was also spending the break with his family.

It was quite the gathering of people of all different ages. Luckily they all seemed to get along well. Jaehyun saw Chenle and his friends attaching themselves to Kun while Jisung waddled over to Jaemin, grabbing the older and wanting him to play with him and his friends. Taeyong made sure to make some small talk with Dami and Soyeon, looking very smiley and happy. Johnny jumped into playing with Chenle and his friends, joining Kun. Yuta was conversing with Sicheng while Mark and Donghyuck day with their friends, Doyoung having taken up a seat with them as well. Taeil and Ten had migrated to Lucas and his friends, seemingly to have a very animated conversation about something.

Jaehyun shook his head at the madness and continued to cook. Taeyong eventually joined him again by the counter.

“This is chaos,” Jaehyun commented teasingly. Taeyong huffed.

“It is not, everyone is enjoying themselves,” he argued and poked Jaehyun’s stomach with his finger. Jaehyun faked immense pain and folded in on himself.

“Ouch, way to break my ribs,” he dramatically exclaimed and Taeyong laughed at him.

“Stop being a baby,” he said. Jaehyun smirked and straightened himself out again.

“You need to kiss it better,” he argued petulantly, unexpectedly making Taeyong blush. Jaehyun felt smug, although the smile dropped off his face when feather light pressure was applied to his cheek. Then it was gone. Taeyong leaned back quickly, averting his eyes. Jaehyun could feel his cheeks burning. Taeyong’s pillowy pink lips had just been on his cheek. Holy-

“Let’s check on the others,” Taeyong mumbled and jumped off the counter hastily before disappearing. Jaehyun was left, dumbstruck.

~

The evening passed quickly, dinner a boisterous and loud affair, then the games planned by Johnny who was the unofficial game master. Overall everything was very well received.

Some of the kids got picked up before midnight, obviously, like Guanlin and Jeongin, Daehwi and Somi. Then Rocky, Doyeon and Yuqi as well.
They were watching a movie while Dami, Soyeon and Lucas all fell asleep before midnight, Jungwoo following into dreamland soon enough. They were all squished together on a mountain of pillows on the floor.

Chenle and Jisung had passed out pretty much as soon as their friends left, apparently taking all their energy with them. Taeyong and Yuta had carried them to bed.

The rest managed to stay awake, chatting quietly in between themselves while they waited for the new year. Kun and Ten had engaged in a conversation about magic tricks, Yuta and Doyoung arguing over something, Renjun giving his input every now and then. Johnny chatted with Mark and Jeno while Suhyun and Donghyuck were painting their nails. Donghyuck decided to paint Lucas’ nails too, seeing as the sleeping boy was unmoving. Taeyong scolded him lightly but nothing serious. Jaehyun was currently leaning back in the armchair, feeling deeply tired, but he fought to keep his eyes open.

Taeyong returned from talking to Jaemin and fell down next to Jaehyun heavily. They barely fit on the armchair, squished together tightly, Taeyong’s head on Jaehyun’s firm chest. The brunet hoped he couldn’t feel his wildly beating heart.

Jaehyun put his arm around the other, relaxing further down into the comfortable armchair.

“What’s your favorite day of the week?” Jaehyun murmured, drowsy. Taeyong hummed.

“I like Sunday,” he said eventually after thinking. Jaehyun frowned.

“That’s like everyone’s hate day,” Jaehyun argued. Taeyong scoffed.

“I know. But I like it. It’s the end of a week and the start of another one. It feels very promising,” Taeyong told him. “What about you?”

“Thursday,” Jaehyun stated. “It’s the day before Friday which means it’s the promise of rest and the happiness that comes with a weekend.”

Taeyong hummed in approval.

The time was nearing twelve, Johnny shouting at them to get up and get out so they could watch fireworks. Jaehyun and Taeyong reluctantly got up and followed the others outside. Taeyong found himself huddling into Jaehyun’s side as the winter cold of the night hit them. Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun were hugging each other, Mark and Donghyuck holding hands, Suhyun stomping around to keep warmth while Kun and Sicheng were smiling through clattering teeth.

Ten latched onto Johnny while Doyoung had been smart enough to actually put on his jacket and not just his shoes, Taeil having done the same. Yuta was jogging in his spot, talking to Sicheng and Kun at the same time.

Eventually Donghyuck brought up his phone and started the countdown.

When they reached twelve o’clock the sky exploded with fireworks.

It was a beautiful mix of colors all across the rainbow, some lanterns weaving through the gorgeous patterns. Jaehyun had always loved fireworks, finding himself smiling as he hugged Taeyong closer. The red head was strung up at the sky with a glimmer in his eye, childlike and pure, the fireworks reflected on his pupils, creating bursts of beauty.

Jaehyun barely registered leaning down and pressing a soft kiss to Taeyong’s rosy cheek. The senior
jolted at the motion and stared at Jaehyun with wide eyes. Jaehyun simply smiled and looked away, feeling Taeyong’s gaze burning on the side of his head. His heart was racing like crazy. He really wanted to lean in and kiss Taeyong right on the lips, right there, right under the beautiful sky filled with fireworks. But he didn’t dare to. Sure, he’d been getting vibes from Taeyong but he couldn’t be sure. Taeyong was a clingy person by nature. What if it was all platonic? Jaehyun felt scared which was a first. Although he knew having a crush was also not something he often experienced, therefore he was at a loss.

Donghyuck went around, giving everyone a kiss on the cheek, except for Mark who got a peck on the lips.

Jaehyun’s eyes crinkled when Donghyuck’s glossy lips landed on his cheek and he watched fondly as Taeyong broke away from him to catch Donghyuck in his arms and accept the kiss. They were roughly the same height. Jaehyun liked that Taeyong was petite. It made his heart stutter.

Donghyuck was held in Taeyong’s embrace for a while, the two brothers watching the sky with identical wondrous expression. Jaehyun backed away quietly to give them some space. But he still heard them.

“This is better than Christmas right?” Taeyong questioned gently.

“Yeah, I love it,” Donghyuck responded softly.

Jaehyun suddenly understood why Taeyong must’ve come up with the idea to have a party. Because their Christmas had gotten dull since Donghyuck and Mark were fighting.

Taeyong truly was something. Someone. Someone great.

Someone Jaehyun would love to kiss and hug and hold and call his own while also giving himself to Taeyong. He gave a small smile at the thoughts, shaking his head slightly. He was so gone for Lee Taeyong.
Chapter 82

Chapter Notes

Oh wow school is starting soon again for me and I don’t want to. I am seriously so opposed to school right now. We need longer breaks :/
Now I’m gonna go play Mario Kart :)

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <3333

It was the third day of school after the break and Ten was feeling ready to snap. Every little thing seemed to agitate him. Doyoung’s bunny teeth. Taeil’s chewing habit. Johnny being ridiculously tall. Yuta’s stupidly bright smile.

Ten was on the verge of a breakdown. The dance competition of a lifetime was approaching and he was stressing about the choreography every day even though Taeyong assured him it was a great choreo but then someone got a move wrong and he was just agitated again.

Although, what bothered Ten the most, was Jaehyun. He was so sick of Jaehyun he might just scream.

Which is why he marched right into lunch, grabbed Jaehyun’s arm, dragged him out of his seat, his food falling back to his plate and then forcefully pulled him all the way to a relatively empty hallway.

All of their friends had looked after them with confusion. Jaehyun was currently looking at Ten with confusion.

“What’s up?” He questioned quietly, figuring it was something serious. Ten scowled.

“What’s up, is you being a complete airhead,” Ten hissed. Jaehyun recoiled in surprise. “I am so sick and tired of life right now and you ogling Taeyong like a full course meal is not helping. I’m so sick of your stupid ass skittering around with lovesick eyes and stupid ‘favorite’ questions and that damn smile you’re always displaying,” Ten managed in one breath, clearly agitated. “You need to do something or I’m going to lose my mind!”

“You’re losing your mind?” Jaehyun scoffed in disbelief. “I’m the one losing my mind. Even if I wanted to do something I don’t know what the hell it would be. I can’t very well ask him to go on a date.”

Ten stared at him with wide crazed eyes. The boy really was stupid.

“Yes,” he gritted out. “Yes! That’s exactly what you can do!”

“I can’t just up and ask him,” Jaehyun protested. Ten was gripping at his hair. Jaehyun was honestly so frustrating it wasn’t even funny anymore. It was painfully obvious that Jaehyun had a crush on their resident red head.

“I am so done with your shit. From now on we will make sure that he knows your intentions until
you gather up your balls enough to actually ask him out,” Ten decided, eyes wide and a bit crazed. Only a bit. Jaehyun gulped.

“Okay,” he whispered in defeat, Ten huffing before storming off.

Friggin lovesick fools.

~

Taeyong had always been a clingy person. He liked physical contact and he loved showing affection. Usually this only extended to his brothers, but ever since they moved into town he had gathered some friends that he was actually comfortable enough to cuddle and cling to. Yuta, Jaehyun, Taeil. Ten, Johnny, Doyoung. And to some extent, Jonghyun and Lisa.

Taeyong was currently curled up next to Johnny, tiredly reading a history book over his shoulder. They had been given homework to read a couple of pages for history, which was exactly what they were doing. The library was buzzing with energy and Taeyong just felt drained. He was incredibly tired from having stayed up with Chenle who had had a nightmare. Now he couldn’t focus. Instead of reading, he put his head on Johnny’s shoulder and buried his face in the tall male’s neck, making Johnny shiver.

“You’re nose is cold,” he complained fondly and Taeyong whined quietly, yet Johnny made no move to remove Taeyong from his current position.

Ara’s departure to a private school and Joe’s overdose were the hot new gossip at their school, which made Taeyong feel a bit better because people had finally stopped, to some extent, gossiping about him. He was old news, which he liked just fine. Much better than being scrutinized everywhere he went for simply existing.

Johnny turned the page, sighing a bit, which made Taeyong smile because he knew the history book was boring. Incredibly boring. And he would much rather spend time cuddling Johnny than reading it. Even though Johnny was tall and muscular he made for a very soft pillow.

Doyoung slammed his books down in front of them, jolting Taeyong from his relaxed state. Doyoung was frowning as he aggressively opened one of his numerous books.

“What’s up?” Johnny questioned, raising an eyebrow at the dark haired senior. Doyoung gritted his teeth.

“My mentor says I need some sort of extra credits to get a full score on my grades at the end of the term,” he said. Taeyong bit his lip. Doyoung was apparently having the same problem as Taeil had before Taeyong managed to score him a tutoring job.

“Try out for sports?” Johnny said, already knowing what Doyoung would think of that.

“Never in my fucking life would I do that,” he hissed. Exactly what Johnny had been expecting then.

“Maybe something to do with singing?” Taeyong suggested, furrowing his eyebrows in thought. Doyoung actually perked up at that. “Maybe you could create some sort of music course for kids?”

“That’s brilliant!” Doyoung exclaimed, slamming his book shut again. “I need to go. Thanks Taeyong!” He shouted before practically throwing all his stuff in his bag and running out of the library.

“You’re welcome,” Taeyong whispered, shaking his head with a laugh. Johnny scoffed and turned
back to his book with a small smile.

“Glad he solved it so quickly at least,” Johnny said, shrugging a bit. Taeyong put his head back on Johnny’s soft shoulder.

“Me too,” he agreed.

~

Mark was in a constant state of anxiety. Nothing had really changed. He drove Donghyuck to school. Donghyuck, Jaemin, Renjun and Suhyun sat on the bleachers during basketball practice more often than not. He did all his homework and he attended every basketball practice, doing no worse than normal.

Yet, he still felt so removed from the situations in his life. He didn’t know how to look at Donghyuck without feeling guilt. Couldn’t face his friends without feeling shame. Couldn’t talk to his brother because he didn’t want to worry him. He just felt the whole concept of the party and the drugging and Lexie weighing him down. Wearing him down. Beating him down.

He was sitting in the music room, plucking at the strings of his guitar, trying to find some positivity, something to write lyrics about, something to create, but he came up blank. He felt so confused.

The door opened and Doyoung walked in, rushed. There was a smile on his face though as he walked right up to the printer. The music room was being used as a semi office space since it wasn’t used frequently by anyone except for Mark.

Mark cleared his throat, making Doyoung turn around quickly.

“Don’t do that,” he protested, holding his chest as if his heart was about to burst out of it.

“Sorry hyung,” Mark shrugged slightly, continuing to pluck at his guitar strings. Doyoung was still waiting for his papers to finish printing and he did notice Mark seemed very down. So he walked over and took a seat next to the teen.

“Why so down?” Doyoung questioned in butchered English, making Mark chuckle.

“Nothing hyung,” he sighed, in Korean, not looking at the older. Doyoung scoffed.

“There’s obviously something,” the senior pointed out. “Is it something illegal? Did you murder someone?”

“No!” Mark protested quickly. “I didn’t do anything.”

“Then what, c’mon you can tell me. Promise I won’t tell anyone unless you want me to,” Doyoung swore and Mark did know that Doyoung wasn’t one for breaking promises.

“I just,” he started, breaking off quickly to gather himself, “I can’t stop thinking about the party. I was being so stupid, not paying attention. And I hurt Donghyuck so much,” he agonized. Doyoung frowned.

“Okay firstly. You weren’t being stupid. It could’ve happened to anyone. Lexie has her eyes on you, of course she would succeed if she really wanted to,” Doyoung stated as if it was obvious. “Secondly, have you ever thought about that you’re actually hurting yourself now too?” Mark looked up from the floor in confusion.
“What?”

“By thinking about this over and over, thinking about shame and guilt and all those idiotic stuff,” Doyoung said, “you’re making yourself miserable. You’ve already made up with Donghyuck, and even if he needs some time to fully trust you again, it doesn’t help to make yourself depressed and anxious about something that cannot be changed.” Mark was looking at him with wide eyes. “It may sound ridiculous, but try to be positive about things. You still have your friends and boyfriend. And eventually the awkwardness will fade and you’ll be the bestest of boyfriends again. Just stop thinking so much, okay?” Doyoung finished, smiling crookedly at him. Mark’s mind was spinning. Be positive. Won’t change anything. You still have Donghyuck.

“Thanks hyung,” he said eventually, finding himself smiling slightly. His thoughts didn’t go away in a flash, but he did feel better. He just needed to change his thinking up a bit.

“No problem,” Doyoung winked and got up to head towards the printer. “You should probably teach that Lexie kid a lesson though. Or get Donghyuck or Suhyun to do it. I’m sure they’d be thrilled.”

“Are you honestly telling me to ‘teach her a lesson’,” Mark scoffed. “That’s not morally correct.”

“I didn’t say to do anything morally incorrect. But if you did I wouldn’t tattle,” Doyoung said, nonchalant.

“Hyung.” Mark was scandalized.

“I’m completely innocent. I haven’t said a thing,” Doyoung hummed as he gathered his papers and starting whistling a happy tune before leaving the music room with a devilish wink.

Mark couldn’t help but smile.
I started school today. Kill me.

It’s a bit short but hope you’ll enjoy this XD

Taeyong watched fondly as Lucas and Taeil sat across from each other in the kitchen. Lucas’ math book was open and the younger was biting his tongue as he tried to solve a problem. Taeil was patiently explaining it to him with a gentle smile until Lucas lit up with understanding and Taeyong felt very fond of them both. He patted himself on the back for coming up with such a good idea. He was currently drying dishes after having had a snack time. Unconsciously, his thoughts floated away to Jaehyun. Taeyong has always been very aware of himself. Something he thought came with being an older brother to people of very different personalities and thoughts. He had to be flexible in his mindset.

Therefore he knew that he was definitely having feelings for Jaehyun. The gentle senior with the gorgeous dimples, pale skin, muscular body, funny remarks, subtly sassy one liners, genuine concern and genuine smiles. Taeyong was well aware of his infatuation. The understanding had dawned upon him during New Years. The feeling of Jaehyun’s lips on his cheek, of his own lips on Jaehyun’s, it was all so incredibly clear and bright. He still felt his heart speed up with the excitement of even thinking about it.

But even though he knew of his interest, he couldn’t say for sure about Jaehyun. The male was reserved, not one for excessive amounts of skinship, not one for boisterous shouting and messing around. When he had energy he would, otherwise he was usually calm and composed, observant and calculating. Taeyong couldn’t read him. Jaehyun did return his cheek peck and he did do this thing where he smiled every time he saw Taeyong but it wasn’t enough to go on.

Besides, even if Taeyong wanted a relationship, he didn’t know if it was a good idea. Honestly, he wasn’t a virgin, but he had still never had a real relationship. They moved too frequently, they kept too many secrets and he was usually closed up about himself, but this time Jaehyun knew of his secrets, knew him as a person and he still stuck with him. The only problem remaining was the moving. Because Taeyong knew it would happen. He may be eighteen, almost nineteen, and technically an adult but he could never leave his brothers. The thought made him shiver in fear. Jisung was only four. He had a responsibility to uphold.

In conclusion, Taeyong could easily say that he was torn between his feelings and thoughts.

“Hyung?” A voice broke him out of his elaborate thinking. Taeyong jerked in surprise and almost dropped the plate he’d been drying for almost a minute. Lucas was looking at him curiously.

“You’ve been wiping the same plate for forever,” he pointed out. Taeyong rolled his eyes and finally put the plate where it was supposed to be.

“Just got lost in thought,” he dismissed the question in Lucas’ eyes, smiling slightly. Lucas shrugged and went back to his math. Taeil looked at Taeyong with some concern but focused back on helping
Taeyong sighed quietly to himself.

“I just feel relieved,” Sicheng said, not looking at doctor Song, instead facing the floor. She regarded him with a smile. “I’m a horrible person.”

“You’re not,” she reassured easily. “You’re simply human. Relief is a completely natural feeling when the situation looks like this. Besides he’s not dead. He is only comatose which can definitely change. But then you’ll also know that he can’t hurt you the same way,” Doctor Song moved a bit in her seat. “Because you have let it go.”

Sicheng had been talking about Joe and Ara a lot that particular session. Doctor Song was good as always, simply laying things out for him to make it clearer.

“I have?” He questioned, confused. Doctor Song chuckled.

“Yes,” she confirmed. “I can see that you don’t hold yourself the same way when talking about them. You’re not scared. You don’t fear them. You feel guilty about being happy that one of them overdosed but you don’t feel fear about the future.”

Sicheng tried to think. Did he feel scared?

Not quite anymore. He couldn’t quite pinpoint it, but the fear of them wasn’t as prominent. He hadn’t been bothered at all lately, focusing more on himself and his friends which was a great thing. Ara and Joe didn’t take up as much space in his mind anymore.

“Even if Joe wakes up,” doctor Song pondered. “I could guess that he wouldn’t be allowed back to school for a while. He might even get a sentence for illegal drug use. Community service or juvie, or maybe he’ll get transferred to a different school like Ara. We can’t know, but I’m certain you won’t feel much fear at all when that happens.”

Sicheng nodded, dazed. Exactly. He wouldn’t. Even if Joe did wake up, it wouldn’t matter much, because he was starting to finally let go of everything that happened, filling his mind with the current instead. His friends, who were great. And his brothers, especially Taeyong, who will always protect him. Sicheng has definitely learned that lesson.

The concept of actually moving on from the bad made Sicheng feel so very happy and relieved. Like something had finally slotted together in his mind, making him see more clearly.

He was moving on.

Taeyong tapped his foot to the beat as he fiddled with Jaehyun’s bracelets, unfastening and fastening them periodically. They were sharing earbuds, sitting in history class. Their teacher had gone out for a while because of something urgent and told them to read some pages. Which they’d finished doing several minutes ago. Therefore Taeyong had dragged out his earphones and held out a bud to Jaehyun who gladly took it.

Taeyong was resting his head on the desk, looking at Jaehyun who was leaning on the palm of his left hand, eyes closed, his right wrist in Taeyong’s grasp.
Taeyong smiled gently at the sight of him and continued playing with the numerous bracelets. It felt soothing to do something with his hands and his whole body shivered when he brushed his fingers against Jaehyun’s smooth skin. Taeyong looked back up only to find Jaehyun looking back at him, brown eyes imploring and dark. They held each other’s gazes for too long. Longer than would be considered socially acceptable until Taeyong finally broke off.

The teacher picked that exact moment to walk inside, looking winded and grim.

“Okay class, back to the revolution,” Jaehyun sighed and Taeyong snorted quietly behind his hand, sharing a short smile with Jaehyun before turning off the music and putting away the earbuds.

~

Doyoung was smiling as he nursed a cup of tea. Taeil was next to him, Yuta, Johnny and Jaehyun on the opposite couch. They were currently at the karaoke café Doyoung frequented, Décalcomanie Café, and had just recently ordered from the same waitress as last time, Wendy. They were waiting for food to arrive.

“Where’s Taeyong and Ten?” Yuta questioned, trying to finish up an assignment he had completely forgotten about while using Jaehyun’s finished assignment as a cheat.

“Extra dance practice. Ten is going crazy apparently,” Johnny answered, shaking his head slightly. They all knew how important the competition was for Ten. He had always wanted a scholarship to the university hosting the competition.

Yuta hummed in understanding.

“Speaking of dance,” Doyoung said conspiratorially. “Taeyong gave me an awesome idea yesterday,” he revealed. Yuta looked up from his notebook at that.


“For an extracurricular activity,” Doyoung explained, sipping his tea. “I’m creating a talent show for the school!”

Johnny’s eyebrows raised impossibly.

“Wow,” Taeil nodded. “That’s actually a cool idea.”

“I know,” Doyoung was still smiling. “I’m going to hold some auditions and make sure the best of the best is presented, then we will host the grand event and give out some great prices. I’ve already made the posters,” he told them excitedly, opening his bag and pulling out a paper. It said time and place for auditioning for their first ever talent show. All grades were allowed to compete.

“That’s great,” Jaehyun agreed, actually finding the idea genius. A talent show would be a great activity to attend and Doyoung would absolutely get high extracurricular scores for that.

“I’m gonna put up the posters tomorrow and try to gather some people who might need an extra curricular activity as well, to create some sort of a committee to help me organize everything,” Doyoung told them. He obviously had everything planned out in his head which made Jaehyun smile.

“It sounds perfect,” Taeil assured with a laugh and Doyoung rolled his eyes at them.

“Anyway,” he dismissed. “I’m thinking of coming up with some judges for the actual show. People
who won’t be biased,” he pondered. “I was thinking of Yongsun noona and her friends. They’re musically educated to a certain extent and I believe most people will be performing during the show.”

“I think I know two more people who could be judges,” Taeil said, lighting up. “Baekhyun hyung and Sehun hyung from my work. They most probably won’t be biased.” He said with a small laugh. Doyoung nodded.

“That’s really good. It would be perfect if you could ask them for me,” Doyoung agreed. Taeil nodded, he definitely could do that.

Doyoung smiled. His plan for the show was coming along nicely so far.
Donghyuck sighed, his bangs blowing upwards with the force of the air he expelled. He was void of makeup, hairspray, tight jeans and his nail polish was chipped. He didn’t care at the moment though. He just really missed Mark. He felt like the junior had been very distant during their first week back to school. Or really, ever since their talk during New Years. Donghyuck felt kind of guilty. He probably made Mark back off when he said all those things, which was so not his intention. He pouted, sighing again.

It was Saturday. And for once he didn’t have any homework during the weekend. Maybe he should just go over to Mark’s place? Yeah. He should.

With determination, Donghyuck got up from his bed and pulled on some socks before hurrying down the stairs. Taeyong was at the kitchen table, playing cards with Chenle, Jisung and Lucas. Jungwoo was hanging out with some friends which honestly made Donghyuck incredibly happy, seeing as Jungwoo rarely managed to get friends during all their moves.

“Hyung, I’m going to Mark’s house,” Donghyuck said as he walked into the kitchen. Taeyong looked up from his cards.

“Do you want a ride?” He asked, Donghyuck shaking his head.

“It’s fine. That would be totally unnecessary,” he insisted.

“You can ride with me,” Sicheng appeared in the doorway, dressed. “I’m going with Jiwoo and Kun to the mall anyway, we can drop you off,” he said. Donghyuck beamed. He was glad because he really didn’t want to walk in the cold winter weather.

“Thanks hyung,” he cutely said, making Sicheng roll his eyes. “By the way,” he started when he was walking out of the kitchen. “Taeyongie hyung has like three sevens.”

“Hyuck!” Came Taeyong’s pouty response as Donghyuck snickered loudly. Chenle cheered in thanks.

“Let’s go,” he rushed to put on his shoes and jacket before walking out the front door with Sicheng. Jiwoo drove an old car, the color peeling off and the seats worn out. Donghyuck liked it.

“Thanks for the ride,” he gladly said when they pulled up to Mark’s house. Jiwoo smiled and Kun said goodbye cheerily while Sicheng ruffled his hair. Donghyuck pouted playfully as he got out and watched them drive away. He noticed that Mark’s parents car wasn’t on their driveway but Johnny’s
was, and so was Mark’s moped.

He hurriedly, excitedly, walked up to ring the doorbell. Mark lived in a fancy neighbourhood, much like Donghyuck, and his house was luxurious but homely.

Johnny opened the door, black hair ruffled and only in his sweatpants and a big hoodie.


“Hi,” he responded just as cheerily, albeit a bit surprised. “I didn’t know you were coming over.”

“Neither does Mark, so it’s fine.” Johnny huffed a laugh at his response.

“Okay, come on in then,” Johnny stepped aside to let him in graciously.

“Thank you hyung! I’ll see you later!” He called, kicking off his shoes and throwing his jacket before rushing up the stairs.

Donghyuck barged into Mark’s room without warning, the junior startling from his position on the bed. Mark was laying on his bed in basketball shorts, striped socks and a blue hoodie, his glasses perched on his nose and phone in hand. His eyes were wider than usual.

“Hyuck?” He said in disbelief, frozen on the bed. Donghyuck grinned and closed the door behind him.

“Hey.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I missed you.” Donghyuck knew his voice was soft and gentle, very much unlike him.

Mark looked shocked as ever, not moving, before relaxing slightly back into the bed.

“I missed you too,” he said, whispered nearly.

Donghyuck felt his heart flutter and walked further into the room, laying down next to Mark on the bed, so they were arm to arm, his head lolling to the side and resting on Mark’s shoulder.

The junior resumed scrolling through Instagram, liking photos and commenting in some places. Donghyuck knew that Mark’s follower count had dropped drastically after the announcement of his homosexual tendencies, but Mark didn’t seem too bothered. He didn’t care for people he barely knew. He only cared about the ones that really mattered.

There was a selfie of Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun that made Donghyuck smile. Suhyun had posted an ugly picture of her brother, in honor of his birthday while he was at the army. Yuta had posted a photo of some seriously good looking food. Taeil had posted an artistic, vague, semi questionable photo of a quote.

Donghyuck enjoyed the peace and silence surrounding them, knowing that they didn’t need to talk to enjoy each other.

He gently wove his arm in between Mark’s and grabbed his hoodie string, tugging on it and fiddling with it between colored nails. He buried his head further into Mark’s shoulder and neck, sighing happily. He felt entirely comfortable.

When Mark finished checking his feed, he locked his phone up and stretched slightly, trying not to
“Do you ever think about how the world would be, without stereotypes, without gender norms, without homophobia?” Donghyuck whispered, still tugging on Mark’s hoodie string. The junior inhaled quietly.

“I have, sometime,” Mark admitted, his hand creeping down to take Donghyuck’s unoccupied one. “But I don’t think it’s possible. There will always be stereotypes. Even if we erase all the ones we have now, new ones would be created.” Donghyuck smiled.

“Such a poet,” he teased, bringing back memories of that day when Mark had encountered some bullies and spewed some seriously poetic stuff afterwards. Mark jabbed at him but he was smiling.


“Yeah.” He took them off, handing them to the younger. Donghyuck slid them onto his face and looked at Mark who had twisted himself to look at Donghyuck.

“It’s not so bad,” Mark praised, teasingly. Donghyuck scoffed and took the glasses off again. They were round and wired with a gold frame. Very pretty.

Mark took them back and put them on.

“Your eyesight is really bad,” Donghyuck laughed, the glasses having made everything very blurry and somehow clear. Mark scoffed.

“I know,” he giggled, high pitched. Donghyuck felt satisfied having evoked such a response. He missed Mark’s laugh.

“Hyung?” He said then, the mood of the atmosphere turning more serious with the use of the, rarely used, honorific. “Why have you been avoiding me?” Mark looked like a deer caught in headlights. So he had consciously been pulling away from Donghyuck. That didn’t sit right with the younger.

“It’s not that, really,” Mark started. “Of course I want to be with you. I’m just giving you some space.” Donghyuck frowned.

“But I don’t want space,” Donghyuck protested, scooting closer, almost every point of his body touching Mark’s. They kept quiet for a few seconds, before Mark sighed.

“I’m sorry,” he said, confusing Donghyuck. “It’s just so hard to see you and know how much I hurt you.”

Donghyuck’s eyes widened.

“I just feel useless and I don’t know what to think anymore,” Mark exhaled shakily.

“Hyung,” Donghyuck took over. “Please don’t say you’re still fretting over Lexie and her stupid drugs.”

“I am!” Mark exclaimed. “I can’t stop.” He sounded so incredibly frustrated. Donghyuck felt a bit helpless. How to help?

“Please don’t,” he softly muttered. “Please don’t blame yourself. Please don’t put yourself down. Lexie is the one at fault here,” Donghyuck tried to tell him, not knowing what else to say. Mark frowned.
“I know it wasn’t my fault. But it’s so hard to let go of it. It’s consuming my mind. I can’t even write
lyrics,” Mark admitted. Donghyuck licked his lips in thought.


“Sing?”

“Yeah,” Donghyuck said, going over to bring the guitar, sitting on a stand in the corner of Mark’s
room. He handed it to the older.

“Play me something,” Donghyuck demanded, sitting down next to the junior. Mark still looked
adorably confused, but he started playing nonetheless. Donghyuck nodded his head a bit to the
cheerful rhythm, humming slightly before breaking out a song from his repertoire. He adjusted to the
speed, matching the beat to his singing. It wasn’t an original song, just a cover, but it still sounded
awesome and new and great. Mark was starting to smile, looking at Donghyuck with sparkling eyes,
waiting for him to round off his song so he could start rapping to it. The lyrics were his own, a verse
he hadn’t been able to put a melody on just yet. But now he had it.

Donghyuck grooved to the rapping, Mark wanting to laugh at his moves.

Eventually the song fizzled out.

“That was good!” Donghyuck exclaimed, grinning. Mark nodded in agreement, smiling as well.

“Yes. It was,” he exhaled.

“Did it take your mind off things?” Donghyuck asked. Mark found that yes. It was the first time in
weeks where he’d been able to feel a bit more vibrant and conscious.

“Yeah. It really did.”

“Good. So instead of thinking of Lexie,” Donghyuck looked down, uncharacteristically shy. “Think
of this instead. Think of me. Think of Jeno, Jaemin, Renjun, Suhyun, Johnny. And remember this
feeling.”

Mark stared in awe at the younger, still gripping his guitar. Donghyuck looked up when he didn’t
say anything, cheeks a light dusting of pink. Mark put his guitar aside and leaned forward,
connecting their lips sweetly.

Donghyuck quickly caught on and put his lean hands on Mark’s neck, scooting closer.

They kissed feverishly, lips hot and breaths mingling. Mark grabbed at Donghyuck’s sides, clutching
at his sweater tightly. Donghyuck giggled into his mouth and moved even closer, almost ending up
in Mark’s lap.

“Woah!” The door burst open, Donghyuck and Mark separating themselves quickly. Johnny was in
the doorway, covering his eyes with two glasses of soda.

“Are you decent?” He asked, voice shrill. Donghyuck nearly blushed. Mark did.

“We were never indecent!” Donghyuck protested, slightly breathless. Johnny scoffed and uncovered
his eyes again, waking inside and setting their soda on Mark’s bedside table.

“You know, I know what it’s like to be young and curious,” he started, sounding completely
ridiculous. Mark groaned in misery, trying to calm his still racing heart. “I was also young once,”
Johnny reminisced. Donghyuck snorted unattractively. Mark loved it though.


“You should be grateful for my advice you brat,” he protested, jokingly.


“Fine, be that way,” then he left for the door. “You’re welcome for the soda!” He pointedly said, back turned to them.

“Thank you so much my favourite hyung!” Donghyuck shouted, voice sweet and tone high. Johnny muttered about ungrateful brats once again before walking out and closing the door behind him.

Donghyuck immediately went for one of the sodas.

“That went well,” he mused, grinning devilishly.

Mark simply sighed.

~

Jisung sat, content, in his chair. They were just starting and waiting for more kids to show up. He really liked his kindergarten. He had some great friends, like Jeongin and Guanlin who always traded cookies with him. And Joohyun who liked dancing just like he did. The teachers were also really fun. They had a whole three of them, which was more than all the other classes had. There was Kyungsoo who was small with big eyes and heart shaped lips. All the kids liked drawing him because of his features. Then there was Hani who always laughed loudly and played with them. Lastly they had Irene. Jisung thought she had a weird name and she was kind of quiet. But he didn’t mind. He was quiet too.

“Today!” Hani started, once the kids had arrived. “We’re making cards for mother’s day!”

Jisung frowned. The other kids seemed very excited, chatting amongst themselves and gesturing wildly.

“You can choose as many colors as you want and we also have glitter,” Hani continued. “If you want to use the glitter pens, Kyungsoo seonsaengnim will help, so please go to him then. Now let’s make beautiful cards to give to your mothers!” She clapped her hands, smiling widely. Kyungsoo was quietly smiling as well, setting up weird glittery pens on a table. They reminded Jungwoo of Donghyuck and the shimmering face paint he always seemed to use. Irene stood by the teacher’s desk, sorting out papers of different colours.

Jisung still felt incredibly confused. Mother’s Day? What was that?

He felt too scared to approach his teachers about it though, so he simply sat there helplessly, seeing all his classmates running towards the papers and the pretty pens.

Eventually Irene took notice of him, walking over to his little table.

“Hey Jisungie,” she greeted gently, her voice naturally quiet. “Why aren’t you getting some pens and a paper?” He frowned at her.

“What’s Mother’s Day?” He blurted out, his legs swinging restlessly under the table. Irene looked a bit taken aback but not entirely appalled.
“It’s when you celebrate your mom,” she explained. “Thanking her for taking care of you, feeding you, helping you. It’s the day where you can show her your appreciation. That you appreciate what she does for you,” Irene said. Jisung nodded slowly and followed her when she grabbed his hand and led him towards the teacher’s desk to grab a paper.

He was still very confused.

He didn’t really understand what a mom was. Did he have one?

~

Taeyong felt happy. It was Monday and he was feeling good. For the first time in a long time. It had just been a good day.

He couldn’t explain why, but he still felt happy.

When he got home, the sun was setting. Sicheng had been tasked with picking up all the brothers since Taeyong had dance practice, so they were all home when the eldest arrived.

Chenle greeted him enthusiastically, playing with a toy train. Lucas and Donghyuck were facing off in video games while Sicheng and Jungwoo sat by the kitchen table, doing their homework.

Jisung quickly waddled over when Taeyong stepped into the living room. The youngest was holding a red paper of some sort.

“Hyung,” Jisung said quietly. “I made this for you. It’s red because your hair is red.” Taeyong laughed, feeling incredibly fond. Jisung didn’t do things like that very often. Jisung’s small hand held out the paper and Taeyong opened it gingerly, seeing lots of glitter and colours splashed over it. He could decipher some stick figures and Jisung’s name was written neatly together with a date at the bottom corner. Probably the work of one of the teachers.

“Thank you baby,” Taeyong gushed, smiling, as he picked Jisung up in his arms. Jisung smiles back adorably.

“They said to make it for Mother’s Day,” Jisung told him then. Taeyong’s face fell. “But I didn’t know what that was, so teacher Irene said that it was to show appreshiashon,” Jisung tried to say, failing with a frown, “for feeding me and taking care of me and helping me,” he listed dutifully, “so I made it for you hyung!” Jisung’s eyes disappeared with his smile, Taeyong staring at him with wide glistening eyes.

Donghyuck and Lucas had paused their game when they heard the word Mother's Day.

“Oh baby,” Taeyong said, stroking Jisung’s back. “I’m not a mom.” The four year old frowned.

“No, you’re a hyung,” he clarified. Taeyong nodded.

“And Mother’s Day is for a mom,” Taeyong continued. Jisung was still frowning.

“But when’s Hyung’s day then?” Taeyong laughed.

“There is none, baby.” Jisung was still frowning. “There is Father’s Day and Mother’s Day, but we don’t celebrate that, because we don’t see them. Our father and mother,” Taeyong tried to explain it understandably for a four year old. “And that’s something we have to keep secret. Like a superhero secret.”
“Like Spider-Man?” Jisung’s eyes went wide with awe.

“Yes. Exactly,” Taeyong agreed. “We can’t tell anyone that we never see our mom and dad. And when you have Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, just draw whatever you want,” Taeyong said.

“Okay hyung. I’ll keep a secret,” he smiled. “And I’ll draw for you when we have days,” he said, cutey. Taeyong laughed.

“Okay,” he agreed, putting Jisung down. The four year old quickly waddled into the kitchen and Taeyong exhaled heavily. So much for a good day.

“You okay?” Donghyuck questioned worriedly. Taeyong smiled.

“Yeah, I was going to have to do that sooner or later anyway,” he said, resigned, and walked over to sit down on the couch.

“You did good, hyung,” Lucas assured, smiling.

“Thanks,” Taeyong sighed.

So much for a good day, indeed.
Chapter 85

Chapter Notes

Okay here we go ppl :))

Hope you’ll enjoy this <3333

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Doyoung was feeling good. The principal had approved his talent show and a teacher had been assigned as his mentor for the project. The posters were officially plastered all over school and the sign up sheet was almost full. In fact, he had just added another one. Now he just needed to gather people to create a committee.

He did have some candidates in mind already. Seungkwan, who was a junior, for one, had already agreed through a very enthusiastic text. Doyoung had sent similar texts to Amber and Somin who shared some classes with him. Amber was very creative and good with sets while Somin was a generally organized person. They both seemed up for it.

He was currently walking down the hallway, heading for his locker to retrieve some stuff for his next class, when a girl with blonde hair and bangs approached him with a smile. He recognized her immediately.

“Hello Doyoung sunbae,” Lisa said, Doyoung nodding his head in greeting. “I heard from Ten oppa that you need people to help with the talent show?” Doyoung perked up.

“Yes! I do need that, you interested?” He asked. Lisa nodded.

“Absolutely, it sounds fun!” She assured. Doyoung smiled.

“Great, I’ll add you to our group chat then,” he decided. Lisa made a sound of excitement.

Awesome, thank you! Bye!” She rushed out, waving as she left. Doyoung waved back cordially.

Things were going well indeed.

~

The week passed in a blur. School was busy, Taeyong struggling to keep track of everything they needed to know and study. Finals were approaching after all.

Dance was a craze in itself, the team practicing like maniacs to perfect their performance. Taeyong had barely seen his friends at all, having spent lunches with Ten in the practice room. He did see Taeil though, because the senior spent many afternoons at their house, tutoring Lucas. Besides, all of them were busy with their own things. Jaehyun, Johnny and Yuta had a basketball season coming up, lots of competitions, and Doyoung was busy planning his show. Max hadn’t been able to spend time with Taeyong either because of work.

He was absolutely friendship deprived. Spending time with Ten was great, but not when their only focus was the choreography. They all needed some down time.
Therefore, Taeyong summoned all of his friends to his house, Saturday at noon.

Johnny arrived first, having brought Mark with him (the younger rushing up the stairs immediately) and instantly launched into a conversation with Taeyong. Yuta and Doyoung came next, both of them looking uncharacteristically fatigued. They perked up when they saw their friends though. Taeil and Ten came shortly thereafter, Ten looking frazzled and Taeil looking completely calm. Jaehyun was last, throwing Taeyong a dimpled smile.

“Great everyone’s here!” Taeyong clapped his hands with a glowing smile.

“Yeah, what did you want?” Doyoung grumpily asked. Taeyong rolled his eyes.

“Nothing. I just want to hang out. We haven’t seen each other all week except for during lessons!” He exclaimed. “We even skipped Discount Friday!” He protested. They all did look slightly guilty at that. It was a sacred tradition.

“Okay. What are we doing, then?” Yuta leaned forward curiously. Taeyong shrugged a bit.

“I don’t know, I didn’t think that far,” he admitted. Ten sighed through his nose.

“Guys this is a waste of time. You woke me up just for me to come here and do nothing? I could really use the sleep with all the practice we’ve been doing,” Ten complained. Taeyong frowned.

“Oh wow, that’s rich. Sorry to disturb your beauty sleep, but dancing isn’t even that bad. Basketball practices are much worse,” Yuta snapped. Ten’s eyes widened in offense. Taeyong shrunk back in his seat. This was not good.

“Excuse you, dancing is much harder than basketball. Anyone can put a ball in a ring,” he snarked. Yuta exhaled noisily.

“It’s a hoop, and it’s much harder than we might make it look,” he bit back.

“Oh okay okay,” Johnny holds his hands up, trying to bring forth peace. “I think this calls for a competition,” he said, factually. Taeyong raised his eyebrows at the suggestion.

“What are you talking about?” Yuta snapped, looking incredibly tired. Taeyong frowned, he could tell that Yuta was not feeling well at all.

“A basketball game, in the park, right now. We’ll see if it’s easier or not. And then Ten and Taeyong may attempt to teach us a dance, to see if it’s as easy as you think,” Johnny explained, sounding completely rational. Ten actually regained some of his mischief back, Yuta slowly breaking out into a smile. This wasn’t a real competition, they knew, because Taeyong was fairly sure that Yuta knew dance was really tough, while Ten also knew that basketball was very challenging. But the idea of a basketball game did seem pretty fun. Yuta stood up, exclaiming;

“You’re on!”

~

Mark and Donghyuck went downstairs at the sound of ruckus and found Taeyong and his friends about to head out.

“What’s happening?” Donghyuck asked, curious. Taeyong turned to smile at them.

“We’re going to the park. We’re gonna have a basketball competition,” he explained. Donghyuck lit
up at that.

“Can we join?” He asked, interested. Mark looked a bit surprised that Donghyuck would want to join a basketball game of all things.

“Yeah sure,” Johnny allowed, Donghyuck letting out a sound of victory and dragged Mark over to put on their shoes.

“I’ll tell Jeno to come as well,” Mark decided, feeling excitement thrum within him at the thought of playing some basketball, for fun.

He was looking forward to seeing how Donghyuck would fare in a game.

~

The basketball court at the park was luckily empty, the group pouring in with excited chatters and loud laughs.

Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun had joined them while Suhyun was staying at home because of a cold she had unfortunately caught.

Taeyong smiled as he saw the people around him interacting; Renjun and Ten griping at each other, Jeno and Doyoung smiling about something, Mark and Yuta laughing, Donghyuck with a mischievous smile as he talked to Johnny, Taeil was walking with Jaemin, gently asking him about school and his classes. Taeyong walked quietly next to Jaehyun who was smiling to himself.

Taeyong found that he also wanted to smile at the sight. Although his freezing cold hands stopped him from doing anything but shivering as he blew some air on them. He had forgotten his gloves in the rush, wearing only a jacket and a scarf. His ears were beginning to turn red as well.

Jaehyun chuckled quietly next to him, a hand gently wrapping around Taeyong’s. Jaehyun’s hands were soft but strong, pale like the rest of him and reassuring in their warmth. Taeyong hid his grin in his scarf.

When they arrived at the court, they divided teams. They decided their captains through Rock Paper Scissors, ending up with Jeno and Taeil. As captains they were then allowed to choose their members. Jeno’s team consisted of: Renjun, Taeyong, Yuta, Doyoung and Mark. While Taeil’s team consisted of: Johnny, Jaehyun, Donghyuck, Jaemin and Ten.

Then they began.

Yuta scored almost immediately, rushing through the court. Doyoung got the ball, passed to Taeyong who passed to Renjun who got the ball snatched away from Jaemin who passed to Ten who tried to land a shot but failed. Yuta hollered at him. ‘I told you so!’

Taeyong managed to find a gap where he could shoot and actually managed to score. Donghyuck also managed to get the ball in the hoop once, while Johnny got it in twice.

In the end, the winning team ended up being Taeil’s team, with a helpful contribution by Jaemin who managed to score a three pointer. Then it was Ten’s turn to holler at Yuta.

Taeyong felt happy and content and very cold but it didn’t matter. Everyone was having fun, Mark currently trying to steal the ball from Donghyuck who was running all over the court. The game was over, but they didn’t leave yet. They still had more left to do.

Taeyong was lounging on a bench, Doyoung sitting down next to him with a huff.
“I’m sweating but I’m freezing,” he complained. “I don’t like it.”

“Don’t be such a Grinch,” Taeyong said, laughing.

“Don’t reference that! Christmas is over,” Doyoung bickered. Taeyong shook his head.

“Taeyong!” Ten suddenly called his name. “Let’s show these peasants what real dancing is!” He said, voice holding a dramatic flair. Taeyong scoffed in amusement but got up nonetheless.

The group settled on the benches, watching the two dancers whispering together. Taeyong was scrolling through his phone, pointing at different songs as he went. Ten nodded thoughtfully but lit up properly when he saw the one he wanted.

“Okay guys. This is gonna be complete freestyle,” he promised, turning to their audience with flourishing hands. “Play the music TY.”

A song everyone recognized started playing. Namely, Taki Taki.

Donghyuck whooped as Ten started moving, the confident smirk on the Thai male’s face assuring them all that they were in for a good show.

And good it was.

Ten’s movements were great and wide yet contained and precise. The angles were satisfying and the moving of his different body parts together was mesmerizing. He was perfectly on beat with every move and his utilization of Latin elements made it all so much better.

The song came to an end.

Everyone cheered loudly, Ten bowing playfully.

“Thank you thank you,” he said, waving his hand royally. “Now for our main course. Lee Taeyong?”

Taeyong looked up from where he’d been choosing music and smiled before going over to switch places with Ten. The Thai male put the music on and everyone paid immediate attention.

~

Jaehyun felt the air leave his lungs as Taeyong started dancing. He recognized the song, heavy beat and dark theme. Namely, Mona Lisa. He found Taeyong’s dancing incredible. While Ten was more chill and swift, Taeyong had more sharp angles, robotic movements and fluid joints. Jaehyun was loving every second of it.

Taeyong’s stoic face, eyes cold, his moves looking flippant yet perfectly right.

It ended all too soon. Everyone applauded as Taeyong laughed, feeling awkward. Jaehyun Wolf whistled. Taeyong blushed, but smiled, whacking Jaehyun on the shoulder.

“So would you like to try?” Ten said, teasingly, to Yuta who rolled his eyes fondly.

“I’ll never back down from a challenge,” he said, determined, and got up.

The rest of the day was spent with Ten trying to teach Yuta a choreography, Donghyuck breaking out some girl group moves, Taeil and Doyoung sitting with Jaemin and Renjun on a bench, Taeyong joining Donghyuck in his dancing, Mark and Johnny shooting some hoops and so much more. It was
a day of positivity and activity, two great phenomenons that have been proved to improve your mental state because of the pheromones they release. Overall, it was a great day, ending with echoing laughter and wispy smiles.

~

Taeyong was annoyed.

He had, miraculously, managed to get sick during their day out. Taeyong rarely got sick, but when he did it was awful. His nose was stuffed, he’d thrown up, his throat was scratchy and there was a slight fever.

Sicheng had been taking up his responsibilities, but he made sure all of the brothers were helping. Taeyong felt bad, having them do laundry and dinner but he had barely been able to leave his bed.

Miserably, he lay there, staring at the ceiling, eyes teary from sickness and blowing his nose every once in a while as his brothers had dinner downstairs. Donghyuck had promised to bring him something after they’d finished their dinner but Taeyong really wasn’t feeling hungry.

He simply felt miserable.

It was Sunday, they had school tomorrow and Taeyong couldn’t drive them. He couldn’t cook, he couldn’t clean, he could barely talk. He would definitely have to stay at home for an indefinite amount of time, which did not sit well with him.

Donghyuck and Sicheng came into his room, carrying a tray. There was soup and water and some painkillers.

Taeyong had forbid them from touching him, preferably from being in his room as well. He really didn’t want his brothers to get sick.

“How are you feeling?” Sicheng asked, setting the tray on the nightstand. Taeyong sighed, voice coming out weak as he replied.

“I’m fine.”

“Liar,” Donghyuck scoffed. “You need medicine.”

“We can’t go to the doctor,” Taeyong said, trying to sit up, arms folding under him.

“Yes we can, you’re eighteen, you don’t need a parent’s permission,” Donghyuck protested. Taeyong sighed.

“Let’s wait a week at the least,” he argued. Donghyuck pouted. “I don’t want to go, only to find out it’s just a cold. Unnecessary money.” Sicheng was quietly frowning at them.

“Fine,” Donghyuck gave up, “but promise that you won’t exert yourself. No cleaning, no getting out of bed, even.”

“I promise,” Taeyong murmured. He doubted that he had the strength to do anything at the moment.

“Good, now eat your soup,” Donghyuck ordered. Taeyong nodded dutifully, finally seated properly, and reached for the bowl.

“I’ll come get the dishes later,” Sicheng promised. “And you’re not going to school tomorrow. We’ll make sure everyone gets to school.”
“Thank you,” Taeyong whispered, mustering a smile.

“It’s nothing, hyung,” Sicheng assured and left with Donghyuck in tow.

Taeyong sighed. His head was pounding, his nose clogged, his hands freezing, his body sweating. Everything was a whole mess.

He hated being sick.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sick. Therefore Taeyong is sick. Sorry TY.
“Where’s Taeyong?” Ten demanded when he entered the canteen. He was anxious because Taeyong hadn’t shown up to the practice room during lunch like they used to.

“He’s sick,” Yuta said, “I heard it from Sicheng.” Ten mellowed out. Good. He wasn’t injured or lost or hurt. Sickness he could deal with. With a sigh, he sat down at the table. It had been quite a while since he spent lunch in the canteen, but it felt nice to sit down and relax for a bit.

“How’s the dance coming along?” Johnny inquired gently, eating some vegetables. Ten bit his lip.

“It’s good. The choreography is all down and I think our energy is pretty good too,” he said, even though he definitely wasn’t feeling energized. “What’s about the talent show?” He turned to Doyoung who nodded.

“It’s going well actually. I have assembled a committee and Yongsun noona agreed to being a judge together with her friends,” Doyoung explained. “Taeil asked his coworkers Baekhyun and Sehun who seemed very enthusiastic about being judges as well.” Taeil nodded in confirmation.

“Yeah, they’ll even bring a friend of theirs, Chanyeol. He’s apparently really good with music,” Taeil added.

“Sounds great, are there a lot of sign ups?” Ten said, impressed that Doyoung had it all together.

“Yes! A lot actually,” Doyoung himself even sounded surprised at it.

“The whole school is buzzing about it. You would’ve known if you’d crept out from under your dance stone,” Yuta teased. Ten stuck his tongue out. Then he noticed Jaehyun quietly staring at his phone screen, thumb hovering above it hesitantly. Ten’s annoyed expression turned into one of fond exasperation as he smiled.

“Hey Jaehyun,” he said, voice mischievous. “Are you trying to text Taeyong?” Jaehyun’s head whipped up from his phone, bangs flopping.

“Uh,” he responded eloquently. Ten scoffed in amusement.

“You’re a mess,” he stated. The others were looking at them curiously. Jaehyun sighed and ran a hand through his hair.
“What’s happening here?” Yuta asked, suspicious. Ten smirked.

“Our little Jaehyunnie has a crush,” he sing-sang. Yuta’s eyebrows shot up to his hairline.

“On Taeyong?” Doyoung asked incredulously.

“I don’t!” Jaehyun protested, pouting. Ten rolled his yes.

“Aa!” Johnny exclaimed. “I see it now! He has a crush.”

“I didn’t even know you liked boys,” Doyoung said, sounding surprised.

“In his defense, Taeyong makes everyone a bit gay don’t you think?” Ten argued. The others stared. And stared. But now one contradicted it.

“I don’t know okay?” Jaehyun finally spoke. “We don’t need to label anything really. And it doesn’t matter. I don’t even know if he likes me back.”

“Does he hug you and touch you a lot?” Johnny asked.

“Yes.”

“Does he smile whenever you’re around?”

“Yeah, but-”

“Does he look at your lips?”

“He might have sometime, but, just wait for a second!” He snapped, making Johnny shut his mouth.

“Doesn’t he do that with all of us?” They pondered it.

“Oh shit,” Doyoung nodded. “He is very touchy so yeah he kinda does.”

“Then how will any of that help me determine if he feels the same?”

“It won’t,” Ten acquiesced.

“Why don’t you just ask?” Taeil questioned. They all turned to look at him.


“I can’t just ask. He might not even like guys.”

“Fine,” Doyoung said. “If you’re too chicken shit to find out then we need a plan.”

“Not with the plans again!” Yuta protested. Ten hummed.

“I think I’ve got something,” he said. “He’s sick. You should go over there and nurse him right back to health and show him what a great boyfriend you would be,” Ten said, decisively. “So he’ll know what he’s missing out on.”

“Good plan,” Doyoung agreed. “Go over there and show him what you got.” Jaehyun stared at them quietly, carefully shifting his focus back to his phone, then back at them.

“Maybe I should. Maybe he’s really sick. What if he’s hurting?” Jaehyun murmured.

“See,” Ten said, not even bothering to lower his voice. “He’s completely whipped.” Jaehyun didn’t
even protest.

“You know what, I’m going over there,” Jaehyun suddenly stood up, invigorated.

“Yes! You do that!” Ten cheered. “Get your man!” Jaehyun didn’t even bother to acknowledge him.

“Can you guys cover for me with the teachers?”

“Sure, now go,” Taeil softly smiled, assuring him. Jaehyun sent them all a smile before he gathered his stuff and disappeared.

“Ah,” Ten sighed. “Young love.”

Johnny shoved him by the shoulder.

~

Taeyong was falling in and out of sleep. He had tried to protest that morning, tried to get up and get dressed but Sicheng had been adamant. Stay in bed. Don’t strain yourself. I’ll take care of them. Promise.

Taeyong trusted his brother. With all his heart. But he still felt useless, lying around in bed doing nothing, even though he couldn’t really find the strength within himself to get up.

He was drifting between conscious thoughts and sleep, trying to relax, but finding it almost impossible. He kept sniffling and coughing and his whole body was shivering.

He didn’t even notice the door opening.


“Jaehyun?” Taeyong croaked in disbelief. Was he having a fever dream?

“I’m here. You should really lock your door by the way,” the brunet said, amused, walking further into the room, pulling up the chair that was beside Taeyong’s closet and sitting.

“But why are you here?” Taeyong felt incredibly confused.

“I wanted to check on you. I heard you weren’t feeling well,” Jaehyun explained, voice uncharacteristically shy. Taeyong felt his heart warming pleasantly.

“Oh, thank you,” he managed, immediately falling into a coughing fit afterwards. Jaehyun started, getting up and walking over to him. Taeyong struggled to breathe as he coughed, but soon warm hands were on his shoulders, guiding him to sit up and lean forward. Eventually the coughing tapered off and Taeyong sucked in deep breaths. Jaehyun’s palm was rubbing his back soothingly and Taeyong sighed, feeling comforted.

“Better?” The brunet asked.

“Yeah, thanks.”

Quietly, Jaehyun helped him lie down again. Taeyong let his eyes fall close, trying to sleep. His mind was dull and his head was throbbing, he really just wanted to sleep. Jaehyun started rummaging around but Taeyong felt too weak to check what he was doing. A door opening and closing. Footsteps leaving. Then footsteps returning. A door opening again. A gust of wind making Taeyong
shiver.

A few minutes later he felt warm hands on his forehead, most likely checking for a temperature, then the smell of tea which was really nice. Then gentle fingers brushing through his fiery red hair.

Taeyong opened his eyes.

“I made tea,” Jaehyun said. “For your throat.”

Taeyong tried to nod and sit, Jaehyun helping him up and handing him the cup. It smelled nice and tasted heavenly, soothing his aching throat.

“There’s lots of honey in it,” Jaehyun said, smiling at him. Taeyong’s heart sped up at the sight of those dimples.

“It’s good,” Taeyong said, feeling slightly better.

He finished it quickly and got situated in a lying position again. He tried to fall asleep yet again, but only finding himself uncomfortable. He couldn’t find a single positron that was comfortable. And he was both hot and cold, clothes sticking to his skin.

“You okay?” Jaehyun asked, looking up from where he was seated in the chair, checking his phone.

“No,” Taeyong sighed. “I can’t sleep.” Jaehyun seemed to think it over, looking for a possible solution which Taeyong loved. The little frown on his face when he concentrated, mouth pursing and fingers tapping any surface they could find.

Then Jaehyun got up, walked over to the bed and sat down on it. Taeyong raised a questioning eyebrow. Jaehyun inclined his head toward the empty space next to Taeyong, looking embarrassed. Taeyong’s eyes widened, his gaze flickering uncertainly over Jaehyun’s face, but he did nod.

Jaehyun crawled underneath the comforter and scooted close, hesitant hands pulling Taeyong toward him. Taeyong settled himself into Jaehyun, head resting on his arm, chest to chest, Jaehyun’s other arm resting over his hip.

It felt warm and nice and extremely safe.

Taeyong loved it.

And their rapid heartbeats meshed perfectly as they both drifted off.

~

Jaehyun thought Taeyong looked beautiful even when he was ridden with sickness.

His skin was pale and his lips cracked. His nose red and his hair matted. But his eyes were still alive with color and vibrancy, his body curved perfectly along Jaehyun’s. Jaehyun felt so comfortable that he also fell asleep, only to awaken and find Donghyuck staring down at him. He repressed a scream.

“Why are you in my brother’s bed?” Donghyuck questioned, voice laced with faux innocence. Jaehyun gaped and quickly untangled himself from Taeyong, who was still sleeping.

He got out of the bed, trying not to jostle the red head, and was met by the sight of all the Lee brothers in the room. He gulped. Sicheng was observing him with a frown, as if he was trying to figure him out.
“Uh,” Jaehyun uttered, not knowing what to say.

“Did you skip school to be here?” Donghyuck asked, looking amused. Jaehyun opened his mouth and then closed it again before opening it again.

“Yeah,” he admitted.


“Jaehyun?” A voice suddenly spoke, soft and raspy. Taeyong had woken up.

“Yeah?” He called back hesitantly. The red head was rubbing at his eyes, stretching his body slightly.

“What’s going on?” Taeyong inquired, finally opening his eyes. He finally noticed his brothers, all of them, in the room.

“Hey hyung,” Lucas said, voice high pitched as he tried to keep in his giggles. Jungwoo pinched his arm.

“What’s going on?” Taeyong asked again, still confused as to why all of them were in his room.

“Uh,” Jaehyun started. “I was just going home,” he said, rubbing at his neck. “I’ll call you later.” Taeyong nodded, feeling a bit disappointed that the other was leaving.

“Okay, bye,” Jaehyun rushed out, pushing past the brothers.

“Bye Jaehyun hyung!” Donghyuck’s sweet voice called after him. They all remained absolutely still until they heard the door opening and closing. Then they pounced.

Taeyong shrieked as his bed was attacked by all his brothers, all of them trying to fit. It was a vicious fight but eventually everyone got seated, Jisung on Chenle, Donghyuck draped over Sicheng and Jungwoo holding onto Lucas so he wouldn’t fall off. Then came the questions.

“Why was he here?”

“Are you guys together?”

“Were you kissing?”

“Why didn’t you tell us you had a boyfriend!”

Taeyong exhaled a laugh. They were talking over each other.

“Guys! Stop,” he called, voice still croaking and dry. “We’re not together. He just checked up on me. We’re friends.” He couldn’t help but feel slight regret that they weren’t more.

“But you like him?”

“He skipped school for you! You can’t be just friends.”

“But he’s so handsome why can’t you be together?”

“You would be a total power couple.”
Taeyong laughed again, shaking his head in disbelief. His brothers were truly something.
I just want to thank everyone who’s reading and everyone who comments and leaves kudos, thank you so much for everything! I appreciate the support so much and I’m so glad to have you guys <3

Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter :))

A few days later and Taeyong was feeling much better. He was so relieved about not having to go to the doctor that he barely cared that he’d missed several days of school. A whole week in fact.

Sicheng and Donghyuck had been so mature and helpful, cleaning and cooking and making sure everyone was okay. Bringing him food and sitting with him so he wouldn’t feel lonely. Taeyong felt his whole heart warming at their actions.

He had been able to leave his room, and was currently sitting on the couch in the living room. It was still noon, so all of his brothers were in school. Taeyong sat, swaddled in blankets, a kdrama on, tea on the table, perfectly content.

He was actually enjoying having some time to relax and do nothing. It wasn’t often that he was allowed to be completely carefree and calm. He rarely had time to sit down without thinking of all the things he had to do.

He sat there for quite a while before he could hear the front door opening, causing him to jump in his seat. He glanced at the clock. It was too early for the kids to be back.

When the air filled with a glorious smell his eyes widened.

Several footsteps and loud voices entered, Taeyong’s eyebrows raising when Yuta appeared from the hallway. His smile was bright.

“Hey Taeyong!” He greeted, Taeil, Ten, Johnny, Doyoung and Jaehyun filtering in behind him. Taeyong stared.

“Hi,” he managed, confused. They all took seats wherever there was space, Yuta taking up the spot next to Taeyong, throwing an arm around him. The red head leaned into the familiar gesture.

“You should really start locking your door,” Jaehyun said, setting up the bags of fast-food he had been carrying. Taeyong rolled his eyes slightly.

“Why are you here?” He inquired, curious. “What if you get sick?”

“We won’t,” Johnny assured. “And it’s discount Friday!”

“Since you can’t come there, we’re bringing it to you,” Ten said, hands out and gesturing towards the food. Taeyong smiled.

“Thanks,” he uttered, voice slightly raspy.
“No need to thank us,” Doyoung scoffed. “Let’s eat!”

They spent the next hours in similar fashion, eating and chatting about everything Taeyong had missed at school. Doyoung’s talent show had drawn the attention of every student at school. His committee had just had their first meeting and the judges were officially ready.

Jaehyun, Johnny and Yuta had been given a day off practice which had been a blessing while Taeil had been reading a new book which Taeyong liked the sound of. Ten had been working with their team and Jungkook had almost sprained his ankle a couple days earlier, thankfully not causing any serious damage, only some bruising.

Taeyong felt happy that his best friends had taken the time to come over just so they could hang out with him and talk about anything they felt like.

They ended up playing a board game which Doyoung made interesting by adding some fun punishments. Ten got slapped on the butt, Yuta had to do push-ups with Taeyong on his back, Jaehyun had to take off one garment of choice for the next three rounds. He chose his shirt which made Taeyong blush as Ten cat called.

Jaehyun and Taeyong accidentally met eyes, causing Taeyong to laugh nervously as he averted his gaze, getting caught by Ten’s knowing look.

When the Lee brothers came home it was to a bunch of rowdy seniors trying to fight each other on top of a table where a discarded board game lay.

~

Sicheng pulled at the hem of his shirt anxiously. He was wearing a tank top. Outside.

Jiwoo was pulling him along eagerly as they headed for the food court. It was Saturday afternoon and the mall was pretty crowded but so far no one had made any obvious indications of seeing his shirt or caring if they did. He did keep it mostly hidden under his jacket though, but knowing himself that he was wearing it was more than enough for Sicheng. He felt proud.

Taeyong was finally feeling better and had told him to go out and have fun, as Sicheng had been cooped up at home during the week to take care of the brothers. Jungwoo had been the one to convince him to wear the tank top and Jiwoo had smiled so widely when she saw it. Sicheng felt safe with his choice.

They reached the food court and Jiwoo immediately noticed Kun waving at them. The Chinese senior also smiled when he noticed what Sicheng was wearing; a tender, soft smile.

“You look great,” he spoke when they sat down, Sicheng smiling in thanks. Jiwoo clapped her hands in agreement, excited.

“Yes he’s perfect, now let’s eat,” she quickly got out, bouncing in her seat. Sicheng and Kun shared amused looks but they waved down a waiter and ordered anyways. The waiter eyed Sicheng for a few seconds before turning around and leaving, cheeks pink. Jiwoo smirked.

“You look such a goner,” she gushed, following the waiter with her gaze.

“What?” Sicheng frowned.

“Didn’t you see? He was eyeing you like crazy. He totally has a crush,” she nodded, as if confirming her own words. Kun hummed.
“You know, I think I agree,” he said, looking as the waiter snuck a glance at them only to turn away quickly when he noticed them eyeing him. Sicheng kept frowning. The guy was tall and handsome, hair black and his smile bright. He would be attractive considering the standards of attractiveness in South Korea.


“Yeah,” she told him. “You could ask him out.”

“I don’t want to,” Sicheng declined. Jiwoo frowned, looking between him and the waiter. Her eyes were narrowed in thought.

“Do you think he’s handsome?” She asked then. Sicheng frowned, squinting at the waiter.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged.

“What about that girl? Is she pretty?”

“Uh, I guess. Maybe?”

“That guy?”

“Maybe? I’m not sure.”

“Then what about Kun?” Jiwoo said, mentioned senior looking at her in confusion. Sicheng felt just as confused.

“Um, he’s handsome,” Sicheng nodded firmly. Jiwoo was looking at him with wondrous eyes, scratching her cheek slightly.

“What about me?” She asked.


“Hey Sicheng have you ever had a sexual encounter?” She asked. He shook his head no. “Have you kissed anyone?” He bit his lip unconsciously.

“Yeah but I didn’t like it,” he admitted, thinking back to the party. Jiwoo was starting to smile, like she had found something confusing but wonderful.

“Have you ever thought about your sexuality?” She wondered. Sicheng nodded.

“Yeah, but I don’t know. I’m not really attracted to anyone, so I can’t really say,” he sighed. Jiwoo nodded in thought, then she pulled up her phone to search for something. Their food arrived at the same time, Sicheng and Kun thanking the waiter who blushed slightly before leaving.

“I found it,” Jiwoo exclaimed, smiling in triumph. Sicheng raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “I mean, this is purely based on speculations, so don’t think too deeply about it.” She warned him. He nodded. “You might be demisexual,” she said. Sicheng frowned, confused.

“What’s that?” He asked.

“It’s when you’re attracted to personality and not looks,” she explained. “Like watching porn wouldn’t work because you don’t know the people in the video. And you don’t find anyone in here attractive except for like Kun and I because you only know us,” she said, voice picking up speed with her excitement. Sicheng’s eyes widened.
“But remember that you really don’t have to label anything if you don’t want to,” Kun, an ever comforting presence, told him. Sicheng nodded. He understood. Jiwoo was just giving him a suggestion, she’d gotten inspired, sure. But he did think it over briefly. That would explain a lot of things. He could feel that it was actually very fitting. His indifference toward strangers. His inability to watch porn. His dislike toward that kiss.

“You might be right,” he concluded, slowly. “But I won’t put definite labels on anything,” he decided. After all, he was only a junior. He didn’t have to decide anything definite at the moment. Like Kun said, no labels.

“Oh no of course,” Jiwoo amended, lookin happy as she started eating. “I just got a sudden idea, nothing to worry about. If it helps then it does otherwise we’ve at least learned something new,” she laughed. Sicheng smiled, her laugh was infectious.

Demisexual.

He had definitely learned something new.

~

The competition fell on a Wednesday. The dance team had gotten the day off, leaving early in the morning to Seoul. Taeyong couldn’t stop bouncing in his seat, excited and nervous. He was wearing a hoodie, sweatpants and a backward SnapBack. Jonghyun sat next to him on the bus the school had provided. Since the dance team was an official club the school was required to offer such things.

It wasn’t a big bus, but it fit them all at least.

Ten was at the front, conversing with Lisa excitedly. Taeyong could see from far away that he was clenching his fists and shaking his leg, indicating that he was actually nervous as hell. Taeyong hadn’t actually let the nervousness fall in yet. Having been trapped at home all of last week had given him so much energy that he could only feel excitement. All of their friends were coming to watch, which only excited Taeyong even more.

Jonghyun laughed when Taeyong spasmed, too much energy in him for him to contain himself.

“Clam down Yong,” the senior chastised in that special voice of his, smiling. Taeyong tried to take a few calming breaths.

“I’m trying,” he protested.

“Just think of something nice and relax. Here,” Jonghyun handed him an ear bud, soothing music playing already. The other ear bud sat in Jonghyun’s left ear. Taeyong sighed through his nose and leaned back in his seat. It was too early for energy, he knew that, so he probably should try to sleep, especially since he needed all his energy for the competition. Jonghyun has closed his eyes, hands folded in his lap, her black hair soft and way over his forehead.

Therefore, Taeyong also closed his eyes and tried to think happy thoughts. His mind immediately drifted to Jaehyun in bed with him, warm arms enveloping his shivering body and a soothing cologne washing over them, legs tangled together and hands intertwined. A soft kiss placed on Taeyong’s cheek, a quiet laugh in the space between them, a soft hum of happiness, an indescribable warmth.

Taeyong was gone, just like that, asleep, with a smile on his face.
The university was already bustling with activity as they pulled up to the parking lot. Several teams from different schools all across the country had gathered and the whole campus was buzzing with anticipation. Taeyong was almost jumping in his spot, feeling energized to the very core. Ten was leading them through the grounds, having been there three times before for every single competition during his school years. There were several handmade signs and food stands being set up. It was a pretty big deal after all and a big crowd was expected.

Taeyong slipped forward in their little cluster and linked his arm with Ten’s, smiling at the Thai male who smiled back.

“You excited?” Taeyong asked.

“I’m anxious as fuck,” Ten said, sighing though his nose. “This is my last chance to get that scholarship.” Taeyong pursed his lips, he didn’t like seeing Ten’s face looking so downtrodden and nervous. He bumped their shoulders together gently.

“Don’t worry, our choreography is great and our energy is high. We’ll give everyone a run for their money,” Taeyong promised. There was a grin spreading on Ten’s face.

“Oh, I guess I am a little bit excited,” he admitted, perking up a bit. “Let’s take these bitches down.”

~

Every team had been assigned their own classroom at the university to act as a sort of green room. Taeyong had noticed that almost every other dance crew had at least one coach and parents with them. He knew that most of his team members’ parents were coming for the competition and since their school was so small they didn’t have a coach. Which was fine. Having a coach might even be more complicated than letting their own creativity flow to create a dance they can be proud of.

The classroom assigned to them seemed to be one they used when practicing with instruments. It was spacious and all the musical instruments had been moved to line up with the walls, giving them a free area to move and practice.

“This is scary,” Lisa said when they had closed the door. “Did you guys see that team who were wearing matching purple hoodies? They were glaring at us!” She exclaimed. “What did we ever do to them?”

“Relax, they’re just psyching you,” Seulgi said, having been through the competition once before as well. She was tying her long black hair up into a bun. “Don’t mind others.”

“But they’re scary!” Lisa emphasized.

“Well so are we!” Momo protested. “Just look at Taeyong oppa. His face is intimidating enough!”
Taeyong blushed, offended. Lisa looked him up and down.

“Yeah I guess that might work, since they don’t know he’s actually a complete softie,” she agreed. Taeyong rolled his eyes, moving to throw his bag in a corner and starting to stretch.

Chungha and Seulgi followed his lead while Jungkook and Yugyeom were going over some moves. Soonyoung was with Jonghyun, laughing about something loudly, which made Taeyong happy because Soonyoung had a seriously infectious laugh. Momo and Lisa decided to bother Ten while he sighed exasperatedly.

The following hours slipped away like sand between their fingers. They went over the choreography, did some freestyle for fun, ate some snacks and chatted a bit. Afternoon was upon them and Taeyong had gotten a text from Johnny saying that they were on their way.

“Oppa,” Lisa said, plonking down next to him. Taeyong looked his phone and looked up.

“Yeah?”

“Can’t we walk around for a bit, I’m starving,” she asked, groaning. Taeyong rolled his eyes.

“Fine,” he relented. Lisa whooped.

“Awesome, who else is coming?!”

They ended up being Taeyong, Seulgi, Lisa, Jonghyun and Ten, leaving the room to find some actual food in favour of the snacks they had.

The campus was huge and filled with people. They felt underdressed in hoodies and sweatpants but it didn’t bother them too much. Their stage outfits were waiting for them after all, complete with a makeup kit that Chungha had brought.

They eventually found a food stand that served some decent food, and ordered a lot, taking the goods in several bags to carry back to their classroom. They were chatting excitedly, Lisa pointing out a intricate fountain close to the main entrance of the university and Seulgi commenting on the explicit architecture of the university buildings. Taeyong enjoyed listening to them and didn’t even notice when he accidentally bumped into another person. He turned to apologize when his breath caught in his throat.

Before him stood a very familiar face. Memories of whispered promises and silent pleas filling his ears. Memories of smiles and tears, sighs and laughter.

He couldn’t tear his gaze away, only being brought back to the present when Jonghyun tugged on his arm.

Taeyong breathed in deeply, trying to stay calm.

Before him stood the very boy who had taken away his virginity and broken his heart.

~

“Lee Taeyong?” It wasn’t the boy before him who had asked, it was the boy behind him. They were both wearing the same logo on their black hoodies, meaning that they were in the same team. But Taeyong already knew that. He had gone to school with them after all.

“No way, Lee Taeyong?!” Another familiar voice broke out from behind the boy in front of
Taeyong, Taeyong was still trying to breathe properly when he spoke.

“Hey Taeyongie,” his voice was gentle, sweet and just as Taeyong remembered it.

“Jinkyu,” he finally managed, voice sounding cold. Just like he wanted it. Jinkyu had blonde hair, handsome features and a typical angelic appearance. Taeyong knew he was no angel though. He knew about a hidden tattoo on his body. About the forbidden thoughts on his mind. About the playboy he was hiding within those kind eyes. He knew Jinkyu wasn’t the perfect specimen, as everyone liked to believe.

“Excuse me,” Ten finally managed to strike Taeyong out of his staring. “But who are you exactly?” He slung a casual arm over Taeyong’s shoulder but the red head knew it was anything but casual. Ten was tense.

“Sorry,” Jinkyu apologized, ever the polite one, and smiled handsomely. “We know Taeyong from school, nice to meet you.” Ten only hummed. The two boys who had been with Jinkyu sided up to him, smiling slightly at Taeyong. They hadn’t been very kind to him during his time at that particular school. Mostly because he’d been a nobody and classified as weird because he’d been quiet and withdrawn. They didn’t know about his and Jinkyu’s relationship. Now he had changed though. He could see the surprise in their eyes when they looked him up and down.

“We didn’t know you danced,” one of them, a brunet, Jaden, said. His real name wasn’t Jaden, but using American names was apparently cool.

“I do,” Taeyong relented, knowing that his teammates were watching their interaction.

“And you changed your hair,” the other one said, he had standard black hair and his name was Byunghoon. Taeyong remembered him being very popular at the school.

“I did,” Taeyong confirmed, wanting it to be over. They fidgeted awkwardly as his replies cut the conversation off.

“Well it was nice seeing you again,” Jaden finally gave up. “We’ll see you on stage I guess.” Byunghoon and him started to move but Jinkyu lingered. Taeyong turned to leave, when a firm hand gripped his wrist. Jinkyu was pulling him back, Ten’s arm slipping off his shoulder. Taeyong noticed the Thai male getting ready to pounce. He shook his head minutely and let himself be dragged close to Jinkyu.

“Taeyongie,” the other breathed into his ear, breath minty and fresh. Picture perfect as he was. “Please. I’m sorry. I’ve already said I’m sorry.”

“Why does it matter now?” Taeyong whispered back, turning his head slightly so they could meet eyes, brown on brown, lips nearly touching. “I don’t want your apologies.” With that, Taeyong broke off and turned his back on Jinkyu, heading towards his teammates who were all watching him with confusion, curiosity and concern.

He didn’t acknowledge them, instead he kept on walking toward their room.

~

“What just happened?!” Lisa exclaimed when they had closed the door behind themselves. Jungkook and Yugyeom startled at her loud voice. Seulgi and Jonghyun simply looked at Taeyong for an explanation.

Taeyong sighed angrily and gripped his hair harshly, putting down the bag of food and starting to
pace.

Ten immediately grabbed him to get him to be still.

“Taeyong,” he said, slowly, carefully. “What’s going on?”

“I didn’t know they were gonna be here!” Taeyong burst out, frustrated. “I can’t,” he mourned. “I can’t do this.” He heaved.

Ten was frowning in deep worry.

“Taeyong, breathe,” he instructed, demonstrating by taking deep breaths himself. Taeyong tried to focus and follow his movements, finding that it helped slightly. They continued for a couple of long seconds before Taeyong was fully calm.

“Let’s go somewhere okay?” Ten decided. “We’ll be back soon guys, you can start eating.” He told the others, who were still watching them. Lisa wanted to protest but kept it in. This didn’t involve her, she knew her boundaries.

Taeyong followed Ten out of the classroom and down the corridor to an unoccupied room. It seemed to be a dance classroom seeing as mirrors lined the walls.

Ten closed the door firmly and grabbed Taeyong to sit him down on the floor.

“Now, what’s going on?” Ten asked, once again. “Who were those guys?” Taeyong sighed. He should tell Ten. It was only fair. He didn’t like thinking about it but Ten was his friend.

“We used to go to the same school in junior year,” Taeyong started. “You already know that we move around a lot, so we don’t stay for long in the same place. This was the middle of junior year, when I transferred there. It was a sizeable school, bigger than ours, and the people weren’t that interested in me. To them I seemed weird and quiet, broody and disconnected. They didn’t care to get to know me, neither did I want to know them,” Taeyong explained, feeling his head hurt at the resurfacing of all the memories. “I was pretty bland back then. I hadn’t quite learned to show my features properly and my hair was a mess so I went pretty much undetected. Until Jinkyu started noticing me,” Taeyong said. Ten frowned.

“That was the guy who grabbed you?” Taeyong nodded in confirmation.

“Yeah. So he started noticing me. Started taking an interest in me. He’s fairly popular. Polite, kind and everyone’s favourite human,” Taeyong scoffed, feeling unusually resentful. “We became friends, we spent time together outside of school. We enjoyed being together, we had so much fun, and there was always this underlying tension I guess,” Taeyong blushed slightly, avoiding Ten’s gaze. “One time he kissed me. Just soft. No heat, no demands. Then it developed. We started experimenting more,” Taeyong trailed off, gathering himself. He really didn’t enjoy talking about Jinkyu. “He took my virginity.”

Ten was gaping at him. He couldn’t really see Taeyong as the type who would have had sex.

“He took up my attention. I had a crush. And he fed into it. My brothers suffered for it,” Taeyong was shaking his head in anger at himself. “I was so stupid, placing him above them. It was awful of me and I really tried to divide my attention more efficiently, I really tried to please everyone. Only to find out that he was actually fucking around with a lot of other people at school.”

Ten almost gasped, because Taeyong rarely swore. Very rarely.
“He never cared for me. I was an experiment to him. And I felt so betrayed when I found out, my heart was torn out of my chest,” Taeyong exclaimed. “I cut off all ties with him. I stopped meeting him, I didn’t go to school and I didn’t answer his calls. He tried to apologize but his attempts were weak. He was mostly trying to placate me so I wouldn’t destroy his angelic reputation,” Taeyong scoffed. “I didn’t expose him though, because I’m not that kind of a person. I knew his parents demanded him to be perfect and I knew the whole school looked up to him. I couldn’t destroy that. So I suffered quietly, tried to make amends with my brothers and then we had to move again. I stopped thinking of him and it worked perfectly fine. Until now.” Taeyong’s voice was bitter, as if the memories were drawing out his dark side.

Ten didn’t know what to do. He was having a hard time processing. He may have just gotten confirmed that Taeyong was into boys (he was pretty damn sure actually) and he wrap his head around that the only time Taeyong had actually opened up to someone he had gotten betrayed. It made Ten angry. To hear that Taeyong always got shit. That he was always pulled into other people’s problems. It wasn’t fair.

“Seeing him brought back so many stupid memories and I feel so annoyed because I don’t want him to have that power over me still,” Taeyong despaired, biting his nails, seemingly reverting back to himself then. Ten smiled sadly, reaching out to grab Taeyong’s hand, pulling it away from his mouth. He intertwined their fingers and Taeyong looked up in surprise. Ten couldn’t believe that his beautiful best friend had been exposed to so much evil in his short life.

“We’re gonna kick their asses and we’re gonna make him regret ever fucking around with you,” Ten promised, making Taeyong laugh incredulously. He still looked nervous and agitated but there was some type of determination in there. “Taeyong, you’re beautiful and a great friend and a great person. Don’t let this idiot bring you down.” Taeyong smiled.

“Thank you Ten,” he said, sincere. Ten leaned forward and gave him a tight hug.

“No need to thank me. We’re best friends,” he whispered. “This is what we do.”
When they got back to the room, no one asked questions which Taeyong was grateful for. He didn’t know if he could handle any more.

They ate their food peacefully, listening to their team mates chatting and chilling. The competition was only two hours away and they needed to start getting ready.

Ten and Taeyong made quick work of the trash and called all of the others to them.

“Okay guys, we’re all set,” Ten said, not able to contain his smile. “Let’s get those outfits on and then we’ll do makeup.” Everyone cheered and immediately went for their bags. Lisa hung back and grabbed onto Taeyong’s arm.

“You okay?” She questioned quietly. He saw Seulgi and Jonghyun hovering close by. He gave them a reassuring smile and patted Lisa’s hand gently.

“I’m gonna be fine,” he promised and he actually believed himself when saying it. Lisa scanned him for signs of lies and when she found none she grinned back.

“Good, now let’s get into those outfits.”

Their concept was very varied, an attempt at bringing together different genres. They were starting off with individual dance sections, Jungkook and Chungha with some hard hitting beats, Soonyoung, Seulgi and Jonghyun with old school pop, Lisa and Momo with contemporary elements while Ten and Taeyong showcased a little sexy dance they’d worked on. After individually showing their segments of approximately twenty seconds each, they were getting together to a hard core dark pop beat, breaking down in a jaw dropping strong performance.

A great focus of the group was to eliminate divisions between themselves and come together as a team, meaning that all of them did the same choreography to show a unity in diversity, as they liked to say. It was sure to rile up the audience at the least.

Taeyong was dressed in tight pants with huge rips, showing off pale thighs, while also wearing a flowing white shirt. His red hair was gelled and showcasing his forehead with a few strands falling down into it. His scar felt very visible which he didn’t like but thankfully no one commented. The others were in similar clothing. Lisa wearing baggier pants and a tighter shirt while Momo’s shirt was almost thigh length. Ten’s shirt was silver and flowed like water when he moved. Jonghyun had gotten heavy eye makeup applied which looked gorgeous and Seulgi had enticing red lipstick.

Taeyong himself glossed his own lips and applied eye makeup. Being Jungwoo’s and Donghyuck’s older brother he had naturally learned to do such things. When they had expressed their interest in makeup he had immediately looked it up so he could provide them with the best advice and support possible. Therefore he knew how to do makeup without being interested himself.
He was currently helping Lisa with her eyeliner as the others looked on curiously.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Soonyoung asked, curious. Taeyong bit his tongue in concentration.

“I have siblings,” he said. Yugyeom frowned.

“But don’t you have brothers only?” He questioned. Taeyong raised an eyebrow, glancing up at them, seeing Ten’s knowing grin.

“Yeah,” he agreed, “so?”

Yugyeom didn’t ask further and everyone else seemed to understand what that meant as they moved to continue with their own business.

It took them around an hour and ten minutes to finish up everything and then they were officially leaving the room, crossing the campus and moving towards the big stage where the competition was going down. The food stands were abandoned in favour of getting good spots close to the stage. Taeyong felt his whole body thrumming in anticipation and he couldn’t wait to let all the energy out during their performance. When they reached the designated area for the competition, a stage manager, who was actually a student volunteer, led them to the backstage and showed them where they could wait. There was a gathering room where all the competing groups stayed, waiting anxiously for their turn. Most of them were practicing last minute and all of them looked ready to kill for first place. Taeyong quickly found Jinkyu in the crowd of dancers, surrounded by the rest of his team. Taeyong remembered always having looked up to them, wanting to be in the team as well. But it wouldn’t have felt the same. Not as good as it felt being in his current crew. Jinkyu looked up, as if something compelled him, and their eyes met briefly before Taeyong looked away. Jinkyu was watching him like a starved man and Taeyong almost scoffed. He was the embodiment of a playboy, that one. He couldn’t believe that Jinkyu had the nerve to ask for forgiveness when all he really wanted was to get laid again. Taeyong couldn’t understand how his younger self had been crushing on Jinkyu at all.

Or he did understand. His own selfish desire for a friend, for a person to care about him, for someone to hold him together for once. Someone to take care of him for a change. He had been careless and it had gotten him absolutely nowhere. It did make him realize how much he loved his brothers so kudos for that Jinkyu, he thought bitterly.

The excited chatter that had been buzzing outside on the lawn where the stage was set up quieted down slightly when the sound of microphone static was heard. Taeyong strained to hear.

The stage had been set up close to the main entrance of the university and since it was such a huge competition he knew that there were a lot of people present, especially from the crowd they’d seen by the food stands earlier. He believed that there might even be some local reporters present.

The crowd hushed down when a voice came through.

“Welcome!” A female voice cheerily greeted the audience who roared. “This is the ninth year we’re hosting this competition and I’m so glad you all could make it! I’m Boa, the headmaster here at the university.”

“And I’m Yunho, teacher and administrator,” another voice joined. Taeyong shivered with the anticipation. His phone buzzed and he picked it up to look with shaking hands. Johnny had sent a selca of himself and Yuta who were making hearts. A ‘Good luck’ text came with it. Taeyong smiled at the photo for a few seconds before tuning back into what the hosts were saying.
“As usual, the price for this year is ten million won and consideration for scholarship to this very university,” Boa said and the crowd’s cheers were deafening. Ten reached out for Taeyong’s hand instinctively, and the red head gripped him tightly, smiling nervously.

This was it. This was their chance.

~

Donghyuck was jumping in his spot. He felt so much adoration for his brother it was crazy.

Originally, Taeyong hadn’t wanted his brothers to come, since it was far and they wouldn’t have a ride and the bus could be dangerous and it didn’t feel worth it. Of course, none of the brothers thought so. Therefore, they decided to go anyways and not tell Taeyong.

Donghyuck had cornered Johnny at school on the day of the competition and convinced the tall male to bring them.

Johnny had frowned in protest and tried to argue with the younger but Donghyuck was very persuasive when he wanted to.

Thus, it was decided that Taeil would be driving the brothers to the competition in Taeyong’s car, which Sicheng had managed to snatch the keys for. Johnny would be driving himself, Yuta, Doyoung, Jaehyun and Mark in his pickup truck.

Donghyuck praises himself for his persuasive skills once again as they made their way from the parking lot to the huge stage by the entrance of the university. The university in itself was very impressive, huge build and pristine colors.

Jisung was being carried by Sicheng while Jungwoo and Lucas held one of Chenle’s hands each. Donghyuck sidled up to Taeil and linked their arms. He liked the gentle senior, he was a comforting presence.

Donghyuck had dressed up especially for the occasion; extravagant makeup with smokey eyes, shimmery lips and diamond details, matching shining nail polish included. A choker around his neck and clothed in blue ripped jeans with a white T-shirt and flannel topping everything off.

Sicheng was wearing one of his crop tops. He had three in total and Donghyuck felt proud seeing him in it.

They reached the crowd area and picked a good spot where they could see the stage properly. Johnny hadn’t arrived yet, so they got settled and waited for them to arrive.

“I’m hungry,” Chenle complained, pouting. Sicheng nodded.

“Let’s go check the food stands and buy something,” he decided. Taeil perked up.

“I’ll come with,” the eldest said.

“Bring me a soda,” Donghyuck shouted after them, seeing Sicheng wave a dismissive hand. He knew they would get it though so Donghyuck didn’t dwell.

Jisung had been given to Jungwoo by Sicheng, the thirteen year old carrying the youngest brother on his back. Donghyuck ruffled his hair and tickled Jisung who squealed with indignant laughter. Lucas was watching his surroundings with wide eyes, seeing all of the college students and grown ups milling about.
Donghyuck got a text almost immediately when his brothers and Taeil had disappeared out of view.

From Mork
we’re here, where are u guys?

Donghyuck smiled and texted back to him, trying to describe the place where they were currently standing.

“The others are here, shout if you see them,” Donghyuck told Lucas, Jungwoo and Jisung who instantly started looking for familiar faces. It took a few minutes until Jisung made a noise of recognition, pointing a tiny finger. Donghyuck followed his line of pointing and immediately saw Johnny’s tall frame making its way over, the others presumably following him.

Donghyuck started waving his arms frantically, overly excited.

Johnny noticed them and smiled.

When the group reached them, Donghyuck latched onto Mark who let him. The junior was dressed in jeans and a cozy sweater, brown hair swooped to the side from running his hands through it. He had glasses on which Donghyuck liked. The look was very casual.

“This is awesome,” Yuta said, looking around. The stage at the centre was flashing with strobe lights and some pop music, awaiting the start of the actual show. He crowd was huge and the atmosphere was hyped.

“Let’s take a picture and send to Yongie,” Johnny nudged Yuta and opened his phone.

Doyoung and Jaehyun stood beside Lucas, Jaehyun reaching over to give Jisung a high five.

“Taeil hyung, Sicheng hyung and Chenle went to get food,” Donghyuck said and intertwined his fingers with Mark’s. The older was looking at him with rosy cheeks, still unused to excessive amounts of skinship.

“Great!” Doyoung exclaimed. “I’m hungry.”

The food arrived only minutes later, Taeil carrying a bag and Sicheng carrying a plate of drinks. Donghyuck cheered at the sight. Chenle was holding onto Taeil’s free hand.

They pounced on the bag of food and Donghyuck snatched a soda which he shared with Mark.

The atmosphere was incredibly carefree and relaxed. Yuta was clinging to Sicheng, the junior looking done with life. Donghyuck bothered Taeil to feed him, snatched Mark’s phone and chased Chenle around when the younger teased him.

It wasn’t long before the food was gone and the music had quieted when two figures made their way onstage.

Donghyuck jumped onto Jaehyun’s back and strained to see. Jaehyun grunted with the added weight but didn’t throw him off.

“Wah they look cool,” Chenle said from his spot in Sicheng’s arms. The woman on stage wore a grey pant suit, her brown hair flowing down her back. The man wore a velvet suit, black hair slicked back pristinely.

They introduced themselves and explained the competition.
“There are seven teams in total,” Boa was saying. “They have all been permitted five minutes of stage time and will be judged by a few select individuals.” The crowd cheered when five people made their way on stage, two females and three males. They waved at the crowd and bowed.

“These are some of the best dancers at the school,” Yunho smiled, seeing the, apparently, students twist in discomfort at his praise. “They will judge fairly.” He nodded. Donghyuck was vibrating from the anticipation. They should get started for real before he dies from the tension.

“I think we’ve talked enough,” Boa laughed genially. “It’s time to bring out our first contestants. Judges, please take your places.”

The five judges for off stage and headed for a small platform set up next to the scene, while Boa and Yunho disappeared backstage.

Donghyuck gripped Jaehyun’s shoulder harshly, music starting to build. The lights dimmed and the crowd cheered when a team of people appeared on stage.

It was officially starting.

~

“No freaking way!” Lisa exclaimed, having peeked at the stage from behind the curtains covering the backstage. “The judges are like famous!” She gasped. Ten hurriedly went over to sneak a peek himself. Taeyong watched him smile in recognition.

“They’re really famous from uploading stuff online,” Ten confirmed, dragging Lisa away, back to the other contestants, with a final glance at the stage. “I know the three guys usually upload a lot choreographies on YouTube. I think their names are Lay, Taemin and Kai,” Ten said when they got back to their team. Taeyong’s eyes widened in recognition. He actually had heard of them before, their videos always trended on Youtube.

“And the girls are Hyoyeon and Hyuna!” Lisa exclaimed, Seulgi gaping in wonder.

“No! They’re great dancers,” she mourned, looking anxious. “But they’re so intimidating.”

“Yeah,” Lisa agreed, having seen them on the stage.

“Guys,” Jonghyun snapped his fingers. “Focus!”

“Jonghyun’s right,” Ten agreed. “Freaking out over the judges only brings unnecessary anxiety. Don’t even think about them,” he scolded lightly.

Taeyong almost laughed at the looks Seulgi and Lisa were sending him, looking like they wanted him to support them in their freaking out. He didn’t.

The lights on the stage suddenly dimmed and the first team was about to go on.

Taeyong knew their performance was second to last, the sixth one. Which was actually good. They would remain fresh in the minds of the judges by the end.

It was also not good because it gave them time to consider the other teams in comparison to theirs.

The backstage was considerably less lively as everyone quieted down and focused on the first performance. Some people were peeking through the curtains while others simply listened, like Taeyong.
Taeyong noticed that Jinkyu and his teammates were constantly sending him looks, whispering in between themselves. They were no doubt gossiping about him, having recognized him.

He tried not to pay them any mind but it was very hard.

Ten walked over and sat next to him on one of the plastic chairs spread around the area. The Thai male gripped his hand and smiled nervously.

“You okay?” He asked. Taeyong nodded.

“Yeah,” he assured. Ten squeezed his hand comfortingly and they sat like that for several performances, finding comfort in each other.

Jinkyu’s team placed fifth in the order and they were getting ready to go onstage.

Taeyong snuck glances under his eyelashes at Jinkyu, seeing his handsome face furrow in concentration as he nodded his head to something another team member was saying. Seeing the nerves on his face before they walked to the stage. Seeing the way his eyes found Taeyong’s one last time before he disappeared.

Taeyong breathed heavily, trying to gather himself. He didn’t want to think of Jinkyu during their performance and he sure as hell wasn’t going to. Instead, he focused on conjuring a picture in his head. Taeil was smiling as he showed Lucas a butterfly that was sitting on a tree. Doyoung was bickering with Mark as they tried to set up the food, Donghyuck was bothering Johnny. Chenle and Jisung were playing in the grass with some figures, Lucas, Sicheng and Jungwoo challenging Yuta and Ten in a game of soccer.

Taeyong, with his hand in Jaehyun’s, a huge smile on his face as the summer breeze warmed his skin.

He found himself unconsciously smiling at the picture he’d conjured, feeling much calmer as he squeezed Ten’s hand in reassurance, seeing the Thai male’s anxious frown.

“We’re gonna be great out there,” Taeyong promised. Ten looking at him with a small nod. Taeyong knew his friends were out there somewhere and the thought alone made him feel lighter, even if there was some sadness that his brothers weren’t. But Jaehyun was out there. And he just knew it was going to be great.

~

Donghyuck froze when he saw the fifth team take the stage. He recognized them. Oh how he recognized them.

“Hyuck?” Jaehyun asked, nudging the sophomore, who was standing next to him. Donghyuck didn’t respond, instead his eyes found Sicheng’s and saw that they were thinking the same thing.

“What’s happening?” Doyoung asked, suspicious. Sicheng was biting his lip in thought as the performance started up on stage.

“Do you guys see the blonde on stage?” Donghyuck huddled close so everyone could hear him. They nodded.

“He used to be together with Taeyong and it didn’t end well,” Donghyuck revealed, knowing the whole story, Sicheng knowing it as well.
Donghyuck noticed Jaehyun tensing up especially, a frown on his face. He almost smirked. Almost.

After having caught Jaehyun in Taeyong’s bed, Donghyuck had finally understood that they were actually crushing on each other. When the thought had been planted in his head it was so painfully obvious. The way they looked at each other, their fleeting touches and sneaky glances.

“He had apparently been sleeping with a lot of other people at the same time,” Sicheng murmured, covering Chenle’s ears. Jisung was a bit further ahead with Lucas and Jungwoo so he didn’t worry about them. Lucas and Jungwoo knew that Taeyong had been together with a guy but they hadn’t gotten the whole story with all the details, like Donghyuck and Sicheng had.

“What a jerk!” Yuta exclaimed, looking outraged. Doyoung’s bunny teeth were bared and Taeil was frowning. Johnny looked shocked while Jaehyun was still, much like a statue.

“Yeah,” Donghyuck agreed. Mark’s hand was on the small of his back, rubbing small circles into his skin. Donghyuck leaned into the touch and saw that Mark, as well, looked angry at Jinkyu’s deceitful manners.

“It’s nothing to dwell on,” Sicheng said breezily. “We know Taeyong is going to be a better dancer than him.”

Donghyuck looked at the ongoing performance and concluded that Taeyong was indeed a better dancer than Jinkyu. Although he might’ve been biased.

They all nodded in agreement and simmered down slightly, expect for Jaehyun who still looked stiff.

The performance was over quickly and the crowd cheered loudly, especially at the front where Donghyuck assumes that some of their classmates resided. He saw Jinkyu throwing them a wink and he grimaced. What a greaseball.

The next team was introduced and they all jumped when they realized it was their team. It was Ten and Taeyong.

A song started up, no people on stage. The song built up, hard hitting beats making their eardrums vibrate.

Two people emerged from the curtains, jumping into a performance immediately.

Donghyuck shouted loudly, intending to cheer them on for all he was worth.

The song slowly changed into something else, an old song with a muffled beat. Three people showed up this time, dancing just as well as their predecessors.

Mark was whistling loudly, Donghyuck whooping excitedly. Jisung had been placed on Johnny’s shoulders to see properly while Chenle sat on Yuta’s.

The song changed smoothly into something much calmer, two girls entering and starting to dance. Donghyuck recognized one of them as Lisa who he’d talked to a few times before.

The last transition brought on a calm, yet exiting beat, whispery singing and some sensual rapping. Ten and Taeyong emerged. The whole group screamed loudly at the sight. Donghyuck couldn’t contain his smile. His brother looked like a whole snack and their dancing was so incredibly good. He saw Jaehyun’s dumbstruck look and whacked him on the shoulder, laughing. Jaehyun rubbed his sore spot and shot him a playful glare before going back to watching Ten and Taeyong.
Soon enough the song bled into something. Something dark, something enticing, something with deep reverberating beats and drum sounds.

The whole team came together as one, all of them standing out in their own way as they performed a powerful group choreography. Donghyuck’s breath was stolen out of his lungs as he watched the performance. It was truly captivating.

When they finished the crowd was thunderous in their cheers, Donghyuck making sure that their little group was the loudest.

~

Taeyong was vibrating as they exited the stage, smiling widely.

It had gone without a hitch. Everything had been according to plan and their energy had been exuberant.

When he had first gotten out on stage he had almost lost his footing as he’d picked out some familiar faces in the crowd. His brothers were there.

Taeyong had been shocked to see them but at the same time so excited that they were there. That they were seeing him.

He had given it his all to make them proud.

“We were so good!” Lisa shouted, jumping from the excitement. Seulgi was smiling more than Taeyong had ever seen her smile. Jungkook and Yugeom were clinging to each other while Momo and Chungha went for the water bottles placed around the room. Jonghyun was smiling and patting everyone on the back for a job well done.

Ten looked about ready to collapse from happiness.

“You were great,” a voice spoke, right behind Taeyong. He swirled and came face to face with Jinkyu.

The blonde was smiling at him, looking almost shy which was new. Jinkyu has always been the outgoing one in their relationship. The one being looked up to.

Taeyong pursed his lips. This was ruining his good mood.

“Thank you,” he said, cold, without emotion. Jinkyu’s eyes were pleading.

“Taeyong.”

“I have to go,” Taeyong interrupted him, turning his back and hurrying to Jonghyun instead. He didn’t look back.

~

The results were announced shortly thereafter. All the teams were called on stage and the crowd was tense with anticipation.

Taeyong looked out at all the people, finding his brothers and friends easily in the crowd. Ten had spotted them as well, waving as he held onto Taeyong’s arm.

Boa and Yunho had received an envelope from Lay, who was one of the judges.
Taeyong clenched his teeth.

“The winner of this year’s competition, the team who will receive ten million won and a consideration for a scholarship to this very school,” the crowd cheered at Boa’s words. “The winner is... Fiction team!”

The crowd exploded in cheers. Taeyong clapping along with them. Fiction team had been the third team to go on stage and they had shown a great performance of the stages through adulthood, using Alice in wonderland as their stand point. He felt the disappointment dawn upon him, but he also knew that he did his best and he was satisfied with his team’s effort. The most overpowering thought was of Ten. How disappointed he must be. Taeyong glanced at the Thai male and was surprised to find a small smile on his face. Ten looked okay.

The judges got up on stage to deliver the price, then proceeded to shake hands with every contestant.

“You guys were a close second,” Hyoyeon commented when she passed them, eyes kind and smile bright. “You were great.”

“Thank you,” Seulgi said and bowed, the rest of the team following her actions. Hyoyeon continued down the line.

“You two were awesome,” Kai commented when he stopped in front of Ten and Taeyong.

“I bet you could get in through an audition scholarship,” Taemin agreed, being right next to Kai. Ten perked up, looking incredibly hopeful.

“What’s that?” He asked. Lay had caught up to his fellow judges and heard the exchange of words.

“You can apply for a scholarship through an audition, you basically sign up and get assigned a time slot where you’re allowed to show some administrators your skills,” Lay explained with a smile, he had dimples. They reminded Taeyong of Jaehyun. “If you’re good enough they’ll give you a full ride scholarship. It’s a bit like scouting.”

Ten looked like the whole world had opened up for him all of a sudden. Taeyong felt happy to see that his friend still had a shot at going to the university.

“Think about it,” Kai said and smiled, leaving with Taemin and Lay to continue down the line.

Ten squealed, shaking Taeyong’s arm.

“We still have a chance Yongie!” He exclaimed. Taeyong nodded. They still had a chance indeed.

We.

They.

Both of them. A chance. To go to university.

Yet, Taeyong knew he didn’t. He didn’t have a chance. After all, he had his brothers to take care of.

~

Ten and Taeyong made their way through the crowd, still in their stage outfits, trying to find their friends and the Lee brothers.

The rest of the team had already left with their parents, looking both disappointed yet content.
Ten noticed a tall frame, Johnny, and shouted his name. Taeyong waved when Johnny turned and spotted them.

They headed for each other, trying to get through the crowd of people heading for the parking lot. Although their advancements were stopped when someone grabbed Taeyong’s wrist.

He was just about done with people grabbing him.

He whirled around and came face to face with Jinkyu yet again.

“Taeyong,” the blonde said, voice determined. His eyes were stormy with emotion. Taeyong felt tired and the energy had drained out of him and this idiot couldn’t take a hint.

“What is it?” He asked, voice cold.

The crowd had thinned out, making it easy for his friends and brothers to join Ten who was behind him, watching the exchange closely. Taeyong could also see people from his old school behind Jinkyu watching them as well. They seemed shocked to see him, Lee Taeyong, looking beautiful. Even more confused as to why Jinkyu was currently talking to him.

“Taeyong, I’ve told you I’m sorry, please believe me,” Jinkyu demanded. Taeyong scoffed, slowly losing his mask of indifference.

“You’re revolting, leave me alone,” Taeyong enunciated. “I don’t care about your apologies, especially not when they’re as fake as you.”

He heard Donghyuck whooping in the background. ‘That’s my brother!’

Jinkyu scoffed.

“Just because you look all sexy and hot now, it doesn’t mean you are. You’re still that shy, young, stupid kid who followed me around like a puppy.”

Taeyong’s eyes flamed with indignation, anger simmering right on the tip of his tongue. He knew Jinkyu’s voice was low because he didn’t want to risk his reputation. And Taeyong was seriously considering outing him.

“Sure, I did follow you around. And that was a mistake on my part, I sincerely apologize. Now let me go,” he said, stepping closer to the blonde, trying to intimidate him with his hateful eyes. They were the same height, although Jinkyu had a bigger build.

“You don’t know what you’re missing out on. Everything you could have if your brothers hadn’t been such cockblockers,” Jinkyu spat. Taeyong heard a gasp behind him and he tensed. His eyes widened in fury. Okay, he was definitely outing him now.

“Really Jinkyu,” he made sure to keep his voice loud, seeing his old school mates creeping closer at the sound of an altercation. “Everything I could have? Like what exactly? You lying to me about your intentions? You copying my homework because you couldn’t bother? Your lying ass cheating on me? You saying you love me when we both know you’re saying the same thing to at least ten other people.”

He saw the shocked faces of the people behind Jinkyu. He saw the flickering fear in Jinkyu’s eyes as Taeyong stepped even closer, their lips millimeters away from each other.
“What would your parents say if they find out we’ve fucked on their kitchen counter?” Taeyong whispered, not wanting his brothers to hear any more vulgarities than they’d already had.

“What the fuck happened to you?” Jinkyu said in disbelief and Taeyong almost felt bad. He felt the hesitation creeping up on him. He was being unusually cruel.

“Nobody insults my brothers,” he hissed instead, ripping his wrist out of Jinkyu’s gradually loosening grip. “I hope everybody understands that you’re not as perfect as you might seem,” he declared loudly, about to walk away, when Jinkyu made a noise of anger.

“You’re such a slut Taeyong. You begged me! Remember!” He was shouting. Taeyong seriously worried for his brothers’ mental states. And he seriously felt the disbelief creeping up on him.

“I didn’t beg for anything,” he seethed.

“Really, what about when we-“

Taeyong had reached out to punch him before he knew it. He landed a right hook on Jinkyu’s cheek, the blonde staggering back with the force of it. His teammates who’d been huddling with others from their school immediately rushed to his aid.

“Leave me alone, Jinkyu. Don’t ever bother to even think of me again,” Taeyong said, turning his back on the scene and walking the few steps to his friends and brothers. They were all watching with wide eyes and gaping mouths. Taeyong didn’t acknowledge them, instead he kept walking, hoping they would follow him, only wanting to get away from Jinkyu.

The others did follow, quietly, and they ended up at the parking lot, Taeyong stopping by their cars, pulling on his hair. He had just punched someone. And his brothers had seen it.

No one had spoken until then.

“Are you okay?” Jaehyun asked, walking forward cautiously to place a hand on Taeyong’s shoulder, trying to calm him.

“I’m good,” he breathed. “I’m great. That felt great,” he admitted. Finally exposing Jinkyu and his lies. Even punching him, it felt indescribably satisfying. Even if there was some guilt.

“It was awesome,” Donghyuck agreed. Taeyong finally managed to look at the others, ripping his gaze away from Jaehyun’s worried frown. Chenle was holding onto Sicheng’s hand, looking uncharacteristically sad. Mark was holding Donghyuck’s hand. Taeyong saw Jisung in Doyoung’s arms, looking sacred. Taeyong smiled softly and walked over to take the child out of Doyoung’s arms. Taeyong felt guilt washing over him when Jisung clung to him, burying his face in Taeyong’s shoulder.

“He didn’t hear much of it,” Doyoung whispered, assuring him slightly. Taeyong pressed his lips together.

“Thanks,” he sighed. The tense atmosphere was suffocating.

“Don’t worry hyung,” Lucas suddenly spoke. “We’ve got your back! He doesn’t deserve you!” Taeyong giggled at Lucas’s serious face.

“Yeah,” Jungwoo agreed vehemently. “He’s at fault! Don’t waste energy on him anymore!” Taeyong smiled widely at them when his friends also joined in, agreeing to Jungwoo’s words.
“Okay, I promise I won’t,” he said, his friends and brothers all smiling. He felt okay. He felt better. He had stood up for himself and his brothers.

He wouldn’t waste his energy on thinking of insignificant things. His eyes met Jaehyun’s and the other flashed a dimple at him, eyes warm and gentle and soft. Jaehyun who had been Taeyong’s comforting space. The person he thought of when he needed to calm his nerves. When he needed to feel content and happy. The person he thought of whenever he wanted to smile.

Yes. He would only waste his energy thinking of things that matter.
Chapter 90

The mood remained somber throughout the car ride home, leaving the brothers with a weird tension settling over them.

Taeyong felt awful. His brothers seemed so concerned about him when in fact he was feeling completely fine. The confrontation with Jinkyu had given him closure. Had given him the outlet he needed to move on. His brothers didn’t seem quite convinced though.

Therefore, after a long drive and some late night snacks, Taeyong called for a meeting.

The family gathered in the living room, Donghyuck and Lucas on the couch, Chenle sprawling over them. Jungwoo and Jisung beside them, Sicheng in the armchair and Taeyong standing in front of them. The eldest had washed off all his makeup and showered, standing in sweatpants and a hoodie.

“Okay,” Taeyong nodded, rubbing his hands together from the cold, trying to gather his thoughts properly. “I’m so sorry for today,” he decided to say. “I’m sorry you were forced to see that and I lost my temper,” he admitted, biting his lip guiltily, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay hyung,” Jungwoo was the first to speak. “We understand that he hurt you and you were defending yourself.” Taeyong smiled, wistful.

“Yes. He hurt me, quite a while ago. And I was indeed defending myself, but I could’ve gone about it in a better way. Violence is never the answer, remember?” They all nodded dutifully. That was a lesson Taeyong had made them learn early.

“Hyung,” Chenle said then, frowning a bit. “What’s a slut?” Taeyong saw Donghyuck tense up, Sicheng’s eyes flickering with anger.

“Chenle-ah,” Taeyong started, walking forward a bit so he could crouch in front of the eight year old. “It’s a very bad word. A word you should never use about someone else.” Taeyong saw Donghyuck tense up, Sicheng’s eyes flickering with anger.

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“But why did he call you that then? If it’s a bad word? You’re not bad hyung.” Taeyong was trying to keep his face gentle and encouraging but he was finding it hard, especially to meet Chenle’s eyes. He felt ashamed. The word brought out doubts.

“But why did he call you that then? If it’s a bad word? You’re not bad hyung.” Taeyong was trying to keep his face gentle and encouraging but he was finding it hard, especially to meet Chenle’s eyes. He felt ashamed. The word brought out doubts.

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them. This time it was lighter, not suffocating, not tense or somber. It felt okay.

“I’m glad you’re okay hyung,” Jungwoo said, breaking the silence. Taeyong stood from his crouched position. “He deserved it anyway.”

“That he did,” Taeyong laughed, running a hand through his hair. “Now let’s go to bed. I’m getting tired.”

Taeyong helped Jisung with brushing his teeth, tucked him and Chenle in, then did the same with Lucas and Jungwoo.

When he was looking for Donghyuck and Sicheng he was rather surprised to find them on his bed instead of being in their respective rooms.

“What’s up?” He questioned gently, plopping down across from them on the soft surface. Donghyuck was wearing a T-shirt and briefs while Sicheng wore actual pyjamas. They shared a quick glance before producing a box from behind Sicheng’s back.

“You were great at the competition hyung,” Donghyuck grinned. Taeyong was shocked, opening the box and finding chocolate. His favorite kind. The tender smile on his face was breathtaking.

“Thank you,” he said, voice barely above a whisper.

“Your team totally should’ve won,” Sicheng shook his head, as if in disbelief that they hadn’t won. Taeyong laughed, opening the box and taking a piece out.

“Maybe we should’ve, but there’s still an opportunity for a scholarship though. Ten has a chance,” he said, offering them some, which they gladly accepted.

“What about you?” Sicheng asked then, quietly, they were looking at him with curious eyes. “Do you have a chance?” Taeyong tried to smile.

“I don’t know,” he dismissed, shrugging. Donghyuck frowned but they didn’t push the matter further.

“Hey Yongie hyung,” Donghyuck spoke after a minute. “I still can’t believe you gave your virginity to that guy.” Taeyong blushed and whacked Donghyuck on the arm, laughing from embarrassment. Sicheng snorted as he chewed on his chocolate, trying to hide his smile. Donghyuck smirked.

“Aww come on, you taught us about the birds and the bees and now you’re shy all of a sudden?” Donghyuck teased. Taeyong rolled his eyes.

“You’re such a brat Lee Donghyuck,” he sighed, nonetheless, he scooted up the bed, arranging them so they were all leaning on his head board, legs stretched out in front of them. Taeyong was in the middle. He sighed again. “What do you want to know?”

He remembered junior year, after the whole situation had went down, how he moped for days before picking himself up and starting to mend the rift between himself and his brothers. He remembered telling Sicheng and Donghyuck everything, although not being specific about the sex details since he felt they were a tad young. He was young too, in all fairness, it just didn’t feel like it.

“How many times did you do it?” Donghyuck asked, curious, peering up at Taeyong. The older cleared his throat awkwardly.
“Maybe five times,” he estimated. Sicheng and Donghyuck nodded.

“Have you ever done anything with a girl?” Sicheng wondered. Taeyong squinted, as if trying to remember, then he nodded.

“Yeah once, I made out with a girl in sophomore year. Although I didn’t like it quite as much as when I was with Jinkyu,” he admitted. Donghyuck hummed.

“Did you enjoy the sex?” He said, sounding unsure of himself. Taeyong choked on his tongue. “You don’t have to answer!” Donghyuck hurried to assure. Taeyong breathed in deeply, trying to remain calm.

“It was weird and I wasn’t used to it. But it was good at times,” Taeyong admitted. “Why the sudden onslaught of questions?” The thought hit him. Why were they so curious all of a sudden?

“Don’t know,” Donghyuck mumbled, looking away. Sicheng frowned, shrugging a bit. Taeyong smiled fondly at them both.

“You know you can tell me anything. I won’t judge,” he assured them. “Even if you’ve had sex, I won’t be mad.” He had been underage himself when actually doing it. And he knew many teens didn’t wait until they were adults. Even if the thought of his brothers having done it caused some concern, he wouldn’t be mad. That would only make things worse.

“No, no definitely not,” Donghyuck assured, Sicheng agreeing that no he hadn’t done it. Taeyong nodded.

“Okay, are either of you thinking of it? Donghyuck, you have Mark. Have you talked about stuff like that?” He inquired gently. Donghyuck shook his head with a shudder.

“We’re definitely not ready for anything,” he stated firmly.

“Okay,” Taeyong assented. “But remember to stay safe and don’t pressure each other into anything.” Donghyuck nodded, Taeyong turning to look at Sicheng who seemed to be pondering something.

“I’m not sure,” the strawberry blonde male stated. “I’m not sure about my sexuality yet, so I don’t think I’ll be having sex anytime soon,” he shrugged. Taeyong nodded, reaching out to grab their hands, one in each of his.


“We love you too hyung.”

~

“Oh hyung, I forgot, I was gonna ask. Do you like Jaehyun hyung?”

“Hyuck!”

“It’s an innocent question! Yes or no answer, come on hyung.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m not saying anything.”

“Aww! Hyung please! I’m dying here.”

“No.”
“Sicheng hyung tell him!”

“Don’t involve me in this.”

“Oh my god you’re both impossible.”

~

The next day, Ten clung to Taeyong like a sloth. He was apparently extremely tired from yesterday’s competition, especially after having been wound up about it for weeks, it seemed like his energy was drained. Dance practices were officially over, seeing as some of the members were seniors and needed to focus on studying.

Basketball was still going hard, their championships not due until after a few more weeks. Doyoung spent time either in the library or with his talent show committee. Taeil mostly studied and worked.

Taeyong felt relaxed and happy, not even caring about how much school work he actually had. He had cleared the air with his brothers, their performance at the competition had been great, he had gotten rid of past demons and he was only left with minor problems.


Like his feelings for Jaehyun.

And his future.

Dammit.

~

Mark was walking down the corridor, checking his phone, when it hit him. Literally. He crashed into Lisa.

The Thai girl wobbled but remained upright, Mark rubbing his sore forehead.

“Oh hey Mark,” she greeted when she looked up and saw him. “Sorry about that.”

“It’s fine, it was my fault as well,” he insisted because he was walking with his Phone after all. “What’s that?” He asked then, pointing at the bundle of paper in her hands. Lisa smiled.

“They’re the sign up sheets for the talent show,” she explained brightly. “Are you participating?”

Mark shook his head.

“Ah no,” he laughed, awkwardly. Lisa hummed.

“Okay, I’ll be on my way then,” she said cheerily. Mark nodded and smiled, waving as they went their separate ways. On the way to his locker he saw dozens of talent show posters and sign up sheets plastered all over the walls. He did understand why people were hyping it. It did seem like a huge deal.


Most people seemed to be singing, rapping or dancing honestly. Which made Mark ponder.

This could be his chance at showing off his lyrics and rapping.
Why wasn’t he participating, indeed?
Chapter 91

Chapter Notes

It’s -14 degrees Celsius. Kill meeee
I had a math test. I’m not sure if it went well or not but I guess I’ll find out soon enough XD
Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter <3333
We are now starting the countdown to 100 :))

Mark speed-walked down the corridor, having just finished his class. He entered the noisy canteen and immediately spotted the person he needed.

Mark had his backpack slung over one shoulder, hair ruffled and glasses askew. He’d ran out of lenses that morning, thus him wearing glasses. Some people turned to look as Mark Lee rushed past them, curious as to why he was hurrying.

He finally reached his destination and grabbed Taeyong by his upper arm. The senior dropped his chopsticks in surprise and looked up with wide eyes.

“Jeez you scared me,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief. Johnny was giving Mark a questioning look from the other side of the table. Ten, Doyoung, Taeil, Yuta and Jaehyun were watching him expectantly, as if they expected him to talk to them. He knew for a fact that Donghyuck, Jeno, Jaemin, Renjun and Suhyun were watching him as well from across the room.

“Hyung come with me,” Mark huffed, his breathing having sped up from power walking. “Come on.”

Taeyong gave him a confused look as Mark tugged on his arm, pulling him to his feet. Taeyong stumbled after Mark as the younger pulled him along.


“Leave it,” Mark puffed out, ignoring the looks.

The door closed behind them with a resounding thud.

~

“Mark? What are we doing?” Taeyong spoke, currently walking like a normal person next to Mark instead of being dragged, they were heading down the empty hallway.

“Hyung, you know the talent show that Doyoung hyung is having?” Mark countered with a question of his own.

“Yeah of course why?” Taeyong frowned.

“I want to participate, and I want you to do it with me,” Mark explained. Taeyong froze. Mark
stopped as well, looking at the red head expectantly.

“What?”

“You and me, performing at the talent show,” Mark enunciated. Taeyong opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again.

“What?”

“Hyung I want to rap and I want you to do it with me. We can write lyrics, come up with a dance or something and perform! It’s a great opportunity,” Mark said rapidly, excitedly, his mouth was smiling. Taeyong thought it over. Actually showing their lyrics to a whole audience. Performing. Rapping. In front of other people. It seemed so unthinkable, yet seeing Mark’s bright eyes, his excited smile. His exuberant energy. Mark really wanted him to do it. Wanted to do it with him.

And who was Taeyong to refuse.

“Okay,” he nodded, slowly. Mark’s eyes widened in surprise as the smile grew even larger.

“Really hyung?” He had to confirm. Taeyong nodded. “Oh my god this is gonna be amazing!”

Taeyong almost laughed at Mark’s excited English. Seeing the younger happy automatically made Taeyong want to smile.

“Let’s go sign up!” Mark decided, walking ahead, Taeyong following.

They were actually doing it. They were gonna perform at the talent show.

~

“Huh,” Donghyuck uttered, slightly confused. “No idea what that was about.”

They had just watched Mark dragging his brother out of the cafeteria, looking half crazed with excitement. Donghyuck shrugged and turned back to his friends.

“Okay, back on topic,” he declared. “I want Lexie to suffer.” He had been reminded of her existence that very morning when she had walked past him in the hall and dared bump her shoulder against his. What a terrible human being.

“And how do you suggest we do that?” Suhyun asked. She knew that Lexie had been a bitch by drugging Mark and almost breaking them up, but revenge seemed pointless. Even if it would be a good laugh, it might only make her more angry.

“Spiders in her locker?” Renjun suggested.

“Hair removal in her shampoo?” Jaemin said.

“Spilling soda on her dress?” Jeno sounded guilty even saying it. Donghyuck sighed.

“Guys, maybe we shouldn’t,” Suhyun spoke. Donghyuck frowned. “What does it matter if we make her suffer? She’ll just do the same back at us. It’s going to be a never ending circle of evil and who knows where we’ll end up?” Suhyun tried to be rational.

“But what she did, it’s unacceptable,” Donghyuck protested. Suhyun shook her head.

“What she did was terrible. So why would we stoop to her level.” Donghyuck hated to admit that
she was making sense. “Trust me. It’ll only make things worse.”

“I guess,” Donghyuck grumbled.

“Don’t worry. Karma will get her some day. Maybe not during high school. But some day it will get her,” Suhyun promised. Donghyuck tried to pick himself up. He did believe in Karma. And Suhyun was always right.

“Okay. I’ll lay off it,” he conceded.

~

He spoke too soon.

That same day, in between his third and fourth period, he was cornered. He had just exited the bathroom and was walking down the empty corridor when none other than Lexie appeared around the corner. Donghyuck sighed noiselessly, hoping that she wouldn’t do anything.

She did.

Lexie took one look at him and smirked, before walking right up to him.

“Oh look, here comes a queer,” she taunted, Donghyuck staring. Because that just didn’t make any sense. At all. He bit his tongue though. “What? No sassy remarks? No makeup attacks?” She scoffed. Donghyuck gave her a faux smile, obviously telling her to get the fuck away. “I can’t believe Mark’s incompetence. Who in their right mind would date you?” Okay, Donghyuck was done playing nice. He stepped closer to her, relishing in the slight fear flickering through her hazel eyes. Her long hair was tied up in a ponytail and she was wearing a shirt tucked into a miniskirt. It looked cold. Although Donghyuck did see the resemblance between her and Ara.

“Oh okay, listen to me,” he held a manicured finger up. “I don’t care about your opinions so keep them to yourself. Your makeup still sucks. You should learn how to use the word queer properly. And Mark has more competence than you will ever find in your own little sad brain. We’re together and you will not be the cause for our breakup,” he told her, eyes swarming with fury. “So stay the fuck away from my boyfriend or I will come for you.”

Lexie was staring at him with wide eyes. Her mouth was moving soundlessly as they stood there. Donghyuck didn’t blink.

Without a word, Lexie turned on her heel and hurried away. Donghyuck scoffed.

“She better have taken my words to heart,” he muttered, turning to walk to class. “Because I seriously will come for her.”

~

Everyone in their friend group knew that Taeyong was a clingy person. Jaehyun enjoyed Taeyong’s cuddly self and he never wanted him to stop.

Taeyong was always hugging someone or holding hands. Always kind and soft and beautiful.

Jaehyun loved it.

He also knew that Taeyong’s affectionate nature probably came from having so many brothers to hug and cuddle. Seeing the red head with his brothers was always something magical. They were all
so attuned to each other, so understanding, laughing and smiling, even though they had been through a lot in life.

And even if Jaehyun loved Taeyong’s cuddly side, he noticed that not everyone did.

He could see it, from the corner of his eye. Every time Taeyong held Taeil’s hands to warm his own, someone was whispering at another table, stealing glances at them.

When Taeyong rested his head on Johnny’s shoulder, someone was staring, eyebrows furrowed.

When Taeyong wiped crumbs off Doyoung’s face, someone let out a quiet gasp.

Jaehyun heard and saw it all.

People at their school were gossiping constantly about Taeyong again, and this time, it didn’t seem all that positive.

~

Sicheng sat with Kun as the older sifted through sign up papers, noting them down in a document on his laptop. They were currently in the cafeteria, Jiwoo and Somin, unfortunately, having class. So it was just Kun and Sicheng.

“How is it going?” Sicheng questioned, watching the older work. Kun shrugged a bit.

“There are a lot of people,” he mourned. “It’s going to take forever.” Sicheng chuckled at his misery, but reached over to grab some of the papers.

“I’ll read for you and you can write,” Sicheng said, starting to list names. Kun typed quickly, keeping up pace quite nicely.

They continued on until the papers were all documented on the laptop, double checking so they hadn’t missed anyone.

Kun smiled and thanked him. Sicheng offered him a smile back.

Movement caught his eye and he noticed people entering the cafeteria. He smiled and waved when it was his brother, Yuta and Jaehyun.

Taeyong waved at them enthusiastically, Yuta winking at Sicheng who rolled his eyes. The three seniors sat down at a table and Sicheng noticed how a lot of the other students in the area were watching them, talking quietly in between themselves.

Sicheng frowned.

“What’s that all about?” He wondered aloud. Kun followed his line of sight and tilted his head curiously. He hummed.

“I don’t know.”

Sicheng wondered why everyone seemed to be so interested in his brother yet again.

~

Chenle felt lost. Daehwi was sick and Somi was away at a dentist appointment. Even thinking about it made him shiver. He really hated the dentist.
He didn’t want to join the game of tag that the majority of his class was playing, instead he sat on a bench, sulking. He had no one to play with.

The eight year old kicked at the ground, trying to keep the frown off his face. He didn’t like being sad, it didn’t feel nice. So he tried to stay positive. He could play by himself.

With a newfound resolve, Chenle headed for the swings, hopping onto one cheerily, then he started swinging. The air felt nice on his face and the speed made his stomach tingle happily.

After running out of breath he let the swing simmer down to an easy swaying, humming a song he and Donghyuck had been dancing to a few days before. He should ask his brother to dance with him again. He missed it already.

A shadow fell over him, blocking the sunlight. Chenle frowned and looked up, finding a child he didn’t recognize there. The kid had short hair and a red beanie shoved on top of it, wearing a huge puffy jacket and staring silently.

“Hello,” Chenle greeted with an eye crinkling smile. “Do you want to swing with me?” The child’s staring didn’t falter. Chenle kept his smile, although it faded slightly. “Um...”

“You’re alone,” the child stated. Chenle frowned, smile slipping off his face. “Why?”

“My friend is sick and my other friend is at the dentist,” he said, confused. The child hummed. “You’re alone too,” he pointed out.

“I don’t have friends.” Chenle’s eyes widened in surprise. The kid was staring again.

“Why not?” He wondered, genuinely confused.

“The boys said I couldn’t play with them because I’m a girl and the girls said I couldn’t play because I’m Japanese,” she shrugged, looking slightly troubled. Chenle didn’t understand why she couldn’t play because of those two reasons.

“You can play with me,” he offered. “Do you want to swing?” The girl pursed her lips, looking a bit lost. But she nodded eventually. Chenle smiled and petted the space across from him on the tire swing. She got on and they started gaining speed. Chenle was giggling, and so was she after a while.

Together they reached an amazing height.

Chenle later found out that her name was Hitomi. And he decided he would be her friend from then and onwards.

~

Sicheng was laying in bed, scrolling through his Instagram. He didn’t have a lot of followers. Which was fine, he didn’t post a lot after all. He liked seeing what others posted more than doing it himself.

Yuta had been texting him sporadically. Sometimes a lame pickup line. Other times a picture of a squirrel that seemed to haunt a tree outside Yuta’s apartment complex. Other times it was some life philosophy. Still lame.

Sicheng enjoyed it though, it made him smile no matter how lame it was.

Matthew had posted another shirtless mirror selca which Sicheng rolled his eyes at. J. Seph had posted a picture of his dinner. Jiwoo had posted a picture of her and Somin. Kun hadn’t posted. He
was much like Sicheng. He didn’t post a lot, but unlike Sicheng he also didn’t check social media a lot.

Suddenly curious, Sicheng opened his messages and sent one to Kun.

*ge, Twitter or Instagram?*

The answer arrived within five minutes.

*youtube*

Sicheng laughed and continued scrolling through his feed when another notification popped up.

This one made his blood run cold and his eyes widen.

It was a link to a news article sent to him by Kun. He almost dropped his phone when he opened it and read it. The news paper was a local one, one that had been following Joe’s case ever since it happened.

One that was currently saying that Joe had woken up from his coma.
Sicheng couldn’t sleep. He was twisting and turning in his bed. He wasn’t necessarily scared of Joe, but he was anxious. He felt confident enough to not fall into the dark hole again, yet he knew if Joe came back to school he wouldn’t be able to go anywhere without looking over his shoulder.

With a sigh, the strawberry blonde male got up and headed out, into the dark hallway. He didn’t turn on any lights, but he knew exactly where to go.

Taeyong’s door was open, as always, and he quietly slipped inside. He saw a brother sized lump on the bed and carefully snuck over. Taeyong was breathing softly, sleeping, and Sicheng lifted the covers and got in.

The movement woke Taeyong up, the elder looking blearily at Sicheng in the dark.

“Sichengie?” His voice was raspy with sleep and his eyes were half closed. Sicheng hummed and scooted closer to his older brother, breathing deeply. It felt warm and comforting and safe.

Taeyong turned to him, opening his arms. Sicheng settled himself into the embrace, face buried in Taeyong’s neck and his hands pressed in between their chests. It reminded him of when they were younger, whenever he had nightmares and would sleep in Taeyong’s bed, the older holding him and chasing away all the bad dreams.

“Hyung did you hear?” Sicheng whispered, tired. Taeyong shook his head lightly. “Joe woke up from his coma.” Sicheng could feel Taeyong tense up and then forcefully relax again.

“How are you feeling?” Taeyong asked, voice soothing.

“I’m not sure,” Sicheng admitted. Taeyong nodded, held him closer.

“I saw your name on the sign up sheet,” Sicheng didn’t feel like talking about Joe. Taeyong chuckled.

“Yeah, Mark wanted me to perform with him,” he said, voice fond. Sicheng smiled as well.

“He’s definitely seeking to marry Hyuck. Otherwise he wouldn’t try so hard,” Sicheng tsk’d. Taeyong scoffed, amused.

“They would have to wait until they’re thirty. Then they can come at me with a proposal,” Taeyong concluded. Sicheng nodded in agreement.

“Yeah. Reasonable enough. They should bring written contracts and all, so we can sign Donghyuck
over.”
“Totally.”
“Definitely.”

They both broke out in fits of giggles, the warmth spreading through their bodies like a fluffy blanket. Eventually the sound simmered out, leaving them in quietude again.

Sicheng felt himself drifting off to sleep, much more comfortable and content than before. His eyes slipped closed, Taeyong’s lips a feather light pressure on the crown of his head.

“Good night Sicheng.”

~

Suhyun walked down the hall with Mark, the older blabbing about the talent show. Taeyong hyung this, Taeyong hyung that. Lyrics about Donghyuck these, lyrics about Donghyuck those. Donghyuck’s voice here, Donghyuck’s voice there.

Suhyun almost didn’t roll her eyes. Almost.

“You’re too cute,” she said, voice full of fake enthusiasm. Mark huffed and stopped talking when he saw Johnny on the opposite side of the corridor.

“I have to go, bye Suhyun,” he dismissed her quickly, leaving without a look back. Suhyun scoffed. Insensitive jock.

But it got her thinking. All the talk about the talent show? Donghyuck’s voice?

She bit her tongue in thought. Singing had always been a big passion of hers. Something she shared with her brother who had an affinity for writing lyrics. They’d been a great duo but now he was in the army. Yet this was a chance after all. To participate in the show.

With determination she walked towards the cafeteria where she knew Donghyuck and Jaemin was. Her converse were making decisive claps against the floor, her red hair flopping against her back. She was wearing a black sweater to match her black nails and when she reached the cafeteria she pulled the sleeves down over her hands. It was really fucking cold.

Donghyuck and Jaemin sat at the corner furthest away, leaning against a radiator. She hurried over.

“Hey Suhyun,” Jaemin greeted with his signature angel smile. She said a quick hi back and settled herself next to Donghyuck, staring at him intently. The younger looked at her with questioning eyes. He was only wearing light makeup and chipped nail polish. She squinted. Trying to see. Was he really a good singer? She would only settle for the best.

“What are you doing?” Donghyuck asked, voice suspicious. Suhyun smirked.

“Mark wouldn’t stop blabbing about your voice and I think there is an opportunity for a collaboration here,” she proposed. Donghyuck frowned.

“A collaboration?” He inquired.

“I want you to sing with me for the talent show.”

~
Sicheng had been going about life as usual. It was the day after Joe’s awakening and he tried to be cool, stay calm, but it was hard to ignore the nagging feeling of something at the back of his mind.

He was sitting with Kun in the canteen, they had migrated inside as the weather was freezing, and they were playing cards with the deck Kun always kept in his pocket. Jiwoo and Somin were eating beside them, but they had already finished a while ago.

Sicheng saw his phone light up with a notification, picking it up from where it had been placed on the table. He frowned. It was a message from an unknown number.

*Come to the hospital after school.* -Joe

Sicheng stared. His mind was running away from him. Why would Joe want Sicheng to come to the hospital? Should he even go? Should he really?

“Who was it?” Kun asked, seeing as Sicheng had stopped moving. The junior handed the phone to Kun who read the message, eyebrows raising in surprise.

“What would he want with you?” Kun wondered, handing the phone to Jiwoo who was eyeing them curiously. Sicheng shrugged helplessly.

“I honestly have no idea.”

“You should go,” Jiwoo said, passion the phone to Somin after reading. “It might be important.”

“And how could it be important? He’s been nothing but a jerk,” Sicheng scoffed. Somin hummed.

“I think you should go. I think you need the closure,” she said, Jiwoo nodding in agreement. Sicheng turned to Kun who was watching him with pursed lips.

“I can go with you,” the senior offered. His eyes were open and inviting. Sicheng could say yes or he could say he didn’t want to go. It was his choice entirely. Seeing Kun offering him that choice made up his mind.

“Okay, let’s go after school.”

~

Taeyong had started noticing people at school sending him weird looks again. Like they were trying to figure him out, unravel his secrets. It did not feel comfortable at all, being watched. He thought it had blown over, but apparently not. And with Joe being awake he felt even more on edge.

He was sitting with Jaehyun in the library, practicing for an upcoming English test. The brunet was next to him, pointing at different passages in the book and talking about them. Taeyong could smell his shampoo. It smelt really nice. Like some sort of spice, yet sweet.

Yet another thing he didn’t feel comfortable with. His feelings for Jaehyun. He couldn’t believe that the other would possibly feel the same. From every stereotypical indication ever he would conclude that Jaehyun was straight, yet he could never know because that’s just not how it actually worked.

His heart was aching though, aching from the pain of keeping it in, suffocating on the words that fought to get out. Burning him up from the inside out with wanting to be near Jaehyun, wanting to hug him, wanting to kiss him.

“Tae,” there was a hand patting his face, Taeyong breaking out of his stupor to find Ten sitting
opposite them, hand returning to his side as he had Taeyong’s attention. His face looked unimpressed. Taeyong turned to see Jaehyun regarding him curiously. Ten sighed loudly, dramatically.

“What do I need to do to get some attention around here?” He complained, muttering to himself. “Oblivious idiots.”

“What do you want?” Jaehyun asked then, finally acknowledging him.

“I need help to study for math. Please?” Ten said, holding up his math book.

“Fine, we’ll do English later,” Taeyong conceded.

“Or you can just do each other, get rid of all the tension,” Ten murmured under his breath.

“What?” Taeyong looked up, confused. Jaehyun who’d heard him blushed furiously.

“Nothing nothing at all,” Ten smiled, innocent. Taeyong frowned but didn’t question it. As he turned his head to get his math book Ten turned to Jaehyun.

“Get your shit together,” he hissed, “I’ll seriously throw you in a closet. I’m this close.” Ten held up his hand, showcasing a narrow space between his thumb and index finger. Jaehyun frowned.

“Let’s start with the cumulative frequency graph,” Taeyong announced, turning back to them and seeing both of them smiling at him. Jaehyun’s embarrassed smile and Ten’s cat like smile.

“Sounds like a plan,” Ten agreed, opening his book to land on the appropriate page. He cringed when he looked up to see Jaehyun and Taeyong blushing as their hands had accidentally touched. A closet didn’t sound like such a bad idea after all.

~

Sicheng walked with Kun, nervous. The corridor was long, winding and pale. There was only room after room after room, so many numbers and so many patients.

They eventually reached their destination, Sicheng knocking hesitantly after Kun sent him a reassuring smile.

“Come in,” an elderly voice called from inside, Sicheng’s eyes widening. He carefully pushed the door open, throat dry like sandpaper.

The inside of the room was much like the rest of the hospital. Sterile, white, plain with no personality. There was an elderly couple standing by the foot of the only bed in the room. He recognized them as Joe’s grandparents. They looked tired and worn out but happy nonetheless. His eyes moved to the figure on the bed.

Joe looked small. Subdued. Nothing like he used to. All his piercings had been taken out, his hair was greasy and he wore a white hospital t shirt with grey sweatpants. His mouth was set in a grim line.

“Well give you some time,” the grandmother said, smiling a bit at Sicheng, and Kun. She grabbed the hand of Joe’s grandfather and walked out of the room. Kun and Sicheng bower in respect when they passed, getting genuine smiles in return. The door closed behind the couple. Sicheng turned to look at Joe again, hesitant.
“Don’t worry, I’m clean,” Joe sniffled and Sicheng could see his hands shaking slightly. He was obviously suffering from detox.

“That’s not what I’m worried about,” Sicheng spoke, voice stronger than ever before during any interaction he’d ever had with Joe. The junior looked at him with his beady eyes. His cheeks looked sunken and sickly, he had been in a coma for a while though so it wasn’t really surprising.

“What did you want?” Sicheng spoke, feeling confident. Joe wasn’t strong. He looked so weak. It gave Sicheng some sort of satisfaction.

“I wanted to apologize,” Joe forced out between his teeth. Sicheng frowned in disbelief. “Trust me, this is humiliating, but I do mean it.” Joe sighed.

“Why? Why would you apologize now all of a sudden?” Sicheng questioned.

“I had a dream,” Joe responded. “I dreamed of something I never thought I’d have,” he inhaled deeply, looking pained. “Happiness. I dreamed of a life where I was happy. Where I had a good life, no alcohol, no drugs, no dead parents. None of the antidepressants they put me on. None of the disappointment in my grandparents’ eyes when they bail me out of jail,” Joe exhaled shakily. “None of the hatred that I feel so fucking deeply rooted in me that I don’t know what to do with myself.”

Sicheng was still, very still. His mind racing. A dream. All of it because of a dream.

“Look, it made me realise some stuff. And I needed to apologise. I’m not sure if it’s for your sake or mine. But at least it’s for my grandparents. They deserve peace. I know they don’t have a lot of time left. They’re tired and old and they will die,” Joe finally looked up to meet his eyes. “And I won’t let them die while worrying about me. Worrying about me bullying people, using drugs or harming myself. I want to give them to feel at peace before they go.”

Sicheng really tried to keep eye contact but it was so hard. Knowing that he had almost wanted Joe to be dead. To die during his coma. To never come back to bother anyone again. It made Sicheng feel so guilty.

“So I wanted to make things right. For them. I don’t expect you to forgive me. I don’t think I’ll ever feel the happiness I dreamt of, so it won’t bother me if you don’t, but if they ask. Tell them you’ve forgiven me,” Joe said, pleading. “Please.”

Sicheng felt Kun’s hand enclose around his own, not having realized that his hands were shaking.

“You’re right,” Sicheng managed to breathe. “I don’t forgive you. You’re fucked up. You’re mean and I don’t think you’ll change.” Sicheng felt like he was being harsh, but Joe’s sardonic smile confirmed it. He knew it himself, he wasn’t going to change. He had accepted his fate. But he was going to be more careful, to show his grandparents they wouldn’t have to worry. To assure them. Before they went. Before he was left alone to do whatever he wanted. Completely alone. No real friends. No parents. Nothing of value left.

“I understand,” Joe agreed. And he did genuinely understand. Sicheng could see it.

“I hope you’ll find something to change your mind. I think you can still achieve happiness,” Kun spoke, gathering Joe’s attention. This time the smile was downright devilish.

“Doesn’t matter. I’m going to hell either way. Why not go with a bang?”

That was the last time Sicheng ever saw Joe.
Chapter 93

Chapter Notes

I am rly starting to despise snow. I want spring now plz

Hope you’ll enjoy this chapter <333

Sicheng felt oddly relieved the next day. He told doctor Song as much during their appointment.

“And why do you think that is?” She questioned. Sicheng bit his lip.

“Well, knowing that Joe won’t bother me anymore is definitely one thing. Also knowing that my friends have my back,” he breathed, thinking back to Kun’s reassuring grip on his hand the previous day. “And trusting in my own strength,” he nodded, knowing that he could stand up to Joe. Maybe Joe had looked weak and powerless, but Sicheng still stood up for himself nonetheless.

“That’s very good,” doctor Song agreed. She wrote something on the little pad she always had with her. “Now, how can we keep going with this streak of trust in your own abilities? That’s what I want to focus on,” she spoke. “Is there anything you could do that might, so to speak, challenge your ability to stand up for yourself? Something small.” Sicheng knew exactly what he could do, but he felt immediate anxiety at the thought.

“There’s this shirt I want to wear to school,” he started. “But it’s not really what a boy would wear.”

“That’s a great place to start,” Doctor Song smiled. “I want you to have worn that shirt to school at least one day, before our next meeting. And you don’t have to showcase it obviously, as long as you know that you have it on. That’s enough for now.”

Sicheng nodded. He did feel oddly excited about it. Wearing his favourite garment to school felt surreal yet he wanted it so bad. Now he was going to do it.

~

Taeyong took all of them to the grocery store later that day. They had run out of ingredients to cook with. And chocolate milk. Therefore Taeyong decided to make a little trip out of it. With all his brothers.

They walked to the store as it wasn’t too far. Donghyuck and Sicheng were holding one of Jisung’s hands each, swinging the child every other step. Jisung was shrieking with laughter. Chenle jumped on the piles of snow by the sidewalk, Lucas chasing after him. Jungwoo walked calmly next to Taeyong, holding his eldest brother’s hand. Taeyong had once again forgotten gloves and Jungwoo was warm so it felt nice.

The grocery store was relatively big, frequented a lot by the citizens of the little town. They grabbed a cart at the entrance and Jisung climbed on to sit in it.

Donghyuck drove the cart, making motor sounds with his mouth as he turned right and left, Jisung giggling every time. Taeyong held a long list of items that needed to be shopped which he handed to Sicheng. They were making slow progress as Chenle and Lucas stopped to look at basically
everything. No one minded though, all the brothers enjoyed spending time together.

They were at the dairy section, getting milk, yoghurt, butter and the stupid chocolate milk, when Taeyong noticed. There were some girls from his school, standing by the eggs, across from all the brothers. They were standing, heads close together as they whispered and pointed. If he would guess he would say that some of them were seniors and some juniors.

He felt someone tug on his jacket sleeve and realized he’d been staring at the girls and frowning. He looked down to see Chenle staring at him with questioning eyes and a carton of strawberry milk in his hand. Taeyong scoffed and stroked his hair.

“Sure love,” he agreed and Chenle cheered as he put the milk in the cart. Jisung was also looking at Taeyong, making grabby hands for the eldest. Taeyong smiled and reached to pick him up, out of the cart. Jisung clung to him, legs around his waist and then Taeyong heard them. The girls.

“What if he’s like a dad? He’s probably been whoring around.”

“He’s too young. He probably has a lot of brothers. Maybe his mom was a slut like him.”

“With the way he clings to Johnny and Jaehyun and Yuta, I bet he’s like trying to get into all their pants.”

“Those gays, sleeping with every guy they can find. Disgusting.”

Taeyong felt his eyes widen in horror. The whispered words were harsh and despicable. And they were talking about him. That must be why all of the people at school were whispering about him. Because they thought he was stealing away all their eligible bachelors.

“Just look at his hair. It’s ridiculous.”

“And he’s passing his disease onto those kids as well, poor things. I hope Jaehyun hasn’t caught it.”

“Or Johnny.”

“Hey lady!” A loud voice startled everyone in the dairy section, Taeyong jerking slightly. He looked down to find Jisung glaring at the girls, his small eyes narrowed. “I don like what you saying! Stop saying that! You’re being a meanie to my brother!” The girls were looking at them with horror filled eyes, having been caught. They quickly turned red and fled from the scene, Taeyong watching them go with a lump in his throat. Jisung’s tiny hands were holding onto his jacket and his gaze didn’t leave the girls until they were out of sight.

“Hyung,” Sicheng called, looking concerned. “What were they saying?”

“They called him a bad word!” Jisung declared loudly, looking mad.

“Let’s not talk about this now,” Taeyong whispered, conscious of the other store goers staring at them. “Let’s just finish shopping.”

The brothers looked like they wanted to protest but decided against it. They quickly made work of the rest of the list, Chenle not even stopping to look at the candy bars, and then made their way home rapidly.

Jungwoo and Sicheng helped Taeyong unload the groceries, throwing worried glances his way all the time. Taeyong tried to appear fine, but he really wasn’t feeling it.
All the brothers quickly gathered up in the living room after they were done.

“What did they say?” Donghyuck broke the silence. Taeyong gulped. Jisung was still looking mad.

“Apparently, there’s a rumour going around that I’ve been with all my friends romantically,” Taeyong tried to explain, still trying to make sense of it all. “They were saying some mean things that’s all.”

“Hyung you need to stand up for yourself,” Jungwoo said, scandalized. “They can’t just go around and talk about you behind your back. Especially when it’s not true.”

“What do I say then? They won’t listen or believe me,” he sighed.

“You can at least try,” Lucas frowned. Taeyong tried to smile at them. Maybe he could try. It couldn’t hurt.

“You’re right,” he agreed, feeling bone tired and drained. “I should at least try.”

“That’s the spirit!” Donghyuck cheered.

“Yeah. You don’t deserve to hear things like that hyung. They can at least keep their opinions to themselves and not bother other people,” Sicheng nodded.

“Yeah!” Chenle echoed, looking determined.

“Thanks guys,” Taeyong laughed. He turned to Jisung, who had been quiet, and held his arms out. The four year old climbed into them.

“Thanks for protecting me,” Taeyong whispered into his hair, rocking him gently. Jisung nodded.

“They mean. They not say mean things about you hyungie. You not mean,” Jisung said, lips pouting.

“Thanks baby,” Taeyong chuckled wryly. Jisung was too good for him.

“Let’s watch a movie,” Sicheng suggested and they all agreed that a movie would be a nice idea.

~

Taeyong laid, restless. He couldn’t sleep. His mind was running with thoughts. He couldn’t believe people were saying he was sleeping with all of his friends. Just because he liked hugging them and holding hands. People truly needed to mind their own business.

Yet the thought still lingered. Jinkyu had also called him a slut. Joe had been very touchy with him. Now the whole school said he was a sleeping around. What made him stand out enough for people to say that. Was it because he was affectionate? Because people were jealous? Because they had hidden desires and only took it out through gossip and rumours? Was it his hair, like those girls spoke about? Did he exude some sort of sex energy or what? He didn’t understand why so many people seemed to think he was easy. Why so many people seemed to believe that about him.

He couldn’t help but wonder.

If enough people believed it, did that mean it was true?

~
Discount Friday was oddly subdued. Jaehyun was tired from their basketball practice, arms feeling sluggish as he lifted his milkshake to drink. Johnny and Yuta suffered similar predicaments, both feeling extremely fatigued from their practice. Doyoung looked deep in thought as he texted on his phone, Taeil spacing out every couple of seconds while Taeyong looked like his mind was elsewhere completely. Ten was done with it all.

“Okay what is going on here?” He finally exploded, not liking the silence enveloping them.

“Basketball practice was harsh,” Yuta winced as he moved his wrist awkwardly, which had been accidentally hit by a ball that Amber had thrown.

“Okay,” Ten could agree to that. “And you’re just yourself,” he concluded with Taeil. “What’s your excuse though?” Ten turned to Doyoung.

“I’m messaging Seungkwan about the host lighting and sound arrangements,” Doyoung responded, words tumbling out of his mouth. Ten pursed his lips.

“You seriously need to sleep,” he sighed. “And you,” he turned to Taeyong then, “you’ve been lost all day.”

“Do you guys think I’m clingy?” Taeyong suddenly asked in lieu of answering, making even Doyoung look up from his phone.

“What?” Johnny sputtered, confused. Taeyong ran a hand though his hair and leaned forward in his seat.

“It’s nothing,” he dismissed. Jaehyun frowned. It was quite clearly something. Taeyong had his mouth set grimly and his forehead was wrinkled.

“You are,” Yuta said, answering Taeyong’s question. The red head looked at him in surprise. “You like hugs, but it’s not like it’s a bad thing.”

“It’s quite nice,” Taeil agreed with a serene smile. Taeyong pressed his lips together tightly.

“Okay,” he nodded, not looking settled at all.

Jaehyun was going to have to investigate further, maybe when his arms weren’t feeling like jelly.

Chenle felt completely ignored. It was Saturday and he really wanted to play with dominoes. Jisung was too young, he would only ruin it, so therefore Chenle decided to seek out some of his hyungs instead to help.

Jungwoo was going out to meet his friends Dami and Soyeon. Lucas had tutoring with Taeil hyung. Donghyuck was busy on the phone with Mark. Even when he asked, the older declined. Taeyong said no as well because he had to study. Sicheng was on his computer and said ‘maybe later’. But Chenle didn’t want to play later. He wanted to play now. And no one wanted to play with him.

The eight year old sat on the sofa, arms crossed, pouting. He felt lonely. Maybe his hyungs didn’t like him anymore. Maybe that’s why they didn’t play. Maybe they hated him. Maybe they were tired of him. Daehwi had been the same the previous day, when Chenle wanted to play on the swings and Daehwi said he was tired of them. Maybe Chenle’s hyungs were the same.

He felt the tears pressing against his eyelids, rubbing at them furiously. He wasn’t going to cry. He
wasn’t a baby.
Yet he couldn’t help but think.
No one wanted to play.

Chenle swallowed his tears and marched over to the front door. He pulled on his shoes and his winter jacket. Taeyong always told them to dress warmly so he also grabbed a beanie and mittens. When he deemed himself finished, he walked out the door.

He would show them. He could be a big boy. He could make it on his own.

~

Taeyong exhaled loudly when he finished his essay. It had been a couple of long hours of writing and researching like crazy but he was finally done. His brain was aching from staring at his laptop for so long.

It was almost time for dinner so he shuffled his way down the stairs, finding the kitchen empty. He assumed most of the brothers were in their rooms, knowing that Jungwoo had gotten home a while ago, same with Lucas who had been at the library with Taeil.

Taeyong started cutting up the ingredients for a stir fry when Jisung toddled into the kitchen and took a seat by the table.

Taeyong paused, washed his hands and walked over to the youngest brother.

“Hey baby,” he said, cuddling the four year old. Jisung made a noise of acknowledgement as he started playing with the puzzle on the table. Taeyong smiled in amusement and went back to cooking.

Another couple of minutes passed before Jisung spoke.


“I thought he was in your room?” He said, feeling the dread creeping up and gripping his heart tightly. Jisung frowned cutely.

“No, he wa’ in there before,” Jisung said and pointed toward the living room. Taeyong felt his mouth go dry as he put down the knife he’d been holding and headed to the living room. There were some abandoned toys and a pile of dominoes. But no Chenle. Taeyong ran up the stairs hurriedly, going to Chenle’s and Jisung’s room. No Chenle.

“Is Chenle here?” He huffed when he reached Lucas’s and Jungwoo’s room. They both looked at him, confused, and shook their heads. Taeyong didn’t even bother to close their door when he ran across the hall.

“Is Chenle with you?” He exclaimed when he opened Sicheng’s door. The junior startled at his sudden appearance.

“No?” He said, also confused. Taeyong ran before he could ask though.

“Hyuck, is Chenle here!?” Taeyong called when he entered the last room. Donghyuck looked up from his homework with wide eyes, then he shook his head.
“No, why hyung?”

Taeyong felt the suffocating feeling pressing down on him, felt the dread consuming his whole body.

He marched into his own room, looked in the closet, under the bed, under the covers. Had Chenle snuck in when he was busy? Was he hiding somewhere?

He looked in the basement, in the bathrooms. In the wardrobes.

Chenle was nowhere to be found.

All the brothers had made their way down into the kitchen by the time he had searched through every corner of the house.

“Hyung what’s going on? Where’s Chenle?” Jungwoo said, eyes wide and scared. Taeyong inhaled shakily, pulling at his hair and biting his nails.

“He’s gone. Chenle’s gone.”
Chapter 94

Chapter Notes

Wow a lot of response came last chapter XD thank you guys for all the support! I really appreciate it <333

Hope you’ll enjoy <3

“What! Hyung~”

Everyone was talking at the same time, Taeyong couldn’t hear what any of them were saying. His head was pounding and his whole body was tense and uneasy. Chenle was gone. His little brother was gone.

“Everybody calm down!” He managed to shout, effectively cutting off all of his brothers. They looked at him with wide questioning eyes. What did he want them to do? What did he think? What was his plan? All eyes on Taeyong.

He bit his nails frantically, trying to think. What to do. What to do.

“Okay,” he started, “Okay, here’s what we’re going to do.” He pulled out his phone and checked the time. “We’re going to go out and look for him. If we can’t find him within two hours we’re calling the police.” Taeyong decided, nodding his head. He looked up at his brothers, taking in their wide eyes, downturned lips, worried frowns. They were scared. He was scared too. He tried to relax his face.

“I want Lucas and Jisung to stay here, in case he comes home,” Taeyong ordered, Lucas nodding dutifully. “I’ll call Taeil to come here and stay with you. Hyuck, call Mark and see if he can help. And ask about Johnny while you’re at it. Sicheng, I’ll call Yuta and have him go with you,” Taeyong said, already pulling up his contacts. Donghyuck went to do the same. “Doyoung and Ten can go with Jungwoo. And Jaehyun can go with me.”

Taeyong opened the door only twenty minutes later to find everyone they had contacted. Taeil, Ten, Doyoung, Yuta, Johnny, Mark and Jaehyun. They had all accepted immediately when the brothers had called which made Taeyong warm inside. He had also texted Max to tell her what had happened and she immediately replied that she would keep a lookout.

“Thank you so much for coming,” Taeyong breathed when they piled inside.

“Oh course we’re here,” Jaehyun said, as if it was obvious. Taeyong nodded, unconsciously biting his nails. Jaehyun reached out to grab his hand. Taeyong exhaled briefly and gave him a squeeze before letting go and heading for the kitchen where his brothers were waiting.

They were all looking frazzled, Jisung sniffing as he was bundled up in a blanket. Taeyong knew the youngest was trying to stay strong but he was only four. It wasn’t easy. Taeyong ruffled his hair gently and tried to smile reassuringly. Jisung was pouting, lips wobbling.
“Okay guys, let’s head out,” Taeyong sighed. “Johnny if you could take Donghyuck and Mark in the car and drive around. Yuta and Sicheng you can check all the parks. Jungwoo, Doyoung and Ten, the mall. Jaehyun and I will check in the city.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Johnny tried to keep his voice upbeat and steady. “We’ll meet you back here in two hours,” he said and they all broke off.

Taeil settled at the table with Lucas and Jisung as everyone left in their groups.

Taeyong felt his hands shaking as he pulled on his jacket and shoes, trying to breathe properly. Jaehyun must’ve noticed, because he helped Taeyong with his zipper. The red head couldn’t even appreciate their proximity since he was so worried.

Taeyong and Jaehyun waved goodbye to everyone else as they trekked towards the city.

It was only a ten minute walk, and it was spent in silence, Taeyong trying to stop thinking of all the terrible things that might’ve happened. His mind spiraled though. Maybe Chenle was crying? Alone, cold, the sky darkening, no way of knowing where to go, how to contact Taeyong, hungry and miserable. Taeyong did not like what his mind was saying. At all.

Then even worse. What if he was dead in a ditch. On a road. In an alleyway.

Taeyong’s hands were shaking.

Jaehyun seemed to take note of it instantly, reaching out to intertwine their gloved fingers.

“What’s your favourite animal?” Jaehyun finally broke the silence as the city descended upon them. There weren’t a lot of people. Taeyong tried to calm his rapid heartbeat.

“I like dogs,” he said. “I’ve always wanted a dog. What about you?”

“Parrots. Parrots are really nice,” Jaehyun said, nodding. “I once went on an trip with my parents and we saw a whole bunch of them. They could mimic anything I told them.”

“That’s nice,” Taeyong laughed, imagining a younger Jaehyun, freckles and dimples, sun kissed skin, wearing a big straw hat, talking to a bunch of parrots.

“What’s your favourite country? Like where would you go in the world if you could choose?” Jaehyun asked then. Taeyong licked his lip in thought.

“America,” he finally settled on. “It’s such a myth you know? Something we always see in movies and shows, something so talked about that I would want to actually go there and find out what the big deal is all about.” Taeyong laughed. “I really want to go to New York.”

“When we lived in America when I was younger,” Jaehyun said, “I thought it was going to be like all the movies. All that hype and then it was very different. Not good or bad, just not what I expected. I never got to see New York though,” he pondered. Taeyong chuckled.

“Sounds like it was fun at least?” He inquired. Jaehyun nodded.

“It was,” he agreed. “I enjoyed it there. And I got to learn English.”

“Lucky you.”

They kept up light conversation as they walked down the streets. It was almost completely dark outside and most of the stores had closed for the evening. The dim glow of street lights were the only
thing telling them all hope wasn’t lost.

Taeyong was gradually getting more anxious by the minute. Jaehyun’s talking had distracted him for a while but as the time ran away he couldn’t help but feel worried. He was still holding onto Jaehyun’s hand, to keep himself somehow grounded.

Their two hours were almost up. Taeyong sniffled in the cold winter air.

“Maybe we should head back,” he said, feeling the lump in his throat, his voice scratchy and dry. Jaehyun watched him with a frown. He didn’t want Taeyong to give up, clearly. Just as Jaehyun was about to open his mouth and respond, a sound emerged from the dark street surrounding them. Taeyong straightened up immediately, eyes growing wide. He gulped fearfully as he looked around the empty street.

There was a convenience store in the corner, illuminated by dingy lights. It was seemingly closed. And just rounding the corner was a small frame, wearing Chenle’s bright green jacket. Taeyong let out a sob of relief and let go of Jaehyun’s hand in favour of running towards the child. Chenle seemed to have noticed him as well, breaking into a sprint.

“Hyung!” His voice was raw and full of unshed tears. Taeyong felt immense relief at hearing it anyhow.

Taeyong swooped out with his arms and scooped Chenle into his embrace, hugging the child tightly. The eight year old started sobbing into his shoulder, babbling how sorry he was. Please forgive me hyung, I’m so sorry, please hyung.

Taeyong couldn’t contain the flood of relief rushing through his body, his whole being consumed with the emotion. Chenle was safe. He was in his arms and he was safe.

~

The others jumped on them immediately when they got home. Chenle got passed around between all his brothers, having stopped crying on the way back. When he reached Jisung though, the four year old was the one to burst into tears instead.

“I’m sorry Jisungie,” Chenle sniffled. “I promise I won’t leave you again.”

Taeyong watched them all fondly and felt exactly how tired he’d become from all the previous tension. He was positively drained.

“You okay?” Johnny asked him, slinging an arm around his shoulders. Taeyong leaned into the tall senior, nodding.

“Yeah. Thanks for helping,” he managed.

“We’ve got your back TY,” Yuta promised and smiled his healing smile. Taeyong laughed and gave all of his friends a hug before they left. Mark hugged Donghyuck tightly before leaving as well. Jaehyun was the last one to go, which he did only after embracing Taeyong gently. The red head sank into the comfort Jaehyun’s arms brought and sighed in contentment.

All the brothers gathered up in Taeyong’s bed after changing into pyjamas. Taeyong even let them skip brushing their teeth because he was too tired. He could see they were as well.

They laid there, enjoying each other, Jisung holding onto Chenle tightly.
“Why did you go?” Lucas asked, pouting at Chenle while stroking his hair. Chenle didn’t dare meet their eyes.

“I wanted to prove that I’m a big boy,” he exclaimed. “No one wanted to play because you all think I’m a baby. But I’m big! I can go outside and stay on the sidewalk and wait for a green light before crossing the road! And a lady even complimented me for being so polite when I helped her catch her dog,” he told them proudly, then he frowned. “But I got lost. I didn’t know what to do, and then it was dark and cold and I was scared,” he sniffled. “And then Taeyong hyung found me.”

Taeyong felt his heart breaking at Chenle’s sad voice. Only because they didn’t play with him. They were terrible human beings.

“We’re sorry,” Sicheng said, looking so sad for their little brother. “We’re so sorry. But Chenle. It’s not because we think you’re a baby, we were all so busy, we didn’t realize. You’re perfect just the way you are. You don’t have to show us you’re a big boy, we know you are,” Sicheng said.

“Yeah! We’re sorry for not playing with you,” Donghyuck said, looking guilty.

“I’m sorry too,” Chenle finally managed to look up and actually make eye contact. “I shouldn’t have ran away.”

“Next time,” Taeyong spoke. “Tell us, okay? This goes for all of you. Don’t run away from your problems. Always talk about it first,” Taeyong told them. “You’ll worry me otherwise.”


“I love you all, remember that,” Taeyong said.

“We love you too hyung.”

Soon enough, they all fell into a peaceful slumber.

~

Taeyong still felt emotionally drained the following Monday. Sunday had been spent at home, all of the brothers cuddling and watching movies all day. Taeyong had enjoyed it greatly, cooking a fabulous dinner as well to maintain their cozy feeling.

Monday brought them back to school though, which reminded Taeyong of that stupid rumour. It drained him of happiness immediately, especially seeing people whispering when he passed them in the hall.

The girls from the convenience store must’ve gossiped about how many brothers he had, adding more fire to the rumours.

He sighed noisily and tried to ignore everyone.

~

Easier said than done.

Before that day, no one had actually said anything to him, they’d only whispered behind his back, now he actually heard people talking when he passed them in the hallway.

“Manwhore.”
“Homo.”

“Disgusting.”

“Slut.”

By the time lunch rolled around Taeyong felt greatly wound up. He felt indignant, knowing people were talking shit about him, yet he couldn’t really stop thinking that it was all his fault. If he was less attractive. If he was less affectionate. Would it be better?

Jaehyun and Johnny were both at their usual table when he sat down.

“Hey Yong,” Johnny greeted, reading a book for their English class, glasses perched on his nose. He was eating at the same time, looking like any other book nerd. Taeyong smiled fondly at the sight. Jaehyun was picking at his food, removing some vegetables he didn’t like. He was having the school lunch, which he usually didn’t. He must’ve forgotten to make his own. Taeyong missed cooking with the other.

“How’s the food?” He asked, teasing. Jaehyun looked up at him with a dead pan expression.

“Don’t even try me,” Taeyong had to laugh at Jaehyun’s faux murderous tone, opening his lunch box instead and offering Jaehyun some gimbap. The brunet immediately jumped on the chance of good food and they ended up sharing Taeyong’s lunch. It was nice, until the whispers rose enough to actually gain his attention again, effectively ruining his mood. Jaehyun seemed to pick up on his tense behaviour, frowning slightly.

“What’s wrong?” He asked, Johnny looking up from his book to glance at them worriedly.

“People are looking,” Taeyong sighed, trying to keep his voice down. Jaehyun snuck a peak and saw that most people were indeed watching them. Like they had been for a while now. Jaehyun hadn’t forgotten about last week, when Taeyong had asked them if he was clingy. The pieces were slowly falling into place. Jaehyun had noticed people gossiping every time Taeyong touched any of his friends. He noticed their distaste. Then with Taeyong asking about it, he finally understood. The gossip must be about Taeyong being together with them in some way.

Jaehyun felt anger at the students attending their school. They couldn’t mind their own business. It was despicable.

Taeyong looked about ready to snap and Jaehyun gently reached out to touch his wrist. Mistake.

Taeyong flinched away from the touch, his chopsticks cluttering as they landed on the table. Taeyong was so still, probably feeling the gazes on his back. Jaehyun was equally still, not wanting to strike him again.

“Yong?” The brunet asked, gentle and soft. Taeyong shook his head and stood abruptly, grabbing his bag, leaving his lunch and rushing out of be canteen. Jaehyun looked after him with flickering eyes.

“Go after him!” Johnny was saying, Jaehyun looked at him, surprised. Johnny had put down his book, eyebrows raised. “Go!” Jaehyun took another second to process before he scrambled out of his seat, following Taeyong, leaving his bag, everyone’s eyes on his back as the canteen doors swung closed behind him.

The whispered broke out once again, louder than before.
Johnny frowned.
Jaehyun sprinted down the hall as Taeyong disappeared around the corner. Every student was at lunch, therefore, the hallway was almost completely empty. He huffed as he ran, seeing Taeyong open a door and enter. Jaehyun reached there before the door even closed and got inside. It was the men’s locker room, reminding him of that one time when Taeyong told them about his parents, crying and looking absolutely destroyed.

This felt similar to that.

Taeyong was huddled in between two lockers, knees drawn up to his body, face buried in his hands, silently crying. It wasn’t overwhelming, no sobbing, no screaming. Just silent. Even more heartbreaking.

Jaehyun tried to catch his breath as he approached the other carefully, he didn’t want to startle the redhead. Jaehyun licked his dry lips and sat down, facing Taeyong, his legs folded together. It was cramped in the space between the lockers but none of them minded it. Taeyong shivered, hands shaking. Jaehyun gently reached out and pried Taeyong’s hands away from his face, seeing his cheeks streaked with tears, his eyes closed.

Jaehyun held Taeyong’s cold hands warmly. More tears made their way down the other’s cheeks.

“Yong,” Jaehyun said, voice calm and soothing. “Please look at me.” Taeyong clenched his eyes shut tightly before exhaling shakily and opening them.

Chocolate met hazel and Jaehyun’s breath was sucked out of his lungs. Taeyong was truly one of the most beautiful humans he’d ever seen.

“Talk to me,” Jaehyun breathed, not breaking eye contact. Taeyong sighed heavily, blinking slightly.

“I hate it,” his voice was rough when he spoke. “I hate it when they look at me. When they whisper. I hate it so much. I don’t want the attention, Jaehyun. I really don’t.” His voice was so desperate, so frantic. “I just want them to stop and mind their own business,” Taeyong let out a delirious laugh. “It’s making me feel so fucking dirty.” Jaehyun felt his eyes widen slightly at the swear word. Taeyong rarely swore. Yet it seemed perfectly reasonable of him to do so in the current situation. “They’re calling me all these names and I hate it so much. My brothers even heard them. It’s so dirty and shameful. I can’t stop feeling dirty.”

“You’re not dirty,” Jaehyun had to intervene. “You’re really not. You’re one of the most beautiful people I’ve ever known. You’re beautiful Taeyong. And you’re so far from dirty as you can possibly get,” he promised, Taeyong was staring right at him, gaze so intense, Jaehyun almost quivered.

“Taeyong. Don’t let them get to you. You are so much better than them, so much better than all of us, okay? You’re beautiful.” Jaehyun’s voice trailed off into a whisper, words evaporating into the

Chapter 95

Chapter Notes

A bit short but I had some stuff to do and time betrayed me XD

Hope you’ll enjoy anyway <3333
tense air around them, the electricity sparking between their locked gazes.

“Do you think I’m beautiful?” Taeyong spoke, leaning forward slightly, lips parted. “Do you really.” Jaehyun’s eyes flickered down, to those lips, up again, cheeks flaming.

“Yes,” he exhaled softly. Taeyong’s eyes didn’t leave his as a cold hand landed on Jaehyun’s cheek, a soft thumb stroking his cheekbone. Taeyong was moving closer, closer, only a handful of air away, then he stopped.

Jaehyun felt his heartbeat drumming in his chest, he could feel it in his ears, hear it in his head. Taeyong wasn’t moving. So Jaehyun did.

He surged forward, hands grasping firmly at Taeyong’s hips as he pulled the other toward him. Taeyong gasped into his mouth as their lips met, hand moving to grip Jaehyun’s neck instead.

The air around them was swiveling with tension, a wound up bundle of energy buzzing, creating a whirring noise, overtaking their senses, crawling under their skin. And then it combusted.

Jaehyun broke away, panting, eyes wide as he watched Taeyong. His heart was still racing, he could feel his own pulse in his wrist. He could feel Taeyong’s pulse against his chest.

They were so close, so close.

They had just kissed.

Jaehyun puffed out air, Taeyong opened his eyes and the swirling want in his eyes pulled Jaehyun in again. Their lips met in a painful clash, but none of them cared, Taeyong nipped at Jaehyun’s lip with his teeth instead, sucking gently on the flesh.

Jaehyun let out a breathy sound, fingers gripping tightly onto Taeyong’s shirt. His head was spinning and pounding and he felt like he was on a roller coaster ride. It was so exhilarating.

Taeyong broke off this time, leaning back on the locker behind him. He removed his hands from where they’d been grabbing at Jaehyun’s shoulders and dragged them through his hair, ruffling it. Jaehyun was still trying to calm down, leaning back slightly as well. His hands didn’t leave Taeyong’s hips though. They stayed like that, trying to breathe properly, not looking at each other. Eventually, Jaehyun let his hands fall away from Taeyong’s body.

“I’m sorry,” Jaehyun spoke, not really knowing what he was apologizing for. Kissing Taeyong? Liking it? The rumours?

Taeyong didn’t respond and Jaehyun got up, holding his hand out.

Taeyong inhaled, shuddering, then he reached out and placed his hand in Jaehyun’s, letting the brunette pull him to his feet. Taeyong didn’t let go of his hand. Then there were fingers on his cheek, a gentle guiding press and Taeyong’s lips were on his again. Only a light press, a warmth spreading all throughout Jaehyun’s body. The whirring around them had settled, had shaped itself into something safe and warm and comforting.

Then the door opened.

Taeyong hastily pulled away, leaving Jaehyun slightly dazed. A bunch of freshmen entered, looking at them weirdly. They were probably having a PE class. Taeyong eyed them, then Jaehyun.

“I’ll see you later,” he mumbled and Jaehyun didn’t even have a chance to answer before the red
head was out the door.

His lips felt cold all of a sudden.

So did his heart.

~

“Ten!” Jaehyun shouted as soon as he found his way back to the canteen. Their table had filled out, all of the friends gathered. Taeyong was nowhere to be seen though.

The Thai male looked up at the mention of his name, raising a questioning eyebrow at Jaehyun’s ruffled state. The brunet sat down, trying to smooth out his hair.

“Did you get in a fight with someone?” Taeil asked, squinting at him. Jaehyun shook his head.

“No, it was Taeyong,” he said, lowering his voice slightly. He didn’t want people to hear in case it would fire up the rumours even more. Taeyong did not deserve that. “We kissed or made out or something,” he said, still feeling the familiar whirring in his ears, the rush of adrenaline at even thinking of Taeyong.


“Wow,” Ten uttered. “I’m impressed. I was seriously considering the closet by now.”

“I’m not even gonna ask,” Jaehyun shook his head. Yuta frowned.

“Where is he then?” The Japanese male asked. Jaehyun’s face fell.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “He kinda ran.”

“Why would he do that?” Johnny questioned, his book abandoned since long.

“We were almost caught by some freshmen and when he saw them he just took off.”

“Damn,” Doyoung sympathized. “Maybe we should find him?”

“No,” Taeil said, surprising them with the firmness of his voice. “Let him think for a bit. He needs it.”

“I agree. Let’s go over to his house after school instead,” Johnny reasoned.

“Right!” Jaehyun suddenly perked up when he remembered, they didn’t know about the rumours. “We should do that, but first things first. Did you hear about the rumours?”

“Which ones?” Doyoung deadpanned. Jaehyun rolled his eyes.

“The one’s about Taeyong sleeping around with like all of us.” He could see the shock clearly on their faces.

“That’s what it was about?! Wow,” Yuta scoffed in disbelief, “people truly are delusional.”

“Yeah,” Doyoung agreed. “Especially since it should be none of their business.” His teeth were clenched as he spoke, eyes scanning the canteen subtly. Jaehyun hummed in agreement, his mind drifting back to Taeyong’s lips. Taeyong’s cold hands. Taeyong’s pure smile. Taeyong.
“So,” Johnny cleared his throat. “We clearly need to talk to Taeyong. See you guys after school in the parking lot?”

They all nodded.

~

Taeyong headed straight outside after leaving the locker room. He felt like he needed some cold to clear his mind.

His hands were freezing but he didn’t even care. He sat on the edge of one of the benches. They were ice covered but he welcomed the numbness.

He had just kissed Jaehyun. And he definitely enjoyed it.

He didn’t know what to make of his own thoughts. Was Jaehyun pitying him, trying to make him feel better? Was he genuinely attracted to him? Was it only on a physical level or was it something more? Taeyong was so confused.

He knew his best plan of action would probably be talking to Jaehyun.

But that also felt scary. What if Jaehyun suddenly took it all back. Called it a temporary lapse of delusional gayness and asked him to forget it ever happened? Taeyong didn’t know if he could handle that. He had opened his heart for the brunet. He had let him in on his thoughts. He had let himself feel again, and here it could all be ruined.

Taeyong sighed heavily.

He just couldn’t catch a break from his own mind, which he desperately needed. He needed to stop and not think.

He leaned back on the cold bench. His hands gripped at the snow. He knew they were going to turn bright red, yet he didn’t care. He closed his eyes gently, feeling soft snowflakes make their way down the still sky and land on his eyelashes.

Hopefully the iciness could provide some sort of distraction from the messy snowstorm in his own head.
Taeyong sighed as he went for the door. He knew they were coming, Johnny had texted him after school ended. Taeyong had avoided them for the rest of the day, tried to get his snow storm thoughts to clear up and make sense. But now he was going to face them, and he was going to talk, and he was going to let the snow storm rage even if it made him say nonsense.

Taeyong inhaled deeply, opening the front door. His friends said their greetings and piled inside, kicking off shoes and throwing jackets before following Taeyong into the kitchen. Taeyong couldn’t keep his eyes off Jaehyun who kept staring at him as well. The brunet looked closed off, yet there was a question in his eyes. Something Taeyong thought he recognized.

They kept relative quietness until they sat down, wary of Taeyong’s brothers in the living room. Johnny cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Taeyong,” the red head tore his gaze away from where he’d been watching the table to look at Johnny. “We know about the rumours.” Taeyong closed his eyes, not wanting to deal with those stupid rumours at the moment.

“We kinda need to know what you wanna do,” Doyoung said. “I mean you’re obviously being affected and we hate seeing you hurt,” he said, sincere. Taeyong smiled.

“Even you Doyoungie?” He teased, trying to lighten the heavy mood. Doyoung rolled his eyes, making a threatening motion with his hand. Taeyong grinned innocently. “Aww you care.”

“For real though Taeyong,” Ten said, leaning forward in his seat. “What do you wanna do about it? Like we can just tell them off, tell them to stop being annoying and stop spreading rumours that aren’t true.”

“That might make it worse,” Taeyong countered. “They won’t believe the rumours aren’t true just because we say they aren’t.”

“No,” Yuta agreed, grinning. “But it might shut them up.” Taeyong smiled slightly, shaking his head. How come he was always caught up in such bizarre situations.

“It doesn’t matter. We’re graduating soon anyway, I’ll just endure,” Taeyong murmured.

“Graduation is months away,” Taeil protested. “Just let us try and talk to people,” he said. Taeyong made eye contact with Taeil. He did trust them all to defend him and they would probably do a good job of suspending the rumours. They’re part of the most popular bunch of students at school after all.

“Okay,” he conceded. “The rumours involve you guys as well, after all, you should defend yourselves.”
“And you,” Jaehyun’s voice was clear and strong, his eyes searching Taeyong’s face as the red head turned to look. “We are defending you as well.” Taeyong’s breath hitched in his throat, tongue peeking out to lick at his dry lips quickly. They didn’t break away from each other’s gazes.

“Hey you know what?” Yuta spoke, Taeyong looking at him, “I think I’ll find Sicheng and ask if he wants to go to the park with the rest of your brothers. You guys can stay here and make dinner or something,” the Japanese male stood, a smirk on his face. Taeyong could feel his own face reddening when Johnny sent a saucy wink his way.

“Yeah let’s go,” Doyoung nodded, bunny teeth showing through his own faux innocent smile. “Dinner better be ready for when we return.”

With that, Taeil, Ten, Doyoung, Yuta and Johnny left the kitchen. Taeyong swallowed nervously. Donghyuck was at Mark’s and Jungwoo had gone home with Dami. Taeyong heard the commotion in the hallway, voices laughing and talking loudly, clothes getting thrown on. Jisung, Chenle, Lucas, Sicheng. Their voices and Taeyong’s friends. It took another minute before he heard the door open and close, leaving silence.

Taeyong chanced a glance at Jaehyun and saw the other already watching him with apprehensive eyes, a question clear in them.

“Let’s make dinner,” Taeyong cleared his throat and stood up, walking over to the fridge and pulling out the proper ingredients. He tried to calm his racing pulse as he washed his hands. He could hear Jaehyun getting up from his seat, the chair scraping against his floor, the gust of wind when the brunet passed him to wash his hands as well.

The silence was suffocating.

Taeyong felt his blood rushing in his ears as he cut the vegetables, snuck a glance at Jaehyun who was working the meat. His sleeves were rolled up to reveal pale skin and stark veins. Taeyong inhaled shakily. His whole body was urging him to reach out and touch, to feel. He awkwardly cleared his throat. Jaehyun glanced at him with soft eyes, Taeyong feeling sweat starting to form on his neck.

He sighed through his nose, hands shaking. He had stopped cutting, his limbs felt heavy. His grip on the knife was convulsive.

Then there was a hand on his, a soft touch prying his fingers off the handle of the knife. Taeyong’s mouth fell open as Jaehyun gently lifted his shaky hand to his lips, placing a soft kiss on his palm. They were almost the same height and Taeyong stared into those soft eyes, the question still there, so clear and glaring. They were so close, Taeyong could feel the heat radiating from Jaehyun’s body. He breathed out softly and moved the hand Jaehyun had kissed, the hand that was still in Jaehyun’s hand. He moved it so his fingers were skimming over Jaehyun’s cheek bones, his pale cheek, down to his ear, gently touching the small ear ring, then landing on the side of his neck. Taeyong felt Jaehyun’s pulse racing under his palm and he surged forward.

Their lips met in a fervor, Taeyong feeling starved off touch as he pressed against Jaehyun. His body was firm and consisted of muscles. Jaehyun’s hands came to rest on his waist, gripping at his shirt for the second time that very day.

Taeyong gasped into the kiss as Jaehyun’s tongue traced his bottom lip, asking for entrance, which was graciously granted. Taeyong wound both arms around Jaehyun’s neck, playing with the soft strands of ankle at the back of his head.
Jaehyun eventually withdrew, breathing harshly. Taeyong let his head fall down on the brunet’s shoulder, panting, heart racing. They took a few moments to calm down, simply breathing each other in, until Jaehyun spoke.

“We need to talk about this,” he said, voice low and soothing. Taeyong nodded into his shoulder, sighing a bit before breaking away from the other. He grabbed Jaehyun’s hand instead and pulled the other senior with him to the kitchen table. They sat down next to each other, Taeyong didn’t let go of Jaehyun’s hand though.

“Do you like me?” Taeyong managed to ask, looking up to meet Jaehyun’s eyes head on. He was scared of course, he didn’t want his heart broken again, but he was strong. He was gonna face his problems head on, like he tells his brothers to do. Practice what you preach. A gentle smile formed on Jaehyun’s face as his thumb stroked Taeyong’s hand absently.

“I do,” he breathed. “I like you so much, Taeyong.” Taeyong felt the doubt lifting off his chest gradually. “You make me feel things I’ve never felt before and I haven’t been able to stop thinking of you since the first day. When I saw you walking into English class.” Jaehyun’s cheeks were slightly red. “You were beautiful. You still are. Even more now. Because I know you now. I now you bite your nails when you’re nervous. I know you love hugs, I know you’re brave and you take care of your brothers so well. I know you like to eat the dessert first because you love sweets. I know that your favourite color is black. I know you. And you’re even more beautiful.”

Taeyong was blushing. Like a freaking tomato. His face was about to explode.

“Oh wow,” he uttered. “You’re truly a valentines boy.” He laughed, still dazed. Jaehyun smiled sheepishly. Taeyong took a deep breath, bracing himself. “And I love it,” he declared. “I love how you scrunch your nose when you laugh. How you always know when something’s up, you’re so observant. And how you put your all into everything you do. You’re so good Jaehyun. And I feel so safe when I’m with you.” Taeyong could feel the doubt disintegrating in his chest. He wasn’t afraid. He liked Jaehyun, Jaehyun liked him back. And even if they wouldn’t be together forever he still wanted the time he could have, he wanted Jaehyun so bad, even more than he’d wanted Jinkyu. Jaehyun was something completely different. Something good, safe and pure. Jinkyu was dirty, corrupted and a liar.

“I like you too, Jung Jaehyun,” Taeyong smiled, interlocking their fingers. Jaehyun was beaming at him, dimples deep. The question was answered, leaving only joy in his eyes. Taeyong couldn’t help but smile just as brightly, it was exhilarating.

A huge weight had been lifted off his chest and Jaehyun had rooted himself deeply in his heart instead.

~

Sicheng laughed as Johnny chased a screeching Chenle. The tall senior was roaring, pretending to be a monster, while Chenle ran for his life. Jisung was on the swings, Taeil pushing him and smiling fondly. Lucas was playing a game of soccer with Ten and Doyoung, all of them slipping on the snowy field.

Sicheng leaned back on his swing and let the afternoon sun touch his face. It felt really nice.

Yuta was next to him, quiet and content. Sicheng found himself unused to Yuta being quiet but he didn’t complain. The older mostly talked nonsense anyway.

“Did you know about Jaehyun and Taeyong?” And so the quiet atmosphere was broken. Sicheng
opened his eyes and looked at Yuta who was watching him curiously.

“Kind of, we knew Taeyong sort of liked him,” he said. Yuta nodded in thought.

“Do you think they’ll figure it out?” He asked then, still curious. Sicheng liked it quite a bit, that Yuta wanted his opinion on things and that he asked so sincerely as well.

“Yeah,” Sicheng nodded firmly. “Taeyong loves fiercely and I think Jaehyun actually likes him. Their personalities mesh really well and they won’t beat around the bush.” Sicheng deducted. “My brother is brave. Really brave. Because he listens to fear. He acknowledges his fear and he tries to live in harmony with it, and he does what is needed.” Sicheng felt his eyes watering a bit. His brother was truly the greatest older brother in the world. Having grown up so quickly just to take care of them. He had his faults but he always tried to make everything work, always keeping their best in mind.

Sicheng loved him greatly.

“You guys are really good,” Yuta said, a soft smile on his face. “All of you. You really care so much for each other.”

“Of course,” Sicheng said clearly. Yuta nodded. “We’re brothers. We love each other.”

~

Yuta couldn’t help but cheer when they arrived back. He entered the kitchen and saw Jaehyun and Taeyong cooking, Jaehyun’s arm around Taeyong’s waist comfortably, both smiling brightly. Yuta’s cheer attracted the brothers and the rest of their friends.

“Finally!” Ten exclaimed, looking ecstatic. “I was seriously gonna find a closet,” he said, looking absolutely serious.

“Yongie hyung has a boyfriend!” Lucas cheered, laughing.

“Taeyong and Jaehyun sitting in a tree,” Chenle started singing. Taeyong had let them go on for quite a while but now he was drawing the line. The red head broke away from Jaehyun, laughing as he munched for Chenle who screamed and ran for his life. Taeyong captured the eight year old, tickling him.

“You little demon,” Taeyong jokingly hissed, Chenle’s dolphin laugh filling the room.

Jaehyun was smiling fondly and Yuta wanted to coo at them yet he was absolutely disgusted by the fondness. Yuck.

Taeyong have mercy when Chenle pleaded, instead hugging the child. Jaehyun’s puppy eyes were even brighter if possible.

“Oh my god,” Doyoung complained. “Let’s eat before I combust from all this affection.”

“Such a joy killer,” Taeyong teased, looking unfazed by the negativity. He was all sparkles and rainbows. Yuta was happy for his friend.

They all settled down to eat, the food tasting exceptionally good. Because ‘it was made with love’ as Chenle so teasingly said, Taeyong raising a threatening brow at him. Yet nothing could bring down their good spirits.
They saved the leftovers for Jungwoo and Donghyuck and decided to leave after they’d eaten. It was late after all.

Yuta cooed when Taeyong pecked Jaehyun’s cheek as they were leaving which earned the Japanese male a punch on the shoulder by a certain red head.

All in all, Yuta would say it was definitely a successful day. Seeing Jaehyun’s love sick expression as they drove away from the Lee residence convinced him.

~

That same night Taeyong had written lyrics like crazy, feeling so inspired. More than he’d been in a while which made him incredibly happy. Especially seeing as he would need some good lyrics for the talent show.

Luckily he could put them to use the very next day. It was Tuesday and the sun was up, beating down on them and relieving some of the cold that often consumed their bodies. Taeyong and Mark were in the music room, having their very first meeting to plan for the talent show.

“What concept are we going with?” Taeyong asked, folding his legs on the chair. Mark was sitting with his guitar, his notebook open in front of him.

“I’m not sure. Do you have any lyrics you’d like to use? I’ll see if I have anything similar,” Mark decided. Taeyong nodded and flipped through some pages in his own notebook. The lyrics form yesterday stood out starkly, making him smile.

“I do have some actually, here,” he handed the book to Mark who took it and read through the lines. The junior was starting to smile.

“This is good, I like it hyung,” he said. Taeyong smiled in thanks and took his book back gingerly.

“Do you have anything similar?” Taeyong questioned, leaning his elbows on his knees. Mark hummed, flipping through some pages.

“I don’t,” he admitted. “But I think I could write some,” he looked thoughtful, nodding slightly. “Yeah I can definitely write some for next time.”

“Okay, then we can just stick to working on the lyrics for this time,” Taeyong said. Mark nodded in agreement, seemingly enthusiastic.

“Let’s do it!”
The first time Taeyong saw Jaehyun that Tuesday was during lunch. Taeyong and Johnny were sitting at their usual table, chatting idly when Jaehyun sat down in the chair next to Taeyong’s. The red head stopped speaking to look at the brunet and smile in greeting. Jaehyun was already staring at him with bright eyes and a dimpled smile.

“Hey,” Jaehyun said. Taeyong couldn’t help but smile.

“Hi,” he returned, giggling slightly. He still felt completely euphoric from the feelings he’d experienced yesterday and they were all hitting him again when he laid eyes on Jaehyun.

“Hello,” Johnny’s voice was loud and teasing, causing both of them to break out of their staring. Taeyong felt his cheeks heat up but he didn’t say anything. Jaehyun chuckled and took out his food instead. He let his hand wander over Taeyong’s thigh as he ate, finding the red head’s hand and interlocking their fingers gently.

“Ugh,” Doyoung complained as he arrived. “They’re holding hands under the table. Kill me, Johnny. Please.”

“Don’t whine,” Taeyong admonished, teasing. “Just because you’re single and miserable.” Doyoung shot him a glare, a downright deadly one.

“So we’re official?” Jaehyun suddenly asked, looking so incredibly hopeful. Taeyong looked at him in surprise, realizing that they’d never actually finalized anything really.

“Um. If you want to?” Taeyong said, awkward.

“I don’t know. Do you? Want to?” Jaehyun countered, a teasing smile on his lips. Taeyong reached out to hit his chest.

“Oh my fucking- just get it done and over with. You’re boyfriends, great, there we go.” Doyoung hissed, fed up. Johnny stifled a laugh and Doyoung glared. Taeyong simply smiled, Jaehyun smiling back.

“Boyfriend?” Taeyong said, raising his tone to make it a question. Jaehyun laughed.

“Boyfriend.”

“I think I might puke! Kill me Johnny. Please.”
Mark was dead tired. Basketball practice had been brutal, he had unfinished homework and he needed to write lyrics for the song he and Taeyong were working on. Great.

The practice had been a morning one, which made it even worse, because then he’d spend the rest of the day sore and miserable. Seeing Donghyuck in math did cheer him up a bit though. The peach haired male was wearing one of Mark’s hoodies which he’d definitely stolen last time he was over. His fingers were adorned in several rings and he also had black nail polish. It was his favourite, Mark knew, because he’d gotten it from Lucas.

Mark walked over and sat down next to his boyfriend, Donghyuck looking up from his phone. Mark noticed that he was texting Jaemin.

“Hey handsome,” Donghyuck teased, “you look dead,” he followed up, making Mark groan.

“Shut up,” he complained and started pulling out his materials. Donghyuck waited until he was done before grabbing his face and pressing a peck to his lips. Mark smiled incredulously, reaching out to touch Donghyuck’s nose piercing. It was a diamond stud that Renjun had bought him after finding out about the piercing.

“Pretty,” Mark whispered, not knowing himself if he was referring to Donghyuck himself or the diamond stud. Probably both.

“Disgusting!” A voice called from the back, making Mark roll his eyes and pull away from Donghyuck. He didn’t turn around to acknowledge the person.

“Yah Mark Lee! You hear me? It’s disgusting!”

Donghyuck was fuming next to him, clenching his fists. Mark knew he wanted to fight back, but it wasn’t worth it. They always had people calling them out, being idiots. They usually ignored it. Part of high school life really. Yet this guy didn’t seem to take a hint.

“Yah! Homos! I’m talking to you!” Footsteps could be heard and Mark was immediately on his feet, turning around to face the person. Donghyuck stood as well. Glaring at the person. It was a male, a bit taller than Mark, but with the same build. Mark actually recognized him as one of the basketball team members who’d been suspended after the incident in the locker room. He’d never liked the guy.

“Do whatever you want, I don’t care. But not in front of me,” he spat. “It’s disgusting, I might just puke out my lunch.”

“Oh listen here you bigot,” Donghyuck started, stepping forward. “What’s disgusting is that ugly face of yours, I might just rearrange it!” Mark was mildly surprised. Donghyuck must’ve been holding back quite a bit if he was that hostile. He saw that the guy was taken aback as well, although he pulled himself together quickly, scoffing.

“You think I’m afraid of you? You’re nothing without your brother,” he sneered. “You’re weak. I mean look at you. All soft curves and edges. Disgusting.” Mark was about to step up, but he didn’t have the time. Donghyuck was already charging, slapping the guy right in the face. Mark gaped as he saw his former team member recover quickly, only to land a punch on Donghyuck’s left cheek. The peach haired male recoiled, and Mark was frozen from shock. It seemed as if the rest of the class had stopped breathing as well. Donghyuck was regaining his senses and Mark’s eyes almost popped out of their sockets when his boyfriend started laughing.

Then, before anyone could react Donghyuck was on him again, stepping on his foot, kneeling his
groin and lastly elbowing his face. The guy fell to his knees with a gasp.

Donghyuck wiped the blood off his lip, Mark staring in surprise.

“Of course Taeyong hyung would teach me some fucking self defense moves after that first time,” Donghyuck scoffed, touching his cheek. “And you ruined my fucking makeup.” Mark was having a hard time processing the situation when he heard a surprised gasp from the doorway. Their math teacher was standing there, eyes wide as saucers. His gaze quickly flickered between Mark, Donghyuck’s bloody cheek and the guy on the floor.

“Lee Mark, Lee Donghyuck. Principal’s office.”

Mark didn’t think his day could get any worse.

~

Taeyong’s mind was drifting as they sat in history class. He was leaning his head on his palm, feeling Jaehyun’s fingers tracing patterns on his thigh under the desk. It was very soothing, and Taeyong found his mind wandering.

He felt very excited at the aspect of having a boyfriend. He wanted to squeal and jump and shout, but of course he didn’t. Of course.

Although he also worried. South Korea was a conservative country and, as proved by a lot of the students at the school, homosexuality was not taken lightly. Taeyong worried for Jaehyun. The brunet was a part of the popular crew after all, he had everything to lose yet he didn’t seem the least bit bothered. Which might even be a good thing, Taeyong considered. When he’d been with Jinkyu they’d been hidden, stolen kisses in the empty locker rooms, always in the safety of their own homes, or making out in Jinkyu’s parents’ car at a remote spot. Taeyong had always been forced to hide that part of himself and he really didn’t want to. He wanted it to be different with Jaehyun.

His thoughts even drifted to Joe. A shiver racked through his body at the thought.

Joe was also one of those cases, hating homosexuality so deeply that he suppressed himself with hatred and took it out through drugs, violence and real inappropriate touching. Which Taeyong had first hand experience with. He hated it so much, the thought of Joe even getting near him like that. It felt so dirty.

Taeyong despised that word.

He was a neat freak. He hated when things were messy and dirty, yet he couldn’t really clean himself up. Clean up his turbulent thoughts and feelings.

He tried to think of Jaehyun. Jaehyun said he was beautiful. He wasn’t dirty. He wasn’t. His brothers looked up to him. He wasn’t dirty. They loved him. So he wasn’t. Yet people at school thought so and it was affecting him greatly. He needed to stop going there. He was better than that. He had a lot of self respect and confidence. He wasn’t going to let them knock him down over some petty rumours.

“Lee Taeyong,” the speakers crackled, startling the students in the room. “Lee Taeyong and Seo Johnny to the principal’s office.”

The room was dead quiet. Jaehyun had stopped moving his fingers, looking at Taeyong questioningly. The red head looked back, confused, and eventually stood up. Johnny was already next to him and they shared worried glances before exiting the room and heading for the principal’s
Donghyuck and Mark sat quietly with their heads bowed down. They were waiting for Taeyong and Johnny to arrive, an awkward silence enveloping them and the principal. Donghyuck had been defiant at first, saying the other guy had started it by calling them names and stuff, yet the principal wasn’t having it this time. They’d apparently been involved in too many conflicts by now to be ignored again. Donghyuck had still wanted to protest but Mark stopped him. Arguing wouldn’t help. So they sat down instead, listened to what the principal had to say and cordially behaved.

“I think this warrants a call to your parents,” the principal had said, looking solemn. Donghyuck had felt the crippling panic creeping up on him and he had seen Mark glancing at him worriedly.

“Please, my parents are very busy. Can’t my brother handle it instead? He’s eighteen,” Donghyuck had pleaded, feeling uncharacteristically powerless.

“He’s not your legal guardian,” the principal had said sternly.

“Please,” Donghyuck had whispered, clasping his hands together and letting his eyes water gently, which wasn’t all that hard honestly; he already felt like crying.

The principal had thought it over for a while before agreeing to calling in their brothers instead, for now.

“This is no final decision,” he warmed them as he got the secretary to call them over the speakers.

And now here they were. Waiting.

It didn’t take long before the door opened, Johnny peeking his head in, looking between Mark and Donghyuck warily, yet curiously, eyes widening when he saw the bruise forming on Donghyuck’s cheek.

The tall senior pushed inside and held the door open for Taeyong who was behind him. The red haired senior gaped when he saw Donghyuck’s bruised face.

“What happened?” He exclaimed, walking forward to touch Donghyuck’s face gently.

“Just some guy, I gave back what I got though,” Donghyuck promised, voice smug. The principal cleared his throat pointedly, shooting him a look. Donghyuck shrunk down into his seat. Mark reached over to grab his hand. Taeyong and Johnny quickly took a seat on opposite sides, next to their respective little brothers.

“I’m sorry sir,” Johnny finally spoke. “But what’s this about?”

“Your brothers were involved in a fight yet again,” the principal recounted. “It’s been one too many, this time I’m afraid we’ll have to contact your parents.”

Donghyuck doubted anyone but him noticed the subtle changes in Taeyong’s demeanor. His clenched jaw. Tiny frown. Hands gripping the seat. Foot bouncing up and down. Taeyong was thinking a hundred miles an hour. How to fix it. How to save the situation. How to lie.

Donghyuck felt so guilty for causing the stress his brother was experiencing. It was all his fault. If he hadn’t run his mouth it wouldn’t have happened. They wouldn’t be in this mess.
“Sir,” Taeyong spoke, voice shaking imperceptibly. “Our parents are very busy, I’m sure there’s no need—”

“I will stop you right there Mr Lee,” the principal cut him off. “I bet your parents take your studies very seriously. I’m sure they would agree to make some time if it regarded school.” Donghyuck wanted to scoff. He wanted to laugh in the principal’s face. As if. They would never.

“But please, they really don’t like being bothered,” Taeyong tried again.

“Is there something wrong, something I don’t know about?” The principal was definitely getting suspicious now. Donghyuck saw his brother swallowing nervously. He felt his own pulse beat furiously in his chest.

“No sir. They’re just currently overseas so a meeting would have to wait,” Taeyong lied straight through his teeth. The principal frowned. “It would be much easier if you talked to me instead. I’ll make sure my brother doesn’t do it again.” The bald old man looked between them both with his frown still in place, as if he was assessing them.

“I’m really sorry sir. I promise it won’t happen again,” Donghyuck earnestly added. The principal sighed.

“Fine, we won’t contact your parents. But this will show up in your records. For both of you.”

There was a collective silent sigh of relief throughout the room. Donghyuck squeezed Mark’s hand tightly, Johnny allowing a small smile to overtake his face. Taeyong’s shoulders relaxed although he didn’t completely let down his guard.

The principal proceeded to lecture them on the importance of distancing themselves from violence and instead getting a teacher when a conflict arose. He also talked privately to Taeyong and Johnny before giving Donghyuck and Mark a week’s detention as punishment.

“What’s gonna happen to the other guy?” Johnny asked as they were finishing up.

“We’ve already talked to his parents, he’s getting a week’s detention as well,” the principal explained.

“Okay,” Taeyong nodded. “Thank you so much sir.”

And then they were out.

Taeyong slumped as soon as they were out in the empty corridor.

“Hyung I’m so sorry!” Donghyuck apologized, walking over to hug his big brother. “I didn’t even think. I’m so sorry.”

“This cannot happen again Donghyuck-ah,” Taeyong said, wrapping his arms around the sophomore.

“I know. I promise it won’t,” he sniffled. The meeting had actually shaken him to the core when their parents had been brought up. Now it was overflowing.

“It’s okay,” Taeyong shushed.

Johnny and Mark remained at a distance, watching the two brothers hugging. They felt relieved as well, seeing as there were no parents needing to be involved. They both knew of the situation the
Lee’s were in, therefore it felt very good to have averted that crisis.

“Oh man,” Mark suddenly groaned in English. Johnny looked at him weirdly, the question clear in his eyes. Mark sighed. “Now I have detention on top of my practices, classes, homework and writing lyrics.” Mark buried his face in his hands, looking miserable. Johnny smiled fondly, throwing his arm around Mark’s shoulders.

“You’re gonna be fine lil bro,” he assured. “You’re one of the most ambitious people I know and you always do your best. Don’t worry about it.” Mark nodded, still looking defeated. “You know I’m proud of you right?” Johnny added cheekily, yet sincerely. Mark looked up at his older brother, wide eyes and a smile. He looked a bit embarrassed but also happier. Johnny felt better knowing that he could comfort his brother, if only a bit. Mark leaned into his embrace slightly, not looking at him as he spoke.

“Thank you hyung.”
Chapter 98

Chapter Notes

Oh my gosh I’ve been so busy today so this is definitely not proofread and it’s a bit short! Sorry :((

Hope you’ll enjoy anyway <3333

The rest of the week progressed smoothly. Donghyuck and Mark didn’t get into more trouble, the rumours seemed to quiet down just a bit and Lucas came home with a test proudly marked with a big red A.

“We have to celebrate!” Donghyuck gushed, hugging Lucas tightly. The blonde smiled in excitement, looking at Taeyong. The oldest brother smiled.

“Of course we’ll celebrate,” he said. “Lucas, you decide.”

“Whatever I want?” Lucas asked, eyes lighting up. Taeyong giggled.

“Whatever you want.”

What Lucas wanted was apparently bowling. He immediately jumped on the chance to bowl, seeing as one of his friends at school had recommended it to him and it was supposed to be very fun. Lucas demanded that Taeyong brings Jaehyun, which surprised the red head. He didn’t know his brothers were so adamant on spending time with Jaehyun, but he invited the brunet and Jaehyun accepted instantly.

Taeyong arranged for them to go bowling Friday evening, after Donghyuck’s detention and Jaehyun’s basketball practice. Donghyuck kept complaining that he couldn’t even spend the detention with Mark since the older had practice. Apparently Mark had gotten morning detentions while Donghyuck got the afternoon ones. Taeyong felt for Mark, the younger had so many things on his plate and he always wanted to do his best whenever he did something, which Taeyong admired.

The red head grabbed Sicheng and they picked up their brothers, Lucas, Jungwoo, Chenle and Jisung, Friday afternoon to take them to an Ice cream parlor while waiting for Donghyuck and Jaehyun to be done. He smiled as he watched his younger brothers devouring their ice creams, wiping Jisung’s cheek with a napkin when the younger was being messy. Sicheng let Chenle taste his vanilla flavour while Lucas and Jungwoo changed their cups completely, finding that they liked the other’s flavour more.

Time passed quickly and they piled into the car to head to the high school again. Jaehyun was standing by the entrance, bag slung over his shoulder, hair still wet from showering. He wore dark jeans, a white T-shirt and a checkered flannel over it. He also had a winter jacket, of course. The cold was still very much present.

Taeyong saw him smile when he spotted their car, those dimples making an appearance.
“Jaehyun hyung can sit in the front!” Lucas exclaimed, Sicheng agreeing quickly and climbing to the backseat, joining their younger brothers. Taeyong raised an eyebrow at them but didn’t question it. Jaehyun got in and his smile widened if possible. Taeyong felt his own lips pull themselves into a grin.

“Hey,” Jaehyun breathed, cheeks rosy from the cold.

“Hi,” Taeyong greeted him back. He heard snickering from the backseat but he didn’t acknowledge it.

“There’s Hyuckie hyung!” Chenle shouted, pointing toward the entrance. Indeed, there was Donghyuck, looking annoyed and out of breath. He jogged to the car and got in the backseat.

“How was detention?” Sicheng asked, teasingly.

“Don’t even ask!” Donghyuck whined. “The teacher is ancient, he has bad eyesight and he can’t hear well either!”

Taeyong tuned out Donghyuck’s complaints, shot Jaehyun a shy glance and started driving towards the bowling alley.

~

Jaehyun was excited to enter the bowling alley. It had been a while since he last went bowling, with his parents, and he missed the feeling. He missed the smell of rubber, the sounds of pins getting knocked down, the junk food.

They paid and got shoes, then they headed for their assigned lane.

“Let’s make teams,” Donghyuck said, and from the familiarity of his tone, Jaehyun understood that they did this often.

“Jaehyun hyung and Taeyongie hyung can be captains,” Jungwoo said, nodding his head.

“Okay, Rock Paper Scissors please,” Donghyuck said, gesturing towards the two of them. Jaehyun laughed and held out his fist. Taeyong took the hint and they played.

Taeyong won.

In the end, the people on Taeyong’s team were Jisung, Lucas and Sicheng while Jaehyun’s team consisted of Chenle, Jungwoo and Donghyuck.

Then they began.

Jaehyun noticed that Sicheng was very good at bowling, likewise with Jungwoo. Chenle got a lot of gutter balls which disappointed him, while Jisung used a kid stand to roll his balls. Donghyuck was more show than skill, doing all sorts of poses and showy moves that often ended up with a gutter ball. Everyone laughed though so it was okay.

Jaehyun was extremely competitive so he made sure to play his best. The brothers were collectively awed at his affinity to get strikes. Jaehyun felt incredibly satisfied with himself.

“Wah you must’ve played a lot hyung,” Lucas said, staring at the screen showing their scores. Jaehyun chuckled awkwardly.

“A few times, it’s been a while now though,” he said.
After seeing how good Jaehyun was his team was ecstatic. Chenle was sure that they were going to win, and he shrieked every time Jaehyun scored. Donghyuck always stood up to jump on his back which Jaehyun only laughed at. Jungwoo was quiet but his smile was sincere.

Taeyong smiled softly as they were seated next to each other on the worn down old blue couch, waiting for their turn. Taeyong was very good, Jaehyun thought. The red head always managed to pick up spares and he always kept his team’s spirit up.

Jaehyun leaned into the other so they were touching from shoulders to thighs. Taeyong sunk down a bit to accommodate him. Jaehyun smiled and reached out to brush Taeyong’s bangs out.

“It’s fading a bit,” he murmured, pulling at the strands. Taeyong nodded.

“It’s gonna look pink soon,” he admitted.

“Cute,” Jaehyun teased. Taeyong swatted at his hand and hid a shy smile behind his hand. Jaehyun only laughed and reached out to grab his hand, intertwining their fingers and putting them on top of his knee as they watched Lucas pick up a spare.

“Hyung!” Sicheng said when the score for Lucas turn had shown up. “Can we take a break, get something to drink?” Taeyong nodded.

“Hyung can you please go and buy for us? We’re too tired,” Jungwoo complained, appearing immensely drained. Taeyong frowned a bit but nodded nonetheless.

“Okay, I’ll go and get some drinks then, be right back,” he said fondly, placing a peck on Jaehyun’s cheek before leaving. The brunet was stunned for a second before a dorky smile overtook his face. He’d been doing a lot of that. Smiling.

“So Jung Jaehyun, if that’s even your real name,” Donghyuck was suddenly in front of him, staring intently into his eyes. Jaehyun furrowed his eyebrows, amused.

“It’s not actually,” he responded. Donghyuck was thrown off course, his previously narrowed eyes widening slightly in question.

“It’s not?” He said, confused. Jaehyun laughed.

“It’s Jung Yoonoh, actually,” Jaehyun admitted, liking the confused look on Donghyuck’s face.

“Okay whatever, that’s not the important part here,” Sicheng butted in, suddenly in front of Jaehyun as well. Lucas, Jungwoo, Chenle and Jisung all joining him. Jaehyun looked between the brothers confusedly.

“What are you doing?” He asked, apprehensive.

“Oh nothing special. Just a good ol honorary brother to boyfriend talk,” Donghyuck cackled evilly.

“Yeah,” Chenle nodded in agreement, trying to puff himself up to look intimidating.

“If you hurt our brother we will hurt you, gravely,” Sicheng said, looking completely serious. Jaehyun gaped at them.

“Exactly. If you hurt his feelings we’ll never forgive you,” Jungwoo declared firmly. Jaehyun felt his heart swell with fondness. They were honestly adorable - and intimidating - but mostly adorable. Jaehyun felt glad that Taeyong had such great brothers.
“I won’t. I promise I would never hurt him intentionally,” he swore, a smile tugging at his lips. They all stared. Even baby Jisung looked him up and down, scrutinizing. Jaehyun held back laughter.

“Okay, we believe you,” Lucas concluded.

“Yes. Now all you have to do is take Taeyong hyung out on a date. Preferably tomorrow,” Sicheng nodded.

“And he doesn’t like roses. His favourite flower is cherry blossom,” Jungwoo supplied.

“But he loves chocolate,” Donghyuck told him.

“But not the dark chocolate. It’s too bitter,” Sicheng corrected.

“And he likes sweet drinks,” Lucas nodded. Jaehyun could feel the smile spreading on his lips as they rattled off Taeyong’s likes and dislikes.

“And he has a serious fear of germs so you better not take him to a place with germs.”

“Are you guys talking about me?” Taeyong spoke, heading for them with a tray full of drinks. Jaehyun immediately got up to help him, grabbing the tray and putting it on the table.


“You’re not scaring him off are you?” Taeyong said, looking at them suspiciously.

“Of course not hyung!” Was the collective answer. Taeyong still eyed them with curiosity as he retook his seat next to Jaehyun who was trying hard not to laugh.

“Tell me if they’re bothering you,” Taeyong said, knocking their knees together. Jaehyun shook his head, watching as Taeyong’s slender fingers reached out and started playing with the hole in Jaehyun’s jeans.

“They weren’t. Not at all actually,” Jaehyun promised and he was sincere. They’d been nothing but helpful and adorable to him. The sweetest.

He saw them watching him with slight surprise, apparently having thought they’d be a bother. They looked pleasantly surprised though.

After drinking some soda they got back to the game.

Jaehyun’s team ended up winning with ten points. They did a silly dance to celebrate and Donghyuck was once again on Jaehyun’s back.

Taeyong laughed at their antics as he gathered up the empty glasses to put back on the tray. Lucas and Jisung joined in on the dancing while Sicheng watched them act like fools, an embarrassed yet amused and fond smile on his face.

After retuning their shoes and getting in the car, Jisung fell asleep, Chenle following him into dreamland soon enough. Lucas and Jungwoo played a game while Donghyuck chatted with Mark and Sicheng put his earbuds in.

Jaehyun glanced at Taeyong. The red head had a slight upturn to his lips, eyes bright and energized. He looked ethereal. Jaehyun cleared his throat slightly to gather the attention of his boyfriend. Boyfriend. He had a boyfriend. Wow. Taeyong turned to look at him, questioningly.
“Do you wanna go out tomorrow?” Jaehyun whispered, careful not to disturb the other Lee brothers. Taeyong’s eyes widened slightly in excitement.

“Like a date?” The red head asked, already grinning. Jaehyun chuckled, nodding.

“Yes. Like a date,” he confirmed.

“Sure,” Taeyong agreed easily. “I’d love to.” Jaehyun’s cheeks were nearly hurting from all the smiling he’d been doing.

“Great! I’ll text you tomorrow then.”

“Okay! Great!”

“Amazing.”

“Awesome.”

“Perfect.”

Then Donghyuck’s agonized groan.

“Will you stop doing that!? You’re even more gross than Mark and I.”
Chapter 99

Taeyong woke up early the next day. He was excited about his date and energy was coursing through his body. He cooked a big breakfast which took quite a while and then went to wake up his brothers.

He started with Lucas and Jungwoo, walking inside their dark room and smiling as he saw how Lucas was sprawled all over his bed, covers halfway to the floor. Taeyong headed over to Lucas and pushed at his brother’s body, so he could lie down. Lucas frowned in his sleep as Taeyong started stroking his hair, scrape his neck, run his hands down his arms. Lucas eyes fluttered open within a couple of seconds.

“Hyung,” he complained, pouting. Taeyong laughed.

“Time to get up Xuxi,” he said and got out of Lucas’ bed, heading for Jungwoo’s instead. This time he just laid down on top of Jungwoo who was curled up. He knew the younger was harder to wake up and therefore he resorted to more drastic matters. Like pulling on his ears.

Jungwoo whined and swatted at him while Lucas had gotten up from his bed to join them. Jungwoo eventually woke up fully from having to ward off their attacks. Taeyong kissed his cheek and got up.

“Breakfast’s ready downstairs,” Taeyong called as he exited the room and headed for Donghyuck. The rest of his morning wake up call went by smoothly. Donghyuck flew up as soon as Taeyong tickled his ribs. Sicheng was awake when he entered, Chenle was a morning bird so no problem waking him, Jisung whined and pouted but Taeyong simply picked him up and let the four year old snooze in his arms.

Finally he had gathered the whole family for breakfast. Jungwoo was still half asleep, much like Jisung on Sicheng’s lap. Lucas and Chenle were chatting excitedly and Donghyuck joined in. Taeyong hummed quietly to himself as he ate his food.

“Why are you so happy?” Sicheng suddenly asked, having seen their oldest brother spacing out. Taeyong shrugged.

“Nothing special,” he said, trying to sound indifferent. Sicheng raised an eyebrow.

“It’s something to do with Jaehyun right?” Donghyuck said smugly, leaning forward in his seat to stare at Taeyong with narrowed eyes. Taeyong felt an involuntary smile on his lips.

“Okay, Yeah. I have a date,” he finally admitted. They all stared before chaos erupted. Cheers and clanking of glasses. Taeyong recoiled in surprise.

“Ahhh our hyung! I’m so proud!” Donghyuck said, standing up, holding a glass high and wiping at
fake tears. Taeyong blushed and swiped at the younger.

“Stop!” He protested through laughter as they continued celebrating.

“This is important hyung! It’s your first date,” Jungwoo said. And yes, Taeyong realized, it is his first date. Jinkyu had never taken him on a date. And he’d never been interested in anyone else. His eyes turned cloudy with memories as his brothers continued chattering happily.

His nerves just increased by a thousand.

This is his first date.

~

When the doorbell rang Chenle was the first one there, greeting Jaehyun excitedly. Taeyong took a deep breath before getting up from the couch and heading for the hallway. Donghyuck paused the movie they’d all been watching and got up as well. Lucas, Jungwoo, Sicheng and Jisung followed him.

Taeyong smiled when he saw Jaehyun. The brunet has his hair styled up, wearing a blue sweater and jeans under his winter jacket. He had gloves on but his cheeks were rosy form the cold. He looked up from conversing with Chenle and smiled right back, scanning Taeyong up and down. The redhead knew he looked good. He wore black jeans and a dark hoodie with chains adorning it. His hair was parted over the forehead and he had applied just a tiny bit of makeup to give his eyes a smoky look.

“You look good,” Jaehyun said.

“Thanks, you too,” Taeyong returned, heading over to put on his own winter jacket. It was padded and black, with fuzz on the hood.

He pulled on his boots and grabbed his gloves before turning to his brothers who were all watching him with excited faces.

“Okay, Hyuck and Jungwoo you can cook. And no candy after ten pm. And please make sure everyone is in bed on time Sicheng,” Taeyong told them.

“We promise to behave,” Donghyuck said. “Have fun!”

Taeyong chuckled and sighed, turning to face Jaehyun.

“Let’s go?”

Jaehyun nodded and grabbed his hand gently, opening the door to leave.

“Bye!” Chenle shouted and then the door closed behind them.

Taeyong felt his heart pick up speed. They were going on a date.

Jaehyun lead him down the driveway and to the curb where an old fashioned car stood parked. Taeyong noticed that the hood was removable.

“Is this your car?” Taeyong said, smiling.

“It’s my dad’s actually,” Jaehyun revealed, opening the passenger door for him. Taeyong got in graciously.
“Such a gentleman,” he teased, making Jaehyun snort. The interior of the car was clean, black, leather upholstery and mocha colored glove compartment. Taeyong put on his seatbelt as Jaehyun for in and did the same.

“Does your dad know what you’re using the car for?” Taeyong asked casually as they started driving.

“Yeah, I told my parents I had a date,” Jaehyun said with a giddy smile. Taeyong felt the fondness creep up on him.

“With a boy?” He inquired, glancing at Jaehyun. The brunet was still smiling, throwing him a look.

“Yes. With a boy,” he confirmed. Taeyong felt the happiness blooming in his chest. Jaehyun wasn’t a complete closet case. Great.

After getting on of his fears confirmed Taeyong allowed himself to relax slightly. He looked out the window at the dark streets they were passing. Because it was winter the dark came quicker than during summer.

“So where are we going?” Taeyong asked, curious.

“It’s a surprise,” Jaehyun teased. Taeyong stared. Now he was just more curious.

They drove for another ten minutes, Taeyong trying to get Jaehyun to tell him what they were going to do, but the brunet was adamant. He wouldn’t tell.

Taeyong was still clueless as they got out of the car. He could see that there were other cars, but he couldn’t see anything through the shrubbery covering his vision. Jaehyun grabbed his hand once again after locking the car and pulled him along. They came into a little path, lamps lighting the way in front of them. It was a short walk, and then Taeyong saw exactly what was going on.

A grin spread on his lips automatically. In at the end of the path was a clearing, a huge one, to accommodate a lake. Which was currently frozen.

There were stands of ice skates and helmets put out, and also several food stands. People were milling about, most of them out on the ice that was covering the lake.

Taeyong pulled on Jaehyun’s hand excitedly.

“We’re ice skating!” He exclaimed. Jaehyun laughed and nodded.

“We are,” he said as they reached the stands of skates and helmets. “What’s your size?”

~

Ice skating had been something Taeyong liked since he was young. He used to go with his brothers to skate, but in late years they’d been doing it less and less.

Now here he was, about to go out on the frozen lake and skate. Jaehyun was holding his hand firmly as they made their way onto the ice. Taeyong felt the familiar strain of standing on skates, the familiar feeling of exhilaration. Jaehyun was smiling at him so widely as well, his heart was going into overdrive.

They started moving slowly, getting used to the feeling. Taeyong found that holding Jaehyun’s hand helped with balance. Jaehyun seemed at ease, lightly moving forward with minimal effort. Taeyong
shook his head in disbelief.

“Why are you so good at everything?” He complained, squeezing Jaehyun’s Han teasingly. The other shrugged indifferently although he looked smug.

“It’s a gift,” he said. Taeyong laughed.

Once he had gotten used to it, he finally let go of Jaehyun’s hand. The brunet watched him fondly as he took off at a great speed, gracefully circling the area. Jaehyun followed suit, speeding quickly after him. Taeyong was laughing loudly as they turned it into some sort of tag, Jaehyun trying to catch him. Taeyong dodged people right and left, twirling excitedly. It was such a nice feeling, almost like soaring.

Jaehyun finally managed to grab his arm, their precious speed making them spin around in circles as they breathed harshly from exhaustion. Taeyong placed his hands on Jaehyun’s shoulders, trying to catch his breath. He righted Jaehyun’s helmet and brushed some hair away from his eyes.

Jaehyun smiled and reached up to grab his hands, gently holding them again. They skated together, moving as if they were dancing, gracefully, not minding the other people on the ice. Not minding if anyone saw them. Instead they were simply being.

Being themselves and being happy.

~

They skated for quite a while until their feet were aching to get out of the ice skates. When they’d returned the skates and helmets they headed for Jaehyun’s car once again, hand in hand.

“Where are we going now?” Taeyong asked as he buckled his seatbelt. Jaehyun laughed loudly.

“I’m not telling you.”

“Aww cmon Jaehyunnie,” Taeyong pouted, trying to appeal to his boyfriend.

“Nope.”

~

The second surprise turned out to be close to the frozen lake. It was a park, but not your traditional park where kids would play, more like a nature park. Flowers and trees and open plains of land. It was all covered in untouched snow, shimmering under the glow of the moon. Taeyong gaped at the scenery as they arrived, awed at the purity of it.

Jaehyun joined him outside the car, with a backpack.

“Let’s go,” he said, nudging Taeyong slightly. The red head raised his eyebrows but followed nonetheless as Jaehyun started wading through the untouched snow. Taeyong watched curiously as Jaehyun started stomping down a section of the snow, only to pull out a blanket and set it down.

“Are we seriously having a winter picnic?” Taeyong asked incredulously. Jaehyun shot him an amused look.

“Something wrong?” He asked, innocently. As if everything was normal. Taeyong had to laugh.

“No,” he breathed, trying to stop his laughter. “Nothing at all.” And it really wasn’t.
They settled on the thick blanket, a Jaehyun pulling out a thermos and a box of chocolates. Taeyong’s eyes widened in pleasant surprise as he saw the chocolate. It was his favourite kind.


He poured the liquid from the thermos into two cups and handed one to Taeyong. He took a sip and his whole body warmed from the inside out. Hot chocolate.

“This is really good,” Taeyong said, his lips warm from drinking the liquid.

“I made it myself,” Jaehyun nodded, sipping his own cup.

They ate some chocolates as well and chatted away mindlessly. How was basketball? How’s the song coming along? Did you study for this test? Eventually they had ended up on their backs, staring up at the star filled sky above. It was beautiful. And silence engulfed then.

Taeyong saw his own breath forming mist as he exhaled, smiling slightly at the wonder of it all.

Suddenly there was a hand on his wrist, Jaehyun grabbing him gently. His hand moved from Taeyong’s wrist to his upper arm. He wasn’t wearing his gloves anymore and Taeyong shivered when Jaehyun’s cold fingers reached his neck. They traced invisible lines there as Taeyong tried to keep his breathing steady.

“You’re so beautiful,” Jaehyun said from next to him and Taeyong turned his gaze away from the stars to look at the brunet instead. Jaehyun was already looking at him, eyes shimmering and pupils blown. His cheeks were red from the cold, or maybe something else?

Taeyong scooted closer, leaning forward until their noses were touching. He pulled his gloves off and reached out to place a hand on Jaehyun’s cheek. Then he closed the distance. Their lips were cold on each other, but gradually warming up as they continued kissing. Taeyong licked at Jaehyun’s lower lip, their tongues meeting and clashing. Jaehyun made a noise in the back of his throat and pulled at Taeyong’s hip, the red head getting up to straddle his thighs. Jaehyun’s hands were roaming his body and Taeyong felt so hot, so hot, in the cold winter night.

And then he froze. Jaehyun’s hand was on his thigh and his mind betrayed him. It conjured a picture of Joe. Of all people. Jaehyun touching his thigh had reminded him of Joe who had always touched his wrists or thighs, ghosted his fingers over his cheek. Joe who made him feel disgusting.

Taeyong pulled away as if he’d been burned, mouth agape and mind racing. His body was crawling from discomfort. Jaehyun opened his eyes confusedly, shooting him a concerned look.

“Taeyong?” He said, breathless, voice soft. Taeyong shook his head slightly to clear his thoughts.

“I’m sorry,” he uttered, feeling detached. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Jaehyun was quick to reassure. “It’s okay. Just please tell me what’s wrong.” Taeyong was staring into space, mind stuck in that place. That place of dirty dirty dirty.

“Taeyong?” Jaehyun snapped his fingers in front of the red head’s face, trying to bring him back into reality. Taeyong finally managed to shake himself out of it, meeting Jaehyun’s worried eyes.

“Taeyong what’s wrong? You have to tell me so I won’t do it again. I don’t want to hurt you.” The sincerity in his tone was so sweet and beautiful and Taeyong was so unsure of himself. Jaehyun was his support. His safe place. Someone he trusted.

“I was reminded of Joe,” he admitted. “I’m sorry.”

“Yes he is. Yeah,” Taeyong nodded. “But I couldn’t help but think of how he always used to touch me. My face, my wrist, my thighs.” Jaehyun tensed under him and Taeyong was reminded that he was still in the boy’s lap. “It made me feel bad. I mean with all the rumours, people calling me a slut. I couldn’t help but connect him to that and now I feel even worse. Like I’m dirty.” Jaehyun’s hands were warm on his waist, higher up than before.

“You’re not,” he whispered, voice soft and intimate. He leaned closer, bumping their foreheads together. “You’re beautiful and people are jealous. They spread rumours because they what to knock you down, they think it would allow them to feel better about themselves. And Joe. He took advantage of you. Of your beauty. His mind is twisted.” Jaehyun was vibrating, most likely with anger. “He used you. And that’s not okay. I hate that you feels like you’re always the one at fault when it’s everyone else who’s making assumptions.”

Taeyong closed his eyes, feeling like he might cry.

“Taeyong you’re beautiful. You’re not dirty. You’re the opposite and that’s why people put you down. They make assumptions and they’re wrong. Even if you would have had sex with a lot of people it still wouldn’t be any of their business. Because you decide over yourself. Don’t think about what other people say and don’t let Joe haunt your mind. In the end he’s not here. You are. You’re the one who’s here and you’re a beautiful person. Inside out.” Jaehyun brushed some hair away from Taeyong’s eyes, leaning forward to connect their lips sweetly. “Don’t let them break you down,” he whispered against Taeyong’s lips.

Taeyong nodded, kissing Jaehyun properly before pulling away slightly.


“I like you too,” Jaehyun said, hugging Taeyong closer to himself. Taeyong burrowed into the embrace, that familiar feeling of safety filling him. Jaehyun thought he was beautiful. Jaehyun was his safe space. Jaehyun believed in him. He just needed to believe in himself as well.

*Don’t let them break you down.*
Wow. Here’s the 100th chapter. It’s crazy to think that we’ve actually come this far, I can barely believe it.

Thank you so much for all your continuous support, all the comments, kudos and hits. I am glad that this story have been able to bring, if only, temporary joy when reading it and I hope you’ll stay with me until the end.

Thank you everyone.

Now enjoy this hundred chapters special ;))

The corridor was near empty. She was one of the last people there, having just finished her last report. The darkly lit hallway brought an eerie tone to the late night and she sighed quietly, reaching up to run a hand through her long dark hair. Her heels clicked against the floor, leaving a trail of ominous sounds behind as she headed for the double doors at the end of the corridor. They were the only doors available on that entire floor, leading to the CEOs’ office. She gripped the files tightly with her pale hands, inhaling deeply before entering the room. To deal with her bosses she needed all the strength she could muster. They were truly something else.

“Hello Mr Lee,” she greeted the man, head bowed slightly. He looked up from his laptop, designer glasses perched on his nose. He was handsome. But she didn’t really care.

“Do you have the files?” Was his response. She faked a bright smile and walked forward to hand them to him. Mr Lee scrutinized them closely, hummed and put them down. She twisted the golden wedding band on her finger while waiting for orders.

The door on the far left, that led to a personal bathroom, opened. Out stopped an elegant woman, eyes sharp and red dress in place. She saw the assistant and pursed her lips.

“Do you have the files?” She demanded. The assistant offered her faux smile yet again.

“Yes, I just gave them to your husband ma’am,” she responded, inclining her head. Mrs Lee stepped over to the desk and grabbed the papers, looking over them closely much like her husband had.

The assistant remained still, used to it. She’d been working for them quite a while after all.

“Okay. That’s good for now,” Mrs Lee dismissed her. The assistant didn’t move. Mr Lee looked up, raising a perfectly shaped eyebrow.

“Are you deaf. You can leave.”

“I just wanted to know, sir,” the assistant cleared her throat softly. She was boiling with red hot anger and indignation on the inside. “Have you sent allowance to your son this month?” Both the Lees automatically rolled their eyes, scoffing.
“Why do you care?” Mrs Lee spat at her, clenching her hands into fists. “Our children are none of your business.” The assistant noted her disgusted tone when using the word children.

“Nothing in particular. We just wouldn’t want the cops to take you down for child neglect,” she threw back at them. “Think of the business. That would ruin our reputation.” She gritted her teeth. Mr Lee scrunched his nose, looking incredibly annoyed. As if even thinking of his kids was a bother. Which it probably was, considering that they were sucky parents.

“We will send it,” Mrs Lee hissed. “Now leave.”

The assistant turned her back on them and left.

Her job truly sucked.

~

Despite having worked late, she was the first one to arrive home. Her spouse and child could be anywhere if she knew them correctly. They would be home for dinner though, she knew they would never miss her making tacos.

She quickly went to her room and changed out of her prim work clothes. A shirt with a ruffled collar and a knee length skirt. She pulled on an oversized baby blue sweater instead, some shorts, and socks because the winter cold was very much penetrating their home. She tied her long hair up into a bun and headed for the bathroom. She removed the stark red lipstick, smoky eye makeup, watched it all go down the sink in a swirl of colored water.

After doing all that she started dinner. She lit some candles and turned on some music, trying to drain her mind of all the work she’d done, all the offensive things her bosses said about their kids. Instead she focused on food.

Soon enough there were various smells and cheerful humming coming from the kitchen, filling the apartment with a nice familiar homey feeling. Which greeted her spouse and daughter as they entered. The food was almost done when she heard the doorknob twist, a smile spreading on her lips automatically. She washed her hands and dried them before heading to meet her family.

“Umma!” The little child shouted as she noticed her parent. Her dark hair was messy from wearing a beanie and her jacket was only half off as she ran to hug her mother.

“Hey baby,” the Lee assistant said, kissing her child’s forehead. She swiftly removed the jacket and threw it on the stool they kept in the hallway. She looked up to meet the eyes of her spouse.

“Hey,” Max said, shrugging her leather jacket off and putting her gloves on the stool as well. She walked forward to place a soft kiss on her wife’s lips. Hayoon whined, her beautiful eyes narrowed playfully.

“Stop,” she protested. “I want food!”

“I’m sure it’s almost done,” Max assured, ruffling her daughter’s already messed up hair.

“It is,” Hayoon’s umma agreed, carrying the child on her hip and into the kitchen. “Why don’t we set the table together and then we can eat?”

Hayoon cheered and wiggled to be let down, which her umma complied with. Max entered the kitchen as well, watching fondly as Hayoon struggled to reach the plates and glasses. She walked forward to place a hand on her wife’s shoulder.
“It smells good, babe,” Max said with an inhale, taking in the appetizing food. The Lee assistant smiled, shaking her head slightly.

“We’ve eaten this a hundred times. How are you guys not tired of this already?” She said in disbelief, reaching up to take Max’s hand instead.

“We’ll never be tired of the food you cook, Sunmi-yah,” Max teased, colored lips spread into a grin. Sunmi shook her head, turning to peck Max on the cheek.

“Let’s eat then,” she murmured.

Lee Sunmi may hate her job, but she loves her family.

~

Sunmi slumped as she sat at her desk yet again the next day. She had finished all her reports, and the Lees hadn’t called her to their office once during the day. It was quite astonishing really.

She decided to work on some of her own stuff as she was technically done. She cautiously looked around, making sure that no one was seeing her as she pulled out the files she kept hidden in an secret compartment in her desk.

It was a copy of a court request she had printed out. She stared at it tiredly. Lee Sunmi truly hated her job yes, but she wouldn’t quit. Why you might wonder? Because she couldn’t stand it.

She couldn’t stand the Lees doing what they were doing towards their children.

Sunmi had been with them for a long time. Ever since she was eighteen and looking for a job to support herself after her own parents had kicked her out. The Lees had taken her under their wing as an intern, later promoted to their assistant. She was the only human on earth to know about their children. And she hated it. She hated knowing that there were seven poor souls out there who had the Lees as their parents.

She couldn’t stand the thought of leaving her job because she was the only one.

There was no one else who would fight for these kids. No one. She wouldn’t allow herself to quit her job without resolving matters first, it didn’t feel humane.

She had met Taeyong before. Once, when he was only nine, she had met him. It had been a crazy encounter really. The Lees had been called by the school who had reported Taeyong getting into a fight with some other kids in his class. They’d been furious, they had gotten their driver to pick him up and bring him to the office. Under protests from the nine year old apparently as he wanted to be with his brothers and nanny. Sunmi had been at the office, saw him come in, was called in herself to bring him water. Taeyong had looked at her with a look full of pleading and tears, yet she had left. She was new, she was scared. She couldn’t risk it. Now she knew it had been stupid of her to do that. Because, out of pure curiosity, she had stayed by the door and listened in.

She had heard the slap. Loud and clear. The soft crying of a child. The stern voices of the Lees telling him to grow up, take responsibility, take responsibility for your mistakes. Your brothers. They’re your responsibility. You were a mistake. You should make sure they don’t become screw ups like you.

Sunmi had been horrified at the things she’d heard. At the cruel words. At the disgust in their voices.
When she heard footsteps heading for the door, she ran as fast as she could, down the stairs and back to her desk.

That had been Sunmi’s first and only time meeting Lee Taeyong. She didn’t know much about the other kids. She knew they were all boys, the youngest one only four years old. Only a bit younger than her own daughter.

She couldn’t imagine the life they had.

And she couldn’t imagine quitting her job before she helped.

She sighed as she looked over the papers. She had printed them, sure, but she didn’t know how to proceed. If she wanted to successfully make sure that the Lees were busted she needed evidence, which she had already acquired. Sunmi had been quite stealthy about gathering sufficient proof to show that they were awful parents, but she didn’t know if it was enough. She had recordings on her phone of them talking about their kids, talking about how much they hated them, but there was never any mention of real abuse and she probably wouldn’t get it unless one of the kids came forward. Without one of the kids testifying it would never work. Which was Sunmi’s biggest problem.

Having been with the company for a while she knew exactly what the Lees were holding over their sons. *If you tell anyone we’ll lose custody of you and you will all be separated.*

And Sunmi understood why none of the brothers spoke up. They didn’t want to lose each other, and she was yet to figure out how to manage bringing the Lees to court without the brothers being broken up should they lose custody.

Sunmi sighed once again, burying her face in her hands. Her brain was tumbling itself around, twisting and turning, trying to find an answer.

If the parents died the custody would automatically go to closest of kin, which would be Taeyong since he was of age. But Sunmi couldn’t exactly go out and murder them. Even though sometimes she really wanted to. Like really wanted to. Just put her hands around their necks and squeeze.

And Taeyong was technically still in school, without an income or residence. He would never be considered as an appropriate guardian according to a judge in court.

Sunmi was stuck. She had no idea what to do.

But she wouldn’t give up.

The thought of those brothers kept her strong. Kept her sane as she worked for some truly insane people.

She would help them. She was going to figure it out. And that was final.

~

Max texted Sunmi as she headed for her car, done for the day. Apparently they needed groceries. She rolled her eyes at the shopping list Max sent her. Three cartons of differently flavoured milk. Her wife and daughter were truly sugar addicts. But she wouldn’t trade them for the world.

When Sunmi had met Max she’d been twenty four. She had worked for the Lees for five years and it was draining her. She had been promoted but all the moving around they were doing applied to her as well. Changing environments so quickly made her incredibly tired. They’d been stationed in Busan when she had seen her. The woman cradling a small child as she sat outside a cafe. It was a
sunny day, during summer, yet she was wearing all black. Sunmi was intrigued and approached the woman, not able to contain her curiosity. She was surprised to find out the woman was actually younger than her, and the child was her own. She wasn’t surprised to find that she fell in love with both Max and Hayoon. So much so that she now considered the child her own, and she was married.

Sunmi headed for the closest store, still in her full on makeup and fancy work clothes. She parked and swiftly made her way inside, heels clicking against the cold ground.

She grabbed a shopping basket and brought out her phone. Her short-cut mint colored nails tapped the code and the list Max had sent her popped up.

She quickly made her way through the store, picking up the items on the list with great speed as she was familiar both with the store and the items, she learned quickly after all, used to moving around and switching her pace. Max had been very apprehensive at first when they started dating, and Sunmi told her how frequently she moved because of her job. It had turned into somewhat of a constant terror that they wouldn’t be able to be together. Yet they had made it work. They loved each other so much that Max was willing to move with Sunmi, every time her job required her to. But it wasn’t like they were leaving much behind. Max’s friends and family had all left her either when they found out she was lesbian or when they found out she had a kid through a one night stand which had obviously been a drunken mistake. And Sunmi herself had been ostracized by her parents long ago by wanting to pursue a career in music, and they had successfully prevented it by doing so. Now she was working for people who were anything but creative and open minded. They would probably fire her if they found out her spouse was actually a woman.

Sunmi was by the diary section, picking out chocolate milk when a body bumped into her. She startled and turned to face the person.

“I’m sorry!” Said the person, a young boy with a bright apologetic smile and dark hair. He looked to be around seven or eight. Sunmi chuckled.

“It’s okay,” she assured, moving slightly to allow him access to the chocolate milk. The boy swiftly grabbed two cartons and waved excitedly to her before leaving. Sunmi was till holding onto her own carton of chocolate milk, following the boy’s path as he walked up to a cart. Her eyes widened in great surprise. The cart was surrounded by seven boys, including the boy that had bumped into her. They looked to be ranged in ages from eighteen to four and she instantly recognized the oldest of them. His sharp features were still the same, his jaw reminding her of his father. His eyes were big and doe like, many of their eyes were actually, much unlike their mother’s shape ones.

Lee Taeyong seemed to sense the eyes on him as he frowned, his previously happy face turning into one of confusion as he turned his head. Sunmi didn’t look away as they met eyes, studying him instead. He was handsome and looked healthy. He had grown up well. They all had. She felt her heart swell with pride. He’d done good.

She jolted when she noticed him walking over to her. Sunmi cautiously put the carton of milk she’d been holding in her basket and stayed until he was closer.

“Excuse me,” His voice was smooth, soft and mannered. “Do I know you? You look very familiar,” he said, a hesitant smile on his face. Sunmi tilted her head slightly, acting as if she was searching his face for something resembling recognition.

“No, I’m sorry,” she shook her head slightly. “I don’t think so.” Her heart was aching for them. “It was nice meeting you though.” Taeyong still looked confused, as if something was persistently telling him they knew each other.
“Oh, sorry,” he said then. “Nice meeting you too.”

Sunmi offered a smile before walking away first. As she rounded the corner she glanced back at the Lee brothers, seeing Taeyong having joined them at the cart again, smiles adorning their faces as they continued on their way through the store. Sunmi let a sad smile take over her face before they disappeared out of sight.

Whatever it takes, she thought. *Whatever it takes, I need to help them.*

Chapter End Notes

If there is any confusion don’t be scared to ask in the comments <3333
Chapter 101

Chapter Notes

Aww thank you all so much for the support on the last chapter!
Here we have the next one XD
Hope you’ll enjoy <333

Mark and Taeyong were currently working on their performance for the initial judging before the talent show. Since there were so many people who signed up the Talent Show committee are holding initial judgings to pick out the very best acts and those will be the ones participating in the actual show. Mark and Taeyong decided that their entry for the initials was to be a cover as they wanted to save the good stuff for the actual show.

They’d been practicing at every available moment, in between all Mark’s activities and Taeyong studying for finals. Taeyong was positive that they were going to be selected for the actual show with the way they’d been practicing.

“Hey hyung?” Mark said, plucking at his guitar. Taeyong looked up from where he was packing up his things.

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.” Taeyong’s eyes widened in surprise as he straightened up a bit.

“For what?” The senior asked, sitting down on the chair next to Mark. The younger shrugged awkwardly.

“For doing this with me. I know you could’ve easily rejected me. I’m just your brother’s boyfriend. I just wanted to thank you,” Mark was blushing. Taeyong wasn’t unused to it, he knew the other easily got flustered. He let a soft smile take over his lips.

“I’m not doing this just because you’re Hyuck’s boyfriend,” Taeyong said, shaking his head. Mark looked up, questioning gaze fastened on the older. “You’re a good person Mark. And you’re really good at rapping. You’re my dongsaeng. I wouldn’t reject you.” Mark’s ears were slowly turning red. Taeyong laughed and reached out to flick the ear teasingly. Then he was up, grabbing his bag and throwing it over his shoulder, waving to a still flustered Mark as he left.

“I’ll see you tomorrow Mark.”

~

Suhyun and Donghyuck were lounging on her bed, lying on their backs, soft background music playing around them.

They were yet to pick a song and it was getting rather frustrating.

“I don’t think we’re a good match,” Suhyun tsk’d, shaking her head as much as she could from a
lying positon. Donghyuck snorted.

“You think?”

The junior sighed, kicking her legs slightly. With her brother it had been so easy, just singing whatever he wrote. But now they had to make some decisions.

“What do we have in common?” Suhyun pondered aloud, closing her eyes. Donghyuck shifted beside her.

“We have taste,” Donghyuck said. “We’re chaotic gays. We’re annoyingly blunt. We like to tease people. Wow, the more I think about it the more I see that we’re kinda horrible people.” Suhyun kicked his shin, grinning when she heard him emit a painful whine.

“What’s your favourite album?” She sighed, head starting to ache from indecisiveness.

“Anything Michael Jackson,” was Donghyuck’s speedy answer.

“We’re not doing Michael Jackson!”

“Aww c’mon!”

Suhyun groaned in frustration and sat up to grab her phone, opening it and going to Spotify. Donghyuck grudgingly sat up as well, peering over her shoulder. Suhyun felt lost as her fingers hovered over the screen. Restlessly she scrolled through her playlists when Donghyuck let out a gasp.

“Stop right there!” He exclaimed, grabbing her phone excitedly. Suhyun frowned.

“What is it?”

“Disney!”

“Disney?”

“Disney.”

Suhyun’s eyes widened. Of course. Disney! They could do a Disney song. She loved them after all.

“Wait, you like Disney?” She almost squealed. Donghyuck nodded enthusiastically, almost stumbling over his words.

“I mean it’s heteronormative, cliche and terribly predictable but I love it!” Suhyun laughed out of pure joy.

“Looks like we have our genre then.”

~

The next day, Taeyong was feeling perfectly cheery. He was still in a good mood from the session yesterday with Mark and his boyfriend’s birthday was coming up. Taeyong had gotten a gift ready last week and he knew Johnny had been planning a party for Jaehyun without the birthday boy knowing. Taeyong was excited.

He saw Yuta ahead of him in the corridor and hurried to catch up with him.
“Hey TY,” Yuta grinned as he saw the other.

“Hey,” Taeyong said, rolling his eyes. Yuta would never let go of that nickname. “Did you get a present for Jaehyun?” Yuta nodded.

“Yes, a hoodie,” he confirmed. “You?”

“Of course,” Taeyong said, giddy. Yuta rolled his eyes but he didn’t say anything.

They reached the canteen quickly and saw that their table was empty.

They took a seat and started getting their food out as they awaited the rest of their friends.

Doyoung and Taeil arrived together, having had class. Ten and Johnny came next, talking amongst themselves. Taeyong eyed them curiously.

When Jaehyun came his eyes widened. The basketball player was being followed by a bunch of girls, talking to him excitedly and handing him various items colored red. Candies, a flower, cards. Taeyong almost dropped his chopsticks. He knew Jaehyun was one of the school’s most eligible bachelors but this was on a new level.

“What is going on?” Taeyong whispered, turning to his friends. Doyoung rolled his eyes.

“It’s almost valentine’s and people want to be early. Besides, Jaehyun is a literal valentine’s boy. They love it,” he explained, eating his food. Taeyong pursed his lips, looking back to his boyfriend. Jaehyun was obviously uncomfortable, trying to let them down easily. Taeyong knew they still hadn’t talked about making their relationship public but he realized that they might actually need to seriously discuss it. Soon.

When Jaehyun finally managed to make his way to their table Taeyong made sure to grab his hand under the table as soon as the other had sat down.

Jaehyun looked at him with a sweet smile and squeezed his hand comfortably. Taeyong saw Doyoung rolling his eyes. The red head knew Doyoung loved them regardless. It was just a facade.

“They look disappointed,” Johnny said, laughing as he watched the girls that had been hounding Jaehyun walking back to their seats, shoulders slumped.

“I rejected their gifts,” Jaehyun sighed. “I don’t want them to waste so much money on me when I’m already taken.” Taeyong felt his cheeks heat up, a small smile taking over his features.

“Kill me Johnny,” Doyoung was shaking the tall senior’s arm, looking to be in pain. “Please. Put me out of my misery.”

“Oh come on,” Ten protested, eating some rice. “Don’t take it out on them just because you’re bitter and single.”

Doyoung glared.

“Don’t act like you’re not the same Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul.”

Taeyong reeled back in shock as Ten’s eyes narrowed.

“He made sure to memorise Ten’s real name because he knows it disturbs him when a Korean can actually say it,” Jaehyun leaned in close, lips touching the shell of Taeyong’s ear as he spoke.
Taeyong shivered slightly, nodding in understanding.

He watched as Ten and Doyoung engaged in a staring battle, none of them blinking.

“Okay that’s enough,” Taeil decided and snapped his finger in between them. As if it was magic, they both stopped and went back to their food.

Taeyong had to smile at his friends’ stupidity.

~

After school Taeyong brought all his friends back to his place, so they could all study together. He should’ve known they wouldn’t get much done.

They spent the time discussing, arguing and laughing about unimportant things instead, Taeyong distributing a steady flow of soda that kept their sugar levels high.

Sicheng eyed them weirdly as he came down to grab a soda himself.

“Aww Sicheng!” Yuta exclaimed, startling the junior. “We should call you Winwin! Because whenever I look at you, from every which way, it’s always a win!” Sicheng turned red and was out of the kitchen without a word.

“Oh my g- stop flirting with my brother!” Taeyong said in between laughter as he whacked Yuta on the shoulder. The Japanese only laughed.

“One would think you guys are drunk,” came a voice from the doorway, all of them turning to see Donghyuck looking at them with amused eyes.

“We’re drunk on life Donghyuck-ah!” Yuta was quick to throw out. The sophomore shook his head, leaving the kitchen to head to the living room.

“Why are we acting like this?” Taeyong whined, feeling giggly. They were truly on sugar highs.

“Finals are fucking with our minds,” Doyoung said, as if it explained everything. And maybe it actually did.

They eventually got hungry so Jaehyun and Taeyong set out to cook some food.

They kept bumping hips all the time, still feeling like they were on cloud nine. Their friends made sure to cheer every time they touched.

Taeyong heaved himself up on the counter as they waited for the water to start boiling, Jaehyun situating himself between the other’s legs, back facing Taeyong’s front so he could see their friends. Taeyong wrapped his arms around Jaehyun’s shoulders and leaned his head on them, feeling perfectly content.

“Aww you two look so good together,” Johnny cooed, smiling at them. Taeyong blushed slightly.

“A visual couple indeed,” Ten agreed, slurping on his soda.

“Mark and I look even better!” Was Donghyuck’s opening line as he entered the kitchen, carrying Jisung.

“Mark hyung,” Taeyong corrected the younger. “Where are your manners.”
“Somewhere far away, deep within all the clothes in your wardrobe,” Donghyuck said, dead serious. Taeyong rolled his eyes. Such a brat, that one.

Donghyuck put Jisung down and walked over to grab a juice packet for the youngest brother. Jisung eyed them all curiously, biting on his fingers. Taeyong pushed at Jaehyun’s back, the other moving away a bit. Taeyong got down from the counter and walked over to his youngest brother, picking him up in a swoop. Jisung giggled happily.

“Hey baby,” Taeyong said, nuzzling their noses together. “How was your day?”

“I learned to paint a dinosaur, hyung! You wanna see?” Jisung asked eagerly, eyed wide with hope.

“Of course!” Taeyong agreed and put the youngest down again. Jisung ran off to get his painting, Taeyong walking back to stand by Jaehyun. Their hands found each other quickly. A big slurp brought Taeyong’s attention to Donghyuck who was drinking Jisung’s juice noisily. The peach haired male wiggled his eyebrows and Taeyong made a threatening motion with his fist.

“That’s exactly how I communicate with my brother,” Doyoung said, nodding.

Jisung came back with a paper, running up to show to Taeyong.

He smiled widely as he looked at it, it wasn’t good, but you could see what it was supposed to be at least. And to Taeyong it looked beautiful.

“It looks great Jisungie! You should show the others hyungs,” he encouraged and saw Jisung glance at the kitchen table shyly before determinedly walking over. Taeyong had to admire his resolve.

Donghyuck handed Jisung the half full juice carton when the younger was done showing the hyungs and they headed back into the living room.

“Your brother is so adorable,” Taeil sighed, smiling. Taeyong smiled as well, nodding slightly. His brothers were the cutest indeed.

~

Taeyong’s eyes widened as he found a box of chocolates in his locker the next morning. They were his favourite.

He laughed incredulously as he stared at the box. Jaehyun had seriously gotten him a valentines gift. Even though it was the other male’s birthday.

Taeyong carefully put it in his bag and secured the zipper before closing his locker. Jaehyun was truly a romantic. First that beautiful date and now gifts. Taeyong felt blessed.

As he walked down the halls he immediately noticed Jaehyun, walking alone further ahead. Taeyong jogged lightly to catch up with the other, grabbing his hand swiftly. Jaehyun yelped as he was being dragged towards the bathroom. They got inside and Taeyong closed the door.

It was completely empty so he didn’t hesitate before surging forward and catching Jaehyun’s lips in a gentle and sweet kiss, hands cradling Jaehyun’s face. The other made a surprised noise but kissed back gently.

Taeyong pulled away, smiling.

“Happy birthday,” he whispered, leaning in close to Jaehyun’s ear. “And thank you for the gift.” He
was giggling. The whole concept was just too unreal for him.

“You’re welcome,” Jaehyun laughed. “And thank you.”

Taeyong pulled him in closer for a tight hug and kept them together for a while before reluctantly letting go.

“I’ll see you later,” he said, knowing that the bell would ring soon. “Expect a gift.” He gave Jaehyun a final kiss, a hot one, before leaving. Jaehyun was left looking after him, feeling a grin spreading on his lips.

His boyfriend was so beautiful. And he was very much a goner.
The day proceeded smoothly. Taeyong was very much amused as random music numbers broke out in the hallways, apparently boyfriends going around and serenading their girlfriends. He quite liked Valentine’s Day after all, it was a day full of love and joy.

After school Taeyong quickly headed home to change and get ready before he was to head over to Johnny’s for Jaehyun’s pseudo birthday party.

He picked up all his brothers, Donghyuck actually riding with them instead of Mark for a change.

Taeyong almost melted when they got home and Jisung, Chenle, Lucas and Jungwoo all gave him Valentine’s cards. He pinned them all on the fridge and quickly gave his brothers the sweets he’d bought very secretly the day before. They were all very happy with their Valentine gifts.

“Are you okay to take care of them?” Taeyong asked, half an hour later, as he was about to leave.

“Yeah hyung,” Sicheng assured, rolling his eyes.

“And Mark’s gonna be here soon as well,” Donghyuck chimed in, throwing his arms around Sicheng who looked done with physical affection.

“Mark hyung,” Taeyong corrected automatically as he grabbed his phone and keys. “I’ll see you later, bye!”

“Bye hyung!” Came the chorus of voices as he closed the door behind him.

The drive to Johnny was quick and Taeyong walked up to the door with light steps. Ten had already opened it before he could ring the bell and ushered Taeyong inside.

“Gotta hurry, he’s gonna be here soon!” Ten exclaimed, slamming the door closed again, Taeyong jumping at the sound. He quickly shed his jacket and shoes, walking inside.

“Taeyong!” Taeil called from inside the living room. “Help me with the balloons please.” The red head did as told, walking inside to see Taeil standing by a drawer, several ballons spread out on it. Taeyong sighed and started blowing air into the colourful decorations. He loved balloons but actually blowing them up was a great hassle.

“Doyoung texted! He’s on his way with Yuta,” Ten said as be entered the room with a handful of party hats and a banner. “Johnny’s with Jaehyun and Mark, they’re gonna drop off Mark at Taeyong’s and it’s gonna be about twenty more minutes.” Taeyong was starting to turn red in the
face, using up all the oxygen in his body.

Ten whirled around, graceful like the dancer he is, setting up plates, glasses and snacks, spreading decorations wherever he saw fit. Taeyong watched him curiously. He did know his wya around Johnny’s house really well.

Taeil finally managed to blow up the last balloon and they started spreading them around the house. Johnny’s and Mark’s parents weren’t at home, away at a business trip so technically they could do whatever they wanted as long as they cleaned up after themselves. Taeyong wondered what it was like, having parents that actually cared even if they were gone often. Was it worse or better than his own situation. Wouldn’t it be harder when you know they care, because then you’d actually miss them.

“We’re here!” Came a loud voice followed by a slam of the front door. Yuta and Doyoung entered in a flurry, parading a delicious looking cake.

“Where do you want this gorgeous baby?” Yuta said, brandishing the cake proudly.

“Lay off it, it’s not like you made it yourself,” Doyoung complained, salty as usual. Taeyong stifled a laugh as Ten arrived to grab the cake from Yuta, disappearing into the kitchen without a word.

Yuta and Doyoung both observed the elaborate decorations, looking impressed.

“Oh!” Came Ten’s loud voice as he reentered the living room. “They just dropped off Mark, they’re about three minutes away.” He was holding the cake, although this time it was adorning lit candles. “Let’s turn off the lights and hide.”

They all hurried to turn off all the lights, going to hide. Taeyong dove down behind the couch, giggling softly. He had always liked surprises, they made him really excited. Ten left the cake on the table in the living room, the lit candles their only source of light.

Soon enough the door opened.

“Johnny,” he heard Jaehyun’s suspicious voice. “Why are all the lights off?”

“Why wouldn’t they be off? We’re saving energy,” Johnny responded, voice airy. Taeyong could hear the lie clearly and knew Jaehyun could as well. He heard footsteps coming toward the living room, heart beating quickly in excitement.

“What’s going on?” Jaehyun’s voice was much closer and very confused.

“Apple pie,” came Johnny’s loud response. And that was their cue. Taeyong jumped up on his feet, shouting, together with everyone else:

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

Ten had been standing close to the lamp switch and quickly pressed it, light illuminating the room. Jaehyun was staring wide eyed, at all of them, the cake, the decorations. A wide smile spread on his lips. Taeyong couldn’t help but smile as well. Jaehyun looked so happy.

“You tricked me!” Jaehyun suddenly exclaimed through laughter, pointing at Johnny. The tall senior shrugged.

“Doesn’t matter now, just blow out the candles before they run out,” Ten said, smiling teasingly. Jaehyun gave Johnny one last look before heading to the cake presented to him. Taeyong came up
right beside him, holding his hand gently. Jaehyun turned to grin at him. Taeyong offered a smile of his own back, leaning up to kiss his cheek lightly. Jaehyun’s cheeks were flushed as he turned back to the cake. Johnny had his phone out, filming. Jaehyun inhaled deeply and then leaned forward to blow out all the air.

All the lights went out in one go, because Jaehyun was good at everything, Taeyong thought, laughing slightly. They all cheered as Taeyong reached forward to swipe his finger across the frosting, bringing it up to smear on Jaehyun’s cheek. The birthday boy recoiled in surprise as his friends cheered, Johnny still recording. Jaehyun smirked and quickly let go of Taeyong’s hand to grab his waist instead, pulling him in close and rubbing their cheeks together. Taeyong squealed and jumped away, frosting on his nose and cheek.

Doyoung was laughing the loudest and Taeyong quickly grabbed some more frosting off the cake, ran forward and smushed it in the other senior’s face. Doyoung spluttered incredulously.

“Oh this is war!” Yuta exclaimed and suddenly it was. Everyone was using the cake to throw at each other and they ran around like crazy, chasing each other.

At the end, the cake was gone, and none of them had even tasted it.

~

After eating some food and having some baked goods, they all gathered up on the living room sofas. Taeyong was comfortably situated against Jaehyun’s side.

“Let’s do gifts!” Taeil said, clipping his hands. Taeyong felt Jaehyun perk up at the mention of gifts as it couldn’t be seen from just his expression. Taeyong smiled secretly. Jaehyun may look all grown up and handsome but really he was a goofball.

Jaehyun ripped through them all excitedly, a hoodie from Yuta, Customized Basketball shoes from Johnny, a gift card from Taeil, a cook book from Doyoung and underwear from Ten because he was a devil.

“Who knows, you might need some sexy underwear soon,” was Ten’s defense which made both Jaehyun and Taeyong blush.

Jaehyun saved Taeyong’s gift for last, holding the box carefully. Taeyong almost started biting his nails from anxiety but quickly sat on his hands to prevent it. He really hoped Jaehyun would like it.

The brunet opened the box gently and his eyes widened as he saw the contents. Taeyong smiled softly as Jaehyun pulled out the two bracelets.

“Wow,” he breathed. “These are beautiful Taeyong.” Taeyong smiled bashfully.

“They’re custom made,” he commented softly, Jaehyun turning them around in his hands. They were both made of black double leather, a silver pendant adorning both of them, and on the back of the pendants Taeyong had gotten ‘TY’ and ‘JH’ carved. “They’re couple bracelets.” Taeyong refused to blush as he said it, seeing Jaehyun turn to him with wide sparkling eyes. He looked so happy about such a small gift, and Taeyong’s insides warmed.

“Just put them on for fucks sake,” came Doyoung’s voice, effectively breaking their bubble. Taeyong saw that he was smiling though. Nonetheless Jaehyun reached out to hand him the bracelet with ‘JH’ on the back and put the other one on himself. Taeyong’s heart was rabbiting, a smile still pulling on his lips as he slid the bracelet in place on his thin wrist.
Jaehyun quickly grabbed his hand, their bracelet clad wrists right next to each other. Taeyong heard a click and looked up to see Johnny had his phone out.

“Did you just take a picture?” Taeyong asked, smiling. Johnny nodded sheepishly.

“Send it to me?” Came Jaehyun’s response. Taeyong rolling his eyes at the sappy look in Jaehyun’s eyes.

“Send it to me too,” Taeyong said, feeling sappy as well.

“Ugh, they’re gonna be that annoying couple who puts that picture as their home screen,” Ten exclaimed. And Taeyong blushed because yeah. That was exactly what he was doing, and from the looks of it, Jaehyun too.

~

The next day was a Friday. Taeyong didn’t see Jaehyun until lunch and he was nearly surprised to see that Jaehyun was in fact wearing the bracelet. In school. For everyone to see. The thought made Taeyong incredibly happy.

After they ate, Taeyong rapped Jaehyun’s wrist. The brunet turned to look at him curiously.

“Let’s go talk somewhere?” Taeyong said, voice low. He didn’t want the people at school to hear a word, they were already gossiping enough.

Jaehyun nodded, standing up and waiting for Taeyong to join him.

They headed for the locker rooms, which were always energy during lunch, and went inside, sitting down on one of the benches.

“What’s wrong?” Jaehyun asked, grabbing Taeyong’s hand and toying with the bracelet the red head had on.

“Jaehyun,” Taeyong started, taking a deep breath. “You know how it was with JinKyu right? When we were together.” Taeyong sighed. “He didn’t want to come out, so we dated in secret. We did everything in secret and I really hated it. I wanted to show everyone that I was dating him and that we were in love, but I wasn’t allowed,” Jaehyun looked concerned. Taeyong pushed through, he needed to get everything out. “I just want to know, do you want this relationship to stay hidden?”

Taeyong saw Jaehyun’s eyes widening and then he was frowning. Taeyong waited patiently as Jaehyun was formulating his response, hoping and hoping for it to be the one he wanted.

“Taeyong, I am in love with you,” Jaehyun finally started. “And I don’t want to hide. As long as you’re comfortable with it, you don’t have to hide anything.” Jaehyun was smiling, dimples on clear display. Taeyong felt the surprise that was probably showing through his face.

“Are you sure?” Taeyong had to make it exceptionally clear. “You saw what happened with Mark. Are you completely sure?” Jaehyun chuckled and reached forward to envelop Taeyong in a hug, talking into his ear.

“I am absolutely sure. I want people to know you’re mine and I’m yours, no hiding.” Taeyong hid his smile in Jaehyun’s shoulder, nodding gently. “I officially allow you to hold my hand, hug me, even kiss me, whenever you want.” Jaehyun declared. Taeyong laughed, pulling away slightly to hold onto Jaehyun’s hand.
“I allow you to do the exact same thing,” he nodded. “And if anyone asks, we’re allowed to say that we are in fact dating.”

“Definitely. And if anyone gives you a hard time, tell me.”

“Only if you tell me if anyone is giving you a hard time,” Taeyong countered. Jaehyun chuckled, dimples on display.

“Deal. No more hiding,” Jaehyun nodded.

“No more hiding,” Taeyong confirmed, feeling so relieved. Jaehyun wasn’t like Jinkyu, he was a better person and a great boyfriend. He didn’t even know why he worried in the first place. “Thank you.”

“Anything for you babe.”

Taeyong’s heart was almost jumping out of his chest. He found that it did that a lot when he was around Jaehyun. And hopefully Jaehyun’s did the same around him.
Chapter 103

Chapter Notes

I am currently on a break from school and it is awesome. I’m so happy that I won’t be needing to get up early and go to school tomorrow rn

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <333

Not proofread as usual

Mark’s hands were clammy, gripping the mic tightly. He tried to breathe properly but it was hard. He didn’t know why he was so nervous, it was simply an initial judging, there wasn’t even an audience except for the actual committee. Taeyong was right next to him, looking out through the curtain behind the scenes. He didn’t seem nervous at all. Mark sighed deeply, trying to gather himself.

“You okay?” Taeyong asked, turning his head away from the performance that was currently going on, to look at Mark. The junior shrugged, and he probably looked terrified. Taeyong laughed. “It’s good to be nervous, just don’t let it take over.” Mark didn’t move, his whole body wound tightly. Taeyong offered him a fond smile and walked a bit closer, putting his arms around Mark’s neck, pulling him into a hug.

“You’re gonna be fine, I promise. You’re not alone out there. I’ll be right with you,” Taeyong promised, petting his hair soothingly. Mark breathed in deeply, hugging back fiercely.

“Thank you hyung,” he managed.

“Mark Lee, Lee Taeyong up next!” Came a static voice from the auditorium. Mark recognized it as Doyoung’s. They broke off and walked toward the stage curtain, going through it and ending up on the stage. In front of them sat the committee on a makeshift judges table. Mark recognized all of them. From left to right; Seungkwan, Lisa, Amber, Doyoung, Somin and Kun. Mark wet his lips nervously, his heart racing. Amber smiled at him encouragingly.

“Hello and welcome,” came Doyoung’s formal voice. Mark almost rolled his eyes. Doyoung was trying his best to stay professional but is sounded ridiculous. “What will you be doing for us today?”

“We are going to perform a rap for you today,” Taeyong said, voice smooth and smile easy. Hopefully you will enjoy it.”

“Okay, you may proceed,” was Doyoung’s answer. Mark could’ve sworn he saw the senior wink at them.

The music started up and Mark tried to focus, he closed his eyes, imagined that he wasn’t in front of anyone else but Taeyong. He could do it.

Mark felt much more calm when his part finally arrived. He rapped calmly, nodding his head to the beat, trying to have a clear diction and a good rhythm. Eventually he fell into it completely, opening his eyes and rapping fiercely, moving to Taeyong, moving toward the front of the stage, enjoying himself.
His part ended and gave way to Taeyong’s, soft at first, growing in volume, giving way to the beat drop and they were having so much fun, Mark was smiling as he hollered the chorus together with Taeyong. Being on stage felt so freeing, so huge, so right. Mark loved it.

The song simmered out, leaving them standing on the stage, facing the judges again. Mark thought he saw the hint of a smile on Doyoung’s face.

“Thank you for your performance, the final list of contenders will be up tomorrow,” Amber was the one to speak, giving them a smile.

Mark and Taeyong bowed their thanks and left the stage.

“That was great!” Taeyong exclaimed as they had given back their mics to the sound director. It was another student, as the talent show was student run after all.

“Yeah!” Mark said, laughing excitedly. “I think we’re gonna be on that list tomorrow.”

“For sure,” Taeyong agreed with a smile.

And Mark was completely right to think so, because the next day, there, right on the top of the list, were their names.

~

The finals in basketball were approaching quickly. The team had been away for several games already and had successfully advanced to the final game, which determined this years’ champions. That game would be held at their own school, unlike every other game they’d had.

Jaehyun was glad to have the home court advantage. And that also meant that all their friends would be able to watch. He knew they would’ve probably went even if the game was somewhere else, but this way they wouldn’t need to travel so far.

Jaehyun wasn’t especially nervous, he was rather excited instead. They’d never gotten so far in basketball championships before. They were a small town after all, but to reach that now, during his senior year, felt indescribably good.

Their practice was dragging on forever. The coach wanted them to practice extra hard as the final game was on Saturday. It was currently Thursday. Jaehyun doubted that it actually helped to practice so hard, seeing as it really wouldn’t make much of a difference two days before the game. He didn’t really mind for himself, but seeing Mark made him feel protective. The junior looked absolutely drained. Jaehyun worried for his teammates’ well being.

“Hey coach,” he said, panting slightly, as there was a time out in their practice game. “Do you think we could wrap up soon?” The man frowned at him, still holding his whistle.

“We need the practice,” he said gruffly. Jaehyun furrowed his eyebrows.

“We might, but we also need sleep and rest,” Jaehyun countered. “We might be too fatigued to play properly otherwise, during the game on Saturday.” The coach mulled over his words, sighing slightly.

“Okay, Jung, you’ll get it your way,” the coach huffed. Jaehyun recoiled when he blew his whistle loudly, shouting for the team to gather up. They all scurried over, Jaehyun smiling at Johnny who looked at him questioningly. “Practice is over for today, good job everyone!” Coach declared. Jaehyun was glad to see the relief washing over his teammates’ faces. “Now hit the showers!”
Jaehyun was out of there quickly together with Johnny, Yuta, Mark and Jeno. They showered and got changed into clean clothes before leaving.

Jaehyun and Johnny waved at Jeno and Mark who headed over to Jaemin, Renjun and Donghyuck. They were apparently going to the mall, while Johnny and Jaehyun headed home instead.

“You want me to drop you off at Taeyong’s?” Johnny asked as they pulled out of the parking lot. That had happened before, Johnny dropping him off at Taeyong’s. Jaehyun shook his head.

“Nah, I have some homework to catch up on,” he said, because he really did. Practice always stole time from his studies.

Johnny nodded and they continued the journey in silence, both of them too tired to actually uphold a proper conversation.

“Thanks for the ride,” Jaehyun said as they reached his house. Johnny saluted him jokingly and drove away only when Jaehyun had gotten inside the door.

He kicked off his shoes and greeted his parents who were in the living room. He was an only child, so all of his life it had always been him and his parents. He didn’t really mind it. He had his friends instead. They nearly felt like brothers at that point. Jaehyun headed upstairs and into his room, discarding his bag on the floor.

He quickly shed his shirt and pants, pulling on some sweats and lying down on his bed. He was almost too tired to study but he knew he had to. He definitely wouldn’t have time during the weekend. Jaehyun took a couple of deep breaths, relishing in the quietude and calmness that washed over him. Until his phone lit up with a message. He smiled, feeling the dimples denting his cheeks, and reached out to grab it. It was a snap from Taeyong, a selca of him and Chenle, wearing silly filters. Jaehyun couldn’t help but grin at the sight, quickly screenshots the picture. He sent one back, a selca of himself making a finger heart. Taeyong’s response was another selca, with a text this time.

is that a bare chest I see

Jaehyun laughed and quickly snapped him back.

you know it babe

They continued chatting for a while until Taeyong had to start with dinner, Jaehyun smiling all the time throughout their conversation. He was so in love he could barely deal with himself.

He turned off his phone and sat up in his bed, sighing as he looked at his school bag. About time that he actually studied.

As he got out his things his mind couldn’t help but wander. Having decided to be public with Taeyong was exhilarating. They hadn’t really been doing anything explicit either way but knowing they actually had the permission and possibility to do it was enough. They had been more touchy for sure, holding hands and sitting pressed against each other, but nothing decisive. Jaehyun had noticed a dramatic increase in the gossiping and rumours, but he didn’t pay them any mind. Taeyong didn’t seem as bothered anymore as well.

Jaehyun had never been one for hiding away, or one for maintaining a great image on purpose. He did what he did and however people decided to interpret it wasn’t his problem. He was in love with Taeyong and he would definitely show it if he wanted to.
If it made him happy, then it was all good.

In the end Jaehyun barely got any homework done, but he didn’t regret it.

~

Taeyong was rushing around to get all his brothers ready, Sicheng helping. Chenle and Jisung had to get into their jackets and shoes, which was easier thought than done while everyone else were brushing their teeth or getting into their clothes or doing makeup.

They weren’t late, but Taeyong wanted to be there a bit earlier.

It was Saturday and the basketball finals were finally happening. All of his brothers were coming, Chenle had even painted a sign to cheer for their friends.

When everyone had their jackets and shoes on they could finally leave.

The drive to school was quick, all of Taeyong’s brothers singing, Donghyuck in the lead. He shook his head, listening to their disharmony. It was loud and noisy, out of tune and the lyrics were off but he loved it anyway.

The parking lot was packed with cars and people pouring into the school. Parents and relatives where welcome as well, so the crowd was bound to be huge. Taeyong found an empty spot and they got out. He made sure that Donghyuck was carrying Jisung, while Jungwoo and Lucas held onto one of Chenle’s hands each. Sicheng was walking at the back to make sure they didn’t lose anyone.

They walked through the school, walked past the lockers and classrooms, arriving at the double doors leading to the gym hall.

The bleachers were packed and the teams weren’t on the court yet. Taeyong assumes they were still in the locker rooms. He saw that the opposing team also had a crowd with them, sitting on the other side of the hall. Taeyong looked over the bleachers and eventually spotted the people he was looking for. He waved for his brothers to follow him and they made their way down, pushing through students and parents to get to their seats.

“Hey,” Taeil greeted as they reached him. He was sitting on the second row, really close to their team’s bench and the court. He was currently alone, saving spots for all of them which must’ve been a feat. Taeyong smiled and made sure to get his brothers seated. Jisung on Sicheng’s lap, Lucas next to Taeil, Jungwoo next to him, Donghyuck between Taeyong and Sicheng, Chenle on Taeyong’s lap.

“I thought we were early,” Taeyong breathed, looking over the crowd. He noticed that several people were staring at him weirdly. Probably because he had arrived with a whole throng of kids.

“Yeah we are. But apparently so is everyone else,” Taeil said, sounding increduous.

“Guys!” Came a loud voice, Ten and Doyoung making their way over. They took their seats quickly.

“Hey Doyoung hyung! Hey Ten hyung!” Was Chenle’s loud response as he ran over to greet them.

“Hey there big boy,” Ten said, pressing a kiss to Chenle’s cheek. Taeyong smiled as his brother started showing them the banner he had made.

“Hyuck!” Came more voices and Taeyong turned to see Jaemin and Renjun heading for them. They
were both wearing a variant of Jeno’s jersey number. Jaemin wore his jersey while Renjun wore his varsity like jacket. Similarly, Donghyuck was wearing Mark’s jersey. Apparently this was some sort of thing the team did with their partners, showing that they were couples. Taeyong had seen several people casting sour looks at Donghyuck while they had been walking, but he had also seen support. Yeri for example, who was the girlfriend of someone in the school’s soccer team had offered him thumbs up.

Taeyong scooted to make room for Jaemin and Renjun, as they took their seats next to Donghyuck. Jisung immediately crawled out of Sicheng’s lap to greet Jaemin who gladly put the child in his own lap.

“We brought snacks!” Renjun said, opening the backpack he was wearing and showcasing bags of chips, drinks and chocolate. Jisung made grabby hands and Jaemin offered him some sweets. Taeyong smiled and turned back to Taeil.

“Are you working this evening?” He asked, curious. He still couldn’t believe Taeil had time to work in between all the studying they had to do.

“No,” Taeil said. “I got the night off, in case they win and we wanna go celebrate.”

“Or if they lose and need a consolation dinner,” Doyoung quipped in, having gotten some snacks from Renjun.

More people joined them, filling out the row over theirs as well. Suhyun, Somin, Jiwoo, Kun, Lisa, Rosé, Jonghyun and Jooheon.

They were chatting excitedly in between themselves as they waited for the teams to come out fo the locker rooms.

Taeyong smiled when he saw Lisa and Jooheon cooing over Jisung and Chenle.

Suddenly a cheer rose over the entire gym hall when the teams made their way onto the court.

Taeyong felt pride bloom in his chest when he saw them. Johnny and Yuta in the lead, Mark, Jeno and Jaehyun, even Jackson and Amber. They all looked so good in their jerseys, shorts, headbands and Taeyong could even see that Jaehyun was wearing the couple bracelet.

They all shouted enthusiastically and waved frantically when their team made their way to the benches. Taeyong caught Jaehyun’s eyes and sent him a smile. Jaehyun was quick to grin back, dimples denting his cheeks. Taeyong could hear some of the girls on the bleachers squealing at the sight and he almost rolled his eyes.

They settled down as the team huddled up. Taeyong’s hands were clasped in his lap as he watched them. He felt nervous but excited. He really hoped they would win.

The game started quickly, both teams high in energy and excitement. Taeyong tried to keep up as the ball moved from player to player, team to team, side to side. I was all very intense and fierce.

Taeyong cheered loudly when their team scored, frowned when the other team scored, laughed when Chenle held up his sign and stood up when there was a foul.

He game was nerve wrecking.

Currently, Jaehyun, Mark, Jackson, Amber and someone named Junhoe were on the court. It was the last few minutes before half time, when Jackson managed to score, giving them a lead with three
points as the second half started up.

Taeyong was sitting on his hands, anxiously rocking back and forth as he watched them. He heard Donghyuck, Renjun, Jaemin and Suhyun munching on their snacks, he heard Jooheon running a critical commentary of the other teams’ fashion and he heard Lisa whispering with Rosé, both of them giggling occasionally. He guessed they weren’t that focused on the game.

The second half started with Jaehyun on the bench, Jeno, Yuta, Mark and Johnny on court together with some guy named Bang Chan.

Taeyong’s eyes couldn’t help but drift toward the bench where Jaehyun was standing, wiping his face with a towel as he drank some water. Taeyong swallowed dryly as he watched the sweat dripping down Jaehyun’s throat.

“Hyung,” came a voice, Taeyong turning to Donghyuck. “You’re staring,” the peach haired boy sing songed teasingly. Taeyong reaches out to smack his shoulder and rolled his eyes. Such a brat. He turned his focus back on the game.

It was coming down to the last couple of seconds and Jeno was rushing toward the basket. They were currently at a tie, and if he managed to score they would win. Taeyong rose from his seat with the anticipation, leaning forward as they all followed Jeno’s advancing form closely.

“Yes come on babe!” He heard Jaemin shout shrilly. And just as Jeno was about to leap a body crashed into him, knocking him down roughly, the resounding smack loud and clear. A gasp fell over the crowd as Jeno turned in pain on the floor. Mark and Johnny were on him in a second, the team covering him from sight. Taeyong snuck a glance at Renjun and Jaemin and saw them frowning worriedly, holding hands.

Another couple of minutes passed until the team dispersed, showing Mark and Johnny helping Jeno to his feet. He looked okay. They all cheered, even the opponents fans were clapping in support.

“It’s a foul,” came Taeil’s excited voice, “he gets a chance to score.”

Taeyong’s eyes widened as he saw the team setting themselves up for a penalty shot, eventually biting his nails. He didn’t even care, it was so nerve wracking.

Jeno breathed in deeply, braved himself, then he took the shot

The ball sailed, in a curved arch, and right down into the basket. A clear goal.

The whole gym hall erupted with cheers. They won! They actually won! The team jumped on each other, shouting and hugging as the opponents slumped to the floor.

Donghyuck, Renjun and Jaemin were quick to run down to the court, jumping at their respective boyfriends. Taeyong followed more calmly as Ten, Taeil and Doyoung made their way down as well. Jaehyun was hugging Johnny and Yuta, smiling from ear to ear as they approached. And Taeyong was so overwhelmed by that point with excitement that he quickly pounced. Jaehyun caught him in his arms and they laughed happily, their hug loving and warm. And then something happened, when they pulled back slightly, something deep, something within them. This urge.

Jaehyun initiated it, smiling nervously before leaning forward to capture his lips. Taeyong gasped as he melted into the embrace, into the kiss. He grabbed at Jaehyun’s sweaty hair, felt the saltiness Of sweat enter his mouth, but he didn’t care. Jaehyun was kissing him and it was so full of love.

He gradually tuned back into reality, pulling away slightly, hearing the confused mumbles, the
enraged conversations, the hush that had fallen over the bleachers.

“Yes get it hyung!” Donghyuck exclaimed loudly, disrupting the quiet atmosphere. Johnny wolf whistled at them, their friends and the Lee brothers hollering excitedly and Taeyong found that he didn’t care about everyone else. Why should he?

He had Jaehyun embracing him. He had the most supportive brothers and friends.

He had everything he needed right there.
Mark waited all of two minutes before dragging Donghyuck away. The younger was smiling at Taeyong and Jaehyun when Mark decided he had enough. He grabbed Donghyuck’s hand and pulled him away, away from the crowded court, the whispers on the bleachers, the prying eyes.

Donghyuck looked confused but he didn’t protest. Mark quickly made it to the locker rooms, knowing that there wouldn’t be anyone in there for a while. As soon as the door closed behind them Mark was on his boyfriend. Donghyuck made a noise of surprise as their mouths met in a hot kiss. Mark was sweaty and gross but that made it even hotter. Donghyuck’s hands quickly came up to tug at Mark’s tousled hair, the junior’s hands resting on his hips, gripping at the jersey Donghyuck was wearing. Mark still couldn’t get over how good Donghyuck looked in his jersey, it was driving him mad.

He moved them back, until Donghyuck’s back hit the lockers, their bodies pressed up close together. Donghyuck let out a whiny noise into their kiss, Mark shuddering at the sound.

“That’s disgusting,” suddenly there was a voice, startling both of them. They broke away from each other instantly, turning to the source of the voice. Mark felt his eyes automatically narrowing when he saw Lexie.

“Not you again,” came Donghyuck’s exasperated groan, his body slumping against the lockers. Mark subtly angled himself in front of the younger, feeling the protectiveness blooming in his chest.

Lexie eyed them, clearly bothered.

“Mark oppa!” Her voice was high pitched and it made Mark cringe. “How could you do this to me!?” Donghyuck reached forward to intertwine their fingers, offering his support.

“You do not have the right to say anything,” Mark scoffed. “You drugged me! You are delusional if you think I’m in love with you or something.” Lexie looked stunned by his response, arms folding over her chest. Lexie stared at them, looking unsure.
Donghyuck was quick to drag him close by his hand, kissing him gently. Mark pulled back to smile at the younger, nudging their noses together. He heard the locker room door close softly.

“You did great babe. Less hostile approach than I would’ve gone for, but eight out of ten for that dramatic delivery,” Donghyuck teased, smiling at him. Mark laughed.

“I don’t think she’ll bother us anymore,” he said, shaking his head. Donghyuck nodded.

“Not after that breakdown,” he agreed.

Mark pulled him in for another kiss.

~

Jaemin was quick to reach Jeno, Renjun hot on his heels. Their boyfriend was surrounded by teammates, who were praising him and patting his back. He did score the winning goal after all and Jaemin couldn’t be more happy.

He grabbed Renjun’s hand and they elbowed themselves toward Jeno who looked a bit overwhelmed with all the praises he was getting. When he noticed them his face lit up though. Jeno made his way toward them, ignoring the other people, and quickly caught both of them in his arms.

“You did so good!” Jaemin shouted, grinning excitedly. Renjun nodded in agreement, the smile on his face genuine and beautiful. Jeno chuckled, embarrassed as he pulled away.

“Thanks,” he said, shy. Jaemin still held Renjun’s hand firmly, as the Chinese boy tiptoed to give Jeno a peck on the lips. Jaemin was quick to join in on the kissing, first giving one to Jeno and then one to Renjun as Renjun’s other hand came out to hold Jeno’s.

“What the fuck,” came an incredulous voice, wiping the smiles off their faces. Jaemin saw a member of the opposing team staring at them with a grimace on his face. He felt Renjun’s grip on his hand tightening reassuringly.

“That’s just wrong in so many ways,” another guy on the team said. Jaemin frowned. They were used to those kinds of comments, having heard them at school a lot, although it had simmered down after a couple of months. No one bothered them at school anymore, they simply ignored them and the basketball team had been cleansed of homophobes after the bullying incident with Mark, so for once they actually felt safe at their school. Now those feelings of shame were resurfacing.

“Hey!” Came a new voice, familiar. Suhyun. “Just because you’re sore losers doesn’t mean you can go around and spew whatever shit you want.” She was quick to jump to their defense, ascending the stairs of the bleachers. The guys looked put out.

“Yeah!” Amber exclaimed, having heard the beginning of an argument, she was still out of breath from celebrating too roughly. “Leave the kids alone, and pick on someone your own size.” She crosses her arms, tattoos visible. People were slowly turning their focus from Taeyong and Jaehyun to the impending argument. Jaemin felt his heart swell with pride, seeing people stand up for them.

“Like you? You friggin wannabe. Think short hair and tattoos are gonna make you a man?” The guy who had started everything sneered. Amber gaped in offense, looking ready to surge forward and choke him if Jackson hadn’t stopped her.

“It’s called being a tomboy you ignorant piece of shit,” was Renjun’s sneered answer. The opponent turned his attention back to him.
“What did you just call me? Want me to beat you up?” He started approaching and Jaemin’s eyes widened when Renjun started pulling away from them to square up with the guy. Bad idea. Bad. The guy was twice Renjun’s size, a senior and a basketball player. His panic slightly calmed when Taeyong appeared from behind them, getting in between Renjun and the opponent.

“I think you’ve done enough. Just walk away,” he said, voice low and demanding. Amber was quick to step up next to him, Johnny, Jackson, Yuta, Jaehyun, the whole team, a lot of seniors who were on the court as well. They were all stepping up to defend Renjun. And by extension Jeno and Jaemin.

The guy from the opposing team eyed the defensive wall that had just been put up against him, looking apprehensive. He made a wise choice and backed off.

“Whatever,” he scoffed as he turned to leave.

Jaemin breathed out in relief, felling his whole body untense.

“You okay?” Amber was the first one to ask, looking at them with concern.

“Yes. Thank you noona,” Jeno responded with a smile.

“No problem,” she assured.

Taeyong also made his way over, smiling at them comfortingly. Jaemin felt weirdly protected by what had just went down. It felt nice to know that more people were actually supportive than just the ones closest to them.

“Coach,” Jaemin heard Yuta say, voice accusing. And Jaemin was reminded. The basketball coach was there. Some teachers were there. Parents. And no one had stepped up. “Why didn’t you stop them?” Jaemin turned to see the Japanese male, asking the coach who looked uncomfortable.

“I didn’t really catch it. Besides, some empty words never hurt anybody,” he dismissed and was quick to walk away from the conversation. Jaemin almost scoffed out loud. *Empty* words hurt a lot of people in fact. Jaemin was comforted to see that Yuta looked just as incredulous as he felt.

His focus was back on his boyfriends when Jeno tugged on his hand.

“Wanna come with to the after party?” Jeno asked, looking at him, then Renjun. “It’s just gonna be the team and some invited people.” They both shared looks before nodding.

“Of course we’ll come, babe,” Jaemin grinned, letting go of both their hands in favour of pulling them both into a hug instead.

And everything didn’t feel quite as hopeless anymore.

~

Taeyong was still buzzing with energy when he entered the house. It was Jackson’s, because he had the biggest house out of everyone on the team and they decided it would be best to hang there. After leaving the gym hall Taeyong had taken his brothers home, bringing Kun as well, since he and Sicheng had promised to babysit while Taeyong and Donghyuck were at the party.

He had then taken himself and Donghyuck to Jackson’s place. His brother was still wearing Mark’s shirt proudly.
There was soft music playing when they entered, the atmosphere calm and inviting. They both kicked their shoes off, heading into the living room. It was crowded but nothing like a huge party, people were sitting around, talking, standing and dancing, drinking or eating snacks. It was pretty chill.

“There they are,” Donghyuck spoke, pointing. Taeyong turned and saw that he was pointing toward an area of the room in the far corner. There was Jaehyun, Johnny, Yuta, Mark, Doyoung, Ten and Taeil. Taeyong and Donghyuck made their way over quickly, all of their friends looking up when they noticed the Lee brothers. Donghyuck went to Mark and plopped down on his lap. Taeyong took a seat between Jaehyun and Johnny. All of the basketball players were showered and changed into fresh clothes. Taeyong relished in the smell of Jaehyun’s body wash, leaning in close to him.

“I can’t believe we actually won,” Yuta breathed, leaning back in his seat.


“We have a legacy to leave behind now,” Johnny nodded. “I can die in peace.”

“Hyung!” Donghyuck complained. “You’re not old! Stop it.” Johnny simply wiggled his eyebrows at the peach haired boy.

Taeyong had gradually gotten closer to Jaehyun, leaning his head on his neck comfortably, Jaehyun’s arm around his shoulders. He felt so comfortable and at peace, surrounded by his friends and family, knowing that no one at the party would judge them. Not having to be alert and tense. It was very nice.

“Taeyong hyung,” Donghyuck said, breaking him out of his peaceful bubble.

“Hmm?” He responded, heaving himself up a bit.

“We got a form yesterday that needs to be signed by a parent,” Donghyuck sighed, “I forgot to tell you.” Taeyong nodded.

“Yeah, remind me later,” he said, slouching back a bit.

“Wait how does that work?” Ten suddenly asked, then he cast a quick eye to Mark and Taeyong was suddenly reminded that his friends didn’t know that Mark knew about their parents.

“Hyung learned how to forge their signatures when he was eleven. He just signs whatever needs to be signed,” Donghyuck said. “And Mark hyung knows what’s up.”

“Wait you knew?” Was Johnny’s first sentence after a stunned silence.

“Yeah! I didn’t know you knew!” Mark threw back. Taeyong laughed at their incredulous tones, burrowing into Jaehyun’s warmth.

“And you’ve been forging signatures since you were eleven?” Came Taeil’s impressed voice. Taeyong shrugged.

“That’s badass,” Ten agreed. Jaehyun’s hands were stroking Taeyong’s hair, rubbing at the strands of faded red.

“Yeah, Taeyong hyung is pretty badass,” Donghyuck agreed, grinning. “We’ve raised him properly.”
“Yah you brat!” Taeyong laughed, trying to keep a straight face. His friends also burst into laughter, but it was okay. He didn’t mind.

“Hey,” Jaehyun whispered, for his ears only. “You wanna come upstairs for a bit?” Taeyong was a bit surprised but nodded nonetheless.

“We’ll be back soon,” Jaehyun announced as he stood up, pulling Taeyong with him. They quickly made their way upstairs, their friends shouting suggestively after them.

Jaehyun led Taeyong to a bathroom and locked the door behind them. Taeyong eyed him curiously, tightening his grip on the brunet’s hand. He waited as Jaehyun gathered himself up, clearing his throat.

“I just wanted to give you something.” Taeyong let go of his hand regretfully to allow Jaehyun to retrieve something from his pocket. Taeyong’s eyes widened as he saw the black jersey, with the big bold letters across the back. Jaehyun’s basketball jersey.

Taeyong gently reached out to grab it, feeling a smile pulling at his lips.

“Thank you,” he breathed with a laugh. Jaehyun smiled nervously.

“I mean it’s only right. You’re my boyfriend,” he said, a teasing lilt to his voice which Taeyong loved. The red head huffed and pulled the jersey over the T-shirt he’d been wearing. It was a tad big but fit well. Jaehyun’s smile was blinding, dimples prominent.

“Looks good,” he said, reaching out to pull Taeyong closer by the hands, placing a delicate kiss on his lips.

“Thank you,” Taeyong said, pulling him in for a hug as well.

They stayed in each other’s embrace for a couple of seconds before letting go, going back to holding hands and leaving the bathroom.

“He’s wearing the jersey!” Was Yuta’s loud exclamation when they entered the living room again, followed by a row of excited whoops.

“Oh wow,” Doyoung complained. “First the bracelets and now this?”

Taeyong and Jaehyun only smiled as they took their seats again. Doyoung groaned.

“Lovesick fools. Johnny! End my misery!”
Sicheng sat together with Kun on the couch, leaning tiredly against his shoulder. His younger brothers had been full of energy all evening. The basketball game had apparently hyped them up completely and now they were acting like a bunch of rowdy dogs. Chenle and Lucas were playing tag while Jisung and Jungwoo did a hand slapping game that had them both shrieking. Sicheng sighed quietly and buried his face in Kun’s neck. The senior petted his hair comfortingly and smiled, amused.

“Kun hyung!” Came Chenle’s excited yell. “Come play hide and seek!” Kun laughed, a warm and comfortable sound, and gently removed Sicheng to get up. The junior smiled and rolled his eyes, sinking down onto the couch. He fiddled with the necklace that always remained around his neck, feeling the ridges of the pendant.

“Hyung,” Jungwoo was beside him, smiling brightly. “Let’s have a fashion show!” Sicheng raised an eyebrow, sitting up slightly.

“A fashion show?” He chuckled. “Okay, if you can get everyone in on it.” Jungwoo cheered and went off to recruit the others. Sicheng smiled fondly, getting up as well.

They managed to round everyone up, and they all agreed to doing a fashion show.

“Jisung and I will go first!” Chenle declared, dragging their youngest brother upstairs.

“Let’s set up a catwalk,” Jungwoo said, clapping his hands excitedly. Lucas and Jungwoo made quick work of gathering up some blankets and pillows, creating a catwalk through the living room. Kun and Sicheng moved the table out of the way and turned off the main light, Jungwoo running upstairs to get his disco ball, which was several years old. After finishing up they took a seat on the couch, waiting for Chenle and Jisung.

“We’re coming! Be ready!” Chenle shouted.

“Okay!” Jungwoo shouted back, turning on his phone and putting on some upbeat music.

Chenle and Jisung walked in, hand in hand. Sicheng cooed at the sight. Chenle was wearing a shirt with a print of a suit and jeans while Jisung wore a shirt which was Taeyong’s as a dress. The youngest was adorned in sunglasses and a hat, while Chenle wore his winter gloves. It looked ridiculously cute.

Sicheng was quick to take out his own phone and snap some pictures.
"Now pose!" Jungwoo called, smiling. Chenle proceeded to do serval different poses, Sicheng snapping photos. Jisung looked a bit confused but happy nonetheless.

They all clapped dutifully when Chenle bowed and skipped over, holding Jisung’s hand.

"Jungwoo and me next," Lucas called, jumping up off the couch. Jungwoo followed and they went upstairs. Sicheng pulled Jisung into his lap while Chenle climbed into Kun’s lap.

"Did you steal this from Taeyong hyung’s closet?" Sicheng asked, pulling at the shirt Jisung was wearing. Chenle nodded.

"Uh huh, I found the glasses in there too!" He exclaimed. Sicheng laughed and hugged Jisung closer. He let Chenle play games on his phone while they waited for Jungwoo and Lucas.

Eventually the two middle schoolers descended the stairs, Jungwoo walking like a real model and Lucas puffing his shoulders up, a stony expression on his face. Sicheng could see the cracks of a smile there though.

Jungwoo was wearing a graphic tee and a scarf, shorts and lipstick that was probably stolen from Donghyuck’s room. Lucas wore a dress shirt which had been stuffed with two other shirts at the shoulders and a pair of jeans. On his feet were slippers. Bunny slippers. Sicheng couldn’t help but giggle at the sight, snapping photos as they posed.

"Looks great! Ten out of ten!" Kun said, in between laughter.

"Okay, your turn! Kun hyung and Sichengie hyung!" Jungwoo said after the song ended. Kun and Sicheng shared a look but complied, leaving the youngsters and walking upstairs.

Sicheng opened his two closets and pursed his lips. Kun peeked curiously over his shoulder.

"Let’s do matching sets,” Sicheng decided.

Later, they walked down the stairs gracefully, to the cheers of the Lee brothers. Sicheng wore a black crop top, jeans and several rings and bracelets that he had stolen from Taeyong’s room. Kun wore a striped crop top, a pair of Sicheng’s fancy jeans and a hat.

Jungwoo was the one taking pictures this time, as Sicheng and Kun tried their best modeling poses. They exaggerated them greatly which brought laughter.

After they were done all of them collapsed on the couch, still in their attires.

"That was fun," Jungwoo commented, smiling. Sicheng nodded, closing his eyes. He was incredibly tired.

"Yes it was,” Kun said, “but I think it’s time for bed now."

“Aww,” came the unanimous response.

"Yes, let’s go get ready, we’ll show Taeyong hyung and Donghyuck the pictures tomorrow,” Sicheng said, jumping at the bought of sleep and quiet.

"Okay,” they gave in, shuffling upstairs. Kun got up and pulled Sicheng with him, both of them following the young Lee brothers.

They proceeded to help them out of clothes and into pyjamas, brushing teeth, brushing hair, reading a story and then turning off the lights in their respective rooms.
Sicheng collapsed onto the couch again when they arrived downstairs.

“This is exhausting,” he huffed.

“But fun,” Kun teased, sitting down next to him.


“Yeah if it’s okay then that would be great,” he admitted. Sicheng grinned.

“No problem at all,” he assured. “We can sleep in my bed.”

Kun nodded and smiled back at him. A comfortable silence came over them, both of them enjoying the calm. Sicheng could feel his eyes falling shut and eventually he was pulled into a slumber.

Kun watched the younger as his breathing evened out, smiling softly. He situated himself in a lying position, curled up and closed his eyes. He was glad to have a friend like Sicheng.

~

School on Monday was a whole festival. Every student was celebrating the win of their school, yelling excitedly every time they came by a basketball player. The trophy was proudly displayed at the front of the school’s achievement shelf and even the teachers seemed more upbeat than usual. It was the first time in a very long time that they had won of course.

Jaehyun felt elated as he walked down the halls. He could definitely feel the looks on him, people judging him and assessing him, but he didn’t care. Every time he passed a team member he got a thump on the back and every time he passed a teacher they gave him an appreciative pat on the shoulder.

He met up with his friends between classes, all of them sitting together in the cafeteria.

“I’m glad it’s over,” Yuta sighed. “The practices were taking a toll on me. And now I’m free!”

“Yes,” Taeil agreed. “Now you can focus on your studies.” Yuta’s smile fell off his face. He groaned miserably and dropped his head onto the table. Taeyong laughed and reached out to card a hand through his friend’s hair. Jaehyun watched his boyfriend do so fondly, body longing to touch him.

“At least we’ll be done after finals,” Johnny said, optimistic. “It’s only these months and then we’re done. No more school.”

“Until we start university,” Doyoung pointed out, hunched over a notebook and writing furiously.

“Such a joy killer, Kim Doyoung,” Ten said, smiling sarcastically. Johnny reached out to pat his back consolingly.

“Have you guys applied yet?” Yuta asked, finally lifting his head from the table.

“Of course,” Taeil and Doyoung said in unison. “We chose mostly schools in Seoul.” Taeil added.

“Me too,” Johnny nodded.

“I am auditioning for Korea National University Of Arts,” Ten said, “I’ve already sent them an email.”
“I looked at some universities in Seoul,” Jaehyun said. He had always wanted to go to Seoul after all.
“But I haven’t applied yet.”

“I checked out some in Japan,” Yuta admitted. “And some in Seoul as well. But I’m not sure what I wanna do.” He almost looked guilty and Jaehyun understood. If that would happen it meant that Yuta would leave them.

“Don’t worry about it,” Taeil seemed to have noticed the same thing. “If you want to go to Japan don’t let anything stop you.” Yuta offered him a grin in thanks and then turned to his right where Taeyong was sitting.

“What about you Taeyong,” he wondered. Taeyong was frowning, biting his lip. Jaehyun’s smile fell off his face.

“I don’t think I’m going to university,” the red head sighed. Although his faded strands of hair were more pink than anything by then. “I don’t have money and I can’t move. Not without my brothers which I doubt my parents would like.” Jaehyun offered him a comforting smile, which allowed Taeyong to smile back carefully.

“It really sucks,” Doyoung agreed, having finally looked up from his studying to offer Taeyong a look, a look that conveyed his frustration at the unfairness of it all.

“It’s okay.” Taeyong was fiddling with his fingers.

“No it’s not,” Ten said, stern. “It really isn’t.”

~

Jaehyun came home with Taeyong after school. Jungwoo was together with his friends, Chenle had a play date with Daehwi, Jisung had a play date with Jeongin and Lucas was hanging out with people from his class. Donghyuck was with Mark, Renjun, Jaemin and Jeno while Sicheng was with Kun, Somin and Jiwoo.

Taeyong and Jaehyun had the house to themselves. Taeyong made them both hot chocolate when they arrived, Jaehyun standing beside him, hand on his waist as he watched him mix the powder and milk.

Taeyong leaned his head on Jaehyun’s shoulder as they waited for the drinks to heat up. It was cold, the snow still hadn’t subsided, yet the minus degrees were gradually turning into something warmer.

Jaehyun wrapped his arms around Taeyong and the other smiled against his neck, arms around Jaehyun’s shoulders.

“You okay?” Jaehyun asked, placing a soft kiss on Taeyong’s cheek.

“Yeah,” Taeyong sighed, “I’m just kind of lost. I have nothing to do with my life except for taking care of my brothers.” He took a deep breath before continuing. “I love them all, so much. And I would never leave them. But I wish it was different. I want to go to university. I want to dance. I want them to have better lives than what we’re doing now, moving around all the time. It’s not stable.” Jaehyun was stroking his back soothingly, Taeyong pliant in his arms.

“I can only imagine how you feel,” he said, grimacing because yeah, it sounded really sucky, everything Taeyong has been through and is still going through. “But I’m here for you. Anytime.” Taeyong nodded against his shoulder, pulling back slightly. His hands grabbed Jaehyun’s face gently, pulling him in for a kiss. Jaehyun melted into it, their lips moving together.
“Hey,” Taeyong said as he pulled away, making sure to look Jaehyun in the eyes. “You know it’s the same for you right? If you need me, I’m here.” The brunet smiled.

“Thank you.”

And they were back to kissing. The hot chocolate forgotten.

Taeyong was rapidly getting lost in the feeling of Jaehyun against him, slowly opening his mouth and deepening the kiss. Jaehyun made an appreciative noise, gripping at Taeyong’s hoodie.

The microwave eventually started beeping, startling both of them. Taeyong pulled away from Jaehyun with a laugh and extracted their cups from the microwave.

He handed one to Jaehyun and headed into the living room. They settled on the couch, cuddling up to each other and turned he television on. None of them really paid attention though, too busy drinking their chocolate and talking about some interesting discoveries.


“Yeah. They’ve been very secretive,” he nodded.

“Do you think they’re hiding a relationship?” Taeyong asked, eyes wide, and a small smile on his face.

“They could be,” Jaehyun agreed. “They’ve made out before.” Taeyong’s eyes widened at that new piece of information. “It was a far during a game.”

“So then might actually be together,” Taeyong concluded.

“I guess,” Jaehyun shrugged. “Let’s not jump to conclusions though babe.”

“Okay,” Taeyong agreed absentmindedly and Jaehyun knew he was already doing exactly that.

“I’m gonna ignore that you just said bro,” Taeyong scoffed, amused. “But that’s also a clue! He might’ve realized he had feelings for Ten and had some sort of big epiphany about his sexuality.”

“Uhh-“

“And then they must’ve been awkward for days until Johnny finally decided to man up and confess!”

“This isn’t a romance novel babe,” Jaehyun interrupted. “I didn’t know you were so into gossip.”

“I’m not!” Taeyong protested, cheeks red. “I’m just curious.” Jaehyun laughed.

“Well how do you even know if Ten is gay?” Taeyong frowned confusedly at him.

“Is he not?” He said, incredulous. Jaehyun paused for a second, thought it over, nodded a bit.

“Yeah. He probably is.”

“Okay, my theory stands! We’ll see if I’m right eventually. I just know it,” Taeyong said, determined, sipping his chocolate. Jaehyun rolled his eyes fondly, kissing Taeyong’s cheek.
“You’re too cute,” he said, sipping his own chocolate.

Taeyong’s cheeks were a flaming red.
Chapter Notes

Oh wow I am so sorry. I did it again. I haven’t answered any comments and I am so incredibly sorry i can’t even tell you. And I’m late on top of that :((

Sorry again! Sincerely, I am sorry <3 hope the frequent updates can console you <333 I promise to answer every comment this time! I promise <3

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <3

And it is as usual not proofread. I’ve been too busy, I’m sorry <333

It was a fairly normal Saturday. Taeyong work up early, made breakfast, woke his brothers, they ate, Taeyong played with Jisung and Chenle and then he helped Lucas with homework as Taeil had been unable to come that day. A normal day, yes.

“Hyung!” Came Chenle’s excited voice, the right year old rushing into the kitchen where Taeyong resides with his homework. “Can we go to the supermarket! Please?” Chenle made his eyes as big as possible, hands clasped pleadingly. Taeyong raised an eyebrow.

“Why do you wanna go to the supermarket?” He had to ask.

“We ran out of chocolate milk,” was Chenle’s sheepish response. Taeyong rolled his eyes adoringly. That damn chocolate milk was gonna be the death of him someday.

“Fine, we’ll go,” he conceded, shaking his head. Chenle cheered and rushed into the hallway immediately to get dressed. Taeyong saved the essay he’d been working on and followed swiftly, getting into his jacket and shoes and then helping Chenle with his shoelaces.

They left the house hand in hand, Sicheng promising to keep an eye on things.

Taeyong enjoyed the walk to the store, swinging their hands in between them, Chenle’s cute humming and Taeyong’s own joking singing joining it. Chenle shrieked with giggles as Taeyong sang, sounding ridiculous. He obviously overdid it for his brother’s happiness. Obviously.

When they got to the store they went for the diary section instantly. Chenle all but dragged Taeyong ost everything else, only focusing on his precious milk. Taeyong chuckled in disbelief. Soon, their whole household would have to stop drinking chocolate milk. It was getting out of hand.

Chenle grabbed two cartons, letting go of Taeyong’s hand in order to carry them both. Taeyong took mercy on him and plucked one of them out of his arms.

As they headed for the queue, Chenle suddenly halted, waving excitedly. Taeyong frowned and followed his line of sight only to notice Max and Hayoon by the eggs, standing together with a woman. A familiar woman actually. The same woman they had bumped into quite a while ago in that same store, before Taeyong got to know Max. He just now managed to connect the dots that she was actually the same person. Taeyong’s eyes widened. He hadn’t even been able to connect the dots when he saw their wedding photos, but now it was clear.
“Hey!” Came Max’s excited voice as they approached the Lee brothers. Taeyong said a polite hi back, nodding to the woman who was Max’s wife. His hand had automatically made its way to Chenle’s hand as a way to remind him of his manners. It obviously didn’t work.

“Oh hi! You’re that same lady we met months ago!” Chenle exclaimed immediately as he’d studied her face. The woman laughed slightly.

“Oh yes,” she nodded. “I remember you!”

“Huh,” Max said, “I didn’t know you guys met each other before. Boys, this is my wife Sunmi,” she introduced proudly, reaching out to hold Sunmi’s hand.

“It’s really nice to meet you, again,” Taeyong said, smile a bit strained. He still couldn’t shake the feeling that he knew her from somewhere else. Sunmi nodded her greeting. Hayoon was watching them all curiously, waving at Chenle when he smiled at her.

“Yes it’s all very nice, but we’re in a bit of a hurry, so I will call you later,” Max said. “So you can tell me all about that boyfriend of yours.” She wiggled her eyebrows teasingly and Taeyong rolled his eyes, smiling nonetheless. Max had been one of the first to know when he’d gone out with Jaehyun, yet they hadn’t really had a chance to talk yet even though it had been a while.

“Of course noona, I’ll talk to you later,” he nodded.

“Great, bye then!” Max smiled, Hayoon waving at them excitedly.


They went their separate ways, Taeyong and Chenle heading for the register. Taeyong was frowning, trying to remember. It was bothering him to feel that nagging in the back of his mind, saying that he had met Sunmi before.

~

The week proceeded just as smoothly. Taeyong and Mark squeezed in as many practices as possible, preparing for the Talent show. They had finalized their lyrics, and were working on a proper beat and hook. Taeyong also wanted some nice choreography for it, but that would be done only after finalizing everything else. Taeyong had also been studying diligently, handing everything in on time. Much because of Jaehyun who helped him a lot with English. He had also spared some time for speculating about Ten and Johnny. The two had been whispering a lot between themselves lately, Taeyong even seeing them smile at each other subtly when they think no one’s looking. He was so sure that they were in a secret relationship. He was dying to ask them but also wanted to give them some space. If they weren’t saying anything it probably meant that they wanted it to stay quiet for a bit more. He would respect that.

Taeyong also found that his brothers were all doing fine at the same time for once in their lives. Sicheng wore his crop tops a lot more and his visits with doctor Song were less frequent, which meant he was doing much better than he had a few months ago. Donghyuck had Mark and all their friends, while also preparing for the talent show which he and Suhyun had passed the audition for. Jungwoo has genuine friends. Friends who weren’t completely dense nor judgmental. Lucas had been accepted to his school’s basketball team which made him very happy. Chenle was positive as ever and still kept his awesome friends, making sure to always include everyone in everything he possibly could. And Jisung was Jisung. Quiet and sweet, loving and adorable. Taeyong felt a sense of calm that he had rarely experienced in his life. The only remaining problematic factor he could
Thus, Taeyong was having a good week, only for it to be destroyed during a somber Sunday afternoon. The weather had been looking much better the last few days, which meant that the Lee brothers could actually make use of their garden. It was Donghyuck’s idea to have a sleepover, while camping in their backyard. Taeyong quickly agreed and made arrangements. He sent a quick text to all his friends, asking if they wanted to come, which everyone agreed to. Mark was also coming. Then Taeyong proceeded to drag out all of their camping equipment from the basement, mostly the tents, and also sleeping bags and mattresses. They did have quite a lot but he told everyone to bring if they had it themselves. Sicheng and Jungwoo brought Chenle to the store for some shopping. They got meat, a temporary grill and loads of snacks. They decided that a barbecue would be nice after all.

Taeyong also put out fairy lights with the help of Lucas, to create a cozy atmosphere. All in all the garden looked perfectly bedazzled and decorated. Satisfied with the work, Taeyong decided to snap a quick picture and send to Jaehyun.

can’t wait for tonight xx

Jaehyun’s answer came within seconds.

me either babe

~

People arrived just as Taeyong was starting up the grill. Chenle ran to open the door and shouted an enthusiastic greeting as he invited everyone in. Since Johnny drove, all of the friends arrived at the same time, which was only a perk. Taeyong smiled when he heard Chenle’s laughter, and he chuckled when Chenle came into the garden, riding on Johnny’s back.

“I wanna do it too!” Came Jisung’s pouty response from where he was playing with a car toy. Johnny nodded and let Chenle down to pick up Jisung instead. Chenle immediately jumped on Yuta when the Japanese male came out to the garden as well. It turned into a full blown race, which had Taeyong gasping from laughter.

Jaehyun stealthily entered the garden and made his way to Taeyong, wrapping his arms around the red head’s waist from behind.

“Hey gorgeous,” he greeted, pecking Taeyong’s cheek. The other smiled, blushing slightly. He turned to peck Jaehyun’s lips.

“Hey yourself,” he said, turning back to grill the meat. Jaehyun rested his head on Taeyong’s shoulder, watching him cook.

Mark and Donghyuck had just made their way outside, bringing a game of Yut and Jegichagi. Taeil, Doyoung and Ten followed them, holding plates and glasses. Sicheng and Lucas had previously set out old picnic tables to create a long table.

While Taeyong and Jaehyun made the food, the others made sure to set the table and started up a game of Yut.

The night proceeded very smoothly, the food was a big hit and the games were outrageously hilarious with Johnny’s shenanigans during the mafia game and Doyoung bickering constantly with Ten.

Eventually they had to go to bed, which had Chenle and Lucas groaning in protest.
“We’re not tired!” Chenle argued, pouting. Taeyong shook his head, smiling slightly.

“Baby, we need to go to bed. I promise you’ll be tired when you lie down.” Chenle still pouted but he didn’t put up a fight. They decided tents through a draw, Taeyong ended up with Jaehyun and Jisung. Sicheng ended up with Yuta, Jungwoo and Taeil. Donghyuck ended up with Mark and Lucas while Chenle ended up with Johnny, Doyoung and Ten.

“No funny business now!” Johnny said sternly, pointing at Mark and Donghyuck who both blushed at the unexpected remark.

“Hyung! Lucas is gonna be in our tent!” Donghyuck protested as Johnny smiled at them teasingly. Lucas suddenly looked grossed out because of Johnny’s suggestion.

Taeyong shook his head in amusement and picked up Jisung to head to their tent. The tents were all close together and lit up with a flashlight in every one of them.

“Good night everyone!” Lucas shouted, all of them echoing the sentiment.

Taeyong and Jaehyun crept into their tent, Jisung in Taeyong’s arms. They settled down beside each other, Jisung in Taeyong’s lap.

“This is really nice,” Jaehyun said, smiling. “It was a great idea.”

“Yeah,” Taeyong agreed. “It’s actually really great to have you guys bonding with my brothers,” he admitted. Jaehyun nodded, reaching out to hold Taeyong’s hand. Jisung eyed them both, eyes wide and curious as always. He seemingly decided not to say anything though, instead he burrowed into Taeyong’s embrace, closing his eyes gently.

“I’m glad to have you,” Taeyong said, feeling incredibly cheesy. Jaehyun bit his lip to hide his huge smile, his eyes reddening only slightly.

“I’m really glad to have you too,” Jaehyun said, reaching over to peck Taeyong’s cheek.

Jisung was starting to doze off against Taeyong’s chest. The senior chuckled warmly.

“I think it’s time for bed,” Taeyong concluded, pulling Jisung up. The four year old whined in protest but got into his sleeping bag nonetheless. He was out like a light within three minutes. Taeyong and Jaehyun also got settled, opening up the zippers of their sleeping bags and using them as a comforter instead. This was the first time they slept together like that, at least the first time Taeyong was completely aware. The last time had been when he was sick.

Jaehyun wrapped his arms around Taeyong, the other scooting back, so they were back to chest. The embrace was really comforting and warm, making Taeyong feel so safe and cared for. That’s one thing he absolutely adored with Jaehyun. His ability to make Taeyong feel safe.

They both managed to drift off within a minute.

~

Taeyong woke up to small hands petting his face. He opened his eyes, only to be met by darkness. He could barely make out Jisung’s small face in front of him. He felt Jaehyun’s calm breaths against his back.

“Hyung,” Jisung’s voice was whiny and soft. Taeyong blinked, trying to wake himself up. He hummed, his voice raspy. “Hyung im thirsty,” Jisung complained, pouting. Taeyong reached out to
stroke his cheek gently.

“Okay okay, I’ll go inside and get you some water,” Taeyong complied. He got out of Jaehyun’s embrace without waking the other, creeping out of the tent into the still dark night. The moon was clearly visible in the sky which made Taeyong smile slightly. He’d always loved the moon. Taeyong made quick work of sneaking inside, heading for the kitchen.

He scoured the cabinets for a water bottle and filled it with cold water when he found one. He was just about to go back outside when he heard a sound. A familiar yet unwelcome sound. Taeyong could feel his heart start racing in his chest, putting the water bottle down on the counter. He took deep breaths, trying to calm himself, trying to stay rational as the doorknob twisted. As the light padding on the floor approached the kitchen. As the light was turned on, making Taeyong squint.

He exhaled deeply, wrapping his arms around himself, and then, he lifted his head, morphing his face into a stony facade. He refused to give them the satisfaction of showing his emotions.

Them. The two people who just entered the kitchen, looking much like they had last time. Red dress. Crisp suit.

His parents.
“Do you make it a habit to be awake at night?” Came the hissed voice of Mrs Lee. Taeyong remained stoic. He didn’t react as Mrs Lee scoffed, walking further into the kitchen. He moved out of her way and toward the kitchen table instead, not taking his eyes off her. Mrs Lee started opening the cabinets, obviously searching for something, frowning as she didn’t find it. Taeyong resisted the sigh threatening to escape his lips.

“Third cabinet, to the right,” he said, voice soft and cold. Mrs Lee sent him a dirty look before checking mentioned cabinet. Indeed, there she found a glass. Taeyong saw from her tense shoulders that she was trying not to explode on him. He didn’t appreciate the sentiment. He didn’t really care what she did, he had no respect for her anyhow.

She filled it with water and drank elegantly, dignified. Taeyong’s eyes drifted to his father, the man unmoving from the doorway. He was staring into space, his face set and rough. He looked tired. Taeyong didn’t feel sympathy.

“Do you make it a habit of visiting when you know your children are asleep?” Taeyong countered, remembering his mother’s words from earlier. The woman turned to face him, her cheeks flushed with anger.

“Don’t talk like that,” she admonished, sounding irritated. Taeyong raised an eyebrow.

“Like what? Saying ‘your children’?” He said, unable to stop himself, helpless toward the flood of anger in his veins. Mrs Lee slammed the glass down on the counter, the noise loud and startling. Taeyong didn’t even flinch though. Mr Lee sighed, still not moving.

“Do not degrade us like that,” Mrs Lee snarled, clenching her fists, manicured nails probably digging into her palm. Taeyong scoffed, turning his head away. He didn’t even want to look at them. The red head ran a hand through his hair, knowing he looked disheveled in his sleeping clothes, yet he didn’t care. He didn’t care how his parents saw him. He gave up trying to be a good son a long time ago. He inhaled deeply, trying to regain control over his raging emotions. Degrade. He was degrading them. Him.

What a fucking joke.

He felt his emotions threatening to spill over and he was acutely aware of his brothers and friends sleeping, right outside, in the tents. Jisung was even awake. He could wander in at anytime. This was real bad. He needed to get the Lee parents out quickly, and at the least, lead them away from the patio door in the kitchen that lead to the backyard. So with determined steps he moved to the living room.

“Don’t you dare turn your back on me when I’m talking to you,” came his mother’s voice, Taeyong shaking his head slightly. He heard her heels clicking as she followed, then the subdued sound of his father’s shoes coming as well.
Taeyong didn’t care as he paced the living room. He yelped when a hand grabbed his upper arm roughly, chasing him to stop, frozen in his tracks. Nails dug into his skin painfully.

“You do not turn your back when I talk to you,” his mother sneered, narrowed eyes making sure to keep eye contact. Taeyong swallowed thickly, nodding minutely. She let go, stepping away as if he was poisonous.

“It’s nothing I haven’t heard before,” he managed to say, not looking at them.

“What was that boy?” His father spoke for the first time and his voice was, similarly to Mrs Lee, filled with scorn.

“I said, everything you tell me is the same meaningless bullshit as every other time you visit.” Taeyong didn’t know why he suddenly felt the need to verbally overpower them. He just despised them so much. So passionately. He wanted to win. For once. Even if it was only small. Such as having the last word during an argument. He wanted that satisfaction, so bad.

“You little ungrateful bastard!” His father was quick to roar. Mrs Lee was glaring at him.

“You should be thankful,” she scoffed. “We give you money and accommodations! Be glad you’re not on the street,” she spat at him. Taeyong wrapped his arms around himself, feeling incredibly pissed off. Yet there was still the nagging presence of his brothers and friends outside. He couldn’t let the argument escalate. So he steeled himself.

“You should be happy,” his father added. “Be glad we’ve not given you to the social workers already. Show some respect.” And Taeyong couldn’t help it, as manic laughter bubbled out of him.

“I should be grateful? Happy?” He exclaimed in disbelief. “If you think you both have contributed to my happiness then you’ve sorely mistaken!” He refused to step back as his father took a step forward, most likely to intimidate him.

“And you don’t think you’ve taken away our happiness?” His mother spoke, voice full of hatred. “All of you have sucked the happiness out of us! Do you understand the disappointment we felt every time another one of you popped out. Every time the nurse said ‘it’s a boy!’ As if it was something to celebrate,” she said, slowly walking closer. Taeyong stood his ground.

“No,” he said firmly. “I don’t understand. My brothers are my happiness. They may be the only thing you’ve contributed to my happiness. And I won’t stand for you insulting them,” he declared. Mrs Lee huffed loudly, annoyed and agitated.

“You are a disgrace,” she growled. Taeyong narrowed his eyes.

“And you two are horrible people. Not to mention terrible parents,” he retorted. He only had the chance to see Mrs Lee’s eyes widening with indignation before a burning pain seared through his head. His cheek ached, the pain pulsating through his whole body.

“No!” Came a loud startling voice, shrill. Taeyong opened his eyes, flinching slightly as a small body crashed into him. His lips trembled as he reached down to pick up the boy. Jisung’s hands were shaking, fisted in Taeyong’s T-shirt. He was facing their parents, wide eyes filled with confusion and anger. “Don’t hurt hyung!” Taeyong felt his heart clenching at that exact moment. Jisung was here and so were the Lee parents. They were both staring at the youngest son with disgust, looking shocked. Taeyong was breathing harshly, unsure of how to proceed.

“Don’t touch him,” came another voice, Sicheng joining Taeyong, standing in forth of him, as if to protect the older. Taeyong whipped his head to the side, seeing all of his brothers right there,
Jungwoo and Lucas holding onto Chenle while Donghyuck made his way inside the living room as well, joining Sicheng. Jaehyun was right there as well, together with Taeil, Mark and Doyoung. Soon enough Yuta, Doyoung, Ten and Johnny also joined. Taeyong didn’t know if he was happy or not. It all seemed so surreal.

“Don’t even think about doing anything else,” came Jaehyun’s icy voice as he held up a hand, showcasing the phone that was currently video recording the whole ordeal. Taeyong wondered how much had been recorded.

“We didn’t know you were having a sleepover,” came Mrs Lee’s tense voice after a long moment, her tone disgusted and coldly amused, as if they were pathetic. Her lips were pressed tightly together, Mr Lee standing by her in shock. They had definitely not been prepared for anything of the likes.

“Of course you wouldn’t know,” Donghyuck scoffed, glaring at the two adults. They both eyed him up and down, Mrs Lee sneering.

“I think you should leave,” Taeyong spoke, regaining his sensibility. They both scrutinized him, eyes distant, and Taeyong could see the underlying grief in them. They didn’t say another word before walking out, passing the people in the doorway as smoothly as possible. No one moved until the door closed with a gentle clicking sound. Jisung promptly burst into tears, clinging onto Taeyong. The eldest was startled but quickly returned the embrace, rocking his brother softly.

“It’s okay. I’m okay,” he assured quietly, his cheek still stinging. Jisung sniffled into his neck, sobbing sadly. Jaehyun walked into the living room, concerned eyes set on his boyfriend. Taeyong didn’t move as Jaehyun reached out to stroke his cheek gently, soothing the pain slightly. Taeyong threw him a smile and then looked to his brothers. They were all staring right back at him, eyed wide and glossy.

“Come here,” he beckoned for them, and was instantly enveloped in a big group hug. Jaehyun backed away slightly to allow them some space.

“That was intense,” Doyoung said, nodding. Jaehyun smiled wistfully.

“As it always is with Lee Taeyong,” Johnny said, a slight smile pulling at his lips as well.

“Wouldn’t have it any other way,” Jaehyun concluded, seeing all of his friends nod in agreement. They really wouldn’t.

~

Jisung has been freaked out when he’d entered the house only to find Taeyong with strange people. He had never seen them before and they looked cold. He didn’t like it. He liked Donghyuck hyung’s laughter. He liked Sicheng hyung’s smile. He liked Lucas hyung’s shouting. He liked Jungwoo hyung’s cheek kisses. He liked Chenle hyung’s hugs. He liked Taeyong hyung. And he loved them all. He didn’t really understand it. Really, how do you know if you love someone. But he knew he liked it, liked it when his brothers were with him, when they were happy, when he saw them smile. He liked it. But he didn’t like these people. They were distinctly cold. He felt it. He didn’t really understand, but he had a bad feeling in his stomach. That’s why, he instantly turned by the patio door and ran for the tents again.

“Hyung! Hyung!” He said, shaking Jaehyun. The brunet male stirred slightly, eyes fluttering open.

“Jisung?” Came Jaehyun’s groggy voice. “What’s wrong? Where’s Taeyong?”
“There’s someone in the house!” Jisung hissed with wide eyes, scared that they could hear him. Jaehyun was alerted instantly, sitting up. He seemed to think it over before grabbing his phone. He held Jisung tightly by the hand as hey crept out of the tent.

“Wait here,” Jaehyun said, Jisung obeying. His little heart was beating wildly, all tiredness gone, and he was no longer thirsty. Jisung waited a few minutes before Jaehyun emerged again, this time with all the Lee brothers following and Taeil. Jisung saw that more people were getting up. He understood why his teachers always told them to walk in pairs or bigger groups. There was safety in numbers. He felt okay to know that everyone would be there to help protect each other and Taeyong hyung. He latched onto Jaehyun’s hand and pulled the boy with him toward the patio door, the rest following.

He felt safe around all his brothers and hyungs. And he knew it would help his oldest brother. They would save him from the bad people.

~

The next day, Taeyong was exhausted. It had been hard to fall back asleep after the whole debacle. Jisung had cried himself to sleep, and everyone had dragged their sleeping bags into the living room instead. Taeyong felt so grateful for his friends and their presence during the night. They’d taken his mind off things, talked to him, cuddled his brothers and it had helped him so much. He had the best friends. And of course the best boyfriend. He woke up to the sound of cooking. He noticed that mostly everyone was still asleep, gently searching himself from Jisung to head for the kitchen. Jaehyun was right there, chopping vegetables while something was being fried in the pan. Taeyong let a grin take over his face as he walked forward, quick to wrap his arms around the brunet, face buried in between his shoulder blades. Jaehyun’s back rumbled with a laugh.

“Good morning to you too,” he greeted, still chopping vegetables. Taeyong hummed, still exhausted. “You gonna stay there forever or are you gonna help?” Jaehyun teased. Taeyong huffed, smiling slightly.

“Fine. If you’re begging me I guess I’ll have to,” he said, sighing jokingly. Jaehyun reached out to pinch his hip.

“When did I ever beg?” He laughed, glancing at Taeyong who went to wash his hands. The other looked truly beautiful in the morning.

In lieu of answering, Taeyong jumped into making food.

“Hey can you send me the video from tonight?” Taeyong asked after a while of silence. Jaehyun turned to look at him, lips pursed. His blood boiled at the thought of anyone laying a hand on his boyfriend.

“Of course,” he assured. Taeyong turned to smile at him and the anger melted away in favour of affection as Jaehyun smiled back. They were okay. It was all okay for now.

~

They all helped clean up the tents and things they’d used the day before, Donghyuck overseeing the work, which meant he was lazing around and telling people what to do.

Taeyong didn’t even reprimand him, he was too tired. All of his brothers had officially encountered their parents and Taeyong didn’t really know what to do about it. He most probably needed them to have yet another gmail talk. He sighed slightly, as he rolled sleeping bags with Doyoung and Yuta.
They were having an awful lot of family meetings as of late.

After cleaning up everyone gathered back in the living room, Chenle wanting them to play board games. They divided into teams and got to playing. Taeyong was with Lucas, Ten and Johnny which was not an ideal combination. They lost miserably. It brought laughter though, so it wasn’t a big deal.

It was around lunch time when the doorbell rang. Taeyong frowned, seeing everyone else confused as well. Who could possibly be ringing the doorbell? Taeyong inhaled deeply before getting up from his seat next to Lucas and heading for the hallway. He didn’t brother peeping though the hole and opened the door immediately. His eyes widened as he saw the person.

“Sunmi-ssi?”
Chapter 108

Okay here it is :)) a bit early because I don’t have time later >_< I’m sorry I didn’t have time to answer every comment I hope you can forgive me :(

It is not proofread but you probably already knew that lol.

Hope you’ll enjoy <3333

Taeyong felt incredibly confused as Sunmi greeted him swiftly, walking inside the house. He stared, incredulous, before closing the door.

“I’m sorry to show up unannounced,” she apologized softly. Taeyong frowned.

“It’s okay, is something wrong? Is Max noona okay?” He asked, sorry overtaking his features. Sunmi gave him a small smile, red lips strained.

“No, no, nothing out of order,” she assured. “I do need to talk to you. If ou would let me.”

“Of course,” he nodded.

“Could we go somewhere more private?” She inquired, Taeyong just then realizing that his brothers and friends were in the living room right beside the hallway.

“Yes, come with me,” he nodded and walked toward the staircase. He stopped in the doorway to the living room though.

“Who was it hyung?” Sicheng asked curiously, all of them looking up at him, pausing their conversations. The game laid untouched on the table.

“Just an acquaintance,” he told them, smiling slightly. “I’ll be back soon, you can keep playing for now.” He saw Jaehyun throwing him a concerned look, but he didn’t pay it any mind, instead leading Sunmi up the stairs and into his room.

The woman eyed the house curiously as they walked, almost wistfully to Taeyong’s confusion. She closed the door as they had entered his room.

“What did you want to talk about?” Taeyong wondered, genuinely curious. Sunmi took a deep breath, smiling assuringly.

“I know this will come as a shock to you, but please hear me out,” she pleaded. Taeyong’s eyebrows raised in suspicion. Sunmi ran a hand through her long hair and started speaking.

“I work for your parents,” were her words. Taeyong could feel his mouth falling open in shock. “I am their assistant. And I have been for many years. I know exactly what they’ve been doing to you and I can confidently say that I absolutely despise working for them.”

“Then why are you working for them?” Taeyong couldn’t help himself, feeling strangely betrayed.
Which made no sense. He didn’t know Sunmi. He’d only met her two times, very briefly and with no further contact. Then why did he feel so betrayed. Suddenly it clicked. She was their assistant. Taeyong had met her before. His feeling of recognition had been completely accurate. She was the one who always convinced their parents to visit, who had met Taeyong when he was merely nine years old. He’d been so scared then, pleading to her for help, yet she’d remained clueless. Apparently not for long though, as she had taken it upon herself to see that their parents visited. Taeyong couldn’t help but think that it wasn’t really a positive thing though. He didn’t want them to visit.

“I couldn’t just leave when I knew you all existed. I couldn’t leave you like that,” she said, voice low and sincere. Taeyong felt his eyes widening. Her voice seemed pained, genuine and he believed her. “I know they’re terrible parents and I didn’t want you to suffer when I could try to help you. And I’ve been trying, trust me. Always telling them to send those damn allowances and visiting you boys,” she said, shaking her head in irritation. “I assume that might’ve been a mistake on my part though,” she admitted, looking at him with concerned eyes. “I heard about what happened yesterday. They were quite vocal about their opinions this morning in the office.”

Taeyong lowered his eyes, a torrent of phantom pain washing over his cheek. He sighed heavily, nodding his head. “It’s okay. You didn’t know.”

“I should have. I really should. It has happened before after all.” Sunmi looked so mad and Taeyong actually appreciated it. He appreciated her showing unabashed anger at the situation. At his parents. It felt terribly refreshing. But he still had questions.

“Why tell me now though?” He wondered. “Why haven’t you sought us out earlier?”

“I didn’t want to disappoint you,” she admitted, looking guilty. “I’ve been working to take down your parents. Trying to find some sort of solution so all of you can be out of their grip. I didn’t want to approach you before I had a solid plan but yesterday’s incident forced me to. You shouldn’t have to live like this anymore,” she mourned. Taeyong swallowed thickly, holding back tears. She was fighting for them. Sunmi was trying to help. Making an effort. For them. People she barely knew. People she hadn’t even met properly. Someone was on their side.

“Thank you,” he managed, sincere. Sunmi reached out and placed a gentle hand on his shoulder.

“Nothing to thank me for. I only want you to be happy. All of you. You deserve it,” she declared. Taeyong inhaled shakily, trying to gather himself. “Now I am sorry to say, but I still haven’t figured out a way to overthrow them without all of your brothers being put in the system.” Taeyong was afraid she would say that.

“I promise I am working on it though. I have all the evidence to bring them down. I just need testimonies from you, preferably, and a plan to ensure you’ll get custody or at least ensuring that you stay together,” Sunmi explained, squeezing his shoulder. “I could use the video from yesterday though, if you have it. I heard Mrs Lee cursing about having been filmed by some kid.” Taeyong nodded, eager to help. There was a possibility now. A possibility to actually break out of the vicious cycle that was their lives. To break free from their parents and have actual possibilities.

“Good,” Sunmi smiled comfortingly, much like an older sister. Taeyong felt safe, knowing she was on their side. ‘I’ll give you my number and you can send it to me.” Sunmi reached into the breast pocket on her blouse, plucking out a pen and paper, quickly scribbling down her number and handing to Taeyong. “Now I have to go, my lunch break is almost over. I expect you to be in touch okay? I want us to discuss this more. I want to hear what you have to say and I would love your help as. Also, it would probably be wise of you to bring it up with your brothers as well.” Taeyong nodded dutifully, still feeling slightly stunned from the whirlwind of emotions and thoughts Sunmi
had bestowed upon him by her reveal.

“Good. Stay safe Taeyong.”

Donghyuck sighed heavily as he laid in his bed. Mark was right next to him. They’d retreated upstairs after the game had ended. Donghyuck feeling utterly exhausted from the eventful night they had experienced. Mark reached out to stroke his hair gently, letting them bake in the silence. Usually Donghyuck didn’t stop talking even if asked, but now he remained still and quiet. Mark furrowed his eyebrows. It gave him a bad feeling, seeing his boyfriend’s morose face. Donghyuck was a happy virus. He always brought joy to people around him, with his sunny personality and cuddly nature. His voice and his jokes. His singing and his energy. It was all so vibrant and radiant. Mark loved it. Now he felt lost. He didn’t know what to do when Donghyuck wasn’t being particularly responsive. The younger had been hiding it well downstairs, but alone with Mark, it all seemed to come crashing down.

“Hyuck?” Mark called softly. The sophomore turned his head, eyes locking onto Mark’s. “Do you want a hug?” That pulled a surprised reaction from Donghyuck, yet the younger looked so hopeful, thus Mark knew it was the right thing to say.

Donghyuck carefully maneuvered himself into Mark’s open arms, burying his face in Mark’s neck, legs tangling, chests touching. Mark didn’t say anything when he felt the wetness on his shirt, heard the small sniffles. He simply rubbed Donghyuck’s back soothingly, letting him cry.

Mark was glad he could be there for his boyfriend and comfort him. He didn’t like the thought of Donghyuck being all alone and crying, it broke his heart.

Eventually the soft sobbing died out, Donghyuck’s hands clenching Mark’s hoodie as he tried to breathe properly. Mark continued rubbing his back, not saying anything yet. He wanted to give his boyfriend time to calm down slightly first.

“Thank you,” came Donghyuck’s voice, soft and raspy. Mark smiled, a small smile.

“It’s nothing,” he assured, feeling strangely intimate. It wasn’t often that Mark comforted people and he was unsure of himself. “You okay?” He almost cringed at his own words, knowing that Donghyuck was most definitely not okay. Donghyuck seemed amused by his words.

“Of course, I’m perfectly fine,” was the peach haired male’s sarcastic response. Mark rolled his eyes fondly.

“Do you wanna talk about it?” He countered, ignoring the sarcasm. Donghyuck sighed into his neck, burrowing further into Mark, their bodies intertwined.

“I don’t really know what to say. I’m just so tired,” the younger said. “It’s really tiring, living like this. Not because of my brothers, they’re absolutely awesome and I love them all, but the moving. The uncertainty. The stupidity of it all. Like Taeyong hyung not being able to enter university. It all sucks, you know,” Donghyuck got out, voice slightly muffled. “And now, to see that they abuse him so readily! It’s all so stupid.”

“I get that,” Mark nodded. He had always had his brother and parents to rely on, he didn’t understand what Donghyuck was going through, but he could understand that it sucked. Donghyuck nodded into his neck, sniffling.

“Thank you for being here,” the younger whispered, so quietly. So delicately. Mark smiled, and said
nothing. He simply continued holding the other.

~

That same night, when Taeyong’s friends and Mark had left (not without Jaehyun kissing his boyfriend and hugging him securely first), Taeyong called all his brothers to the living room after dinner. He had put Sumi’s number in his phone right after she’d left and sent her the video. Now he just needed to tell them, preferably without getting their hopes up too much. He had thought about it himself so much the last years and had never been able to think of a solution that would allow the brothers to stay together. And hearing Sumi’s words, he didn’t feel especially optimistic. But it was something, Taeyong assured himself. They had something at least. Sunmi was actually helping them, she actually cared for them, and Taeyong would hold onto that thought tightly.

But now, sitting in front of all his brothers, he wondered, what do I say? They needed to talk about it, so it was probably best to jump right in. He waited for Jisung to settle in his lap and for Chenle to grab onto his plushie before opening his mouth to speak.

“We need to talk about yesterday,” Taeyong said. “I know some things happened.”

“Hyung,” Sicheng said, scandalized. “They hit you.” Taeyong sighed lightly, feeling Jisung’s grip on his sleeve tighten.

“Yes I’m aware,” he tried to joke half seriously. “And that’s exactly what we need to talk about. Chenle, Jisung,” He said then, looking at his youngest brothers. Chenle was staring back, wide-eyed and Jisung looked up questioningly. “Do you understand who those people were?” Chenle bit his lip nervously, shaking his head. Jisung frowned.

“Bad people,” Jisung said, “they bad people.” Taeyong almost laughed at the simplicity of it. Because yes, they were bad people. They were.

“They were our parents. Our mother and father,” Taeyong explained to them gently. Jisung was still frowning. Chenle was starting to frown as well.

“But they were mean to you,” Chenle said. “Daehwi’s mom doesn’t hit him.”

“I’m glad she doesn’t hit him baby. But not all parents are good,” Taeyong tried to explain. “They’re supposed to be, but sometimes it isn’t like that. We don’t have it like that.”

Why? Came the dreaded inquiry from Chenle. And Taeyong hated it. He couldn’t right out tell them their parents wanted daughters not sons. Because even Taeyong couldn’t make sense of it, it was too surreal.

“Sometimes life isn’t fair, sweetheart,” Donghyuck spoke instead, stroking Chenle’s hair gently. Jungwoo and Lucas both looked deep in thought. They knew about the Lee parents but they had never met them before.

“No it isn’t,” Taeyong agreed. “I just need you to remember that I’m always here for you, right?” They all nodded. “Don’t let them put you down, okay? We’re all together and that’s what matters,” he concluded. Jisung burrowed into him, nodding. He saw Lucas smiling slightly, Jungwoo’s eyes bright and wide, Sicheng reaching out to grab Chenle’s hand, Donghyuck’s red rimmed eyes. They were truly shaken up after the incident, but Taeyong also knew his brothers were strong. They would all make it through and they would be okay.

He didn’t even get to mention Sunmi, but he also decided against it. If he did they might get their hopes up, and he was not quite ready for that. Not yet. He would tell them soon enough, they still
deserved to know, but they’d been through enough for today, he decided. He would tell them, soon.
Chapter 109

Chapter Notes

Ugh I’ve had so much at school this week and I had two tests today therefore I couldn’t answer any comments :(( I’m sorry, I will answer every comment this chapter though, promise <333

I also wanted to say that this story is indeed approaching the end. I would account for around five more chapters at the moment. It is really sad but I also believe that it is time to round it up. Hopefully I can maybe post some oneshots in the future or something alluding to this story :))

I just hope you’ll stay with me until the end and support this story because it’s been an awesome experience <3

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <333

Sicheng skidded across the floor lightly, bare feet touching the cold surface. He shivered in the night, gently pushing the door open. Donghyuck looked up, confused, yet relaxed as he saw I was only his older brother. Sicheng grabbed at his necklace absentmindedly.

“What’s wrong?” Donghyuck was quick to ask, putting away his phone. Sicheng sighed and walked inside fully, reaching out to grab Donghyuck’s hand and pull at him. The younger let himself be dragged up from the bed and into the hallway, following his sibling obediently. Sicheng rushed them past Lucas and Jungwoo’s door, heading instead for Taeyong. The kids had just been put to bed so Sicheng knew their eldest brother would be awake.

He gently opened the door, peeking his head in. The night light was still on, Taeyong sitting on the bed, strung into nothingness. Sicheng pulled Donghyuck with him inside and closed the door behind them. Taeyong looked up, startled.

Sicheng and Donghyuck quickly made their way into the bed on either side of Taeyong, the eldest watching them curiously.

“What’s happening?” He questioned, confused. Sicheng pressed his lips together tightly.

“He’s not right,” Donghyuck said, shaking his head in frustration. “I know you want to go to university hyung. You want a future, and this isn’t it. You cannot base your life around us all the time. You need to have a chance at your own life,” he proclaimed. Taeyong’s eyes were downcast in resigned sadness.

“Hyuck, you know I can’t just leave like that. I can’t leave you guys, I could never. You’re always my number one priority,” he insisted. Donghyuck whined in frustration. Sicheng felt sadness well up in his chest, like a big wave suffocating his very being.
“Then we change it! We change the situation! Why can’t we do that?” Donghyuck said, almost sounding childish, yet Sicheng understood his sentiment. Why couldn’t they break out of the circle.

“You know what will happen!” Taeyong countered. “You will all be put in the system and I will be tossed to the streets with no way to keep contact with you!” He said, biting at his nails, distressed. Donghyuck looked like a kicked puppy, pouting. Sicheng felt the same suffocating feeling gripping him further.

“We can’t just give up,” Donghyuck protested, albeit weakly. His voice was subdued and low, so unlike him. Taeyong quickly heard the change of pace, removing his fingers from his lips to look at his younger brothers. Seeing their dejected faces he was quick to draw them close to himself, both of the younger siblings basking in the familiar hold of their eldest brother. The very same embrace that had kept their nightmares at bay. Helped them cry when in need. Held them through every moment in their very lives.

“We are not giving up. I promise,” Taeyong sais firmly. “Remember that visit today?” They both nodded. “That was Sunmi. She’s Max Nona’s wife and she also works for our parents.” Sicheng and Donghyuck pulled out of his embrace to stare incredulously. Taeyong almost wanted to giggle at their expressions as he told them of Sunmi’s words from earlier, her promise to help them.

“No way!” Donghyuck protested as Taeyong finished telling them. “She’s like a secret agent!” Taeyong shook his head fondly.

“Are you sure we can trust her?” Sicheng wondered then, looking apprehensive. Taeyong smiled slightly.

“I believe her. She seemed genuine enough,” he concluded. Sicheng nodded.

“Okay. Then I will trust her too,” he decided. Donghyuck nodding in agreement.

“Of course, she seems cool,” he said, enthused.

“Good, because we are not giving up, okay?” Taeyong declared. “Remember that.”

~

Jaehyun worried. Taeyong had looked fatigued all of Monday during school. He also seemed to revert back to his old self, withdrawn and subdued. Yuta seemed to notice as well, which comforted Jaehyun. At least he wasn’t irrationally worried.

“He needs some cheering up,” Yuta nodded as they whispered in between each other. They were supposed to be working on an assignment but the teacher wasn’t paying attention, which allowed them to converse quietly.

“Okay what do you suggest?” Jaehyun said, eager to help his boyfriend.


“You take too much of his attention. Let us have a piece as well, will ya? We miss him,” Yuta said. Jaehyun sighed slightly, yet yielded. Yuta was sort of right, they had been a tad distant lately.

“Fine, you can have him for a day,” he conceded. “What do I do then?” Yuta shrugged.
“That’s not my issue,” he said, turning back to his assignment, looking smug. Jaehyun rolled his eyes in amusement. Typical.

~

Taeyong sighed as he made his way inside. The day had been a draining one. It was only Monday and he still felt ready to collapse in bed to sleep. His body was weighed down with a cement block of thoughts about his parents, his brothers and the whole ordeal they were in. He had been distant all day which he knew must’ve worried his friends and boyfriend yet he couldn’t find it within himself to stop moping. He couldn’t stop thinking of it all. His parents being dickheads was nothing unusual, he loathed them for it but it was not anything he’d never been dealt before. His cheek still stung with phantom pains but it was a minor inconvenience. His brothers seemed to be okay, Chenle had a play date with Daehwi, Jisung was playing with Jungwoo while Lucas had stayed after school to study with his friends. Sicheng was with his friends and Donghyuck had gone home with Mark. He was positive that they were coping, and at least somewhat okay.

Then there was Sunmi. She was helping him and he finally had someone to book ideas with. He’d been thinking of it himself these last few years, always trying to come up with a plan to free himself and his brothers from their parents. Now he had another person to discuss with. It felt liberating yet uncertain. Because Sunmi has also been trying to come up with ideas for several years, and she was yet to find a suitable outcome. Taeyong worries greatly for the implications of that. None of them had been able to, does that mean they won’t ever be able to.

Taeyong wanted out. He wanted to be able to decided for himself where to live and what to do with his life. He would take his brothers and move to Seoul if the chance ever arose, so he could attend university, so he could have a future, so he could have some semblance of an independent life, because he really wanted it. A good and happy life.

Taeyong shook his head, trying to ignore the prodding thoughts in favour of sitting down and doing homework. He settled by the kitchen table, pulling out the books from his backpack. With a last sigh he started reading.

It didn’t take long before he was interrupted. He startled as the door flew open, several pairs of footsteps entering the Lee household. Taeyong’s eyes widened as he looked up from his studies. A horde of his friends came into the kitchen, carrying bags of food and snacks.

“Uhm,” Taeyong uttered, confused as he watched them. Yuta, Doyoung, Johnny, Ten and Taeil. No Jaehyun though.

“Hey TY,” Yuta exclaimed excitedly with one of his signature grins.

“Hi Yuta,” Taeyong greeted, accepting the hug the Japanese male gave him. He smiled, homework forgotten.

“We’re having a hangout, no homework allowed,” Johnny declared as he stocked the fridge. “That goes for you too Doyoung,” he added. The mentioned senior scoffed, Taeyong laughing at his offended expression.

Ten took it upon himself to sweep all of Taeyong’s books and his pen down from the table and into his bag again. Taeyong shook his head incredulously.

“Where’s Jaehyun?” He wondered then.

“Nope,” Doyoung said, shaking his head. “No Jaehyun.”
“Bros only,” Johnny agreed. Taeyong found himself smiling fondly. He’d missed his idiotic friends.

“Okay, fair enough,” he agreed. “So what’s on the schedule?”

“Hah,” Ten scoffed. “As if we’d have a schedule.”

“Don’t you worry your pretty little head Taeyongie. We have it all figured out,” Johnny promised.

Taeyong raised an eyebrow and shared a questioning look with Taeil who only smiled sheepishly.

Although as the night progressed he found that it didn’t really matter if they didn’t have a plan. Just enjoying their company was enough. They spent most of the time in the living room, the rest of the Lee brothers spending time in their rooms and upstairs. Chenle got a ride home from Daehwi’s mom and Donghyuck ate with Mark (The younger being the one to cook) while Sicheng ate at the mall. Lucas (who had come home relatively early), Jungwoo and Jisung grabbed some leftovers from the day before. Taeyong wanted to cook but they insisted that he needed to be with his friends and they really didn’t mind. He loved his brothers so much it was crazy.

His friends spent the evening fooling around with him, they played some games as well, and also ate takeout. As the night neared Taeil grabbed snacks, Ten grabbing drinks, and then they settled in the couch to watch a horror movie. Taeyong was easily startled and couldn’t help himself as he grabbed onto Yuta’s hand. The Japanese male only laughed and smiled.

After watching the movie they chatted mindlessly about whatever they could think of.

Taeyong really enjoyed letting go of his thoughts for a while in favour of being with his friends instead. Their appearance had eased his heart, allowing him to stop thinking so compulsively. He appreciated it dearly and told them as much that night.

The happy smiles he got in return made his heart flutter with happiness.

~

Jaehyun felt weird as he stood in line. He figured he should at least do something when his friends are busy and his homework had been all done for the evening. Therefore, the brunet decided to go to the movies. He had a discount, provided by Taeil, which he would gladly use. He felt okay considering his friends had left him all alone to steal his boyfriend away. He actually felt quite amused. He knew his friends missed being with Taeyong so he would gladly let them have this one night. He figured Taeyong needed it.

Thus, he was currently standing in line to reach the ticket booth. Before him stood quite a lot of people but he wasn’t impatient. He could wait. As he scrolled through his phone, moving slowly with the line, he heard it. Whispers from behind him. Subtly, he asked himself, glancing backwards. He recognized the people. They were seniors at his school, he had seen them around before and he knew they were some of the more avid gossipers in school. He frowned, trying to show that he wasn’t listening even if he totally was.

“I can’t believe that psycho turned our Jaehyunnie gay!” One of the girls complained, voice annoyingly high pitched. Not melodically like Ten or Donghyuck, just annoyingly.

“It’s gross! He must’ve worked some serious magic to get Jaehyun to like him,” a boy commented.

“I bet Jaehyun doesn’t even like him, he’s probably being forced. I knew there was something wrong
with that dude,” another guy spoke. “He has all those kids! It’s weird.”

Jaehyun felt his hands clenching into fists as he listened. They were continuously bashing Taeyong, which did not sit right with Jaehyun. His boyfriend deserved none of their hatred and he was about to go over there and give them a piece of his mind when it was suddenly his turn.

“Next,” said the monotonous voice of the person at the register. Jaehyun gathered himself quickly and turned to face the employee.

“Hey Sehun hyung,” he greeted, smiling cordially. The bored employee let a small smile grace his face.

“Hello Jaehyun, how are you?” Sehun has been Jaehyun’s senior at school so they knew each other to some extent.

“I’m okay,” he nodded. “I have a boyfriend now,” he scratched his neck sheepishly. Sehun’s eyes widened. Then he started wiggling his eyebrows. Jaehyun blushed.

“Oh really. Our little Jaehyunnie is all grown up, hmm?” Sehun teased, laughing. “Baekhyun will love this.” Jaehyun paled at the mention of Baekhyun. The older was notorious for his teasing and Jaehyun did not want any of it. He had been one of the kids Baekhyun babysat when younger and while it had been hilarious it had also been borderline crazy.

“Hyung,” Jaehyun complained. Sehun laughed but didn’t say anything about it.

“What can I get you?” He asked instead.

“A ticket to how to train your dragon, please,” Jaehyun said, handing the money and discount over. Sehun swiftly punched it in and gave him the ticket.

“I’ll see you soon Jaehyun. And being that boyfriend of yours,” he said with a suggestive look before Jaehyun left. The brunet blushed but agreed nonetheless.

As he went toward the snack counter he cast a glance at the students who had been talking shit about Taeyong. He was surprised to find them staring at him already, looking like they’d send a ghost. He gave them a cold glare before turning his head away. Jaehyun smirked to himself, satisfied that they seemed scared. He didn’t like when anyone messed with Taeyong.

People really need to learn how to filter themselves.
Chapter 110

Chapter Notes

Wow I cannot believe that we are approaching the end. It’s just too crazy. But not yet tho! Don’t be discouraged people >_<

Not proofread as usual but I hope you’ll enjoy <333

Taeyong sighed as he tapped his pen against the notebook in front of him. He was coming up blank. They needed a good chorus for their song but it was not working out. Mark sat on the opposite side of the music room, head on the table as he tried to bring forth an idea. It was obviously not working from the way he was sighing. It was after school and they had decided to stay and finish their song. Which had been a fine idea in itself but not as productive as they’d hoped.

“I have nothing hyung,” Mark complained. They had all the verses done but no chorus and the chorus was one of the most important parts to really solidify their message in the song. Taeyong shook his head.

“Me either,” he confessed. Then he swiftly threw his pen down. “I think we need to get out of here. Wanna eat ice cream?”

Mark perked up at the mention of the cold sweet, smiling as he nodded.

“Yes, let’s go.”

~

The ice cream parlor wasn’t far from school so they walked there. When they arrived and had ordered they settled at one of the tables outdoors, watching as people passed them by. The weather had gotten considerably better, it was almost warm outside. The sun actually greeted them eagerly and Taeyong closed his eyes, basking in the rays that shone upon them. Mark was eagerly consuming his ice cream, looking more energized. Taeyong smiled a bit, taking the occasional bite of his own ice cream.

“Hyung?” Mark spoke, Taeyong humming in response. “Are you okay? I never really got to ask.” He trailed off, sounding unsure. Taeyong knew he meant the instance a few days ago, with his parents. Taeyong had almost forgotten that Mark had been there as he had tended to all his brothers. The red head opened his dyed, smiling at the younger.

“I’m okay, thank you for asking,” he confirmed, finding that it was the truth. Mark smiled back and they didn’t speak more of it.

“So,” Mark said after a minute’s silence. “The chorus?”

Taeyong nodded gently, scooping up the last of his ice cream. He felt refreshed and ready to actually think again.

“Yes,” he said, frowning slightly. “We need something striking, something that will linger in people’s minds and that fits our lyrics.”
“Uhm,” Mark started eloquently. “Well the lyrics are kind of aggressive are they not? We’re kinda going mad.” Taeyong nodded.

“Yeah, for sure. We should play around with that.”

Taeyong was standing outside of Sunmi’s and Max’s apartment. He breathed in deeply. Sunmi had requested that he come over so they could discuss matters more. He felt unreasonably nervous. He didn’t know if Max knew about Sunmi or even about him. He didn’t know if she would be mad or sad or happy to see him. He was very unsure. It was Friday afternoon and he’d left his brothers at home, Sicheng being in charge. Mark and Taeyong had managed to fix their lyrics the day before and were now finished with the song. Taeyong was going to come up with a choreography and then they were good to go. He thought about inviting Max and Sunmi. But he hesitated. If the night went well he would, he promised himself.

Max was the one to open when he rang the doorbell. Taeyong was stunned when he saw her, the older immediately going to hug him. Taeyong hugged back hesitantly, confused. Max pulled away to look at him.

“I’m so sorry Taeyong,” she said, looking guilty. “I had no idea. I’m sorry you have to go through all that.” So Sunmi must’ve told her, Taeyong concluded. He smiled in thanks.

“It’s okay noona,” he assured, feeling slightly uncomfortable, he didn’t want her to think differently of him.

“It’s not. But I’ll leave it be for now,” Max scolded him slightly. “Come on in.”

Taeyong was met by the smell of food as he entered. Hayoon came running down the hallway to greet him enthusiastically. He hugged her and smiled as she showed her newest toy. It was a pretty red racing car which she drove over every surface she passed. Taeyong laughed and took off his jacket and shoes before entering. Max led him to the kitchen where Sunmi was standing, cooking food. She looked up and smiled when they entered.

“Hey,” she greeted, walking over to hug Taeyong. He felt positively overwhelmed with all the affection. “Was it okay to find your way here?” She asked, stirring around some vegetables that were being fried. He nodded.

“It was,” he assured, looking around the apartment. “I like your home.” He declared. It was a very nice apartment after all. The color schemes were cozy and inviting, the furniture looked comfortable and stylish.

“Thank you,” Max winked at him. “I decorated it myself.”

They continued chatting pleasantly while cooking. Taeyong breaking off the conversation for a bit to play with Hayoon before the food was done. During their meal the child did most of the talking, discussing her day with Max and the parks they visited and the food they ate. Taeyong listened attentively and laughed when she told him something funny.

“I think it’s time for bed,” Max declared when the dishes were done and the leftovers were put away. “Come on Hayoon.” The young girl pouted but didn’t protest as Max herded her to her room.

Sunmi and Taeyong quietly poured some soda in three fancy glasses and sat down in the living room.
“How are you?” She asked, sipping her soda gently. “I saw the video and it looked pretty terrible.”

“I’m okay. It wasn’t as bad as anything I’ve endured before,” he stated. Sunmi frowned.

“What else have they done to you?” She wondered, looking worried.

“I have a scar,” he cleared his throat out of nervousness and gently tapped his cheekbone, so she would see the disfigured skin right under his eye.

“They did that?!” She said, leaning forward to look closely. Her gentle fingers came up to touch the skin carefully. He almost recoiled but stayed still.

“Yeah, my father smokes when he gets mad,” Taeyong explained, Sunmi shaking her head slightly in disbelief.

“That’s absurd, they’re monsters,” she said, frowning angrily. Taeyong shrugged helplessly.

Max entered the room soon after.

“She’s sleeping,” the dark haired woman told them, grabbing the third glass for herself. “Let’s talk for real now.”

“What is there to talk about really?” Taeyong sighed, sinking down in the couch. He had been racking his brain for possible solutions the last week and it had been a complete bust. “There’s no way to escape their custody.” Max frowned.

“Let’s not get depressed okay? I’m sure there’s some way, we just need to be smart about it,” she told them confidently. Sunmi tried to smile but it looked more like a grimace than a genuine smile. Taeyong understood, she had also been looking for any possible loophole and failed to find a thing.

“The only way the custody would go automatically to closest of kin, which would be Taeyong, is if the parents suffered sudden death,” Sunmi told them. “Any attempt at a trial would most likely end up with all the kids being placed in different homes with foster parents, because I doubt anyone would take in all of them.”

And Taeyong knew that he himself would be left to his own devices as he was technically adult.

“It’s impossible,” he moaned, in despair. Max smacked his shoulder, reprimanding him.

“Don’t say that! Keep you spirits up!” She told him. Taeyong inhaled deeply, trying to perk up. She was right. Being miserable would get him nowhere.

“Now let’s look at it again,” Max said, grabbing a notepad from the living room table. She started scribbling things down, mostly gathering up all the facts before they could start thinking of a loophole.

Seeing Max and Sunmi so invested in the matter gave Taeyong comfort and even though they got nowhere closer to solving the custody issues after the night was over, Taeyong knew he had them to rely on. He knew they cared and he was getting serious older sister vibes from both of them.

And they both promised to come to the talent show, which made Taeyong feel even more like he actually had people who cared about him.

~

Johnny sighed and rubbed at his eyes, adjusting his glasses. He was sitting in the library, trying to
Johnny was pulling at his hair, frustrated because he couldn’t structure a sentence.

“You should probably stop that,” a voice startled him. “You don’t want to lose hair at your age.”

Johnny scoffed and looked up at Donghyuck who had sat himself down across from the tall senior.

“Why are you here?” Johnny asked, amused. Donghyuck was wearing all black, matched with black nail polish and smoky eye makeup.

“Why can’t I?” The younger countered.

“It’s the library,” Johnny said, as if that wasn’t obvious. “You never go here,” he stated. Mark had told Johnny all about Donghyuck’s hatred toward the library, how he didn’t like that he had to be quiet.


“Fine, have it your way, you liar,” he teased. Donghyuck grinned innocently at him.

“Hey hyung?” Donghyuck said. “What are you doing?” Johnny’s smile fell off his face.

“I’m writing an essay for English,” he told the sophomore, frowning down at his open document. Donghyuck nodded in sympathy.

“But aren’t you a native speaker?” Donghyuck remembered then. Johnny nodded.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean I can come up with an essay just like that.”

“Why not? Just bullshit it.”

“It’s an important essay, I can’t just bullshit it.”

“You’re almost as boring as Mark hyung. You’re both so good. Yuta hyung wouldn’t care even if someone else wrote it for him. He would see it as an investment,” Donghyuck declared. Johnny shook his head in amusement. Donghyuck and Mark were truly opposite people, yet they somehow worked like a well oiled machine together. It was curious indeed.

“Taeyong should knock some sense into you,” Johnny teased, laughing when Donghyuck pouted.

“He would never. I’m too precious,” the sophomore decided, fluttering his eyelashes. Johnny laughed again, feeling fond. Donghyuck was truly something else.

~

Chenle pouted as he settled in the living room. All his brothers were busy and he really wanted someone to play with. He understood that they didn’t want to be busy but they still were and it made
him sad. He wouldn’t run away though. He knew it was bad. His brothers all told him it had been really scary when he was gone, and so did he think because walking around alone had been much more scary than he thought it would be. Thus, Chenle would not run away this time, he promised his brothers. And he would always keep a promise.

Now he just needed to find a way to occupy himself. Chenle wasn’t used to big alone. Having six brothers always made sure that he wasn’t alone, yet now no one had the time. Then Chenle remembered. Someone did have time!

Jisung!

Chenle dashed away from the couch, hurrying up the stairs and into his shared room with his youngest brother. The four year old was sitting on the floor, driving a car around, making humming noises. Chenle smiled widely, cheeks bunched up and eyes disappearing.

“Jisungie!” The eight year old shouted, running and settling next to his brother. Jisung looked up, startled, before relaxing because it was only his brother after all. “Jisung let’s play!” Chenle decided, pulling on his brother’s hands. He younger sighed before leaving his toy car and following Chenle to the older’s bed. They settled on it, facing each other.

“Let’s play a hand game,” Chenle said, holding out his small limbs. Jisung pouted, wrinkling his nose. “Aww you’re so cute!” Chenle exclaimed, squealing, reaching forward to pull at Jisung’s cheek. The four year old was not impressed. “Jisungie, do you love me?” Chenle cooed, eyes wide and twinkling. The youngest brother blushed a bit before, begrudgingly, nodding. He didn’t often express emotions but he did love his brothers.

“Ahh I love you too Jisungie!” Chenle said. “Now let’s play the hand game!”
“Babe!” Came a loud voice, a very familiar voice, and Mark turned around, eyes holding a question. Donghyuck was charging at them - them being Mark, Jaemin and Suhyun - and Mark waited for the younger to jump at him, finding himself surprised when Donghyuck went for Suhyun.

“Baaaabie,” the sophomore whined at Suhyun who swatted at him, irritated. Mark’s eyebrows raised impossibly high.

“Leave me alone you heathen,” Suhyun almost growled, trying to push Donghyuck’s offending limbs away from her. The peach haired male didn’t budge.

“Don’t you love me babe?” He pouted. Mark was beyond confused.

“Did Mark hyung just get dumped?” Jaemin questioned, eyes glittering with amusement. Suhyun rolled her eyes.

“As if,” she scoffed. “He’s still got a boyfriend and I would very much appreciate if he could collect said boyfriend.”

“No,” Jaemin protested. “This is interesting. Proceed.”

Donghyuck laughed and hugged Suhyun even tighter, the junior groaning in misery.

“Hyuck?” Came Mark’s questioning voice. The sophomore finally acknowledged him. His eyes glinted teasingly and he fortunately let go of Suhyun in favour of sitting down next to Mark, very close to Mark indeed.

“Don’t worry, you’re my number one,” he promised, Mark rolling his eyes at Donghyuck’s cheesiness.

“So what was that all about?” Jaemin asked, sipping the smoothie he had bought in the cafeteria.

“She hates it, so I do it,” Donghyuck shrugged, leaning into Mark comfortably. The older boy felt his heartbeat rushing as his boyfriend got close and it was honestly a really nice feeling.

“He’s a fucking devil,” Suhyun hissed menacingly, sneering Donghyuck a glare. He only winked at her.

Mark’s arm came up to rest around Donghyuck’s shoulders, smiling slightly as he looked at his boyfriend’s face. It was a really nice face. The makeup and the nose piercing glinting in the bright lights of the cafeteria. But then, everything else. The moles on his cheek, down to his neck. His
bright mischievous eyes. His full lips, and melanin skin. All so beautiful.

“Earth to Mark Lee?” A hand in his face broke his trance. Mark blinked several times and looked up, blushing as he saw both Suhyun and Jaemin looking at him with raised eyebrows accompanied by knowing smiles. He looked back to Donghyuck and noticed the younger was slightly flushed.

“You two are disgusting,” Suhyun said fondly. And really disgusting was just her way to say adorable. Mark coughed awkwardly but didn’t remove his arm from Donghyuck. In fact, he rather tightened his grip, pulling the younger closer.

“Truly disgusting,” Jaemin agreed. “I need at least one of my boyfriends down here now, we will not stand for this. You cannot be cuter than us.”

Mark laughed, feeling Donghyuck’s soft breath on his skin as the younger laughed too.

~

Jaehyun frowned as he observed the people at the opposite end of the hall. He was with Johnny, both of them waiting for a class to start. Jaehyun couldn’t help but feel apprehensive as he watched the people, they were whispering, which was always a bad sign. He didn’t even notice Johnny talking until the other poked his shoulder.

“Sorry what?” Jaehyun said, focusing back on his best friend. Having been the only English speaker when Johnny arrived in South Korea and started in the same class as Jaehyun had inevitably brought them close. Jaehyun could easily say that Johnny was his best friend. The tall male looked exasperated.

“What’s up? You’re not listening at all man,” he said in English. Jaehyun quickly switched languages.

“I’m sorry, it’s just those people over there. I think they’re talking shit about Taeyong,” he said, glowering over Johnny’s shoulder at mentioned group of students.

“I thought we didn’t care about that?” Johnny reminded him. Jaehyun pressed his lips together.

“I don’t, when they talk about me,” he answered. “But if it’s Taeyong then it’s different.” Johnny raised an eyebrow.

“Okay seriously you need to stop glaring and listen to what I’m saying,” Johnny said, putting his hands on Jaehyun’s shoulders. The brunet begrudgingly tore his gaze away from the gossiping students. “Jaehyun don’t obsess over things like that. It’s really meaningless. And truthfully it’s not even important.” Jaehyun knew that, he did, but it still angered him.

“He doesn’t deserve it,” Jaehyun protested, frowning. Johnny shook his lightly by the shoulders.

“Neither do you Jaehyun. If you want to stop them then go over there and yell, even though we both know it’s not gonna help anything,” Johnny told him logically. “Otherwise, just focus on you and your own thoughts. We can’t always change others, but we can change ourselves.” Jaehyun nodded, taking a breath.

“Thanks Johnny,” he breathed, sincerity in his voice and eyes. Johnny smiled back brightly and turned his head away, yet Jaehyun could catch a glimpse of the slight worry lurking in the depths of his friend’s eyes. It reminded him. Jaehyun had been awfully distant from his friends the last few weeks and suddenly it all surfaced. He had been so busy with Taeyong and spending time with Taeyong that his contact with Johnny had diminished greatly.
“Hey,” he said, bringing Johnny’s attention back to him. “Are you okay?” He asked, still speaking English. Johnny seemed a bit surprised at his question, and Jaehyun was immediately taken aback because Johnny obviously thought he wouldn’t notice. Just how bad of a friend had Jaehyun been lately.

“I’m not sure,” the tall senior answered truthfully. Jaehyun’s frown was worried. “But I can’t really talk about it now.”

“Are you in trouble?” Jaehyun wondered, lowering his voice.

“No,” Johnny assured. “I’m not in any danger. I promise I will tell you soon. Just not now.” It was unlike Johnny to sound so downtrodden which only worried Jaehyun further. He wouldn’t push though. He knew Johnny needed space if he asked for it. Instead, he reached out a hand and clapped Johnny’s shoulder. Their eyes met, a gaze full of understanding and appreciation for each other, and Jaehyun desperately hoped that it helped Johnny feel better, even if only a little bit.

~

Sicheng basked in the sunlight that shone down upon them. They had started frequenting the grass spot outside of the school again as the snow had cleared up. Kun was next to him, on his right, Jiwoo and Somin on his left. They were all enjoying the first touches of spring, having already eaten their food.

“Hey,” Jiwoo suddenly spoke. “There’s a party this Friday at Matthew’s place. You guys wanna come?” Sicheng felt the apprehension crawling in the pit of his stomach, nervous tension filling his whole being. Last time he went to a party was not the best time ever spent. But still, Doctor Song encouraged facing his fears and this was a perfect chance to do just that. Sicheng gnawed at his bottom lip, trying to come up with a proper answer.

“I’ll go,” Kun said, the smile being heard in his voice.

“Sweet,” Jiwoo nodded. “Sicheng? You wanna come? I promise we’ll keep you away from the alcohol. I’m designated driver anyway so I won’t drink,” she told him gently. “But if you don’t want to you don’t have to.” Sicheng pondered. It did sound good, staying sober with Jiwoo. At least he wouldn’t be pressured into anything. And really his only experience with a real hardcore party was that one damned time. All parties couldn’t be like that. So maybe he should give it a chance.

With a determined nod, he said;

“I’m in.”

~

Taeil tapped his fingers idly against the surface of his kitchen table. Books were spread about him, notebooks open and his laptop running. He’d just gotten a mail with his work times for the rest of the month, Heechul cutting him some slack as it was exam season. Taeil felt immensely grateful for his boss even if the man was often eccentric, lively, teasing and borderline crazy.

Baekhyun had texted him three crying emojis because the man had most of the early morning shifts where all the school classes and annoying kids were the only visitors. Taeil smiled down at the text, replying with some emojis of his own.

He felt incredibly weary and worn out. He’d been having regular lessons with Lucas at the library or at the Lee residence while also studying his own subjects. He almost felt like he was mixing up the two and the outcome was not coherent in any way or form. With a sigh Taeil ran a hand down his
He was grateful he didn’t involve himself with the talent show. Doyoung sent him constant complaints about how it was all too much just about every day. With the talent show being one of the biggest events their school had it was a lot of work. Especially for Doyoung who was basically the founder of it all. It was all his vision and his work. He wanted it to be perfect. Taeil could definitely understand that, he just hoped the other wouldn’t collapse under the pressure.

The talent show was set to happen the week before summer break, so pretty soon after the exams, which made it all harder. There was literally not time to rest in between. Taeil shook his head slightly at the stress of it all. School was truly an evil invention at times.

He decided that he couldn’t stay cooped up anymore and sent a quick text to Doyoung before leaving his apartment, books still strewn about the table.

~

Taeil arrived at Décalcomanie café almost exactly when Doyoung did. The other looked tired but grateful for the distraction.

“How you holding up?” Taeil said, slightly jokingly as they had ordered from Wendy, who was their regular waitress. Doyoung just shook his head quietly.

“I don’t want to think,” he said. Taeil could understand that. It was rather late so the cafe wasn’t that crowded. Taeil stared up at the empty stage, feeling it pull at his very heartstrings. Since Taeil was a child he had always loved singing, and he had often been told that he was very good at it. Yet he had never thought of seriously pursuing it as a career. Now it was probably too late.

“Let’s sing.” Doyoung proposed, obviously having seen him eyeing the stage. “It’s open mic.” Taeil smiled and nodded. Even if he wasn’t pursuing it professionally he could still enjoy it in his free time. Together they got up on the stage and selected a backing track. The patrons in the cafe didn’t really pay any attention to them but Taeil didn’t mind. Just singing was enough.

The song began and he lost himself in the emotions and the thrill of it all. The thrill of showing his voice and using it. He wasn’t a very talkative person, but when singing, he could get all the sounds and words out. It felt right.

And it definitely took his mind off the piles of paper he had to review.

~

Taeyong sat in the library, diligently pouring over his books and helpful documents, when someone settled down opposite of him. He looked up and was met by his brother.

Sicheng looked nervous, pulling at his necklace which Taeyong always found cute since Sicheng didn’t even notice he was doing it himself.

“Hello,” Taeyong greeted him, amused.

“Hi hyung,” Sicheng started. “I need to ask you something.”

“Okay,” Taeyong said, apprehensive. “Go on.”

“Matthew, you know Matthew?” Sicheng waited for Taeyong to nod before continuing. “He’s having a party on Friday and I’m invited.” Taeyong blanched. He definitely remembered what happens last time Sicheng went to a party and he would rather not have a repeat. Yet he couldn’t
really say no. He didn’t want to forbid it because he knew, parties weren’t terrible. Usually they were fun and his brother had just been in the wrong company. Yet the fear still lingered. What if he would drink irresponsibly again? Or get pressured into something? Or drugged? All the possibilities were running through his mind. Yet one thing became apparent. Taeyong wasn’t Sicheng’s parent. He was a brother. He couldn’t think of it from a parent perspective.

“Do you want to go?” He asked, tilting his head. Sicheng hunched his shoulders together but nodded bravely nonetheless.

“I do,” he said. “And I wont drink. Jiwoo isn’t drinking so I’ll stay with her. And I promise I’ll have my phone at all times.”

Taeyong nodded absentmindedly. He trusted his brother. Of course, he didn’t trust others though. Yet which one held the most weight to him? He knew exactly which.

“Okay.” Sicheng’s eyes widened impossibly.

“Okay?” The younger asked incredulously. “Are you saying I can go?”

“Yeah. Just promise to keep your phone on all the time,” Taeyong told him. “And I would prefer it if you didn’t drink but I can’t stop you. Just be sure that you’re safe with trustworthy people if you do, that’s all I can ask of you, my little brother.”

Sicheng gaped at his sibling. A weird feeling of love filled him. A sense of protection and trust. His brother trusted him. And he wouldn’t betray that.

“I promise I won’t drink hyung. Promise.”

The smiles they shared were both small and sincere, an understanding passing in between them.

Taeyong trusted all his brothers because he knew they went to him. They always went to him. Everything always managed to reach him one way or another and he always did his best to help them. They trusted him with their everything, therefore he should do the same.
Chapter 112

Chapter Notes

Oh wow I’m sorry I didn’t have time to answer any comments :((

Wahh I can’t believe we’re so close to the end now it’s crazy. Also we hit 200k which is just mind blowing. I never would’ve thought we’d get this far :D

Not proofread as usual ugh

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <3333

Friday came upon them quickly and Sicheng felt very excited for the party even if some of the worry remained. He had picked out a great outfit with the help of Jungwoo. He wore a cropped long sleeved shirt with a sort of harness and tight skinny jeans. His strawberry hair was skillfully swept up and to the sides, like he just rolled out of bed but not really. Donghyuck had applied his makeup, giving it a dramatic flair with Smokey eyes and enticing lips. His necklace still resides under his shirt. Sicheng really liked his look and quickly snapped a mirror selfie before walking downstairs. Jiwoo would be there soon enough to pick him up.

Taeyong smiled when he saw Sicheng, hugging him gently.

“You look great,” he said, voice genuine and Sicheng felt really happy. His thoughts about Taeyong had greatly changed during the course of his therapy. He could view the other as simply his older brother and someone he loved dearly without all toxic thoughts and comparisons. He cherished the strength he had regained over his own emotions and mind.

“Remember to keep your phone on,” Taeyong said, trying to look stern, although it was ruined by a smile.

“I promise,” Sicheng said holding up said device which pinged with a message from Jiwoo. She was there.

“I’ll see you tonight,” Taeyong said, hugging him again. Sicheng felt warm. Taeyong would stay up and wait for him. Somehow that was really heartwarming to him. He nodded and got his shoes on, quickly wearing his jacket.

“Bye hyung,” he said, waving slightly as he left. Taeyong wanted back and disappeared behind the front door. Sicheng was saluted by the cold air and hurried to Jiwoo’s car and her heating system. The car was completely warmed up when he got in and he relished in the sensations of heat.

“Hey,” Jiwoo greeted, Somin in the passenger seat smiling at him through the rear view mirror. Sicheng said his greetings back and quickly buckled in.

They picked up Kun and then they headed for Matthew’s accommodations.

The party was relatively quiet when they got there as it was still early but J. Seph and Matthew had already started drinking when they entered.
“Sicheng!” Matthew called out loudly. “My man! Come here!” Sicheng laughed as he was dealt a warm hug. There were some people milling about and music was playing quietly. Sicheng knew that wouldn’t last for long.

And he was right.

After approximately an hour the party was in full swing. The music had been turned up and the bass was vibrating Sicheng’s eardrums. People were dancing, laughing, playing games and drinking. They were drinking a lot. Yet Sicheng felt safe. He was seated in a couch with Jiwoo and J. Seph while Kun had been dragged onto the dance floor by Somin and Matthew. Sicheng was actually enjoying himself. Jiwoo hadn’t been drinking at all and Sicheng didn’t feel pressured to do anything this time around which was a huge relief.

He observed all the people on the dance floor, grinding, slow dancing, stumbling around in their drunken states. It was actually very entertaining.

And someone in particular caught his eye. The person had just entered, looking around curiously. Sicheng felt his eyebrows raising, it was the same person who he had been their waiter a couple weeks ago at the mall. He was dressed in a sleek shirt and jeans, looking handsome. Sicheng thought he looked too young to be a college student though.

“Hyung?” He said, turning to J. Seph. The other gave him attention immediately. “Who’s that?” Sicheng nodded subtly toward the boy, and he did stand out so J. Seph understood who he meant.

“Ah,” the older nodded. “That’s Eunwoo. He’s cousins with Kang Joon.” J. Seph explained and pointed toward another male, who was chatting with some people. He was also handsome, objectively speaking, and Sicheng nodded absentmindedly. “He’s apparently homeschooled.”

Sicheng watched as Eunwoo made his way over to his cousin, smiling.

Then his attention was stolen again.

“Sicheng,” Kun and appeared in front of them, looking flushed and with a smile on his face. “Come dance with us.”

Sicheng smiled and grabbed Kun’s offered hand, following him out onto the dance floor. Matthew and Somin were both dancing and smiled when they saw Sicheng joining. Sicheng did know how to dance. He had taken ballet lessons when younger and could say he was at least proficient when dancing. Yet it was a party after all, and actual dancing skills held close to no meaning. So he put his lessons behind him and simply followed the flow of the music.

Dancing was a great way to let go of your thoughts and release happy pheromones which is exactly what Sicheng experienced. He kept dancing with his friends until he was sweating in the tight space between all the people in their near proximity. He barely acknowledged it though, lost in the beat and the overpowering bass.

After some time passed he finally had to tap out and get some water.

The kitchen was empty when he entered, grabbing a glass and poured himself some water. He greedily gulped he liquid and after he had drained it all he stopped for a second and simply breathed.

His heart was still racing from excitement and he was panting from slight exhaustion yet the adrenaline kept him going. It was all so exciting. The flashing lights, the loud music, the laughter of the people. It was thrilling.

Much better than his first party experience. Apparently the people you’re with actually makes a huge
difference. Sicheng couldn’t help but smile to himself, thinking of his friends. He was so glad to have found them. Truly happy.

He couldn’t ask for better friends.

His thoughts were interrupted by a person entering the kitchen. He jerked in surprise.

“I’m sorry,” came a gentle voice, Sicheng looking up to see Eunwoo on the threshold. “I didn’t mean to startle you.” His smile was apologetic and completely genuine. Sicheng wondered at his ability to sound so caring.

“It’s okay,” Sicheng assured, smiling back slightly. He wasn’t one to socialise with strangers often but Eunwoo seemed nice enough.

“Are you okay?” Eunwoo asked, seeming worried. Sicheng raised one eyebrow.

“I’m perfectly fine,” he assured. Eunwoo rubbed at his neck, laughing slightly.

“Sorry, you just looked so lost in thought, I wondered if something troubled you,” he admitted. Sicheng shook his head softly.

“No, it’s rather good things actually,” he said. Eunwoo was still smiling at him. The boy seemed to be pure sunshine.

They didn’t say anything more for a while, Eunwoo walking into the kitchen and grabbing a drink of the alcoholic punch. Sicheng our his glass in the dishwasher but didn’t leave quite yet. He wanted to talk to Eunwoo more, but didn’t find it within to say anything. Luckily, he didn’t have to.

“What’s your name?” Eunwoo’s gentle voice reached his ears, Sicheng looking over to see the other gazing at him curiously.

“Sicheng,” he provided. The other nodded.

“I’m Eunwoo.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too.” And the sunny smile was back on Eunwoo’s face. Sicheng couldn’t help but smile back. “Do you wanna talk more? We can go and grab a couch.” Sicheng pondered for a second. He could dance with his friends again but he also felt rather drained so maybe it would be better to take it easy for a while.

“Sure, lead the way.”

Sicheng spent the rest of the night chatting with Eunwoo. He found out that they were the same age, Eunwoo was homeschooled (which he already knew) and the boy wanted to be an actor some day. They continued talking for a long time and eventually migrated to the dance floor, swaying together awkwardly until it cleared up slightly when Sicheng dared to make some actual moves that weren’t just rocking from foot to foot.

And at the end of the night, Sicheng went home, feeling giddy, with a new phone number in his contact list.

~

Come Monday and Taeyong was feeling pretty good. He was glad that Sicheng had a good time at
the party and he had also gotten a lot of studying done even if he was nowhere near prepared enough.

He was currently sitting in the library, trying to focus, when he saw people sneaking glances at him. Taeyong had definitely noticed that the rumours had started gaming traction again, but he didn’t particularly mind. The song he and Mark were performing would set their minds straight, and he would ignore them for now in favour of studying. At least Jaehyun didn’t seem bothered which was good. Taeyong was glad that his boyfriend wasn’t minding the backlash from making their relationship public, it really gave him a sense of security, knowing that Jaehyun wouldn’t leave him at the first sign of hardship.

Taeyong didn’t want to think about Jaehyun though, not right now, because now he needed to focus on his studying. He was rubbing at his temples, trying to shake the head ache that was starting up, while reading the history book. Again. It was incredibly boring and drawn out but he needed to get the information to stick.

He was interrupted by a person plopping down across from him though. He looked, honestly grateful for the interruption, and was met by Lisa. She was smiling nervously, fiddling with her hands. Taeyong sighed and closed his book, done with history for the time being.

“Hey Lisa,” he greeted lightly. “Something wrong?” He said, looking at her fidgeting hands. Lisa inhaled deeply before replying.

“I’m thinking of asking Chaeyoung out,” she rushed. Taeyong raised an eyebrow. “Chaeyoung is Rosé’s real name,” she clarified. Taeyong knew who Rosé was. She hung around Lisa often and was also one of the people who had passed her talent show audition thus being a part of the final line up.

“You should,” Taeyong nodded. He had seen those two make heart eyes at each other numerous times. He was certain that Rosé would say yes if Lisa asked. The Thai girl looked at him anxiously.

“Are you sure?” She questioned then.

“I am. Are you?” Taeyong countered. “Even if you’re questioning it, you should still ask. That way you’ll at least know instead of hopelessly pining over her.” Loss nodded thoughtfully, sighing lightly.

“I guess that’s right,” she agreed. “But it’s scary.”

“Of course it is,” Taeyong nodded. “It’s your emotions. Your feelings which are highly personal. And you’re giving another person access to them. That is scary,” Taeyong assured. “But it’s better to know than to go around and ponder.” A slow smile was spreading on Lisa’s lips.

“I think I know what you mean,” she said, standing up. “I have to go. I’ll see you later oppa.”

“Bye,” Taeyong called after her as she power walked out of the library. It took only seconds before Ten had set himself down on the seat Lisa had vacated.

“What was that about?” He asked, looking at the door she had disappeared out of.

“She’s asking Rosé out,” Taeyong told him.

“About time,” Ten chuckled, shaking his head. “They’re almost as bad as you and Jaehyun were,” he added, nodding to himself. Taeyong rolled his eyes when something occurred to him.

“Hey,” he said, calling Ten’s attention to himself. “Isn’t it weird that many of the people I know are
part of the LGBT community?” Ten seemed to mull it over for a bit before responding.

“Not really,” he replied, “certain people have a charm. Yours attracts LGBT people like crazy.” Ten said, winking saucily. Taeyong scoffed and reached out to smack Ten’s arm. The other feigned immense pain.

“I’m wounded,” Ten cried dramatically.

“Be quiet you big baby we’re in the library,” Taeyong reprimanded, looking amused. Ten huffed jokingly before they both started laughing. Taeyong shook his head in amusement, calming himself down.

“But for real,” Ten said. “You’re exuding some serious gay vibes for all the lost queers to follow.” Taeyong blushed slightly. He wasn’t used to talking so openly about matters like that. It wasn’t really something people in South Korea discussed so openly but considering that Ten was from Thailand he didn’t really conform to those values. Taeyong admired his friend for that.

“What about you then?” Taeyong inquired. “Do you have anyone catching your eye?” Ten sighed deeply, smiling slightly.

“Not really,” he said, shrugging. Taeyong frowned, thinking of Johnny’s and Ten’s closeness. He wondered if Ten was lying or if he had actually been completely wrong. Or maybe Ten hadn’t realized his feelings yet.

That thought made Taeyong cringe inwardly because he was really starting to sound like one of those obsessed romance novel readers.

“But what about you?” Ten countered. “How are things with Jaehyun?”

“It’s all good,” Taeyong assured, smiling. He and Jaehyun talked every day and spent a lot of time together.

“Good, I’m happy for you,” Ten said, nodding. The conversation died out in favour of studying. Taeyong was amused to see Ten actually study properly. The other usually never did that, in public at least.

They enjoyed the silence and each other’s presence until the bell rang, signaling the start of classes.
If there are any spelling mistakes I’m sorry, I haven’t had the time to proofread. 

Hope you’ll enjoy the chapter <3333

Lucas laughed loudly as he scored, the other team groaning in misery. It wasn’t really a game, not a proper one, simply them playing around during their lunch break. Lucas always played soccer when he had free time. Yuqi and Doyeon also liked playing which was one of the reasons he became friends with them. Yet the boys didn’t allow girls to play with them. Lucas said it was ridiculous of them to not allow girls to play, knowing that Yuqi and Doyeon could play just as well as them, but no one listened to him. Eventually he had stopped hanging with them and found some people who wanted to play who were in fact not against mixed gendered teams.

He could easily say that they were all his favourite people and he loved playing with them. And his team had just won. Again.

Yuqi pumped her hand in a cheer, hugging a boy called Jihoon who was also on their team. Lucas ran a victory lap, the other team looking sullen.

“Alright fine, you can stop now,” a girl, Mina, complained. Lucas laughed again and finally stopped celebrating. Really, it wasn’t that big of a deal. It was only a middle-school-lunch-break-friendly-game. Nothing major.

They settled for a bit, drinking some water and chatting about a new game that had just launched, when Lucas shouted.

“Hyung!”

He waved his hands, gaining Jungwoo’s attention. The older boy smiled his gentle smile and waved lightly before walking over. Lucas got to his feet and went to grab his hyung’s hand.

“This is my hyung! Hyung these are my friends!” Lucas introduced, very vaguely. Jungwoo had already met Doyeon and Yuqi but shyly greeted the others as well.

“You’re a very pretty hyung,” a boy, Woojin, nodded seriously, snagged tooth slightly visible. Jungwoo blushed at be compliment, laughing melodically.

“Hyung,” Lucas powered on, ignoring everything. “Do you wanna play soccer with us?” Jungwoo hesitated, looking at the field and the ball, opening his mouth to respond when they were interrupted.

“As if! He’s too much of a sissy!” A snarling voice called from the side of the field. Lucas frowned when he recognized them. It was the same guys who had rejected playing with girls, including the two boys who had been harassing Jungwoo since the very arrival of the Lee brothers. The wanting and detention Taeyong had gotten them had warded them off a bit but no entirely. Lucas knew Jungwoo now had good friends to protect him at least.

“He is not! That’s a bad word!” Lucas protested, frowning angrily on behalf of his brother.
“He is! He’s too scared to play soccer!” One of the bullies called, the one who’d taken part in Jungwoo’s harassment. The one with bigger build. They were a group of boys, mixed in ages. Lucas had once been one of them but now he was so glad to have left them for better people to play soccer with.

“You’re being very rude!” Lucas argued, flinching slightly in surprise when Jungwoo reached out to grab his arm. The older looked upset and Lucas knew he easily got hurt. But he also knew that Jungwoo hated conflict.

“Let’s just leave,” the boy said in his soft voice. That gentle voice of his that never failed to bring comfort to Lucas.

“What? You’re too scared? Are you a coward? Such a frail little princess!” The bully with bigger build called, taunting them. “Hey! Come on! Let’s play a game! Unless you’re scared. I bet we would destroy you. And your brother’s little team of freaks.” He smirked. “I bet we could take you blindfolded. There are even girls on your team.”

Lucas wanted to run and jump him but Jungwoo’s steady grip on his arm prevented it. He looked over to see his brother’s lips pressing into a thin line. He looked determined.

“You know what!” He called, voice strong and firm. “I will accept that challenge.” He said, causing a murmur of surprise rise within the bullies team. Several moments passed before they spoke again.

“Fine! Let’s do it.”

The field was alive with tensions as the two teams got settled. Lucas’ team of misfits vs the bullies as Lucas liked to call them. During his time at the school, Lucas had managed to gather a fairly big group of both boys and girls yet the bullies team had more ‘members’ if they could even be called that. Class divisions in middle school was truly a tragic thought.

The game turned out to be more like a real actual game. Nothing like the friendly ones Lucas always did with his friends. This was serious. He could feel it in the air. Lucas and the captain of the other team squared off at the centre, waiting for the countdown. Mina who had decided to sit out the first few minutes loudly shouted.

“Three! Two! One! Go!”

Lucas and the opponent dived for the hall at the same time, the bullies team managing to steal it and head for the goal. Jihoon was their goalie and even if he wasn’t the tallest he wasn’t afraid to throw himself at the balls.

Yuqi was the one to steal the ball away from he opposite team, making a swift pass to Woojin who sprinted toward opposite goal. His shot was swiftly deflected though.

There were only five minutes left of the lunch break when Jungwoo finally acted. He agilely sprinted onto the field, intercepting the central midfielder of the other team and stealing the ball, heading to the opponents goal. Lucas ran parallel to him, shouting excitedly.
“Go hyung! Go!” He screamed, a smile starting to spread on his face. Jungwoo dodged several people of the other team in his pursuit of the goal, looking unusually determined. Lucas was definitely not used to seeing his calm brother so competitive.

Lucas held his breath as Jungwoo took the shot, kicking the ball harshly toward the centre of the goal, although the aim was a bit off as Jungwoo had been blocked last second. The goalkeeper of the bullies team managed to block it, the ball sailing toward the goalpost. Lucas eyes widened in surprise as the ball bounced off of the goalpost and right at Yuqi who headed the ball. It smoothly went right past the goalkeeper’s fingertips and into the goal.

Lucas stared for a second, stunned, before he exploded in a cheer.

“We won!” Mina shouted, voice shrill with excitement. Lucas ran toward his brother, pulling Jungwoo into a huge hug.

“We did it hyung!” He screamed, Jungwoo laughing in amusement.

“This doesn’t prove anything,” came a petulant voice, disturbing Lucas’ happiness. The bully who’d bend harassing Jungwoo looked at them menacingly, although Lucas thought he looked more like a pouting child than anything.

“This proved everything,” was Jungwoo’s countering statement. And with that, the bell rang.

~

Sicheng had taken to texting Eunwoo a lot, noticing that they had a lot in common to talk about. In a fit of trust Sicheng had inevitably revealed his musings about sexualities and found out that Eunwoo was questioning himself as well which lead them to entirely new conversations and conclusions. Sicheng was enjoying himself thoroughly.

Although, his texting was interrupted by a devil.

“Who are you texting and why is it not me?” Yuta smiled cheekily, settling on the bench next to the junior. They were in the hallway but it was relatively empty. Sicheng scoffed and locked his phone.

“Are you cheating on me?” Yuta said, scandalized. Sicheng raised both eyebrows.

“There is nothing to cheat on!” He protested. Yuta simply shrugged and smiled. “And I was only texting a friend,” Sicheng admitted. Yuta looked at him curiously.

“Only a friend?” He said teasingly. Sicheng snorted.

“For now yes,” he acquiesced. Yuta grinned brightly, then his eyes widened.

“Wait! Does this mean you’re dumping me?” He accused, feigning hurt. Sicheng reached out to hit his shoulder.

“We’re not together!” He protested. Yuta laughed.

“But I love you Sichengie!” He exclaimed dramatically. “Please don’t leave me.”

Sicheng sighed, sufferingly, and didn’t signify that with a response. He simply got up and started walking. Yuta scrambled to chase after him.

“Where are you going?” He cried, still playing. Sicheng couldn’t help it when a smile spread on his lips.
“Away from you!” He called back, starting to run slightly. Yuta sped up and ran after him.

“No! My love!” Yuta called, causing Sicheng to start laughing as he ran for his life. Or his sanity, whichever works when you’re being chased by Yuta Nakamoto.

If anyone saw them, they would probably think they were crazy. Sicheng wouldn’t oppose that thought.

~

Taeyong let his head fall down on the table, groaning in misery. His school work was killing him and finals week was upon them soon. He had been studying nonstop and it was taking a toll on his ability to think.

Someone plopped down opposite him as they so often did when Taeyong was in the library, causing the red head to pull his head away from the wooden table. He was met by not one, but two people. Jooheon and Jackson were looking at him expectantly.

“What you doing?” Jooheon asked, smiling. His eyes crinkled and his dimples were simply adorable, reminding Taeyong of Jaehyun.

“Just studying,” he said, sighing lightly. The word made Jackson groan, the blonde sinking down in his chair until he was sprawled out, head tipped backward. Jooheon petted his chest comfortingly. Or condescendingly, Taeyong couldn’t really tell.

“I take it your studying hasn’t been going well?” Taeyong said, voice teasing yet sympathetic. Jackson straightened up, giving him a puppy eye look.

“No. It hasn’t been going anywhere,” Jackson admitted, frowning. “And it’s almost finals week.”

“Maybe you could get some help?” Taeyong suggested. “I bet Taeil wouldn’t mind helping you.” Taeyong knew for a fact that Taeil and Jackson shared some classes.

“I guess,” Jackson said, looking dejected. Taeyong reached out to squeeze his hand reassuringly.

“What about you?” He said, turning to Jooheon this time. The brunet nodded, looking satisfied.

“I’m all set,” he declared, smiling again. Taeyong smiled back. Thankful that someone was prepared at least.

“But that’s not why we came here,” Jackson said, perking up. “On graduation day, there’s gonna be a party - at my place - and we wanted to invite you.” Jackson revealed. Taeyong perked up as well. A party actually sounded pretty good. And he might even drink, to celebrate high school being over. He very rarely drank but that might just be the perfect opportunity.

“Of course I’ll come,” he agreed, smiling. Jackson whooped and immediately got shushed by a passing librarian. He sheepishly apologized.

Taeyong held his laughter bravely while Jooheon snickered shamelessly at his friend.

“Okay good. We won’t bother you more now,” Jackson assured, getting up. Jooheon followed him,
waving goodbye to Taeyong as they left the library.
Chapter 114

Chapter Notes

Yes we are approaching the end. This is not proofread as usual :(( hope it’s fins anyway >_-<

Hope you’ll enjoy <3333

Finals week had officially started. Sicheng and Donghyuck rarely saw their brother at all for he was cooped up in his room studying to the last minute. They kindly took it upon themselves to care for their younger brothers and cook all the food. They even brought plates to Taeyong who often forgot to eat. The senior was completely swamped in books and notes, dark bags beginning to show under his eyes as the week progressed.

Taeyong didn’t really know why he was trying so hard when he wasn’t even applying for university. Where lied his motivation? He didn’t quite understand but he could only guess that the hope still lied within him that he would end up at university some day and wasting his finals would be a big mistake.

Sunmi was yet to come up with a plan and neither had Taeyong, therefore he didn’t get how he was still holding onto hope.

His friends didn’t seem to be daring any better, Ten looking exhausted, Doyoung snarling at everyone, Yuta being constantly confused, Johnny being frazzled and even Jaehyun was beginning to look unkempt. Taeil remained composed and sane. He was possibly the only one who did.

“Fuck this. I hate it so much. It can go and die,” Doyoung growled, not one for swearing so harshly.

“Language please,” Taeyong reprimanded, frowning at his friend. Doyoung simply shook his head, still frantically writing notes. Taeyong had given up on that. He was running on caffeine and five hours sleep. He could not handle more note taking at the moment.

“It’s gonna be fine,” Jaehyun tried to assure, leaning back on the wall behind him. They were in the cafeteria, at a corner table.

“It’s not that bad,” Taeil agreed. “Just calm down and let us talk about something else.” He soothed, smiling. It was only the four of them. Yuta was stuck in an exam, same with Johnny and Ten had been whisked away by Lisa.

Taeyong cautiously reached out and grabbed Doyoung’s notebook, pulling it away from him. The senior glared at him yet surrendered with a sigh.

“I guess you’re right,” he relented, putting his pen away and letting his head fall down on the table. “Talk about something that is not school, the talent show of university.”

The silence fell over them like a wet towel. Suffocating and heavy. They found that their minds had been so wound up in school and their futures that no one could produce a proper conversation topic without it. Taeyong absentmindedly fiddled with Jaehyun’s bracelet as his boyfriend was seated next to him. Jaehyun let him, enjoying Taeyong’s cool fingers skittering lightly over the skin of his wrist.
“How’s your love lives?” Taeyong finally managed to come up with something that did not include any of the forbidden topics. His question made Doyoung groan miserably.

“Don’t ask that,” the dark haired senior mourned. “That’s forbidden from now on.”

Taeyong shook his head slightly, amused.

“You just love sucking the fun out of everything, Doyoung,” Jaehyun teased good-naturedly, his dimples making an appearance. Doyoung lifted his head to glare playfully.

“Of course, Jung. I wouldn’t want you having fun, now would I? That would simply be a tragedy,” Doyoung said, touching his chest as if the thought pained him. Jaehyun stuck his tongue out childishly which had Taeyong snorting a laugh because of Jung Jaehyun was doing that, then the exams were truly making them crazy.

~

Sicheng sipped his drink gingerly. He had managed to slip out - Donghyuck taking care of their brothers for the time being while Tayeong was preoccupied - and meet up with Jiwoo and Kun. Somin was studying for one of her upcoming exams but Jiwoo and Kun said they could manage taking a break. After witnessing finals week it had definitely hit Sicheng that all of his friends were going to quit school soon. He knew Jiwoo was going to the local university, while Somin was aiming for a university in Busan, and Kun for one in Seoul. It had sunk in that Sicheng’s friends were actually graduating. And he wasn’t. It automatically brought his mind to their parents. In all the events going down in his life recently, the notion that they would have to move soon was suddenly becoming more apparent. They had been allotted eight months in this city and those months would be over in the middle of summer. It made Sicheng’s chest contract just thinking about it. He hadn’t thought about it for a while, their moving, but now it was closing in on him.

“Are you okay?” Jiwoo asked, Sicheng snapping back to reality harshly.

“I’m fine,” he assured, trying to keep his voice even. Jiwoo frowned but didn’t press further.

“How’s exams going?” Sicheng asked then, smiling slightly. Kun nodded.

“It’s going well I think,” he concluded.

“Yeah. It isn’t as bad as some people make it,” Jiwoo agreed, taking a bite of her sandwich. Sicheng noticed that some of her dark lipstick got stuck on the bread.

“Or you are the one who’s underestimating it,” Sicheng suggested. Jiwoo rolled her eyes but didn’t counter his suggestion, instead she changed the subject almost completely.

“What about you? And your new friend. That Eunwoo guy,” she said, wiggling her eyebrows.

“What’s happening there?”

“Nothing,” Sicheng said, shaking his head. “We’re just friends.” Jiwoo nodded thoughtfully.

“Have you thought anything more about your sexuality?” Kun wondered then, looking curious. Sicheng licked his lips nervously.

“I looked some things up,” he nodded. “And I might be demisexual,” he said the word hesitantly, the pronunciation foreign on his tongue as it was an English word. Jiwoo nodded encouragingly. “It kinda fits with what I feel.”
“That’s good,” Kun said, smiling. “Just remember that it doesn’t matter. You don’t need labels if you don’t want them.” Sicheng frowned slightly. He knew that. He understood perfectly well that labels didn’t really define him, yet he couldn’t help but feel like he needed that sense of belonging to a certain category. The uncertainty was making him anxious yet he didn’t want to label anything for sure because he couldn’t really know. He sighed.

Sexuality was a confusing mess.

~

Finals week was coming to an end, Taeyong only having two exams left before he was done. It had gone down relatively painlessly. He had managed all of his exams and he dared even say that they went pretty well.

He met up with Jaehyun during lunch before he was to go through with his last two exams. His boyfriend was munching soullessly on a homemade meal, barely even noticing Taeyong until the other sat down next to him. Jaehyun jolted slightly, smiling when he noticed Taeyong.

“Hey,” the red head greeted with a smile. Jaehyun shook his head, trying to wake himself up.

“Hi,” the brunet chuckled. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Taeyong nodded, pulling out his food. “I only have two left.” He said, grinning when Jaehyun reached out to hold his hand, intertwining their fingers.

“I finished before lunch,” Jaehyun revealed. “My mind has kinda logged off now.” Taeyong could understand that. After school he would most probably go home and crash. He looked down at their hands, both of them pale. He noticed Jaehyun had scribbled on his palm, doodles and random words sitting on his skin and a sudden thought struck Taeyong.

“Have you ever thought about getting a tattoo?” The red head asked, looking up to gaze at his boyfriend. Jaehyun looked back at him, thoughtful.

“Not really,” he admitted. “My parents would freak. They still think it’s associated with gang activities when you have a tattoo,” he laughed slightly. “Why?”

“Nothing in particular,” Taeyong shrugged and even as he said that, he found the thought lingering in his mind for the entire day.

~

Donghyuck was at the ice cream parlor near their school, having been let off early from his last class. Jaemin who’d been sharing that class was also with him. They were sharing a cup of three differently flavoured ice creams that they both had been dying to try.

“Jaemin?” Donghyuck spoke, swallowing a spoonful of the delicious treat. The other sophomore hummed, looking up at his friend.

“Yeah?”

“How did you end up together with Jeno and Renjun?” Donghyuck wondered, suddenly having been hit with the realization that he had no idea how his favourite thruple had gotten together. Jaemin smiled, a small and reminiscent smile.

“Uhm we’ve known each other for a long time,” Jaemin started, “I became friends with Jeno in
kindergarten, because as you know, this town is small and everyone knows everyone.” Donghyuck did know. He was on first name basis with the cashier at their grocery store.

“He was awkward and awfully shy but that didn’t stop me from befriending him. I always shared my snacks with him and always made sure we played together,” Jaemin laughed, shaking his head slightly. “Eventually we just became inseparable.” Donghyuck could definitely see that. Jaemin and Jeno were always attuned to each other.

“Renjun came to town during our first year of middle school. He had moved from China with his family. At first we didn’t really pay much attention to him, he was kind of closed off and didn’t know the language well and we were fine with it being just us two, as it always had been since kindergarten,” Jaemin sighed slightly, scooping up some more ice cream and eating it before continuing. “Eventually the three of us were grouped together for a project. Jeno and I found that Renjun was actually not as quiet as we thought. He had a lot to say and he was very witty,” Jaemin said, looking proud. Donghyuck couldn’t help but smile because yeah. Renjun was quite smart and outspoken.

“We kept hanging out together after the project was over and eventually a duo turned into a trio,” Jaemin sucked in a breath. “When I first started realizing my feelings I was terrified. I think it was in second grade of middle school. I was fourteen and I guess my hormones were going crazy. I started thinking of Renjun and Jeno in a different light, a more romantic one, and it scared me so much. Being gay was never something I’d thought of, no less something I’d ever discussed with them. So I panicked. I just broke down, one day, at school and fled to the locker rooms.” Donghyuck frowned, feeling sad that his friend had suffered so much when discovering his feelings. “You might be shocked, but the person who helped me was actually Mark hyung.” This made Donghyuck choke on the ice cream he had just put in his mouth.


“Yes. Mark hyung helped. He found me that day in the locker rooms and comforted me. He had recently moved to town with his family, from Canada. He was also a year older, but it didn’t seem to matter to him. Mark hyung was so kind and reassuring, so I told him. Everything.” Donghyuck felt slightly shocked. He would never feel comfortable enough to spill his life secrets to a stranger.

“I told him all about Jeno and Renjun and how I felt about them. He was so nice. He listened and when I was done he offered advice. He told me try and figure out what they thought about homosexuality, and then to tell them about my feelings if their responses were positive.”

“Mark hyung actually gave you decent advice. That’s unexpected,” Donghyuck said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Maybe. But I was still terrified. Because even if they were okay with homosexuality they might not be okay with polyamory. I told Mark hyung as much and he told me to go for it anyway. Because if I let my feelings sit and simmer and grow, they would cause even bigger issues in the future.” Jaemin said, their ice cream gone by then. “So I did as he said. Almost. Actually not at all. Before I had the chance Renjun exploded. Apparently he’d been having similar thoughts and just blurted everything out one day at Jeno’s place. We were all unsure, not knowing what to do. And Jeno asked for some time to think. When I look back I can remember that Jeno was actually very mature for a fourteen year old.”

“Well if he was then, then he is now too,” Donghyuck scoffed. Jaemin nodded in agreement.

“Anyhow. We stayed away from each other for a while. A couple of weeks even. People definitely
took notice of it but it didn’t really matter. I was just so scared that I had lost my best friends. And of course I hadn’t. Jeno sent a text in our group chat, asking that we meet up at the park. So we did. And we talked. And we agree to try it out. Being in a relationship,” Jaemin finished, looking slightly lost in memories. Donghyuck was grinning.

“Honestly,” he said, “it’s really cute. You’re like the epitome of childhood friends turned lovers.” Jaemin blushed slightly but smiled nonetheless.

They sat for a while in silence, Donghyuck feeling content with having unwrapped another layer of his friend’s life. The sun shone on them, the trees starting to look greener with every day. Yet it left Donghyuck with a bittersweet feeling. With the unveiling of his friends’ lives and their personalities came a deeper friendship which Donghyuck knew would have to be terminated as the Lee family moved. And that was going to be soon.
Chapter 115

Chapter Notes

Alright here it is :)) not proofread as usual ugh

Hope you’ll enjoy anyway <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taeyong smiled at the scene in front of him, raising an eyebrow. Donghyuck and Mark were being rather clingy and Taeyong felt exasperated at their reluctance to let go of each other. He cleared his throat pointedly.

“Fine,” Donghyuck sighed, letting go of Mark. “I’ll go now. I’ll see you later,” he pecked Mark’s lips before leaving, heading to his class. Mark has a free hour while Taeyong had been let off his classes. His finals were done, same with every senior at the school, and thus they had gotten a bit of free time. In reality, their teachers knew they wouldn’t bother listening if classes were actually held, so they have the seniors time off.

Even though this was the case, Taeyong knew that a lot of seniors still went to school for extra curriculars which mainly consisted of the talent show. After finals, Doyoung had crashed and slept for twenty four hours straight only to wake up and throw himself right back into the talent show plans. He had roped several of their peers into helping with lights, equipments and refreshments as the show would be a pretty big deal. A pretty big deal, which Taeyong and Mark were part of. Which was exactly why they were meeting up.

“I have the arrangements done so we only need to rehearse,” Mark said, a huge smile on his face as they headed for the music room. Taeyong smiled right back at him, even though he couldn’t tell if Mark was happy because of the finished product or because he’d just been spending time with Donghyuck. Taeyong guessed that it was a bit of both.

They closed the door after entering and Mark threw his bag on the floor gracelessly. Taeyong rolled his eyes and grabbed it, putting the bag on a chair instead.

“Did you have a choreo in mind?” Mark asked, curious, as he was setting up the speakers. Taeyong sighed though his nose, stretching a bit as he strolled around the room. Finishing his exams left him with a nice feeling of satisfaction and relief, not even the aspect of pressure from the talent show could bring him down at the moment.

“Kind of,” Taeyong nodded. “But only for the chorus, we don’t want to interfere with the verses. Play me the arrangement and I’ll think of something real quick.”

Mark looked at him dubiously, but obeyed. Taeyong swayed to the vibe, pulling his SnapBack down over his eyes. He was wearing casual clothes, consisting of sweatpants and a tank-top, which showed just how little he bothered with school at the moment. His finals were over anyways. No need to impress anyone, as Mark was like a little brother.

As the chorus part came on, Taeyong mumbled the lyrics, trying some moves that would hopefully look relaxed, yet forward and hopefully aggressive to match their rough beat.
Mark watched, wide eyed, as Taeyong had found a repeated pattern of motions that fit perfectly with the chorus.

“There we have it,” Taeyong said, smiling as he had obviously noticed that the moves were there. “Now I just need to teach you.”

Mark gaped, unable to respond properly. He had never danced professionally before. Nor danced a lot at all. He liked dancing at parties of course, but he’d never tried actual dancing.

Taeyong swiftly made his way to the speakers, grabbing Mark’s phone and pausing the track, he walked over to stand in front of his brother’s boyfriend.

“You ready?” He asked the younger, kind smile in place. Mark licked his lips nervously but nodded anyway. Taeyong beamed, immediately jumping into teaching.

He was patient, kind yet affirmative. Told Mark exactly what the key point for every move was and how to execute it properly, yet interrupted and firmly emphasized the points if Mark messed up. It was a good balance.

“You actually have rhythm so that helps a lot,” Taeyong nodded, smiling teasingly. Mark pursed his lips on mock offense. “Okay fine. But I’m serious. Having a sense of beat is great when dancing and this choreo isn’t that skill focused anyway. As long as you can properly deliver your passion it’s all good.”

Mark smiled in thanks, feeling slightly reassured that the choreo wasn’t exactly set in stone. It relied a lot on natural feelings and expressions.

Eventually they tried it with the music, Taeyong monitoring as Mark tried to dance on the right beat. A smile graced the senior’s lips as he continued replaying the chorus for Mark to practice. The junior was passionate, absolutely. He looked determined and was not keen on making mistakes. He wanted to get everything down perfectly and it warmed Taeyong’s heart to see.

“I think you’re good, wanna try a complete rehearsal, with rapping as well?” Taeyong asked when Mark had finally gotten used to the choreography. It wasn’t hard nor long and mostly repetitive, so Taeyong figured it was sticking to his memory easier.

“Okay, let’s get it!” Mark hollered, slightly breathless from dancing. Taeyong headed over to turn on the music and then they were doing it for real. Rapping their parts, the chorus and the choreography. Everything. Even if there was no audience or anyone else in the room, they were giving it their all. That was one thing Taeyong had always admired about Mark. He always gave it his all. That was also something Taeyong figured they had in common.

“We did it!” Mark exclaimed excitedly as the music came to a stop. Taeyong nodded, feeling a great sense of pride, and Mark rushed forward to give him a hug. Taeyong was still for a second before reciprocating. Mark didn’t show affection very often so Taeyong figured he should cherish the moment.

“We did,” he nodded, laughing as Mark pulled away with a wide smile. Taeyong lingered for another second before heading over to his water bottle. Mark went for his own bag to pick up his bottle as well. Taeyong settled, cross legged on the floor while Mark plopped down into a chair.

“It’s not long until the show now,” Taeyong said, breaking the comfortable silence.

“Five days to go,” Mark nodded, sinking down in his seat.
“And how does it feel to compete against your own boyfriend?” Taeyong inquired teasingly. Mark scoffed playfully.

“How does it feel to compete against your own little brother?” He countered, causing Taeyong to giggle.

“Fair enough,” the older acquiesced when something occurred to him. “Oh! I just realized. We never had the big brother threatening the boyfriend talk.” Taeyong smirked as a panicked look came over Mark, the younger sitting up straight.

“Don’t you think we’re past that?” Mark wondered, laughing nervously. Taeyong shrugged, indifferent.

“Oh I don’t know.”

“Aww come on Taeyong hyung!” Mark almost whined, making Taeyong break his facade.

“Fine. I’ll let you off the hook for now.”

Mark sank down in his chair again, shaking his head in disbelief.

No me would want to be on the receiving end of a threatening talk with Lee Taeyong. Especially when it concerned his brothers.

~

Jaehyun sighed as he laid in his bed, shirt discarded and hair messy. He scrolled through his phone, feeling bored. School was over for the day, Taeyong was practicing with Mark, and his other friends were still recuperating from the finals. At least that’s what he thought, raising a confused eyebrow when the doorbell rang. His parents were at work, so he was the only one at home.

With swift agility he got out of bed and jogged down the stairs, to the front door.

“Hey,” he said, confused yet happy, when Johnny was the one on the other side. Johnny smiled, looking slightly nervous.

“Hi,” Johnny greeted, Jaehyun letting him in.

“Is something wrong?” Jaehyun wondered as Johnny removed his shoes and jacket. The tall senior looked very nervous which was unusual.

“Not really,” Johnny said, sighing slightly as they walked inside. He took a seat on the couch, waiting for Jaehyun to sit down next to him. The brunet did so, although cautiously. He waited patiently for Johnny to speak. Which the other did. “Remember that time, like two weeks ago? When you asked if something had happened. If I was in trouble?” Jaehyun nodded, remembering it clearly. “Well it isn’t really something bad, but I guess I should tell you.” Johnny straightened, sucking in a deep breath as he prepared to tell his best friend.

“I applied for a university in Chicago. And I got my letter of acceptance today.”

Jaehyun felt like he’d just stepped out of a cold shower. His best friend. Johnny. Johnny who is his best friend. Johnny was leaving. Yet he stopped his thoughts right there. Because Johnny got accepted to a university in America. He got accepted and that was something to celebrate. Therefore, Jaehyun let a smile grace his lips.
“That’s great,” he breathed, still feeling shocked. He tried to shake himself out of it, feeling slightly better. “I’m proud of you.” He was. He actually truly was. Yet he couldn’t help but be sad, for he would miss his best friend so much.

“Thank you,” Johnny managed, some of the tension leaving him. “But I haven’t accepted yet. I wanted to tell you first.” Jaehyun gave him a wistful smile.

“Do you want to go there?” Jaehyun asked, feeling his eyes tearing up slightly. “More than anywhere else?”

“Yes,” Johnny answered, truthfully, for his eyes shimmered with want.

“Then you should accept.”

Johnny’s smile was small and bittersweet yet thankful to Jaehyun for not making it harder than it already is.

“Does Mark know?” Jaehyun wondered, then, breaking the fragile silence.

“Yeah,” Johnny sighed. “He wants me to do whatever makes me happy.”

“That’s good,” Jaehyun nodded in approval. Then something clicked into place. “Did Ten know?” Johnny’s hesitance was answer enough. That’s why they’d been secretive.

“He found out by himself. He borrowed my phone and saw the search history because he’s the devil,” Johnny chuckled. “I had to tell him.” Jaehyun nodded. He knew how Ten could be.

“You know, Taeyong thought you guys were together,” the brunet revealed then, chuckling. His laughter stopped instantly when he saw Johnny’s red cheeks. “Wait a second! Are you?” Johnny shook his head though.

“We’re not,” he promised. “Not yet at least.” Jaehyun stared. Eyes wide.

“Taeyong is gonna freak.”

“Don’t say that. We’re not together. We’ve just expressed some interest,” Johnny defended.

“Some interest,” Jaehyun repeated, eyebrows raised and mouth curving into a smirk.

“Shut up,” Johnny protested, not being able to stop a smile from spreading on his own lips.

Jaehyun simply smiled innocently.

~

“How you holding up?” Sunmi questioned gently, voice quiet. Taeyong sighed gripping the phone slightly. He was in his room, resting while Donghyuck made dinner. He felt guilty for leaving the younger alone but Donghyuck insisted.

“I’m good,” Taeyong said, his finals were done, the performance was done, school was done. Everything was fine. Except the one thing Sunmi was actually referring to.

“Any ideas yet?” She inquired, sounding incredibly tired. Taeyong could relate to that.

“No,” he sighed, feeling defeated. They had properly hit a dead end. Even Max was out of ideas. They had searched the Lee family tree. Finding that their grandparents on both sides were dead and
their actual parents were both only children. Not even a distant parent’s cousin could be located. They had also talked to social services and nothing could be swayed to their advantage.

“Don’t give up,” Sunmi whispered, sounding quite defeated herself. Taeyong shook his head in anger. Anger at his parents at the system at the world.

“I won’t,” he promised nonetheless. He wouldn’t because his brothers needed him and they deserved a better life.

“I won’t either,” Sunmi promised. Taeyong could hear the slight smile on her voice. They wouldn’t give up.

As long as there was hope, they couldn’t give up.

“I hope you’re ready for Friday,” Sunmi said then, her tone taking on a teasing hint. “Max is very excited and I would hate for her to be disappointed.” Taeyong laughed.

“Don’t worry, we’re all ready,” he promised. Mark had the choreography down and their raps were perfected to the slightest detail. He hadn’t heard much from Donghyuck but he assumed the younger was just as prepared as them. Knowing Donghyuck’s singing ability, Taeyong knew that the audience would not be disappointed.

“That’s great,” Sunmi said, laughing. “Hayoon has been dying to see Jisung and Chenle.”

“They miss her too,” Taeyong agreed. “they promised to save you guys seats.”

“Perfect. I guess we will see you on Friday then.”

“You definitely will.”

“Bye Taeyong.”

“Bye noona.”

Taeyong spent the night drawing. Sketching small symbols and words, trying to come up with the best possible ones. He didn’t know for sure if he was gonna go through with it, but somehow it felt right.

He tried them out on his arms, looking for good spots and angles. He looked upon his work with satisfaction once he was done. It looked very nice yet he still felt uncertain. Tattooing was highly looked down upon by some people, yet Taeyong found that he shouldn’t care. They were beautiful. And they symbolized something important. Something very important to him.

That’s all that mattered.

Chapter End Notes

Now there’s only two chapters and an epilogue left (unless something changes, then there might be more). Wow. This is crazy.
Hope you’ve enjoyed the chapter and don’t be afraid to comment :))
Taeyong took deep breaths as he tried to calm his fraying nerves. He had just entered the school’s backstage area, where only participants of the talent show were allowed. It was at least an hour before the show so Mark had not arrived yet. Taeyong knew the junior was with Donghyuck so his little brother had not arrived either. He sat quietly at one of the chairs. The room they were in was small and slightly cramped but he didn’t particularly mind. He didn’t know most of the people in there, but they were all so focused on themselves and their own performances to care about him. He greeted Rosé, but otherwise he didn’t recognize anyone.

He sank down in the chair he was seated on, sighing and trying to calm his racing heart.

The door opened to let in more participants and Taeyong jerked up, smiling when he saw who it was.

“Hey,” he breathed, gathering the attention of Jonghyun. The dark haired male grinned back and went over to sit with him. Jonghyun has also been one of the people accepted into the final lineup and Taeyong knew he was dancing. Apparently with Chungha and Seulgi.

“Hey,” Jonghyun greeted pleasantly, reaching out to grab his hand. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too,” Taeyong admitted, chuckling, embarrassed. “How were finals?”

“Surprisingly it went well,” Jonghyun nodded. His dark hair laid wavy over his forehead, eyed lined with dark makeup. Taeyong liked the look. “What about you?”

“I survived,” Taeyong laughed near hysterically for a split second. He was prone to spasming when nervous and this was one of those occasions. Jonghyun shook his head, amused.

“That you did,” he winked. “I’ll see you later, I have to go check off with the stage managers.”

Taeyong nodded and reluctantly let go of his friend’s hand. He could really use the distraction, especially as Mark wasn’t there yet.

He fished his phone out from his pocket and opened his messages, sending one to Yuta. The Japanese male responded within seconds, a cute encouraging message with lots of heart emojis.

you can do it Taeyong! We believe in you!

And after came a selca of Yuta and Taeil.
Taeyong smiled down at it, feeling slightly better.

He didn’t have to wait long for Mark to show up after that, the junior bursting through the doors with Suhyun and Donghyuck on his tail. Taeyong snorted teasingly and rose from his seat.

“You should be glad that I love you,” he threatened and grabbed Mark’s wrist, pulling the younger with him out of the room. Donghyuck and Suhyun laughed at Mark’s panicky expression. Taeyong quickly found a bathroom and dragged Mark inside.

“I’m sorry hyung,” he pleaded. “We list track of time.” Taeyong nodded, appearing nonchalant, as he opened his bag and took out various makeup articles and clothing garments.

“Fine,” he sighed as he turned back to Mark who looked like a kicked puppy. “You’re forgiven.” The younger immediately breathed out in relief. “Now close your eyes.”

Taeyong proceeded to give Mark’s face a touch up, trying to bring forth his best featured as well as possible. He wanted them to stand out on stage. Their song held a message after all.

“You’re good at this,” Mark said, relaxing into it.

“I have younger siblings,” Taeyong said, rolling his eyes in amusement. Mark hummed.

After Taeyong finished Mark’s makeup he did his own quickly. He’d already applied a base at home so it didn’t take long. Then he did the hair.

Eventually they were ready enough to leave the cramped bathroom.

They hadn’t really changed clothes, only added some accessories and outer garments to match the makeup.

When Mark and Taeyong walked back into the little room where all the participants resided Taeyong could feel everyone’s attention on them. He noticed that Mark tensed up at the blatant interest shown, and subtly shielded him from view slightly. Taeyong was used to people staring, no matter if it was admiration or scorn. He had seen it all. He didn’t want Mark to be exposed like that.

They sat down next to Suhyun and Donghyuck who were both wearing makeup, matching black nail polish and similar colour arrangements of clothes. Mostly shimmery grey and black.

“Wow,” Donghyuck uttered as he saw Mark. “My brother can work miracles. You’re not even ugly anymore,” he teased. Mark scoffed and reached out to hit his arm.

“Shut up,” he grumbled, Donghyuck sticking his tongue out.

“Stop fighting kids,” Taeyong told them, jokingly.

“He started it,” Mark protested with a barely hidden smile. Donghyuck grinned innocently while Suhyun was rubbing her temples, as if their antics were normal occurrence. Which they probably were for her.

Taeyong tried to stop his leg from bouncing up and down in nervousness. This was the first time they were showing their rapping and own lyrics. Taeyong had never thought he would share such deeply personal lyrics before and it was still a daunting experience to go through with.

His heart filled with relief when the door opened and a head peeked inside.

“We start in ten,” Doyoung said, looking tired yet satisfied. Everything must be running smoothly
then. “Everyone ready?” A chorus of affirmatives met him and he breathed a sigh of relief before turning his eyes to Taeyong who smiled at him. Doyoung gently slipped into the room and went over to his friend.

“Everyone ready?” Taeyong asked, smiling as Doyoung promptly fell down in the seat next to him, head lolling into Taeyong’s shoulder.

“Just peachy. I’m glad that this is gonna be over soon,” Doyoung admitted tiredly. Taeyong reached out to stroke his hair gently. Usually they weren’t so affectionate but Taeyong could tell that Doyoung needed the assurance.

“You’re doing great. It’s going to be a legendary night,” Taeyong promised. Doyoung smiled and let him pet his hair a bit more before straightening up.

“Okay,” he nodded. “I have to go. Good luck out there.”

“Thank you,” Taeyong said, waving as Doyoung left the room with a final goodbye.

~

Jaehyun relaxed back into his seat, relieved. They had managed to find enough seats for everyone to fit, and squeeze themselves together cozily. They were early enough, almost fifteen minutes, and Jaehyun was thankful for Ten and Yuta’s quick dictatorship. Johnny and Jaehyun were the ones driving, meaning that they also picked up the Lee brothers. Chenle and Jisung were running around looking for lost things while Lucas was barely dressed, therefore, Yuta and Ten had taken command and gotten them all into the cars in record time.

Now they were actually seated.

The auditorium was beginning to fill up quite nicely and Jaehyun had to lean onto Johnny who was beside him as the brunet had taken up the seat next to the aisle and people were constantly pushing their way through there.

“This is so exciting,” Johnny exclaimed, from next to him. The tall senior was grinning, looking toward the stage as he observed the students who were staff running around, trying to get everything ready.

“Yeah,” Jaehyun had to agree. “Doyoung did a good job.”

It didn’t take long until someone tapped Jaehyun’s shoulder gently. He looked up, confused. Two women and a little girl were standing there.

“Hi,” the one with an all black outfit said. “Are you Jaehyun?”

“Yes,” he confirmed, smiling hesitantly.

“Great! I’m Max, Taeyong’s noona,” the women said, smiling back. “This is Sunmi and Hayoon.”

Jaehyun had actually heard all about them, Taeyong having talked about them quite often.

“Ah!” Johnny exclaimed. “I thought I recognized you! Taeyong showed me your wedding pictures,” he said, grinning. Max’s eyes lit up.

“Hayoon!” Came a loud voice, Chenle standing on his seat and waving. The little girl who had been quiet up until then grinned and shouted back. She tugged on Max’s hand and the woman let go so
Hayoon could wiggle her way through everyone and get to Chenle and Jisung.

“We can squeeze in,” Jaehyun said, nudging Johnny’s shoulder. Eventually Chenle and Jisung ended up on the laps of Ten and Taeil. Hayoon made herself comfortable on Yuta who had charmed her out of shyness.

Max and Sunmi gingerly took the two spots which had been freed and breathed out gently in relaxation.

“How has it been going?” Jaehyun asked, glad to not have the aisle seat anymore. “With Taeyong’s parents?” Sunmi smiled ruefully.

“Not great, honestly,” she answered and they left it at that. Jaehyun could tell that she was disappointed with the progress they had made.

Silence commenced and Jaehyun glanced around the auditorium, trying to pick out familiar faces. He noticed Jeno, Jaemin and Renjun close to the front. Jackson, Jooheon and Amber on the opposite side of the aisle. No sight of Doyoung or anyone from the talent show committee. He did see several teachers though.

The lights started dimming slightly as it neared showtime.

Jaehyun was nearly vibrating with excitement. He had no idea of how anything would go and the anticipation was killing him.

Soon enough, the lights were completely dimmed and a figure stepped onto the stage. Jaehyun could barely make out Seungkwan’s figure. When he stopped in the centre of the stage, a spotlight being turned on. Jaehyun could clearly see the suit he was wearing and the microphone in his hand.

“Welcome to the first talent show ever in the history of this school!” He greeted them. “We have selected a few special acts for you to witness tonight and the winning performance will be awarded with a gift certificate to Décalcomanie Café!”

Applause rose from the audience, the auditorium completely filled.

“Our judges tonight are some very special guests. Welcome! Former students, Park Chanyeol, Byun Baekhyun and Oh Sehun!” The crowd cheered loudly as the three stepped onto stage, most of the teachers and older students in the audience knowing exactly who they were. Chanyeol bowed graciously, Baekhyun waving and Sehun merely smiled. They took their seats at the very front row.

“And the owners of Décalcomanie café who so kindly provided the gift certificate for tonight! Yongsun, Wheein, Hyejin and Moonbyul!”

The four women walked in, smiling and waving as they also took their seats at the front row. Seungkwan smiled and cleared his throat before speaking again.

“And with that,” he said, eyes sparkling. “Let the show begin!”

~

Taeyong could feel his heart beating as the talent show officially began. He watched as the room started buzzing with excitement, the first act leaving to get on stage. Mark and Taeyong were somewhere around the end so they didn’t worry quite yet.

Taeyong couldn’t believe that they were actually doing it. Performing. Really, it wasn’t that different
from dancing, yet it seemed much more important. This was their lyrics. They were representing themselves. Their thoughts and feelings.

Mark looked equally nervous, his leg bouncing up and down anxiously.

Taeyong saw Donghyuck putting his hand gingerly on Mark’s leg and pat it reassuringly. The junior stopped and reached down to intertwine their fingers. Taeyong smiled at the display and it calmed his nerves a bit.

Several performances came and went, the tension rising to unbelievable heights. The only time Taeyong spoke was to wish Jonghyun, Seulgi and Chungha good luck when it was their turn.

And then it was finally their turn.

“Mark and Taeyong!” Called the senior student who’s job it was to make sure that everyone got on stage in time.

They both shared a nervous look before getting up. Mark squeezed Donghyuck’s hand one last time before they headed out.

“Good luck!” Suhyun and Donghyuck shouted after them.

~

Jaehyun perked up when he heard Seungkwan announce the next act. Taeyong and Mark.

He swiftly leaned forward in his seat, the lights dimming on stage. A rough beat started playing, almost dirty.

*You make me so mad*

Jaehyun’s eyebrows raised as the intro played, the stage remaining empty. Then a voice started rapping. A voice Jaehyun recognized very well.

*When I’m in the house, guess what happens*

At the end it always turns out
To be empty and demolished (I killed it)

Jaehyun marveled at the lyrics and Mark’s flow, never having heard the younger rap before. It was mind blowing. And he looked great as well. Jaehyun smiled as his almost-little brother, seeing his fancy clothes and the makeup. He looked so confident, so comfortable. He was dominating the stage.

*A damn mic in my fist now (how?)*

Could this be possible?
Am I that powerful?
Guess that’s why rumors
Around the world are saying that
Mark is absolutely fully capable

Soon enough, Mark’s verse ended and made way for Taeyong. And holy fuck. His voice. Jaehyun was gobsmacked. Taeyong’s voice was raspy. *Raspy.*

*Be quiet this is downtown*

I don’t need anything kick up
I’m this area’s janitor
Stop talking and clean up

“He’s really good,” Johnny whispered from beside him, Jaehyun nodding in stunned agreement.

To all those suffering from lack of attention
Shame on you
Starting from now I’ll call you a nickname boo
Stop caring about other peoples thoughts, this is originally you
Whatever anybody says I’m gonna do gotta do
By the time you get your head straight I’m gone I’m done

Jaehyun absolutely loved the lyrics and he adored his boyfriend’s look. He was also feeling incredibly hot because damn his boyfriend was gorgeous.

The chorus started, and it was terribly addicting. The choreography looked awesome and Jaehyun really couldn’t stop marveling at the performance in itself.

And if anyone was listening to the lyrics, then he could bet they were sorely regretting messing with Lee Taeyong.

~

Taeyong was sweating as he stepped off stage, a huge smile on his face. The applause when the were done had been thunderous and he thought they had a pretty good chance of winning.

They met Donghyuck and Suhyun on the way, Taeyong giving his little brother a hug while Mark dropped a peck on his cheek in the excitement. Donghyuck gave them both thumbs up and then left to get on stage himself. As they entered the backstage area the rest of the participants were looking at them curiously, gauging their satisfied faces.

Mark and Taeyong didn’t pay them any mind, taking their seats at the corner of the room.

They were both breathing harshly, adrenaline pumping through their veins from the hype of the performance.

Taeyong could hear the notes playing from the Disney arrangement Donghyuck and Suhyun were singing. It was a medley of different songs and their voices sounded beautiful together. He smiled proudly as he leaned back in his chair, letting their sweet melodies lull him back into relaxation.

Mark was still breathless beside him, eyes wide and mouth stretched into a smile.

“We did it hyung,” he breathed, turning to look at Taeyong. The older nodded and grinned, eyes closing gently.

“We did.”

~

Jaehyun was basically sitting on his hands, leg bouncing up and down. He was biting his lip so hard, he might even draw blood.

“And the winner is...” Baekhyun said, keeping the tension high. Every participants had been brought up to the stage, and Jaehyun could see Taeyong reaching out to hold Mark’s hand.

“Taeyong and Mark!” Chanyeol shouted, effectively ruining Baekhyun’s momentum.
The auditorium erupted with cheers, Jaehyun jumping from his seat and shouting his throat raw. Johnny was whistling loudly from the seat next to him and Jaehyun felt so proud. Of both Mark and Taeyong. And Donghyuck and Suhyun they had all been amazing.

He watched as Mark and Taeyong walked to the judges, receiving the gift certificate from Hyejin and a trophy from Sehun.

“And don’t forget!” Seungkwan cut in, smiling happily. “Please give a big hand for the person behind all of this. Kim Doyoung!” And Jaehyun was shouting again because really, Doyoung deserved it as he had done a great job.

The dark haired senior got up on the stage, smiling awkwardly. Taeyong was quick to pull him into a hug as the applause continued to rain down upon them.

*Jaehyun couldn’t be more proud.*

He was so engrossed that he didn’t even see Sunmi slip away to take a call.

~

Taeyong, Mark, Donghyck and Suhyun quickly found their friends and family by the entrance as they exited the school building. Sicheng, Jungwoo, Lucas, Chenle, Jisung, Taeil, Yuta, Johnny, Jaehyun, Ten and Max with Hayoon. Jaemin, Renjun and Jeno were there as well. Taeyong briefly wondered where Sunmi was, but didn’t linger on it. He was enveloped in a hug by his brothers immediately after getting close enough. Various shouts of:

“We’re so proud hyung!”

reached his ears and he smiled carelessly. He noticed that Johnny had done the same with Mark. Taeyong knew that their parents couldn’t make it, but Mark seemed content anyway.

Max and Hayoon gave him a rose which Hayoon had apparently picked out herself.

Jaemin, Jeno and Renjun were hugging Suhyun and praising her voice, she looked properly embarrassed which was new while Donghyuck was the second one to be smothered in hugs by the Lee brothers.

Taeyong observed the chaos gladly and felt his heart melt when muscular arms wound themselves around his waist. He leaned back into Jaehyun, receiving a kiss on the lips. Tender and soft.

“You were great up there,” Jaehyun said, smiling into his neck. Taeyong chuckled.

“Thank you,” he accepted graciously nonetheless. He enjoyed he moment for a second more until they were interrupted.

“Taeyong!” Came Sunmi’s voice, her voice frantic. Taeyong was immediately alerted and he broke away gently from Jaehyun to turn in the direction the voice had come from. Sunmi was walking rapidly toward them, phone in her hand.

“What’s wrong?” Taeyong asked when she finally reached them.

“You were great and awesome on stage but I have to speak with you right now,” she told him, urgent. Taeyong’s eyes widened in concern and he gave his brothers a reassuring look before following Sunmi so they were out of ear shot.
“What is it?” He asked, suddenly feeling scared. Sunmi took a deep breath, gathering her thoughts. And then she said what Taeyong had least expected.

“It was the police, Taeyong,” Sunmi’s look was one of wonder. “Your parents. They’re dead.”
Chapter 117

Chapter Notes

A bit short BUT there will be another chapter after this so do not fret!
I repeat, there will be another chapter after this AND an epilogue after that :))
So I hope you will enjoy this <3333
Not proofread as usual ahhhhhh

Taeyong stared up at his ceiling, not really knowing what to feel. The tapestry in his room was oddly soothing, a dark midnight blue. He liked blue. It was like the sea, or the sky, or the nail polish Donghyuck often wore. It was nice.

With a sigh his mind reluctantly started floating toward less nice things.

Sunmi had promised not to tell anyone else, earlier that night. And Taeyong had dismissed all the concerns his brothers and friends expressed. He didn’t want to ruin their night. He was telling them in the morning though, no doubt about it. They had to know.

A car crash. Of all blasted things, his parents had died in a car crash.

The other driver had been inebriated and ran a red light. All three of them had died. His mother at the scene. His father in the hospital.

Taeyong felt tears pricking at his eyes. He hated them, he did. He despised them for abandoning their children and leaving him with all the responsibility. But he also felt something for them. They were the people who had birthed him after all. Birthed all his brothers.

Yet he couldn’t help but feel relief. They were gone. They were unable to put another unfortunate soul into the world. They were finally gone and out of his way. And really, it wouldn’t be much different would it.

They were never there to begin with.

~

The mood was sombre the following morning, Taeyong’s fatigued state affecting all of them. Sicheng didn’t know why Taeyong seemed so down when the day before had been such a good day.

He got his answer soon enough.

After breakfast Donghyuck immediately inquired Taeyong.

“Did something happen?” He asked, frowning at their eldest brother. Taeyong looked up at his brothers with an unreadable expression. They were all still seated at the dining table.

“Is it about what Sunmi told you yesterday?” Lucas questioned, eyebrows furrowed. Taeyong sighed
and Sicheng knew it was about exactly that.

“Let’s go sit in the living room,” he said, urging them to get up. He picked up Jisung himself and carried the child on his hip.

They settled in a semi circle around their brother, waiting patiently for him to explain.

“Something happened yesterday,” he began hesitantly, unsure. Sicheng nodded encouragingly, trying to bring some comfort to his eldest brother. “With our parents.” Jisung was frowning up at Taeyong, looking mad.

“They hurt you,” he said, pouting. Taeyong shook his head, carding gentle fingers through Jisung’s soft hair.

“They didn’t hurt me,” he assured. “In fact. They will never hurt me again.” Sicheng’s eyes widened in confusion.

“Stop beating around the bush,” Donghyuck ordered, frustrated by the riddles his brother was speaking.

“Fine,” Taeyong sighed. “Yesterday evening, our parents were driving, they were heading out to meet with some clients. And they got into an accident. They didn’t make it.”

A shocked silence descended upon them, every brother staring in disbelief at their eldest brother. The one who had always taken care of them.

Their parents were gone. Officially gone. Never to disturb them again. Never to hurt Taeyong. Or them.

Sicheng couldn’t help but feel free.

“I don’t know what to feel,” came a timid voice, breaking the fragile silence. Jungwoo.

“There is no right or wrong,” Taeyong assured. “Jungwoo, your feelings are your own and no one else’s. You can feel whatever you want. Be it sadness, anger or even joy. Maybe all of them. It is up to you completely and I would never blame you for feeling whatever it is you feel.”

Jungwoo nodded pensively, looking conflicted. Lucas was staring quietly at his eldest brother, lips pressed together.

“What do you feel hyung?” He couldn’t help but ask, eyes shining. Taeyong gave him a wry smile, hugging Jisung just a bit tighter.

“I feel relieved in a way,” he revealed. “We’re not bound to them anymore. We don’t have to abide by their rules. We don’t have to move anymore. We don’t have to be afraid that they’ll tell the police or that they’ll hurt us,” Taeyong said, all in one swoop. “We are safe and free to make our own choices. And I think that weighs heavier than my grief.”

The brothers looked at him, not appalled by his admittance to not feeling much grief. But rather admiring their brother yet again for his strength, honesty and love. He put so much trust and love into them.

And, in that moment, knowing that they were free. Knowing that they would be together, that they would always support each other. They, too, felt naught but relief.
Taeyong held Jaehyun’s hand firmly as he entered the shop. It was a secluded shop. It was hidden inside a closed off alley, as the business was highly frowned upon and wouldn’t be allowed in the middle of all the other high end shops in the near vicinity.

It had been almost two weeks since the death of Taeyong’s parents.

He’d told his friends about it the day after he’d told his brothers, all of them offering their support to him and promising hey would always be there if he wanted to talk. He didn’t doubt that. His friends were pretty awesome.

He had gone with Sunmi to social services as soon as possible and discussed the proceedings. Even if no one had technically known about the Lee brothers being children of their parents it was still on paper and Taeyong had been contacted by social services almost instantly after he’d told his brothers. It turned out that his parents had never written a will and therefore all their money went automatically to Taeyong. Money had been one of his biggest worries after hearing about the death of his parents. He didn’t know how to support himself and his bothers without their money but it turned out that he didn’t need to worry. He received all the savings of his parents which was a huge amount and knew they would survive for another couple of months at the least.

He was also told that custody of all his brothers would go to him as closest of kin which was an immense relief. He had signed the papers instantly and was officially the legal guardian of all his little brothers. Taeyong had excused himself and cried in the bathroom after the meeting, he was so relieved.

And now, here he was, in a tattoo shop, feeling better than he’d had for a while.

“Are you ready?” Hyolyn asked as she had greeted them. Taeyong smiled and nodded. They had met before to finalise the design and Hyolyn felt like a friend by now. Jaehyun squeezed Taeyong’s hand and followed him to the room where the tattoo would be made.

Taeyong took a seat, Jaehyun pulling his chair up close to Taeyong so he could hold his boyfriend’s hand.

“Let’s begin then,” Hyolyn said as she had picked out all her tools. Taeyong nodded, feeling nervous, and quickly took off his shirt. Hyolyn swabbed the spot she was tattooing with some antiseptics and then she started. Taeyeong frowned in discomfort but Jaehyun was in front of him, smiling soothingly and rubbing his palm calmly.

“You’re doing great babe,” Jaehyun assured, pulling Taeyong’s hand up to his lips and pressing a light kiss to his palm. Taeyong smiled back, slowly getting used to the pain.

Jaehyun continued talking and smiling, trying to distract him, which worked quite well. And soon enough, it was done.

“All done,” Hyolyn said with a smile as she cleaned it up and put a plastic bandaid of sorts on the fresh tattoo, before leaving to clean up her tools. Taeyong relaxed his shoulders, pulling on his shirt when she was done. Jaehyun still held his hand when he pulled up the shirt with his other hand and looked at the piece of art Hyolyn had created. He couldn’t help but be in awe of it.

It was a beautiful tattoo. The size of Jaehyun’s palm, placed right in between Taeyong’s shoulder blades. There stood a great tree, the roots winding their way down, and centered around the majestic tree were six elements. Up in the sky, a beautiful harmony of day and night, of a moon and a sun,
both equal and strong. A littering of stars adorning the sky, above the tree, and a bird, swift and beautiful, flying through the branches. Then the flowers. Baby’s breath, scattered about the ground by the tree, joined by a proud stag, peering curiously and facing the person watching the tattoo.

It was stunning.

“Does it look alright?” Taeyong breathed, the tension unbearable as he felt Jaehyun’s fingers trailing his spine, making him shiver.

“It looks beautiful,” Jaehyun said, letting Taeyong’s shirt down. Taeyong smiled and turned to his boyfriend, pulling him in for a gentle kiss. Jaehyun returned it eagerly.

Taeyong couldn’t wait to show his brothers.

~

It took several days before the tattoo had healed enough for Taeyong to be confident enough to show his brothers. He checked it every day in the mirror and made sure to not walk around shirtless or wear low cut shirts. He had already shown his friends and they all absolutely loved it.

But his brothers were the important ones.

“Guys, come to the living room!” He shouted, feeling nervous. He was seated in the armchair, waiting for them to arrive. They trickled inside soon enough, looking at him inquiringly while taking their seats.

“I have something to show you,” he said, when everyone was present. They all looked very curious and Taeyong figured he wouldn’t keep it from them any longer. So in one quick motion he pulled off his shirt and turned his back toward them.

He heard a gasp that sounded much like Jungwoo and turned his head to look at them.

They all looked various levels of shocked and awed.

“It’s so cool hyung!” Chenle exclaimed, looking overjoyed. Taeyong smiled softly and chuckled.

“It’s really beautiful,” Sicheng agreed, Jisung and Lucas creeping closer to inspect. Donghyuck was staring, eyes shimmering.

“And it holds special meaning,” Taeyong said, settling on the floor, still with his back slightly turned to show them the tattoo.

“What does it mean?” Jungwoo questioned, curious. Taeyong smiled.

“The sun, is Donghyuck,” mentioned brother’s eyes widened abnormally. “Warm and strong. Shining brightly and always able to bring a smile to our faces. The moon is Sicheng. Calm and tranquil, yet as beautiful and strong as the sun, guiding the way through the dark. The flowers. Baby’s breath. Pure and innocent, yet strong willed and powerful, Jungwoo. The stag, proud and tall, curious and carefree. Lucas. And Chenle. The bird. Active, beautiful and swift. Soaring high in the sky. And lastly. Jisungie. The stars. Glowing brightly, untouchable and admired, yet anchoring us to the earth.”

Taeyong could tell that his brothers were touched by the gesture, seeing Donghyuck’s eyes shimmering with unsure tears.
“What about the tree,” Chenle asked, voice quiet in the heavy atmosphere. Taeyong opened his mouth to speak but was intercepted.

“Taeyong hyung,” Sicheng breathed. “The tree stands strong and tall, protecting the forest and encouraging its growth. The tree is the roots.”

Taeyong smiled, putting his shirt back on gently and feeling the warmth in the air. The living aura and the unspoken words which were so clear.

“Love you hyung,” Jungwoo was the first one to speak, smiling at his eldest brother. Taeyong felt his own eyes watering.

“I love you too. All of you.”
Graduation day was a big deal. Taeyong didn’t particularly feel anything special, but his brothers were doting on. They made a big breakfast before he even woke up and Sicheng proudly showed him his graduation suit already ironed. Taeyong shook his head at their antics, smiling fondly. They ate breakfast in a joyful manner, all his brothers already off for summer break. Lucas was chattering about every little thing he wanted to do during the break while Jungwoo spoke of spending break with his friends. Sicheng had plans for a camping trip ready with Somin, Jiwoo, Kun, Matthew and J. Seph while Donghyuck had plans to go to a lot of beaches with Mark and their friends. They were far away from any sort of beach, but Johnny had promised that Mark could borrow the car occasionally. Chenle was going to play with Daehwi, Hitomi and Somi. Jisung was kind of lost and simply focused on eating instead. Taeyong felt happy seeing his brothers so excited and knew that he was in for a lot of fun this summer too. His friends wanted all of them to spend as much time together as possible since they were to leave for different universities this fall. The thought made Taeyong’s stomach churn in concern as it was too late for him to apply for this year’s term and he would not be attending. Money was also a problem. Even if they had a lot, it would run out eventually, so he should probably get a job. They might even move. The house was incredibly expensive after all.

He shook his head to clear away all the worries for now. It wasn’t the right time and place. Now he was going to enjoy breakfast with his brothers and proceed to finally graduate.

~

The gym hall was buzzing with energy as the students lined up. Taeyong knew his brothers were in the crowd and he didn’t worry too much about them getting lost or separated. Sicheng was responsible and would make sure it didn’t happen.

He quickly weaved his way through the rows of students, greeting the people he considered friends. Hugging Jonghyun, waving at Jackson and Jooheon, squeezing Kun’s arm in passing, smiling at Amber. He couldn’t believe his time as a high school student was actually over.

He quickly interlocked his fingers with Yuta as he finally approached his friends. The Japanese male grinned widely at him and pulled him in for a hug.
“I can’t believe this,” Yuta said, voice low and awed. Taeyong shook his head in agreement.

“Me either honestly.”

Taeyong quickly got pulled into embraces of Johnny, Ten, Taeil and Doyoung, while Jaehyun dropped a kiss to his lips.

They all liked his accordingly and fidgeted nervously as they waited for the principal to start speaking.

“This is surreal,” Doyoung breathed, looking much better than he’d had in weeks. His eyes were bright and clear, complexion pale and unblemished.

“It is,” Taeil agreed, sounding nervous.

“I can’t believe we made it,” Johnny said, looking around him, at the crowd and the students. Taeyong saw Ten reach out to hold Johnny’s hand. He automatically squeezed Jaehyun’s hand which was already in his grip. Jaehyun smiled at him, reaching out to clasp Johnny’s shoulder.

“We made it,” he confirmed. “It’s over.” Taeyong smiled at his friends, smiling o the positive energy surrounding them completely.

“It may be over,” he nodded. “But that only means it’s the beginning of something new.”

~

Donghyuck pounced on him as soon as he exited the gym hall, throngs of people surrounding them all around. Taeyong chuckled and hugged him tightly.

“I’m so proud of you hyung,” Donghyuck whispered, letting go of him. Taeyong gave him a sincere smile and was quick to be caught up in another hug, by Sicheng, then Lucas, then Chenle, then Jungwoo and lastly Jisung. He picked the toddler up and looked over his shoulder to see Johnny being smothered by his parents with Mark standing awkwardly beside them. Jaehyun was enclosed in a tight hug by his father, Doyoung receiving similar treatment from his brother and parents. Taeil’s parents and grandparents were there which made Taeyong smile even wider. His smile dimmed slightly when he noticed Yuta, Ten, Amber and Jackson standing together, smiling and chatting. He knew all of them were foreign students but it still made his heart clench painfully, seeing them without their families. He could comfort himself with the fact that he knew Ten and Yuta would be returning home during the break for a few weeks at least.

“Here hyung,” Jungwoo pulled him out of his reverie and Taeyong turned back to his brothers, Jisung still in his arms. Jungwoo was holding out a minimalistic bouquet of flowers, different sorts and colors that fit perfectly together. Taeyong reached out and took them gently, awed at the beauty of them.

“Congratulations on graduating hyung,” Lucas grinned. Taeyong smiled back at them, a gentle and loving smile.

“Thank you so much,” he breathed, holding the flowers like they were a precious treasure. Jisung reached out a hand to place on his cheek. Taeyong kisses his palm, making the youngest giggle quietly.

He had never felt so at peace.

~
He met up with Sunmi and Max for lunch because he would be meeting his friends that night during the party anyway. Sunmi and Max had picked him up from home and simultaneously left Hayoon in Donghyuck’s care since he was babysitting. Sicheng was out celebrating with Kun, Jiwoo and Somin.

Taeyong ate his food happily, feeling nothing but joy. Sunmi and Max both watched him fondly, sharing knowing looks.

“So what happened to the company?” Taeyong asked after a while, suddenly reminded of Sunmi’s job at his parents company. The woman snorted, smiling.

“I quit my job,” she announced.

“Finally,” Max added, sounding very happy about that. Taeyong smiled.

“I’m glad,” he said. “Now you can pursue a career you actually want.” Sunmi sighed slightly.

“Oh I don’t know. I’m a bit lost honestly,” she admitted. Taeyong could understand that. He could relate perfectly well to that.

“It’s okay,” he said, shrugging. “Me too.” Max laughed gently at them, sipping her drink. It was a warm day and the cafe was relatively empty as they were quite late, for it being lunch. Max preferred it that way, not liking it when too many people stared at their unusual appearances. A boy with pinkish hair, Max herself in all black and Sunmi who was just naturally gorgeous and eye catching (Max might be slightly biased. Only slightly).

“I never got to thank you,” Taeyong suddenly said, looking at them both gravely. Max raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “For helping me with my parents.”

“We weren’t much help,” Max shrugged, frowning. She still felt disappointed in their inability to find a proper solution, even if the problem was technically solved by now.

“You were,” Taeyong countered. “You were there. You tried to help. You always cared and you always stayed with me.” Taeyong said, glancing extra at Sunmi. Her only reason for staying with the Lee’s has been Taeyong and his brothers after all. “You supported us where not many others have. And I am really thankful.” Sunmi was smiling at him, like a proud older sister, eyes watering slightly. With a laugh she told him;

“I couldn’t stop caring even if I wanted to. And I’m glad I didn’t. Thank you, Taeyong. For remaining strong and always encouraging me to fight on. You’re an inspiration Taeyong. And don’t forget that.”

~

The sun was still up when Jaehyun pulled into Jackson’s street. He was driving Taeyong, Ten and Taeil, Johnny driving Yuta and Doyung. Johnny’s car was already parked at the curb and Jaehyun was quick to do the same. Jaehyun couldn’t help but sneak glances at his boyfriend as they were walking inside. Taeyong wore skin tight jeans and an oversized hoodie which revealed way too much collarbone and it even gave a sneak peek of his tattoo. Jaehyun felt his mount go dry when he watched the smooth expanse of skin on revealed by Taeyong’s shirt and didn’t manage to tear his gaze away until Ten whacked him on the head.

“Stop ogling and move your ass, Jung Jaehyun. We can’t stand here all day,” Ten complained with a smirk, motioning toward the hallway Jaehyun was currently blocking the way out of. He rolled his eyes but complied nonetheless, following Taeyong who had disappeared while Jaehyun had been
lost in thought. He greeted his teammates as he went, ignored some dirty looks some girls threw at him and quickly located Johnny and Doyoung in the hallway sofa. Taeyong had already found his way to them, hugging each and every one of them. Jaehyun smiled and went closer. Ten was hot on his tail while Taeil had been stopped by Amber.

“Hey Jaehyun!” Johnny said, holding up a drink. It was clearly alcohol. Jaehyun shook his head but greeted him nonetheless.

“I think we’ll have to sleep here at the rate he’s going,” Doyoung complained rolling his eyes, although fondly. He wasn’t really irritated, Jaehyun knew he was actually feeling great.

“Taeil can drive instead,” Ten dismissed and plopped down next to Johnny who immediately drew the smaller male into himself. Jaehyun smirked at them, knowing they weren’t quite together but obviously interested. Taeyong had come to stand next to him, reaching out to grab his hand. Jaehyun turned to him, raising a questioning eyebrow. Before Taeyong could speak though, they were interrupted.

“Yongie!” Yuta shouted, crashing in between them and separating their hands, just having come back from the kitchen. “Come dance!” He said tugging on Taeyong’s hand. The, now, pink haired male smiled apologetically at Jaehyun and followed his friend.

“I’m coming too,” Ten exclaimed, disentangling himself from Johnny and running after them. Jaehyun shook his head, amused, and took Ten’s abandoned spot next to Johnny.

“Ahh Jaehyun. He’s so pretty,” Johnny mourned, sipping his drink. Jaehyun snorted a laugh, reached out to grab the drink from Johnny’s hand and downed it in a swoop. Johnny pouted at him.

~

Taeyong had been alternating between dancing and sipping drinks in the kitchen. Yuta knew he was a lightweight and therefore, shared drinks with him so Taeyong wouldn’t be drinking a huge amount. The pink haired male wasn’t going home that night anyway so he didn’t really hold back. He was spending the night at Yuta’s to sleep the rush off and then heading home in the morning.

They kept dancing, Ten and Taeyong nearly grinding on each other during the racier songs. They got roped into playing some drinking games and by sunset Taeyong felt light, fun, giggly and considerably drunk. He hadn’t seen much of Johnny, Jaehyun, Taeil or Doyoung but he figured they were hanging out with other people.

“Okay,” Ten said as Taeyong almost toppled over. The music had only gotten louder and louder during the night and some really cool lights had been turned on as the sun had made way for the sake of night. “You need water.” Taeyong nodded in agreement, feeling a sudden bout of dizziness.

He managed to make his way to the kitchen, leaning on Ten as they left Yuta to a game of beer pong. Ten quickly filled a glass and handed it to him. Taeyong gladly downed it and felt considerably better.

“Let’s lay off the alcohol for now,” Ten said with a grin, winking at him. Taeyong nodded with a smile, Ten handing him more water which he sipped slowly.

“I’ll just sit here for a while,” he said, gesturing to his spot by the kitchen bar. “You can go back out.”
“Are you sure?” Ten said dubiously, not wanting to leave him.

“I’m absolutely sure,” Taeyong assured, feeling his mind clearing up slightly. Ten sensed the clarity in his words and nodded, leaving the kitchen with a wave.

Taeyong lounged in his chair for a while, letting the throbbing intoxication leave him as he drank more water. He was feeling perfectly fine when Jaehyun entered the room.

“Hey,” his boyfriend greeted with that dimpled smile. Taeyong smiled back, reaching out to pull Jaehyun close when the other was near enough.

“Hey yourself,” Taeyong said back. “Haven’t seen you for a while. I missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Jaehyun said, eyes glittering. He quickly glanced down at Taeyong’s lips and the pink haired male surged forward, capturing Jaehyun’s lips in a hot kiss. Jaehyun’s arms came to rest around Taeyong’s middle, Taeyong’s fingers trailing his cheeks gently as their lips moved together.

The heat was nearly unbearable and Jaehyun was feeling fuzzy and so hot. So hot.


“No, I’m driving remember,” he answered, pulling away reluctantly.

“I can taste the alcohol on your lips,” Taeyong said, smiling teasingly. Jaehyun laughed, cheeks a light shading of pink.

“Fine. You got me. I had some of Johnny’s drink,” he admitted. “What about you?”

“I’m feeling fine,” Taeyong said, and he was completely right, except the unbearable heat simmering in the pool of his stomach. “Come with me.”

Jaehyun raised an eyebrow but followed as Taeyong led them upstairs, opening a door and finding the bathroom. He quickly pulled Jaehyun inside and locked the door behind them. The light setting was turned on low and Jaehyun couldn’t stop himself as he pressed forward, capturing Taeyong in a heated kiss. The pink haired male made a whiny noise, back pressed up against the door, as Jaehyun completely surrounded him, his scent, his body, his hot breath ghosting over Taeyong’s lips as he drew back for a split second. Taeyong was quick to wrap his arms around Jaehyun’s shoulders, kissing him fervently, as he backed Jaehyun away from the door.

The brunet ended up on the toilet seat, Taeyong climbing on top to sit in his lap. They resumed making out, Jaehyun’s eager hands roaming underneath Taeyong’s shirt. His fingers ghosted over the tattoo and Taeyong let out a satisfied sound. Jaehyun groaned as their bodies pressed together, Taeyong’s lips trailing his neck, his tongue coming out to lick at Jaehyun’s skin. Heat. So much heat.

And then it stopped.

“Okay okay okay,” Taeyong breathed, pulling away slightly. He was still on Jaehyun’s lap though. “We should stop.”

“Yeah,” Jaehyun nodded, even if he was disappointed. He wouldn’t be able to stop himself if they continued but he didn’t want to them to do anything. Not here and not now. Taeyong was breathing harshly, trying to calm down as Jaehyun observed him in awe. His spit slick lips, mussed hair, ruffled shirt. He looked absolutely beautiful. And Jaehyun felt so lucky to have him.
As Taeyong calmed down from the excitement he couldn’t help but feel incredibly happy. He had made it through school. He was free from his parents. He had money to support himself and his family. He had a great boyfriend. He had the best of friends. He had the most beautiful brothers.

He had everything he could’ve ever hoped for.

And, in that exact moment - in Jackson’s bathroom with Jaehyun of all places - Taeyong felt truly, inexplicably happy.

Chapter End Notes

O my gosh only an epilogue left. This is absolutely mad.
Chapter Notes

Here we are. The final chapter. The epilogue.

Hope you all will enjoy this <3333

And here is a drawing of the tattoo, and I am so grateful to @weirdandflowers for making it! Thank you so much <333

https://pbs.twimg.com/media/D4Nl7U5WsAE5i6A?format=jpg&name=large

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The leaves had only started shifting their wondrous colors, from green to yellow, to orange, like a flame in the wind, blowing and shuddering and eventually sailing to the ground. Autumn.

Taeyong liked autumn.

He breathed in deeply as he stepped out of the van. The same van he’d had since he first got his license because he knew that anything less would not fit all his brothers. He ran a hand through his pink hair, the strands soft between his fingers.

Donghyuck stepped out next, looking up at the building in front of them. His hair had reverted into a light shade of chestnut, gentle waves hanging across his forehead. His face looked sharper, cheekbones more pronounced and the baby fat starting to diminish. His skin was a healthy tan color after the summer’s merciful weather.

Taeyong went over to help Jisung out, holding the child on his hip. The youngest Lee brother looked up in wonder as Chenle jumped out after them, running forward to grab Donghyuck’s hand firmly. Sicheng emerged from within as well, stepping up to stand next to Taeyong. Tall and proud. Almost an adult, Taeyong smiled wryly. His strawberry blonde had been switched out for a black color, making him look so mature.

Jungwoo and Lucas were next, Jungwoo reaching out to hold Lucas’s hand gently. Jungwoo was sporting a dark brown hair color now, Lucas still in his blonde.

Taeyong looked over all of them, smiling. He had seen them grow so much during the last couple of months. It had been crazy. The summer had been an adventure in itself, every day spent to the fullest. Taeyong had definitely had an eventful summer, spending a lot of time with his friends and Jaehyun. But now it was over and making way for another chapter in their life, untested waters.

Taeyong locked the van and started for the door, his brothers following. The traffic buzzed all around them, the environment not a very familiar one. Taeyong put the keycard to the scanner and the door opened with a click. He quickly led his brothers inside, going for the stairs. Jisung was heavy, but nothing he couldn’t handle as he started walking upstairs. His brothers followed silently, vibrating with nervousness and excitement. Three floors up and they were standing in front of their new home. Taeyong gently unlocked the door and pushed it open. He stepped aside and let his
brothers enter first, then followed them inside.

It was their first apartment. They’d never lived in an apartment before.

Taeyong smiled as he took in his brothers satisfied faces. The apartment was spacious. It had several rooms and a good view. It was less expensive than the house they’d lived in previously and, more importantly, it was in Seoul.

Donghyuck had ventured to the big window facing the city. Skyscrapers, Han river, stores and parks. All of it could be seen. All the wonders of the capital.

Taeyong breathed light sigh of relief as he set down Jisung, letting the youngest explore. They liked it. It was okay. He pulled at the sleeves of his purple hoodie, walking around gingerly. The apartment was empty, everything cleaned out, therefore, it echoed as he stepped toward the hallway. He checked every room, bathroom, the kitchen and eventually ended up back in the living room. It was considerably smaller than any place they’d lived before, but Taeyong figured it would be fine. His brothers had all been unanimous in their decision to move, feeling like they could use a fresh start, away from anything influenced by their parents. Together they had decided on the apartment.

“Jaehyun hyung’s here!” Jungwoo exclaimed, looking out the window and down at the street where they’d parked the van. Taeyong walked over and peered outside, seeing the big truck pulling up. Jaehyun was indeed there.

Taeyong smiled involuntarily and followed as his brothers rushed down the stairs.

Jaehyun had exited the truck when they arrived, smiling happily as he drew Taeyong into a hug. Sicheng and Donghyuck headed straight for the back of the truck, opening it and looking over the boxes and furniture inside. They’d bought a lot of new furniture which were still in boxes as well so it was easier to transport. The younger brothers were quick to explore the contents of the truck.

“How was the drive?” Taeyong asked, giving Jaehyun a chaste kiss. The brunet smiled, kissing him again before answering.

“I had a great time, you?” Taeyong chuckled, disentangling himself from his boyfriend.

“We had fun. Everyone sang at the top of their lungs,” he said, heading for the back of the truck where his brothers were unloading things. Jaehyun followed him.

“Sounds great,” he said, dimples making a sincere appearance.

“Are the others coming?” Taeyong wondered gently, watching as his brothers struggled with a particularly heavy box.

“They’re on their way,” Jaehyun nodded. Ten had already settled himself in his new apartment in Seoul. He’d started looking immediately after getting accepted into Korea National University Of Arts and was currently renting a one bedroom apartment close to the university. Not too far away from Taeyong. Both Doyoung and Taeil had also gotten accepted into their wanted universities, both of them in Seoul, while Jaehyun had gotten a scholarship for sports to a university which was also in Seoul.

Johnny was currently in Chicago, settling in to his new apartment and new home for the next four years. The goodbye had been a hard one. Especially as Yuta also left for Japan. Taeyong felt the stinging in his eyes as soon as he thought of them. H sighed gently.

Just another part of growing up.
Sicheng and Donghyuck had both been enrolled in the closest high school, Sicheng starting his senior year and Donghyuck his junior year. Lucas and Jungwoo were both attending the middle school while Chenle was starting elementary school. Jisung was enrolled in kindergarten.

Donghyuck’s and Mark’s farewell had been a tearful one as well, but it wouldn’t last long. Mark had already planned which university he wanted to go to and luckily it was in Seoul. He was going to live with Jaehyun once he’d been accepted so really, Donghyuck would be able to see him frequently only a year from now.

Max and Sunmi had taken Hayoon and moved to Seoul as well. Sunmi wanted to try and pursue a career within music, and figured the capital was a good place to start. Max had picked up a job as a barista while Sunmi worked at a cafe, doing auditions anytime it was possible.

Taeyong smiled a bit as he thought of all his friends, a bittersweet feeling washing over him. His brothers had started carrying their stuff inside and he quickly moved out of his mind and into the real world. Jaehyun and Taeyong grabbed a particularly heavy, big box and started carrying it inside. There was an elevator, but it was small, so no furniture or big boxes would fit. Jaehyun laughed breathlessly as they tried to get it up the stairs, getting stuck at every turn. Taeyong almost collapsed from laughter as well, trying to keep the box from crashing to the floor.

When they finally managed to get it inside, Taeyong plopped down on the floor to catch his breath. He watched amusedly as all his brothers walked in and out with various boxes and items. Jaehyun fell down next to him, Taeyong feeling his gaze on the side of his face.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Jaehyun inquired, smiling gently. Taeyong offered a smile back.

“I’m just thinking of the future,” Taeyong shrugged, pulling his knees up to his chest and leaning back on the wall, his tattoo tingling slightly as his hoodie scratched against it.

“What about it?” Jaehyun wondered, voice gentle and quiet.

“My brothers are growing up,” Taeyong said, a distant look in his eyes. “I’ve already started college funds for them all. And I have a job interview scheduled.” Jaehyun knew about the job interview. It was a night time job, as a waiter at a bar. “Sicheng also offered to work but I really want him to focus on school.”

“Don’t you have money from your parents?” Jaehyun wondered. He understood Taeyong wanting to keep his younger brothers away from the working world, but supporting a family of seven on a waiter’s salary. That sounded impossible.

“We do. But I’m not sure how long it’ll last. For now I’ll try to see if it’s enough that I’m the only one who needs to work,” Taeyong said, concern lacing his voice. Jaehyun scooted closer, grabbing Taeyong’s hand gently.


“I might apply for the spring term. At Korea national university of arts, for the dance major,” he admitted. “But I’m not sure if I can handle it. It’s gonna be expensive. And it won’t give me a great career path.”

“I’m sure you’ll be alright,” Jaehyun said, feeling a proud smile spreading over his lips. “You’re really strong Taeyong. You can do just about anything if you set your mind to it. And you have us. You have me. You have your brothers. And you have some great friends.”

“That I do,” Taeyong agreed, turning to look at him with a appreciative yet vulnerable smile.
“Taeil hyung is here!” Came Lucas’s shrill shout, causing both Taeyong and Jaehyun to turn and look at him. Lucas was looking out of the window, waving excitedly. Taeyong stood and dragged Jaehyun with him, going over to the wide window. He looked down to see Taeil, Doyoung and Ten getting out of a car.

“I’m going downstairs!” Lucas exclaimed, leaving them alone in the apartment. Taeyong kept a firm grip on Jaehyun’s hand as he looked down at the people on the street. His brothers, Lucas joining them quickly, all smiling, all growing, all beautiful. His friends, there, supportive and helpful. Always there for him.

And then at Jaehyun, who was already looking at him with glittering eyes.

“You know,” Jaehyun said, turning his gaze to the skyline visible from the window, “the future is uncertain. And we can’t know for sure what’s gonna happen. But there’s always a rainbow after the rain. And I think your rain has finally subsided.” Jaehyun turned to look at Taeyong again, meeting his eyes head on. “Now there’s only the rainbow left.”

Taeyong squeezed his hand, nodding slightly as he looked to the window yet again. The sun was shining upon them, almost as if it was smiling, and his gaze wandered down to his brothers. His brothers. His life, his strength, his love, his home. His everything.

And Taeyong knew they were going to be okay. They were going to make it. And their future would hold much happiness. He could feel it, in the very core of his being.

As the saying goes;

*Love conquers all.*

Chapter End Notes

This was it! Thank you so much for sticking with me through this journey! I really appreciate very commmet kudos and hit I’ve gotten on this story.

This project has been my biggest one by far, I definitely didn’t expect it to turn out so big and I couldn’t thank you guys enough. It’s been a wild ride, and it has been awesome.

Remember that the future may hold more fics in this universe but don’t expect them to come very soon, I’m not writing anything at the moment, but I have some plans, so keep an eye out for that in the future.

Again, thank you all so much!!! I promise we will see each other again.

Love you <3
Hope you liked it! Comment your thoughts and leave a kudos if you want :))

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