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**Oh My God They Were Roommates**

by lildemonlili

**Summary**

This is the story of what happens when a useless lesbian falls fast and hard and has no clue how the hell to handle it with any kind of grace.

**Notes**

Well it’s been a long road for me working on this for myself and now for all of you. I hope you all like it and that you find it worthy of the hype.

All of my gratitude goes to my wonderful betas who have listened to my shit for the past months and read and reread and edited everything.

A special thank you to the girl who made me want to write again, and to my amazing friends who have kept me motivated through this entire process.

This story is my baby, so please be gentle and feel free to hit me up on twitter on @dajeongmi or on my cc (link to that on twt).

Thank you for waiting.
Having a plan was probably the most sensible way to enter one's 20s.

No, it most definitely was.

Unfortunately, this was a realization made by Kim Dahyun only when she stood with a box full of someone else’s clothes on the street outside her apartment.

“Thank you so much for helping me with all this.” Said a sweet voice, dragging Dahyun from her thoughts. She turned with a hum and looked at the blonde girl who was crawling out of the back of a white van, dragging with her another box identical the one Dahyun was holding. An apologetic smile lit up the girl’s entire face, making her eyes shine. Dahyun adjusted her grasp on the box by propping it up with her knee and bending back further. Her knuckles were whitening with the strain and her hand ached. She should’ve let it stay on the ground until Sana was ready to go, but as soon as she had picked it up, her pride had prevented her from putting it back down.

“Only six more boxes to go, and then I’m treating you to pizza.” Sana promised with a grin and signaled for them to head inside.

“How long have you lived here?” Sana asked as they entered the elevator, pushing the button to the fourth floor.

“A year, give or take. My old roomie decided to move in with her girlfriend.” Dahyun scrunched her nose and rolled her eyes. Sana looked questioningly at her. “Oh no, she’s my best friend, they’re just so sappy it’s awkward to be around them for too long. You’d think two years would take the honeymoon stage out of a relationship.” Dahyun cringed, adjusting the heavy box again.

The elevator chimed and came to a halt, letting them out too slowly for Dahyun’s liking. They turned right and walked towards Dahyun’s-... towards their apartment.

“What about you?”

“I’ve lived here… a day?” Sana wondered, pursing her lips.

“I mean why did you move?” Dahyun clarified.

“I know what you meant.” Sana giggled and nudged her. “I used to live with some friends but it didn’t really work out. So my friend Momo and I were stuck with the apartment and we couldn’t afford it. We wanted to find something together, but when she saw this she insisted I take it. And it’s good because it’s a lot closer to our school.”

Dahyun backed into the door and propped the box on her leg, opening their door. She hurried as much as she could over to the growing pile of belongings and put down the box, swallowing a complaint as her arms yelled for a break. Then Sana was beside her, putting down her own box. She sent Dahyun a bright smile and made to take another trip down to the moving van.
“You go down, I need to use the bathroom.” Dahyun said without meeting Sana’s eyes. Sana nodded and walked back out, leaving the door open by a crack. Dahyun waited until Sana was out of earshot to throw a curse at Sana’s belongings. She massaged her shoulders and non-existent biceps. How much stuff did that girl have anyways? Sure, she got the big room, but it wasn’t that big.

Dahyun swung her arms around, trying to regain some feeling in them, before heading into the bathroom, massaging at her shoulders. She locked the door and sighed, using the opportunity to actually pee.

It was so tempting to let exhaustion overpower her, as she sat there, head buried in her hands. She considered texting Jihyo to say that she wouldn’t be staying the night, but never got around to it.

Three minutes later she collided with Sana in the hallway. The older girl had attempted to carry two boxes at once, apparently to save them a trip, and laughed at her own clumsiness as Dahyun caught the top box.

“Thank you.” Sana said through giggles. Dahyun’s shoulders complained but she ignored it. “By now I owe you both pizza and wine.”

“I have some wine in my fridge?” Dahyun pondered.

“That’d do.”

Sana let them into the apartment. Even if it had caused trouble for Sana, a part of Dahyun was grateful that she didn’t have to take another full trip.

On the last two trips down to the white van, Dahyun was careful about waiting to lift the box until they were both ready, but she still couldn’t hide a relieved groan as she put down the last box. Even Sana sighed and stretched. Dahyun reached back and tried to rub out a muscle knot in her shoulder, wincing as it gave a jab.

They stood in silence for a little, looking at the boxes.

“I don’t actually know any good pizza places nearby...” Sana admitted with a shy smile. It made Dahyun chuckle. She pointed at a menu stuck to the fridge with one of those tourist magnets that said *I heart Singapore*.

…

The keys were cold against Jihyo’s hands as she pressed them in a familiar pattern. Sound filled the tiny apartment and her mind emptied of every bad thought. There was just her and the piano and Tzuyu on Jihyo’s bed with her laptop and a set of sheet music. Somehow playing made all of her worries go away, and filled her heart with sound, feeling it stream through every artery. She wasn’t flawless, and it was never easy. But she felt at home in this piece.

Only when the song ended and she stopped humming along did she notice that Tzuyu had been as
With a smile, she turned on the chair and faced Tzuyu. “Was that okay?”

“Definitely. It always helps when I can see it being played.” Tzuyu said, her ears moving slightly as a smile spread across her face.

“You have a weird brain. But I like it.” Jihyo said and shook her head.

“You guys keep saying that. You and Dahyun.” Tzuyu ran her hand through her hair. Grabbed the hair tie from her wrist and started working her hair into a ponytail.

“Well, it’s true.” Jihyo shrugged.

Just as Jihyo was about to change the subject, Tzuyu’s phone chimed. Tzuyu looked at it and grabbed it to read properly. Moments later Jihyo’s phone vibrated in her pocket as well, and she frowned. The message was from Jeongyeon, about getting together at her place on Friday. All of them, for once. It had been more than a month since she had last offered to have people over, and it pleased Jihyo to see that she was once again up for bringing people over.

“Did you get the text from Jeongyeon as well?” Jihyo asked as she texted Jeongyeon back, telling her that she was up for it.

“Yeah.” Tzuyu said and wrote something on her phone. “I still don’t understand why she refuses to use the group chat.”

“She’s just bitter that Nayeon changed her name in the chat.”

“I thought she got her back for that.”

“She did. But they handle things very differently.” Jihyo explained, reminding herself that while Tzuyu had gotten close with most of the group quite soon, it always took longer with the two oldest. They somehow had a special bubble around them that most people never got to be included in.

Tzuyu went back to writing on her laptop, her words pulling Jihyo from her thoughts. “Handle things how?”

“Nayeon yells and forgets about it. Jeongyeon cares a lot more. She’s superb at dishing out the insult, but really bad at being on the receiving end.” Jihyo chuckled. Watched as Tzuyu pressed a dramatic stop on her laptop and stretched.

“Do you have everything you need?” Jihyo asked.

“Yes, it was really just that last bit. I’m just gonna send it to Dahyun, then I’ll be out of your hair.”

Tzuyu squinted slightly at the screen as her eyes darted across it.

“You don’t have to go.” Jihyo shrugged. “I mean I have to do laundry, but—”

“Sure.” Tzuyu closed the laptop with a shrug.

“Yeah? I already washed it but it’s just in a big heap in the bag.” Jihyo said, grabbing the laundry bag from beside the piano. Poured the contents onto the bed as soon as Tzuyu had moved her laptop and the sheet music.

“How is school anyway?” Jihyo asked, not sure how else to ask. Didn’t want to seem overprotective, even though she had long ago had to admit, that she was.
“Better, I think. It’s hard to know, but I think better.” Tzuyu grabbed a shirt and folded it.

“That’s a relief.” Jihyo smiled and put a pair of pants next to the shirt.

Tzuyu smiled. Grabbed another shirt. Jihyo took a sweater.

They shared the work in silence. Tzuyu didn’t seem to mind, and Jihyo loved that about her. It was something Jihyo used to do with Mina when she lived in the building, and it was only now she realized how much she missed having people around to do the trivial stuff with as well.

“Isn’t this Dahyun’s?” Tzuyu asked, Jihyo jolting slightly, looking around at the grey shirt.

“Oh. It is. She must’ve forgotten it here.” Jihyo frowned.

“Do you want me to bring it to class for her?” Tzuyu offered.

“No, it’s okay. I’ll bring it with me on Friday.” Jihyo grabbed it from Tzuyu and folded it. Held it gently in her hands for a second and then put it on the bed away from the other piles.

“You’re never gonna stop worrying, are you?” Tzuyu asked.

“Never.” Jihyo said, sincerity in her voice.

Tzuyu took another shirt. Folded it, opening her mouth and closing it again. Jihyo frowned but Tzuyu just shook her head and smiled.

“My boss is talking about promoting me.” Jihyo changed the subject.

“That’s amazing.” Tzuyu beamed.

Jihyo fiddled with a sock. “Yeah, I mean. I’m not sure I’d be-”

“Come on, you practically run the business already. Even did back when I met you.” Tzuyu said.

“I just hope I can actually do well. It’s gonna be different once I actually have all the responsibility. I don’t know if I can handle it.” Jihyo admitted, pushing in the pockets of a pair of jeans before folding them.

“Sure you can.” Said Tzuyu.

“You should come by again.” Jihyo looked at her. “It’s been forever, I might’ve forgotten your order by now.”

“I will. I promise.” Tzuyu smiled and took the last shirt.

…

Dahyun stepped out of the shower to see her screen light up. No less than eleven messages were listed one after the other on her lock screen. She sighed and wrapped a towel around her hair, drying her hands in it. Grabbed her phone in one hand and a large towel in the other, reading the messages.
2:53 pm Chaeyoung: Is she here?

2:54 pm Chaeyoung: What was her name again? Something Japanese right?

2:54 pm Chaeyoung: Was it Sana?

3:15 pm Chaeyoung: Jeongyeon wants a group night on Friday, you game?

3:16 pm Jeongyeon: Group night at my place Friday, wanna come?

3:19 pm Jeongyeon: Your new roomie is welcome to join if you want.

5:10 pm Chaeyoung: Are you alive? Is your roommate an axe murderer? You're either dead or getting laid.

5:12 pm Chaeyoung: Please don’t be dead. Or getting laid. It’s bad luck to get with your roomie on the first day. Have some respect and wait a few weeks. Or at least a few days.

5:53 pm Tzuyu: You’re coming to movie night, right? I’m not gonna survive gross and grosser if you aren’t there.

5:55 pm Chaeyoung: Don’t make me come over there.

5:59 pm Jihyo: I found a shirt at my place, is it yours?

There was a picture attached to Jihyo’s message, a grey shirt with the logo of Dahyun’s dad’s favorite baseball team, the LG Twins. When had she left that? Probably the last time she stayed over, which was when? A few nights ago? Honestly it was all just a blur by now. She sighed and started answering, wrapping the towel around her awkwardly.


6:34 pm Dahyun: I was helping Sana move boxes for hours and just took a shower to smell less like a donkey and more like a person. I haven’t been murdered and I definitely haven’t gotten laid, thank you very much.

6:35 pm Dahyun: I haven’t decided about Jeongyeon’s movie night yet. Gonna talk to Sana about it.

She dried off and got clothed, combing through her damp hair before twisting it in a bun, changing to her chat with Jeongyeon.

6:40 pm Dahyun: Thanks Jeong, I’ll probably join and I might ask Sana if it’s really ok with you for her to join?

Tugging her lower lip between her teeth, Dahyun switched to the chat with Jihyo.
6:42 pm Dahyun: It’s mine! Or my dad’s but I stole it. Thank you. I’ll come pick it up in a few days.
6:42 pm Dahyun: Oh, and Sana moved in today!

In the time it had taken her to answer all the texts, Chaeyoung had answered.

6:41 pm Chaeyoung: Just making sure. And you’re sure you don’t need me to move back in? You’re sure you can handle things without me?

Dahyun snorted and got dressed.

6:45 pm Dahyun: Getting cold feet already?
6:46 pm Dahyun: I definitely do not need you to move back in, I can’t handle more of you two than I have to.
6:46 pm Dahyun: Now go away and annoy that girl of yours instead of me.

Dahyun shut off the screen on her phone and pocketed it, shaking her head at Chaeyoung as she walked back into the living room. Sana was sitting in Dahyun’s couch, and beamed as she looked around at Dahyun. It occurred to Dahyun that she should probably think that it was weird how happy Sana was all the time. In the few hours she had been here, she had filled the entire place with giggles and sunshine. But Dahyun didn’t think it weird at all. Just saw it as a welcome change in an otherwise annoyingly colorless month. Months.

“Pizza will be here in five minutes. Hopefully. Should I get the wine?” Sana asked, bringing Dahyun back to reality.

“That’d be great.” Dahyun hummed and flopped onto the couch as Sana got up. As Sana turned into the kitchen, Dahyun looked after her, guiding her around. Told her where she could find glasses and a wine opener and what shelf in the fridge had the leftover white wine.

A squeal sounded from the kitchen and then a breathless laughter. It seemed that Sana had tripped over her own feet in the kitchen. Her cheeks were slightly pink as she hurried back to the couch and handed over the wine and glasses. And then Sana let out another laugh and honestly, Dahyun wasn’t sure why. But she found that she didn’t need to know.

As Sana sat back down, Dahyun started working at the cork. She fumbled slightly as Sana curled up next to her, keeping a little less than what Dahyun considered a respectable distance for acquaintances. But never mind that, Dahyun thought. They were roommates, they might as well get used to being close. After all, it wasn’t the world’s biggest apartment.
“So, I have a favor to ask.” Sana looked at her glass, then at Dahyun. “Big favor actually.”

“Fire away.” Dahyun took a sip.

“Well, you remember I told you that my friend Momo and I lost our apartment?” Sana put the glass down.

Dahyun nodded.

“Well, she’s still apartment hunting, and she’s getting kicked out of our place soon. So I was wondering if you’d be ok with her staying in my room for a few days. Weeks probably, if we’re being realistic. Just until she finds somewhere else?” Sana’s eyes were big and full of plea. And Dahyun couldn’t help notice just how pretty she was.

“I’m sure we can manage.” Dahyun said without really considering it.

This made Sana beam and excitedly she threw her arms around Dahyun. It blew the air from Dahyun’s lungs and almost made her spill the wine, but she didn’t care.

“Thank you, Dahyunnie!” She said, sunshine in her voice. Then she drew back and raised her glass. “Cheers… to being roommates.”

She poked at Dahyun with a toe. With a laugh, Dahyun clinked her glass against Sana’s and they both drank.

…

12:34 am Dahyun: HELP.

12:34 am Dahyun: Please be up.

12:34 am Dahyun: Help.

Chaeyoung’s eyes went big as she read the messages that had popped up while she had been writing.

12:37 am Chaeyoung: Oh my god, you banged.

12:38 am Dahyun: No we didn’t!

12:38 am Dahyun: Shut up

12:38 am Dahyun: Nevermind.

12:39 am Chaeyoung: Come on, it was a joke.

12:39 am Chaeyoung: Mostly.

12:40 am Chaeyoung: No, ok, I was sure you actually had slept with her. Nvm, what’s up?

12:41 am Dahyun: She’s asleep. On me.

12:41 am Chaeyoung: lmao. What?!
Chaeyoung laughed. Loud. Loud enough to wake the girl next to her. A pair of drowsy eyes looked up at her the light from the phone reflected in them.

“Dahyun,” Chaeyoung giggled and turned her phone so Nayeon could watch the conversation. A sleepy giggle escaped the older girl’s throat. She was hoarse, like she always was right when she woke, and it made Chaeyoung’s heart flutter.

12:43 am Dahyun: She bought me pizza after we finished moving and we drank the wine I had left from Mina’s birthday. And she’s… Cuddly. I don’t really think there’s anything in it?

12:44 am Dahyun: She’s just very touchy.

12:44 am Dahyun: and tall

12:44 am Dahyun: and pretty

12:44 am Dahyun: We watched a movie and she was leaning on me a lot.

Chaeyoung snorted at her friend’s obvious panic. Nayeon was chuckling as well, following the conversation.

12:45 am Dahyun: and now she’s asleep. I’m lying on the couch and she’s sort of… well, laying on me?

This time Nayeon laughed out loud and buried her face in Chaeyoung’s arm. “Poor Dahyun.” She whispered

“Poor Dahyun? She’s sprawled on the couch with a pretty girl on top of her. For years that was my dream!” Chaeyoung grinned, and added, softer: “Still is.” Even if she thought it might be comments like this that made Tzuyu and Jeongyeon roll their eyes and pretend to puke.

Nayeon hummed.

12:47 am Chaeyoung: And the problem is?

12:47 am Dahyun: What am I supposed to do?! I can’t carry her to bed, my arms are dead!

12:47 am Dahyun: Don’t.

12:47 am Dahyun: It’s from carrying boxes.

12:47 am Dahyun: But I don’t think I can get out without waking her up.

12:48 am Chaeyoung: Well, it’s obvious isn’t it?
Chaeyoung chuckled at the sarcastic tone but decided to take it as a compliment. After all one of them was single and the other was not. And Chaeyoung took great pride in being the latter.

12:49 am Chaeyoung: Can you reach a blanket?
12:49 am Dahyun: Yeah. why?

Chaeyoung rolled her eyes. She felt Nayeon’s cool hand creep under her shirt and drawing circles around her belly button. The hairs stood up wherever Nayeon’s fingers trached. She looked down at Nayeon again but she was paying attention to the screen.

12:50 am Chaeyoung: Ok, this is only because I’m your friend and you’re obviously the most useless lesbian I’ve ever met.
12:51 am Chaeyoung: You throw the blanket over both of you.
12:51 am Chaeyoung: And you go to sleep.
12:51 am Chaeyoung: It’s quite simple.
12:51 am Chaeyoung: And then you stop texting me and enjoy this.

Chaeyoung felt Nayeon’s shoulders shake with quiet laughter. The hand on her stomach wandered distractingly upwards.

12:53 am Dahyun: I hate you, you know that?
12:54 am Chaeyoung: Goodnight!

Chaeyoung turned the phone on silent and looked at Nayeon whose eyes were glued to the younger girl’s face.

“At least she’s not alone.” Chaeyoung mumbled as she reached over her girlfriend to reconnect the phone to the charger.

“And Sana seems friendly,” Nayeon said, amusement in her voice. “As long as she doesn’t make Dahyun fall for her. That’d be such a mess.”

“Don’t worry. I give her shit a lot, but Dahyun doesn’t really fall for people that easily. She’s never had a serious crush, I think.” Chaeyoung slid down, turning on her side.
“Unlike some people.” Nayeon’s fingers scratched over Chaeyoung’s stomach before settling on her waist.

“Hey, it really wasn’t a choice, maybe if you hadn’t been so hot then...” Chaeyoung trailed off, her cheeks warming at the way Nayeon raised her eyebrows. “What?”

Nayeon smiled. “You’re cute when you’re flustered. It’s okay that you had a crush on me.”

“I still have a crush on you.” Chaeyoung admitted with a grin.

“Aww, babe that’s so cute.” Nayeon cooed, fingers trailing up the younger girl’s side.

“You know I love you, right?” Chaeyoung hummed, leaning into Nayeon’s touch.

“You might’ve told me.” Nayeon shrugged playfully, smoothly moving her hand around to Chaeyoung’s front. “But I don’t really remember that well. Old age and all that.”

Chaeyoung brushed her lips against Nayeon’s sleep-swollen ones. “I love you, Im Nayeon.”

Nayeon chuckled and pushed the younger girl onto her back, moving to settle above her.

“I love you too.”

...

Dahyun couldn’t sleep. The feeling of Sana’s chest rising and falling against her stomach was too distracting, especially coupled with her warm breath against Dahyun’s collarbone. Sana’s hand was wrapped around Dahyun’s shoulder and the other resting under Sana’s head, separating it from Dahyun’s chest. She had managed to throw the couch blanket over Sana effectively by throwing it as far down their bodies as she could. With as little motion as possible she had used her toes to pull at the ends to cover Sana’s bare legs.

Sana mumbled in her sleep and Dahyun dared to look at her phone again. 2:17 am. She sighed and closed her eyes. This was definitely going to have consequences in the morning. She had a class at ten the next morning. But that wasn’t the big problem. It was her night to close up at work. Of course she would have Jeongyeon there, which helped a little. She would understand. Or laugh. Probably both. Jeongyeon... Oh, right. Dahyun’s eyes shot open as she remembered the conversation she had had with Sana about Jeongyeon earlier. She looked at her phone and opened her KakaoTalk, her arms wrapping around Sana’s back so she could write without the light bothering the sleeping girl.

2:19 am Dahyun: I’m game for movie night. Sana wants to come but she has a friend coming over. Says she’s probably game as well but I didn’t want to invite both without asking you.

Dahyun considered seeing if anyone else was still online, but just as she was about to put the phone away and give sleep another try, the message marked as “read” and a response was being typed.
2:21 am Jeongyeon: What are you doing up at this hour, are you ok?
2:21 am Dahyun: Yeah, I’m fine.
2:21 am Jeongyeon: Then what, did you get laid or something?
2:22 am Dahyun: Why does everyone assume I’ve gotten laid? Me. Really?
2:22 am Jeongyeon: It’s bound to happen sooner or later, but I guess since it’s you, later is probably a better guess.
2:23 am Dahyun: Fuck off.
2:23 am Dahyun: What about Sana and Momo, can they come?
2:23 am Jeongyeon: Weird names.
2:23 am Jeongyeon: Sure, I don’t mind.
2:24 am Jeongyeon: What are you doing up anyway?
2:24 am Dahyun: None of your business
2:25 am Jeonyeon: Fine, I’ll just ask Nayeon.

Dahyun’s breath caught but it had nothing to do with the message. She felt Sana’s hand travel from her shoulder to her chest and settle above her heart. It was beating treacherously fast against her ribs.

2:26 am Dahyun: Why do you assume she knows?
2:26 am Jeongyeon: Cause you tell Chaeyoung everything. And she tells anything to Nayeon if she asks. And Nayeon loves dishing.

There was no arguing with that logic, so Dahyun just let out a sigh and replied.

2:27 am Dahyun: Fine. Sana fell asleep on top of me and I can’t sleep because of it.

Dahyun waited for a response, knowing full well Jeongyeon was laughing her ass off and felt inclined to throw her phone against the wall to avoid whatever response Jeongyeon was going to come up with.

2:30 am Jeongyeon: Well, you have fun with that.
Dahyun turned the screen off, feeling Sana stir.

“Dahyunnie?” Sana’s voice was croaky and for a moment Dahyun thought she was talking in her sleep. But she felt the hand move from her heart again and a finger traced up her neck, and had to swallow hard to avoid losing herself in the feeling. It wasn’t as if she was trying anything, but it was incredibly hard to ignore the reality of Sana squashed on top of her.

“Mh?” She tried to feign a calm she didn’t have.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” Sana asked in a whisper.

“I was…” Dahyun lied.

“No you weren’t.” Sana said, a smile in her voice. “Your heart is beating like crazy.”

Dahyun felt her face cringe involuntarily and she opened one eye slowly and looked down her own body. Sana’s gaze fixed her. She sighed and opened the other eye, facing Sana’s stare full on.

“I’m not used to people sleeping on me.” Dahyun admitted quietly.

Sana giggled, her entire body shaking against Dahyun’s.

“Sorry.”

She didn’t sound sorry.

“Also, the couch isn’t really the most comfortable place to sleep.” Dahyun added.

“Would the bed be better?”

“What?” Dahyun’s heart jumped and caught in her throat, her warmth creeping up her neck and settle in her cheeks. She stared at the girl still laying on her chest staring up at her with inquiring eyes. Her entire demeanor was so innocent that Dahyun felt she might’ve imagined that sentence.

“I’m gonna go at least.” Sana smiled. Dahyun felt her mouth open and close as the weight of Sana’s body lifted off of her, the blanket falling to the floor, her mind attempting to catch up with a reality she had not expected to be in. Ever.

“Goodnight, Dahyunnie.” Sana said, trailing her fingers across Dahyun’s embarrassingly warm cheek. Sana’s fingers were soft and cool against her skin. Had she been smarter, had she read her new roommate better, she would’ve let herself lean into the touch. But instead she felt the muscles of her neck tighten, keeping her head perfectly still. She felt Sana’s eyes on her, but Dahyun kept her gaze locked on the front door. Only when Dahyun was sure Sana had turned her head away, did she dare look after the older girl as she walked into Chaeyoung’s- into her room. Oh right. Not together to bed. Just.. to bed. Because this wasn’t some cheesy heteronormative rom com she had fallen into, where having a one night stand with your new roomie is seen as normal and desirable. This was reality. And the reality was that Dahyun’s head was spinning. She was absolutely exhausted, yet completely awake. Her arms ached and her legs were buzzing from the sudden return of a steady blood-supply. She should move. She should definitely move into the bed. She wanted to. But she didn’t. Instead she grasped pathetically at the air and the floor until her fingers closed around the blanket. Pulled it with much effort from the floor and wrapped herself in it, turning heavily onto her side and curled up, waiting for sleep to take her.
The blanket had a new scent on it.

And the apartment had a new resident.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Dahyun woke to the smell of burnt toast. Sniffing once, twice, she scrunched her nose and opened her eyes. She was still on the couch, wrapped in the blanket, a little too neatly for how her sheets usually looked in the morning. The smell of burnt bread hit her nostrils again and she sat up, looking around. With lenses that stuck to the insides of her eyelids, she tried to make sense of it all.

With the blanket tugged around her shoulders, and phone habitually in her hand, Dahyun walked into the kitchen to find Sana scraping at a piece of charred toast with the dull side of a knife. The older girl looked at Dahyun like a deer caught in headlights, and for a moment Dahyun had to just stare, trying to wrap her mind around the sight of Sana. Her blonde hair was in a messy bun and she wore round spectacles that made her look incredibly adorable. But the thing that really made Dahyun stop was the fact that Sana was wearing an oversized sweater, Dahyun’s oversized sweater. Ignoring the last thought, Dahyun put her phone on the little round kitchen table, grabbed two pieces of bread from the pack on the counter and held out a hand for the burnt toast. Sana handed it over with an apologetic smile. Without a single word, Dahyun threw it directly into the trash, making Sana gape, then giggle. Dahyun then propped the two new pieces into the toaster and checked the setting. Meanwhile, Sana started cleaning the sink of charred crumbs. Dahyun found them plates and strawberry jam, leftover from Chaeyoung. A thought at the back of Dahyun’s head reminded her that she would have to discuss shopping and cooking with Sana. Honestly she hadn’t been good at remembering either since Chaeyoung moved out, as she had been handling that stuff for months.

“Did you sleep well?” Sana asked, breaking the silence, examining the sink for leftover crumbs.

Dahyun didn’t know what to answer, so she just shrugged. Honestly, she was exhausted. Once she had fallen asleep, it had been worried dreams and one of her occasional nightmares that had haunted her. And a part of her wished that she had woken Sana earlier or hadn’t let her fall asleep on her in the first place. But there was another part of her that didn’t mind.

The sound of the toaster saved her from the rest of that thought, and she grabbed the toast quickly, placing one piece on each plate at the table in the tiny kitchen. She filled the kettle with water and turned it on, knowing full well that she would need more than a piece of toast with jam to keep her going through class.

Class.

Her heart in her throat, Dahyun grabbed her phone on the table and turned it so the screen turned on. 8:26. How could she have forgotten to set her alarm? She never forgot. Thankfully she had only overslept by about ten minutes.

“Everything ok?” Sana asked.

“Mh. Just… I have class soon.” Dahyun mumbled, grabbing the now crispy golden toast as it popped up, and sat down. Sana joined her with the other piece and they took turns with the jam.

“What class?” Sana asked between bites, pulling at her hair tie until her hair was released. It fell messily onto her shoulders and down her front, and she ran her hands through it until she had a
“History of musical theater.” Dahyun held a hand in front of her mouth as she answered before swallowing. Noticing the sound of boiling water, she got up and dug into the pantry looking for cup noodles. She found one and looked over at Sana, silently asking if she wanted one. Sana nodded, and Dahyun grabbed one for each of them.

“Are you always this talkative in the mornings?” Sana asked playfully.

“Huh?” Dahyun looked up from her attempts to open the cup. “Oh. I’m just tired.”

“I know.” Dahyun wanted to say more. Things like but you looked so peaceful and I didn’t mind it flew through her head, but she let them stay there. In her head. Instead she took it out on the lid to the cup noodles and almost spilled the contents when she finally managed to get the plastic cover halfway off.

“I hope you slept some after I moved.” Sana said genuinely as Dahyun got up from the creaky kitchen chair once more, this time to get the kettle.

“I did.” She assured Sana. Tried to force a smile at her, but found that she didn’t have to. Sana’s smile was almost impossible not to return.

A buzzing on the little kitchen table grabbed her attention and found her phone lighting up. Sana looked at the caller name with interest.

“Chaeyoung? Isn’t that your old roomie?” She asked.

“Yup.” Dahyun said and picked up. “Hello?”

“She lives!” Chaeyoung proclaimed in the other end of the phone. Dahyun heard Nayeon laugh loudly somewhere in the background

“What do you want?” Dahyun grumbled. Sana tried to get her attention, pointing to the kettle and then to Dahyun’s cup ramen. Dahyun nodded.

“I just thought calling you would be a good idea in case you might oversleep.” Chaeyoung said.

“Oh. That’s… kind of you.” Dahyun said, watching as Sana poured hot water into Dahyun’s cup and then her own, shutting the lids on both.

“You sound dead. Did you end up sleeping at all?”

“In the end.”

“And your roommate… Sana?”

“Yes, Sana.” Dahyun explained.

“That’s me!” Sana said excitedly, raising a hand and giggling.

“Put me on speaker!” Chaeyoung immediately insisted.

“No way.” Dahyun cut her off. Sana looked at her questioningly. Then bit her lip and explained. “My friend wants to talk to you.”
Sana nodded enthusiastically, sitting up straighter.

“It’s your lucky day, Chaeng,” Dahyun said in a warning voice. “Don’t make me regret this.”

“Never.” Chaeyoung promised and Nayeon was laughing again, closer this time.

Dahyun sighed and pressed the speaker button.

“Can she hear me?” Chaeyoung asked.

“Yes, I can! Hi, I’m Sana!” Sana waved at the phone. Dahyun pressed her lips together, hiding a smile.

“Chaeyoung here, nice to uh, well, not meet you I guess, but nice to talk to you! I used to live in your room. I’m also Dahyun’s very best friend in the whole wide-”

“No you’re not.” Dahyun grumbled, opening the lid of her ramen, stirring impatiently with a pair of chopsticks.

“Don’t listen to her, Sana. I’m her best friend.”

“She is!” Nayeon agreed from the other end. “I’m Nayeon by the way. I’m the reason those two don’t live together anymore.”

“So, you’re the grossly sappy girlfriend.” Sana chimed happily. Dahyun looked up, her eyes wide, shaking her head violently. Sana looked confused.

“Oi, Kim Dahyun.” Nayeon warned. Great, Dahyun she was definitely going to pay for this on friday.

“I’m sure Dahyunnie didn’t mean it in a bad way.” Sana tried to help.

“We’re not grossly sappy!” Chaeyoung insisted.

“No, you’re just gross.” Dahyun finally snapped.

“Shut up.” Chaeyoung laughed.

“Fuck off.” Dahyun grinned, finally satisfied with her noodles. She took the lid off entirely as she turned off the call and sent a short text to Chaeyoung.

8:45 am Dahyun: Thank you.

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“I’m gonna kill algebra. I don’t know how but I’ll find a way.” Chaeyoung sighed and threw the pen onto the paper in annoyance.

“I think I might have my answers to that problem somewhere. I took the class last year and I may have a bunch of hand-ins somewhere.” Nayeon looked over at Chaeyoung’s notes, moving the pen.

“That’d be amazing,” Said Chaeyoung. “I cannot figure it out for the life of me. I mean, who knows
“Not me. I got mine from Jeongyeon.” Shrugged Nayeon.

“Oh right, you guys took it together.” Chaeyoung mused as Nayeon closed her laptop and got up.

“Hang on, I’ll check,” She said and left the room. Chaeyoung leaned on her arms, waiting.

It was one of the practical things about dating an older girl. Usually Nayeon had already had some of the minor courses. But sometimes Chaeyoung regretted that she had chosen the same major as Nayeon. Of course, being in separate years made a difference, but some of their subjects overlapped and during their busy weeks they hardly spoke about anything but school. Not that Chaeyoung didn’t like school. But sometimes she missed just talking about something else.

“Found them!” Nayeon yelled from the bedroom. “Oh wait! Nope… Yes, this is it!”

Chaeyoung chuckled and sat back up as Nayeon returned, handing the younger girl a stack of notes. Chaeyoung quickly scanned it and groaned. She had miscalculated in the very first step. With a click of the tongue, Chaeyoung ripped off the page she had been writing on and started over.

“You never told me last night, but now that you’ve talked to her, what did you think of Sana?” Nayeon asked, just as Chaeyoung was about to redo the problem.

“Mh, not sure. I mean she seems fun? Friendly too I guess, like you said. I’m just not sure it’s what Dahyun needs right now. She’d be much better off with someone like Mina as her roommate.”

“Did she ask Mina?” Nayeon frowned.

“No, I did. But she said she wanted to try living on her own for now. I just don’t understand why she would want to live all by herself so far away from the rest of us.”

“She’s a hermit.” Nayeon shrugged. “I’m sure she’s good enough. Sana, I mean. Maybe fun is exactly what Dahyun needs.”

“Maybe. You probably know better than me. I mean. Sorry… That wasn’t fair.” Chaeyoung said bending over her math.

“No, it wasn’t. But I get it; she didn’t tell you. But she did it of a good heart.”

“I know.” Sighed Chaeyoung. Smiled when Nayeon wrapped her in a hug and kissed her temple.

“When you’re done with math hell, do you want to go through the work for the presentation next week?”

“Sure.” Chaeyoung smiled.

And they were back on the subject of school.

Dahyun yawned. Loudly. Unattractively. Without covering her mouth. She didn’t give a flying fuck by now. She just wanted to sleep. But instead here she was, filling a tray with almost-empty glasses of beer and other less telligible beverages, grabbing the dish cloth she had put down earlier, and wiped the table clean.
“Running on fumes today, huh?” Jeongyeon walked past her with four plates of delicious food.

“It’s not that bad.” Dahyun insisted. She placed a new paper cloth onto the now clean table and took the tray of glasses out into the kitchen. Jeongyeon soon joined her.

“You look like hell.” Jeongyeon said dryly, adjusting her shirt into her skirt and fixing the tie. She looked at the clock and then at the line. It was empty but the next serving wouldn’t be far behind. Even on mondays the place was packed.

“I threw out her toast.” Dahyun groaned, rubbing at her temples.

“Excuse me?” Jeongyeon snorted, turning to look at Dahyun.

“She made toast. Sana.” Dahyun continued as Jeongyeon leaned against the line, shifting the weight on her feet with a slight cringe. Dahyun noticed she wasn’t wearing her usual sneakers but i canvas shoes that definitely weren’t meant for eleven hour shifts. “She made toast and burned it to a char and it woke me. The smell. And I just... Took it? Without a word. And threw it out…” She groaned at her own stupidity.

“You made her a new piece, right?” Jeongyeon asked with actual concern.

“Yes? I think… Yes, I did. I even let her use Chaeyoung’s jam.” Dahyun shook her head then stretched her neck, feeling it crack satisfactorily.

“That’s something at least.” Jeongyeon said and walked over to stand behind Dahyun, rubbing at her shoulders caringly. Dahyun hummed happily and leaned into her friend, her eyes fluttering closed. She might fall asleep right then and there, knowing full well that Jeongyeon would always catch her.

But then the chef, Taeyang, called from the line. Three plates were waiting to be served. Jeongyeon let Dahyun’s shoulders go with a final squeeze and Dahyun took the order.

…

“I’m never going to get back to a regular sleep schedule as long as I work here.” Jeongyeon sighed, sitting down on the bench outside the restaurant, rubbing her ankles.

“Nope. But the money is good.” Dahyun mumbled, her head leaning against the brick wall. The night air was cool, but not cold. It was just past 2 am and they should be heading in opposite directions home. But they didn’t. Instead they sat, like they always did, just for a minute, shoulder to shoulder, looking onto the dead street. Jeongyeon was holding a bottle of leftover red wine from the kitchen. There was only a few swigs at the bottom, barely worth sticking around for, but it had become a tradition whenever they were the ones who closed up.

“Is she cute at least?” Jeongyeon asked unexpectedly, taking a careful sip of the wine.

“Huh?” Dahyun leaned forwards and looked at Jeongyeon.

“Your new roomie; Sana. She cute?”

“Yup.” Dahyun pressed her lips together and looked straight ahead.

“How cute?”

“You know. Cute.” Dahyun accepted the wine bottle from Jeongyeon and valued the contents. She could empty it in one go. She settled for a sip.
“So, drop dead gorgeous.” Jeongyeon concluded.

“Yup.” Dahyun stared at the lamp post.

“You didn’t already fall for her, did you?” Jeongyeon sounded almost worried. Dahyun zoned back and turned to look at Jeongyeon. She didn’t answer. She didn’t exactly feel like she had a crush on Sana. It was more a permanent state of confusion. She made her dizzy. Made her completely unable to think.

“She wore my clothes.” Dahyun blurted. Jeongyeon waited for her to elaborate. “She’s so. I don’t know her at all and she keeps trying to cuddle me and hugged me goodbye before my shift. And this morning,”

“With the toast?”

“Yeah, she was wearing my sweater. You know, the one Mina brought back from Japan for me. We don’t know even know each other. I should find it weird, right? Or is it weird that I actually don’t really mind?”

Jeongyeon didn’t answer. She got up, cringed and looked down at Dahyun with tired eyes.

“You can have the rest.”

Jeongyeon walked into the darkness, heading towards her apartment.

Dahyun emptied the bottle.

…

The irony lay heavy in the air around Chaeyoung as she sat on the cold floor in the kitchen, head leaned on the fridge. For an entire month she had lived here officially, yet she hadn’t felt less like this was her apartment. When she lived with Dahyun, this place had been her favorite, but now it felt somewhat like a stranger.

Chaeyoung mumbled to herself as she wrote in her notebook. Lyric after lyric poured from her in the darkness lit only by her phone shining down on her from the countertop. Every word was about the same person. Had been for years. The girl whose arms Chaeyoung could so easily wrap herself in if she just got up and walked into their bed.

There were many places and many people whom Chaeyoung loved. But no place more than Nayeon’s heart and no person more than Nayeon. She knew in her heart that people would look at them and think what an odd match. Knew that all their friends had thought so as well. Of all the combinations in the world, this had been the least expected. Even Chaeyoung had been surprised. She had always waited for the day where her feelings for Dahyun would turn from friendship to romance. It had been the logical choice. But it never happened. She was always just stupid little Dahyun. The best friend in the world. But Nayeon. Nayeon had turned the younger girl into a flustering mess from the start, and had enjoyed it.

A smile spread on Chaeyoung’s lips as she closed the notebook. Got up and turned off the light on her phone. With a yawn she entered the bedroom and crawled gently under the covers, the warmth from Nayeon pulling her in. She settled naturally on her own side of the bed and stared at the
beautiful sleeping girl on the other side. Her hair was red this time around. Had dyed it a few weeks ago when she had gone with Jeongyeon to get her roots done.

“I love you.” Chaeyoung breathed. Nayeon slept.

Finally Chaeyoung scooted closer, her knees bumping against Nayeon’s before turning around and pulling Nayeon around herself like the most wonderful blanket. The sound of Nayeon’s hum and the feeling of her tugging the shorter girl closer was enough to make Chaeyoung’s heart burst. It was all the little things. All the ways they remembered to love each other.

“I love you.” Chaeyoung whispered again. Nayeon mumbled something indistinctive, her face burying in Chaeyoung’s hair.

…

Despite her currently permanent state of insomnia and the exhaustion that followed, Dahyun rather enjoyed the time she had to herself in the middle of the night after a closing shift. Or normally she did. But tonight her mind was full of worry. Restlessly she started counting the seconds it took for her shadow to overtake her under the streetlights. It only helped somewhat.

She got to her front door and took off her sneakers outside the apartment as to not wake up Sana. Her phone buzzed and she answered quickly that she was home too. A ritual between her and Jeongyeon. She looked at the messages she had gotten throughout the night while unlocking the door to the apartment.

It took her a few seconds to grasp the scene. The house wasn’t dark and quiet like she had expected. The TV was on, volume turned down and the lamp beside the couch had all three lights on. Sana was sitting in the couch, looking at her. A girl’s head was nestled in her lap, fast asleep under the pink and yellow striped blanket.

“Hi,” Sana whispered with a wide smile.

Dahyun looked from Sana to the girl in her lap and back to Sana. Sana noticed and let a hand tangle in the sleeping girl’s dusty rose hair.

“Momo.” She explained quietly, pointing at her with her other hand.

So that was Momo. Dahyun looked at her for a moment. She too was quite pretty, peacefully sleeping with her mouth slightly ajar. Sana caught her eye and smiled softly.

“Wanna join?” Sana asked, looking around for a seat.

Dahyun closed the door behind her, put down her shoes and considered it.

“I should sleep,” Dahyun explained quietly, feeling sleep in the corners of her eyes.

“Oh. Okay.”

Something in Sana’s tone made Dahyun stay put. “What are you watching?”

“Some anime Momo chose. Not sure what it’s about but the music is good.” Sana giggled.

Dahyun looked around at the TV to see if she recognized it. She didn’t.

“It’s almost done I think. Come on, sit?”
Dahyun sighed and nodded, sitting on the floor by Sana’s feet. She felt the exhaustion try to overpower her, but she was determined to reach her bed tonight.

With drooping lids, Dahyun tried to focus on the screen.

“Chocolate?” Sana offered, a hand appearing by the side of her head holding a bar of Dahyun’s fourth favorite chocolate brand. A solid choice.

Dahyun accepted. Any time was chocolate time, really. It tasted like heaven. Slightly like the red wine she had gulped down earlier, but mostly like heaven. She hummed happily, letting her lids win over for a second. Her bed was calling for her but she ignored it.

“You’re completely exhausted, aren’t you?” Sana asked. Dahyun jumped slightly, feeling a hand in her hair, combing through it gently.

“We had so many customers.” Dahyun complained with a yawn. “Don’t people ever eat at home?”

Sana chuckled and scratched lovingly at Dahyun’s scalp. A shiver ran down the younger girl’s spine.

“Can I ask you something?” The words flew from Dahyun before she could stop them, and she looked up at Sana. Sana’s hand slipped from Dahyun’s head and settled on the couch cushion. She was still combing her other hand through Momo’s hair.

“Sure.” Sana said.

Dahyun’s eyes were fixed on Momo’s calm face as she slept without noticing a thing. Her eyes followed Sana’s hand.

“Nothing, nevermind.” Dahyun turned around to face the TV again. Girls were crying on the screen, hugging each other. Dahyun’s mind seemed to spin incredibly fast without getting anywhere at all. Her thoughts started wandering to the shift, went over every customer, every slip-up. Then the slip-up’s of last shift. The notes she forgot to take. The test she didn’t ace. Biting down on her lip she tried to focus her eyes on the anime. The episode was coming to a close, the ending theme playing over the scene. She finished the last bite chocolate and got to her feet, using almost all the strength she had left. Her legs cursed her and her head was spinning with exhaustion.

“I’m gonna head in. Night, Sana.” She mumbled.

Sana smiled up at her with sparkling eyes, a thumb tracing along Momo’s cheek.

“Goodnight, Dahyunnie.”

The cold lights burned her retinas as Dahyun closed the door to the bathroom and turned on the faucet. She let cold water run over her wrists and then cupped her hands into the sink and pouring one handful of water after the other onto her face, rubbing at her skin. Her heart was pounding. She was definitely too tired. She blinked and tried to steady her breathing.

It was all so irrational. It had been a good shift and she had enjoyed working with Jeongyeon. She loved her work, so then why was she going over everything like this? She frowned, trying to remember if she had swept the floor before washing it. Tried to remember if she had locked up. Had Taeyang? No, Jeongyeon had. She groaned and grabbed the edges of the sink, her arms sore. Maybe she should start working on the assignment. Get some of it out of the way. No, definitely not. It was almost three in the morning and she was beyond exhausted. And this was stupid.
She dried her face and didn’t bother with her night routine. Just took out her lenses, brushed her teeth and combed through her hair before dragging herself into her bedroom, setting the alarm on her phone. Her room was tiny, but there was more space now than there had been last summer, several shelves gone. Dahyun tried not to notice it. Instead she flopped onto the bed and curled her body around the squirrel plush normally situated in the corner of her bed. A leftover from her childhood bedroom that she couldn’t get herself to throw out. She had gotten it when she was five and had named it Pearl. Absentmindedly she rubbed her thumb over its ear, the repetitive motion calming her down. Or maybe it was just the heavy duvet holding her body down. She checked that she had set an alarm. She had. With a sigh, she slipped into a worried sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Tuesday morning came with the sound of a loud discussion in very fast Japanese.

Dahyun attempted to understand some, but she only knew very few words from Mina, and none were close to whatever Sana and Momo were saying. With a groan, Dahyun turned onto her side and got up, reaching for her glasses, but found that she hadn’t put them on after taking out her contacts last night. She squinted as she walked out of her room and into the bathroom, putting on the glasses that lay neatly on the shelf under the mirror. It did not help her mood in the slightest to see how she looked. With a wipe she attempted to remove most of the smudged makeup, nudging her glasses in the process. When she was somewhat satisfied with the result, she adjusted the nose pieces on her glasses and twisted her hair into a bun. It would have to do.

Momo and Sana were still rambling. Then the sound of something breaking and a scream. Then a giggle. Immediately more awake, Dahyun hurried out of the bathroom and looked into the kitchen, the smell of burnt bread hitting her like a wall.

“What happened?” She asked, making a mental note to teach Sana the ways of the toaster.

Momo was standing against the sink a hand covering her mouth, laughing at Sana. Sana was kneeling, trying to pick up the broken pieces of a plate, looking up at Dahyun apologetically. Dahyun couldn’t help but smile at her.

“You better get used to this.” Momo said between laughs. “She’s the clumsiest person on earth.”

“Am not.” Sana mumbled.

“Are too.” Momo insisted, reaching down to take the pieces from Sana.

Dahyun’s eyes travelled from Sana’s figure to Momo. Last night Momo had been underneath a blanket and you couldn’t see her body as such, but now it was on full display. Whatever recipe those two girls were made from, Dahyun envied it. Sana was tall and lean and Momo was fit. As in, extremely fit. And it was becoming increasingly difficult for Dahyun to pull her eyes from the piece of stomach exposed from the hem of Momo’s top to the waistband on her sweatpants. It was hard not to stare at her, in general.

Dahyun really wasn’t used to having pretty girls strut around in her apartment. Not that Chaeyoung wasn’t pretty, but Dahyun had never thought about her in any other way than as her best friend. She noticed Nayeon the first few times she wandered into the kitchen in underwear, Dahyun wasn’t completely blind after all, though she had quickly gotten used to it. But this? Dahyun wasn’t sure she was going to get used to the two Japanese girls any time soon.

“Do you have a broom or something? Maybe a dustpan too?” Sana asked, still crouched on the floor.

“Oh, right. Yes.” Dahyun said, her warmth flushing up her neck. Momo’s eyes caught hers and her
lips parted in a smirk. Her eyes were enchanting and Dahyun averted her gaze, looking down at Sana who was trying to stack the larger pieces of the porcelain.

Dahyun excused herself and cursed internally at her blush, fetching the dustpan and broom from the back of her closet. They had never had an actual place for cleaning utensils despite the noticeable amount of space in the living room, and since Dahyun did the cleaning, it had just made sense at the time. But with Sana that might have to change, if she really was as much of a klutz as Momo accused her of being.

She allowed herself three deep breaths and felt her cheeks as she walked back. They were warm.

“Thank you. I’m sorry I broke your plate, Dahyunnie.” Sana smiled as she held the dustpan while Momo sweeped the last bits and pieces of broken porcelain into it.

“It’s fine. They’re Ikea. You can buy me a new set someday.” Dahyun said, helping Sana up.

She noticed that the burnt toast was already in the trash today.

“I’ll make breakfast.”

…

Chaeyoung had never been the best at piano. But she loved it anyway. Loved the memories it held even if the keys felt wrong under her fingertips. She sang along very quietly. Never liked singing out loud when Nayeon was home. Not that Nayeon ever complained about it, but Chaeyoung’s only insecurity was knowing she could never do a song justice the way her girlfriend could.

Just as she finished the song she felt arms around her shoulders and lips on her hair.

“I know you like Michelle Featherstone, but babe. You need to play something less depressing from time to time.” Nayeon mumbled and stroked her cheek.

“It’s not easy to play something cheerful on this.” Chaeyoung muttered and ran her finger over the middle C. The tone died out too fast.

“How about something romantic then?” Nayeon asked and walked around to sit on the shorter girl’s lap, arms wrapped around her neck. It cheered Chaeyoung up immediately.

“Like what?”

“Like a love song about how much you love your girlfriend.” Nayeon beamed at her.

“Oh, that’s a good idea. If only I had a girlfriend whom I really really loved.” Chaeyoung teased, chuckling when it worked. Nayeon swatted her arm and claimed her lips in a deep kiss.

“Fine, you win.” Chaeyoung mumbled under Nayeon’s lips.

With a grin, Nayeon drew back. “So if I move, will you play a love song for your girlfriend?”

“Deal.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes.

And she played for Nayeon, feeling her girlfriend’s hands around her waist and her chin on her
shoulder. Heard the older girl hum in her ear but she let Chaeyoung sing. And Nayeon kissed her cheek and chuckled when it made Chaeyoung miss a chord, playing a minor instead of a major.

Maybe the keys would have mercy on her in the end.

…

For most people who move in together, whether strangers or friends, even best friends, there’s an adjustment period. It’s cautious and full of consideration, trying to learn habits and mood swings. But with Sana there wasn’t. It was a head-dive. Sana was everywhere, all the time, invading every inch of Dahyun’s personal space. And Dahyun should’ve minded it. But she didn’t. Somehow it felt like she had been waiting her entire life for someone to take the lead and break through to that place where Dahyun had no mask. It wasn’t like she wasn’t close with her other friends, but it had taken them months or even years to get to the stability that rested between the seven of them.

Sana had told Dahyun on the first night that she had known Momo for the better part of their lives, but she treated Dahyun and Momo with the exact same affection. It was confusing. Half the time Dahyun felt as if Sana was hitting on her and the next she felt like she should avoid her eyes to allow Sana and Momo privacy. And then there was Momo. Momo who was in no way easy to figure out, whose mood changed in seconds, but who seemed to have only a fraction of an inch more respect for personal boundaries than Sana did. But Dahyun didn’t mind that either. Just accepted them as if they had always been there.

With a sigh, Dahyun turned around to face the showerhead, warm water pouring over her face. Momo and Sana had gone to the store to replace most of Dahyun’s pantry after effectively emptying it and Dahyun had taken the opportunity to gather her thoughts.

Her mind was buzzing with the words of the chapter she had recently read on the works of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. The duo had been active during the golden age of musical theatre and Dahyun had an assignment due on Hammerstein by Friday. She tried to recall some of the main points from the section about *The King and I*. King Mongkut had been born in 1804. Or 1801? It was one of the two. She counted on her fingers the number of wives and concubines as well as the number of children and tried to calculate how many kids each woman would’ve gotten. She shook her head. It wasn’t prudent to the story of the musical.

She shivered as she stepped out of the shower, quickly grabbing the towel and drying off. When she turned to grab her clothes, her eyes fell on the hamper. The sweater she had gotten from Mina lay neatly folded at the top, as if it had never left. Without thinking, she grabbed it and put it on, even though it had a stain on the sleeve.

Momo and Sana returned an hour later, arms linked and carrying each a massive bag of food. Dahyun looked up from the couch, head leaning on her hand, arm resting on the back of the couch and her feet on the coffee table. She returned their greetings lazily, and couldn’t help smile at them. Sana released Momo’s arm and hurried over, standing behind the couch looking down at Dahyun’s book. A picture of an old yellow poster took off half of a page, and Sana’s eyes flitted across it. Dahyun had been buried in the chapter on *Oklahoma!* , comfortably wrapped in the blanket that always lived on the couch.

“It looks super cool.” Sana breathed, gently placing the grocery bag on the floor beside her.

“It is. It’s not *In the Heights* but it’s still really cool.” Dahyun sat up straighter and propped her glasses back up her nose, reaching for the glass of chocolate milk on the coffee table by her feet. She
took a gulp before setting it back, ignoring Sana’s little giggle. So what if she was a grown up and still loved chocolate milk? Didn’t people say not to lose the spirit of childhood or something?

Momo walked past them grabbing the grocery bag and bumping into Sana on the way, causing her to stumble and grab the back of the couch for support. Immediately Dahyun felt her closeness and squirmed. Seemingly, Sana didn’t take this as a sign that Dahyun was uncomfortable, but rather that she was making space for Sana. With a swift motion, Sana had swung her legs over the back of the couch and sat next to Dahyun, leaning close to read along with unfeigned interest.

“So, that guy?” Sana pointed at the name Richard Rogers. “Who is he?”

“Oh, he’s a composer. You know, The Sound of Music?” Dahyun turned a few pages, making a dog ear on the page she had reached before Sana joined. She found a page with the original poster for The Sound of Music.

“I know that one! I didn’t know the other one though. The yellow one? Did he make that as well?” Sana scooted impossibly closer. Dahyun felt Momo’s eyes on them before she disappeared into the bathroom.

“Yup, same director too. They were really successful in the forties and fifties.” Dahyun explained as Sana flipped the pages back to the Oklahoma! poster.

“Would I know any songs from this one?” Sana pointed at it.

“Well, you might know the song Oklahoma! but I’m not sure you’d know any others. Maybe People Will Say We’re In Love?”

Sana shrugged and grabbed her phone. She quickly found the soundtrack and played the latter of the two songs. She squinted and looked like she was trying to recognize it, bobbing her head slowly as the song played. Dahyun couldn’t take her eyes away from Sana’s smile as she stared at Dahyun’s text book. But in the end, out of fear of getting caught, Dahyun decided to follow her example, doing her best to ignore the feeling of Sana’s arm pressed against her own. She tried to read more, her fingers fidgeting at the dog ear. Then Sana readjusted herself and her head rested calmly on Dahyun’s shoulder. Dahyun reread the sentence. Ripped the dog ear and cursed under her breath, letting go of the page. She settled for picking lightly at her cuticles even if she knew it was a bad habit. Really, she just had to finish the chapter.

The song ended and Sana hummed happily.

“What’s that?” Dahyun asked.

“No,” Sana said and pressed another song from the album “But I liked it.”

The song filled the entire room and all of Dahyun’s mind as she dove back into the text. She heard Momo exit the bathroom and then felt hands in her hair.

“I’m gonna go for a run.”

Dahyun leaned her head back and looked up at Momo, her hair tickling on Dahyun’s cheeks. Momo shook her head so her hair tickled all over Dahyun’s face. Dahyun huffed and tried to wave it away, but Momo took it and tied it into a ponytail, then bent further down and placed a kiss on Dahyun’s forehead as if it was the most normal thing to do to someone she had known for just about six hours. Dahyun felt her cheeks warm as Momo kissed the top of Sana’s head as well, and disappeared out
the door. She wiped at the place where Momo’s lips had touched, a tingling sensation lingering. A giggle revealed that Sana was watching her, but neither commented. Almost simultaneously they returned their focus to Dahyun’s book, the older girl’s head once more resting on Dahyun’s shoulder. For almost twenty minutes they sat there without a word, Dahyun reading the best she could, wishing she had a pen to twirl instead of ruining her nails. She flinched as she accidentally picked too hard at one of her cuticles and looked to see if it had started bleeding. Then Sana’s hand covered Dahyun’s.

“Do you always fidget this much?”

Dahyun tried not to notice how cool and comfortable Sana’s fingers felt on her own would they fit? No, what the hell kind of thought was that anyway? “… I don’t know.” Dahyun answered finally. “Maybe? I usually use a pen. I get restless quite easily.”

“Well, stop ruining your nails please.” Sana said in a pout and squeezed Dahyun’s hand. “Should I get you a pen?”

“I… No, it’s fine.” Dahyun turned her head to look at the expression on Sana’s face but the blonde hair fell like a screen down Sana’s face, the angle already odd with Sana’s forehead pressing against her neck.

Dahyun’s eyes jolted back to her hand as she felt Sana’s fingers forcing through the spaces between Dahyun’s.

“What are you doing?” Dahyun asked, trying not to let the complete lack of breath sound in her voice.

“I’m helping.” Sana turned on Dahyun’s shoulder and Dahyun met her eyes. They glinted as she smiled.

It was an odd feeling. Not because they didn’t know each other, but because in this moment it felt like they did. As if Sana knew that the feeling of her fingers tight around Dahyun’s hand provided exactly the comfort the younger girl needed to focus.

…

Maybe Dahyun should have wondered why Sana comfortably spent the next hour turning the page for Dahyun as she read, occasionally putting on a new song – always one mentioned in the text. But she didn’t.

“Are you interested in musical theatre?” Dahyun asked as she read the last page of the chapter.

“Not really? I mean I like the songs and stuff, but I haven’t ever gone to a play, and I never felt like I was missing out. It’s interesting though.” Sana explained. “I mean it would be a perfect fit for me, if it wasn’t wasn’t for the acting part.”

Dahyun closed the book but didn’t move. Just let the book rest in her lap.

“What do you mean? As a musical theatre performer?”

“Yeah. I love dancing and singing but I can’t act for the life of me.” Sana giggled.
“It’s true, she really can’t.” Momo agreed, appearing from the kitchen with a coffee mug steaming of soup. She had gotten home from her run about half an hour earlier, complained to Sana for a few minutes about traffic slowing her down and then gone to shower.

The couch was really only meant for two, but Momo didn’t seem to care. Truth be told, as close as Sana was to Dahyun, another person could fit. And so, Momo placed the mug on the coffee table next to Dahyun’s legs and her empty glass, lifted Sana’s legs and sat down, Sana’s legs curled across her thighs. It didn’t look very comfortable. Sana tried to adjust as Momo reached for her mug, but ended up settling for keeping her feet on the coffee table next to Dahyun’s. Only then did Dahyun notice that Sana’s fingers were still twined tightly with her own. She made to release them but felt Sana’s grip tighten.

“Do you have more to read today?” Sana asked neutrally, as if she hadn’t just done that.

“I have an assignment due on the chapter,” Dahyun cleared her throat, propping the glasses up her nose again. “But it can wait a bit.”

“Good you need a break.” Sana turned to look at Momo who was sipping at her soup, trying to balance the need to eat and not burn her tongue. “Did you make any for me?”

“Nope.” Momo mumbled and took another sip. Sana grumbled and then looked at Dahyun.

“Hungry?”

“Starving.” Dahyun noticed the moment she was asked.

“Want me to make something for us?”

“Is that wise?” Dahyun asked dryly.

Sana opened her mouth and looked at Dahyun feigning offence. Dahyun couldn’t help but laugh at her, earning her a pout.

“I have leftovers in the fridge.” Dahyun suggested.

“No you don’t.” Momo chimed.

“Okay. Well, do we have anything that doesn’t require cooking?”

“Soup? And otherwise no.”

“Soup then.” Dahyun shrugged “I’ll make it.”

There was a part of her that regretted the decision to go make food. It was the part that noticed how Sana’s weight disappeared from her side and her hand slipped from Dahyun’s as the younger girl got up. Instead Sana’s head fell onto Momo’s shoulder, poking the older girl’s cheek cheek with obvious amusement.

There was no doubt that she could get used to the two girls, but she was slowly starting to fear for Friday. There was an increasing chance that she would arrive with Sana hanging off of her, and dealing with everyone’s teasing was not something she looked forwards to. And really, she wasn’t sure that the explanation “Oh no, my new roomie is just a koala reincarnate, no worries” would be widely accepted.

It was a nice change of pace though. Not one she had expected, but nice. It seemed that forty eight
hours was all it took, to settle into a new normal. Or maybe Sana had just become a much welcome distraction.

... 

“So, that would be one bowl of gamjatang, a serving of bibimbap, and two sparkling water with lemon?” Dahyun asked kindly. The woman looked at her husband for a second then back at Dahyun. “And kimchi please, and a bowl of white rice.” Dahyun nodded and scribbled on her notepad. “Anything else?” The couple shook their heads in unison and the woman let her hand fall onto his, squeezing it lightly. Dahyun tried not to notice.

“You’re welcome to call for me any time, if you need anything or have questions.”

As she turned from the table, Dahyun blinked fast and swallowed a yawn. Her dreams had been disturbing her all night and she hadn’t found calm until she had rolled over and grabbed the old plush squirrel, and even then it had been a battle.

With a slight shake of the head she took a round in her section making sure everyone was pleased with their dinners and drinks before heading into the kitchen, nodding her head at Joohyun, the shy sous chef. She found Mina near the line, passing orders through to the kitchen.

Dahyun joined her and bumped her hip. “Busy day?”

“As always.” Mina smiled. “You?”

“I guess. I’m too tired to notice.” Dahyun grinned.

“I thought you were sleeping fine after Sana moved in? Jihyo said you stopped sleeping at her place.” Mina sounded concerned. She flinched as her finger pressed on a sore point on her shoulder.

“I spent a night on the couch and it’s still biting me.” Dahyun said with a shrug. As if that was all.

“Oh, right. I guess that’ll do it.” Mina nodded understandingly, then added with a frown, “Why did you sleep on the couch?”

“Long story, I’ll tell you after closing.” Dahyun promised.

Mina nodded, keeping an eye on three almost finished plates.

“Are you coming on Friday, to Jeongyeon’s?” Dahyun asked.

“Movie night? Yeah, I might. You?”

“Yup, plus two.”

“Plus two?

Three dishes were put onto the line with the note for one of Dahyun’s tables. She balanced the dishes.

“Yeah, my new roomie Sana and her friend Momo. They’re both Japanese, and from Kansai, so at least you’ll have that in common? But really, I hope you join. I miss hanging out with you.” She grinned before walking out of the kitchen to bring the food to her customers. A smile played on Mina’s lips.
Thursday came in a haze of closing shifts and bad dreams. Dahyun stood in front of the mirror in her room and massaged her sore arms. Three closing shifts in a row might have been overdoing it a bit, but it was good money and it kept her mind from going into static noise. But she was only just getting back to working the floor for full shifts and it seemed she wasn’t entirely back to her A-game yet. She had always had pride in being the best waitress who remembered all the customers and their orders, but especially the past few days she had slipped up more than usual. She blamed the lack of sleep. It was always worse when she didn’t sleep much. She heard a stumble from the kitchen and then a giggle. Smiled. Too fast she had gotten used to the sounds of Sana’s clumsiness, of her giddiness and the sunshine in her voice. Dahyun shook her head at the continued laughter in the kitchen and reached back at her hair, combing it with her fingers to make a ponytail.

“Dahyun, can I borrow the broom?” Asked Sana appearing suddenly in the door. Dahyun turned, dropping a large chunk of the hair she had been holding.

“Uh sure, it’s in the closet.” Dahyun said and tilted her head in the direction of her tiny closet.

Sana nodded and walked behind her, but then stopped. “Oh, you forgot a strand.”

Shivers ran down Dahyun’s spine as Sana’s cool fingers trailed over her nape and grabbed the forgotten pieces of hair. Dahyun dropped some more by accident, trying to poise herself, and Sana giggled.

“Let me.” She said and swatted Dahyun’s hands lightly. Dahyun let go, felt her hair fall awkwardly and Sana catch it. Her fingers scratched against Dahyun’s scalp as she gathered the hair.

“Hair tie?” Sana asked. Dahyun reached around and gave it to her. Sana was standing too close, not close enough, and Dahyun wondered fleetingly how she had let Sana get under her skin so fast, and how to stop it. Because this was getting downright ridiculous. It wasn’t that she hadn’t been attracted to strangers before, but she had always acknowledged that they were just that, strangers. But Sana wasn’t a stranger, even if she probably still counted as one by conventional standards.

“There we go.” Sana smiled and to Dahyun’s regret and complete thrill, wrapped her arms around Dahyun’s frame and pressed a kiss to her now exposed neck. Dahyun pressed her lips together as hard as she could to hide the silly smile that tried to break free. Sana giggled and checked that she hadn’t left any lipstick on it before fixing the collar of Dahyun’s shirt.

“Have fun at work.” Sana said, pulled her ponytail tighter, kissed Dahyun’s cheek and walked out. This one did leave a mark, and Dahyun frantically removed it, checking the mirror five times to make sure there were no remains of it. If Jeongyeon ever saw, she would never hear the end of it. As if that was really the big deal here, instead of the fact that a complete, well somewhat stranger had just kissed her, twice.

Honestly, Dahyun didn’t function properly for the next hour, a tingling sensation on her neck and Sana’s laughter in her ear. She almost walked right past her work, her mind guiltily stuck on her roommate’s entrance at the restaurant.
Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
How to Fluster Kim Dahyun in Three Minutes or Less

Chapter Notes

For this chapter I suggest listening to Jihyo's cover of Butterfly by Rhythmking, if you haven't already, do it now before reading, and if you have then do so anyways. I listened to it so much when I wrote this entire story. It's https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7p9zQyQCHo

Thank you for waiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jihyo sighed. Tried not to lose her temper.

“I'm sorry, I'll get it eventually, I promise!” The poor boy muttered.

“I know, I'm sorry, I'm just tired. You're doing well.” Jihyo promised and gave his shoulder a squeeze.

“Thanks.” He sighed and smiled before returning to the coffee machine.

It wasn't as if he was terrible, Minho, he was just too nervous. It was his fourth shift under Jihyo's supervision and though he was definitely making progress, it wasn't going nearly as fast as Jihyo could have wished, even if he worked hard. She missed Mina. Missed how easy it had been to train her and how good she was with the customers. Missed working with her in general. Missed her.

“Like this?” Minho broke through her thoughts. Jihyo snapped around to him and looked as he poured the frothed milk into the coffee making a leaf pattern.

“Exactly!” Jihyo nodded, smiling as Minho beamed at her.

He was a nice kid. Really was. And throughout the shift, Jihyo's confidence grew, that he would become a good employee. Maybe even a great one. He worked hard, and it had been Jihyo who had vouched for him when the choice was between him and another boy for the job. She had seen a potential in him and had promised to train him. After the second shift she had almost admitted defeat, but it was finally starting to help.

Until he broke a cup. The sound rang in Jihyo's ears and she bit her lip hard trying not to scold him. His ears were red and Jihyo's mercy took over for her frustration. Patted his back and told him to fetch the broom. It wasn't his fault how the sound made her flinch.

By the time Jihyo was done with her shift, she was absolutely exhausted. But she didn't go home. As always after a long shift, she longed for the cool spring air outside and walked from the coffee house to the river. Looked at the people walking by, at the water flowing calmly along.

Just as she was about to sit down on the edge of the river, she noticed a girl huddled in her brown
coat, face in her phone. The smile on her face made the corners of Jihyo’s lips curl. The girl’s black hair fell onto her shoulders, and she was beaming at whatever was on her phone. Jihyo walked up to her. Tried to look at her phone. But Mina turned it off the second she saw Jihyo, chuckling at her pout.

“Whatcha doing?” Jihyo asked as she plopped down on the bench beside Mina.

“It’s warm.” Mina just said and look out on the river.

“It’s cool considering it’s supposed to be spring.” Jihyo shuddered, tucking the coat tighter around her.

“Nah, it’s warm.” Mina just repeated. “Did you come from work?”

“Yup. Five hours of teaching Minho how to make leaves in the coffee and how to make a frappe.”

“I thought he was doing better by now?”

“Oh, he is. But it’s a slow process. It’s nothing like teaching you.” Jihyo looked around at Mina.

“You could come back, you know?”

“I know, but I like it at the restaurant. I like working with Dahyun and Jeongyeon. Not that I didn’t like working with you…”

“Mina, it’s fine, I understand.” Jihyo leaned back and looked over the river. “How is she?”

“Tired. Said it was just one bad night, but I don’t think it is.”

“She hasn’t been over since Sana moved in.”

“Doesn’t surprise me. I think Sana managed to overwhelm her quite thoroughly.” Mina said.

“Really?” Jihyo turned to look at Mina, a small smile playing on her lips.

“Just keep your eyes open tomorrow.” Mina’s eyes sparkled, but didn’t elaborate.

For almost ten minutes they just sat there, side by side, feeling the chilly air and looking over the river, talking about Minho and old times. It was almost like in high school. Almost. Except Mina wasn’t laughing nearly as much now as she had then. Had barely been able to speak a sentence without giggling back then. Or maybe it was just a part of Mina that Jihyo no longer saw.

“I’m gonna head home, I’m starving.” Jihyo finally said, getting overwhelmed by the last thought.

“See you tomorrow?” Mina asked.

Jihyo nodded and made to walk away. Then turned and looked at Mina.

“The offer is always there, Mina.”

“I know.” Mina sighed calmly.

Jihyo turned and walked along the river towards her home.
Dahyun had slept less than three hours, when the sound of glass breaking made her sit up straight, clutching the squirrel plush. Then the sound of Sana’s laugh. It was the same way she laughed whenever she tripped; embarrassed and breathless. Dahyun lay back down and turned to look at her phone. Friday. 8th of April. 2:34 AM. What was Sana doing up?

Habitually, Dahyun scrolled down the notifications, mostly emails from school and social media notifications, but also three messages, all received around midnight.

11:48 pm Jihyo: Mina says you’ve been tired at work. Are you ok? You haven’t called in a while.
11:53 pm Jihyo: Sorry if I’m prying, I’m just worried, you know that right?
11:58 pm Chaeyoung: Hey, you up?

The sensible thing would be for Dahyun to go back to bed. But she wanted to answer Jihyo first, bless her caring soul.

2:39 am Dahyun: This is probably the entirely worst time to write you, I promise I slept up until now. Sana broke something in the kitchen and it woke me.
2:39 am Dahyun: I'll call in the morning.
2:40 am Dahyun: Are you coming tonight? I hope you are, I need my shirt back.

For a moment, she considered putting the phone away, but if there was the slightest risk of Chaeyoung having a serious reason to write her at midnight knowing Dahyun’s sleep schedule, she had to check.

2:40 am Dahyun: I fell asleep early, I hope it wasn’t anything serious.

Just when she was about to shut off the phone, the screen changed. An incoming call from Jihyo.

“Mh.” She mumbled into the phone, her voice hoarse.

“Hi.” Jihyo said in a tone of relief.

“What’s up?” Dahyun asked quietly, as to not let Sana know she had woken her.

“Movie night has moved to my place.” Jihyo said.

“It’s 3 am, you could have told me that in the morning.” Dahyun said, suspicious. “What’s actually up? And why are you even up?”
“Just what Mina said... You’re ok, right?”

“I’m fine.” Dahyun smiled. “There’s no point in you losing sleep worrying about me though”

“I’m cramming, we have a major test tomorrow. I’ll nap before you guys show up. Which reminds me, don’t show up before five please unless you wanna wake the post-nap Jihyo monster.”

“No thank you, I don’t like sleep robbed Jihyo.” Dahyun turned and stared at the ceiling. Then she remembered that the broom and dustpan were in her closet and groaned. “Actually, can you hold on for a minute?”

“Sure, why?”

“I need to hand Sana the broom before she tries something stupid like picking up the glass because she doesn’t want to wake me.” Dahyun rolled her eyes and sighed, putting on her glasses and getting to the closet. Sana would do something like that.

“Oh ok. Yeah, sure. I’ll just try to remember all eighteen of these dates and fail miserably in the meantime.” Jihyo complained while Dahyun grabbed the broom and dustpan.

“Well good luck with that.”

Dahyun opened the door and murmured without knowing what she was trying to say. Shut her eyes with a whine, at the light coming from the hallway. Sleepily, she dragged her feet and popped her head into the kitchen, squinting.

“Dahyunnie.” Sana breathed, her entire face lighting up.

“Well good luck with that.”

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“Dahyunnie.” Sana breathed, her entire face lighting up.

“I’m sorry…” Sana looked genuinely sorry.

“It was a joke, it’s ok. I don’t really feel attached to glasses. Or plates. Just try not to break my mugs.” Dahyun held the phone with her head against the shoulder, hearing Jihyo curse and repeat dates over and over. Bent down and held the dustpan while Sana swept the kitchen floor for glass.

“I’ll do my best. And I’ll buy new plates. Pretty ones.” Sana was still pouting.

“Just settle for cheap ones. Ikea like these ones is probably the best idea.” Dahyun sent her the biggest smile she could muster, and it made the corners of Sana’s mouth twitch, her eyes softening. Dahyun got up and placed the dustpan with content on the kitchen table.

“Remember to wrap it in newspaper or something before you throw it out.” Dahyun gestured at it. Sana nodded eagerly. Unaware why, Dahyun felt an overwhelming need to make sure Sana smiled before she went back to bed, but she couldn’t think of any way. For a second she thought about reaching out and touching her cheek like she did to Dahyun whenever she walked by, but the moment she felt her hand react to the movement she stopped it, closing it into a fist. She felt a smile try to pry its way onto her lips, but pressed them together hard instead.

“Goodnight, Sana.” She said, and walked back to bed. Felt Sana stare after her.

“You’re entirely too kind, Kim Dahyun.” Jihyo’s smile was audible.

“She didn’t do it on purpose. But now I’m entirely too awake.”
“Lay down, I’ll help you sleep.” Jihyo said quietly. Dahyun hummed, knowing exactly what this meant. For the past two months Dahyun had crashed at Jihyo’s place whenever Mina or Jeongyeon had told on her or whenever she had swallowed her pride and called herself. And Jihyo had picked her up after work or from home. Had taken her home with her, singing her to sleep while she studied. As if it was no big deal to show up at two in the morning at your friend’s job to take her home.

The memory threatened to overwhelm Dahyun as she got back under the still warm covers. Felt like she might cry. Maybe it was because she was tired, or maybe her heart was just too full of affection for her friend to bear the gesture at such a late time.

Jihyo’s voice was calm and wonderful as she sang, like the warmth of a crackling fire through the phone on the pillow beside Dahyun. The younger girl closed her eyes and listened to the story Jihyo’s voice told her. Curled up around the plush, trying to hug every affectionate feeling for her friend into it, so that maybe she could feel it. Still, Dahyun’s heart might just burst.

Jihyo hummed the end of the song.

“Thank you.” Dahyun mumbled, her voice high-pitched.

“I’ll keep singing until I can hear you snore.” Jihyo said quietly.

“I don’t snore...” Dahyun objected feebly.

“You do. It's cute and quiet, but you do snore.” Jihyo giggled and started singing. “Every time you come around my way, you spread your wings and chase my weary clouds away.”

Dahyun felt sleep fight her beating heart. The darkness wasn’t half as lonely with Jihyo singing. Her lips parted in a wide calm smile and she let out a sigh. Jihyo giggled in the phone before continuing. Dahyun briefly opened her eyes and saw that the lights were off in the hallway, the light no longer shining through underneath the door.

Sana had gone to bed too.

“Little butterfly, you're shining through. And I never wanna live without your love.”

Jihyo kept singing and Dahyun kept thinking. Until she drifted off. And Jihyo whispered: “Goodnight, little butterfly.” But Dahyun didn’t hear. Or she would have objected. She wasn’t a butterfly.

…

“New notebook?” Jihyo asked as she sat down next to Chaeyoung, her eyes drooping slightly.

“Yup.” Chaeyoung grinned, turning the book to show her the cover.

“What did she write this time?” Jihyo asked, turning to the back page. Read Nayeon’s message. A simple note asking Chaeyoung to keep Nayeon in her thoughts when she wrote about love.

“Do you think she has a special notebook budget?” Jihyo chuckled.
“Probably. She’s bought me almost one a month for the entire time we’ve known each other.”

Chaeyoung let her fingers skate over Nayeon’s message before returning to the page she was writing on before Jihyo sat down. Turning the book slightly, she let Jihyo read along as she wrote, crossing out every now and then, Jihyo’s head on her shoulder.

“You look beat.” Chaeyoung commented eventually, when she closed her book. She shuffled slightly to wrap an arm around Jihyo.

“I didn’t get to sleep until three in the morning. I’m not ready for the test at all.”

“Oh, come on, you’re always at the top of the class.” Chaeyoung nudged her.

“Not for this, I can promise you.” Jihyo groaned and looked at her wrist watch.

“Just get some sleep tonight instead of cramming. You can’t think on no sleep.”

“Funny, I feel like I’ve given that lecture myself.” Jihyo got up and offered her hand to Chaeyoung.

“Sometimes you just gotta hear it from someone else.” Chaeyoung shrugged and let Jihyo pull her up. They walked together until they found Nayeon in a crowd. With Jihyo’s arm around her, it was impossible to reach her though, and she settled for following her into the lecture hall.

…

Music played quietly from her phone on the couch. Dahyun checked the clock. Almost noon. And the paper was due at four.

She was trying her best to write, notes scattered across the table, twirling her favorite pen distractedly in her hand, despite writing on a laptop. It helped her focus. Sana was in school and Momo was at the studio, so she had the apartment to herself, basically for the first time since Sana had moved in and dragged Momo with her.

She was writing a part on *Oklahoma!* and the importance of letting a story advance through song, rather than having it interrupt the story. Without thinking about it, she reached for her phone and switched to *Lonely Room*. To get into the mood, she argued to herself. Felt the need to defend her distracted mind. But her thoughts kept falling to Sana and Momo. How had it only been a few days? How did it only been a few days? How did they, well mostly Sana, take up so much of her mind so fast? It couldn’t be normal. Of course Chaeyoung would just call it a convenient distraction and tell her to get it together and deal with her shit. As if it was that easy. And maybe Sana was just that. A comfortable distraction. No. No she wasn’t. She was just… hard to figure out. Wonderful. Needed. Like bubbling champagne right before a meal; the thing that cracks open the conversation. Except she hadn’t broken the ice gently like champagne settling in the throat and cheeks as a warm hug. She was a huge massive red icebreaker, shattering Dahyun’s walls. Walls that she had so carefully built to spare her friends of worry. And Dahyun realized, pen twirling in her hand, exactly what it was about Sana that made her so irresistible. It was the desire to lean on someone. To let someone be there, and let someone soothe you, even if she had no clue what she was doing. So maybe Sana was a convenient distraction. But she was also an unexpected comfort. Even if Dahyun had no clue why Sana had chosen her.

She wasn’t going to ask.

Just wanted to lean a little longer.
As Jud sang and Dahyun twirled the pen, the door opened, revealing a sweaty and grinning Momo, a shopping net in her hand. She waved at Dahyun.

“Hey Dahyun, you studying?”

Dahyun smiled back and paused the music. “Yup, are you restocking my fridge?”

“That’s the deal right?” Momo grinned.

“Exactly.” Dahyun pointed at her with the pen as the older girl walked closer.

“Did you eat?” Momo asked as she walked past Dahyun, ruffling her hair affectionately.

Dahyun pressed her lips together. “Nope…”

“Want dumplings? I bought some from that place down the block.” Momo asked from the kitchen.

“From Higashi’s? Yes, please.”

Dahyun felt her stomach rumble in agreement as she returned to her notes. Jud was still singing about Laurey.

Soon Momo joined Dahyun on the couch with lunch as Dahyun made a stack of the notes that she was done with and another with those she hadn’t gone through yet.

From what she had learned about Momo, Dahyun expected that she would have to be fast if she was to get any dumplings, and sure enough, she was soon flicking away Momo’s chopsticks with her own, trying to get the last gyoza.

“You can’t just offer me lunch and then eat it all.” Dahyun complained as Momo successfully snatched it.

“I can try.” Momo grinned as she made to eat the gyoza. Then she turned her chopsticks and directed them at Dahyun. “Here.”

Dahyun hurriedly chomped down on the gyoza before Momo had a chance to change her mind. Momo let out a laugh.

“Ph-ank-you.” Dahyun mumbled, covering her mouth with her hand.

Momo just laughed and got up to pack away the lunch.

When she returned she had a soda and a glass of chocolate milk.

Half an hour later Momo was asleep on the couch, leaning against Dahyun as she wrote. Her mouth was slightly ajar and her breath was calm. Dahyun twirled her pen, holding it still only while she wrote. But just as she was sure that she was almost done, Dahyun realized that she had already written a paragraph on this part before, and backtracked. The phone was still playing, but had switched to another musical, still by the duo she was writing about. She reminded herself to learn how to play this one, then shook the thought from her mind.
Momo turned slightly in her sleep.

Dahyun wrote.

…

It had been ages since Dahyun had felt this nervous about going to Jihyo’s place, but sitting tightly mushed between Sana and Momo on the subway made all her worries flood through her veins. She had only known the girls for a few days yet they were so comfortable around her that it was hard to imagine they would act any different when meeting the others. And Dahyun wasn’t exactly known for being cuddly. So she kept thinking up ways to excuse their clinginess and especially a way to excuse the warmth that crept up her neck when Sana wrapped her arm around her shoulders. Dahyun honestly rarely got crushes and the fact that she, within hours probably, developed what was undoubtedly a crush on her new roommate was bound to be noticed. There was no doubt that most of her friends would read her on a mile’s distance.

Dahyun felt her heart beat fast and picked at her cuticles. What if they found the girls weird? What if they didn’t fit in at all? What if-

What if Sana could try to chill for just a second and maybe let Dahyun live? Just as she had started fiddling, Sana’s hand was in hers, squeezing it tightly, and Dahyun couldn’t think. They weren’t even talking. Momo was just bobbing her head to the music from her headphones, Sana’s eyes on the screen of her phone. And Dahyun wished she had something to distract her as well but she had made the mistake of placing her phone in her back pocket and now couldn’t reach without being obvious.

Sana’s thumb ran soothingly over Dahyun’s skin but it did absolutely nothing to calm her down, almost charging her to an uncomfortable level instead. Like a cat being stroked too long. With a deep breath she started counting the seconds until they were at Jihyo’s, the urge to text Chaeyoung in a blind panic increasing. Then Sana was giggling again and Dahyun looked around automatically, meeting Sana’s gaze.

“You’re so cute.” Sana just said. Dahyun stared, her mind going to a state of what could most accurately be described as static noise, trying to make sense of the reason behind that comment. It didn’t work.

If this subway would just stop soon so they could get off. So they wouldn’t sit so close. So she could get her stupid brain to work again.

And it did. Came to a halt and Dahyun got up so fast, Sana’s hand slid from hers.

“This is our stop.” Dahyun said hurriedly, trying not to care about the amused expression on Momo’s face. A wide smile spread across Dahyun’s face, not from happiness but from embarrassment, and she felt very much like hiding her face in her hair. But the girls thankfully just got up and followed her out of the subway and up to the open street.

The fresh air was a blessing, even though it was still chilly. Jihyo lived quite close to the subway in one of the downtown dorms, and Dahyun walked fast. As fast as she could at least. But then Momo’s arm was around her shoulders and Sana’s hand snuck around hers.

If her friends saw them like this, Dahyun would never hear the end of it. Torn between enjoying the feeling of Sana’s hand in hers and the need to not be mocked for all eternity, she walked, enveloped
by the two girls she really barely knew. And then her stomach dropped.

Nayeon was turning the corner, Chaeyoung following suit.

Dahyun’s hand automatically let go of Sana’s and she shook Momo’s arms off her shoulder, realizing a moment too late what she had done. They both looked confused. And worse. They looked hurt. She opened her mouth to speak but no words came out. So she did the only thing she could think of, used her newfound overpriced freedom to wave exaggeratedly at Chaeyoung and Nayeon with both arms in the air and started half walking, half running at them.

Chaeyoung’s lips parted in an amused grin as Dahyun quickly approached, engulfing her best friend in a hug. “Don’t comment, just save me.” Dahyun whispered breathlessly.

“What have you do- oh, wow.” Chaeyoung whispered, and Dahyun figured her best friend had seen Momo and Sana approaching. “Are those two yours?”

“Yup. Save me.” Dahyun mumbled.

“Bless…” Chaeyoung chuckled.

“Shut it.”

“If you want my advice, just let yourself sandwich there.” Chaeyoung said quietly. And despite the growing need to flick her right between the eyebrows for her cheek, Dahyun appreciated that the younger girl kept her voice low enough that Nayeon didn’t hear.

“Who says I’m being sandwiched?” Dahyun hissed.

“Your face. Your arms. It screams gay panic.”

“Fuck off.” Dahyun grumbled.

“Then let go.” Chaeyoung poked her side, to no good. “Which one is yours?”

Dahyun’s cheeks burned, knowing they must be close now. “... blonde.”

“Hot.”

Dahyun kept her arms still tightly wrapped around Chaeyoung’s petite frame. “That’s my problem...”

“Do I not get a hug?” Nayeon interrupted with raised eyebrows, catching Dahyun’s eye, a smirk around her lips.

“I’m getting to it.” Dahyun grumbled.

“I’m waiting.” Nayeon sang. Her eyes glinted.

Dahyun sighed and let go of Chaeyoung just as Sana and Momo reached them. Turned instinctively to look at them but Nayeon, impatient as always when it came to affection, wrapped her arms around her from behind, claiming her hug.

“I’m Nayeon.” Nayeon introduced herself to Sana and Momo.
“I’m with Im Nayeon.” Chaeyoung snorted.

Nayeon looked a little like she wanted to kill Chaeyoung, and a little like she was gonna kiss her. Dahyun hoped for the first.

“We talked.” Sana said kindly, obviously not noticing the pun. Impossibly Dahyun liked her more for missing it, or ignoring it. Or maybe it was the smile she flashed at Dahyun, that the younger girl automatically returned. Momo however, just stared from Chaeyoung to Nayeon and back again. Didn’t speak. Leaned a little closer to Sana.

“So, you’re Sana?” Chaeyoung asked, as if she didn’t know. Sana nodded and her entire face lit up in a smile that outshone the sun, instinctively grabbing Momo’s hand when the older girl touched hers with her fingertips.

Finally, Nayeon released Dahyun, allowing her to step out of the naturally formed circle she had become the unwilling center of. And Dahyun watched with anticipation as the three girls started talking - Momo had still yet to utter a word - trying to decide whether to mediate or not. Maybe she should. After all, these were just complete strangers, and Dahyun was vouching for them, with what? A few days of getting to know them. And she hardly knew anything about them. But as she stood with her arm pressed against Chaeyoung’s, and she felt her hand squeeze Dahyun’s, thumb running over Dahyun’s. It made it all ok.

Life doesn’t ever turn out the way you plan. Sometimes life means you don’t get to do the one thing you love. Other times it means that you somehow end up being the center of a game of who can make her blush faster. Sometimes you’re just stupid enough to let your brain develop a crush on essentially a total stranger and then bring her to meet all of your friends, knowing full well it could never end well.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
The Story of How Seven Became Nine

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the slight delay.
I really hope you'll enjoy the chapter, it's one of my favorite in the entire story.
I'm honestly just always soft for OT9.

Thank you for waiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A bright smile greeted the five as Jihyo opened the door for them. Indiscriminately to the newcomers, she hugged them each on turn, kissing Dahyun’s cheek softly as the younger girl walked past her into the apartment. The scent of Jihyo’s apartment embraced Dahyun like a warm blanket. There was something entirely soothing about it. Dahyun almost let the comfort overpower her. She had gotten so used to this place being her free space when she couldn’t be in her own body.

It was really only now Dahyun felt how tense she had been for the past hour, as her shoulders fell and she stretched her head from side to side. She noticed Tzuyu in Jihyo’s wonderfully big couch and almost joined her before remembering Sana and Momo. She turned at Sana’s giggle, her ear catching it as naturally as if she had said Dahyun’s name. Jihyo was gesturing around her room and Sana pointed at the wall behind the couch. Polaroids, drawings, miscellaneous tickets from movies and concerts and train rides, and an abundance of talent show prizes all hung like a collage behind Tzuyu. It was a mess but not an annoyance to the eye. It drew you in. Organized chaos. And it had drawn Sana in as well. She studied the wall closely, leaving Momo behind. With a frown, Dahyun noticed how Momo seemed almost smaller in the space, left behind by Sana. She shifted her weight uncomfortably, eyes shifting to meet Dahyun’s. And she really did try to return the grin Dahyun sent her. But it didn’t go all that well, her eyes flickering to Jihyo and then Tzuyu. Then to Nayeon and Chaeyoung by Jihyo’s big dining table, and back to Dahyun. Who would have thought that Momo would be the one to go all shy and quiet? She was just fine with invading pretty much every inch of Dahyun’s personal space without even knowing her.

“Oh, I love this!” Sana exclaimed, wresting Dahyun from her thoughts. Sana was looking at a photo of Jihyo, Tzuyu and Dahyun from Halloween last year. Dahyun’s cheeks flushed at the memory. She had definitely been the odd one out. Both Jihyo and Tzuyu had worn stunning dresses and looked like a million bucks. Whereas Dahyun had been a bunny. A bunny with a fluffy tail and a carrot and everything. Had completely misunderstood the concept of college parties. She looked around at Momo, noticing her moving closer, out of the corner of her eye. Dahyun switched her weight towards her and Momo’s hand snuck around Dahyun’s arm. Meanwhile Jihyo continued to tell the story behind whatever item Sana pointed at. And Dahyun couldn’t help staring. Sana’s entire body seemed to be taking to Jihyo’s natural warmth and shine, making her even more radiant.

“This one?” Sana pointed at a beer bottle label CASS fresh.

“Oh.” Jihyo’s eyes flickered and she smiled. “That’s a long story actually. We’d better make sure people have food first.”
Sana looked at Dahyun who nodded her head in Jihyo’s direction, signaling for Sana to follow. With a shrug and a smile, Sana walked past Dahyun into the kitchen.

“Hey Momo, you’re a dancer right?” Asked a voice from the kitchen table. Nayeon sat on the edge of it, nose in her phone.

Momo nodded, but when Nayeon didn’t look up she took a breath and said: “I am, yeah.”

“Do you know this dance?” Nayeon turned her phone at Momo, finally looking up. Momo’s grasp on Dahyun's arm strengthened for a second then disappeared. She walked over, looking at the phone intensely, leaving Dahyun in the middle of the room. However, before she had time to decide whether to join Jihyo and Sana or Momo and Nayeon, Chaeyoung was by her side and pulled her to the couch.

“I forgot to mention; you look like hell.” She noted on the way.

“Just tired.” Dahyun grinned at her, her eyelids fighting her on the sincerity of it.

Chaeyoung hummed and pulled Dahyun with her onto the couch. “Me too.” She sighed and leaned on Tzuyu who immediately made room for Chaeyoung in her arms.

Dahyun grabbed Chaeyoung’s legs and lifted them across her lap, Chaeyoung momentarily surprised but then relaxed in the arms of her friends, closing her eyes peacefully.

“How was the exam?” Dahyun asked.

“It was shit!” Nayeon answered from the couch, looking back down at the phone, huddling close to Momo.

“It was fine,” Chaeyoung said tiredly. “I got most of it right as far as I can tell.”

“You went home and looked it up, didn’t you?” Dahyun grinned.

“Only a few.”

“More like half.” Nayeon grumbled.

“She’s just mad cause she got some wrong.” Chaeyoung hummed.

“Shut up, or I’m kicking you out.” Nayeon said dryly.

“Yeah, right.” Chaeyoung opened her eyes and sent Nayeon her cutest smile, showing off her dimple. Nayeon rolled her eyes but returned the smile, her eyes shining softly.

“Ew. No more cuddles for you.” Tzuyu exclaimed without letting go.

“Yeah, right.” Chaeyoung looked up at Tzuyu with mischief glinting in her eyes.

Tzuyu poked her dimple, a soft smile playing around her lips.

“Now who’s being gross?” Dahyun mumbled and turned her attention to Jihyo who had walked in with bowls of snacks, Sana trailing after her with soda. “Isn’t Jeongyeon coming? Since it moved to your place?”
“She’s coming in a few minutes I think.” Jihyo placed the bowls and threw a piece of chocolate at Dahyun. “She just texted a few days ago and asked if I could host instead, not sure why.”

“What about Mina? She said she might join.” Dahyun said, biting down on her chocolate.

“She’s coming, but she didn’t say when. I haven’t heard from her in the last hour or so.”

...

As Jihyo had predicted, Jeongyeon showed up a few minutes later, carrying several bottles of wine and, as she said, vodka just in case. She quickly joined Sana and Jihyo in the kitchen, ordering chicken and cold buckwheat noodles for all. Sana’s laugh was once again audible from the kitchen and Momo was teaching Nayeon a dance move, probably one from the video. Dahyun felt her eyes rest on the two of them. Nayeon wasn’t as good as Momo, not by a long shot, but she caught on fast and soon they were huddled together again, pointing at the screen and repeating the move, this time with an addition. Nayeon seemed beyond pleased to get a private lesson. And somehow, Nayeon had gotten Momo to loosen up and forget about her shyness. Or maybe it was just getting to dance, that did the trick.

It was so enchanting to watch Momo dance, something Dahyun hadn’t yet gotten a chance to, that she didn’t even notice Sana until Dahyun felt the couch dip. She jolted slightly and looked around. Sana was keeping an unusual amount of distance, Chaeyoung’s legs creating a barrier. Without thinking Dahyun caught Sana’s eyes and lifted Chaeyoung’s feet with one hand and patted the seat next to her with the other. Sana’s eyes smiled before her mouth caught up. She scooted over and allowed Chaeyoung’s feet to rest in her lap, the angle forcing Chaeyoung to lean even further into Tzuyu’s arms. Sana’s shoulder pressed against Dahyun’s.

Chaeyoung raised an eyebrow but Dahyun ignored it. She had made Sana smile. They sat in a strange but comfortable silence, Dahyun dared to lean against Sana, but quickly pulled back when Sana started giggling uncontrollably.

Mina didn’t leave them hanging for long, joining only ten minutes after Jeongyeon, her cheeks revealing a blush as she looked around at the eight pairs of eyes looking at her. Jihyo was quick on her feet and engulfed her in a hug, leading her to the dinner table where Momo was still discussing dance with Nayeon. Mina quickly waved at the four in the couch and held exchanged a smile with Dahyun, holding her eyes for a second.

“Dinner should be here in about fifteen minutes so I don’t know if we should wait for that or break out the wine?” Jeongyeon looked at Jihyo, catching her in a yawn.

“Wine please.” Nayeon answered.

“I guess that decides it.” Jihyo said with a shrug, clearly not bothering to argue sense when it was Nayeon versus alcohol.

Jeongyeon got up and passed behind Mina. Nayeon and Momo seemed to have finished their discussions, as they got up too and helped Jeongyeon pass out glasses. With nine to share, a bottle only just made it around to all. The five at the table joined the four on the couch, Jeongyeon and Momo sharing the chaise, Nayeon on the armrest by Chaeyoung’s head and Jihyo sharing her old
wingback chair with Mina, hugging her tight as the younger girl sat on Jihyo’s lap. It made Dahyun smile and Jihyo noticed, sticking out her tongue at her and pulling Mina closer. Mina let out a chuckle.

“Thanks for inviting us along.” Sana said, though she looked unsure of who to thank, initially addressing Jeongyeon but then switching her gaze to Jihyo.

“No problem. It’s always fun to meet new people and I guess at least you will see a lot of us now that you’re living with Dahyun.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“And you all know each other really well then?” Sana asked. Momo was still quietly observing.

“Yeah. It sort of just grew into this.” Jihyo said. Mina repositioned herself, allowing Jihyo a better view, wrapping her arms around Jihyo’s shoulders.

“It was just Jeongyeon and I to start,” Nayeon took over. “But that was ages ago. We went to primary school together. Jihyo was in a younger year and we didn’t talk to her much for a while, but really, look how cute she is, you can’t really resist that.”

Jihyo’s face lit up.

“I could.” Jeongyeon claimed.

“No, you couldn’t.” Nayeon coughed.

“Then as high school started Jihyo found that silly thing in her class. All shy and friendless, didn’t know the language well.” Jeongyeon pointed at Mina whose gummy smile lit up her entire face, a laugh bubbling on her lips. “And I started working at the same diner as Dahyun when I started college.”

“I knew Chaeyoung from high school, we-” Dahyun stopped, then looked at Chaeyoung before continuing. “She was a year under me but we hung out a lot. And my senior year I started as a kitchen girl at the place where I work now as a waiter. And Jeongyeon brought me along for some stuff. Then I brought Chaeyoung... And then that happened.” Dahyun cringed at the timing of Nayeon placing a kiss on Chaeyoung’s forehead. Tzuyu flicked Nayeon’s forehead and Nayeon flicked back before taking revenge by kissing Chaeyoung full on the lips, upside down, earning her a happy hum and a giggle from Chaeyoung and puking noises from both Jeongyeon and Tzuyu.

“Oh, just let them be.” Jihyo laughed.

“What about her?” Sana asked, gesturing at Tzuyu, looking at Jeongyeon “Did you go to school with her as well?”

“Tzuyu? God no, she’s a baby. She’s the newest addition to the squad, though we weren’t sure we were going to let her in.” Jeongyeon teased.

“Why not?” Asked Sana, seemingly not catching on to Jeongyeon’s joke.

“Jeongyeon couldn’t handle the possibility of someone as beautiful as Tzuyu overshadowing her.” Nayeon insisted.

“I think that was you.” Jihyo said dryly before turning back to Sana to answer her first question about Tzuyu. “She joined quite randomly, almost a year ago. Mina and I worked at this coffee house - I still work there. And Tzuyu came in a lot on her own, so we took her home.”
“You make me sound like a stray puppy.” Tzuyu said, faint indignation in her voice.

“You were! With those big sad puppy eyes whenever I didn’t have time to talk to you.” Jihyo laughed.

Tzuyu’s cheeks reddened slightly but she settled for a timid smile rather than a comment. Chaeyoung looked up at Sana, whifting her hands at Nayeon’s red hair halfway covering her face.

“What about you?”

As Sana told the story of how Momo and she met, Momo only commenting rarely, the glasses emptied of their first glass and Jeongyeon got the second bottle out, sharing it between them. Just as she was about to sit back down between Sana and Momo however, the doorbell rang, and she got up to open, Mina jumping up to help carry - the natural waiter in her taking over - Dahyun thought with a smile.

Leaving the food to Jeongyeon and Mina, Dahyun listened as Sana talked. Told about how she was an only child and had been taken in by Momo and her sister and treated as a third sister. How her mom had suffered from a bad health and the two Hirai sisters, especially Momo, had been her safe space from all the worry. How she always saw Momo as her real sister and never had many other friends, none other than Momo who stuck around when things got bad. So when Momo was offered a scholarship here, she applied for one too, so they could go together, leaving home together.

Throughout the story, Momo had crawled back into her shell, and Dahyun feared that Momo would clamp up completely if someone didn’t make sure to include her soon. Tried to come up with ways to do this. Dahyun hadn’t really expected this, as both Sana and Momo had fit in so naturally at the apartment, but while Sana seemed to thrive even in great crowds like this, Momo certainly didn’t. At least until the chicken was brought out. Food seemed to have a magical power over her, even more than usual, and she was soon in a quiet but intense battle with Jeongyeon about who could eat the most. Dahyun had stopped eating a while ago and so had most others. While Dahyun and Sana didn’t take much notice of Momo’s eating habits, Jihyo was laughing louder with each bite, obviously amused at the thought that someone might beat Jeongyeon at what had obviously become an outright eating competition. Mina had moved to the floor, now sitting cross legged on pillow by Jihyo’s feet, and was gazing at the battle as well, a playful smile around her lips, her eyes darting between the two girls.

“We should start taking bets.” Dahyun suggested playfully.

“5 says Momo wins.” Chaeyoung grinned, catching Dahyun’s eye.

“10 says Jeongyeon wins,” Mina added.

“15 says Momo wins and eats everything in Jihyo’s fridge afterwards if no one stops her.” Dahyun said, crossing her arms, earning a laugh from Sana and a sheepish smile from Momo.

“Confidence. I like it.” Jihyo teased.

“She ate my entire fridge on the first day.” Dahyun said.

“Sorry.” Momo mumbled halfway through another chicken leg.
“I must admit,” Jeongyeon sighed, obviously full, face slightly puffy and eyelids drooping slightly. “I’m impressed.”

Momo’s face lit up halfway through a sip of soda. She was adorable, and looking around, Dahyun was pleased to see that everyone else seemed to think so too. Momo dug in for another mouthful of buckwheat noodles, and Jeongyeon cringed.

“Yup. I’m done.” Jeongyeon admitted defeat, leaned back, but with nothing there to catch her, as she was still sitting on the chaise, it was only Momo’s fast reflexes that prevented her from falling back completely. Sana too helped, tugging at Jeongyeon’s arm to help get her back up, and Momo had an arm around her waist. Jeongyeon looked absolutely taken aback, a blush visible in her cheeks. Jihyo and Nayeon were howling with laughter.

“Are you sure you’re well, Jeongyeon?” Jihyo asked, wiping a tear from her eye.

“I’m fine!” Jeongyeon insisted, squirming because Momo was still very close to her.

“First you lose at eating and now this? Who would have thought Jeongyeon was secretly a bottom?” Nayeon teased.

“I’m gonna kill you if you don’t shut up right now.” Jeongyeon’s entire face flushed. She looked around for help but only Tzuyu and Momo weren’t laughing at her.

“I just never knew you’d go for overseas girls!” Nayeon kept at it, never knowing when to stop.

“Okay, that’s it.” Jeongyeon got up faster than Nayeon managed to register, climbing awkwardly past Dahyun and Tzuyu’s legs and pouncing at Nayeon with her entire weight, both falling to the ground. Nayeon squealed incessantly as Jeongyeon poked and tickled her, sitting on her stomach to prevent her from moving.

“Are they always like this?” Sana asked quietly in Dahyun’s ear, her breath warm and her nose tickling against the top of Dahyun’s ear, making her squirm.

“Uh, yeah. They’re pretty insane. But don’t think too much about it. They’d kill for each other.” Dahyun looked around at Sana, the sound of Nayeon’s squeals zoning out as she saw just how close Sana was. She wasn’t smiling. Just looking. At Dahyun. Looking very intensely at Dahyun. Who turned away. Looked back down at the mess of limbs and laughter. It would have taken less than three inches to reach out. The thought made her dizzy, but she blamed it on the wine.

“Someone make her stop!” Nayeon called through laugh, hitting Jeongyeon’s arm, the night blue beads of their bracelets striking each other with a clank. Identical but Jeongyeon’s worn on her left, Nayeon’s on her right. Instinctively Dahyun looked at Jihyo and saw hers on the left arm as well. A memory from a school fair when they were still in elementary school, Jihyo had told.

“Jeongyeon if you break, you buy.” Chaeyoung said dryly.

“Fuck no.” Jeongyeon stopped and got off of Nayeon before she could regain breath. She quickly sat down next to Mina at the foot of the wing chair, her face flushed and her breath shallow. Mina seemed utterly amused and Jeongyeon nudged her grumpily, making her laugh even more. Nayeon settled by Chaeyoung again, distractedly running a hand through the younger girl’s black hair.

…

They never got around to the Vodka. It didn’t turn into that kind of night. They played board games and planned what to do for Chaeyoung’s birthday. Dahyun had missed the last one because of work,
and though she had made up for it with a movie night, she had also promised not to miss this one. Eventually they agreed to just do a night similar to this one, though Nayeon insisted on more alcohol. Jeongyeon seconded that. Jihyo rolled her eyes, and got shit for being a hypocrite. They all knew who drank the most.

They were halfway through a game of Codenames when Chaeyoung turned the subject over to Momo.

“So, how long are you going to stay with Sana and Dahyun?”

“Oh,” Momo shifted in her seat. “I’m actually apartment hunting, so I don’t know exactly. Hopefully not that much longer, I don’t want to intrude.” Momo answered.

“You’re not.” Dahyun insisted immediately and Momo beamed at her.

Mina’s eyes flickered to Jeongyeon and Dahyun noticed that they seemed to be having a wordless conversation, before Mina turned back to Momo and said: “Jeongyeon has a room if you don’t mind having her for a roomie?”

All eyes turned to Jeongyeon.

“What happened?” Jihyo asked before anyone else could.

“I thought you two were doing fine again.” Nayeon said.

Jiyeon, Jeongyeon’s roommate slash girlfriend slash ex girlfriend slash girlfriend again, of years had been unstable to say the least. It was well known that Jeongyeon had always had a soft spot for her, and while she had mostly handled it on her own it hadn’t passed their noses by entirely. Their on-again-off-again relationship had been a heavily discussed subject for as long as Dahyun had known Jeongyeon. Jiyeon had been reckless and uncooperative and used Jeongyeon for all her personal gains, using her kind heart and forgiving spirit.

“I threw her out. She hadn’t paid rent in three months and it’s my name on the lease.” Jeongyeon said coolly. She didn’t meet Nayeon’s eyes, but stared at the ring on the coffee table made by her glass.

“She got pissed when I said I wouldn’t fool around anymore. I mean officially we broke up months ago. Just figured enough was enough, right? But she took it out on me. I just didn’t feel anything anymore, hadn’t since we broke up probably, and she got really uncomfortable to be around. So, at the start of February I told her she had two weeks to get her shit out of my apartment and I started looking for a new roommate.” She shrugged. It honestly didn’t seem to bother her much, but even so, Jeongyeon’s body relaxed into Jihyo’s when the younger girl wrapped her arms around her. Dahyun had a feeling they weren’t getting the full story, but Jeongyeon had clamped up for now. She would tell them eventually. She always did.

“So you’re finally over?” Tzuyu asked

“Finally... you say that as if I should’ve left her long ago.” Jeongyeon scowled, then shrugged. “But yeah, Jiyeon and I are over. Absolutely one hundred percent over.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Nayeon asked.

“I... I’m sorry.” Jeongyeon didn’t meet her eyes.

“You’re not even calling her Bona anymore, and you still... didn’t tell me.” Nayeon’s frowned.
There was a quiet rumble of thunder in her voice, subtle and unthreatening still, though it made sure everyone in the room knew, that she wasn’t pleased at being left out of the loop in her best friend’s life.

“Later, ok?” Jeongyeon’s eyes flickered to Nayeon’s for a split-second. Then leaned her head on Jihyo’s shoulder, the younger girl wrapping an arm around her shoulder. Nayeon nodded.

“Are you serious about considering Momo for a roommate?” Asked Dahyun quietly, breaking the silence that followed.

“As long as she pays her rent and contributes to the food budget? Sure. I don’t see why not.” Jeongyeon said, her head on Jihyo’s shoulder. She looked up at Momo and smiled tiredly, her shoulders still tense from the revelation of her private life. “You seem cool, and if you have Dahyun’s blessing that’s all I need.”

Momo shone and melted into Sana’s arms, Dahyun ruffling her hair.

“Guess I’ll have to get used to living without your kisses.” Dahyun teased.

“What?” Chaeyoung, Nayeon and Jeongyeon all exclaimed at once. Tzuyu almost choked on her water, coughing and beating a fist against her sternum to stop spluttering.

“On the cheek! Only on the cheek!” Dahyun insisted quickly. But then Sana laughed heartily next to her, leaning on her shoulder and nuzzling her nose into her neck, and it was just making it even harder for Dahyun to focus on saving the situation.

“Okay, what exactly is going on with you three?” Nayeon demanded. This was exactly the situation Dahyun had not wanted to get into. Why the hell had she even said that? She felt her heart beat too fast as she tried to blink the oncoming dizziness away.

“We just really like Dahyunnie.” Momo teased, reaching over to pinch at Dahyun’s cheeks. This honestly could not get any worse. Dahyun’s face felt hot and she was sure that she was bright red. And worse, she saw Jihyo mouth the word Dahyunnie and shake her head with what was undoubtedly a smirk.

“So, not only did you finally get a girl, you got two? Well done, Dahyun.” Nayeon said impressed. Chaeyoung laughed.

“I didn’t get anyone! We’re just friends! They’re just- I just-” Dahyun tried desperately to focus.

“Oh, we’re not dating!” Sana finally understood and broke through Dahyun’s babblings, Dahyun thankful for her help.

“She won’t let me.” Sana added in a lower voice, a mischievous glint in her eyes. Dahyun regretted ever bringing them.

“Yeah, we just love teasing her because she’s so easy to mess with. Such a cute little thing.” Momo insisted, patting her under the chin lovingly. Dahyun gave up. Let them. Because sitting here, squashed between Tzuyu and Sana, still with Chaeyoung laying across and Momo leaning in on her as well, Dahyun could do nothing but laugh in an attempt to brush it off. And besides, it wasn’t as if she could ever get mad at Momo or Sana for teasing her. At least Momo was finally comfortable in the crowd. And then who cared that they had given the others a good laugh. As long as none of them actually believed that Dahyun liked them. Didn’t feel like gushing on the way her heart threatened to fly out of her chest whenever Sana came close.
Nayeon scowled. Stared at the door and tried to word everything in her head. And as soon as the lock to the bathroom clicked, she pushed the door open, forced her way inside and closed it, not letting Jeongyeon leave.

“What the-”

“You have exactly five seconds to tell me what the hell is going on.” Nayeon locked the door again, flopping down on the cold floor, arms and legs cross defiantly, staring up at Jeongyeon. Blocking her exit really did seem like the only way to make Jeongyeon talk by now.

“To tell- Nayeon, there’s nothing more to it. We broke up.” Jeongyeon shifted her weight.

“That didn’t stop you the first… five? times she left you.” Nayeon said coolly, nodding in a gesture that told Jeongyeon to sit her ass down and talk. The younger girl did.

“The difference is, I left her this time, ok? I deserve better than Jiyeon.” Jeongyeon shrugged, fiddling with the bracelet.

“But why didn’t you tell me?” Nayeon demanded, trying to act a lot less hurt than she was. Which was still very hurt. “I’m supposed to know what goes on in your life. And for the past… Three months? You’ve barely spoken to me. I mean I get it, you have your bad weeks, I’m used to that. But three months. What the hell is going on?”

“I just… needed time to figure out what to do about Jiyeon. About… About myself.”

“And you didn’t think it was something you could’ve discussed with me?” Nayeon frowned.

“It’s complicated.”

“You’re seriously not getting away with ‘it’s complicated’, Yoo Jeongyeon. Not in a million years.” Nayeon grumbled.

“Just give me a little time to figure out where to go from here, ok? You know me. I’ll come back eventually.”

“It’s a pain having you as my best friend, you know that right?” Nayeon glowered.

“I know. Good thing you’re so horribly impossible to be around that it’s only me and Chaeyoung who can stand you for more than five minutes.” Jeongyeon smirked.

“I’m gonna murder you in your sleep.” Nayeon hissed. Grabbed her hand and held it tight. “Idiot.”

Dahyun’s body was limp. Night had fallen long ago and the lights were dim in Jihyo’s apartment.
Nayeon was asleep with her head in Jihyo’s lap, mumbling in her sleep as Jihyo stroked her cheek absentmindedly. Tzuyu was talking in her usual quiet voice and Jihyo was huddled close to hear her over the sound of Jeongyeon, Chaeyoung and Momo’s loud discussion. They were sitting on the floor playing a dare game and Momo kept losing. Chaeyoung looked like she was having the time of her life making Momo lose on purpose and Jeongyeon looked slightly fed up with their ridiculousness. Dahyun knew that it was just a facade, Jeongyeon was worse than both of them when she wanted.

“Dahyunnie, you can’t fall asleep here.” Sana said quietly.

“Yes I can.” Dahyun mumbled and leaned her head back against the wall.

“You definitely can’t sleep like that, you’re going to hurt your neck.” Sana insisted with a smile and tugged gently at Dahyun. She was too tired to protest and let herself fall onto Sana’s lap, mirroring Nayeon and Jihyo.

“Can I sleep here then?” Dahyun asked.

“Yes you can.” Sana said and reached over to cover Dahyun with a blanket, rubbing her arm gently.

“Thank you, Sana-chan.” Dahyun mumbled into the blanket and Sana giggled shyly at the name.

“You’re welcome, Dahyunnie.” Said Sana, her voice bubbling over with sunshine. The sound tethered immediately in Dahyun’s conscience.

With much effort, Dahyun turned her onto her side and looked at Momo who was now throwing herself at Chaeyoung in attempt to stop her from getting her to lose. Chaeyoung yelped and tried to get the girl off her but alas. The youngest girl grumbled as Jeongyeon laughed so loud it filled the entire room. Momo looked at her new roommate-to-be with a smirk.

“Don’t.” Jeongyeon warned.

“Or what?” Momo wiggled her eyebrows.

“I’ll kill you.” Jeongyeon said.

“No you won’t.” Mina commented from the wingback chair, looking up from her phone.

“Fine. But I won’t let her move in with me.” Jeongyeon looked around at Mina.

“Yes you will.” Mina chucked and stuck her tongue out at Jeongyeon. Jeongyeon sulked. Then yelped. Momo had used the moment’s lack of attention to release Chaeyoung and launch herself at Jeongyeon instead. She didn’t do even anything, just lay across Jeongyeon, but it was pinning the older girl to the floor effortlessly. Both Jihyo and Chaeyoung laughed, and Dahyun chuckled into the blanket.

“Let me go!” Jeongyeon complained and tried to push Momo off her.

“Not until you promise never to threaten to throw me out.” Momo sang.

“Oh, she can’t make that promise.” Chaeyoung said. “But don’t worry, she’ll never actually do it.”

“Why won’t I?” Jeongyeon looked at her with raised brows.

“C’mon, we all know you’re just a big softie.” Chaeyoung teased.
“That’s true.” Jihyo added.

“But if she doesn’t promise, then she’s never getting out of here.” Momo added pressure and Jeongyeon looked like she regretted the last chicken wing.


“Your friend is ridiculous.” Dahyun noted.

“So are yours.” Sana chuckled.

“You’re right. All of our friends are ridiculous.” Dahyun mumbled. Sana hummed, gave her arm an affectionate squeeze.

Dahyun felt herself doze off.

She won’t let me .

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag TWICEroomies
There's a change in weather coming.

I'm honestly just so happy with all the comments I've gotten, it means the world to me. I hope you'll read this chapter with open eyes but first and foremost, with patience.

Thank you for waiting.

Momo-invasion. That was probably the only way of explaining the state of the entire apartment. Boxes were stacked high and low, furniture, at least double the amount that Sana had, stacked on top of each other in such amounts that you could barely get through the living room. But even if Momo was more sorry than anyone, there was no getting around the fact that her room at Jeongyeon’s wasn’t ready and that the landlord at Sana and Momo’s old apartment had left a kind message threatening Momo to clear out her stuff or have it given to goodwill. So for the second time in two weeks, Dahyun was outside of a white van waiting for a japanese girl to emerge from the back.

“At least it’s faster when we’re three.” Sana said, slightly out of breath, propping up the box she was holding. Dahyun however, had learned from last time. Had the box by her feet and sent Sana a grin. Sana grumbled and shifted her weight. Stuck her tongue out at Dahyun for good measure.

“You could just carry it inside?” Dahyun suggested. For a moment, Sana seemed to consider, then she pressed her lips together and nodded. Dahyun allowed herself a few seconds to look after her, admiring the sight of the sun hitting her hair. Until someone - Momo - cleared her throat beside her.

“You could try being less obvious.” Momo raised an eyebrow at her.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Dahyun shrugged and lifted the box. It was huge but not too heavy and Dahyun suspected that it was full of teddy-bears.

“What in the actual hell are we gonna do though, there’s no more room for stuff, and I still have a desk and three chairs.” Momo sighed,

“I mean I have one idea. But it’s… You’re not gonna like it.” Dahyun looked around at her, halfway up the stairs.

“What?”

“If we make do without the TV for a week, move the couch to the corner and stack stuff in that, then use my bed as a couch and store the desk and some of all the boxes in there?” Dahyun offered.

Momo looked at her with narrowed eyes. “So you wanna give up your room for a week. So I can
“Store my stuff?”

“Basically.”

“What’s your motive?”

“Being able to get to the front door from time to time?”

“I don’t get it though. I mean, why are you even letting me stay here?” Momo asked, pushing open the door to the apartment, immediately met by a kitchen table, upside down with boxes stacked on top of it.

“You’re Sana’s friend. It’s her apartment too.” Dahyun shrugged.

Honestly, she wasn’t really extremely pleased to have all of Momo’s stuff taking up every corner of empty space. But what was she supposed to do? Turn her away? And besides, it was only a week, and despite the fact that she wasn’t looking forwards to sleeping in the middle of the living room for a week, it was the only solution she could think of, to get enough room.

Momo seemed to accept both solution and explanation however, and put the box onto the couch, looking around.

“We should probably move the bed now, before we get more stuff in.” she pondered.

Dahyun nodded.

“Bed? What bed?” Sana appeared from the kitchen with two glasses of water. Stubbornly made Dahyun and Momo drink everything before explaining.

“We’re moving my bed into the living room to use as a couch so we can get extra space to fit everything.” Dahyun explained as soon as she had emptied her glass.

Sana looked from Dahyun to Momo and back again, then crossed her arms. “No way. You’re not giving up your room. We’ll move my bed.”

“It’s twice the size of mine and impossible to move. Do you not remember swearing you’d never move it again once we fit it in?” Dahyun tried to return the stern expression in Sana’s eyes.

“I don’t care. This is already way more than I could hope for.”

“Sana. It’s just a week, we already decided it’s the most logical solution.” Dahyun said, stepping closer to the older girl.

“Why can’t we just store some of it in Jeongyeon’s living room until she’s ready?” Sana grumbled.

“It’s too late for that, we only have the van for another hour. So unless you want to carry it all for 25 minutes by foot both ways, then we’re stuck.” Dahyun insisted, then reached out and touched her arm. She immediately unfolded her hands, her expression softening. “Sana…”

“I just feel so bad making you do this.” Sana sighed.

“I’m choosing it.” Dahyun insisted, squeezing her arm gently. Sana looked down at Dahyun’s hand, and the younger girl immediately withdrew it, fiddling with the hem of her shirt.

“Mhh, fine.” Sana scrunched her nose. “But if you can’t sleep, we’re switching ok?”
“What makes you think I can’t sleep out here?”

“Do you think I’m blind? You’re barely sleeping in there.” Sana nodded towards the hallway, in the direction of Dahyun’s bedroom.

Dahyun pressed her lips together. “It’s nothing I can’t handle.”

“Sorry, it’s not my place to meddle. I mean I barely-”

“It’s ok. We’re friends.” Dahyun shrugged. “I’m just saying, there’s no reason for you to worry.”

“Friends don’t lie to friends.” Sana raised an eyebrow.

“Okay so I don’t sleep very well. It’s been going on for months though, and I haven’t died yet. And besides, I have it under control by now. I have ways to cope.” Dahyun sent her a smile. Almost reached out again. Almost.

Sana deflated and nodded. “As long as you’re ok.”

“Yes sir.” Dahyun grinned and saluted her. Sana rolled her eyes and chuckled. Ruffled her hair as she walked past, instructing Momo and Dahyun to move the bed out so they could start moving furniture. Dahyun yelled an “Aye aye!” after her, just to hear her laugh.

“Did Jeongyeon say when the room would be ready?” Dahyun asked, leading Momo to her bedroom, quickly moving the stuffed squirrel and her sheets into a pile on the floor, conveniently hiding the toy.

Momo chuckled.

“You don’t have to hide it. It’s cute. And besides, I already saw him. I came looking for the broom while you were at work.”

“Oh.” Dahyun blushed.

“I have a ton of stuffed toys.” Momo said, walking to the far end of the bed, trying to figure out how best to turn it so they could carry it out.

“Yeah but I actually still sleep with that one.” Dahyun sighed, mirroring Momo as she reached across the bed and pulled, tugging the bed onto its side.

“So?” Momo shrugged, pulling the bed to make space between the wall and the bed for Dahyun. “I still sleep with mine too. Or use Sana to cuddle.”

For a moment Dahyun imagined Sana laying in Momo’s arms, curled into Momo’s body. Then imagined what it would be like to be that close to her. Shook the thought from her mind.

“Y-you never answered about Jeongyeon.” Dahyun tried as Momo counted and they lifted. The bed was heavy, and Momo visibly lifted it a lot higher, but they managed.

“Some time next week. She’s really sorry about it though. Offered to come help and everything but I told her it wasn’t necessary.” Momo said.

They angled the bed, Dahyun moving backwards out of the room.

“I thought Jiyeon moved out already.”
“She did but she left most of her stuff and Jeongyeon didn’t want to just throw it out. I think she managed to get a hold of her though. Something about her picking it up monday?” Momo said, slightly breathless from an unsuccessful attempt at getting the bed out. Though through a lot of effort and some very fascinating Japanese curse words, the bed ended up in the living room.

…

Okay so maybe it wasn’t the brightest idea she had ever gotten, offering to sleep in the living room. But for whatever reason, she had, and now it was two in the morning and she was wide awake. Hated the air and how big the room was. Felt exposed in the middle of the room, even laying under the blanket, curled around the stuffed toy. Even with the residual tingling sensation on her forehead from where Sana’s lips had touched when she had said goodnight. But no matter the case, it was too late to change her mind. She could only pray that the week would go by fast.

Tossing and turning, the time passed from two to three, and all she could think about was how little she liked the dark. How she missed Jihyo’s arms around her, voice singing her to sleep. When she had been younger it had always been comforting to know that her brother and later that Chaeyoung had been right across the hall. But out here, not even the comfort of knowing that Sana and Momo were just a wall away, could do much to soothe her hammering heart. Distractedly she scratched over the fabric of the stuffed toys, but little did it help. And for one desperate moment she considered knocking on Sana’s door. And the next she considered calling Jihyo.

Did neither.

Just turned and sighed.

When Momo came out at half past four to use the bathroom, Dahyun pretended to be asleep, but Dahyun had a feeling Momo had seen her shuffle. She paused in the hallway for a second before heading into Sana’s room. This was bad. Really bad. If she could just find some way to sleep, she would be fine.

She just needed a few hours.

…

9:58 am Tzuyu: Are you on your way?

10:03 am Tzuyu: Dahyun? Are you sick?

11:05 am Tzuyu: You didn’t miss much thankfully, boring class, but please text when you get this.

…

Dahyun groaned. Warm sunlight was heating up her face, and she rolled to find shade. But she only
found the edge of the bed. With a jolt she was wide awake, her heart racing. A sheen of sweat covered her arms and face. How was it so warm in here?

Something was buzzing. Buzzing. As she looked around, she saw her phone on the floor. It was blinking at her, a call incoming. She barely registered who it was, before picking it up and swiping across the screen.

“Where are you?”


“Where are you, your shift started ten minutes ago.”

“I… What?” Dahyun looked around, fumbled with the phone and looked at it. 3:11 pm. She cursed loudly.

“Are you ok? Dahyun please, what’s wrong?”

“Mina… I-I overslept. I must’ve… I must’ve o-overslept. I didn’t sleep well last night and- I missed class. And- I’m- I’m on my way. Can you stall? Please Mina?”

“Sure, I’ll figure something out. Just hurry. Yang-nim is in a mood.” Mina whispered and hung up.

Heart in her throat, Dahyun tried to free herself of the sheets. Stumbled. Cursed. Noticed the couch blanket on top of the sheets. Sana? Did she put it over her? Had they just let her sleep? Where were they anywhere? Probably at school. No, it didn’t matter.

Dahyun piled the sheets on the bed. Ran to the bathroom. Accidentally banged her head against the door, not quick enough to open it. Cursed again. Everything in her head was chaos. Everything around her was a blur. Nothing seemed real. But somewhere in the haze, instinct took over, and she splashed water in her face. And accidentally down her shirt. Discarded it thoughtlessly. Then ran to the bedroom. Sprayed on just enough deodorant to mask that she hadn’t had time to shower. Put her hair in a messy bun and checked her bag for work clothes. Then put on clothes. Tied her hair into a messy bun. Grabbed the bag. Ran. Didn’t check that she had her keys. Didn’t check that the door was locked. Didn’t check to see if the lights were turned off. Just ran. She could not afford to lose this job. They had barely let her keep it. And now that she was finally back on the floor, back to her old self. But was she? Was she really back? She had been their best waitress. Remembered every customer, every order, every allergen in each dish. But she hadn’t been that person for a while. If Yang-nim fired her… She would have to move back home. Back to her mom. Move out. Away from- no. No there wasn’t time to worry about that right now. It wasn’t a priority. She couldn’t tether herself like that, not this fast. She just had to get to work.

“Come here.” Jeongyeon hissed as Dahyun came toppling through the back entrance. Caught the younger girl halfway through a stumble and sat her down on the bench, grabbing the bag from her back and pulled off the oversized t-shirt, soaked in sweat.

“Press this to your face.” she said sternly, handing Dahyun a soaked cool towel while she dug into the bag for Dahyun’s shirt. Hurried to her locker and found a deodorant, trying to mask the fact that she had sprinted there. And Dahyun could barely breathe. Could barely muster the energy to notice
just how much Jeongyeon was doing for her. How she forced first one of Dahyun’s arms and then the other through the white waiter shirt. How she buttoned it. Knotted the tie around Dahyun’s neck. Made her stand up and helped her change from slacks to skirt. Tied the waiter’s apron around her waist. How she tied Dahyun’s hair into the mandatory ponytail instead of a bun.

“Jeongyeon.” Dahyun finally breathed, exhausted before the shift had even started. With watery eyes, she turned the towel to get the cool side against her skin.

“I know. You’re ok.” Jeongyeon cupped her face. Looked at her with warm eyes that contradicted her commanding voice. “We told him there was a problem with your dog.”

“But I don’t have a dog!” Dahyun squeaked. “I’m terrified of them!”

“Well you do now. His name is Wan, he’s a 3 year old pekingese and he’s been throwing up all day so you had to take him to the vet immediately.” Jeongyeon said.

“You named my non-existent dog ‘Wan’. As in bark?” Dahyun asked, finally starting to regain some control of her breathing. Felt dizzy. Her thighs were aching and her hands shook, but she wasn’t as warm anymore.

“You don’t get to judge.” Jeongyeon reprimanded. “You get to say thank you for saving your ass. Now get out there.”

Then Jeongyeon kissed her forehead. Checked that she didn’t leave a lipstick mark. Then pushed her out of changing room, into the kitchen.

…

Any minute. Any minute now she would surely pass out. Felt herself sway on the spot, Yang-nim’s shouting passing over her head. She was a model student. A good waitress. Worked hard and paid attention. She didn’t deserve this. It was just a slip-up. Just a mistake. Except she had known the moment she laid down, that she was only gonna sleep when she was too exhausted to keep awake. So wasn’t this, deep down, her own fault? No. No she didn’t deserve this. Did she? It wasn’t as if she was an angel. She had done shit. Not permanent record shit, but still. Piercing words made their way through the haze. One by one. Useless. Pathetic. Unable to take care of herself. Was it his words? Or her own? She didn’t know. Was so used to it by now. But it still made her eyes sting as the words cut little pieces off her. But she didn’t give him the satisfaction of breaking her. She was at least stronger than that.

“I promise I won’t ever be late again.” She said monotonously.

“This is a warning Kim. A real warning. You’ve been nothing but a pain in my ass lately, and if you don’t suit up and find that gear soon, I’m going to start looking for your replacement.”

Dahyun worked in a haze. Smiled at the customers. Took orders. Delivered the right food to the right food. Was more efficient than she had been in months. Was almost too perfect. Except that she fell flat every time she entered the kitchen. Wanted to cry every time Mina and Jeongyeon looked at her with worried eyes. Every time Taeyang patted her shoulder and told her she was ok. Every time Joohyun winked encouragingly at her. So the moment she could, she offered to man the bar, just to
It was easier to distract herself with the sound of buzzing conversations all around her instead of worried eyes. Even if she knew that she was going to pay hard for this once she was done. Would probably not make it home. But the phone was on silent in her locker, and she didn’t want to call Jihyo. Didn’t want to bother her again.

Jeongyeon left at eleven, after Dahyun repeatedly had turned down her offer to take Dahyun’s last hours. The older girl had been there since noon. She did not need another three hours on her neck, just because Dahyun had screwed up. Getting her to cover for Dahyun to Yang-nim was more than Dahyun could’ve asked of her. But it was hard not to feel, when Jeongyeon’s arms wrapped so tight around her before she left for the night.

At half past midnight Yang-nim left and asked Mina to lock up. He never stayed until closing time. And he was never sober when he left. It was only Mina, Dahyun and then Joohyun in the kitchen left by now. Music played from the speakers on the walls around the booths in the area across from the bar, where their drinking guests usually sat. Every now and then Dahyun allowed herself moments where the music filled her soul and she felt her fingers spread, tapping chords onto the bar. For a moment everything else was gone and she feared she might break. Gathered her hand in a fist so hard they made her knuckles impossibly whiter on her already pale skin.

“Miss? Hey miss. Can I get a beer or what?” Asked an impatient voice. Dahyun looked up and met the eyes of the man in front of her for only a split second before she switched her focus to his eyebrows.

“Sure, I’m sorry I spaced. What brand?” She asked with a kind smile.

“Prime draft, three please.” He answered, his voice milder.

“Coming right up.” Dahyun turned and ducked into the refrigerator under the desk, grabbing three beers. Her knees struggled as she got up, but she ignored the pain. Was good at that. She opened the beers and handed them over the desk and received payment in cash. Was good at her job. Was proud of her job. Even if she was feeding beers and probably though unwillingly fantasies to men who got drunk on thursday nights.

…

There was something magical about Mina. A blessing and a curse that made the customers follow her voice and gaze longingly after her. And most of the time it was nothing but a hassle that they wouldn’t leave her alone, but tonight Dahyun saw how she used her kindest smile as she took over Dahyun’s failed attempt at throwing out the last costumers. Even if there was a security guard connected to the street patrolling the establishments, they rarely used him. And though they probably should have tonight, Dahyun knew why Mina didn’t. Knew that it would mean paperwork and conversations that would drag out the time to get home.

“Thank you” Dahyun breathed, swaying on the spot as soon as she had locked up. Was inclined to just lean against the glass and slide down onto the floor. It was probably nice and cool.

“Go home, Dahyun.” Mina said softly, enveloping Dahyun in her arms.
“If you don’t let go I’m gonna cry on you.” Dahyun sighed, forehead against Mina’s shoulder, the older girl’s hands stroking up and down Dahyun’s back in a soothing rhythm.

“I don’t mind that.” Mina hushed. It was a good thing, as the tears were already falling onto Mina’s shoulder.

“I’m just so tired…” Dahyun croaked, her feet dragging as Mina led her through the restaurant, out through the kitchen and into the dressing room.

“Do you want me to call Jihyo?” Mina offered.

“No I should get home.” Dahyun tried to hold back a cry, her shoulders shaking with the effort to not sob.

“You cannot walk home like this. If you wait, I can drive you?” Mina offered.

“No it’s okay, it’s late for you too. I’ll get home.” Dahyun tried.

“Come off it Dahyun. I thought you were past this I don’t need help thing.” Mina sat her down on the floor by the lockers, holding her face between her hands. Wiped the tears with her thumbs.

Dahyun breathed shakily, wondering if she dared say it.

“S-sana… is usually awake still…”

It was stupid. Why did she even say it. She could not honestly expect Sana to come pick her up in the middle of the night. They barely knew each other. Except they did know each other.

“Okay.” Mina said. As if there was nothing weird at all in Dahyun’s request. “Your phone?”

“S’in my locker.” Dahyun mumbled and closed her eyes. Felt like she was about to pass out. Soft lips pressed against Dahyun’s forehead and then Mina’s presence disappeared. A sound revealed that she had opened a locker and a shuffling of fabric told the younger girl that Mina was rummaging for her phone. But Dahyun didn’t even have the energy to say that it was in the front pocket. Then Mina was back and took her thumb, pressing it to the phone, unlocking it. The older girl settled right beside Dahyun, close enough that Dahyun could hear the beeps from the phone as it rang.

“Hello?” Dahyun heard Sana’s voice through the phone. She didn’t sound tired. It made Dahyun sigh with relief. A part of her had feared that Sana was asleep, even though she almost never was when Dahyun came home.

“Sana? It’s Mina. I don’t know if you remem-”

“Mitang!” Mina smiled at the nickname. It was something Momo and Sana had come up with on friday. “Why do you have Dahyun’s phone? Is she ok?”

“Well. She’s ok, sorta. But she needs someone to help her home. I can’t do it, I have to close up, but maybe… Can you pick her up? I can text you the address, it’s not too far from your place.”

“Of course.” There was no hesitation and no questions asked beyond that. So Mina merely thanked her and hung up, texting the address and receiving a thumbs up. Dahyun’s tears had stopped falling but her cheeks were still week, and her eyes were giving up, her contacts blurring her vision as they repeatedly went out of focus.
“Okay, I’m going to sit you down here, and then start closing up. I’ll be back to check on you.” Mina pressed a kiss to Dahyun’s hair.

“Thank you…” Dahyun mumbled letting her eyelids close heavily.

“No look at me.” Mina insisted, causing Dahyun to look at her again. The older girl held her eyes, forcing them to focus, forcing them to see properly for the first time since stepping in the door eleven hours earlier. “Please get some sleep tonight. I don’t really care how you do it. I just need you to get some sleep.”

“Mh.” Dahyun mumbled and felt new tears overwhelm her. She buried her head in her arms and felt Mina’s hand stroke her hair for a moment before she disappeared, the door closing after her.

She had been functioning somewhat well since she started getting picked up here by Jihyo, but tonight was just a bad night. It had been a bad day. And she was so tired. So Dahyun closed her eyes to stop the tears. Just to stop the tears. And slowly she felt her heart steady. Then felt nothing at all.

…

“Dahyun…” a voice called calmly, as if in a dream.

Dahyun smiled into her arms and hummed. A giggle. Then a hand on her arm and another stroking hair away from her forehead. Dahyun didn’t want to open her eyes, in case she disappeared. The scent was so familiar and the voice so calming.

“Come, Dahyun. Let’s get you home.” Sana said, her voice close.

Dahyun mumbled a response, still floating in and out of sleep. Hands cupped her face and lifted it, a breathy chuckle so close Dahyun could feel the huffs of air on her nose. She opened her eyes, and saw only a blurry mess of what was undoubtedly Sana. The blonde hair framing her unclear face revealed her. She blinked until her eyes focused. Thumbs wiped across her face, trying to remove the salt from dried tears, but in vain.

“We’re going home now, Dahyun.” Sana repeated. Let go of Dahyun’s face and ran her hands down Dahyun’s arms, coaxing her to get a hold of her wrists. Pulled the younger girl gently off the floor, quickly wrapping an arm around Dahyun’s waist when she stumbled. She smelled wonderful. Like flowers and lemon and spring.

“Thank you.” A voice behind said quietly. Dahyun turned as in a trance and saw Mina with a towel over her shoulder, leaning against the door. “Make sure she sleeps. And gets to class. It’s at 11.”

“I will. Thank you for calling me.” Sana said sweetly.

Sana never let go of Dahyun. Not even for a step. The entire way home she had one arm around her waist and the other around Dahyun’s wrist, steadying the arm Dahyun had wrapped around her neck.

“You promised you would tell me if you didn’t sleep.” Sana said quietly.
“Sana, it’s no big deal.” Dahyun sighed. Regretted having ever called her. What was she thinking anyways?

“I know we haven’t known each other very long, but I know enough to say that it’s a big fat lie. It’s a huge deal.” Sana sounded angry now. “I really like you Dahyun, and I consider us friends. And I know you consider me your friend. Or you wouldn’t have called me.”

Dahyun mumbled unintelligibly, her eyes still closed almost completely.

“Step.” Sana warned as they reached the front door of their building. Didn’t demand more from Dahyun. Instead she helped Dahyun inside and into the elevator, shifting to wrap both arms around Dahyun. It was really more than one could expect of anyone, and Dahyun felt her heart swell with affection for the older girl. And it was so hard to focus. Because Sana was so close and the smell of what was probably her perfume filled Dahyun’s nostrils and conscience. If she dared, Dahyun could merely turn her head by a few degrees, and her lips would touch Sana’s neck. But she didn’t. Her mind wouldn’t let her. But her heart was begging her to do it.

Apparently at age almost twenty one the heart gets desperate to get certain things done. Like actually kissing a girl. And here Sana was, carrying her home from work in the middle of the night, obviously caring for Dahyun, having spent over a week doing what some who had a bit more sense than Dahyun would count as flirting. But her mind wouldn’t let her. Because she didn’t know Sana. And kissing your roommate in a state of sleep deprivation after the day she had had would be just about the least clever thing Dahyun had ever done, and that was saying a lot.

“Thank you.” Dahyun breathed as Sana removed an arm to unlock the door and let them into their apartment. Momo’s stuff was still everywhere, and Dahyun’s bed was in the middle of the room where the couch used to be. Except it wasn’t empty. Sprawled on Dahyun’s bed, arms, mouth ajar and a twitching toe sticking out under the covers, was Momo. Fast asleep.

“Wh-“

“She insisted.” Sana shrugged. “Said, I’m the cause of this mess and I can sleep anywhere. She saw you pretending to be asleep last night.”

“But where am I-“

“With me, if you don’t mind. We can switch if you’d rather sleep with Momo, or I can-“

“No… no it’s fine.” Dahyun muttered. Was honestly too tired to try and find a reason not to take the offer. Too tired to try and decipher Sana’s motives.

“Can you sleep with your contacts in?” Sana asked quietly, steering Dahyun through the apartment.

“Mh. It’s ok.” Dahyun hummed.

“Can you sleep with your pyjamas in?” Sana asked quietly, steering Dahyun through the apartment.

“Mh. It’s ok.” Dahyun hummed.

“Then let’s get you to bed. Are your pyjamas in the bathroom?”

“Don’t know.” Dahyun said honestly. She had left in such a hurry and everything was a hazy mess now. She might not even be able to tell which shoe was left and which was right at this point. And Sana just hummed and guided Dahyun into a room that wasn’t her own and was sat on a bed that wasn’t hers. Took off Dahyun’s shoes and undid the ponytail. Only when she started undoing the buttons on Dahyun’s shirt did Dahyun wake enough to realize what was happening. She looked up at Sana with wide eyes.

“Oh. I’m just. I just wanted to help. You shouldn’t sleep in that.” Sana fumbled.
Dahyun tried to think of something to say, but Sana stepped back and almost fell over her own feet. She turned and quickly opened her closet, throwing a huge white shirt and a pair of frilly pink and lilac shorts at Dahyun. Then turned to stare decisively at the wall, arms crossed and leaning against the closet. Dahyun couldn’t help the chuckle that forced its way up her throat and out past her lips.

“Just change.” Sana rushed.

Dahyun did her best, but her fingers were too tired to quickly undo the buttons and she kept apologizing for being slow. Eventually she got Sana’s shirt over her head, staring down at herself. The shirt was way too big and fell well down her thighs, covering the shorts completely. Most of the nightwear Dahyun had seen Sana in looked like it fit a man three times her bodyweight.

“Ok, I’m decent.” Dahyun mumbled and sat back down on the bed. Sana’s bed. Where she had agreed to sleep. Not that she wasn’t used to spending the night in someone else’s bed, but never with someone who made her heart race like this. “You’re sure it’s ok that I sleep here?”

“Dahyunnie.” Sana turned, arms still crossed but a soft glint in her eyes, a smile tugging at her lips. “It’s two thirty in the morning, will you just lie down already?”

Dahyun sighed and nodded, shuffling under the covers, while Sana took off the sweater she had been wearing, revealing her night shirt. Had she been woken by the phone call after all? Out of respect, Dahyun stared determinately up at the ceiling the moment Sana tugged at the strings in her sweatpants. A soft thump revealed that Sana was changing clothes, but Dahyun just stared at the ceiling. Only when steps revealed that she was walking, did Dahyun look at Sana as she walked across the room, turning off the light. The bed shifted and Dahyun knew, even if she couldn’t see it very well, that Sana was crawling across her, settling in the spot in the corner. As Sana settled under the covers, Dahyun became horribly aware of just how close they were, feeling the warmth emitting from her under the covers.

“Momo left her teddy bear for you in case you wanted to borrow. Something about not wanting to embarrass you with the squirrel but wanted you to have a cuddle buddy. I argued I’d be a better cuddle buddy though, but it’s your choice. I don’t think neither me or the bear would mind your cuddles.”

Dahyun praised the darkness as her cheeks burned. Sana’s voice was so conversational, and Dahyun wanted nothing more than to take Sana up on the offer. But she didn’t. Just took the huge teddy bear that Sana offered her. Then something, a finger, poked at her cheek and Dahyun felt Sana shifting in her side of the bed.

“Go to sleep Dahyun.” Her voice was close and Dahyun nodded. Turned her face, just to say goodnight, to say thanks. But in the exact moment she had chosen to turn to look at Sana, Sana had leaned in, obviously with the intention of kissing Dahyun’s cheek as a goodnight, but the changed angle meant that Sana’s lips brushed over the corner of Dahyun’s lips, and to Dahyun’s horror, just stayed there, as if the older girl hadn’t noticed that she had gotten the angle wrong.

But that wasn’t the worst.

For whatever reason Dahyun might never forgive them for, her own lips responded almost automatically, though so briefly that she could hope that Sana never noticed. She felt Sana giggle against her skin, against her lips and then the pressure disappeared.

“Go to sleep, Dahyunnie.” Sana repeated.

Dahyun couldn’t think. Couldn’t focus on anything but the tingling sensation on the corner of her lip.
The bed shifted again and Dahyun turned as well. Away from Sana. Tried to ignore the way blood rushed in her ear, digging her fingers into the fuzzy fur of the teddy bear, hiding her face against the back of it’s head. And maybe if she hadn’t been completely exhausted, she would’ve been able to analyze the situation properly and take the proper distance. But her eyes shut before she was ready for it and got pulled unwillingly off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
There was something on Dahyun’s stomach. Something stuck between her stomach and Momo’s teddy bear. A hand. A hand probably belonging to the body pressed against her back, hugging her close.

“She really does sleep like the dead when she finally sleeps.” A voice behind her said. Sana’s voice. And it was so close.

“Try again.” Said another voice, more distant. Momo.

“Dahyun, you have to get up.” Sana whispered. If she was honest, Dahyun wasn’t quite sleeping anymore but not entirely awake either. Just lay with her entire body crumbled around the teddy bear hoping it would mask the sound of her racing heart, as she became increasingly aware of Sana’s bare legs against her own and her torso pressing against Dahyun’s back. Dahyun wanted to run and never move at the same time. Felt the way the corner of her mouth tingled as if to remind her of exactly what had happened last night. Felt like her heart might burst yet somehow completely safe in Sana’s arms.

Then Sana’s hand slid around to her side and started tickling there, making Dahyun squirm.

“Oh, she’s awake!” Momo exclaimed the minute Dahyun failed to hide her grin.

“Mh-not.” Dahyun protested. Felt Sana’s laugh on her neck, leaving goosebumps in its wake. If only Dahyun could read Sana’s mind, know if she had noticed it, and please also know why in the world they were cuddling. Had Sana just fought the teddy bear for cuddle rights as soon as Dahyun had fallen asleep? What reality was this anyway? But she couldn’t really do much about it. Couldn’t really get herself to up and ask Sana, so hey you know how you kissed me last night? What was that about and would you like to do it again because I’d be up for that thank you very much. Yeah, no, not likely to happen.

“Dahyun you have school soon.” Momo chuckled, prising Dahyun from her thoughts.

Slowly Dahyun opened her eyes, but only to glower at Momo. “I’m cancelling school.”

“Right… sure you are” Momo raised an eyebrow at her.

Dahyun tried with a pout but it didn’t help at all. So she closed her eyes again.

“I’ll make some food for you.” Momo’s voice said, and then footsteps revealed that she was gone.

“Did you fall asleep fast?” Sana asked, her hand tracing wonderfully back down to rest on Dahyun’s
stomach.

“Mh, thank you.” Dahyun mumbled into the bear.

“You’re welcome.” Sana said and hugged Dahyun even closer.

“What time is it?” Dahyun asked quietly.

“Late enough for you to have gotten enough sleep and early enough that you can make it to class.”

“Thank you.” Dahyun said again, scratching over the fuzzy surface of the teddy bear distractedly.

“You don’t have to keep thanking me, it’s not a big deal.” Sana’s breathy laugh hit Dahyun’s skin again.

“You picked me up at work in the middle of the night and you let me sleep in your bed. That is a big deal.” Dahyun insisted, turning slightly to look at Sana, blinking her dry contacts into focus.

“I guess.” Sana smiled. She moved back a little, allowing Dahyun to turn onto her back, letting the bear go. Sana removed her hand and propped herself up on her elbow.

“Feeling better?” She asked.

“Much better. As in, so much better.”

Dahyun looked up at the ceiling, pressing her lips together hard. Sana’s fingers ghosted across Dahyun cheek, then up to stroke hair away from her face and finally touching the tip of Dahyun’s nose gently, briefly, making Dahyun scrunch her face. Sana laughed. How one person could contain so much laughter and energy, Dahyun might never figure out. Her energy was so contagious and made Dahyun’s heart stronger and her head lighter. And Dahyun didn’t want to figure out why. She just wanted to bask in whatever sunshine Sana offered.

She heard steps and drew her eyes away from Sana in time to see Momo waltz into the room with a mug of steaming hot tea and a bowl of what was probably reheated dinner. Still sore from strain and heavy with sleep, Dahyun sat up, finally free of Sana’s embrace, propped against the wall with a pillow behind her back as Momo handed her the japchae and a fork and placed the tea on the nightstand. Sana sat up too, pouting at Momo, clearly disappointed that Momo hadn’t brought her breakfast as well. Dahyun took a proper mouthful and hummed happily at the taste. She had been too tired to feel how empty her stomach was, but now that she tasted the food, it complained loudly, wanting more. Meanwhile Sana was still trying to silently convince Momo.

“No way.” Momo said simply when Sana started blinking at her charmingly.

“Please Momoring… I’m hungy.” Sana’s pouty voice was downright irresistible, and Dahyun almost offered to go make food for her just for that voice.

“Then go make some for yourself.” Momo said coolly. How she managed not to cave was puzzling.

“Momoring…” Sana begged.

“Sana-chan…” Momo imitated Sana’s voice exaggeratedly.

“We can share. Here.” Dahyun said and offered Sana what she had just gotten onto the fork. Sana lit up and leaned in, closing her mouth around the fork, humming happily at the taste. Dahyun heard Momo sigh loudly and leave the room, then a rustling from the kitchen.
A rhythm built between Dahyun feeding her own grumbling stomach and feeding Sana, and soon Momo joined them with another two bowls, pushing Dahyun and with her Sana further towards the wall and gently setting the teddy bear down on the floor before settling besides Dahyun. Handed one of the bowls across to Sana, seemingly unbothered by the fact that the youngest was once again becoming a very squished middle of a sandwich. Sure, the bed was a decent size, but three people side by side was the absolute limit.

As soon as Dahyun and Sana had finished Dahyun’s bowl, Sana insisted on sharing her own with Dahyun as well, and Momo kept muttering under her breath at them.

Dahyun didn’t mind.

…

Chaeyoung winced. Placed the coffee on the counter and sucked on her thumb.

Just as the barista had handed Chaeyoung the two cups, someone had nudged Chaeyoung in the back, making her jolt and the coffee spill. She huffed and turned to see but no one admitted to doing it. With a scrunch of the nose, Chaeyoung picked up the coffee and walked outside. She was about to head back when a familiar face came around the corner, running at a seemingly comfortable but for Chaeyoung insane pace. The Japanese girl’s rose-colored hair was in a high ponytail and she had big headphones on. It was clear that she hadn’t noticed Chaeyoung, but was coming closer and closer nonetheless.

“Momo!” Chaeyoung called and tried to wave, a cup of coffee in each hand. Nothing. Not until she was less than fifteen feet from Chaeyoung did the shorter girl manage to get Momo’s attention. Of course Chaeyoung would have preferred if the result wasn’t that Momo stumbled and almost fell as she was distracted, but it was better than Momo just running by, perhaps. She waited patiently as Momo regained her posture and took off her headphones. Momo grinned widely and took a few deep breaths. It was only now that Chaeyoung realized, she had to talk. As in speak words that made sense.

As what’s up and other variations of that sentence seemed ridiculous Chaeyoung settled for “Hi.”

“Hi.” Momo beamed and looked at the coffees. “Study break?”

“Yup. Coffee run.” Chaeyoung grinned.

“Which way?” Momo asked. “In case you want to get home before the coffees get cold, I mean”

“Oh, right, this way.” Chaeyoung pointed with her right hand and Nayeon’s coffee.

Momo turned off the music on her phone and walked alongside Chaeyoung.

“So we didn’t scare you off the other night?” Chaeyoung asked.

“Not in the slightest, I had fun!” Momo insisted, pulling at her shirt to get air.

“You just seemed very shy at first.”

“I’m not good with a lot of strangers. It’s super easy two on two or three on three, but more than that and my brain sort of dies for a while.” Momo chuckled. “It’s always been that way. But once I know people I don’t mind the crowd.”
“Just a lot of strangers at once?”

“Exactly. But you’re not strangers anymore. Now you’re my friends!” Momo beamed at her.

“Yes we are.” Chaeyoung agreed happily. “Do you run every day?”

“Most days. I gotta be in the best shape I can to keep up my reputation.”

“Yeah that makes sense. I guess as a dancer you have to be fit.”

“No, not necessarily. I mean yes, you have to be able to move for a period of time but it’s much more about coordination and muscle memory.” Momo explained, stretching.

“I have neither of those.” Chaeyoung snorted.

“Sure you do. Everyone has. It comes the moment you start listening to music.”

“I listen to music all day, I swear I have no coordination. Rhythm yes, but only for playing instruments.”

“Just try some day. Listen to the music with your heart instead of your head.”

“Listen with your heart? Really?” Chaeyoung giggled and stopped in front of her building.

“I know it sounds cheesy, but just try it.” Momo shrugged, looking at her with a hopeful glint in her eyes.

“I will.” Chaeyoung grinned.

“And tell me about it?” Momo asked.

“Sure.” Chaeyoung said as she tried to unlock the door.

“Here.” Momo said and opened it for her. “Oh, wait.”

“What?” Chaeyoung turned in the door.

“You don’t have my number.”

“Oh, well, I…” Chaeyoung tripped over her words and tried to hold the door and the coffees and find her phone. Almost failed at all three. But Momo just ran her eyes over Chaeyoung’s body and found the edge of the phone sticking up from Chaeyoung’s jeans. Without really grasping the situation, Chaeyoung told her the passcode. Momo nodded, typed it and added her number to Chaeyoung’s phone book. Hirai Momo.

“Good luck with the studies.” Momo put the phone back in Chaeyoung’s pocket.

“Thanks. Good luck with your run.”

“Thank you!”

And Momo was off, and Chaeyoung allowed herself exactly five seconds to stare after her. The sight of Momo was quickly wiped from Chaeyoung’s mind though when she entered the apartment and found that what was most likely a tsunami or one of Nayeon’s study freakouts had occurred while Chaeyoung was gone. Papers were everywhere and Nayeon was in the middle, looking lost. Chaeyoung merely shook her head, took off her shoes and walked over to her girlfriend, setting
down the coffee and crouching in front of Nayeon.

“Let’s get this sorted, yeah?” Chaeyoung held Nayeon’s face in her hands.

“Mm-k” Nayeon mumbled. “You’re late.”

“I ran into Momo.” Chaeyoung smiled and pressed her lips to Nayeon’s nose. It scrunched and a giggle bubbled in Nayeon’s throat. “Or rather, she ran into me. Almost.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, she was out for a run, you should see that by the way. You know that thing about how Yoga pants only makes like 1% of the population look hot? She’s the one percent.”

“I can imagine.” Nayeon snorted. “Legs like that?”

“Exactly.” Chaeyoung grinned as she helped Nayeon up from the floor and put her to work, gathering papers in four piles depending on the subject. “She’s pretty cool, you know.”

“Oh definitely, I actually understood those dance moves after she taught them to me, and that’s after Hyelim tried to teach me last week. Plus, I always approve of anyone who can make Jeongyeon into a flustered mess.”

“Self-compliment?” Chaeyoung chuckled, reaching for a note.

“Always.” Nayeon smiled. Was already doing better. And Chaeyoung loved knowing that her presence had something to do with that.

…

“Hey.” Dahyun sighed as she sat down next to Tzuyu in the lecture hall.

“Hi! You never answered my text…” Tzuyu looked at her with big eyes and a worried frown.

“I had a shitty day. I meant to text, but I slept up until like an hour ago.” Dahyun apologized.

“It’s ok. Were you ill?” Tzuyu inquired, scribbling nothings on the edge of her paper.

“No, I overslept. By five hours. And was late to work as well.” Dahyun sighed and shook her head, trying to get the memory of Yang-nim’s stinging words out of her head. She hadn’t deserved it. Had she?

“That’s unfortunate.” Tzuyu said.

“To say the least. Do you have plans after class?” Dahyun asked.

“Not other than the lovely cramming of half my curriculum.” Tzuyu flashed her a smile.

“I’ll treat you to coffee if you’ll listen to me?” Dahyun tempted.

“Mh, I don’t know.” Tzuyu bit gently on the end of her pen, a glint in her eye.

“Please? Pretty please pretty Chou Tzuyu. I really really need to talk to someone. Preferably you.” Dahyun begged.
“I guess it wouldn’t be too bad.” Tzuyu gave in. Smiled in that way that made her ears move.

“Thank you…” Dahyun sighed, leaning on her arms, waiting for the lecture to start.

Class was thankfully interesting, and Dahyun tried her best to keep up with the pace, taking an excessive amount of notes to keep her motivation high, and keep her mind from drifting to the feeling of Sana’s lips, of her hand, of her body curled around Dahyun’s. She felt Tzuyu’s eyes on her from time to time, and knew that the desperation in her begging had left the younger girl worried.

When class ended they left together and walked without talking until they found the coffee shop, one of the only in the area with student friendly prices. Tzuyu wasn’t a big talker but Dahyun never minded. There was a soothing presence about her that Dahyun appreciated. She was stable; a formidable tree, providing shade and cover when needed, and right now, Dahyun needed just that.

“What do you want?” Dahyun asked as they looked up at the menu behind the counter.

“The usual.” Tzuyu smiled shyly. Dahyun wondered why she had bothered asking. She ordered and paid while Tzuyu found a table. It was a well-practiced rhythm.

“So, what’s up?” Tzuyu asked as Dahyun handed her the tall glass and sat down, hands wrapped tightly around her own, staring at the cookie crumbles on top of the whipped cream.

“What counts as a kiss?” Dahyun asked, not bothering to beat around the bush.

Tzuyu didn’t comment or ask for further elaboration. Just sat in silence for a while. When Dahyun snuck a peak at her, Tzuyu’s brows were furrowed and her gaze on her own cup.

“Well,” She said slowly. “if it’s a real kiss it has to be on the lips, of course.”

“You mean like full on the lips? Or does it count if it’s only partly?” Dahyun asked, eyes once more fixed on the crumbles. If it had been anyone else, they would have laughed at her by now, but Tzuyu never judged and Dahyun loved her for that. She never made Dahyun feel like a fool.

“I don’t know. It depends, was is intentional?” Tzuyu asked.

“I’m… Not sure. I don’t think so.” Dahyun admitted.

“So an unintentional kiss, partly on the lips.” Tzuyu said.

“Yes.” Dahyun confirmed.

“Did she comment on it? Or try to kiss you again?”

“How do you know it wasn’t me?” Dahyun asked, looking at her.

“You don’t know if it was intentional, and you would never be brave enough to kiss someone you’d only known two weeks, no matter how into her you are.” Tzuyu said flatly.

“True.” Dahyun mumbled and finally took a sip of the cool mocha under the whipped cream. Chocolate always helped.

“Wait.” Dahyun looked up with a frown. “Who are we talking about?”
“Sana. Obviously.” Tzuyu shrugged. “I think my answer is that you need to get your shit together and kiss her properly. Or at least talk to her about it.” Tzuyu said and drank, eyes catching Dahyun’s and holding them there. Dahyun nodded.

“Like you said, I’ve never been brave. I don’t even know if she likes me.”

“You’re either blind, stupid, or have no confidence at all.” Tzuyu took another sip, and got whipped cream on her nose. She squinted down at her nose, looking absolutely ridiculous and adorable. Dahyun chuckled and handed her a napkin.

“You’re not blind, yet. You’re definitely not stupid. You’re usually confident. So what is it that makes you so unable to see that she’s into you?” Tzuyu asked.

“Sometimes I might think she is but you’ve seen her with Momo, she treats us exactly the same. She’s just… She’s confusing.” Dahyun sighed and grabbed a spoon full of whipped cream, relishing in the taste.

“But how long has she known Momo? Was it ten-twelve years she said?” Tzuyu argued.

“Something like that.”

“And she has known you for what, two weeks?”

“But so has Momo and she’s almost as bad. They’re so-. So touchy.” Dahyun tried to grimace but didn’t do very well. It turned out more like a dopey smile. “God, you’d hate it. I thought I would too, but I don’t. It’s so different with Sana. She’s so apparent, so. Confusing.”

“You say that a lot.” Tzuyu smiled.

“You know how TV’s used to go to static noise when the antenna stopped working?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s how my mind feels every time she does any of her Sana things.”

“And what are Sana things?”

Dahyun took several gulps of frappe, taking her time. Then the events of the last two weeks poured from her lips and her soul, settling between them. How Sana had leaned on her the first night and eventually fallen asleep on top of her, how it felt to have her breath on Dahyun’s neck. How their fingers fit so perfectly when their hands were twined, how soft her lips were against Dahyun’s cheek, against her neck, against her own. How many times she had wanted to be a braver version of herself. And Tzuyu listened. She didn’t interrupt or laugh or judge. She just listened and drank her own frappe.

“Tzuyu, I slept well for the first time in ages last night. I felt so… safe. Like when I was a kid and I sat for hours at the piano because I felt like nothing could hurt me if I kept playing?”

Tzuyu nodded.

“I want more than anything to sleep like that again.”

“With her.” Tzuyu concluded.

“I want to feel safe like that.” Dahyun nodded.
“Tell her.” Tzuyu said.

“You know me, I would never-” Dahyun started, trying to get the last remains of whipped cream onto her spoon.

“You’re a lot braver than you give yourself credit for.” Tzuyu said, grabbing a hold of Dahyun’s hand. Dahyun’s eyes snapped up and looked at her.

“I don’t know what I would do if it was me. If I couldn’t sing anymore.” Tzuyu mumbled, her voice suddenly unsure and her eyes glazing over.

Dahyun squeezeed her hand and sent her a reassuring smile. “I might not become the biggest composer of my time, but I will still work with what I love.”

...

“So, do you come here often?” Jihyo asked, a teasing grin on her lips and a raised brow as she looked down at Mina. She had been walking after work again, and had once more found Mina there, on the same bench, looking out over river.

Mina giggled and shrugged. Licked her lips and put her phone away as Jihyo joined her.

“I like it here.” Mina mused.

“Looking forwards to summer?” Jihyo asked.

“Definitely. I want to go swimming.” Mina looked around at her.

“You always say that.”

“And I never actually do it, I know. But this year.” Mina nodded to herself as if she had just formed a binding contract. Then she turned and looked at Jihyo, her eyes wavering slightly.

“Jihyo… Dahyun, she-”

“Last night?” Jihyo asked.

Mina nodded.

“But you didn’t call.”

A pause. Then Mina spoke tentatively “She asked me to call Sana.”

“Oh.” Jihyo looked out over the river. Tried not to feel hurt. Just stared at the water flowing calmly. It wasn’t like she was Dahyun’s protector or anything. And Dahyun didn’t owe her anything. It wasn’t a matter of who; the important thing was that Dahyun had actually, for once, asked for help.

“I’m glad she feels like she can lean on Sana.”

As soon as she had said the words, she had feared the knot in her stomach that would tell her the words weren’t genuine. But it didn’t come. There was only gratitude towards the new girl in their group.
“I really thought she was doing better.” Mina sighed.

“We hoped.” Jihyo shrugged. Offered her hand to Mina.

…

Tzuyu went with Dahyun home after the trip to the coffee house and stayed for dinner as well. They spent the afternoon studying together with the argument that if they both failed at least they could blame each other. They made scene charts and time lines and compared notes on the similarities between modern musicals and those of the golden age.

Sana took Momo out to eat, noting that they were usually so loud and didn’t want to disturb Dahyun and Tzuyu studying, even though Dahyun kept insisting that it wasn’t a problem.

Dahyun found dumplings in the fridge, from Higashi’s. She took them and put them in the very back of the fridge, so Tzuyu wouldn’t accidentally see them and suggest they eat them. Instead she suggested that she and Tzuyu cook together. Dahyun rarely cooked, but Tzuyu was good and they made enough peanut butter stir fry for at least six people. Played loud music from Dahyun’s bluetooth speaker and sang dramatically along to everything from “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” to “A Wonderful Guy” and bounced test questions off of each other as they chopped scallions and pepper. Dahyun had forgotten to buy carrots, but they made do without them.

When Momo and Sana finally returned well past ten pm, Tzuyu was on her way out of the door. Sana refused to let her go without a hug and Tzuyu uncharacteristically let her and also let Momo hug her as they met in the door. Tzuyu waved one last time at Dahyun whom she had placed on the bed that acted as couch, wrapped her in the blanket with tea and chocolate and given her firm instructions to stay put.

Momo’s cheeks were red from the cool April night outside and her lips parted in a shy smile as she joined Dahyun on the bed, kissing her cheek.

“Jeongyeon called while we were out. Says I can move in starting monday. Thank you for helping me get that room!”

“No problem.” Dahyun smiled and offered Momo a piece of chocolate.

Sana walked over as well, grabbed Momo’s pillow and seated herself on the floor by Dahyun’s knees, grabbing the remote. It took a moment, but Dahyun realized with a frown that Sana was wearing her sweater again. And it still had a stain on the sleeve, even if Dahyun had tried to get it off. She didn’t mind. If anything it would make it smell like Sana. And Sana smelled like lemons and perfume; and Dahyun loved the smell of lemons. Suddenly.

“Are you done studying for the night?” Sana asked, looking up at Dahyun.

“Yeah, thankfully.” Dahyun said and felt peace settle around her.

“Wanna watch Monster’s Inc?” Momo asked excitedly.
“I… Sure.” Dahyun chuckled and wrapped an arm around Momo’s shoulders, setting the tea down.

It took all of her bravery to reach forwards and let her fingers stroke across Sana’s hair, but she did it, and it earned her a giggle that soon turned into a chuckle. Dahyun tried to make it seem as natural as possible as she let her fingers run through Sana’s hair, over and over. Sana leaned into the touch, humming, and for a second Dahyun allowed herself to hope that maybe Tzuyu was right.

... 

Momo watched the entire movie without falling asleep, a feat that thoroughly impressed both Sana and Dahyun, but as soon as the credits rolled, she was out like a light, head in Dahyun’s lap. Dahyun looked down at Sana, then at Momo. Stroked a hair out of Momo’s face and smiled as her lips twitched in her sleep.

“I should go to sleep, I have work tomorrow… and class.” Dahyun sighed.

“Don’t worry about Momo, she’s already in bed. Just put the blanket over her.” Sana said quietly and got up, holding Momo’s pillow. “Here, if you get up we can put this under her head instead.”

Dahyun carefully lifted Momo’s head and got out from under her. The sleeping girl mumbled and squirmed as Sana placed the pillow under her head. Dahyun threw the blanket over her and let a thumb run across her cheek. She looked up and saw Sana’s hand outstretched towards her. Once again, Dahyun had to use all the courage she had to reach out, but she did. Sana’s grip was firm but welcoming as she dragged Dahyun into the bathroom.

They washed up wordlessly, side by side, took off their contacts and grinned slightly at the sight of both of them in the mirror with their glasses. Double four-eyes. And while Sana used the toilet, Dahyun went to check on Momo and sneak her large stuffed Sully bear, under her arm. She hummed and curled around it. Throughout the movie, well throughout most of the day, something had lured in the back of Dahyun’s mind, and this was the opportunity Dahyun had to test her theory. Ever so gently, the younger girl leaned down and pressed her lips against the soft skin on Momo’s temple. She was warm. But it didn’t make her stomach jolt, and the feeling of Momo’s skin didn’t linger. It was just warm.

Then Sana called quietly and Dahyun went to pee, trying to ensure that she would have the best odds at a night without waking up. When they had both changed, Sana grabbed Dahyun by the hand again, and led her into Sana’s room. Dahyun was wearing Sana’s t-shirt, but had opted for long pyjama pants underneath this time. Didn’t think her heart could take another night with the feeling of Sana’s bare legs against her own.

Almost as if it had already become habit, Dahyun waited for Sana to settle on the inner side of the bed before putting her glasses on the nightstand and crawling under the covers, settling on what she assumed now to be Momo’s side. Hesitation came however when the option was once again whether she should go for the teddy bear or Sana, but all her bravery had been used for tonight.

And it didn’t matter anyway. Sana chose for her.

Just as Dahyun had reached for the stuffed bear, Sana started pulling at her arm. Dahyun turned and looked at Sana, whose pout could not have been more outspoken. Her eyes were big as she held out
her arms towards Dahyun. Dahyun didn’t bother to suppress the smile that spread across her face at the ridiculous girl in front of her, but let bear be bear and scooted closer, letting Sana pull her in. Sana turned onto her back and wrapped one arm around Dahyun’s shoulder pulling her closer by the arm with the other. Dahyun’s pulse made her ears ring as she settled her head in the crook between Sana’s shoulder and neck.

Surely, as her chest pressed against Sana’s side, the older girl would notice how hard Dahyun’s heart was beating. Surely she would figure it out eventually. Surely she must have felt Dahyun’s warm cheek against her shirt when she slid her fingers in between the spaces of Dahyun’s and rested their twined hands somewhere just below Sana’s ribcage. Surely. Surely she must’ve figured out how much Dahyun felt. How fast she had fallen. How desperately she never wanted to get up or move, if not to stretch out just a bit and feel how Sana’s skin felt under her lips. She wondered if it was warm. It felt warm under her shirt, but she wanted more than anything to know.

Dahyun could do nothing but try to sleep, feeling Sana’s chest rise and fall calmly, trying to match the rhythm to steady her own treacherously smitten heart. She was a fool for falling for her roommate, for a total stranger; but an even bigger fool for not doing anything about it.

Yet even if her heart was beating fast at the feeling of Sana so close, Dahyun still felt her body calm down and felt how her eyelids got heavier with each second. Prayed that sleep would take her to wherever Sana had drifted off to.

Maybe all that’s needed to start healing, albeit slowly, is a good night’s sleep, a friend to lean on, a hand to hold and perhaps a bit of chocolate. Or maybe this was just a band aid. But a very soft band aid that smelled like lemons and perfume and home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Reconsidering Life While Trying to Get a Desk Through a Door

Chapter Notes

So many people are reading now, and talking to me about the story, and I love all of you so much!

Thank you for waiting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8:48 am Jeongyeon: Hey, you doing better?

Dahyun looked down at her phone when it buzzed. With a smile, she leaned against the wall in the hallway outside her lecture hall. Class started soon, but Tzuyu wasn’t there yet and she could always spare a few minutes for Jeongyeon.

8:49 am Dahyun: Definitely. I’m sorry, I should’ve let you know. I’ve just been busy with papers.

Dahyun took a sip of water and scrolled through her texts until she found Mina’s number.

8:51 am Dahyun: Hi. Thank you for the other night. I’m sorry it had to come to that, but I’m so glad you helped me. I’m doing better now.

Shifting her weight from one foot to the other, Dahyun pressed the notification from Jeongyeon that had appeared while writing Mina.

8:51 am Jeongyeon: No worries, Mina said you were in good hands.

She definitely had been in good hands. Was in good hands. For the fourth night in a row she had slept for more than a few disturbed hours, and she felt how it healed her. It made it feel less like a lie every time she told her friends she was fine.

8:52 am Dahyun: I was. Sana was very kind to me. And Momo too. I’m almost considering keeping her.
Just as she sent the text, an answer from Mina appeared as a banner at the top of her screen.

8:52 am Mina: That’s so good to hear. I’m glad you texted. I switched shifts with Jeongyeon, I hope you don’t mind closing up with me tonight.

Dahyun smiled and quickly texted that she didn’t mind at all before turning back to the chat with Jeongyeon.

8:53 am Jeongyeon: Can’t stick to one, huh?
8:54 am Jeongyeon: Well I’m a funny girl.
8:54 am Jeongyeon: Btw, are you coming tomorrow?

Dahyun frowned for a second and was about to write back but saw Tzuyu approach out of the corner of her eyes, a smile playing on her lips, revealing her dimple.

8:55 am Dahyun: Yeah, I’m helping Momo move
8:55 am Dahyun: Class now, see you tomorrow!

Dahyun put her phone away and walked with Tzuyu into the lecture hall. As always they chose seats on the left, about halfway down. But just as Tzuyu had sat down, and Dahyun was about to, Tzuyu spoke.

“So did you kiss her??”

The surprise at the sentence cause Dahyun to slip and almost miss her seat.

“Jesus christ, Tzuyu. You can’t just-” Dahyun winced. “No, I didn’t.”

Tzuyu shrugged and opened her bag, pulling out a music sheet notebook, a regular one and an old blue pencil case. “I thought you were going to do something about it.”

“I’m working on it.” Dahyun said.

“I’ll ask again tomorrow then.” Tzuyu’s eyes glinted mischievously.

“How about we make a pact. I tell you first thing if it happens and until then you shut up about it.” Dahyun offered, digging into her bag, moving notebooks and her laptop around, trying to find her own pencil case.
“Deal.” Tzuyu smiled and handed Dahyun one of her pencils when the older girl reemerged with a frown and only the notebooks in her hand. Had probably left the pencil case back at home on the coffee table.

“Who would’ve known you had such an interest in my love life?” Dahyun rolled her eyes.

“Well, mine is non-existent so I’ll take what I can get by messing with you.” Tzuyu said honestly.

“You do know all you have to do to get a love life is to say yes to one of your many many suitors?” Dahyun chuckled and wrote the date on the top of the page of each open notebook. There was a part of Dahyun that envied Mina and Tzuyu and the attention they got merely for their beauty, but a much bigger part was glad it wasn’t her. A part that had grown considerably after Mina had joined the restaurant staff and Dahyun had seen the not so pretty side of all the attention.

“I just don’t like any of them.” Tzuyu scrunched her nose.

“Have you ever, though?”

“Liked any of the people who ask me out? No.” Tzuyu shrugged.

“No I mean, liked anyone. At all.”

Tzuyu shrugged and grinned into her notebook. “It happens.”

“But you never tell any of us.” Dahyun looked at her.

“How do you know I just don’t tell everyone *but* you?” Tzuyu raised an eyebrow.

“You wouldn’t…”

“I could.” Tzuyu shrugged.

“But you haven’t.”

“No. I haven’t. Not everyone.”

“Every-Chou-Tzu, I’m offended.”

“Get over yourself.”

“You get over yourself!”

“Wow, sharp reply.” Tzuyu chuckled.

Dahyun felt her cheeks warm. “I-”

“Shh, class.” Tzuyu nudged Dahyun as she was about to retort. Dahyun shook her head with a grumble and turned her head from her smirking friend in the direction of the lecturer.

…

For whatever unfathomable reason, Chaeyoung couldn’t play today at all. Not a single chord came out the way she wanted it, either missing a key or pressing them unbalanced, promoting one key over
another. Sometimes she just missed the beat, the note too fast or too slow, hit too hard or not at all. But eventually she just gave up. Unplugged the headphones and got up.

“You okay?” Nayeon asked from the table by the kitchen.

“Yeah, just can’t get this to work.” Chaeyoung huffed and flopped onto the chair next to Nayeon.

“Yeah, I figured that much. You curse like a sailor when you think no-one is listening.”

“I curse like a sailor, period.” Chaeyoung shrugged. Rested her head on her arms.

“True.” Nayeon agreed, running a hand soothingly up the younger’s back, squeezing her shoulder before burying her fingers in the black hair.

“Did you find out about the project?” Chaeyoung turned and looked at Nayeon, smiling softly as the latter moved the hair from Chaeyoung’s face, tracing her fingers gently around the back of her ear.

“Sadly yes,” The older girl said, rolling her eyes. “She can only fit it in Wednesday after class.”

Chaeyoung sighed. “I don’t get how you managed to be teamed up with the busiest girl in school, she’s never available for anything.”

“If Seolhyun doesn’t have at least five projects at a time then she wouldn’t be Seolhyun.” Nayeon shrugged. “I need to text Jeongyeon and tell her I can’t make it. I really wanted to help.”

“You can come over for dinner afterwards?”

“Mh, maybe, if we’re done before the devil sets the sun.” Nayeon huffed and took her phone from the table. Chaeyoung watched her. Watched how she gnawed on her lip and rolled her eyes as she wrote. It was fascinating how disgruntled Nayeon could look, but even more fascinating how quickly she melted. Like how she did in this moment where Chaeyoung poked at her shin with a toe and sent her a dimpled smile. Sometimes it was better to be tired with someone you loved than just sitting by yourself.

…

One look at the right-hand corner of the laptop was enough to break the mood. And what a mood it had been. For three hours, Sana had been buried in her homework on one side of Dahyun’s bed and Dahyun on her laptop writing an assignment. It hadn’t been heart-racing or in any other way hard to focus, sitting there side by side, just warm and comfortable and calming. But seeing the time on the laptop pulled Dahyun back to reality, and with a sigh she saved her work and started combing her hair into a ponytail.

“Already?” Sana asked with a frown. Then looked at the clock and pressed her lips together.

“It’s ok, I’m gonna quit.” Dahyun yawned.

“No you’re not.” Sana rolled her eyes and closed her book, disposing of it on the far side of the bed.

“How do you know?”

“You would’ve quit ages ago if you didn’t need it.” Sana shrugged.
“Mh, you’re right, I’m poor and have a world of bills.” Dahyun grumbled.

“When are you gonna be home?” Sana asked.

“I’m closing tonight. So I guess two thirty if I’m lucky, three if I’m not?” Dahyun tightened her hair in the tie and stretched her neck, sore from staring into her laptop for three hours.

“Mh, well have fun, and say hi to Mitang from me.” Sana beamed. “It is her who’s on with you tonight, right?”

“Yup.” Dahyun grinned. “How do you even know that?”

“You mentioned it yesterday?” Sana shrugged.

“Incredible.” Dahyun shook her head. “Oh, can you make sure you feed Momo when she gets home. But don’t let her eat the dumplings without me.”

“They’re gonna go bad before you get around to them.” Sana argued.

“We’ll have them tomorrow when we move her stuff.” Dahyun made to get up, but hands around her arm pulled her back, and then Sana’s arms were tight around her in a hug, and despite the slightly awkward angle, Dahyun allowed herself to melt into it.

“I’m gonna be late.” Dahyun looked up at her.

“Mh, fine.” Sana huffed and kissed Dahyun’s forehead chastely before letting her go. But Dahyun’s mind had gotten on static noise and she just lay there against Sana, until the older girls’ giggles forced their way through Dahyun’s conscience. Clearing her throat, Dahyun got up, scratching across her forehead and over her scalp.

“See you, Sana-chan.” Dahyun grinned.

“See you tonight, Dahyunnie.” Sana smiled softly, before opening her book, laying comfortably across the bed, stomach against the sheets, legs in the air and feet dangling carelessly.

One day, Dahyun might tell Sana. Tell her how her smile made Dahyun’s heart soar. How Sana’s lips against her skin made it tickle. How her touch made shivers run down Dahyun’s spine. But not quite yet. Mostly because the moment she told Sana, she could risk losing it all. And even if it wasn’t optimal, she just wanted to live in this dream a little longer. It felt too good to fall. But the ground was getting closer and there was no-one there to remove it from under her or fly her above the clouds where the sun always shines.

So instead of thinking about the realistic outcome of telling Sana, and actually dealing with the possibility of rejection, Dahyun spent the entire walk to work thinking up scenarios, one more far fetched and cheesy than the other, in which she actually managed to confess to Sana that not only would she like to kiss her but she had also wanted to do so for a while. Scenarios that ended in ways that made Dahyun’s stomach turn excitedly and a dumb smile spread on her face.

She couldn’t pinpoint exactly when she had first thought about it. Kissing Sana. Maybe when Sana had picked her up from work. Maybe when she had kissed Dahyun’s cheek the first time. Maybe the very first night when Sana’s breath burned on Dahyun’s neck. She wasn’t sure. Just knew that it was taking up every part of her thoughts now. That her world had somehow stopped revolving around all her guilt and frustration and started revolving only around finding out how Sana’s lips felt against her
own. About satisfying the eagle growing in her chest, spreading its wings excitedly at the thought of holding Sana’s face in her hands and taking her breath away.

But right now, she had to turn off Channel Sana. Because she had just walked a block too far, and with warm cheeks had a turn around and backtrack until she reached the restaurant, trying her best not to miss it this time.

With five minutes to spare before the shift, Dahyun stepped through the employee’s entrance to the restaurant, her eyes immediately falling on Mina on the bench by their lockers. She was adjusting her hair, tightening the ponytail and then poked at the mole on her nose, checking it in a hand mirror.

“Leave it be, it’s cute.” Dahyun said sitting down next to Mina, undoing the shoelaces on her chucks.

“Mh.” Mina scrunched her nose, then looked around at Dahyun, worry in her eyes. “How are you doing?”

“I’m fine. Honestly, I was just so tired the other night.” Dahyun put a hand on top of Mina’s. The older girl took it and turned it, rubbing over her thumb as Dahyun continued. “I had been sleeping in the living room because all of Momo’s crap is in my room, but we switched and now I sleep just fine.”

“Promise? You’re not just pretending because you don’t want us to worry?”

“No really. I’m good.” Dahyun sent Mina a salute and a grin that made her chuckle. Almost mentioned the reason she had been sleeping so well, but opted not to. Mina would just think it was weird.

“I’ll believe you then.”

And with that they armed themselves with brooms and dishcloths. It was always the first order of the day for the late shifts, clean up after lunch. The restaurant normally had a busy period around lunch and then quieted down until four in the afternoon where people slowly started arriving again, and by seven it was always pouring in. Even if Mr Yang-nim was a horrible boss, Dahyun had to give him credit for how well the restaurant was going. Although that credit should be equally attributed to Taeyang, Joohyun and their kitchen.

The shift progressed smoothly, and really, Dahyun should’ve been suspicious as soon as things started going her way. Because when did they ever? But the need for something to go right had lulled her into a sense of false security, so when Mina offered to help out in the bar after Dahyun got back from her bathroom break, Dahyun just nodded and took over cleaning the tables. The only thing on her mind was getting done with cleaning as soon as possible. Hoped to get back before Sana went to sleep. And she should’ve been ashamed that everything was about Sana, to the point where she hadn’t even seen it coming, but she didn’t. Just turned her head in surprise at the first drunken complaint from one of Mina’s many suitors. Realized too late that it was rarely a good idea to have Mina in the bar without backup. But there she was, with a polite smile and a shake of the head, handing back a phone number.

“I’m sorry, I can’t accept this.” Mina said kindly handing back a receipt on the back of which a guy
in his mid-twenties had written a number.

“What, your boyfriend gonna mind?” The man leaned on the counter and Mina discretely stepped back, leaving the receipt on the counter.

“I don’t have a boyfriend but that wouldn’t have affected my answer if I had.”

Dahyun admired Mina. She was amazing with words, amazing at handling these things, kindly looking at him without returning his gaze. Never stepped out of line. The one thing Dahyun didn’t understand however, was why Mina didn’t just lie. She could’ve easily lied and said that she was seeing someone. It was a suggestion Dahyun had brought up several times, but Mina never took it.

“Oh, come on. Can’t she close up? You can leave with us.” The customer insisted, reaching across the counter. Mina stepped back again with extreme precision, right outside his reach, still looking at him.

“No thank you.” She said.

“Why? I’m a total catch.” He grinned.

“I don’t want to.”

The man tried to reach her again. Dahyun saw the flicker in Mina’s eyes as she hit the counter behind her. That was it; Dahyun’s wake up call, to not just stand idly by. Enough was enough, and the younger girl left the dish cloth on the table, stepping between Mina and the man at the bar.

“May I help you?” She asked politely, ignoring the way her heart immediately raced. She was never good at confrontations, never good with words. But for Mina she could pretend to be. The customer seemed just the right amount of baffled to take away his focus. Dahyun had been successful. For a moment he looked from Dahyun to Mina behind her and then back again. Shrugged and shifted his footing.

“Can you give this to your friend and give me two Soju?” He asked, handing Dahyun the receipt with his number with a wink.

“Sure.” Dahyun found two shot glasses. Placed them on the bar between them and poured the Soju. Received payment and the receipt. With one last look at Mina, the man turned around and walked away, a shot glass in each hand. Back to his table of loud friends. The minute he was far enough away Dahyun tore the receipt in two, four, eight, sixteen tiny pieces and threw them in the trash, grabbing Mina’s hand and squeezing it.

“You’re too kind for your own good, Mina.” Dahyun looked at her softly.

“So I’m told.” Mina grumbled, forcing a smile.

“Wanna switch?” Dahyun offered, but Mina shook her head.

“I’m never going to get used to this. It’s easier to say no now but-” Mina shook her head. “I just hate when they get mad at me. I feel like I’m doing something wrong by rejecting them.”

“You don’t owe them anything.” Dahyun insisted.

“Thank you, Dahyun.” Mina nodded and sighed, slumping against the counter.

“You got this.” Dahyun attempted to wink at her, making the older girl chuckle at the obvious fail.
“And if not, just do what we talked about.”

“Lie and tell them I have a boyfriend?”

“They don’t need to know you’re gay,” Dahyun said quietly, “It’s none of their business.”

“Mh, but lying...” Mina scrunched your nose.

“You don’t have to be an angel, Mina. Lie a little. Live a lot.” Dahyun grabbed a clean towel from the counter and swung it over her shoulder. Grinned at Mina as she walked away, not catching what Mina was mumbling under her breath. She was inaudible enough as it was, you couldn’t expect anyone to hear what she said when she actually tried to be quiet, especially when the sounds of Hip and Lip were blasting from the loudspeakers above the bar.

…

Around half past two, Dahyun unlocked the door to the apartment, quietly sneaking into the darkness. Only a lamp on the floor by the corner to the kitchen was lit, lighting a way through the chaos of Momo’s belongings for Dahyun. For once it seemed that Sana and Momo had gone to bed at a somewhat sensible time, Momo fast asleep on Dahyun’s bed. The sight of her slightly open mouth and flickering eyes under the eyelids made Dahyun realize how much she was going to miss Momo when she wasn’t here anymore. And guiltily worse, how much she was going to miss having an excuse to sleep in Sana’s arms.

Shaking the last thought from her mind, Dahyun took off her shoes and tiptoed past Momo and into the bathroom. Wondered if Mina got home ok. She normally drove there in her little green Toyota, but tonight she had walked instead. Dahyun didn’t like the idea of her walking alone at night, but then again, Dahyun was too. When Dahyun had questioned why she was walking, Mina had explained that her car was at the garage. But when Dahyun had still been worried, Mina had suggested that they adopt Dahyun and Jeongyeon’s tradition of the “I’m home.” text. It was always hard not to be protective of Mina, just something about her aura, but tonight even more after the incident with the customer. But just as Dahyun looked through her social media while brushing her teeth, a message popped up, letting the younger girl known that Mina too was home. Dahyun had sent hers as soon as she had entered her own building. As soon as she had cleaned the sink, Dahyun changed clothes and took out her contacts, her eyes thanking her for it. Didn’t bother to put on her glasses but just finished washing her face and walked into Sana’s room as if it was the most natural thing to do, the path to her own room long forgotten.

Sana was asleep, undoubtedly so, and Dahyun carefully crawled under the sheets, argued with herself, and scooted closer. Her leg bumped into Sana’s and she froze, afraid to have woken the girl. Heart in her throat, Dahyun waited, until she finally sighed in relief, even if her courage had left her. Turned and reached across Sana for the stuffed bear in the corner. Though just as Dahyun was about to turn her back to Sana, a mumble revealed that Sana hadn’t been nearly as asleep as Dahyun had thought.

“You’re mean.”

“What?” Dahyun looked over at Sana, the bear in between them.

“I thought you liked my cuddles.” Sana grumbled. Dahyun chuckled awkwardly, a warmth creeping
up her neck as Sana whined, “And now you’re laughing at me!”

“No, I’m just-. I’m laughing because you’re cute. I just didn’t wanna wake you.” Dahyun explained.

“I’m cute?” Sana was definitely awake now. Her face was barely visible in the darkness but Dahyun knew from her voice that she was beaming.

“No, I take it back. Not cute at all.” Dahyun said, thanking the darkness. Nonetheless, Dahyun put the bear back in the corner and let Sana pull her close.

“You are mean.” Sana stated, holding the younger girl impossibly close.

“Am not.” Dahyun mumbled against Sana’s neck.

“Yeah, you are.”

“No I’m not.” Dahyun chuckled.

“Yeah, you’re a big meanie!” Sana insisted.

“I’m literally allowing you to squash me, you should know how few people are allowed this amount of cuddles.”

“You should’ ve just cuddled me immediately.” Sana huffed. “Meanie!”

“Don’t give me a reason to make it true, I know you’re ticklish.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“Don’t test me.”

“Mh, fine. You win.” Sana said disgruntled.

“Thank you. Now go back to sleep.” Dahyun adjusted against the older girl and felt lips in her hair.

“You should too.” Sana mumbled into Dahyun’s hair. Then sighed and pulled the sheets further up around them.

It was possible right? That Sana was doing all this - wanting Dahyun to cuddle her; kissing her all the time - there was a possibility that Sana liked her back, right? This wasn’t just regular friendship stuff. At least not any friendship Dahyun could ever remember having and she did after all have six - seven other friends who were all in one way or the other, into girls, as far as she knew at least. Didn’t actually know about Momo now she thought about it. But the rest. And Dahyun wanted to ask. Wanted to ask Sana if she considered there to be a possibility of more than friendship between them. But couldn’t get herself to move. Just wanted the bliss of Sana’s body against her own and her hand on Dahyun’s waist.

For minutes she lay with her head in the crook of Sana’s neck, asking herself if this was weird, what they were doing, if she should have told Mina when she had the chance, gotten an opinion. If this was something she shouldn’t be doing. Doubt was threatening to overpower her, and it almost made her pull away, but she didn’t want to wake Sana again. Just wanted to figure this out. But what if Sana really didn’t feel anything? What if she instead started pulling away out of respect for Dahyun’s feelings? What if their bubble burst? But then again, how much longer could she take being torn by the conflict raging inside her chest, and how the heck did Sana not see it?

For a split second the need to do something, anything, soared inside Dahyun, wings spreading
powerfully in her chest, and without really thinking she turned her head slightly and pressed her lips to Sana’s neck. Froze. Felt sparks fly through her veins and her heart hammer against her ribs, trying to break its confines. Drew back.

It was nothing like kissing Momo, or Chaeyoung or Jihyo. This was addictive. But Dahyun just pressed her lips tight together and held her breath, waiting for Sana to say something. But she didn’t react.

When she was finally convinced that Sana was asleep and hadn’t noticed, closed her eyes, swallowing hard. Buried her forehead against the point on Sana’s neck where her lips had touched. Tried to let the scent of Sana calm her.

She would tell her. Soon. She would try to tell her. Soon.

…

“If you back a little and turn it-” Jeongyeon’s voice rang through the hallway. Dahyun grunted and tried turning the desk “Yeah, like that. Okay, it fits.”

Dahyun swore as every muscle in her body went into protest. They had been carrying things the entire day, down into the van in the morning and now back up and to the fourth floor, to Jeongyeon’s apartment after lunch. It was a good thing that apartment was bigger than Dahyun’s and barely contained anything anymore, as most of the stuff in Jeongyeon’s apartment had belonged to Jiyeon.

“You didn’t have to do this.” Momo mumbled next to her, easily carrying a box, her top accentuating strong shoulders and her rose-colored hair in a high bun.

“I know.” Dahyun said and sent her a strained smile. “I’m choosing to.”

Momo nodded shyly and waited as Dahyun and Jeongyeon struggled in the doorway.

“Dahyun, your hand!” Jeongyeon exclaimed and stopped dragging. Dahyun’s hand had almost gotten caught between the desk and the door. She moved it with difficulty, feeling it ache and the desk tip slightly in the time it took for her to reposition her hold on it.

“Thank you.” Dahyun said and nodded for Jeongyeon to continue moving into the apartment. Just as they managed to finally angle the desk right to get it through the door, Chaeyoung showed up behind Momo with what Dahyun knew to be a laundry bag currently used for Momo’s toiletries. As soon as there was enough space, both Momo and Chaeyoung snuck behind the other two and the desk, carrying the stuff into what was now going to be Momo’s room. This of course meant that they both had to hurry quite a bit to get out of the room again, as Jeongyeon and Dahyun now had to master the trick of getting the desk through another door in order to get it into Momo’s room.

“You sure she needs the bed too, can’t she just sleep in yours?” Dahyun complained as they once again had to get the desk through a door.

“I suggested that too but she wasn’t much for it.” Momo grinned, leaning against the wall for a moment to catch her breath before she went back down with Chaeyoung to get more boxes. Jeongyeon grumbled indistinctly.
“She’s a catch, you know.” Dahyun wiggled her eyebrows, angling the desk.

“I’m not interested.” Jeongyeon’s cheeks flushed, pulling the desk and getting it stuck.

“Sure. Right. Have you seen her? Legs for days, abs that can cut diamonds, and she’s Japanese. And she’s so cute.” Dahyun tried to sell the idea as they wriggled the desk back out a bit and turned it some thirty degree.

“Well, if you’re that into her why don’t you go for her?” Jeongyeon said flatly as they finally got the desk through the door to Momo’s room and sat it down where she needed it.

“I’m not into Momo.” Dahyun shrugged, biting down on her lip. Leaned on the desk and felt her mind once again travelling to Sana. If she could just stop thinking about her for one goddamn second. And if she could just not have Sana’s giggle on repeat like a record stuck on the same three seconds, threatening to make her knees buckle just from the memory.

“Oi, earth to Kim Dahyun. Where’d you go?” Jeongyeon asked, ripping Dahyun rudely from the vision in her head of Sana’s smile and the way her hair fell into her face when she nodded exaggeratedly this morning when Dahyun offered to make scrambled eggs.

“Uh, school.” Dahyun said almost on reflex.

“Right, cause school gives you heart eyes.” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow.

“I don’t have heart eyes!” Dahyun protested.

“Oh, you so do.” Jeongyeon laughed.

“Can’t you just go get laid or something instead of being on my neck?” Dahyun huffed.

“That’s a whole smartass comment coming from you.” Jeongyeon snickered.

“It’s a friendly suggestion. And Momo is right there. She’s gonna be in your apartment now, I bet you it’s not gonna take long for her to win you over.” Dahyun crossed her arms.

“I’m not gonna do her. And I already told you, if you have a crush on Momo, you should just go for it.” Jeongyeon shrugged, her eyes glinting.

“I’m not into Momo!” Dahyun huffed, realizing too late that Jeongyeon was well aware of this.

“You’re not?” Asked a feigned offended voice behind Dahyun. Then arms were around her and Momo’s strong body seemed to attempt to eliminate every inch of space between them, making Dahyun blush. Just because she wasn’t into Momo didn’t mean she didn’t feel anything when she so firmly pressed herself against her. “Well, I can still change that, can’t I?”

“I think you already have.” Jeongyeon laughed.

“Nah, she just thinks I’m hot. I can live with that.” Momo grinned and pressed kisses to Dahyun’s cheek, to her jaw and to her ear.

“Ew.” Dahyun said, turning her head to get away as Momo’s kisses got sloppier. Wiped her ear with her sleeve. At least the two older girls were entertained.

“Okay, are we moving your stuff or not?” Asked Chaeyoung, appearing in the door to Momo’s room, out of breath with another box, placing it on the floor.
“We are! Sorry.” Momo said hurriedly, letting go of Dahyun who had to spend a few seconds regaining her footing.

“Good,” Chaeyoung stretched and then grinned. “I’m happy to help though.”

“Well, it’s only a few more boxes and then the bed.” Dahyun said.

“Wanna order dinner now or wait until we’re actually sure we’re gonna survive the bed?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Order now.” Momo insisted. “Chicken?”

“Sounds good.” Jeongyeon said and disappeared into the kitchen to order for them. Meanwhile Dahyun went with Momo and Chaeyoung out the front door.

“I already hate that bed and we haven’t even started moving it yet.” Chaeyoung said, as they walked down the hallway.

“I know, but Jeongyeon claims there’s no room for me in her bed so we gotta.” Momo said rolling her eyes and clicking her tongue.

“She has a king size, there’s plenty of room!” Chaeyoung complained. Momo just shrugged.

…

“I thought we were having chicken?” Momo asked as they finally sat down around Jeongyeon’s coffee table, looking at the box with the italicized lettering revealing that it was from Higashi’s. Dahyun had grabbed the dumplings from her fridge in the morning and brought them to Jeongyeon’s, storing them here.

“We are, but you and I have an outstanding with these.” Dahyun said and opened the box.

“But I thought it might have been a good reason to come visit soon.” Momo said with a pout.

“You’re gonna come over anytime you want, dumplings or not, right?” Dahyun handed Momo a pair of chopsticks.

“If I’m welcome.”

“When has that ever bothered you? But sure, you’re officially welcome to come visit.” Dahyun laughed and stuffed her mouth full of dumpling. Momo did the same with a shrug and a grin. They tasted amazing. Even if it wasn’t a tradition yet, Dahyun would work hard to make it one, because Momo and dumplings was a good combo.

“Are you two willing to share those?” Chaeyoung asked from the couch, eyeing first Momo and then Dahyun sceptically.

Momo and Dahyun exchanged looks.

“One.” They said in unison, both equally hard to understand, still busy with their dumplings.

Chaeyoung took one.
Chaeyoung and Dahyun stayed for another two hours, mainly because there was chicken and beer and Fluxx. Dahyun won. Momo sulked. Well, she sulked until Dahyun tiredly curled into a ball in Momo’s arms. And honestly, once seated there with Momo’s warm body around her it was hard to accept that she should probably go home before falling asleep here. But she didn’t want to go home. She really didn’t want to go home to the bed that was now back in her room, without Sana. But it was for the best. Definitely for the best. And Chaeyoung was pulling at her arm trying to get her to go with her, a well timed little roar of a yawn escaping the younger girl. They were taking the same subway line home, Chaeyoung just had to go a bit further. So there really was no getting around it.

The subway was cold and rumbled too much, but Dahyun and Chaeyoung leaned on each other in the almost empty compartment, watching video clips on Chaeyoung’s phone and talking about Chaeyoung’s upcoming birthday. Even though they didn’t live together anymore, somehow nothing had changed between them. There was the same confidentiality between them that there had been ever since Chaeyoung sat down next to Dahyun all those years ago. And it was for that reason that Dahyun didn’t mind breaking the mood; knew that Chaeyoung would understand.

“I’m afraid that I can’t sleep.” Said Dahyun in a low voice. Chaeyoung raised her head and looked at Dahyun.

“You’ve been sleeping fine the past few days though, right? Since the last-”

“I have. But tonight is going to be different.” Dahyun needed to tell someone. And she needed it to be Chaeyoung. She needed her best friend.

“Why?” Chaeyoung inquired.

“I’ve been sleeping in Sana’s bed for the past few nights. Ever since Momo’s stuff arrived. That night at work, the one Jeongyeon mentioned, that was the first night after Momo’s stuff arrived and we put my bed in the living room. I couldn’t sleep at all that night, and since that Momo insisted on switching. And... I’m afraid I can’t sleep without Sana.” Dahyun picked at her cuticles. Chaeyoung covered her hand and held it tight.

“And you can’t ask her if you can keep sleeping in her room.” Chaeyoung concluded.

“It would be weird.” Dahyun cringed.

“I guess. Yeah, it would.” Chaeyoung agreed honestly. “But I think you should try anyway. Try telling her the truth.”

“All of it?”

“She deserves the truth. You live together, you-” Her expression changed, and Dahyun frowned when Chaeyoung’s lips shook and her voice trembled. “I’m sorry. I know my being away so much the past few months made it harder.”

Chaeyoung didn’t meet Dahyun’s eyes.
Dahyun opened her mouth to protest, but Chaeyoung just shook her head. She looked like she was on the verge of tears, and the sudden change in the mood made Dahyun wrap her free arm around Chaeyoung.

“Nayeon told me.” Chaeyoung muttered into Dahyun’s shirt. “How many nights Jihyo picked you up and took you home. Got you from work and from home when you were up late. Told me that she, that Nayeon- she sat with you. For nights... Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know… I didn’t want you to put your life on hold for me. I couldn’t get myself to hang onto you just because I was scared. I guess- I guess I just didn’t want to be scared anymore.” Dahyun sighed and felt Chaeyoung’s hand let go and then both her arms around Dahyun.

Chaeyoung just nodded and sniffled, so Dahyun kept going, though her voice was only a whisper against the younger girl’s shoulder.

“I didn’t want to admit that I was the scared girl who couldn’t be alone. I didn’t want to keep you from Nayeon, not when you were so excited to move in with her. It was all just bad timing. I should’ve told you. I know that now, and I’m sorry. Chaengie, I’m so sorry.”

With a whimper Chaeyoung gripped harder around Dahyun. “You’re a fool, Kim Dahyun.”

“I know.” Dahyun sighed. “I’m sorry.”

“Please tell her. Let her help you, I know she’ll want to.”

“I…” Dahyun buried her forehead in Chaeyoung’s shirt. Closed her eyes. “I’ll try.”

...

The apartment was dark.

Dahyun’s bed was cold.

And Dahyun was left of courage.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Drinking Games part 1: Fools on a Cold Kitchen Floor

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the slight delay, but I wanted to post chapters 9 and 10 closer to each other than regular ones.

Thank you for waiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chaeyoung’s birthday arrived in a haze of coffee and involuntary naps.

Dahyun woke on the couch, now back in its place, books and notes from all of her subjects spread in a seemingly random pattern across the coffee table, onto the couch and even on the floor. She looked around, her foot pushing a book on lyrics vs composition onto the floor, landing on her flashcards for the just finished test about Rogers and Hammerstein II. Her hair was a mess, the bun on the top of her head halfway undone. With a few deep breaths, Dahyun blinked her contacts into focus and yawned.

“I was just about to wake you.” Said a voice emerging from the kitchen. She walked over with two cups of tea, replacing the empty coffee mug on the table. As she walked past Dahyun again, she reached over and stroked her hair out of her eyes. Then walked into the kitchen with Dahyun’s empty mug and Dahyun’s eyes on her back. Her hair swayed a little when she walked, but too soon she disappeared into the kitchen. A scramble told Dahyun that Sana was cleaning the cup. She turned up in the hallway before Dahyun had gotten enough sense to look away. But Sana didn’t seem to notice, her expression a frown as her eyes searched the mess around Dahyun.

“Do you have any clue when they will start being kinder to you? It seems like an insane amount of work.” Sana commented with obvious worry when Dahyun scrambled to stack her notes enough that Sana could sit down. She settled with the usual lack of personal space, her body snug against Dahyun’s.

“I just need to get to May, then we tone down the intensity to one of the subjects; this one. And it’s my birthday that month so hopefully I’ll get some money from my parents, so I can take fewer shifts.” Dahyun sighed, sleep making her voice croaky.

“I can contribute more with rent if you can’t get the money to last?” Sana offered.

“No, it’s fine. We’re roommates, we share.” Dahyun reassured her

“If you’re sure.” Sana was studying her face, then nodded at the cup on the coffee table. “Drink your tea.”

“What time is it?” Dahyun asked as she reached for her tea. Lemon.

“Just past three. When are we leaving?” Sana asked, sipping from her own mug.

“Around five if we walk there. Half past if we take the subway.” Dahyun rubbed her eyes.
Sana shuffled and grabbed her phone from her pocket as it buzzed. She looked down at it, a soft smile around her lips.

“What?” Dahyun asked curiously.

“Just my mom. She worries easily.” Sana muttered and answered.

“That’s sweet of her.” Dahyun said, taking a sip of her tea.

“It should be me worrying about her.”

“Why? If you don’t mind me asking.” Dahyun frowned.

“Not at all,” Sana smiled. “She’s just dealt with some health stuff. Bad heart... But she’s been doing really well for the past three years.”

“Oh, well, I’m glad she’s doing good.” Dahyun didn’t exactly know how to react to that.

“Me too, I guess I just keep waiting for it to turn bad again. It’s stupid, I know.” She shook her head.

“It’s not stupid. It’s natural to worry.” Dahyun reassured her.

“I guess.” Sana smiled slightly, putting her phone down. “Did you finish the presentation?”

“Which one?” Dahyun laughed hopelessly. The tea had finally gotten the perfect temperature and she took a large gulp, savoring in the taste of it.

“The one you told me about yesterday, about… What was it? Composition and incorporation-”


“Do you have to do more before we leave?” Sana asked, looking around at the mess.

“Not too much. I want to look over these-” Dahyun pointed at a stack of sheet-music but realized those were the wrong ones and started sifting through the piles to find the ones she needed. Her heart raced immediately, but just as she was about to get up to see if she was sitting on them, her eye caught on the name of the song she was looking for. She sighed and picked it out from underneath her book on golden age musicals.

“These ones.” Dahyun showed her three different songs from different musicals. “My Man” from *Funny Girl*, “For Good” from *Wicked* and “People Will Say We’re in Love” from *Oklahoma!*.

“I remember this one.” Sana said and pointed to the last one. Dahyun smiled. She did too.

“I like it.” She hummed and took it gently, fingers ghosting over the lyrics underneath the sheet music. “Do you have to play them?”

Dahyun shook her head. “I’m gonna use them to figure out how music contributes to conveying love in a song. Like, other than the lyrics.”

“That’s so cool.” Sana breathed.

“I just need to listen to each a few times and make some notes, then I’ll be ready to go.” Dahyun made another attempt at an energetic smile.

“And you’re sure you can’t save that until tomorrow?” Sana frowned.
“Why?”

“You look like you could use some more sleep…” Sana admitted, reaching out to stroke Dahyun’s mess of a hair.

“I… I can.” Dahyun gave in, leaning into the touch. “I can do this tomorrow.”

“Good idea.” Sana smiled warmly and took the sheets of paper and tea from Dahyun, placing it on the coffee table as neatly as she could. Dahyun swayed slightly on the couch and Sana caught her. Always seemed to catch her lately. And Dahyun found the all to familiar spot in the crook of Sana’s neck while Sana adjusted herself slightly and let one hand run slowly up and down Dahyun’s arm, the other removing the hair tie from what might once have been a bun. Combed her fingers through Dahyun’s hair. But Dahyun barely registered. She just relished in the smell of Sana’s perfume and let sleep drag her back in.

…”

Gentle kisses to her forehead pulled Dahyun from sleep way too soon. Stuck somewhere between sleeping and being awake, the younger girl mumbled and squirmed, trying to get closer to Sana. Made her giggle by doing so.

“Dahyunnie, you’re going to miss your best friend’s birthday, and I don’t think she’ll accept the excuse that you were busy sleeping on your roommate.” Sana teased, cupping Dahyun’s face, still pressing soft kisses to Dahyun’s forehead, to her cheek and to the tip of her nose. As always when Sana was too close like this, Dahyun became horribly aware that all she had to do was move her head a fraction of an inch and Sana would be kissing her lips instead of her nose.

So she moved.

Backwards.

Out of reach.

“You’re right.” Dahyun said. Sana’s eyes flickered momentarily, then her lips spread in a warm smile. Why hadn’t Dahyun kissed her right there? Why did her mind turn so horribly blank when she opened her mouth to speak? It was pathetic. She was completely useless. If she just spoke her mind. Told Sana. But it would be so awkward if Sana didn’t like her back. How would she feel knowing her roommate was crushing on her? Would their newfound friendship and confidentiality survive that, or would she draw back? Would Dahyun lose Sana and by extension Momo, as soon as she had gotten them? Honestly, she couldn’t even imagine her life without either them by now.

“Are you gonna change before we leave? I don’t really know what’s customary to dress like for something like this…” The insecurity in Sana’s voice immediately returned Dahyun from her train of thoughts.

“Oh, you’re fine, you look good. I’m gonna change though.” Dahyun looked down herself, cringed and got up grudgingly. It wasn’t as if Chaeyoung would ever judge her for showing up in her so called grandma-style clothes, but Nayeon would never let her hear the end of it.
Sana was standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom when Dahyun poked her head in five minutes later. With her toothbrush still sticking out of her mouth, Sana turned and shuffled slightly, making room for Dahyun.

It was becoming a familiar routine, sharing the mirror.

She had gotten used to having the place mostly to herself, as Chaeyoung mostly had morning classes and more often than not spent the night at Nayeon’s. But Sana often bumped into Dahyun in the bathroom, her afternoon classes allowing her a sleep schedule that was more like Dahyun’s than Chaeyoung’s had been. Luckily it had only taken them a few days to get a system. Sana on the left and Dahyun on the right. And they always talked. Today Sana talked about how horrible their calculus lectures were and how she kept zoning out. How she envied Momo and her ability to learn their dances in no time. How she found it embarrassing that she had to keep asking Momo to show the steps. And Dahyun listened with patience and reassured her. Talked about her teacher’s distracting lisp and how Tzuyu had actually ordered tea instead of frappe the other day.

In these moments it seemed almost like they were just regular roommates, and Dahyun was sure she could get used to just having this. But then Sana promised to show her their most recent choreography, and Dahyun felt her stomach respond to the thought of Sana’s body dancing in front of her.

Yeah, she really had to get over it soon.

Or do something about it.

But right now, she merely shook her head and blinked, trying to get her mind in a very different direction than where it was currently heading.

…

“You’re late.” Chaeyoung frowned with a pout as she opened the door.

“I know. I’m sorry. But I have a present for you?” Dahyun gave Chaeyoung her most charming smile and blinked in what she hoped was an endearing manner.

“I guess.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes and chuckled.

“So, this is for you.” Dahyun handed her a flat present and wrapped her arms around her best friend’s neck, planting an open-mouthed kiss on her cheek. “And so was that. Your birthday kiss.”

“Ew, gross!” Chaeyoung complained and wiped her cheek.


“What’s- Dahyun!” Chaeyoung howled as Dahyun placed more wet kisses onto her best friend’s cheek. “Hey- you stop that! I’m covered in saliva- Ew!” Dahyun laughed against the younger girl’s skin and stopped kissing her, but held her tight still as she chuckled and allowed the closeness. “What’s gotten into you?”

“Missed you, I guess.” Dahyun mumbled happily against her best friend, feeling how Chaeyoung’s body finally relaxed and drew back a little to wipe the poor girl’s cheek dry somewhat. It wasn’t a
lie. The moment she had seen Chaeyoung, there had been a moment where everything between them passed over Dahyun like a wave. The little drawings on yellow post it notes. The hours together side by side during recess and after school. The rush when they signed the lease on the apartment. The sinking feeling when they changed the contract. And then a few days ago in the train. Finally admitting to Chaeyoung how bad things had actually been. Realizing that she could have both; could let Chaeyoung live her life separate from their little world and still go to her. Could have her best friend without making her stop to wait for Dahyun.

“Dahyun?”

“Mh? Sorry. I just-” Dahyun shook her head and stood on her toes to kiss Chaeyoung right between the eyebrows, longer than she normally would.

“It’s a good thing this is only once a year.” Chaeyoung sighed and shook her head when Dahyun drew back. “That wasn’t one kiss, that was like a hundred.”

“Okay, so I overdid it a bit but who cares?” Dahyun shrugged, pulling herself from their past- “It’s your birthday!”

With a roll of the eyes and a grumble, the birthday girl turned to Sana and gave her a polite hug as well.

“Thank you for inviting me.” Sana beamed and handed Chaeyoung a rectangular box. “I hope you don’t mind I had Dahyun help me with your present.”

“Not at all.” Chaeyoung smiled and gestured for the two newcomers to step further into the apartment.

Sana passed behind Dahyun into the apartment and Dahyun found herself following her roommate with her eyes until the older girl found Momo in the couch and happily sat down - not on the empty cushion next to Momo - but in her lap. With a chuckle, Momo wrapped her arms around Sana’s waist. And then arms wrapped around Dahyun’s as well, and Chaeyoung’s voice was in her ear.

“So, how is that going?” Chaeyoung asked.

“Huh? What?” Dahyun turned her head slightly as Chaeyoung rested her chin on Dahyun’s shoulder and handed Dahyun the present from Sana as she started opening Dahyun’s.

“Nothing. You’re useless, you know that?” Chaeyoung leaned her head against Dahyun’s, tugging at the piece of scotch tape holding the wrapping.

“Very aware, thank you very much.” Dahyun mused, watching Chaeyoung’s hands in front of her, as the content of the present, thick expensive watercolor paper and a good brush, was revealed. Chaeyoung leaned her head harder against Dahyun’s and the older girl returned it.

“You didn’t have to. I know-”

“Shut up and let me spoil you for once.” Dahyun ran her hand over Chaeyoung’s arm before handing her the present from Sana that she had been holding. It matched Dahyun’s somewhat, this one containing some of the liquid watercolors she had been daydreaming about for months. For another minute they stood by the door, Chaeyoung examining her new supplies.

“I love you.” Chaeyoung hummed.

“You’re embarrassing yourself, weirdo.” Dahyun mused as Chaeyoung let go of her, walking
around her to the dining table before walking back to Dahyun. Definitely caught Dahyun’s yawn as she walked back.

“You ok?” Chaeyoung linked their arms.


With a sceptical nod, the younger girl dragged Dahyun over to the rest of the party, sitting down between Momo and Nayeon while Dahyun joined Mina, Tzuyu and Jihyo on the floor.

“Okay, so now that we’re all here, can we please start drinking?” Nayeon asked, casually wrapping an arm around the birthday girl, nosing into her black hair.

“What about food?” Mina asked, looking around at Tzuyu and Jihyo.

“Sure, that too.” Nayeon shrugged.

“This is the reason you’re always the one who gets the worst hangovers.” Jeongyeon said dryly.

“Or she’s just old.” Jihyo shrugged.

“Fuck off.” Nayeon made a face.

“That’s not your decision, it’s your girl who invited us.” Jihyo said coolly.

“Then at least get the alcohol, I need something to distract from your-” Nayeon made a gesture at all of Jihyo and grimaced. Jihyo scowled, though she immediately softened as Tzuyu caught her eye.

“Fine, alcohol.” Jihyo shook her head with a smile and nudged the youngest girl.

No-one objected to that claim.

…

“Come on, just say it!” Nayeon complained loudly.

“Like hell I will!” Jeongyeon objected just as loudly.

“It was your question, you have to answer!” Jihyo said, louder than any of them.

“She rigged the questions, I’m not going to answer!” Jeongyeon’s cheeks were flushed, partly due to the amount of alcohol she had consumed at this point and partly because of the question Jihyo had read aloud for her.

“It’s not that hard, just admit you’d do me if I wasn’t taken!” Nayeon insisted, leaning back in the couch nonchalantly.

“Who says I’d ever do you?! You’re just about the last person in this room I’d pick.”

“Of course you’d pick me.” Nayeon rolled her eyes.
“Not in a million years!” Jeongyeon made her best barfing imitation much to Jihyo’s delight.

“Then fucking pick someone, Yoo.” Nayeon kicked at Jeongyeon with her free foot, though the angle didn’t allow much of an impact.

“But we’re adults, why the hell are we even playing truth or dare?” Jeongyeon complained.

“Vodka.” Chaeyoung and Dahyun deadpanned.

Jeongyeon groaned and looked around at the crowd, her eyes searching for anyone who’d help. Then with a sigh and a deep blush spreading across her neck and chest she looked up at the ceiling and grumbled “Momo.”

“I knew it! Now you have permission to go for her.” Chaeyoung laughed turning to Momo who looked surprised and shy, but smirked at Jeongyeon nonetheless.

“I still say you wanted to pick me but you can’t get yourself to admit how much you like me.” Nayeon flicked her hair and wiggled her eyebrows.

“Ew.” Jeongyeon glowered.

“Hey, that’s my girlfriend!” Chaeyoung warned, earning a sloppy kiss from Nayeon. Tzuyu caught Dahyun’s eye and they grinned. Neither called them out on it. Not tonight. Tomorrow maybe. Definitely.

“Yeah, you can keep her.” Jeongyeon cringed.

“You need to get laid. You’re insufferable.” Nayeon insisted, then turning to Momo, “Fix it, please.”

Momo laughed and wrapped her arms tighter around Sana still in her lap, looking around at the others. She almost seemed shy. And it seemed that Sana noticed it too, because as Nayeon was about to open her mouth, Sana quickly asked for the game to move on. Jihyo agreed, insisting that there were children present, patting Tzuyu’s hair. Tzuyu however protested and said that since she too was turning twenty next month as well she could hardly count as a kid. Frankly looked a little offended. But Jihyo just poked her cheek and told her she’d always be a baby to Jihyo. Though it seemed like Tzuyu wanted to protest more, she just closed her mouth and let Jihyo nuzzle closer, her cheeks flushed from the quite heavy amount of alcohol she had gotten. Even Tzuyu seemed to have gotten more than normal, normal being none, but now her eyes were unfocused and she swayed slightly at the weight of Jihyo leaning against her.

While most of the others were good at handling alcohol, she and Tzuyu had never been much for it, but tonight it was different. Dahyun didn’t feel the effects too much yet, but she was convinced that she would feel it the second she had to get up. Nevertheless, Dahyun poured herself another swig of vodka and topped it off with orange juice. Could hardly taste the alcohol anymore. Looked over at Sana for the umptieth time, and found her lazily playing with Momo’s hands. So Dahyun leaned against Jihyo, though the older girl was still leaning on Tzuyu. But as Dahyun let her body slump against Jihyo’s, she adjusted to let Dahyun lean better. It was nice. But still Dahyun kept her eyes on Sana, hoping she wouldn’t notice, or maybe hoping just a little bit that she would. Then Jihyo’s arm wrapped around her shoulder and Dahyun shifted to lay down, finally tearing her eyes from Sana’s smile and resting in Jihyo’s lap. Relished in the feeling of Jihyo’s hands absentmindedly playing with her hair and stroking her cheek. It made Dahyun’s heart calm down a bit, and the thought of pulling Sana aside and telling her exactly how she felt got pushed a little further back in her head.
As long as she didn’t put it off too long.

“Tzuyu, truth or dare.” Nayeon said, breaking through Jeongyeon and Chaeyoung’s quiet conversation, starting the game again.

Tzuyu looked apprehensive. “I… Dare.”

“I dare you to tell me the best kiss of your life.”

“That’s not a dare!” Tzuyu flushed.

“Answer!” Nayeon insisted.

Tzuyu scowled. Her eyes travelled down to meet Dahyun’s. There was that thing once again about Tzuyu. And for a moment, Dahyun wondered if they were in the same boat. Or if Tzuyu was just private enough that she hadn’t told. Or maybe she just hadn’t told Dahyun.

“Tzuyu, come on.” Nayeon insisted, waving her beer bottle as she pointed at the youngest, her eyelids drooping. She had definitely been in a mood to drink tonight.

“How about we actually play a game that isn’t for twelve-year-olds?” Jeongyeon asked grumpily, obviously not over the whole Momo incident.

Tzuyu looked at Jeongyeon gratefully and Dahyun, Sana, and Mina quickly agreed. For Dahyun, though she felt for Tzuyu, more than anything else, she did not want to risk that any of them unknowingly made her do or say something about Sana that she wasn’t ready to.

They switched to Mafia and Jeongyeon provided roles as well as more vodka for all whose cups were empty. It was just like regular Mafia apart from the fact that you had to drink the entire contents of your cup when you died during the night and take a shot if you were eliminated during the day. While everyone closed their eyes, Jeongyeon got the shot glasses and a bottle of white rum with strawberry taste courtesy of Jihyo. It tasted absolutely disgusting but Jihyo had insisted that if it was rum for the strawberry princess it should be strawberry taste.

Dahyun wasn’t chosen for anything, and kept her place in Jihyo’s lap, hoping it would make her seem innocent. Or maybe was just too lazy and drunk to bother with anything else.

“Mina is definitely a mafia.” Jihyo insisted off the bat.

“Why are you always out to get me?” Mina complained, though Dahyun could barely see her from the angle she was lying in. “I’m not the Mafia.”

“Oh, come on. I heard you move.”

“You’re sitting too far away to hear anything.” Mina grumbled.

“Dahyun isn’t, Dahyun did you hear anything?” Jihyo asked, stroking Dahyun’s hair.

“Wha- no.” Dahyun turned in Jihyo’s lap and grinned up at her. “I heard your tummy growl.”

“Go home Dahyun, you’re drunk.” Jihyo chuckled and poked the tip of Dahyun’s nose.

“Very true.” Dahyun leaned up a little, adjusting so she could see Mina better from the angle. “But since I’m using Jihyo as my pillow, I have to follow her, so I’m on Mina too.”
Then there were two. And it didn’t take much accusing for Momo to get on that wagon too.

“I’m with those two. Mina is mafia.”

“Oh, come on.” Mina scowled at Momo but got nothing but a huge cheeky grin back.

“I trust Jihyo and Jihyo says you’re mafia, so you’re mafia.” Momo shrugged.

Mina let out a whine. “But I’m not mafia! I promise, Momo. Just trust me. Trust me and not Jihyo. I bet you she’s mafia and just trying to get rid of me to win some easy points.”

“Why do you all think it’s Mina?” Sana asked just as Momo was about to talk.

“She’s always mafia.” Tzuyu shrugged.

“I’m not!” Mina insisted and then looked up at Jeongyeon who was hiding her grin behind her mouth, the younger girl narrowing her eyes at her with a huff. “This is all your fault.”

“Is not. They’re the ones who got gullible after one night.” Jeongyeon gestured at their friends, barely able to contain herself.

“One night where you made me mafia five times in a row.” Mina grumbled and returned her attention to Momo.

“Just trust me, I’m not mafia.”

“Then accuse someone instead.” Momo challenged, a glint in her eyes.

“What about Sana, she keeps giggling.” Mina argued, just as Sana once again had a fit of laughter in Momo’s arms.

“She always does that no matter what.” Momo said with a shrug.

“She could be using it as a distraction.” Tzuyu argued in favor of Mina.

“Eh, I still say we eliminate Mina.” Jihyo said and pointed at Mina.

“But I’m not mafia!” Mina insisted.

“You might be. And really, can we afford to take the chance?” Chaeyoung raised an eyebrow at her.

“That’s the stupidest argument, any one of us might be the mafia!” Mina said.

“Yeah, well, I’m on Mina.” Chaeyoung pointed at Mina as well. They just needed one more vote on her, and Chaeyoung solved this by whispering something at Nayeon that made her grin widely and immediately point at Mina as well. Dahyun felt the need to throw a pillow in their face, but controlled herself.

And so, Mina, the doctor, was eliminated first. She took her shot and winced, scowling at Jihyo for the betrayal and possibly her choice of disgusting alcohol. Quietly Dahyun reminded herself to take out Jihyo next turn just because of that wide grin, but when Jeongyeon announced the arrival of morning after a night of calling on the different players, Dahyun had been killed by the mafia.

With a scowl up at Jihyo she grabbed her drink and a straw she hoped hadn’t been used before, lazily drinking but not bothering to move from Jihyo’s lap. Just watched as Sana and Momo started bickering when Sana accused Momo. Tzuyu kept saying it was Sana but Chaeyoung and Nayeon
went for Tzuyu. Eventually Momo did as well.

Tzuyu, the policeman, slumped back against the couch and stared down her shot as if it was gonna drink itself, but in the end Jihyo coaxed her into taking it. None of them could help laughing at the ridiculous face the youngest made at the taste and Jeongyeon was by her side immediately with a regular coke. Thankfully Tzuyu drank, sending Jeongyeon one of her most endearing smiles and Jeongyeon smiled stupidly back. It was a general effect of Tzuyu’s best smiles. You sort of just stopped functioning properly, overwhelmed by her cuteness.

“Okay, night has fallen.” Jeongyeon interrupted and moved over to sit next to Mina who had moved backwards from the circle around the coffee table. The spot gave Jeongyeon a perfect view of the remaining players.

Dahyun watched as Momo and Sana woke as the mafias and both smirked at her. Dahyun almost yelled at them. She should’ve known. Really should’ve known. How had she suspected Jihyo? Even after she had gotten killed. That gullible huh? Or that drunk. But while she tried her best to wordlessly curse their asses from here to the moon, they agreed to kill Chaeyoung. A wise move as Nayeon and Jihyo were unlikely to agree, probably securing their victory. Dahyun felt dizzy as she finished her drink. Had a feeling someone had miscalculated something in this round but was too affected to figure out what.

In the end Sana stood as the sole winner when Nayeon and Jihyo uncharacteristically agreed on Momo and Sana played along, then killing Nayeon for good measure the next night.

After the third round, Jihyo suggested they play video games but Nayeon wanted to play cards. Honestly, Dahyun wasn’t sure she could focus on either, and it was made no easier by Tzuyu pulling her to her feet to free Jihyo from under her. The tall girl caught Dahyun as she stumbled.

“How much have you had?” Jihyo asked quietly as Dahyun clung to Tzuyu.

“Not sure.” Dahyun scrunched her face trying to remember, but she had lost count after the fifth? Sixth? No, it really was no use. She shrugged and let Tzuyu and Jihyo drag her into the kitchen and place her on a chair.

“Jihyo, can you? I really have to pee…” Tzuyu asked and got a nod from the older girl. Left Jihyo and Dahyun alone in the kitchen.

“You never drink this much.” Jihyo mumbled as she poured a glass of tap water and held it in front of Dahyun. Waited patiently until Dahyun managed to close both hands around the cool glass and she drank willingly, though her mouth was used to the alcohol and the sugar by now, making this taste quite a bit too bland. Jihyo kneeled on the floor and rested her arms on Dahyun’s knees, looking up at her.

“Dahyun…”

“Mh?” Dahyun asked, blinking Jihyo back into focus every few seconds.

“You never drink this much.” The older girl repeated.

“I know.” Dahyun sighed. “I know I don’t. I hate the taste.”
“Why then?” Jihyo asked.

“I don’t know.” Dahyun shrugged. Finished the water and put the glass on the little table.

“... You haven’t called much lately.” Jihyo said, her voice small.

“I know.” Dahyun looked down at the older girl and felt her heart swell. There was genuine concern in Jihyo’s eyes. Everything about Jihyo was genuine.

“But you’re sleeping better?” Jihyo asked, resting her head on her arms, turning her gaze away.

“I am.” Dahyun lied easily and stroked Jihyo’s hair.

“I’m glad.” Jihyo hummed, her voice barely a whisper as she continued. “But… I wish you’d call even when things are going well.”

Dahyun felt her throat close up. Carefully lifted Jihyo’s head and slid clumsily onto the floor, wrapping her arms around Jihyo, hiding her face in her hair. Could barely hold back tears.

“I will.” Dahyun croaked. “I promise I will.”

The floor of the kitchen was cold, but neither of them seemed to care. They just held onto each other like drunken fools, which they probably were. Dahyun definitely was. Because without really knowing why she started singing, quietly, out of key - but singing the song Jihyo always sang for her. Because it was the only thing she could think of doing in that moment. Quiet though the song might be, it filled the kitchen somehow and Jihyo hugged her impossibly tighter, mumbling along. It sounded a lot better than Dahyun’s, but the younger girl didn’t stop.

At some point, and Dahyun wasn’t quite aware of when, they were joined by Chaeyoung, who sat down quietly beside them and leaned on Dahyun’s shoulder. Dahyun loosened her grip on Jihyo and wrapped one arm around Chaeyoung, the other still stroking Jihyo’s back.

It hadn’t been an intrusion on Dahyun’s moment with Jihyo, for Chaeyoung to join. Had just been another reminder. And the song was a promise to do better. A promise to start remembering to share the good times too. And Dahyun felt somehow both overwhelmed by how crappy a friend she had been lately, and soothed at the hope of improving. Just holding them both so close felt like retribution.

Still, even now, she couldn’t help but think of Sana. And it stung. Because all her attention had been turned to Sana and it would’ve maybe been ok if it hadn’t been for this horrible timing. If she could’ve just met Sana a year ago, or maybe in a year from now. But she had just dumped right down in the middle of a storm and offered cover. And Dahyun wanted to tell Jihyo and Chaeyoung how much happiness she had right now because of Sana. Yet right now, she was so painfully aware, that if she hadn’t been so completely lost in her feelings, she would have spent lunches with Jihyo or nights with Chaeyoung instead of using every excuse to cuddle up with Sana. Had forgotten her friends in the rush of sunlight.

From now on she would do better. But with six friends that had turned to eight, it was almost impossible to keep up with everyone. Especially when she could barely keep herself together.

I don’t wanna do a damn thing without you.

Dahyun winced. Realized for the first time that she actually hated that this song, how every song was suddenly about Sana. But it wasn’t Sana she hated. God, no. It was her own mind. Hated that even now with Jihyo’s calm breath against her collarbone and Chaeyoung’s hand around Dahyun’s, she
was still thinking about Sana. And she hated that she couldn’t stop the words that escaped her lips.

“How do you know when something turns from a crush… to something more?” She breathed.

The magic was broken.

Their bubble had burst.

Or at least that’s what she had thought.

But there was only care and fondness in Jihyo’s expression as she pulled back. She turned her head to the side and let her eyes examine every feature in Dahyun’s face. A smile spread on Jihyo’s face. The kind that made her eyes glint. And then Chaeyoung’s fingers laced through the spaces between Dahyun’s, and Dahyun returned the tightness of Chaeyoung’s grasp.

“You really are a fool, Kim Dahyun.” Jihyo shook her head slightly and leaned back into Dahyun.

Maybe there were kinds of magic that couldn’t be broken.

Bubbles that never burst.

Or at least that’s what she hoped.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Drinking Games - part 2: A Cautionary Tale of Vodka and Kissing.

Chapter Notes

It's part 2 of the strawberry princess' birthday!

Thank you for waiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed until Nayeon claimed her girlfriend from the pile of tangled limbs and quiet voices. Jihyo sighed against Dahyun and sat up, Dahyun immediately missing the warmth and pressure. But just as Dahyun was about to ask for more closeness, Tzuyu showed up in the door, her eyes shifting from Dahyun to Jihyo. Held the eyes of the older girl as she spoke.

“Can we talk? If you have a moment…”

“Sure. Sure, I’m-” Jihyo looked around at Dahyun.

“It’s ok, go.” Dahyun assured her. Dahyun nodded and got up, following Tzuyu back into the hallway. Then a door opened and closed, and Dahyun was left alone, with the feeling of cold hard kitchen tiles and the distant sound of her friends having fun. Wanted to join but also wanted to sleep. Except right now she really had to pee. So blinking the dizziness away, she got up and found the bathroom.

It was unbelievable how much you had to pee when drunk. As if the bladder had suddenly turned the size of a walnut. But maybe this was just her punishment for drinking more than she probably had ought to. Dahyun fumbled a bit trying to get the toilet paper off the roll and clumsily had to wind a bunch back, and when she looked in the mirror, she noticed that her cheeks were slightly flushed and her pupils wide. It was definitely time to stop. Not that she really knew why she had chosen to keep going.

Cooling her wrists under the faucet, Dahyun let her mind wander. Maybe if she got the chance, she would have the courage to tell Sana how she felt. They called it liquid courage, right? It wouldn’t be that bad to just walk up to her and- oh god, if she got to kiss her. No, no this was about talking to her. What was wrong with her that she couldn’t think about anything else? As if she had somehow switched brains with some horny fourteen year old. If she talked to Sana, then maybe they could get everything out in the open and find a way to move on. Move forwards or backwards… or whatever. Honestly she should just have more, confess and then blame the alcohol. Laugh it off. She was so good at just laughing it off. Yeah, that was definitely the solution.

Dahyun cleaned her face the best she could, dried up and headed out, back to the kitchen for her glass. But it wasn’t empty anymore. Jihyo was standing in front of the sink, looking into the depths of it.

“Are you ok?” Dahyun asked, Jihyo jolting slightly as she looked up at Dahyun. Her eyes wavered but she just shrugged and made room for Dahyun by the sink.

“Me? Yeah, I’m fine.” Jihyo smiled. “I think… No, actually, do you wanna play kings?”

“Kings?” Dahyun asked, her brain working just a bit too slow for her liking.
“You know, card game?” Jihyo smiled slightly.

“I… I guess.” Dahyun frowned.

She let Jihyo drag her out of the kitchen, forgetting the glass by the sink. Momo and Mina were playing Mario Kart on either side of Jeongyeon in the couch, Sana on a pillow on the floor between Momo’s legs, watching them.

“Jeongyeon, have you seen the cards?” Dahyun asked as she reached them, patting Jeongyeon’s head distractedly.

“Oh, yeah, they’re-” Jeongyeon moved forwards towards the coffee table, but as both Mina and Momo had been leaning on her, they both shrieked, though Momo managed to get an extra bonus while Mina drove into the water.

“Hah! Karma!” Momo grinned happily.

“Karma for what?!” Mina whined as the car reset.

“For being a sore loser.”

“I’m not a sore loser.” Mina huffed.

“You whacked me over the head for hitting you with a blooper.” Momo smirked at her.

While the two Japanese girls kept arguing, Jeongyeon handed Dahyun the cards, grinning up at her as Momo once more settled with her head on Jeongyeon’s shoulder. And for a moment she was sure that someone was staring at her. And with a jolt of the stomach she saw Sana turn away and stare at the TV the second Dahyun dared hope it had been her staring. Wanted to sit by her. Hold her hand. Lean on her shoulder. But she didn’t. Instead she turned away from her four friends by the tv, towards the dinner table against which Nayeon was leaning, scrolling through her phone.

“Are we playing?” Nayeon asked when she looked up and saw the pack of cards in Dahyun’s hand.

“Kings.” Jihyo said from behind Dahyun, showing up with rum and coke.

“Finally!” Nayeon smirked. “This is my kind of game.”

They settled around the table and were soon joined by Tzuyu and Chaeyoung, though the youngest opted for orange juice instead of rum. For a moment Dahyun was sure that Jihyo would protest as Dahyun grabbed the rum, but she didn’t even notice. Was just shuffling, her eyes narrowed. So Dahyun poured herself a generous amount and topped it with coke, sipping from it and wincing. Maybe a little too strong after all.

Nayeon started, drew a six of hearts and grinned as everyone took a sip. Dahyun got a two and gave both sips to a chuckling Nayeon. Then Tzuyu drew a four and chose Chaeyoung as a drinking mate. Jihyo drew a three and took three large gulps. Nayeon was the first to get a waterfall, and Dahyun felt the disorientation return halfway through, but didn’t waver. By the end she swore her revenge for Nayeon though, and got it when she was last to raise her hand on a seven. Then Chaeyoung complained loudly when Dahyun used her innocence in the romantic department as a way to get the others down when she had to do her round of never have I ever. And when Tzuyu drew a king she made the rule that every time Nayeon swore she had to drink.
After the second round of waterfall, Dahyun took the punishment that came with leaving the table, as the other consequence would have been her walnut sized bladder bursting. She swayed slightly as she walked and made sure to not stumble over her own legs.

One look in the bathroom mirror was enough for Dahyun to grimace at herself. In an attempt at splashing water in her face to freshen up, she had smeared her make-up slightly and gotten water down the front of her shirt as well. She scrunched her nose in dismay and tried to correct her make-up with a finger. Then wiped her shirt with a towel and sighed. It might really be time to stop. With that consideration, she emerged from the bathroom, adjusting her shirt. But her path was blocked by someone. Someone who smelled lemony and slightly like flowers. Sana. Sana whose arms were immediately around her, steadying her. And Dahyun looked up, her stomach jolting at the feeling of Sana’s warm body so close to her, her senses heightened but her responses slow.

“Sana-chan.” Dahyun mused happily.

“You look like you’re having fun.” Sana chuckled.

“Very much, espe-” Dahyun stumbled over the word and hiccupped. “Especially right now.”

“Okay, just how much have you had to drink?” Sana rubbed Dahyun’s back, laughter still bubbling from her lips like champagne. Maybe Dahyun could take just one more drink.

“Mh-lot.” Dahyun mumbled and wrapped her arms around Sana’s waist - you know for stability. Not at all because she finally had the courage to do almost all the things she wanted whenever she saw Sana looking at her with that smile that seemed to make every nerve in Dahyun’s body stir all at once.

“You’re very pretty, d’you know that?” Dahyun mumbled as Sana fixed the younger girl’s hair.

“You’re very drunk, Dahyunnie.” Sana chuckled and pressed her lips to Dahyun’s forehead. Dahyun hummed and leaned into it. “And apparently a very cuddly drunk.”

Dahyun just nodded and buried her head in Sana’s neck, taking in her scent unapologetically. It felt amazing for once to not be stopped by her doubts. Couldn’t even remember what it felt like to be nervous.

“Why do you always smell like lemons?” Dahyun mumbled.

“It’s my conditioner.”

“I like it.” Dahyun took a deep breath into Sana’s hair. Sana giggled and squirmed slightly, but Dahyun just tightened her grasp, trying to eliminate every inch of air between them.

“Okay, well, I think it’s water for you from now on.” Sana said, amusement evident in her voice.

“Why…” Dahyun whined.

“Because you’re hitting on me.” Sana chuckled.

“So?” Dahyun asked and drew back. She looked up at Sana, trying to focus. Felt with a racing heart how Sana’s eyes flickered between her own. Adjusting in the older girl’s arms, Dahyun felt herself stand up on her toes, inching closer to Sana.
And then Tzuyu was there. Broke the magic. Pulled Dahyun back. And Dahyun could’ve yelled at her. Because she almost did it. She almost kissed Sana. But Tzuyu was stoic in her expression, in her posture, as she caught Dahyun’s eyes and held them.

“Weren’t you on the way to the bathroom, Sana?” Tzuyu asked, looking over at Sana. “I can hold this clingy thing meanwhile.” Sana looked confused for a second. Her eyes flicked from Dahyun’s eyes to her lips and Dahyun’s stomach did a somersault. But then Sana’s hand stroked across Dahyun’s cheek and Dahyun felt herself being handed over to Tzuyu. If Dahyun had been less drunk she might’ve reacted in time, might’ve resisted more when Sana freed herself. But then again, if she had been less drunk she would’ve never gotten to this point. So Dahyun merely sighed when Tzuyu’s arms wrapped around her.

Tzuyu rested her chin on Dahyun’s head and waited until Sana had locked the door.

“Not like this.” Tzuyu mumbled solemnly.

Dahyun sighed. “I know…”

Tomorrow she would thank Tzuyu for not letting her, but right now she couldn’t. All she could think about was how Sana had looked at her lips. That meant something, right? When a girl looked at you like that?

“Can you take me home with you when you leave?” Tzuyu asked quietly, leaning her head back against the wall.

“Weren’t you going to stay here?”

“Change of plans.”

“Ok, sure.”

“Thank you.” Tzuyu hugged her tighter, and Dahyun felt her sigh heavily against her. Let the younger girl walk her to the couch. Away from Sana and the temptations she couldn’t resist. They found Momo, Mina and Jeongyeon still in the couch, still playing Mario Kart. Though now it was Jeongyeon battling Momo.

“Can we join?” Tzuyu asked, her tall frame still wrapped around Dahyun’s petite body.

“Sure,” Mina looked up, her eyes travelling from Tzuyu’s face to Dahyun, “You good Dahyun?”

“No, Tzuyu’s mean.” Dahyun huffed, sticking out her bottom lip.

“When you’re sober you can do whatever you want, but not like this.” Tzuyu mumbled.

“I know.” Dahyun whined. “You’re still mean.”

“I’m ok with that.” Tzuyu shrugged. “Mina, can you take her?”

“I- sure.” Mina frowned. With the slight feeling of being a puppy handed from one to the other, Dahyun let Mina pull her onto her lap

“Don’t let her do anything dumb.” Tzuyu reprimanded before walking away.

“Dumb? Dahyun? Like we can prevent it.” Jeongyeon snorted and let out a loud laugh as Momo’s car spun from being hit with a turtle shell.
“I’m not that dumb.” Dahyun pouted, leaning into Mina.

“No, you’re not. But you are a fool.” Chaeyoung commented as she joined, sitting by Mina’s feet.

“That… I cannot deny.” Dahyun shrugged and started nudging Chaeyoung’s shoulder with her foot until the younger girl shot her a look and moved to sit by Momo’s feet instead. Dahyun chuckled lazily and dangled her feet off the couch.

…

Midnight came and left, and Chaeyoung’s birthday was officially over, but they all stuck around until one in the morning. Mina was the first to leave. Needed to catch the right trains if she was going to get back before sunrise. It seemed that this became everyone’s cue to pack up, Tzuyu’s hand tugging at the hem of Dahyun’s shirt, her eyelids drooping and her body swaying slightly where she stood. The worst buzz had left Dahyun, as it had been almost an hour and a half since she had stopped drinking, and her body ached.

“You wanna head home, Chou-Tzu?” Dahyun asked, linking her arm with Tzuyu’s to keep the tall girl steady. And herself as well, maybe. Probably. How long did you have to stay away from alcohol to start feeling better?

“Mhh…” Tzuyu nodded.

“Yeah, I think we’re heading home now too.” Jeongyeon yawned, hanging off Nayeon’s shoulders like a koala.

“Good, then you can stop being a pain.” Nayeon hummed, stroking Jeongyeon’s arm.

“Jerk.” Jeongyeon said, tightening her arms around the older girl before letting her go. “Momo, you ready to go?”

Momo, who was still on the couch with Sana, Chaeyoung and Jihyo, looked for a moment like she was going to protest but in the end she nodded and dragged Sana with her from the couch. Jihyo was the only one who was gonna spend the night, and even if she had wanted to move, Chaeyoung was curled in a ball in her arms, fast asleep, the controller for Mario Kart limply in her hand.

“Can you help me get this tired child home?” Dahyun asked Sana as the older girl joined them by the door, holding onto her own arm, pinching slightly at the skin.

“M’not… child.” Tzuyu mumbled, more and more of her weight against Dahyun.

“Okay, Chou-Tzu.” Dahyun hushed, taking a few deep breaths to feign more energy and a more sober demeanor.

“Let me just get my purse, do you have everything?” Sana said calmly, trying to hand a very clingy Momo off to Jeongyeon who didn’t seem the slightest like this was a plan she wanted to be a part of, but in the end she accepted and said her goodbyes to Jihyo and Nayeon, telling the latter to tell the sleeping birthday girl goodnight for her. In the meantime Sana had gotten back with her purse.

“You know you can still stay here, right?” Nayeon said quietly as she hugged Tzuyu goodbye. If Dahyun hadn’t stood right by the youngest, she wouldn’t have heard it.
“I know.” Tzuyu smiled. “Thank you, Nayeon.”

Just as they were about to leave, Chaeyoung stirred in Jihyo’s arms and resurfaced with a raspy groan, stretching and almost hitting Jihyo in the face with her arm.

“The strawberry princess lives.” Dahyun noted with a grin as Dahyun blinked, her mouth slightly ajar, looking around.

“Where’s…”

“She had to catch a train.” Momo explained, leaning half against the wall and half against Jeongyeon.

“Oh. You could’ve woken me.” Chaeyoung pouted.

“Sorry. But you’re catching the rest of us, just in time.” Dahyun said and watched as Chaeyoung and then Jihyo got up and joined the rest of the party by the door, the older girl rubbing her thighs, probably sore after having Chaeyoung sleeping on her for an hour.

Sana was the first to get a hug from Chaeyoung, and it made Dahyun happy to see it. Momo who had been shy when first introduced had now so quickly become familiar with all of them, whereas Sana still kept to Dahyun and Momo. But as Chaeyoung pulled back, Sana pressed a chaste kiss to the younger girl’s cheek. The latter blushed but allowed it.

“Happy birthday, Chaeyoung. Thank you for inviting me.” Sana said with a soft smile.

“No problem.” Chaeyoung said, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

“I know it’s not exactly your birthday anymore but Mina told me about the tradition, and though I’m not exactly a part of the group yet, I just-”

“Sana. You are a part of the group. And it’s ok. I’m glad I got my birthday kiss from you, even if it was late.” Chaeyoung assured her. Sana beamed, and her posture straightened proudly. Chaeyoung’s smile widened automatically and she shook her head at the silly girl. Dahyun couldn’t help smiling either. Not even when Chaeyoung caught her gaze and rolled her eyes.

As soon as everyone had said their goodbyes, the five left together, but separated down on the street. Even if they lived in roughly the same direction, it would’ve been a detour for Jeongyeon and Momo to go past Sana and Dahyun’s building, and Momo looked half-asleep already. Definitely wasn’t in the mood for a detour.

…

Cool wind blew through the streets, as Sana, Tzuyu, and Dahyun walked side by side, arms around each other, their shadows switching between following them and showing the way as they passed under the yellow street lights. It was warm. Somehow it had become the end of April.

Dahyun’s vision blurred in and out of focus, the cars on the street going too fast for her to properly notice and the sounds of the night distant as if the three girls were surrounded by a bubble. There was something assuring about walking together, Tzuyu in the middle, her long legs taking lazy heavy steps, stumbling every few blocks. Sana’s arm was around Tzuyu’s shoulder, holding her
gently, while Dahyun held around her waist, steadying herself as well as her friend. The wind helped sober Dahyun up a little, cooling her cheeks and her neck, taking deep refreshing breaths, but she was still definitely not sober. Not even close.

Dahyun’s phone buzzed in her jacket pocket and she fumbled with the zipper, trying to get the phone out. It buzzed another two times before she managed to retrieve it.

1:24 am Chaeyoung: Thank you for tonight. Text when you get home, and make sure Tzuyu drinks water before she sleeps.

1:25 am Chaeyoung: You should drink water too!

1:25 am Chaeyoung: Oh and about Sana. She’s good for you.

Dahyun pressed her lips tightly together, trying to hide a smile, and clumsily typed a response with one hand.

1:26 am Dahyun: Will do. Happy birthday

1:27 am Dahyun: Thankyou.

Dahyun shut off the screen and put the phone back in her pocket. Sana looked at her inquisitively.

“Chaeyoung.” Dahyun said as an answer to the question in Sana’s eyes. “She likes you.”

“I like her too!” Sana exclaimed happily, beaming at Dahyun. “I like all of you! So much.”

“We like you too.” Dahyun chuckled.

And it wasn’t just the crush part. She really liked Sana. Liked the new normal she had brought with her. In fact, she didn’t think she ever wanted another normal than this. Dahyun’s mind was still so full of love and admiration for all of her friends, and she let their faces take up her vision, their smiles making hers wider and their laughter ringing in her ears.

Maybe she was just being sentimental because of the alcohol - no, she definitely was - but maybe that was ok. She closed her eyes and leaned on Tzuyu. Her heart threatened to burst and was glad Tzuyu couldn’t read her mind, or she would’ve called out on how sappy she was. And even that made Dahyun’s heart swell.

Tzuyu was never good at sappy or cheesy, but she loved so fiercely, so genuinely and Dahyun knew that Tzuyu would always stand up to anyone who got in the way of someone she loved.

“Step.” Tzuyu said quietly and Dahyun opened her eyes in time to step from the curb onto the asphalt as they passed the street.

All the way home, that was the most they talked, but they held onto each other, steadying and
comforting one another in the darkness. Only when they got to the front door of Sana and Dahyun’s building did they let go of each other. After fumbling to find her key, Sana unlocked the door, and held it for the other two.

“You two can take my bed if you want. It fits two, and the couch is really uncomfortable to sleep on.” Sana said as they headed up the stairs.

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather not sleep with Dahyun, she kicks in her sleep.” Tzuyu looked down at Dahyun.

“No she doesn’t?” Sana frowned. “I mean once but-”

“I actually do bustle quite a lot in my sleep, normally...” Dahyun felt a warmth creep up her neck at the memory of having once kicked Tzuyu’s thigh so hard during a nightmare that it bruised.

“Well, I’ve only noticed it one time.” Sana shrugged.

“But,” Dahyun turned to Tzuyu just as they reached the door, “Sana doesn’t kick, you can just sleep with her if that’s ok with you?”

“Uh, sure.” Tzuyu said with apprehension. Sana looked at her, clearly not buying it.

“I can take the couch if you’re more comfortable with that?” Sana asked. Unlocked the door and held it for them.

“No, I’m the one who didn’t choose to stay, I’ll take the couch.” Tzuyu said as they stepped into the apartment, Dahyun reaching to turn on the lights.

“No way. You’re taking my bed, I’ll bunk with Sana, she’s used to me by now anyways.” Dahyun said firmly, squatting to untie her shoelaces.

“But-” Tzuyu frowned and crouched beside Dahyun, Sana busy taking off her own shoes, stumbling over her own feet and giggling at herself. Tzuyu’s voice was barely a whisper when she spoke. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Look, I promise I won’t kiss her, or confess, or- or anything. Ok? So you just take my bed and I’ll handle it.” Dahyun insisted under her breath.

“Mhh, I don’t like it. But if you promise.”

“You said it yourself, not like this, right? This isn’t how it’s supposed to happen.” Dahyun got back up, Tzuyu following her.

“Okay.” Tzuyu nodded.

“What are you two talking about?”

“... Tzuyu’s girlfriend.” Dahyun shrugged.

“You have a girlfriend?!” Sana’s entire face split in a wide smile.

“No. Definitely not. She’s drunk. Don’t trust her.” Tzuyu scowled down at Dahyun. Once in a while Dahyun swore Tzuyu made herself taller just to bother Dahyun.

“I’m not drunk.” Dahyun protested.
“Yeah you are, Dahyunnie.” Sana giggled as Dahyun decided to disprove her own point by colliding with the couch.

“Well, I’m your problem tonight.” Dahyun grinned at her.

“I think I can handle five feet of drunk goof.” Sana said with raised eyebrows.

“Okay then. You and me tonight then, Sana-chan.” Dahyun nodded decisively. Sana giggled into her hand at the nickname and Dahyun felt like flying. Then Sana almost tripped over her own feet as the three walked towards the rooms, and Dahyun wondered for a split-second how much she was affected by the alcohol. They had barely talked that night and Dahyun hadn’t seen if Sana had gotten a lot. Maybe she was just being her clumsy self. But no matter the reason for the stumble, Sana merely laughed at herself and straightened up, running a hand through her blonde hair, the dark roots growing slowly longer.

…

Jihyo sighed. With a raised eyebrow at one of her oldest friends, Nayeon leaned against the counter, watching how Jihyo stared into the empty glass.

“You okay?” Nayeon asked with a frown.

“Yeah, but so tired. I’ll be out of your hair in a few. Promise.” Jihyo sent her a tired smile, but Nayeon honestly didn’t like sending Jihyo out into the night by herself.

“You really should stay, Jihyo. It’s a long way home and-”

“I’d rather just get home.” Jihyo ran a hand through her hair and yawned loudly.

“If you’re sure.”

“You know, for someone who claims they don’t give a shit, you sure care a lot.” Jihyo nudged her, and Nayeon couldn’t help but nudge back.

“You better text me when you get home.” Nayeon sent Jihyo what she hoped was a stern look.

“I will.” Jihyo nodded and pushed herself away from the counter. At Jihyo’s gesture towards the living room, Nayeon followed her, watching as the younger girl put on her coat, patting the pockets to check for content and then looked around at Nayeon again.

“I’ll see you… what? Monday? Do we have classes together monday?”

“I think so. Probably.” Nayeon shrugged, not bothering to try and remember.

“Then Monday.” Jihyo nodded, smiling at something over Nayeon’s shoulder, and next thing, Chaeyoung’s arms wrapped around Nayeon from behind.

“Had a good birthday?” Jihyo asked with a chuckle. Chaeyoung nodded into Nayeon’s shoulder.

“Good.” Jihyo took the few steps to reach them, hugging both at the same time. “Night, Chaeyoungie. Night, Nabongs.” She said, sending them a tired smile before walking out of the apartment.
For a moment Nayeon just stood there, looking at the closed door, but then Chaeyoung leaned her head against Nayeon’s.

“She’s a big girl. She’s gonna be ok.” Chaeyoung muttered.

“I know.” Nayeon smiled, turning in her girlfriend’s arms. “But at least now we have the apartment to ourselves”

“Okay, wow, mood change.” Chaeyoung chuckled as Nayeon played with the black hair.

“You make everything dirty.” Nayeon rolled her eyes, pecking Chaeyoung’s plump lips softly.

“Says you who tried to do me after two dates.” Chaeyoung said dryly.

“Says you who let me.” Nayeon retorted.

“... I guess you have a point.” Chaeyoung chuckled, tugging the older girl closer. “So. Do I get my birthday present now?”

Dahyun’s heart raced and her head was spinning.

The minute she had laid down, the remaining effects of the alcohol hit her. Hard. Or maybe it was the wonderful feeling of being back in Sana’s warm, big, comfortable bed, her head on the pillow that smelled like lemons. It was intoxicating all on its own. And she thought of how she might do it. How maybe tonight when Sana pulled her close she would turn around in her arms and ask if she could kiss her. And maybe she would let her, and Dahyun would finally know how Sana’s lips felt. They looked soft, and felt soft against her skin, but she wanted to know how they felt against her own lips. Wanted to know how she tasted. Or maybe it would just get awkward and someone would end up sleeping on the couch. Yeah, better not. And besides, she had just promised Tzuyu fifteen minutes ago that she wasn’t going to try tonight. But still.

Only a few minutes passed from when Dahyun had laid down until Sana walked into the room, closed the door and turned off the lights, leaving them in darkness. Then the sound of glasses being put on a nightstand. She could do it now. Could do it right now. Say her name. Yet some little voice kept ringing in her ears, persistent and annoying. Not like this. But she wasn’t drunk anymore. Was she? She was dizzy but that was Sana right? She wasn’t drunk anymore. She was allowed to kiss her. But... if she still had the courage, then maybe she was actually still drunk? But not a lot. Not too much.

Dahyun fixed her eyes on the blurry outline of the lamp in the ceiling as the bed dipped and she felt Sana crawl across her. Clenched her hands around the sheets to keep from reaching up and pulling Sana close. She could feel her heartbeat and hear the blood rushing in her ear and wondered if Sana could her hear how shallow her breath was.

“You ok there?” Sana asked with a breathy chuckle as she settled next to Dahyun.

Not like this.
“Yeah. Just... dizzy.” Dahyun croaked, her mouth dry. She closed her eyes and tried to steady her breathing, biting down on her lip. Why did Sana do this to her, make her so desperate, like a teenager with her first crush. But she was somehow in this moment just a teenager with her first crush.

“Do you need water?” Sana offered, already on her way up, but Dahyun shook her head, too fast, and she felt slightly sick. She tried to focus but everything was too far away for her eyes to see. Really shouldn’t have taken off her glasses already.

“You sure?” Sana insisted. Dahyun looked over at her, and found that she was close enough for Dahyun to make out her features properly. And considering Dahyun’s horrible vision, that was definitely close enough.

Not like this.

Dahyun held her breath. Tried so hard not to cave. Needed Sana gone. Right now. Just for a moment. To get over whatever was going on with her right now, because she was definitely losing control of it. It felt as if the alcohol had magnified her feelings tenfold. Everything was just too much, and there was no cool wind in here to make her feel less like she was going to hurl.

“I guess… Water… Would be good.” Dahyun breathed. Once again she felt the bed move. Felt Sana crawl over her and out of the bed. Dahyun bustled, kicking her legs to get the covers away, a clammy sheen of sweat spreading over her skin. And with all the strength she had, Dahyun propped herself up on her elbows, letting her head fall back against the wall with a sigh. Why wouldn’t Tzuyu’s voice inside her head shut up? Why was it so hard to just ignore it and ask Sana? And Dahyun feared the answer. That the voice was right. That she was still too affected by the alcohol, that she might not remember this in the morning.

Sana came back too fast, tippy-toeing and closing the door behind her gently. Turned on the little bedside lamp on the nightstand. Awkwardly because of the angle, Dahyun grabbed the pillow and propped it up against the wall, sitting more upright as Sana kneeled by the bed. Took the glass when Sana held it out to her and held it with both hands. It was wonderfully cool, and for a moment she forgot that she was also supposed to drink the contents and not just hold it. But Sana was watching her with a smile playing on her lips.

Dahyun tried to concentrate on drinking the water. It was hard, when Sana’s smile was so infectious. If she spilled water down herself from smiling too much, Dahyun thought, she would definitely never manage to get Sana to fall for her.

“You know,” Sana said, her eyes glinting, a mischievous smile replacing the sweet one as soon as Dahyun had managed to drink some of the water. “It’s my birthday in December.”

Dahyun stared at the older girl, her mind trying to decipher the relevance of this.

“Yeah, you told me that the first night.” Dahyun said feebly. Drank a little more of the water. It was like putting two and two together and getting the answer three hundred and forty five.

“It’s an awful long time away.” Sana leaned closer to Dahyun.

Oh.

Dahyun took her time drinking the water, but eventually lowered the glass, focusing on the blurred outline of Sana’s hairline. And when she spoke, she tried to be as neutral as she could.
“It is.”

But she was practically asking her to-. Wasn’t she?

_Not like this._

“You don’t have to wait until then.” Sana’s grin made her entire face light up. And Dahyun wondered if she was joking. Because the slightly raised eyebrow and glinting eyes suggested she might be. But she caught Dahyun’s eyes and moved closer. She was definitely asking her. Or messing with her. Oh god, what if she was messing with her like always? What if she was and Dahyun would look like a complete fool. Either way she would have to tell Sana. Immediately. Admit her feelings to get her to stop. It was the only solution.

_Not like this._

God, could Tzuyu’s voice just shut up for one second, it was really hard enough to focus without it.

“What are you doing?” Dahyun breathed as Sana kept inching closer.

“Giving you an opportunity.” Sana said with a shrug, her voice cute and innocent, but her smirk not so much.

“An… opportunity?” Dahyun’s voice caught in her throat. Sana was too close. In about three seconds she was going to break. “What do you-”

“You can kiss me if you want.” Sana breathed so quietly, Dahyun had to spend several seconds making sure she had heard her right. But she had felt Sana’s breath against her lips, sending sparks through her entire body. Sana’s smile had gone. Less than two inches away. If this was Sana teasing her, Dahyun might actually get mad. But it couldn’t be.

_Not like this._

Shut up. Just. Shut up. This was it. This was the moment she had been hoping for, dreaming of. This was… okay, so a slight chance that Dahyun was reading it wrong. Maybe thirty percent. Could be that she meant that she wanted cheek kisses, like she gave Dahyun all the time. After all, they didn’t kiss each other on the lips on their birthdays. So maybe a fifty fifty.

_Not like this._

In this moment she almost hated Tzuyu for saying it. For saving her. And Dahyun bit her lip, regretting the words before she even said them.

“Good to know.”

Immediately, Sana drew back and chuckled. Closed her eyes for a moment. Almost hesitantly she reached up and let her fingertips run across Dahyun’s forehead along her hairline and down her temple, tucking a strand behind her ear. And she got up. Crawled back across Dahyun into the bed. Put the covers back over the both of them. Laid down on her back.

“Goodnight, Dahyun.” She said sweetly and turned on her side, facing Dahyun. Closed her eyes.

Dahyun put the empty glass on the nightstand, turned off the light and shuffled to get back down, fluffing her pillow the best she could. Stared at the ceiling, waiting for Sana. Waited for her to pull at her arm or turn Dahyun onto her side and drag her closer.
Anything.

But nothing happened.

She kept staring at the ceiling. Sana wasn’t touching her, not even a fingertip. And Dahyun didn’t dare look. Her head was spinning and Sana’s words replayed in her head.

You can kiss me if you want. And Dahyun wanted to. But Sana’s eyes had been full of devilry and her chuckle had been light. The fear that Sana was just messing with her was threatening to overpower her, moving uncomfortably in her stomach. The thought that Sana might just have said it to make Dahyun blush. But Sana had to know by now. She had to be aware why Dahyun turned into a blushing mess every time Sana did stuff like this. But she never did anything about it. If it wasn’t for the tiny little fact that Dahyun hadn’t ever really said anything. So how could she know? How could she even have an inkling that Dahyun was here, her mind blank every time Sana came too close. And Sana hadn’t said anything either. So probably, most likely, Sana had no intention of ever doing anything about it. Because it wasn’t like that for her. She felt no different about Dahyun than she did about Momo. But Sana wasn’t touching her. For whatever reason she wasn’t saying. And Dahyun wanted to respect that. Didn’t want to intrude.

For about half an hour.

Then she gave in.

Scooted closer, turning onto her side, facing away from Sana.

“Sana. I… I can’t sleep.” She breathed, hoping against hope that Sana was still awake.

Sana was around her instantly, as if she had just waited for Dahyun to ask her. The eagerness of Sana’s touch made Dahyun chuckle and Sana buried her head in the younger girl’s hair. Dahyun heard a giggle. Or maybe something else. But she never found out, because her body reacted instantly to Sana’s body pressed against hers.

Dragged her off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Dahyun could barely breathe. The room was too stuffy and warm, and the sheets were clammy. And in about two seconds, she was definitely gonna throw up. Definitely. Which meant getting away from Sana, so it wasn’t-. But... Wait. Where was Sana? There were no arms around her. No legs against hers. No soft breathing. No smell of lemons.

Swallowing hard, Dahyun opened her eyes and turned in Sana’s bed. Stared at the wall.

Sana was gone.

But when she had gone, Dahyun had no clue of. She had been out like a light the second Sana was around her. As if Sana had become her safety blanket. Had she?

_You can kiss me if you want._

God damn it. Why the hell hadn’t she just done it. Why hadn’t she just… let herself go for once? Why did she have to be such a pathetic useless- Okay, yeah, it was definitely time to find a toilet. Or a bucket. Anything really, by this point.

Trying her best not to get trapped in the sheets, Dahyun stumbled out of bed, her eyes swimming and the floors moving under her. Somehow managed to make it to the bathroom, but would most likely get a bruise on her shoulder from a collision with the door jam.

…

Ten minutes later, Dahyun dragged her trembling body into the kitchen, everything aching and the acid burning in her throat. Didn’t even notice Tzuyu until after she had sat down on one of the old kitchen chairs.

“You look dead.” Tzuyu said dryly.
“I am.” Dahyun groaned, resting her head on the cool surface of the kitchen table with a sigh.

“Did you kiss her?” Tzuyu asked without a warning.

“Christ, Tzuyu, will you let me live?” Dahyun whined, her speech muffled by the fact that her cheek was sticking to the surface, which warmed a lot faster than Dahyun wanted it to. Already missed the cold and considered turning her face to find a new cool spot. Couldn’t move enough to actually do so.

“Here, drink this.” Tzuyu said, placing a glass of water in front of Dahyun. “Did you?”

“No.” Dahyun sighed. “No, I didn’t.”

But I fucking should’ve. Somehow, the feel of Sana’s breath on her lips was still there. But she didn’t want to get into it with Tzuyu. It was all a blur, and a part of Dahyun was sure that she was imagining the whole thing as being a lot more intense than it probably was. But whatever the case, Dahyun didn’t feel like sharing. Not yet.

“I’m proud of you. Drunk kissing never ends well. Now drink your water.” Tzuyu said neutrally. Dahyun grumbled and raised her head, her cheek sticking slightly to the table. Rubbing her cheek with one hand, Dahyun grabbed the glass with the other and immediately sighed. It was ice cold, but the feeling of condensation on the glass brought back memories of last night. Of the sparkle in Sana’s eyes. Dahyun shook her head. Shook the memory out and took a careful sip of the water, acid still burning in her throat and her stomach turning uncomfortably. But the water was an almost instant relief. Made it easier to ignore whatever was trying to drill a hole in her skull.

With a smile, Tzuyu walked around the table and started running her fingers through Dahyun’s hair, gathering it in a ponytail.

“If you’re gonna throw up again.” She explained when Dahyun mumbled unintelligibly at her. Despite hoping she really wouldn’t need it, she was grateful. The possibility was definitely there. If her stomach even had more content left. But then again, the water she was trying to drink could just come right back up too.

In an attempt to cool her warm face, Dahyun held the glass to her forehead, closing her eyes at the relief it provided.

“I love you, you know that?” Dahyun mumbled as a drop of water from the glass trickled down her forehead into her eyebrow. She wiped it lazily and opened her eyes again.

“I know.” Tzuyu said, sitting back down opposite Dahyun.

Dahyun looked at her. Somehow, Tzuyu didn’t seem dead nor tired. Didn’t look happy or sad. Just… sat there. Looking at her phone. And to Dahyun’s complete astonishment, she saw that Tzuyu’s phone wasn’t open on Instagram or Twitter or whatever. It was open on the university intranet, looking up an assignment. At this hour. Whatever hour it was. After the kind of party they had had last night.

“…Tzuyu?”

“What?” Tzuyu turned off the screen on her phone and looked at Dahyun with a frown. Tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. How in the world did Tzuyu manage to look downright adorable while Dahyun was sure she mostly resembled the sad remnants of a regurgitated shrew?

“How do you do it all?” Dahyun asked with as much power in her voice as she could muster.
Tzuyu frowned. “I don’t know what you-”

“You take max credits.” Dahyun continued. “You have a job, you’re always hanging out with either Jihyo or Chaeyoung or me, I don’t know how you do it all.”

“I… I actually ask myself that sometimes as well.” Tzuyu smiled weakly before changing the subject. “Do you want breakfast?”

For a moment Dahyun considered pressing the subject, but the way Tzuyu’s eyes wavered suddenly made her rethink. “Yes please.”

“Toast?”

Dahyun tried suppressing a smile, but failed. “Yes, if you don’t burn it.”

“Why would I burn it?”

“No reason. Nevermind. Toast would be nice.” Dahyun said feebly, waving a hand at Tzuyu. Bit her lip and looked down at the half empty water glass. “Is… Is Sana out?”

“Yeah, she left a note, said she went to help Momo unpack.” Tzuyu said, her back to Dahyun.

“Oh.” Dahyun swallowed. Felt her stomach turn. Nerves and hangovers definitely didn’t do well together.

“Please don’t turn into one of those gross couples we hate.” Tzuyu begged.

“We’re not a couple” Dahyun mumbled.

“But you want her to be your girlfriend.” Tzuyu noted.

“I want a lot of things that are never gonna happen, Tzuyu.” The thought of… yeah, no, that was never gonna happen. Yet her mind went back to night before and she felt her own fingers ghost across her forehead like Sana’s had done. Had Sana even been drunk? Her breath hadn’t smelled like alcohol. Had it? Dahyun let a finger touch her lip, trying to remember. It was hard to remember much. But she hadn’t been as drunk as she had been afraid of, because Sana’s glinting eyes and mischievous were vividly imprinted in Dahyun’s memory.

Maybe if she just asked her, actually talked to her about it, she would find out. Because either way, this couldn’t keep going. She had to either kiss Sana or get the girl to take enough steps backwards to let Dahyun get over her. But either way, she needed to know. This was all too much.

“Sore spot?” Tzuyu asked.

“Eh, it’s fine. I’m just… way too close to barfing to discuss my love life right now.” Dahyun sighed.

“That’s fair.”

“I have got to talk to her.” Dahyun mumbled and let her forehead lean against the kitchen table. “I have to… do something.”

“I agree. You need to get laid.” Tzuyu said in a way too casual voice.

“Shut up. I need to get over her.”

“Under her. You’re in no way capable of topping.”
“It’s too goddamn early for you to be so snarky, why aren’t you hungover?” Dahyun lifted her head from the table and stared at the younger girl with a dead expression.

“Because I, unlike you, did not have a plan to get drunk and confess to a girl.” Tzuyu shrugged. “And because you’re tiny.”

“Okay low blow, what does that even have to do with anything?” Dahyun scowled.

“Small people have a lower threshold.”

“So is that why I feel like someone’s practicing one of Metallica’s drum solos against the inside of my skull?”

“Probably.” Tzuyu got up and took the almost empty glass from Dahyun. “I’ll get you an aspirin and then make breakfast, ok?”

...

2:36 pm Dahyun: Hey, is Sana with you?
2:37 pm Momo: Yup, we’re unpacking
2:38 pm Dahyun: Good. How are you? Not too hungover?
2:38 pm Momo: Nah, I’m good. Jeongyeon’s got it worst here
2:38 pm Dahyun: Bet she’s just blaming Nayeon like always
2:38 pm Momo: Yup.
2:40 pm Dahyun: How about Sana?
2:43 pm Momo: She’s good too. You could just text her, you know.
2:44 pm Dahyun: I know
2:45 pm Dahyun: Thank you Momo.

...

Okay so in retrospect getting far more hammered than ever tried before, maybe should’ve waited until a day where you didn’t have an eleven hour shift afterwards. Especially with everything going on with Sana still taking up most of Dahyun’s mind. But it didn’t change facts. And fact were that Dahyun had barely eaten, could not keep her eyes in focus and had left a note on a yellow post it on the kitchen table for Sana.

Sana.
There’s leftover bulgogi in the fridge, bottom shelf, blue box. Will be home around 2:30-3:00 AM.

- Dahyun

Not that she couldn’t have texted Sana. But she somehow couldn’t get herself to do so. And couldn’t really justify communicating any more through Momo. Maybe it was the fear that Sana would expand the conversation at this hour, ask what happened, ask if Dahyun was ok. And Right now, Dahyun just couldn’t handle any of that.

It was bad enough that the lights were so bright and the music from the loudspeakers rang in her ears and for some reason her knees wouldn’t stop shaking. And with every minute she regretted that last drink. And the one before that. And maybe the one before that too. The only thing she had been able to keep down all day was an antacid and a glass of some ginger and orange juice that Tzuyu had bought her from the corner store. Though the taste of ginger still sat grossly in her mouth, it miraculously had helped her nausea. But she didn’t dare eat. Throwing up on the customers was probably a very bad tactic for a girl who was really trying not to screw up. Not to fail again. So Dahyun just stuck to filling the tray on her arm with empty glasses and used napkins, getting the last of the lunch tables cleaned and ready for dinner guests.

“So I was thinking,” Jeongyeon said, passing by Dahyun, balancing four used plates on her left arm, “You should come over after class tomorrow, if you have time?”

Dahyun frowned. How did Jeongyeon have that same ability as Tzuyu to look amazing after a night like that? And while Tzuyu might not have been that drunk, Jeongyeon definitely had been. That much Dahyun was sure of.

“Dahyun?” Jeongyeon tilted her head with a frown.

“Oh, right! Uh…” Dahyun tried to remember her schedule. She had a test on friday but that was still three days away. And if she got up early tomorrow she could fit in the essay she had to write before class.

“Sure. Any particular reason?” Dahyun frowned.

“Momo misses you.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“I… well.”

“And I maybe miss you too.” Jeongyeon shifted her footing and put a stabilizing hand on the empty dishes.

“I haven’t been very good at… all of that - being a good friend and all… have I?” Dahyun felt her stomach turn uncomfortably. But not in the hangover kind of way. In the guilty kind of way.

“I think it’s a mix of us giving you too much space and you not wanting to bother in case something went down.” Jeongyeon shrugged as much as the weight of the dishes allowed. “So you’re coming over?”

“Sure.” Dahyun nodded. “You should get those out.”

Jeongyeon nodded and turned to walk away, looking back at Dahyun with a grin. “We’ll have dumplings or whatever.”
“You really are trying to score her, aren’t you?” Dahyun grinned back.

“Says you.” Jeongyeon chuckled and walked away. And somehow Dahyun’s heart felt just a little lighter.

With a shake of the head, Dahyun got back to filling the tray, going over her schedule in her head. If she started revising in her head now, she might be able to get a head start.

It just didn’t go that way. Because sometimes an attempt to revise while having a hangover and working at the same time, is just not that good of an idea, and when she was assigned to door duty at six, Dahyun gave up trying to revise. It was all she could just to manage the reservations list.

She should’ve been so happy to be assigned door duty. It was her favorite part of work after all. Welcoming guests, making them smile even if they were drenched from the pouring rain outside, managing the time slots and the tables, in a big weird puzzle that somehow always made sense in Dahyun’s head. She had always been good at figuring out systems and Chaeyoung used to say that she solved puzzles like she read sheet music - using math and patterns.

Tonight however, Dahyun could barely enjoy this part, hated every song from the loudspeakers and had to rely on her instinct to smile whenever she greeted guests. But Mina and Jeongyeon made it easier. Swarmed the tables like bees but still somehow smiles at Dahyun every chance they got. And somehow, tonight it didn’t feel like they were pitying her, like they were looking after her. Just felt like friends all going through the same aftermath of a party that maybe got a little too festive, and shouldered it together.

Really. It was all slowly improving. Except every time she lowered her guard, her mind went back to Sana. And it made Dahyun’s heart race and her cheeks flush. She kept getting stuck somewhere between being mad at Sana for being such a tease when Dahyun was obviously crushing so hard and being convinced that Sana had actually meant it. That Sana actually wanted Dahyun to kiss her. But if she wanted that, why hadn’t she just done it? Honestly, Dahyun just had to get her shit together and confess so they could move out of whatever this was. Because it was too much, and it was so scary to risk losing her. To have to cope without the girl who had become her safety. Except there was that feeling of Sana’s breath on her lips that made Dahyun feel lightheaded.

And then Dahyun was pulled from her thoughts. Loud voices pierced through her ears, and the words made Dahyun’s heart sink feel heavy with worry.

“You never called.” A man’s voice said loudly, and Dahyun turned to look at the scene, even if she already knew who the words were meant for. And there Mina stood; somewhat safe behind the counter of the bar, frozen with a towel wrapped around a glass.

“I’m not interested. I apologize for not making that clear.” Mina said politely, her voice so gentle that Dahyun could barely make it out.

“But your pretty friend gave you my number.” The man said.

“You know, but I’m not interested. Would you like to order drinks?” Mina asked, regaining her posture and drying off the glass, placing it with the bottom up. Held her chin high. The man glowered for a moment, then ordered three sojus. With a kind smile Mina got his table number and provided the drinks. As he walked away, Dahyun caught Mina’s eye and nodded encouragingly, making her
smile genuine.

“Excuse me?”

Dahyun turned at the sound. A couple stood in front of her. A chubby balding man with round specs and kind eyes next to a short lady with grey strands in thick black hair and wrinkles around the eyes.

“Hello,” Dahyun said, a professional smile on her lips. Knew it didn’t reach her eyes. “I’m sorry about that. How may I help you?”

“We have a reservation here at 8:30 pm.” The man in front of her said.

“Ah yes, of course.” Dahyun nodded “May I have your last name?”

“Peom.”

“Peom...” Dahyun mused, running a finger down the list. Mumbled the name over and over searching for it.

_Peom._

_Peom._

_Table 14. Peom Jeong-Yul. 2 people. 8:30 pm._

Her heart skipped a beat and she felt an uncomfortable heat creep up her neck and settle in her cheeks. She looked down the list of tables and her fears were confirmed. Half an hour earlier she had seated another couple at their table. Frantically, hear eyes ran over the seating chart, trying to find a free space. Nothing. The headache returned on full force, and her pulse rushed in her ears. Why this all of a sudden? It was okay. It was just a slip up. But her heart was racing and her cheeks flushed involuntarily. She blinked fast. Felt sick. Bit down on her lip. Come on. This was nothing. She always solved these problems. This was just. Bad, this was bad. The screw up she couldn’t make. The mistake there wasn’t room for. Yet another mistake. Why did she keep making these mistakes? Why did she-

“Miss, is there a problem?” The man asked with a frown.

“Uh, logistics, I’m sorry. Let me just check on something, I will be right back.” Dahyun sent them her most polite smile. The man nodded apprehensively. Dahyun blinked. Rapidly. Turned on her heel. Walked as fast as she could - into the kitchen - away from the noise. Away from her own head. Her head hurt. She pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to get it to subside. Just a bit. But it didn’t. As soon as she got into the kitchen, every part of her body shook. Gave in. As if it had only held on her until this point. Hadn’t even felt herself shaking until now.

Jeongyeon was immediately there, a hand on her back.

“You okay?”

“I’m...” Dahyun mumbled, her knees weak. It wasn’t as if she had never made mistakes like this before. She wasn’t perfect. But her head was spinning and she had to bend down, leaning on her knees. Definitely regretted every single shot of the strawberry rum now. Tried to blink the room back
into focus. Tried to turn her head to look up at Jeongyeon instead of at her sneakers. Maybe if she
could just get Jeongyeon to help. She just had to ask for help. Jeongyeon would help. God, her head
was going to explode.

“Do you need to be sick?” Jeongyeon asked, but her voice was distant. “Dahyun?”

What was wrong with her? This wasn’t a big deal. 8:30 was usually the time when the earliest guests
started getting done. It wasn’t a problem. Yet she kept shaking. Kept… Was she crying? What was
wrong with her. It was just a mistake. Just… Just a mistake right? Nothing that would get her fired.
God what if she got fired. She wouldn’t be able to keep the apartment. Wouldn’t be able to pay her
bills. Would have to start lending from her parents just to keep the interests paid. Pay for what? A
shattered dream.

“Mina!” Jeongyeon’s voice rang somewhere behind a veil. Someone was holding her shoulders.
Dahyun blinked. The kitchen tiles swam. And then she was being pushed down. Fell onto a surface.
on her forehead. Cold droplets on hot skin. It burned. Her skin. She couldn’t breathe. Why couldn’t
she breathe? What was wrong with her? It was just a mistake. Just a mistake. Just a mistake. A sound
escaped her lips. A whimper? A sob? And she dug her fingers into her arms. Was gonna throw up.
Definitely gonna throw up. Definitely-

Hands cupped her face. Soft cool hands. And her head was forced up. Forced to focus. And there
was a face in front of her. With soft eyes. Mina’s soft eyes. And it was all too much. It was just a
mistake. This was just Dahyun being pathetic. It was just the hangover or the remnants of November
or whatever. It was too much of a fuss. But she still couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t… Couldn’t breathe.
And Mina’s features were blurry.

“You’re ok.” Mina’s face was so close but her voice was so far away.

“Peom” Dahyun mumbled. “Four- fourteen.”

“Jeongyeon’s on it.” Mina said. “You’re ok.”

“Peom Jeong-Yul.” Dahyun repeated, her voice breaking.

“We’ve got it under control. You’re ok.” Mina said, still holding Dahyun’s face, thumbs rubbing
against her cheek. Dahyun tried to focus. Her eyes landed on the mole on Mina’s nose. Focused only
on that. Really, Mina should get away. Because in about five seconds Dahyun was going to throw
up on her. Not even from nausea. But her head… It was. God someone was pressing a bowling ball
against her forehead.

“You’re ok.”

Mina kept saying it. But she was lying. Dahyun’s head was so heavy. Hurt so much. And her face
was wet. She kept looking at Mina’s face. Couldn’t meet her eyes. Stared at the mole on her nose.
Blinked. Her eyes kept swimming. Why was she even crying? If she could just focus. She was never
gonna drink again. Ever. Never. Not if this was the price. But it wasn’t just the alcohol. And Dahyun
knew that. Even in her delusion and all this pain Dahyun knew that.

“Look at me.” Mina said.

But she was. She was looking. Dahyun’s eyes flickered. And she shut them tight. Couldn’t breathe.
Her head was going to kill her. Or her heart. Whichever won the battle to cause her most pain.

“Look at me.” Mina repeated. And Dahyun did. Opened her eyes. Let out a sob. Met Mina’s gaze. It
was so firm. Warm. Trapped Dahyun’s. And Dahyun couldn’t breathe. Sobbed. Then a hand was on her back. Something was shoved into her hand. Then her hand was pushed to her mouth. And Dahyun did her best to breathe. The bag inflated. Deflated. Her skin still burned. But at least now, if she threw up, it wouldn’t be on Mina. Mina. Mina who still kept her gaze locked. And somehow it was the only real thing to Dahyun. Mina. Her eyes. The thumbs that still wiped her cheeks. They were wet. Something cool pressed against her forehead. Mina wouldn’t let her look away. Her head hurt. But the cloth helped. She could breathe. But it hurt. The bag inflated. Deflated. Over and over. And Dahyun felt dizzy. Felt sick. Felt… relief?

New tears trickled from her eyes, momentarily blurring Mina’s features.

“You’re ok.” Mina said.

Dahyun sobbed into the bag. She wasn’t ok. This was the second time in less than two weeks that she had broken down at work. The second time in less than two weeks that Mina was drying her tears. And she had been so sure. Had been so confident that everything was better now. But it had just been a band aid. And damn it, Dahyun knew that band aids did nothing to fix what was broken underneath. Another sob left Dahyun. Another stream of tears.

“You’re ok.” Mina insisted and her grip on Dahyun’s face got tighter. And the cloth disappeared momentarily and then returned, colder. Someone had turned it. Dahyun moved the bag from her mouth. Her lips trembled. Her chin.

“H-hurts” Dahyun stammered.

“What hurts?” A voice asked. Jeongyeon’s. Somewhere above her. She must be the one holding the cloth.


“You’re ok.” Mina insisted. Relief washed over Dahyun once more. Or exhaustion. It was hard to put a word to any feeling right now. The cloth disappeared from her forehead. Lay on her neck the next moment. Cooled her. And Mina’s eyes were still there. Except so was the rest of her face. And her cheeks were wet too. With a trembling hand, Dahyun reached out. Wiped the tears from Mina’s cheek. Mina’s eyes softened. Dahyun kept breathing into the bag. Awkwardly, Dahyun tried to dry the other cheek too. Tried not to poke Mina in the eye wiping the tears away. It helped somehow. And Dahyun held on to the peace Mina offered.

“You’re ok.” Mina mumbled.

Dahyun was ok. Right? She was ok?

“You’re ok.”

She was ok.

Once more, the cloth was turned, coolness once more on her neck. She looked up. Jeongyeon was holding the cloth. And Dahyun’s water bottle. And Dahyun let the bag fall. Reached out. Took the bottle. Drank. Breathed. Drank. Breathed. Handed back the bottle. Breathed. The cloth disappeared again. But then Mina’s forehead pushed against Dahyun’s. Gently but demanding all her attention. Footsteps. Jeongyeon was gone.

“You’re ok.”
“I’m… I’m ok.”

Her head still hurt. Tears still flowed.

“You’re ok.” Mina breathed.

“I’m ok.” Dahyun looked into her eyes. “Jeongyeon…”

“She took care of it. She offered them drinks and asked them for patience. There was another couple about to leave. You’re ok.” Mina let her face go, but kept their foreheads pressed together. Squeezed her shoulders lightly.

“I’m ok.” Dahyun repeated. “I don’t know. I don’t know what happened.”

Her body felt weak. She wasn’t aware how much time had passed. What if her boss found out? What if. What if he found out. She had already been late. And this. This wasn’t good.

“Hey. Hey no. No, you’re ok.” Mina grabbed her face again and pressed her lips to Dahyun’s forehead.

“You’re ok.” She mumbled against Dahyun’s skin.

“Did he see me? Yang-nim” Dahyun feared the answer.

“Do you think for a second he’s been out of the office? No, of course he didn’t. You’re ok.” Mina kissed the bridge of Dahyun’s nose and then wrapped her arms around Dahyun’s neck, hugging her close.

“I’m ok.” Dahyun breathed and tried to get Mina to let her go. “You should go help Jeongyeon. The place is packed.”

“Felix took over. Just cause he’s a kitchen boy doesn’t mean he can’t serve food.” Mina said, her arms tightening shortly before letting Dahyun go, staring into her eyes. “You’re more important.”

“I’m ok.” Dahyun promised. “You go. I’ll be out in a few minutes”

“Dahyun…”

“I’m ok. Promise.”

“Mh, okay. But I’m gonna kick your butt from here and until Monday if you’re lying to me.” Mina promised quietly. Kissed Dahyun’s forehead again.

Dahyun chuckled and coughed.

Then Mina was gone and Dahyun stared at the floor. It seemed so silly. Double bookings happened. It was no big deal. The place was big enough that there was room for those kinds of mistakes. They were only human. Dahyun made a simple mistake, nothing more. But her body had betrayed her, faster than her mind could make sense of it all. It really must’ve been the hangover making everything so much worse. It was stupid to have gotten that drunk. Everything about yesterday had been stupid. She should’ve traded away her shift. After all had an exam on friday. And she had agreed to go to Jeongyeon’s tomorrow. She would just have to deal.

She was ok.
It took a few minutes, but eventually she managed to get up. Ignoring Taeyang’s worried looks, Dahyun took a moment in the bathroom to freshen up, then returned to the floor. Thanked Felix and finished her shift, though she had switched places with Jeongyeon, waiting tables instead of organizing the floor.

Several times during the night she caught the staff looking at her. Saw the worry in their eyes. Hated it. Hated that she had broken down. But she just smiled at them. Joked around. Used every little bit of remaining energy pretended to be her usual energetic self. It helped. Laughing and pulling jokes. And at one point Jeongyeon even noted that she seemed to be better, and they joked around a litte.

It was almost as if it had never happened. If it wasn’t for the headache and her stinging eyes, she might’ve believed it if someone told her it never happened. But the next second she caught Mina and Jeongyeon with their heads together. Discussing. Looking at her when they thought she didn’t notice. They were talking about her. Pitted her. No… No they loved her. They did this out of love. Worried because they loved her. Dahyun knew that. But her stomach turned. And she wished they would just all stop worrying. Would stop pitying her.

She was ok.

…

She had expected Sana to be asleep when she got home. It was late after all. But she saw the light under the front door and allowed herself five seconds to breathe before unlocking the door. She stepped inside and found Sana on the couch, hiding in a blanket with a bag of chips and wide eyes. Screams came from the TV.

Then Sana looked up at Dahyun. Reached out and grabbed the remote. Paused the movie.

“How was work?” She asked, her voice shaking slightly.

Dahyun took her time taking off her shoes and jacket. Allowed herself a moment to figure out whether or not she should tell the truth or not. But she couldn’t take one more pair of worried eyes. Couldn’t take any more commiseration.

“It was good.” Dahyun lied. “Busy night. I’m off until saturday now. Thankfully. I’m so beat.”

“You going straight to bed?” Sana asked, curling up the top of the chips bag and tying a bag clip around it, preventing the remaining chips from going stale. Was she going to bed now as well?

“Yeah, I promised Jeongyeon I’d keep Momo company tomorrow night so I gotta study before my afternoon classes.”

“Do you ever take time off?” Sana asked, getting up, the blanket still around her.

Turned off the TV.
“Yeah, tomorrow night.” Dahyun grinned at her.

“I mean to yourself. Stare into a wall or your phone or something. Alone?”

“I guess not. I don’t really like being alone?” Dahyun said.

_But I like being with you._

They walked together to the bathroom.

“Yeah, I remember you said you slept at Jihyo’s a lot before I moved in.” Sana said.

Side by side, they washed up. Had Sana waited for her?

“I did.” Dahyun took out her lenses, and put on her glasses. “I didn’t like sleeping alone.”

“And now?” Sana asked.

“I still don’t.” Dahyun yawned, covering her mouth.

_I like sleeping with you._

Sana didn’t ask more. She just hummed and combed through her hair. The roots were starting to show, revealing black hair underneath the blonde. Without talking, they got ready for bed together. But they didn’t look at each other. Didn’t nudge each other. Just stood there, side by side, brushing their teeth, cleaning their lenses, cleaning their faces. And eventually there was nothing left but the smell of toothpaste and Sana’s raspberry foam cleanser. And her eyes finally found Dahyun’s.

“Goodnight, Dahyun.” Sana stretched and looked at Dahyun with a peaceful smile.

“Goodnight, Sana.” Dahyun smiled back.

_I like you._

Sana turned and walked out. And Dahyun felt her body ache, finally allowing herself to feel. Because feeling when Sana was there… wouldn’t have ended well. Would it? Dahyun dug her fingers into her arms and locked the bathroom door. Sat down on the closed toilet seat and felt her eyes swim with tears of exhaustion.

She had almost told her. Almost reached out. But not tonight. No more tonight. No more. Of anything. Except her screen lit up.


3:12 am Jeongyeon: You asleep yet?

Dahyun considered not answering.

3:13 am Dahyun: Almost, but I won’t be if I keep texting you.

3:13 am Jeongyeon: I just worry.

3:13 am Dahyun: I know.
Dahyun bit her lip. Wrote. Felt how her heart tugged with regret before she even pressed send, but sent it anyway.

3:14 am Dahyun: I'm fine though.
3:14 am Dahyun: Just stop worrying please.
3:14 am Dahyun: It's not necessary.
3:14 am Dahyun: And honestly getting a little annoying.
3:15 am Jeongyeon: Ok.
3:16 am Jeongyeon: Night.

Dahyun almost forgot to turn left when she exited the bathroom, rubbing her tired eyes. But Sana’s door was closed. And turned and walked into her own room. Closed her own door. Fell onto the bed. With a groan of regret she set the alarm for only four hours later. Took off her glasses and rolled into the corner, her back against the wall. Waited for sleep to take her.

…

“Hello?” Jihyo frowned and yawned. It was barely seven in the morning.

“Jihyo? Did I wake you?”

“No…” Jihyo lied and covered the microphone to yawn loudly before returning to the conversation. She still had a bit of a headache from friday, but it wasn’t half as bad as it had been yesterday. She had felt completely dead then, and hadn’t been able to get out of bed for more than fifteen minutes at a time without getting too nauseous.

“I did wake you... I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, I’m up now.” Jihyo turned onto her side and pulled the covers further up. Felt her stomach growl.

“Do you have work today?”

“At noon.”

“Can we meet? Now?”

Maybe it was the way Mina was talking, hushed and unsure, or maybe just the fact that she was calling at this hour. But Jihyo sat up, a worry in her heart building.

“Sure. But... Mina, what’s wrong?”
Jihyo’s stomach dropped with Mina’s words.

“She’s not ok.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Please leave a comment or come talk to me @dajeongmi on twitter or use the hashtag #TWICEroomies
You know that feeling in your stomach kind of like hunger and kind of like someone decided to pull at your intestines and kind of like your organs are simply trying to switch places? Yeah, that’s guilt. And it was exactly the feeling Dahyun was trying not to dwell on as she emerged to street level from the subway, a clear blue sky interrupted only by the tall buildings around her and the warm sun shining down on the idesias with a promise to make the streets burst into a sea of yellow. Still, the weather didn’t really matter much, even if it normally cheered Dahyun up. The regret and awkwardness was being doubled by the lack of sleep and her almost chronic state of confusion as she made her way to Momo and Jeongyeon’s apartment. Honestly, she could’ve cancelled. Wanted to cancel. Didn’t want to face Jeongyeon. But if it wasn’t here, it’d just be at the next shift, and she had after all, promised to come by. So here she was. Leaving the revision and frustration about Sana behind. Once again, she had gone when morning came, and this time, Dahyun had an inkling that she wasn’t going to find her at Momo’s. Actually wasn’t aware if she even had other friends, as she never really talked about anyone but Momo and her sister. A classmate every now and then, but never named.

Without really noticing her feet carrying her, Dahyun reached the apartment building and stared at the name on the door phone. Momo’s name that been written in with a red pen on a piece of paper covering over Jiyeon’s name. A rush of guilt flooded over Dahyun at the sight of Jeongyeon’s name. She had just done it to be kind. She was just looking after Dahyun. Had done so ever since that night. And Dahyun could still hear her shouting outside the room, even now.

Swallowing her pride, Dahyun pressed the buzzer and leaned her forehead against the building.

“Hello?” Jeongyeon’s voice said, Dahyun’s stomach jolting once more.

“It’s me… You-”

“Dahyun? Good, finally.” Jeongyeon’s voice sounded almost relieved? Had she been afraid that Dahyun wasn’t going to show?

A click revealed that the door had been unlocked, and Dahyun sighed before pushing open the door.

With thoughts circling around Jeongyeon, Dahyun reached the apartment. It was flung open before Dahyun had even knocked, and a tiny frame engulfed her, black hair blocking her view, Chaeyoung hugging her so hard that it felt like they were sixteen all over again. For a moment Dahyun could even smell Dahyun’s grandma’s freshly baked cookies and a hear the laughter when Chaeyoung
played a minor key rather than a major accidentally. But…

“Chaengie…” Dahyun frowned and felt Chaeyoung’s arms tighten around her shoulders for a second before letting her go “What are you doing here?”

“I... Well, Momo invited me over? Nothing more than that?” Chaeyoung said with a shrug, but her eyes searched Dahyun’s.

“Then why did you hug me like I’m terminal?” Dahyun asked, kicking off her shoes and taking off her coat, hanging it on the overfilled hook by the door.

“Am I not allowed to miss my best friend?” Chaeyoung feigned a pout, but Dahyun didn’t buy it for a moment.

“What are you planning?” Dahyun knew already that she wasn’t going to get an answer. Strongly suspected that she had attained knowledge of last night’s incident from the source with the blonde hair whose fingers were currently digging into her arms, eyes narrowed, looking decidedly not at Dahyun.

“You told?” Dahyun asked without greeting Jeongyeon.

Jeongyeon shrugged. “I thought she knew.”

Dahyun pressed her lips together. Looked from Jeongyeon to Chaeyoung and back again. Nodded. “Can we talk?”

Jeongyeon’s fingers dug harder into her arms for a second then she gestured towards the kitchen, and Dahyun followed the older girl. Watched as Jeongyeon opened the fridge and grabbed a soda, settling on the kitchen counter.

“I don’t think I thanked you properly.” Dahyun leaned against the wall. Jeongyeon kicked her feet slightly. “And now I can put an apology on top of the thank you.”

“You don’t have to apologize.” Jeongyeon took a gulp of her soda.

“I do.” Dahyun insisted. “It was a shitty thing to say. I’m just.. Sick and tired of being weak, and needing people to watch over me, and I took it out on you because you care. And that’s not fair.”

“Well, you’re right about that, but honestly, just because you tell me I’m annoying for caring, doesn’t mean I’m gonna stop, you know that right?” Jeongyeon reached out and poked Dahyun’s stomach with a toe.

“So we’re good?” Dahyun asked with a small smile.

“I am. But you. You need to get this shit under control again.”

“I know.” Dahyun sighed. “God, I just…”

“I know.” Jeongyeon poked her stomach again, and Dahyun tried to catch the foot, but Jeongyeon retreated it too fast. Offered Dahyun the soda and shook her head with a smile as Dahyun took a gulp, feeling the bubbles down her throat. Handed it back to Jeongyeon.

“So what did you do about your hot roommate?”

“Getting food.” Jeongyeon hopped down from the kitchen counter and wrapped her free arm around Dahyun’s shoulders, dragging her back out into the living room. Ruffled Dahyun’s hair just for good
measure.

“You two cool?” Chaeyoung asked from the couch, raising an eyebrow at them as Dahyun tried to step on Jeongyeon’s foot to get her to stop messing up her hair.

“The coolest. Way cooler than you.” Jeongyeon said, trying her best not to laugh. She obviously didn’t see Dahyun as much of a threat. Did however end up leaping out of the way to avoid Dahyun, spilling soda down her shirt in the process.

“Oi, Kim Dahyun!” Jeongyeon huffed, letting go of Dahyun to grab a kleenex from the side table by the couch, drying over the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip on the front. Dahyun just rolled her eyes effectively - so she was sure Jeongyeon saw - and flattened her hair before joining Chaeyoung in the couch.

“I’m gonna kill you someday.” Jeongyeon promised.

“Yeah, yeah.” Dahyun waved her off and turned to face her best friend, swallowing a yawn. “So how’s the wife?”

Chaeyoung chuckled, pulling Dahyun’s legs into her lap, playing with the rips in Dahyun’s jeans. “Panicking about how amazing she is, as always.”

“Vocal tests?” Dahyun asked, leaning her head against her arm, adjusting as her back pressed into the corner of the couch, preventing her shoulder blade from digging into the armrest.

“What else?”

“I don’t understand her.” Dahyun shook her head. “Subjects she’s not great at she’s always really chill about but as soon as it’s something she’s ace at she gets so many nerves she can barely function.”

“It’s simple.” Chaeyoung shrugged. “There’s too many expectations. If it’s just herself she’s risking letting down but if she’s risking letting anyone else down she just becomes a mess.”

“Ahh… And that’s why you’re dating her and not me.” Dahyun scrunched her nose.

“Very true.” Chaeyoung mused, a smile on her lips.

“Ew. Okay new subject, I did not sign up for soft Im Nayeon hours.”

“But they’re my basic mood.” Chaeyoung pouted. “I love her…”

“Trust me, I know, that’s kind of why I have a new roomie now.”

Chaeyoung gave a loud laugh and squeezed Dahyun’s knee to make her squirm and kick. “Don’t you dare say you’re unhappy with your Sana.”

“I’m not- She’s not my-”

“Are we talking Sana?” Jeongyeon asked, flopping down on the Chaise next to Dahyun. “Cause I want in.”

“We’re not talking Sana.” Dahyun whined, squirming as Chaeyoung kept trying to grab her knee. “Sto-stop that!” Dahyun pulled her legs back, hugging them, squeezed into a corner between her friends.
“We’re talking Sana.” Chaeyoung said decidedly.

And so they did. Even if Dahyun refused to be a part of the conversation.

…

Momo grabbed the last dumpling. Dahyun moped. Momo gave it to Dahyun.

“I don’t get it.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes when Dahyun happily chewed on the dumpling, opening a soda. Momo was sitting between Dahyun and Jeongyeon in the couch, while Chaeyoung sat cross-legged on the chaise, a box of take-out noodles in her lap.

“What don’t you get?” Momo asked as she reached for the bowl of buckwheat noodles.

“You spend five minutes bickering about who should get the last one and then the minute she pouts you give it to her?”

“Don’t question the way of the dumpling.” Dahyun shrugged.

“But-”

“Do not,” Dahyun pointed at her with the chopsticks, “question the dumpling.”

“I just-”

“Well, it’s simple.” Momo said as Dahyun narrowed her eyes at Chaeyoung, raising an eyebrow.

“Simple?” Chaeyoung said, snorting at Dahyun.

“I just can’t resist her.” Momo cooed, wrapping her arms around Dahyun as she took a gulp of soda.

“She’s way too cute!”

Chaeyoung frowned slightly at them, then shook her head and held up her hands in defeat. Dahyun felt the familiar warmth creep up her neck as Momo started kissing her cheek.

“Momo, come on, we’re eating here.” Jeongyeon complained, looking up from her phone instead of just eyeing them every thirty seconds. She had been texting on and off for the past half hour.

“You’re just jealous.” Momo smirked.

“Am not.” Jeongyeon said neutrally, pocketing the phone.

“Don’t even deny it, I noticed you staring at me.” Momo said, her arm around Dahyun.

Jeongyeon turned her attention firmly to the rice cake she was eating. “What, am I supposed to not notice you? It’s not like you’re trying to be discreet!”

“Well, if you’ve got it, flaunt it, right?” Momo grinned.

“Then don’t complain.”

“Not complaining.” Momo said with a shrug and pressed another kiss to Dahyun’s cheek. Dahyun chuckled and took another gulp of soda.
“I swear you’re worse than Nayeon with the kissing.” Jeongyeon grumbled. “I’m seriously regretting letting you move in.”

“You’re just afraid you can’t handle it.” Dahyun said and poked at Jeongyeon’s leg with her toe.

“Not in any way afraid.”

“Yeah? So you wouldn’t cower if I did this to you?” Momo asked, and reached under Dahyun’s chin, turning her face so they were barely an inch apart. Dahyun met her gaze unwaveringly, feeling both Chaeyoung and Jeongyeon stare at them with breaths held. In their defense Dahyun hadn’t been this close to a girl, ever. At least not what they knew. Yet, as they stared at each other, there was something in Momo’s eyes that made Dahyun’s trust in Momo fade just a little.

“I swear, if you two start making out...” Jeongyeon warned.

“I could never.” Momo chuckled and her breath hit Dahyun’s lips before drawing back. And Dahyun couldn’t help feeling slightly relieved. Any wrong movement in that moment and Momo would’ve actually kissed her. Not that it would’ve been the end of the world, but Dahyun couldn’t help the stupid dream of who she wanted to get her first kiss from. Every kiss. Momo caught her eyes again, and winked. Then leaned back, into Jeongyeon, who automatically wrapped an arm around her shoulders, tapping a rhythm on her arm.

“Thank god, I was about to barf up my food.” Chaeyoung noted, her eyes flickering from Jeongyeon’s fingers to Dahyun’s face.

Dahyun looked at her with indignation “You have nothing to let any of us hear.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” Chaeyoung mumbled and shrugged.

“Couch sex.” Dahyun simply said, her eyes narrowed at her best friend.

“You seriously cannot keep holding a grudge for that, it was one time!” Chaeyoung said exasperatedly.

“Wait, what?” Momo asked.

“Dahyun once saw Nayeon’s naked ass on accident.” Jeongyeon explained, then turned her head at Chaeyoung. “Did you actually not know she was home or was it just an excuse?”

“We actually thought she was at rehearsal.” Chaeyoung didn’t look nearly as ashamed as Dahyun would’ve liked.

“I will never get over that sight.” Dahyun mumbled.

“Oh come on, Nayeon has a nice butt, it couldn’t have been that bad.” Momo noted dryly.

“See?” Chaeyoung gestured at Momo, her eyes still on Dahyun. Then she frowned and looked at Momo. “You checked out my girlfriend?”

“I checked out all of you. Yours is nice too.” Momo didn’t seem the least bit ashamed.

“I… thank you?” Chaeyoung looked slightly confused.

Momo drank of her soda with a shrug and leaned into Jeongyeon, resting the back of her head in the crook of the older girl’s neck. “You’re welcome. I only give praise where praise is due.”
Dahyun finished her soda and looked at the clock. And the magic was broken at once, reality hitting her like a wave without warning. It was almost eight. Late... Very late. And if she had to get home in time to revise, then it was... wait, when was the test again? What even was the curriculum? She felt Jeongyeon’s eyes rest on her and sent her a smile before getting up.

“What are you-”

“I drank almost three sodas, my bladder is bursting.” Dahyun lied.

“Rip…” Chaeyoung hummed, closing the empty take-out box.

With half an ear still on the conversation - Chaeyoung had started questioning Momo’s taste in music, Dahyun walked into the bathroom. Locked the door and stared into the mirror. Taking a few calming breaths, she drew out her phone and looked at the list she had made earlier. If she could excuse herself within an hour she could get home before ten, then she could probably get two hours of revision in before heading to bed. At least. It might be a little late, but it was going to be necessary. The test would count for 40 percent of their grade, and right now, Dahyun couldn’t remember a single thing they had been through. Her analysis of music to underline emotion had been written with too much haste this morning, but it wasn’t due until the next day. If she hurried she could look it over and hopefully finish some before Tzuyu came over to study for the test together. Counting on her fingers, Dahyun made a mental note of the order in which she should do everything to get through it. Turned on the faucet and held her hands under the cold water. Had always hated how the nerves gave her clammy hands. Hated that she had to force herself to keep it together like this instead of just being able to deal. Or tell them.

... 

But sometimes plans don’t turn out the way you plan it. Sometimes, intention to study and get home in due time get overshadowed by the magic of laughter and maybe an unspoken wish to escape. And sometimes that magic causes you to end on a coffee table reenacting Monty Python’s Flying Circus.

“Our chief weapon is surprise, surprise and fear, fear and surprise-” Dahyun rambled, pointing at the three girls in the couch.

Jeongyeon had stopped functioning properly the moment Dahyun had started her impression and Chaeyoung was pretty much crying with laughter by now, sniffling and wiping her eyes, a hand on her stomach. Only Momo, though chuckling, seemed less immune to Dahyun’s stupidities. Still, seeing their faces, knowing that the laughter that rang through the house was caused by her, was a rush Dahyun had missed more than anything in the past six months. It was intoxicating, addicting, and Dahyun felt like flying. As if she had no limits and no problems.

“Our two weapons are fear and surprise, and ruthless efficiency- our three weapons are fear, surprise and ruthless efficiency-” Dahyun continued, pinning Momo down with a look. It was obvious that she was questioning Dahyun’s sanity, but eventually the laughter poured from her like a bursting stream in the spring.

“Our three weapons are fear, and surprise, and ruthless efficiency... and an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope…”

Dahyun flicked her fluxx goal card unexpected things at Momo before finishing Ximinez’
monologue and jumping down, bowing deeply, Jeongyeon and Chaeyoung clapping loudly.

“I’ll come in again!” Dahyun said, making to jump back onto the table, causing Chaeyoung to actually slip from the couch onto the floor but Dahyun stayed down and offered her a hand. If she could do nothing else for the rest of her life, Dahyun knew that she would just like to make Chaeyoung and the rest of her friends laugh this much. Chaeyoung and Jeongyeon were still trying to steady their breathing and dry their eyes. However, Momo had stopped laughing. And the look she sent Dahyun seemed to deflate her. But Dahyun merely kept smiling, even if her stomach was turning uncomfortably once more.

Not that it made much of a difference now, as a still chuckling, half crying Chaeyoung announced that she was going home to her nervous wreck of a girlfriend.

“Bring her next time.” Momo suggested.

“Oh, please don’t.” Jeongyeon interjected, playing with the sleeve of Momo’s shirt.

“I’ll tell her you said that.” Chaeyoung noted, getting to her feet and stretching.

“I’m not afraid of her.” Jeongyeon insisted, to which both Dahyun and Chaeyoung raised their eyebrows.

“Well, it’s girlfriend care time, you all be good.” Chaeyoung waved at them, but stopped halfway on her way to the door, staring back. “Wait, Momo-”

“Yeah?”

“If you’ve checked out all of us, you’re the best to give an unbiased opinion. Best butt?”

Momo snorted, obviously taken aback by the question but answered almost immediately. “Mina, obviously.”

“Damn, and here I thought I’d have a good point to bring back to the wreck.”

“She’s a close third.” Momo shrugged.

“Who’s second?”

“Me.” Momo grinned unabashedly.

“I… fair.” Chaeyoung shrugged, and then she was off.

“What about you?” Momo asked, getting up from her position of halfway squashing Jeongyeon. The oldest girl took a thankful opportunity to go pee, finally able to move.

“What about you?” Momo asked, getting up from her position of halfway squashing Jeongyeon. The oldest girl took a thankful opportunity to go pee, finally able to move.

“Me?”

“You could stay here?” Momo suggested softly. Her mood change made Dahyun frown. Made her actually consider it.

“I should really get home,” Dahyun mumbled. “I have a lot of school work and I need to sleep.”

“Don’t pretend with me, Dahyunnie.” Momo said it quietly, but her gaze was intense.

How could she know? Maybe her eyes saw more than she let on, or maybe Dahyun was just too obviously exhausted by now. But somehow, Dahyun couldn’t keep her mask on with Momo. Just
melted into her outstretched arms and let the older girl care for her. Wondered how she did it. How she had broken through a barrier in mere hours that she could still put up in front of the others. Momo somehow just… saw.

“Okay… Thank you.” Dahyun mumbled. And Momo took that as a yes to staying.

…

Momo’s bed wasn’t as soft as Sana’s, but it was far more crowded. There was barely room for the both of them and all twelve of Momo’s massive stuffed toys that made her own stuffed squirrel seem pathetic in comparison. But Dahyun quickly recognized the pastel teddy bear she had used and picked it from the pile.

“I thought I was going to be your cuddle buddy!” Momo complained immediately. Dahyun laughed at her ridiculous pout and changed into the pyjamas Momo handed her.

“What is it with you and Sana and cuddles?” Dahyun asked as she climbed under the covers and waited for Momo to join her, placing the bear back in the pile.

“Not sure. Just makes me feel safe to have someone to protect I guess?” Momo shrugged, shifting her footing as she struggled to put her shirt on the right way.

“Mh, I guess.”

“As a kid I’d always cuddle my teddies but as I got older I cuddled Sana instead whenever she came over. Kept her safe, you know?”

“You were really close, huh?” Dahyun muttered.

“We are still. But I guess there were times where we were almost inseparable. Or more like I wouldn’t let her go.” Momo finally got both arms out of the t-shirt and pulled at the front to get it to fall right, skillfully clipping off the bra underneath before crawling into bed, turning on her side to look at Dahyun.

“… Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.” Momo shrugged.

Dahyun swallowed, couldn’t look Momo in the eyes. It was a thought that had occurred to her repeatedly over the past weeks. That there might be a history there. “You and Sana… Have you-”

“What, dated?”

“She kissed you?”

“She was afraid that she would be bad at it” Momo shrugged. “She’s not, by the way. But she’s just… she tries to hide it all behind her laughter. Not that she isn’t happy, but her family has never been the easiest subject.”
“Her mom has been ill, right?” Dahyun frowned. Knew only what Momo had told the first night and then what Sana had mentioned a little while back.

“She has. A lot. Almost… a few times. She’s good now though but it always kind of broke Sana whenever she was in a bad period. But because everyone else around her just left, she never told me about the bad periods. So I had to learn how to read her to help her and now I think I know her too well sometimes.”

“You know a lot about people. I mean I can fool those two goofs on a good day, but you see right through me.”

“Well, that’s because you’re a lot like her. Sana. You both hide behind your smile.” Momo said.

Dahyun frowned. She was nothing like Sana. But Momo also wasn’t wrong in her observations. Dahyun’s smile was her best mask. An actress in her ace game when she could just bring out that smile. So she nodded at Momo and let the older girl tug her closer and curl around her. She hummed as Momo ran her hand up and down Dahyun’s arm, and Dahyun couldn’t hold back a chuckle as a ridiculous thought entered her mind.

“What?” Momo mumbled.

“Well, for someone who’s never kissed a girl, I sure have gotten into bed with quite a few by now.” Dahyun said, a nervous giggle bubbling out under her breath.

“Well, it’s your own fault that you haven’t kissed anyone yet.” Momo said against Dahyun’s neck.

“What, do you wanna kiss me?” Dahyun laughed.

Momo didn’t answer.

Dahyun turned in her arms, her stomach jolting at a sudden thought. Had she read it wrong, with Momo and Sana?

“Do you?”

“No.” Momo looked sincere. “And you know that.”

“I…”

“I get that you haven’t told me what’s going on, we’re not that close-”

“We literally couldn’t get closer.”

“Dahyun.”

“Sorry.”

“I know we’re not that close. But just promise me that you’ll try to get better before anything else. Make it your first priority.”

Dahyun nodded against Momo’s neck, without even bothering to protest. Knew that Momo was right. Sighed and closed her eyes as Momo stroked Dahyun’s hair and wrapped a leg over Dahyun’s.

“I have to be up by seven. I need to head home, I have a paper due.” Dahyun said with a yawn.

“Why did you stay here then?” Momo asked softly, confusion in her voice.
“... I don’t like sleeping alone.” Dahyun mumbled.

Momo hummed and rubbed circles on Dahyun’s back.

“Sleep now, then.” Momo said and tugged Dahyun closer.

...

In another bed, in another part of town, Chaeyoung was trying to get her breathing under control, shuddering as she crawled under the covers for warmth. Heard Nayeon’s breathless chuckle next to her and turned her head.

“You know, you should join next time.” Chaeyoung said, running a hand through her tousled hair.

“What, so that was a solo show?” Nayeon frowned.

“No, I mean join when Jeongyeon and Momo invite us over.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes.

“Why?” Nayeon asked with little interest.

Chaeyoung sighed. “Look, I know you and Jeongyeon aren’t exactly on the best of terms—”

“She’s hiding something, I know it.” Nayeon huffed.

“Then talk to her.” Chaeyoung shrugged. “You’re best friends.”

“It’s not that simple this time.” Nayeon turned onto her side, away from her girlfriend.

“Nayeon.” Chaeyoung tugged at Nayeon’s shoulder, turning her back around. Kissed her swollen lips once.

“She’ll come to me when she’s ready to talk.”

“Momo asked for you.” Chaeyoung noted.

“She did?” Nayeon asked.

“She did. So... Join me next time?” Chaeyoung asked again.

“Mh... I guess.” Nayeon smiled. “And I guess I can suffer through Jeongyeon being a dick.”

“You love her and you know it.” Chaeyoung shook her head.

“Mh... Maybe.”

“You love her. And I love you. But right now, I’m gonna write.”

“I always did inspire you.” Nayeon grinned.

“Oh, definitely. My own personal muse.” Chaeyoung leaned down and pressed her lips to her girlfriend’s just for a second before getting out, grabbing a shirt and panties on the way. Laughed as Nayeon wolf whistled.
Chaeyoung tugged her shirt town over her knees as she turned on the lamp beside the couch. Grabbed a notebook. One of many. And old one, almost full. And Chaeyoung wondered what would happen if Nayeon ever broke her promise to never look in them until Chaeyoung asked her to.

…

A snort left Dahyun as the sound of her phone woke her, sun creeping past the blinds. She tried turning to grab her phone to turn off the alarm, but Momo was holding onto her so tight, their legs tangled and Momo’s strong arms preventing her from moving.

“Momo…” Dahyun mumbled and poked gently at Momo’s arm. It worked. Somewhat. Momo didn’t wake, but her grip loosened just enough for Dahyun to be able to reach behind her and grab the phone. She turned off the alarm and tried waking Momo, quickly realizing that it was going to take too long. So instead Dahyun just started moving Momo’s limbs, enabling her to sneak out of the bed. Momo grumbled and turned around, her back to Dahyun, hands gripping at the foot of the pastel teddy bear, instinctively pulling it closer. And Dahyun allowed herself a second to look at her sleeping friend.

The bathroom was empty and Dahyun thought she heard Jeongyeon talking in the kitchen. She rubbed her eyes and tried to fix her face and hair somehow, grabbing what she recognized as Momo’s hairbrush. The feeling of the brush running over her scalp woke her a bit. With a groan she tied her hair in a lazy bun.

It was already ten past seven and the pressure of the assignment, of everything... It was too early for her heart to betray her like this. With all the force she could muster, she grabbed the sink, clenched her teeth. Begged for the pulse in her ears to shut up.

She was just a little bit behind, that was all. And one bad grade wouldn’t be the end of the world. She was gonna be ok. She was ok. With a sigh she turned on the faucet and let the cold water run over her wrists and hands, cooling her down. She was ok.

When she entered the kitchen she found Jeongyeon leaning against the sink, on the phone, chuckling. She looked at Dahyun and covered the mic on the phone with her hand. “Slept well?”

Dahyun nodded and grabbed a cup of noodles, filling the pot with water and getting it to boil. “You?”

“Like a rock.” Jeongyeon yawned and returned to her phone conversation. “No, she’s still sleeping.”

Dahyun saw her smile softly. Shyly?


Dahyun frowned. “Who was-”

“Jihyo.” Jeongyeon explained and took a bite of toast.

“Sorry to just steal your food and your roomie and then bail, but I have an assignment due at noon. And Tzuyu is coming to revise with me.” Dahyun poured the now boiling water over the noodles and closed the lid on them.
“Don’t worry about it, you do you.” Jeongyeon insisted. “You seem better.”

“I am, I’m really good. I honestly don’t know what came over me the other day, it was so weird.”

Dahyun looked at her watch.

“I’m gonna change real quick.” She added before Jeongyeon could comment. Heard her call Dahyun’s name but ignored it.

Making as little noise as possible, Dahyun snuck back into Momo’s room, Momo still fast asleep with her back to Dahyun. Dahyun quickly shimmied out of the borrowed pyjamas and put on her clothes from last night. Heard Momo mumble in her sleep as Dahyun tippy-toed out of the room again, closing the door gently.

“Do you at least have an easier schedule after this exam?” Jeongyeon asked as Dahyun sat down with the cup of noodles, opening it to judge if they were done. They weren’t.

“Yeah, well, I’m going to have more shifts again but classes are going to hopefully get easier.” Dahyun nodded.

“Good.” Jeongyeon sounded hesitant. “And how about—”

“Jeongyeon. I’m good.” Dahyun grinned and gave her the thumbs up.

Dahyun opened the lid again, not willing to wait more. The noodles were slightly chewy but they tasted good and she ate fast, Jeongyeon scrolling lazily through what looked like Instagram, but Dahyun wasn’t sure from the angle.

“Jeong?” Dahyun said as soon as she was done with the noodles.

“Mh?” Jeongyeon looked up from her phone. “What?”

“I just… Thank you again for having me over. It was so much fun. I’ve missed it a lot. Missed you. Outside of work, I mean.”

“Yeah, me too.” Jeongyeon poked gently against Dahyun’s hand. “You should come over more.”

“I will.” Dahyun nodded and got up. “Tell Momo I’m sorry I had to leave?”

“Sure.” Jeongyeon smiled. Followed Dahyun to the door.

…

“I’m not sure this is right.” Dahyun mumbled.

“I’m not sure this is right either.” Tzuyu groaned.

“We’re gonna fail.” Dahyun whined.

“We’re gonna die.” Tzuyu agreed.
Tzuyu and Dahyun sat on the floor on either end of the coffee table in Dahyun’s living room. Dahyun let her head fall onto the table, her forehead on a piece by Sondheim.

To hell with Sondheim anyway.

He was a git.

Well.

No, Dahyun didn’t mean that.

Not really.

Just right now.

The clock read three in the morning, Friday rising with the sun in a few hours, and they had spent hours going over the assigned sheet music. Dahyun couldn’t focus. Couldn’t visualize. If she could just play it out, she would be able to figure it out. Instead, they listened to the pieces over and over, with lyrics, without lyrics, making notes and comparing. The coffee pot was empty and a mouthful of cold coffee was all that was left in Dahyun’s mug. She drank it anyway, wincing. Had never really liked the taste of black coffee, much less cold.

“But the assigned essay could be on any one of these, right?” Tzuyu asked, pointing to a long list of musical pieces.

Dahyun lifted her head, resting her chin against the coffee table instead of her forehead.

“Yup.”

“We’re screwed.”

“We need more coffee.” Dahyun sighed. She didn’t get up. Neither did Tzuyu.

“And you’re sure you shouldn’t sleep instead? What good is it even to go over this so late?”

“I can’t sleep even if I want to, but you should sleep. Take my bed.”

“No way, if you’re staying up, so am I.” Tzuyu insisted. “We die together, remember?”

“Yeah. But I really need to figure this out. I’m sure I could figure it out if I could just...” Dahyun clenched her fist, stretched her fingers then clenched her fist again.

“Wait.”

“What?” Dahyun looked up at Tzuyu. Her eyes sparked.

“... I have an idea.” Tzuyu mumbled, then got up with an energy Dahyun didn’t fathom or could ever hope to muster at this hour. Dahyun merely watched as her friend disappeared into her room and returned with an squared notebook and scotch tape, opening the notebook on an empty page.

“Can I use this?”

“Sure.” Dahyun looked at her, trying to find out what the hell was going on.
“Can you hand me that?” Tzuyu pointed at a black pen by Dahyun’s hair.

“... Sure.” Dahyun lazily swiped it across the notes. Watched as Tzuyu started counting squares on the paper and drawing lines. Slowly, a picture formed. One that made Dahyun’s eyes grow big and heart race as she realized what Tzuyu was doing. Made her stomach turn as she raised her head from the coffee table and looked. Tzuyu ripped out the page and drew the same on the next page.

Dahyun opened her mouth to protest.

“This is going to work.” Tzuyu stopped her, reading the expression on Dahyun’s face right. To say that Tzuyu looked stubborn would be the understatement of the century. She looked downright fierce in her determination.

“But Tzu-” Dahyun said.

“Just try.” Tzuyu said, ripped out the second page and got up, placing the pages on the table in front of Dahyun, gathering the sheet music in stacks to make space. Took the scotch tape and connected the two pieces properly, then taped them to the coffee table.

“I’m not sure I can. It’s not the same.”

“Try.” Tzuyu insisted.

Dahyun studied the pages Tzuyu had drawn on. It was a piano, drawn in almost real scale, not with all octaves but most, which worked for the most pieces. This was silly. But Tzuyu was looking at her with a fire in her eyes, and Dahyun carefully placed her fingers on the make-believe notes, adjusting to the scale.

“Okay, now this one.” Tzuyu said and held up the hardest piece in front of Dahyun. “I’ll play the music on my phone when you’re ready and you just play along.”

“I-”

“You can do this, I know it. You’re a genius.”

“I’m a doof and you know it.” Dahyun argued.

“You’re a goddamn genius when it comes to music, and you know it. Dahyun, I’ve never seen anyone with your talent.”

“Tzuyu...” Dahyun croaked.

“You can do this.” Tzuyu said firmly.

“I don’t…”

“Try.”

“Then... okay, at least let me just try without music. I’m not used to this.” Dahyun said, admitting defeat. Probably might as well have given in to the younger girl from the start.

It felt awkward, wrong. Her fingers were so used to the distance from a one key to the next that she had to try several times to scale it down. It was muscle memory and it would be a hard opponent.

It was much against her will that Tzuyu turned on the music and Dahyun tried to play along, barely needing to read the sheet music.

The first time was awkward. She kept making the chords too big, fitting a real piano, kept slipping behind when she had to adjust. Ignored the jolts. Knew that Tzuyu had drawn it in less than full scale out of kindness, but somehow it made it harder. Was just a cruel reminder of a crushed dream.

The second time was better. Somehow.

The third time she played with tears in her eyes. Tears that dripped onto the paper and smeared the penned lines. Played with Tzuyu’s hands squeezing her shoulders, asking if she wanted to quit. Played with a shake of her head.

The fourth time Dahyun cracked it.

Yelped out loud and nearly crumbled one of the pieces of paper. Her hand ached already, but she ignored it. Instead she grabbed the sheet music and noted down exactly where the change in music caused the mood shift and added a little note at the bottom of the page about why. And as she looked up, she found that Tzuyu beamed, her eyes shining as Dahyun explained enthusiastically, pointing between the chords she made with her hand and the sheet music and the lyrics.

“Okay. So here, we expect her voice to climb in tone to increase drama, right? Because the song dictates it. Right?”

“But it doesn’t, when she sings true it goes down, but the music is swelling.” Tzuyu pointed to the point in the sheet music.

“Anticlimax.” Dahyun said. “But we remember this song as dramatic. Because of the music that proceeds the lyrics. But the lyrics aren’t contributing to that.”

They knew the theory of this, had gone through it some weeks ago, but finding the exact point in the songs that was hard. And Dahyun had been so familiar with the piece that she had assumed the structure instead of actually listening to it. But because her hands could observe the song separately from the lyrics, she noticed the difference.

The exhilaration of the breakthrough felt almost like being high, and Dahyun was so enchanted by her own discoveries that she managed to get through three more pieces this way; Dahyun playing along on the imaginary piano, albeit still fighting the muscle memory, and Tzuyu playing the pieces on the phone and noting down every time Dahyun said. “Here, contradiction.” and “Here, affirmation.”
Still, at five in the morning Dahyun went into the kitchen and drank an entire glass of water with her painkillers and cursed at herself. Grabbed a pack of choco pies.

“You should really sleep.” Tzuyu leaned against the door, looking at her.

“So should you.” Dahyun smiled. Struggled to open the pack, her hand trembling terribly. Watched with little protest as Tzuyu grabbed the pack and opened it.

They shared the pack.

Neither went to bed that night.

…

It was hard to decide whether it had been worth it, staying up all night.

To save their grade, it definitely had. Dahyun had used several of the points from the night’s revision in her essay and had been happy with the effort she had put into it, when she finally handed it in.

But now? Now she was stumbling across the curb, her feet refusing to carry her much further. Didn’t notice if anyone was home. Didn’t notice if she remembered to close the door to her room. Didn’t bother to take off her jeans. Didn’t crawl under the covers. Just curled into a ball around the squirrel plush, lying on top of her bed.

Cried into it until she fell asleep.

…

Dahyun sat up with a jolt.

A blanket fell off of her shoulders, gathering around her legs. Heart in her throat, she looked around, blinked her contacts into focus. It was dark. The door was closed and no light was visible around the edges. Was it night? Must be.

With sweaty palms, Dahyun grabbed her phone, still in the pocket of her jeans, but it had run out of battery. Cursed and fumbled with the charger.

What time was it?

Her hand still ached. And it broke her heart. Despite herself, last night she had thought maybe. Just maybe. And she blamed herself for letting Tzuyu get her hopes up. But loved Tzuyu for trying. All this time, she had thought that she would get used to her new normal, with Sana, with Momo, with
her work and less classes. More bills. The tiny but painfully present scar on the side of her left hand by her thumb.

It was all so stupid. She was so stupid. And so weak. Useless. For months she had been carried around by her friends. Kept standing only because Jihyo forced her to sleep. Calm only with Mina’s hands cupping her face telling her sweet little lies. Smiling only when her friends did.

But sleeping also when Sana wrapped her body around her. Calm when she held her hand. Smiling whenever Sana did. But she had neglected everyone else because of Sana. Had forgotten to call Jihyo. Had spent way too little time with Chaeyoung. With Jeongyeon.

She had relied so much on her friends and given so little in return.

What if she would always just be the one who had to be picked up, who could never stand on her own. Who could never get back up. Not properly. Not back to who she used to be.

More than anything she wanted to become the girl she used to be. The one who dragged Chaeyoung out of bed at three in the morning to get snacks and watch the sun go up, kaw’ing at the birds as they flew by. To be the one to always choke on her food because she was laughing so hard. The girl who sang karaoke offkey with a wooden spoon in front of her howling friends.

The one who would always be at the center of the laughter.

Not at the center of everyone’s worries.

It was so stupid. So stupid of her to have worried them so much. She had just kept convincing herself she just needed a few nights of good sleep to be fine. To catch up. But who was she even kidding anymore?

Tears fell before she could stop them. Her heart clenched painfully in her chest. She was way too exhausted. Way too stressed. Way too confused and tired of all this. Had to keep breathing, but her breath was shallow and the dizziness was threatening to overpower her.

She was useless.

Powerless.

More than anything, she just needed a little bit of control. Something she could grasp onto, something steady. And Sana had been so willing to let her escape into her light. Had crawled under her skin in a matter of days, hours, minutes.

And now her bed was so cold, and Sana wasn’t there, and she was forced to face the reality. That
she wasn’t there yet. That all their hard work to keep her afloat wasn’t working. That all of her attempts to fight were failing.

But what was she supposed to do? Not pay her bills? Not complete her education?

Just give up?

It was this exact thought that made Dahyun freeze, made her grab her phone, begging that it had charged enough to turn on and allowing her heart a moment’s relief when it did.

1:34 am.

She thought it might be too late, but the call was answered almost immediately.

“Dahyun?”

“I… I’m not ok.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twt @dajeongmi or use #TWICEroomies

Chapter 13 will be posted when TT reaches 400M.
Petrichor

Chapter Notes

We did it!! TT400M! We actually really did it!!! Congratulations TWICE, good job ONCE!
Here is Roommates chapter 13 as promised
Thank you for fighting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Grey. Everything was gray. The train was cold, loud, unwelcoming and perfect for the occasion. Perfect for a trip through town in the dead of night. With a sigh, Dahyun leaned against the window. The clammy sweatshirt stuck to her arms, still wet from the short walk from her home to the station.

…

“I… I’m not ok.” Dahyun said quietly. Hadn’t been sure she could get the words out, but now that she had, it felt like a burden lifted from her shoulders.

“No, you’re not.”

“I don’t know what to do.” Dahyun sighed, running a hand through her hair. Rubbed her tired eyes. They hurt. Probably the lenses. “I’ve just tried not to let it bother me, and mostly it hasn’t. I’ve been fine like ninety percent of the time.”

“Have you though?”

The speed that argument came at, stung more than Dahyun wanted to admit. “Yes. I mean. I’m sorry. I’m just tired and stressed but that’s college for you, right? I don’t know. I’m just being overdramatic. It’s probably nothing. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m-”

“Dahyun.”

Dahyun took a deep breath. Recognized the gravity in her voice and nodded to herself. “Yeah?”

“It’s 1:30 in the morning.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t-”

“Stop, that’s not what I meant.”

“Then what?” Dahyun frowned. Was maybe just a bit more confused still than she wanted to admit.

“You’re calling me at 1:30 in the morning saying you’re not ok. Finally. And now you’re trying to take it all back?”

“I just. I got scared, that I wasn’t over everything. That I wasn’t better.”
“But you’re not better, are you?”

Dahyun looked down at her knees and remembered for a moment all the things that had made her call in the first place. Knew that she had to stop running.

“No. I’m not better.”

Silence.

“How long have you known?” Dahyun asked.

“A while. I’m not sure. I was going to ask you to come over tomorrow- today- if you hadn’t called me yourself. I just knew there was no point trying to get through to you while you were studying for that exam.”

“I’m never going to play again.” Dahyun clenched her hand. It still ached horribly and the nerve jolted almost as if just to underline a point.

“I know.”

For a moment Dahyun didn’t answer. Just got up, out of the bed. Out of her room. Took step after step to relieve at least some of the pain. Winced when she turned on the lights in the bathroom, locking the door after her.

“Dahyun?”

“Can I…” Dahyun’s voice caught in her throat as she took out the lenses, placing one in each room in the little case, flushing them with salt water. Put on her glasses and looked at herself in the mirror. Saw how the tears glazed over her eyes almost immediately. “Can I come over? I don’t know what to do.”

“Do you want me to pick you up?”

Dahyun considered the offer for a moment. Longed for a little melancholy, honestly. “No, I’ll take the subway.”

“At this hour?”

“Trains do ride at this hour.”

“I know that.”

She sounded hurt, and Dahyun felt the guilt settle in every fiber of her body.

“Sorry. I just.”

“I get it. Just be safe.”

Dahyun nodded. Unlocked the bathroom. Walked into the dark hallway.

“I will.”

...
She wasn’t alone anymore, in the train compartment. A crowd of four people had entered at the last stop, tipsy and high-spirited. Played loud music and laughed. Music so loud that it deafened the sounds of the four-hand piano piece that played from Dahyun’s headphones. But there was no point in telling them to turn it down, so Dahyun merely covered her face with the hood of her sweatshirt and turned up the music, leaning her head against the window of the train.

Still, laughter broke through the song. Dahyun turned up the sound more, and disappeared in the memory of it. It was the first piece they had learned to play together, playing in the piano room during lunch breaks. It had been a wonderful moment, when they finally did it. Played it to perfection together. Student and teacher. Padawan and Maestro. A girl and her best friend in the entire world. Even now, with her aching hand, for the first time fully accepting that they would never play together again pressing down on her, it brought her comfort. She could almost feel the cool keys of the piano. Closed her eyes. Let herself be swept off by the song. Let herself engulf in the smell of cookies and the sound of Chaeyoung’s laughter. Her favorite sound, even overtaking the sound of just the right key finishing a song, leaving the heart satisfied and full. Yeah… Chaeyoung’s laughter was better than that.

The train stopped and started.

Dahyun counted the stations.

Knew exactly when she would have to get off.

Knew this trip well.

Even if she rarely took it with a smile on her face.

Promised herself to change that.

…

Low-angled rays of sunlight poured through the living room window, bathing the room in a cold light. Dahyun wrapped the blanket tighter around herself.

“Dahyun?” Chaeyoung’s voice was soft, too caring. Too worried even if it was obvious that she tried not to be.

“Chaeng-chaeng!” Dahyun smiled at her. Knew it was a mask. Just hoped that Chaeyoung would let it slide. And besides, most of the time, Dahyun could get away with the mask. Was too good of an actress to let the pain show. Good enough to fool her best friend. “What’s up?”

“How’s the pain?” Chaeyoung asked, joining Dahyun in the couch.

Dahyun shrugged and gnawed at her lip. The doctor had taken off the bandages this morning. It had been bad to look at her hand first in a cast and then in bandages after the surgery. But now that it was exposed, it was somehow worse. It was all pink and irritated, and Dahyun had to stop herself from scratching it every five minutes.

“Stop that.” Chaeyoung mumbled and covered her hand. Dahyun had been staring at it again. For
a moment Dahyun considered just letting it slide. Laugh it off. But she couldn’t.

“What if it won’t heal?” Dahyun whispered as she leaned into her best friend. Admitted her fears for once.

“It will.” Chaeyoung assured her. Nosed Dahyun’s temple and ran her thumb softly over the scar. Soothed the itching sensation and made it hurt a little less. “Did you sleep?”

Dahyun shook her head and felt tears prickle in the corners of her eyes. “I had to write the email. To my teacher. Tell her I couldn’t rejoin the class.”

“It’s for the best.” Chaeyoung hushed. “You’ll get back to it. You can always apply to take the class next year.”

Dahyun nodded. Then shook her head. “... The doctor said it’s unlikely that I can ever stretch my fingers enough to hit the wide chords without being in pain. Like the add-nine chords?”

“But even so, you might be able to play most songs once this heals properly.” Chaeyoung argued. Dahyun looked at her, hoping that the affection that soared through Dahyun’s heart would cut through the sense of hopelessness and frustration that filled the air between them.

“I don’t know if I can settle for less.” Dahyun admitted.

“Give it time.” Chaeyoung hummed and wrapped an arm around Dahyun’s shoulder. Held her close for a moment, then spoke again. “And in the meantime, I think I found a solution to the sleeping problem. You know, take the edge off?”

“You suggesting I drink it off? Or take benadryl?” Dahyun drew back a bit to look at her.

“No. I mean, benadryl could be a solution, but listen. I found these things at the drugstore. They’re not sleeping pills. They’re something called... Argh, what was it... uh, melatonin I think. Yeah, that. And there’s like no side effects to them. They even come with flavors, you know, as chewing tablets. It’s basically just something we already make in our brains but by adding more you get extra sleepy. So maybe it can counteract the anxiety enough so that you can fall asleep easier?”

Dahyun looked as Chaeyoung pulled out her phone and looked it up. It looked legit.

“I guess it’s worth a try. Otherwise I’ll just have Tzuyu supply me with benadryl. She always has them lying around for her hay fever.”

“Making the kid into a drug dealer. Brilliant idea, Kim Dahyun. Look, just try them, okay?”

“Oh, first of all, she’s a month younger than you are. But fine. I’ll try.” Dahyun nodded and leaned into Chaeyoung again.

“Good cause I already bought you a bottle. One pill before sleep, like half an hour before.”

“Let me guess, you got the strawberry flavored ones?” Dahyun raised an eyebrow, the air between them lighter somehow.

“Of course.” Chaeyoung shrugged.

Then she switched the window to YouTube, and insisted on showing Dahyun at least five different videos of cats being stupid.
Dahyun laughed that day.
Loved Chaeyoung.

... 

Dahyun had barely knocked before the door was flung open and arms were around her, brown hair blocking her vision and a raspy whimper in her voice. It didn’t matter that Dahyun was drenched from the pouring rain outside, Jihyo didn’t shy away for a second. Just held Dahyun close, arms so tight around her neck, her body pressing against Dahyun’s.

“I’m ok.” Dahyun mumbled and held the older girl tight, running a hand down her back.

“Shut up.” Jihyo mumbled, lips pressing into Dahyun’s hair. And Dahyun knew that she was crying. Could hear it in Jihyo’s breath and feel the older girl’s attempts to control her own shaking.

Dahyun held her tighter. Didn’t say anymore. Just let Jihyo hang onto her.

It should be awkward standing in an empty hallway at 2:30 in the morning, but it wasn’t. It was just... Jihyo. And for the longest time they stood there, arms around each other, their silent conversation impossibly more sincere than the promises they had made the night of Chaeyoung’s birthday.

Eventually, Jihyo’s grip loosened, and she drew back, wiping Dahyun’s cheeks before she dried her own. Gave a wet laugh and shook her head. “You’re such an idiot.”

“I know. A dumb little butterfly, right?” Dahyun made little flapping motions with her hands, just to hear that laugh again, if only but once.

“The dumbest.” Jihyo sniffled. “You’re both... So dumb.”

“Wait... Both?” Dahyun frowned and looked past Jihyo, into the apartment.

Tzuyu was sitting in the couch in her favorite hoodie - the one with the big paw print on the front - wrapped in a fluffy pink blanket, her hair in braids and a steaming mug of tea in her hands. She looked at Dahyun and smiled, shaking her head. Dahyun knew what she was thinking. Idiot. And Dahyun was inclined to agree.

“Well, as a whole, you still take the prize.” Jihyo said dryly as she pulled Dahyun into the apartment, “But right now I’m inclined to mark both of you as idiots. To think that you convinced each other-”

Jihyo seemed lost for words. Then she clicked her tongue and seemed to make up her mind.

“No, you know what? No more scolding. Just... sit down next to fool number one over there.”

Jihyo gestured at Tzuyu, the youngest looking somewhere between sheepish and slightly offended.

Dahyun felt a bit like laughing. Ashamed of their stupid ass decision, yes, but also just a little bit like laughing at Jihyo. Just because she was being such a mother trying to deal with her kids after they had chosen to color with crayons all over her wall. And it was ironic, simply because her natural state in life was anything but motherly. It was just... loud. Weird. And Dahyun missed that side of her, however humorous her current exasperation was.
While Jihyo mumbled under her breath and disappeared into the kitchen, Dahyun turned to join said fool number one on the couch. But just as Dahyun made to sit down she noticed a stack of fluffy fabrics on the armrest. Gave a chuckle and eyed the pile.

“Don’t even try to resist, she’s been in a mood ever since I called.”

“You called her?” Dahyun grabbed the clothes.

“I maybe sorta broke down a little after the test. Too tired I guess… And I didn’t want to disturb you in case you were sleeping.” Tzuyu shrugged and sipped from her tea.

“So you’re good?” Dahyun frowned. “You and Jihyo I mean? I thought for a second- you know, the party? I thought maybe you’d been arguing, but I didn’t wanna pry.”

“No, we’re good.” Tzuyu nodded. “Just a misunderstanding.”

“That’s good.”

“Yeah.” Tzuyu sent Dahyun a shy smile, then looked at her clothes. “You should change. You’re drenched.”

“Oh, right.” Dahyun looked down at the fluffy clothes in her hand. Sent Tzuyu a smile and turned from her, poking her head into the kitchen to Jihyo, kissing her once again tearstained cheek before borrowing the bathroom to change.

There was a tranquility about Jihyo’s place that allowed Dahyun to distance herself from the panic and confusion that had overwhelmed her. Everything somehow just became easier when wearing Jihyo’s fluffy pyjama pants.

When she came back out of the bathroom, Jihyo was there, waiting for her with a mug of steaming hot tea. Took Dahyun by the arm and sat her down beside Tzuyu, wrapping her up in the blanket and then put a cup of chamomile tea in her hands. She looked down at Dahyun and Tzuyu with crossed arms and raised eyebrows, sniffling.

“You’re both idiots.”

Dahyun looked over at Tzuyu who in turn looked at Dahyun, both smiling slightly.

Jihyo shook her head and told them to drink their tea. Found pens and paper and chocolate, went to stand in front of them and had both of them move over a bit, sitting down between them.

“Did you figure out things with work?” Jihyo looked at Tzuyu.

The paper in her hands already had a schedule on it. Tzuyu’s, from the look of it. Why she worked so much when she only had to pay for a small college dorm room, Dahyun didn’t get. She rarely bought herself anything.

“I think we’re all set.”

“And your head?”

“Me and my head are good.” Tzuyu emptied her cup of tea, holding it tightly between her hands.

“Your head?” Dahyun frowned.
“She means all my thoughts running around in there.” Tzuyu leaned forwards a little to look past Jihyo.

“You should try to sleep then.” Jihyo said. “Use the bed, we’ll fit.”

“Jihyo…” Tzuyu said quietly. “I don’t”

“It’s okay.” Jihyo reassured her. “I’m ok.”

“But-” Tzuyu tried, but as Dahyun caught her eye she clamped up. The blanket fell from around her as she got up.

“We’ll join you soon.” Jihyo said softly.

“Mh,” Tzuyu eyed Dahyun again, “Just... don’t let her lie in the middle. She kicks.”

“I know. I’ll be the middle.” Jihyo said, and for a moment Tzuyu pressed her lips together tight, in an obvious attempt not to smile, though her exposed ears revealed her. Moved just a little bit.

“Goodnight, Tzuyu.” Jihyo said quietly. Smiled fondly at the younger girl.

“Goodnight, Jihyo.” Tzuyu hummed and walked into the kitchen with her cup.

As soon as the door to Jihyo’s room closed, Dahyun felt her heart attempt to bring her out of the calm, but she leaned on Jihyo and let the older girl take her hand. Let her rub over the scar. Let her help.

“Okay, now. How about we start from… well, the start.”

“Would you like me to lie down on the couch so you can play shrink? Hear all about my troubled childhood?” Dahyun asked jokingly.

She felt her heart race and heard the rain hammering against the windows. She really wasn’t sure how it would go over if she had to tell everything. It was easier just to keep avoiding it.

Jihyo looked at her, squeezed her hand and told her to drink her tea.

Somewhere, between the fuzzy pyjamas, the smell of chamomile and Jihyo’s soft humming, Dahyun started talking. Told about everything that had gone down since Sana moved in. About everything that had happened since Dahyun stopped coming over.

Couldn’t look Jihyo in the eyes. Talked to the tea instead, staring at it as it turned cold between her hands.

…
“So you’re… back where you were before Chaeyoung moved out?”

Dahyun nodded. “I think I am.”

“Except this time you’re also in love.” Jihyo really couldn’t help that dumb little smile on her face, could she?

Dahyun pressed her lips together. “I don’t… know if I’d say ‘in love’. But I like her….”

“You’ve rambled about her for forty five minutes, I think we’re well beyond a schoolgirl crush here, Dahyun.” Jihyo raised an eyebrow and then took the half-empty cup of cold tea from Dahyun and placed it on the table. Took Dahyun’s hands instead.

“… I guess that’s a fair point.” Dahyun sighed, squeezing Jihyo’s hands. Knew that she held on more for herself than for Dahyun. “But how can those two things even be happening at the same time? How can I be sure that Sana isn’t just a projection or whatever it is shrinks say about these things? I barely know the girl.”

“I think the fact that you worry about exactly that, proves that it’s not the case. And you do know her. You’ve lived together for what? A month?”

“Yeah, that’s about right. But it’s just inconvenient.” Dahyun groaned. “I like her so much.”

“I’m glad.” Jihyo hummed.

“Why are you glad? This is not what I need right now at all!” Dahyun groaned, leaning on Jihyo.

“Maybe it is. Because for the first time you’ve started reaching out on your own. Not because we nag you. And I’m not saying she’s gonna fix you. I’m definitely not, that’s not her responsibility. I’m saying you’re changing because you’re letting someone in for once. Way in there.” Jihyo let Dahyun’s right hand go, to poke gently at Dahyun’s forehead.

“Not my heart?”

“No, we all live there, but you’re letting her into that odd brain of yours. And it’s okay to like her. It’s even okay to be in love with her. Just try to get your life under control before trying to get her into bed.”

“I-” Dahyun felt her cheeks burn immediately, and from Jihyo’s chuckle it showed clearly. “I mean, I-”

“You really are such a useless lesbian, huh?” Jihyo said in an amused tone.

“I really am,” Dahyun sighed and shook her head with a smile. “How do you even do it? I mean, how do you get past the fear that everything is just gonna change and fall to the ground?” Dahyun asked.

“I… have no clue.” Jihyo admitted quietly. “Alcohol was my solution and look how that turned out.”

“Oh God no, I’m never gonna drink again.” Dahyun groaned.

“Right, you keep believing that.” Jihyo clicked her tongue and held Dahyun tighter. “Now I think I have solutions to some of your problems, but it will have to wait until tomorrow, because this is going to require help from everyone. I mean, it’s not exactly an easy situation you’ve put yourself in. Well, I would say, he put you in but you won’t let me blame him-”
“It was an accident.” Dahyun interjected.

“Still hate him.” Jihyo mumbled.

“Don’t.” Dahyun begged. “We’ll never know whose fault it actually was.”

“Fine… But you’re okay with me recruiting the group?”

Dahyun shrugged. “It’s probably better they all know about… about everything anyway. They’ve been worried.”

“Yes, we have.” Jihyo kissed her hair. “Come on. It’s almost half past three, we’re going to need all of the few hours we can get.”

“I’m sorry to have kept you up like this…” Dahyun said and stifled a yawn.

“I’m not. I just want my happy, stupid, little Dahyunnie back.” Jihyo got up and pulled Dahyun with her.

“Are you sure I shouldn’t sleep out here? Sure, your bed is big, but three people? Isn’t that a bit much?” Dahyun frowned.

“I’ve had Jeongyeon and Nayeon in it more times than I can count and those two practically fight in their sleep.” Jihyo said dryly.

“Do you plan to get all of us into bed by the end?” Dahyun joked, her eyes drooping, hiding another yawn behind her hand.

“In one way or another.” Jihyo winked and dragged Dahyun with her.

...

Dahyun could hear the rain. Only the rain. How it fell around her, onto her, soaking her to the bone. Felt how the water ran down her back and down her face. Could feel the hairs sticking to her face and her heartbeat in her throat.

But no matter what she did, Dahyun couldn’t go faster. Barely moved no matter how fast she moved her legs.

“Dahyun.”

The voice was distant, barely audible through the rain. Called for her over and over. Then cursed. Cursed?

Dahyun woke.

For a moment she was two places at once. Out in the rain and safe in whoever’s arms were around her. Whoever she had been kicking. And then she was fully awake. All at once. Except her face was
still wet with the rain… with tears. And the realization made her body shake worse than it already was, and she tried to hold on to whomever was keeping her safe, but her left hand was still in a cast and the other was awkwardly stuck against her own stomach.

“Hey, Dahyun! It’s okay, I’m here!” The voice was raspy with sleep but undeniably belonging to Nayeon.

Dahyun couldn’t respond. Couldn’t think. Could just press herself into Nayeon’s body, somehow halfway sitting, halfway lying in her arms, the older girl leaning into the corner, tugging Dahyun impossibly closer.

“It was just a dream.” Nayeon said soothingly. “It was just a dream, you’re okay. You’re safe.”

But Dahyun just shook. Tried to listen to Nayeon’s voice, but couldn’t stop shaking. Bit down on her lip to stop the sobs, and tasted blood. But Nayeon didn’t walk away. Didn’t stop talking.

It had been almost a month, and still, nothing seemed to be better. She was supposed to get the cast off in three days, and then have the surgery. But she wasn’t ready. Wasn’t ready at all. Because one thing was having her stress relief, her biggest passion, taken from her for a month. Another thing was risking that they took it away forever. That he had taken it away from her. But it wasn’t his fault, she could’ve just looked. The only thing she could do to cope, was just to blame the rain. Otherwise she’d have no-one left to hate but herself. Poor little Dahyun who couldn’t be alone. Poor little Dahyun who was so caught up in her own misery and fear that she barely sensed the world around her. Poor little Dahyun who hadn’t gotten through a single night in a month without a nightmare, hadn’t gotten through a single day without an unexplainable panic attack. Who winced every time a car passed by her. And it was all so stupid. She was so stupid. It was just an accident. Just bad luck, and she was so... weak.

Somewhere between it all, Dahyun passed out, a whimper leaving her as she drifted off, still shaking in the older girl’s arms, exhausted to the point where she couldn’t stay awake even for a second longer.

Nayeon was still there when morning came.

…

Something was warm against Dahyun’s face as she woke, and she realized that it was sunlight. The storm had passed and made way for a strong spring sun. The scent of lilac filled Dahyun’s nostrils, coming from the sheets and the pillow. Jihyo. But the bed was empty. And voices were coming from the living room. Jihyo and Tzuyu were up, it seemed, and had let her sleep. For a minute, Dahyun merely stared up at the ceiling fan before turning to check her phone, almost poking herself in the eye as she put on her glasses. Subconsciously she noted that it was half past ten, but her eyes fell only on the single email notification on her screen. No other messages. Not that she had expected any. But the name on the email kept claiming her attention. Nothing good ever comes from an email from a professor when it’s subject is ‘concerning missing assignment’. Had Dahyun forgotten to hand it in? Maybe she had. But there was no room in her head to deal with it, her skin flushing with heat that quickly settled in the shells of her ears, her cheeks and her arms. She had definitely written it. Clutching a hand to her chest, Dahyun tried to get her heart to stop beating so fast. Logically Dahyun
knew how to handle a situation like this, even if she had never been in it before, but her brain could barely connect far enough to realize whose laughter was forcing its way through the sound of her pulse rushing in her ears.

Nayeon.

Nayeon’s laugh. Nayeon’s cackling… Nayeon? Why the hell was Nayeon here?

Leaving the phone in the bed, Dahyun untangled herself from the covers and walked out of Jihyo’s little bedroom, trying her best not to look at the little keyboard in the corner that Jihyo had bought after her high school graduation, just to learn how to play for fun.

Dahyun did indeed find Nayeon in the living room, but also Mina and Jeongyeon, as well as Jihyo and Tzuyu. And they were all looking at her. Dahyun, busy trying to make sense of it all, just stared from one to the next, their faces expressing worry and care in varying balances. Then Jihyo was there by her side, having jumped from her seat next to Mina, pulling Dahyun by the wrist and sitting her down on the exact seat that Jihyo had just left, leaving her squeezed between Nayeon and Mina. Yet neither of them were supposed to be here right now. So why were they?

“What are-”

“Reinforcements” Jeongyeon said from her seat next to Nayeon.

The frown on Dahyun’s face seemed almost permanent by now. “For what?”

“What do you think?” Nayeon rolled her eyes and put a hand on Dahyun’s knee. “For you.”

For a moment, Dahyun opened her mouth to protest but then remembered what Jihyo had said. Help from everyone. They were here… for her. To help her. But-

“Where’s Chaeyoungie?” Dahyun asked, looking around for her best friend.

“What, aren’t we enough for you?” Nayeon feigned a pout. If she was here, then Chaeyoung surely-unless she was mad at Dahyun for not coming to her? Was it possible that she was actually angry with Dahyun? Guilt tugged at Dahyun’s insides.

“She’s in the bathroom.” Jeongyeon said, obviously sensing Dahyun’s fear, and a wave of relief flushed over Dahyun.

“So you’re basically having a full group intervention for me?” Dahyun tried to relieve the mood, but she could hear the indignation in her own voice.

“Not Momo and Sana. We didn’t know if they knew, and-”

“They don’t.” Dahyun pressed her lips tight together. “I haven’t really gotten around to telling them…”

“Don’t you think it’s about time?” Mina asked.

“I just don’t want them to feel sorry for me. What’s done is done and there’s nothing to do except get on with my life. And they- yeah, they still need to know.”

“They won’t love you less.” Mina said. “And they won’t pity you.”
“How can you know that?” Dahyun asked, finding Mina’s eyes. Had looked into that face so often, but never realized just how much love she found in it until now. Honestly had no clue what she had done to win Mina’s friendship to such an extent. There had never been anything beyond friendship between them, but for some reason, there had always been a mutual instinct to protect and reassure each other. And the words she spoke, her small voice held such power that it almost liberated Dahyun.

“None of us love you less. And none of us pity you. In fact, we all quite admire you.”

Dahyun smiled. Didn’t know what else to do, and couldn’t have helped it even if she wanted to. And just as Mina put a hand on Dahyun’s other knee, Nayeon’s thumb still rubbing soothingly over the left one, a door unlocked and Chaeyoung appeared from the bathroom. One look told Dahyun that she had been crying, her eyes red, and her hair a mess. She didn’t say hi. Barely looked at Dahyun. Yet when she joined the rest, she sat down right in front of Dahyun, back against her knees, and she gave a wet laugh when Dahyun tried to tickle her sides with her toes. Then Jihyo came back from the kitchen, carrying a plate with more pieces of toast than Dahyun could probably eat, all with strawberry jam. And a glass of chocolate milk.

Dahyun shared the toast with Chaeyoung. Drank all the chocolate milk in one go.

No-one spoke, just looked at Dahyun. But she wished they would speak. Wished they wouldn’t just observe her. Because with every passing minute it got harder to believe Mina’s words - that they didn’t pity her. Right now, she just felt silly. They were all being extremely overdramatic. And so was she. It was her fault that they were sitting here - probably ditching school and maybe even shifts, to be here. And for what? A stupid decision to pull an all-nighter. A bit of anxiety. A dream that wouldn’t be more than that. But that was nothing. They all had dreams they would never achieve, right? Knew that Jeongyeon did. Knew that Chaeyoung and Mina did too. Jihyo. If she just passed this exam and get her late assignment- god, the late assignment. She still hadn’t done anything about that. She picked at her cuticles to avoid rubbing her fingers over the scar. Then Nayeon’s hand was in hers.

But it just made her feel more pathetic.

None of us pity you

Lies.

…

“Dahyun?” Nayeon’s voice was quiet. So quiet that Dahyun barely heard it.

Dahyun had been sitting with her nose buried in her laptop, reading a long research paper on the brain’s perception of major and minor chords in modern music. But now that Nayeon sat down next to her, hugging her knees and biting her cheek, Dahyun closed the laptop and put it onto the coffee table.
“You ok?” Dahyun asked. It was all she could manage.

“Yeah.” Nayeon smiled nervously. “How is your hand?”

“All good.” Dahyun nodded and showed her, clenching it and releasing it. Lied.

Nayeon nodded and took Dahyun’s hand between both of hers. Patted it gently. “Good… good. And- and you’ve been sleeping well recently? Taking your meds and stuff?”

“Of course!” Dahyun smiled. Lied.

She didn’t want to lie. Especially to Nayeon. Nayeon, who had carried her through nightmares time and time again, who kept their secret from Chaeyoung to spare her the worry, even though she thoroughly disapproved of it. Nayeon, who let Dahyun heal on her own terms, merely holding her. Yet she still felt like the same little scared girl she had become that night. Poor little Dahyun who always had everyone worrying about her. No. No more of that. From now on she was going to run on the good old fake it ‘till you make it train. And she was doing well. She could pull this off. Nayeon’s relieved smile told her that.

“So, what’s up?” Dahyun asked, turning in the couch to see her better.

“I-” Nayeon started, then cleared her throat. “God, why is this so hard.”

“What?” Dahyun frowned.

“I want… I want Chaeyoung to move in with me.” Nayeon mumbled.

Dahyun felt her heart stop, if only for a second, then beat harder than before.

Life without Chaeyoung…

She had known it would come sooner or later. The minute she signed the lease with Chaeyoung that she would some day have to find a new roommate. Even if they were barely dating at the time, Nayeon and Chaeyoung were already too stable, too good for each other to not last. But it hurt nonetheless. In that moment, it felt like betrayal. Nayeon was taking something from Dahyun, and Dahyun had failed to let her know she wasn’t ready to give it up yet. And now she was left with all the consequences and no-one to blame except herself.

“Dahyun?” Nayeon asked.

“Huh? Oh. Yeah, it’s-” Dahyun nodded and forced herself to think only about her friends, taking herself out of the equation. “It’s a great idea.”

It was. It really was. For those two it would be perfect to live together. They would both thrive living so close, basically already sleeping over every or every other night, spending most waking moments together. But Dahyun couldn’t help thinking about the other benefit. That neither of them would have to worry about her, if they weren’t here. That she could just get a roommate who didn’t know Dahyun and who didn’t have to ever know her.

They could be happy.

“Are you sure?” Nayeon frowned.

“Yeah! I think it’s brilliant!” Dahyun smiled widely. “And your place is so much better than this. I really think it’s a good idea. I really do.”
Dahyun muffled her sobs into the pillow that night.

…

There’s a certain point you reach, when your friends stare at you eating toast with jam for too long, and no-one speaks. Dahyun reached that point just around now.

“So,” Dahyun started, putting the now empty plate down next to Chaeyoung on the floor. “What’s the plan?”

“Well, we gotta get you better, don’t we?” Jihyo raised an eyebrow at her.

Dahyun pressed her lips together and tried really hard not to protest. It didn’t work out all that well for her.

“Really, Jihyo, I’m-”

“If you say you’re fine one more time I’m gonna smack you so hard.” Chaeyoung turned and glared at Dahyun.

Dahyun glared back. Then deflated.

“So, I might be a little bit anxious sometimes.”

“More like really anxious most of the time.” Jihyo said dryly.

“And you’re not sleeping.” Nayeon added. “Bet you’re still having nightmares too.”

“And you forget things. All the time. Your schedule, your pencil case, your homework.” Tzuyu looked at her with kind eyes under a stern expression.

“And you freak out about things you never used to freak out about. Details. Little things.” Jeongyeon continued

“Getting panic attacks because you’re so scared of losing your job?” Mina took her hand and squeezed it.

Dahyun looked around at them all. Felt cornered. “I mean-”

“Look, how about we stop listing all the bad things and start figuring out how to fix it?” Jihyo suggested.

Dahyun nodded.

“You’re working a lot at the moment. More than you should with that hand, I mean you’re not supposed to work more than 20 hours when it’s not even fully healed.”

“I have a loan to pay out, and 20 hours barely covers the interest rate, let alone food and rent.” Dahyun admitted.
“The surgery bill, right?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Yup. To fix- to… to operate on the nerve. And to pay for classes.”

“And you’re still doing max credits?” Nayeon asked.

“I have to. I dropped two high credit classes right before exams last semester because I couldn’t play. They offered to let me take the exam this summer but there’s no way. So the credits and the money are out the window.”

“So if you took less classes,” Jihyo started, but Dahyun interrupted.

“I’d be graduating later than expected which means longer time to get a hopefully well-paid job so I can get rid of the bill and not just pay interests.”

“What about summer classes?” Tzuyu suggested.

“Huh?”

“Do a few low credit classes with me, this summer, that way we can both take less subjects next semester.”

“I…” Dahyun couldn’t focus. “I just need to move on with my life. I can’t have it hanging over my head forever, it’s just. It’s bad enough that I can’t play anymore but to have this reminding me every time the month rolls over?”

Dahyun’s throat started closing up and she gulped to try and relieve the sensation. Didn’t work very well.

“You know you can always borrow the money from me.” Mina offered.

“We’ve been over this five times, I’m not taking your money.” Dahyun looked at her. It wasn’t a secret that Mina was well off, but there was no way Dahyun was going to start lending money from her friends. Couldn’t have that in a friendship.

“I can fix the loan.” Nayeon said, to everyone’s surprise, including her own.

“How?” Dahyun stared at her, confused.

“Well, I think I can fix it, anyway.” Nayeon corrected herself and started explaining about creditors and freezing interest and how most creditors are quite willing to lower the interest or freeze it if they see a risk that they might not get their money at all. “They live off of making money because people need more than they have, but they’d rather make a little money than risk you not paying at all.”

“How do you even know that?” Chaeyoung asked.

“My mom explained it to me, how she handled it after my dad left and she had all the debt on the house.” Nayeon shrugged and turned to Dahyun. “Just leave that to me, we’re going to call as soon as their phone hours are open.”

Dahyun looked at her in amazement.

“And I’ve got big boss man Yang-nim handled.” Jeongyeon cut in “He might be an ass but you’re his best waitress.”

Dahyun felt warmth creep up her neck, and she opened her mouth to protest but Mina spoke before
she could. “She’s right.”

Jeongyeon continued. “So tomorrow, you and I are going to go talk to him and get the schedule switched around. Mina and I already talked about it, and with two of the others as well, and if it’s okay with you, we’re going to switch so you get more of the half shifts instead of the full ones.”

Dahyun looked from Jeongyeon to Mina and back again. She opened her mouth several times to say something but she couldn’t get a word out. Somewhere in between Tzuyu’s offer and Nayeon’s words about creditors and the fact that Mina and Jeongyeon had talked to the other waiters at the job, Dahyun had forgotten how to breathe. It was all so much. Too much. But they were all doing it for her, and she was being so silly, it was all too much. There wasn’t a need for all of this. She would just be causing them pain and trouble. Jeongyeon and Mina both worked so much already and she was going to cause them an even bigger workload. She felt tears prickle at the corners of her eyes. Hated that she was getting them all to do so much. But she couldn’t let them see.

“I’ll be right back.” Dahyun muttered. “Gotta pee.”

She got up and left for the bathroom before any of them could say a word. As soon as she had locked the door, Dahyun slid onto the floor, clutching her pounding heart. It was all her fault. If she could just be stronger, get everything under control, then there would be no need for all this. The way they were reacting was like she had stopped working altogether but she was working just fine. If she could just get her heart to stop trying to break her ribs; if she could just stop being so dizzy, stop the tears that pressed against her tightly shut eyelids, she would be fine.

“Dahyun.”

Dahyun looked up, recognizing the voice. But she couldn’t let her see her like that.

“Dahyun. Dahyun, open the door before I kick it in.”

Squinting slightly, Dahyun wondered if there was an actual possibility that such a small person could excess enough strength to break down a door. But she knew that Chaeyoung would at least try. So really, there was no way around it. Didn’t even bother to try and get it together, merely shuffled and reached up, tears trickling down her cheeks as she unlocked the door. It opened gently, and Chaeyoung snuck in.

“Too much?”

“Too much.”

Chaeyoung locked the door again and sat down next to Dahyun, offering her hand. Dahyun didn’t take it, but instead let the weight of her entire body lean on her best friend.

“One thing at a time.” Chaeyoung kissed her hair.

“Mh.” Dahyun mumbled into her neck.
Felt safe in Chaeyoung’s arms, in Jihyo’s home.

…

Dahyun was barely standing. Could barely see, the darkness so dense that she could barely see a hand if she stretched it in front of her. But she could see the figure sitting on the bench in front of the restaurant. Could feel the arm that linked with hers and tugged her along. Knew without looking that it was Mina’s.

She should’ve known, even without seeing her face, who was sitting on the bench.

“Jihyo? What are-” Dahyun’s voice caught as Jihyo stood up, facing them, her worried eyes searching Dahyun’s face.

“You’re coming with me tonight.” Jihyo said in a small voice. Unusually small.

“Why? I don’t understand?” Dahyun mumbled, swaying slightly. Mina’s grip on her arm strengthened.

“I’m sorry, I had to.” Mina muttered, and let go just as Jihyo’s arm wrapped around her shoulder. Like a kid handed from one parent to the next.

“I’m… Jihyo, it’s two in the morning.” Dahyun squinted at her. Saw Mina walk away without another word, and then heard the sound of a car door.

“I know. And you’re sleeping at my place tonight.” Jihyo said.

Dahyun was too tired to protest. Too tired to defend herself. Too tired.

Jihyo’s body was warm in the freezing January night as she was led to Jihyo’s old red car, and just as they reached it, Mina drove past them, an apologetic look on her face and her lip tucked between her teeth.

Only then did Dahyun understand that Mina had called Jihyo.

Dahyun stumbled. Jihyo was the only thing there to hold her up. Patiently, the older girl opened the door to the passenger seat and helped Dahyun in.

“You’re okay. We’re gonna make you all okay again.” Jihyo muttered and closed the door. Got in and drove off, in the opposite direction of Dahyun’s home.

They didn’t speak - just listened to Jihyo’s calming playlist.

It almost helped.
“When do you have class tomorrow?” Jihyo asked as she pulled the covers over herself and Dahyun twenty minutes later.

“I don’t- I don’t remember.” Dahyun mumbled and fumbled around for her phone. It wasn’t there. Where was her phone? Had she even brought it to work?

Tears fell.

“I’ll call Tzuyu in the morning.” Jihyo wrapped an arm around her. “Just sleep.”

“I don’t know if I can.” Dahyun croaked.

“Try. I’m right here.” Jihyo hummed, but Dahyun merely shuffled and turned her back to Jihyo. Hid.

“Don’t tell Chaeyoung about this.” Dahyun begged into the pillow.

“But she’s your best friend.” Jihyo sounded absolutely devastated.

“Promise me.” Dahyun croaked, grasping the pillow as tight as she could, her hand throbbing with pain. “Don’t tell her. Or Nayeon.”

“But I-”

“Just promise me.” Dahyun sobbed.

“Okay... Okay, alright.” Jihyo gave in. “I promise. If you promise to call me before things get this bad next time.”

Dahyun nodded and felt Jihyo’s hand on her arm. Dahyun turned. Buried her face in Jihyo’s neck and let the older girl sing her to sleep.

Slept a record-breaking five hours for the first time in four weeks.

Mina had to call Jihyo three more times before Dahyun started doing it herself.

…

One by one Dahyun’s friends came into the bathroom.

Chaeyoung held onto her the entire time, guiding the conversations; was her pillar.

Nayeon was first. The three of them sat on the floor together and called Dahyun’s creditor. Nayeon explained the situation and Dahyun tried to explain her budget and how much income she could realistically manage, then Chaeyoung cut ten hours off that shift schedule, and Dahyun reluctantly agreed.

It took almost half an hour, but eventually they convinced him to freeze the interest for six months
and then keep her on a low interest plan until the end of college.

Nayeon thanked him sincerely. Then called him a cold-hearted shithead the minute they had hung up.

Dahyun loved her.

Jihyo brought ice cream and more tea, and sang for her until Chaeyoung called them out for being overly cheesy. Dahyun laughed.

Tzuyu brought her calendar and one for Dahyun - had sent Mina down to buy one while Nayeon was helping out. They filled it with time tables and reading plans and time to relax. Then agreed to take two summer courses together to make up for credits so Dahyun wouldn’t feel inclined to take max credits next semester.

Chaeyoung drew little Mickey Mouse ears one the pages where she had put herself on Disney Duty as she called it. Once a week she was going to come over and make sure Dahyun did something fun. And in Chaeyoung’s words, what was more fun than Disney movies and snacks? Nothing. At least nothing when those Disney movies and snacks were accompanied by Chaeyoung.

“Can we invite Momo?” Dahyun asked hesitantly. She didn’t know if Chaeyoung had wanted it to be something all by herself, but despite everything, Dahyun found that she missed Momo terribly and knew that no-one loved singing along to Disney music more than Momo.

“Of course. But then we’re buying extra snacks.”

“Oh, definitely.” Dahyun agreed.

By two in the afternoon the sun was shining through the little bathroom window. But Dahyun’s stomach was turning at the thought of work. She knew from her scheduling with Tzuyu that she would only be able to manage half the amount of hours she had worked per week the past two months. And getting Yang-nim to agree to that was the least of her problems. It was Mina and Jeongyeon and the other waiters she was worried about.

She could barely manage letting them through the door. There were too many people all of a sudden.

It was too warm.

The sun was too hot on her cheek.

It took almost an hour. An hour of Mina and Jeongyeon reassuring Dahyun that she wasn’t a bother; that it wasn’t going to burden them to change shifts. Dahyun could feel their determination, knew that they had talked this over before addressing it with her. With her new schedule Dahyun would go from 33 hours per week to 21, one of these being an 11 hour shift and two being half shifts. And
Jeongyeon promised to kick Yang-nim’s ass if he didn’t comply, but Chaeyoung just laughed at her and the other two followed.

They all knew Jeongyeon was about as hardcore as butter left out of the fridge on a warm day.

…

“There is no way in hell I’m going to wait until morning. I need to see her!”

Dahyun recognized the voice, half-asleep and still quite heavily drugged. But there was no doubt who was shouting, and who she was shouting for. With a shaky smile, Dahyun looked at the clock on the wall. Three in the morning.

Felt pain and love hit her like violent waves.

“Miss, please calm down.” Another voice said, more mature and controlled, but definitely not happy with the situation. “It’s the middle of the night and she’s probably sleeping, she’s been through a lot in the past hours, and it’d be much better if-”

“Please… Please! I’m awake!” Dahyun said as loudly as she could. She paid for it as her body sent a ripple of pain through every fiber in her body. Still, she kept going with all the force she had left.

“Let her in. Please!”

“It’s the middle of the night,” The nurse said exasperatedly, “visiting hours start at nine.”

“Just five minutes please. Please let me see her. Five minutes then I’ll come back at a normal hour.” Jeongyeon pleaded with the nurse.

Dahyun didn’t bother try to keep the tears back. She was too tired. Was too full of love for her friend who had obviously come here straight from work instead of going home.

“Five minutes.” The nurse’s voice was strict but compassionate. “And then you come back at a sane time. During visiting hours.”

A surge coursed through Dahyun, but before she could even get through one steadying breath, Jeongyeon slipped between the curtains, providing a little bit of privacy for Dahyun in all her pain. As soon as Jeongyeon saw Dahyun however, her face screwed up, and Dahyun could almost read her mind. And she was blaming herself.

“Jeongyeon… Please.” Dahyun said with what little breath she had left, reaching out with her good hand.

For a moment Jeongyeon looked like she might faint, but her chin and lip trembled and she walked around to Dahyun’s side, taking the hand and sitting down on the red chair next to Dahyun’s bed. She didn’t speak. Just crumbled as Dahyun rubbed circles over her skin with her thumb.

“It’s not your fault.” Dahyun said.

Jeongyeon shook her head violently, and looked up at Dahyun with eyes that sought forgiveness
more than anything.

“It’s okay. I’m okay.”

“No you’re not... you’re all... Dahyun, your face. Your arm... your hand.”

“I’m okay.” Dahyun repeated.

“H-how long do you have to stay here for?” Jeongyeon whispered.

“I don’t know. It’s just some bruised ribs. And the concussion wasn’t too bad. But the hand is—” Dahyun’s voice broke off.

“It’s just broken, right? Broken wrists can be fixed.” Jeongyeon insisted.

“I don’t know. They talked about a nerve. I’m scared.” She could barely muster the words as they spilled from her tired mind.

“I’m sure it’s going to be fine.” Jeongyeon reassured her, even though they both had the same fear. That this was the end of Dahyun’s life as she had known it, the end of every possible scenario of her future that she had imagined.

Jeongyeon didn’t leave.

...

Never in her life had Dahyun imagined this part would be so hard. This last part. Even though she would have to tell Momo as well, this was somehow way harder.

Almost ironically, the key stuck in the door as she unlocked the apartment on tired feet, and was met with the sound of the TV and Sana in the couch, wrapped in the pink and yellow blanket, hugging her legs. But her eyes weren’t on the TV.

“Hi.” Dahyun said quietly, taking off her shoes.

“Hey.” Sana’s voice was low, but melodic as ever.

“Can I sit?” Dahyun asked as she walked over to the couch, rubbing over her thumb distractedly.

Sana nodded.

“I—I’ve been worried.”

“I’m sorry.” Dahyun said, sitting down at a respectable distance from Sana. “I should have called.”

Dahyun hesitated, tried to find out how to start; where to start. It was all such a mess. She just knew how the story ended. And it wasn’t in a good way. Not yet anyway. But there was hope now at least, that it eventually could.

Maybe it was this thought, that made Dahyun reach out, or maybe it was just an inability to stay
away from Sana for one second longer. But no matter the reason, Dahyun reached out, and tugged lightly at Sana’s wrist, until her right hand was in Dahyun’s left. Then Dahyun turned their hands so the scar faced them both. With a wriggle of the thumb, Dahyun called attention to it.

“I have to tell you something.”

“I figured you would eventually.” Sana said softly, shuffling gently to sit cross-legged, closer to Dahyun. Placed their clasped hands on her thigh. With her free hand she reached out and ghosted a finger over the scar.

“I noticed it a few times. It’s a surgical scar, right?”

“How can you see that?” Dahyun said, her mouth falling slightly open in surprise.

“It looks like the ones my mom has.” Sana shrugged. “Though it’s a lot smaller.”

Dahyun closed her mouth and stared at the blonde girl, the roots showing more than ever.

“Jeongyeon’s sister is an actress.” Dahyun said distractedly, noticing Sana’s little black baby-hairs by her hairline.

“What?” Sana tilted her head, a frown on her face that made Dahyun return to reality.

“Jeongyeon’s sister. She’s an actress, does plays and movies, mostly background work so far. Had a small role in a play back in November, and the last night, Jeongyeon wanted to surprise her and come see the play even though she had already seen it two times. So we agreed to split her shift, because I was working on this huge composition piece at the time, with Chaeyoung and Jihyo. So I was supposed to work on that until seven, then take over her shift at eight so she could go see the last half of the play. It was the best we could fit in, but it was just good enough. Except I completely forgot about time, and I ended up rushing out of the apartment.” Dahyun paused when Sana’s grasp loosened for a second, and Dahyun held on tighter. Looked up at Sana and her eyes glazed over already. As if she knew what Dahyun was about to say.

“It was pouring down and already dark, and the rain drenched me completely. I was freezing, shaking so hard. I could barely see a hand in front of me. And I don’t actually know if it was my fault for not looking properly or his. But there was a car, hit the front wheel of my bike, and somehow miraculously not me, but the speed was enough to throw me onto the street. I broke a rib and got some hairline fractures. Lots of bruises, my arm and chest looked like someone had put military paint on me. But my hand. It hit the edge of a storm drain and the wrist was fractured. The nerve right here was badly damaged.” Dahyun gestured at the scar. “They tried to fix it with surgery, but they couldn’t make it better. Not back to what it was.”

“When was this?” Sana asked in a small voice. Her eyes had given way for tears the second Dahyun had mentioned the car.

“Early November of last year.” Dahyun pressed her lips together. “I got back to work around Christmas and then took full shifts in January so I could start covering the hospital bills and late fees for classes. But that wasn’t really why I’ve been so… Off.”

“I don’t-” Sana’s voice was small.

“Just… watch this.” Dahyun said quietly, holding her gaze for a moment.

Knowing it would break her heart just watching, Dahyun drew out her phone, shuffled through her videos and found the one she was looking for. As she pressed play, she couldn’t help grasping
grasping Sana’s hand tighter.

Dahyun was wearing a suit. Black, pinstriped and cooler than the blue dress her mom had suggested. Her long black hair was braided and fell down her front. The camera was shaking slightly. Dahyun’s mom was crying as she recorded it.

Grieg’s *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen*.

Sana’s mouth fell open and tears trickled down her already wet cheeks. Dahyun’s eyes had already spilled over the second the first note fell. The note that made her heart break into a thousand pieces. It had been the goal of her life, to play that song. She had started when she was thirteen, given up for almost two years and spent all of her fifteenth year learning it. On her sixteenth birthday she played it in front of two thousand people, to perfection.

A true virtuous she had been called. The one to watch. The shining star in the crowd. That one in a million who might be able to make a living from her talent.

The screen turned black.

The music was over.

“You can’t play anymore?” Sana breathed.

“I-I can’t play anymore.” Dahyun confirmed.

It was the first time she had fully accepted the truth of those words. It was threatening to crush her. But then Sana’s thumb ran across the scar with such purpose that Dahyun was sure Sana was trying to make it disappear. As if her own skin could erase every bad consequence that had come from that one rainy night where someone missed a red light.

“Can you play it again?” Sana asked quietly.

Dahyun nodded, and turned on the video once more, except this time she turned down the music slightly.

And with the sound of her first dream coming true, she told what had happened since the accident and up until last night. Then told about this day too. About the steps she had taken and how much she loved each and every one of her friends. Even admitted that she felt guilty for accepting their help.

Sana didn’t say anything, just listened, her thumb stroking across the scar, healing the pain of it. Until Dahyun’s words died out and there were only the last hour between them.

“What do you want my part to be?” Sana asked. “In this, I mean.”

“Honestly… I don’t know.” Dahyun admitted. It was the truth. She didn’t know. Because what she wanted, she couldn’t have. “I guess… Just you being here? I don’t need anyone to fix me as such, I just have to get everything around me to make sense again. So I guess just… space, you know? Time? For now. Until I can stand on my own two feet again?”

Sana nodded and sniffled. And though her eyes were sad, there was a smile on her lips. But Dahyun couldn’t help notice how Sana let go of her hand, running both hands through her blonde hair, shifting in her seat to once again hug her legs.

“Sana, I-” Dahyun started, but her words caught and she changed directions. *Not like this*. “I’m
really glad you moved in.”

“Me too.”

The sun set outside the apartment.

Dahyun’s heart was still trying to get closer.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using the hashtag #TWICEroomies
May part 1: A Little Less Desperation

Chapter Notes

The second double chapter is here! I hope you'll enjoy this first part! I've been looking forwards to publishing it!

Thank you for waiting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes a village.

But it also takes time.

That much Dahyun had accepted by now. She just wishes it were easier to remember that she was supposed to accept help as she stood in front of Yang-nim, red faced and with his finger pressed so firmly against the schedule on the table between him on one side and Dahyun and Jeongyeon on the other. Hard to trust that it was all going to be okay when he spluttered about how hard it was to change a schedule, and that they had no right to talk to the other waiters behind his back to try and change the schedule around him.

But Dahyun stood her ground. With Jeongyeon’s hand calmlying on the small of Dahyun’s back, tethering them together, Dahyun insisted that she needed to change her schedule - right now.

“You have absolutely no sense of how this works, Kim, I just made these plans, I can’t just-”

“I’ll quit.” Dahyun interrupted him with a cool voice and her heart in her throat, making it hard to breathe. Felt how her neck flushed and hoped Yang-nim wouldn’t notice.

“Excuse me?”

“I have a different offer. A coffee shop, offering me the hours I’m asking you to give me and the same pay.” Dahyun said, somehow managing not to let her voice tremble like it wanted to. It wasn’t a lie. But she’d rather not have to take that option, as most of her classes overlapped with the schedule at Jihyo’s work, and she’d have a hard time managing it all. The late hours at the restaurant were better, and she loved the job despite Yang-nim.

For a moment Yang-nim just stared from Dahyun to Jeongyeon and back again, his body deflating slightly and the resemblance to a beet fading slightly.

“You…” Yang-nim trailed off.

“The Black Bean, the coffee house Myoui used to work at has a spot open as one of their trainees backed out.” Jeongyeon confirmed, and Dahyun could hear distant thunder in her voice. Knew suddenly that there was a reason she claimed herself to be tough. That it was only love that kept her from going off on someone who deserved it. And she was about to strike. Dahyun felt it, like sparks in the air around the older girl.
Yang-nim opened his mouth. Closed it again and glared at the two girls. And Dahyun really had to do her best to keep from grinning, because she knew that they had won. Knew that her loyalty and normally sharp mind was enough that Yang-nim couldn’t afford to let her go. Especially seeing as he had personally bullied one of the kitchen boys into quitting and one of the waitresses as well. Which meant that Felix had been upgraded to waiter and they were now two kitchen boys short.

“Give me that.” Yang-nim eventually snapped, holding out a hand for the schedule Mina had written up, signed by all the people involved in this change. Jeongyeon cleared her throat and handed it over.

Dahyun barely breathed as Yang-nim’s eyes scanned the paper, grumbling under his breath.

“There’s nothing but fucking trouble with you, Kim. How about you try and get all your fucking shit together instead of being such a pain?”

“That’s exactly what I’m trying to do here, sir.”

“Don’t you talk back at me, Kim. Don’t you fucking dare.” Yang-nim said in a low threatening voice. Then he sighed. “Fine, okay. I’ll put up the new schedule, but if any one of these don’t turn up for a shift I’m firing both of you.”


Dahyun bit down on her lip hard and they both bowed deeply before exiting the office.

“You good?” Jeongyeon asked, nudging her as the two walked into the kitchen.

“I’m ok.” Dahyun promised, hand on her heart as she took deep breaths. She was ok.

“He’s such a lousy little git.” Jeongyeon shook her head and leaned against the line.

“Who?” Taeyang asked, appearing by the line, his chef’s hat slightly askew. Jeongyeon leaned up and fixed it with a grin.

“Who do you think? Yang-ssi.”

“Of course.” Taeyang rolled his eyes and looked at Dahyun who was still trying to get her breathing under control. “D’you get to keep your job?”

Dahyun nodded. “With a little help from my friends.”

“Good friends. You hold on to them.”

“Oh, I plan to.” Dahyun sent Taeyang a tired smile and turned to Jeongyeon, reaching up to fix her bangs. “Thumb War to see who gets door-duty?”

“You’re on.” Jeongyeon grinned and offered her hand.

Dahyun won. And it could’ve all just been bliss from there, if Yang-nim would just do as he usually did, which was drink and stay in his office. But just as Jeongyeon grabbed the broom, the door to Yang-nim’s office opened, and Yang-nim walked out. Yelled a little. Glowered a lot. And Dahyun thought she might never have despised anyone as much as she did him. Especially when he spent the entire shift on the floor or in the kitchen, not only breathing down Dahyun’s neck, but Jeongyeon even more so. And it honestly scared Dahyun. Because Jeongyeon was already busy with her junior year, doing freelance journalism for anyone who would take her stories, and had now taken extra
shifts for Dahyun. She definitely did not need the extra stress of Yang-nim threatening to fire her. Luckily, she seemed a lot less fazed than Dahyun, a rock somehow. And when Yang-nim finally left them to close up around midnight, Jeongyeon was right there by her side in the bar, nudging her.

“It’s okay you know. Just let him fume.”

“I’m gonna quit.” Dahyun sighed. “He’s never gonna let it go.”

“You’re not gonna quit. He’s a bastard but who cares? You’re going to stick to your schedule.” Jeongyeon insisted.

They didn’t stay and talk on the bench that night. But Jeongyeon walked her home, despite the fact that it was ten minutes in the wrong direction. Hugged her a little tighter than she normally would have, before turning back where she had come from. Disappeared into the darkness of the night.

…

Dahyun sighed. It was friday and she had finished her third shift. Nothing was better. Jeongyeon was still getting picked at for every little thing. Dahyun still screwed up and even though Taeyang and Mina and the others kept helping her, it just made her feel even more pathetic. Helpless. This was something she was good at. Was supposed to be good at. And suddenly it was all gone. As if she had suddenly forgotten how to ride a bike.

Dahyun turned off the faucet in her bathroom. Dried her hands. Stared down the bottle of pills on the sink. Looked at the clock. What even was the point of taking half shifts if she was still up at this hour? She had barely slept, and this was the fourth time she had gotten up to try and calm herself.

With a deep sigh, Dahyun turned off the lights and walked out of the bathroom, only to find the lights on in the hallway. And the door to Sana’s room open. Frowning, Dahyun peeked into the room she had so often slept in by now, and found the big bed empty. Then a tap turned on somewhere behind her, and Dahyun’s body jolted at the sound. Maybe she had gone up to get water? But if… then why were the lights on?

For a second Dahyun considered walking back into her room, but decided against it, turning on her heel and walking into the kitchen, lights on here as well. Sana was standing by the sink with the kettle held under the kitchen tap, bottom lip tucked between her teeth and eyes narrowed at the kettle as if trying to judge how much water was in it. Dahyun stared. Completely bemused by the sight of Sana in her huge sweater and pink unicorn cotton shorts. And maybe she could hear the wheels turning in Dahyun’s tired brain, because she turned her face a little bit, eyes smiling as she found Dahyun’s.

“Want tea?”

“Sana, it’s three in the morning.” Dahyun said.

“I know that.” Sana shrugged. “Want tea?”

“Wh…” Dahyun trailed off, not entirely sure what question she was about to ask. Why was she awake? Why was she making tea? Had Dahyun woken her?
“I thought it might relax you a bit.” Sana explained in an unusually small voice. “My mom always gave me tea when I had nightmares.”

“... Okay. Thank you.” Dahyun muttered.

And maybe there’s a point you reach where you get so tired that you kind of forget about all the things that make you hesitate. Or maybe Dahyun just couldn’t stay away for a second longer. But no matter the reason, as Sana put the kettle on its holder and turned on, Dahyun took the few steps to reach her, gently wrapping her arms around Sana’s waist from behind. Could feel that Sana’s hair was still slightly moist from the shower she had been taking when Dahyun got back from her shift. Could smell the lemon conditioner.

“Thank you, Sana.” Dahyun said quietly. Rested her cheek against Sana’s shoulder and heard her chuckle.

“Are you turning into a sober cuddler as well?” Sana asked.

“More like exhausted cuddler.” Dahyun shrugged, letting go again. Her heart had left a very unsubtle reminder that she was currently wrapped around the girl she was very much trying not to fall incredibly in love with. Was currently failing at that quite a lot. But honestly, are you supposed to not fall harder for a girl when she gets up in the dead of night to make you tea?

“Have you slept at all?” Sana asked, swallowing a yawn as she turned to face Dahyun. Ran a hand through her hair and propped the round glasses back up her nose, scrunching it slightly. Dahyun forgot the question, staring at the way her lips twitched when she scrunched her nose.

“Hm?”

“Oh god, you really are exhausted.” Sana smiled softly. “I asked if you slept.”

“Ah, well.” Dahyun shrugged. “A little.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Sana asked, then tugged her lip between her teeth again, brows knotted in an apologetic expression. Right… Dahyun had asked for space. And maybe exactly for that reason did Dahyun actually talk about it.

“I slept maybe forty minutes. Then woke up because I kicked my knee into the wall. And since then I’ve just been thinking.” Dahyun looked past Sana, at the kettle almost boiling.

Sana didn’t ask her to elaborate. Just walked around Dahyun and sat down on one of the two chairs by the tiny kitchen table.

“I could take Jihyo’s offer.” Dahyun wondered out loud, mainly just to reassure Sana, or at least that was what she convinced herself she was doing, as she reached into the cupboard for mugs. “Work with her instead of Jeongyeon and Mina.”

“But you don’t want to?” Sana asked, reaching out to take the mugs, giving Dahyun the large one and taking the smaller one for herself.

“I love Jihyo, it’s not that. But I have a lot of fun at my work now. I mean, the long shifts suck but there are so many good things too. Like when I close up with Jeongyeon and we drink the leftover wine and talk? I love that. And I think finding a job that you actually enjoy, is hard, at least when it’s not what you’re passionate about.” Dahyun said, finding a selection of tea bags. Took the kettle as soon as the water started boiling. Sat down opposite Sana.
“I get that.” Sana nodded. “But you’re still considering quitting?”

“Mostly because of my boss.”

“Yang?”

“Yang-nim, yeah. He’s such a dick.” Dahyun rolled her eyes and chose a tea bag. Lemon and ginger, unsurprisingly. Watched as Sana chose the same.

“Sounds like it.” Sana nodded.

“I bet his mother was a hamster.” Dahyun mused as she poured the hot water over the tea bags, filling the mugs. “And-”

“And his father smelled like elderberries.” Sana finished with a giggle.

Dahyun looked at her, trying not to look too surprised that Sana knew the quote.

A wondrous smell of lemon and ginger spread in the kitchen and filled Dahyun’s nostrils. And Sana was right, the tea was calming. Or maybe Sana was.

It took nearly half an hour for them to finish their tea. To finish talking.

...

Dahyun gazed into the depths of a mug. Not the same mug she had been examining the bottom of last night, but a mug nonetheless. And this time it wasn’t so much trying to make time go slower so she wouldn’t have to go back to bed without Sana, but more a case of trying to ignore Tzuyu’s worried stare. But there really was no running from the fact that Dahyun had dark circles under her eyes and had kept picking at her cuticles all through the lessons today. That there was maybe a justification for Tzuyu’s worries.

“You’re not taking the medicine, are you?” Tzuyu asked.

“Nope.” Dahyun pressed her lips together and wished she had more coffee so she could buy herself a moment.

“You’re not talking to Jihyo either.” Tzuyu noted.

“Nope.” Dahyun admitted.

“Idiot.” Tzuyu clicked her tongue.

“Yup.” Dahyun nodded and finally looked up. “What am I supposed to tell her? I’m sorry, I’m not doing as well as we agreed?”

“You don’t get better just because you tell yourself to. Or promise someone to. And with your hand and your stress level, you’re definitely not going to get better overnight.” Tzuyu said.
Dahyun shrugged. “I can wish though.”

“Wishing won’t do you any good here. And you’re a fool if you think Mina and Jihyo aren’t in cahoots about this.”

“Then at least they’re talking, even if it’s about me.” Dahyun grumbled under her breath.

“Oh come on, you know they’ve been doing well for months, don’t you try to deflect.” Tzuyu kicked her shin gently under the table. Dahyun pursed her lips and scrunched her nose.

“Why do you have to always be right?” Dahyun asked.

“Why do you have to always be so damn stubborn?”

“I just don’t-”

“Want to bother anyone, I know that, but if you keep pushing, eventually someone’s gonna leave. You can’t just let us in and then push us right back out. It’s not the way to do things.”

Dahyun looked at Tzuyu. Really wanted to know how in the world someone so young could hold so much wisdom behind the innocent eyes. Wondered sometimes what Tzuyu’s life had been like in general. She never told about it. Never let anyone know about her past or even her family.

“Do you have siblings?” Dahyun blurted before she could stop herself.

“What?” Tzuyu looked slightly taken aback.

“Do you? Have siblings?” Dahyun asked again.

“I… I have a brother, why?”

“I just don’t know anything about you, outside of the nine of us.” Dahyun fiddled with the mug.

Tzuyu nodded and took a sip of her coffee. Why was it her who had coffee left and Dahyun who didn’t?

“You never really ever tell us about your life before Jihyo and Mina found you.” Dahyun pondered.

“No, I guess not.” Tzuyu emptied her mug and put it down. Smiled at Dahyun.

And somehow that was just the end of the conversation, and Dahyun knew it, even if it was frustrating. It hadn’t ever really occurred to Dahyun before, but now it felt like some puzzle she wasn’t allowed to solve, and it bugged her. Until she realized that this must be exactly how it felt to have to catch Dahyun only when she fell, because she too had refused to talk about her problems. How it must’ve felt for Jihyo to pick her up after work that first night and how it must’ve felt for Chaeyoung when Nayeon told her how bad Dahyun was doing. And the realization threatened to throw Dahyun out of balance.

It’s the weirdest places and the weirdest times you decide to become someone new.
Look, going out for dinner with a girl like Sana definitely isn’t something you complain about. It just isn’t. Except it was so late now, and Dahyun’s entire body was trying to murder her for suggesting that they go try the new indian place two blocks over. What kind of an idiot was that anyway, running on eight days of a quite failed attempt to get better. It was that non-existing balance between longing to be near a girl who kept pulling away and accepting that you had in fact asked her to, so maybe you should just let her. There was just this thing, where leaving Sana alone was the last thing Dahyun wanted, and holding her impossibly close was the thing Dahyun wanted more than anything else.

Maybe that and sleeping. Combined preferably. But then there’s the whole using your roomie as a safety blanket thing that doesn’t go over very well most of the time, and- and Dahyun just wanted to sit down. Lie down. Sleep.

Dahyun leaned against the wall as Sana closed the front door behind them. With a grumble the younger girl tried to kick off her shoes instead of reaching down to undo the laces. Felt Sana look at her and the familiar smile tug at her lips when she met the older girl’s eyes.

“You should just go straight to bed, you look completely beat.” Sana said softly.

“Mhm… good idea.” Dahyun sighed and nodded. Didn’t move but closed her eyes instead, head against the wall. Felt dizzy.

“Dahyunnie.”

Sana’s voice was close. Close enough that Dahyun didn’t dare open her eyes. Did it anyway, and found her just as close as Dahyun had hoped.

“Come on.” Sana said, nodding towards the hallway. Dahyun nodded but didn’t move. Wanted to move, but couldn’t.

“Right…” Dahyun’s eyes swam out of focus, and she felt how her eyes drooped.


Almost timidly Sana touched Dahyun’s wrist, then closed her fingers around Dahyun’s wrist with a hum and tugged softly. If only to get closer, Dahyun took a step towards her. Immediately stumbled. But Sana just caught her.

“I got you.” She said, a breathy giggle slipping past her lips.

Dahyun’s cheeks flushed faster than usual. Probably with exhaustion as much as the fact that Sana was once again wonderfully around her.

“Always… got me.” Dahyun muttered almost unintelligibly.

Sana giggled again. “Come on. Let’s get you to bed.”
Dahyun took another step, Sana’s arm around her waist, holding her steady. And another. And eventually she ended up in the bathroom, without really realizing it. Looked at the bottle beside her glasses. Resisted the urge to swat it onto the floor for mocking her.

“You could try.” Sana muttered.

“No, it’s fine, I don’t need them.” Dahyun scrunched her nose. Then remembered the mug at the coffee house with Tzuyu. Sighed.

Sana raised an eyebrow, holding Dahyun’s gaze despite the younger girl’s attempts to avert it.

“Dahyun.” Sana said softly. Nudged the younger girl’s hip with a familiarity that woke Dahyun a bit.


Sana smiled at her. “So Chaeyoung said one of these before you go to bed?”

“Yup, they’re just gonna like… make me extra sleepy or something. People use them to avoid jet lag and stuff.” Dahyun said and watched as Sana opened the lid and dug one out. Frowned at it and gave it to Dahyun.

“They look like vitamins.” Sana noted as the pink pill lay in Dahyun’s palm.

Dahyun took the pill. Chewed it and frowned. “Taste like vitamins too.”

Sana spent a minute reading the inscriptions on the bottle, while Dahyun started washing her face, Sana following. It was almost habit. How they worked in canon, getting ready for bed. First Dahyun and then Sana, washing faces, taking off makeup, taking off lenses and brushing their teeth. But Dahyun only got to enjoy the serenity of their routine for a moment, because the next she was halfway choking on her toothbrush because Sana had attempted to make a face at her in the mirror and had spilled toothpaste on her chin in the process.

Sana whined and cleaned her chin, puffing her cheeks at Dahyun. Dahyun just leaned over the sink and spit out excess toothpaste foam, angling her head to catch a mouthful of water from the tap. Sana followed her and then grabbed the pink hair brush while Dahyun took the black one.

“Is it working? The pill, I mean?” Sana asked as she brushed her long blonde hair.

“I don’t really know. Maybe?” Dahyun tried to notice a difference, brushing through her own hair. She couldn’t really feel a difference in her body. Just knew that laughing with Sana had made her head feel less heavy. But her eyes still drooped. And her muscles still ached.

“I hope it works.” Sana hummed, switching to brush the other side of her hair. Judged the length of the roots.

“Me too.” Dahyun hummed as Sana started taking off the hairs from her brush.

“And if not-” Sana started, but turned to throw the hair into the bin in the corner. Didn’t elaborate.

Dahyun barely dared say it, but did it anyway. “If not?”

“Dahyun. All you have to do is ask.” Sana said, and Dahyun swore she heard defeat in Sana’s voice. A sigh. As if there was a part of the conversation Sana had tried to explain over and over and was tired of repeating. She didn’t meet Dahyun’s eyes, but merely walked out of the bathroom, turning in the door, looking back at Dahyun. Past Dahyun.
“I really hope you sleep well.”

Dahyun nodded. Sana walked out. Closed the door to her room. And Dahyun wished she wasn’t such a coward. Because even if she couldn’t be more than friends with Sana, she still missed sleeping in Sana’s bed. Missed her arms around her and her breath on Dahyun’s neck. The way her knees felt in the pit of Dahyun’s.

Okay, so maybe not entirely good with just being friends. Because her mind fell to Sana’s smell, to her lips pressing against Dahyun’s cheek. To the giggle against Dahyun’s skin that sent sparks through her. To the feeling of Sana’s chest pressed against her back.

No, definitely not good just being friends.

Her own bed was a better idea. At least until she could get the image of Sana’s body in cotton shorts and- yeah, no, her own bed. Definitely.

Dahyun groaned and walked into her room, plopping onto the bed and burying herself in the blankets, grabbing her squirrel plush. If that pill would just work soon, that’d be mighty grand, honestly. Because the pictures of Sana, the feel of her, was making it really hard not to smile like a goddamn fool one moment and be in total disarray the next.

For a while, Dahyun tossed and turned, trying to find a comfortable position. But then slowly her muscles seemed to give in, and eventually she just lay, completely unable to move. Felt numb and dizzy all at once. The melatonin had finally kicked in.

But she didn’t sleep.

Her body was limp and her thoughts were slow, but she couldn’t sleep. She couldn’t think properly, couldn’t turn around, just held onto the squirrel. Honestly, Dahyun hadn’t expected this kind of reaction from it. And honestly it was kind of scary. Not to be able to move. Not to have the energy to even turn. Could just lie there, feeling anxiety in slow motion instead of her normal hundred miles per hour speed.

By midnight she was still painfully awake, her body slowly regaining a bit of the energy, enough to turn on her side. And she was getting desperate. It just couldn’t keep being like this. And despite everything inside of her telling her that it was a horrible idea, she longed for another bed. So much so that she somehow ended up standing outside Sana’s door, trying not to knock. Didn’t even know how she had gotten there, but just tried her best not to knock. Tried to remember that using the girl you like, your roommate, as a blankie was a bad idea. That giving into her would be bad at this point and probably falter the hope Dahyun had of asking Sana out once she had gotten her life somewhat under control. It was definitely a stupid-... But she knocked anyway. Because apparently the part of her body connected to the thoughts of Sana’s wonderfully warm body had taken over for common sense. Brilliant.

“Mh?” Said Sana’s voice the second time Dahyun knocked. She had been asleep… Definitely had.

“Can I come in?” Dahyun mumbled at the door, despite her better judgment.

“Of course.” Sana mumbled groggily.

Dahyun opened the door and dragged herself inside, still dozy from the melatonin.

“...Can I sleep here?” Dahyun asked quietly, meeting Sana’s gaze. It was soft and wonderful and
Dahyun felt like just that look could save her world.

For a moment Sana just stared. Then she nodded and shuffled to make a comfortable amount of space for the younger girl. And Dahyun wondered when things had changed; when she had stopped pulling Dahyun close on her own accord. Had she been awake that time? Did she know that Dahyun had kissed her neck? Was she aware that Dahyun had to spend every waking moment trying not to think about her? If she knew that Dahyun had kissed her neck that night, that she wanted more- If Sana knew this, then it all made sense. But not in a way Dahyun liked. More in the sense that Sana was being respectful of Dahyun’s feelings. Yet it was the last thing Dahyun wanted right now. Despite knowing it was bad for her to keep seeking out Sana like this, right now she just needed to sleep.

She would deal with the feelings later.

“Thank you.” Dahyun sighed as she finally got her mind together and crawled under the covers. They were warm, but Sana’s body was too far away.

“You’re welcome.” Sana muttered sleepily. “You’re always welcome.”

Dahyun nodded and turned to look at Sana.

“Can… Sana, I know this sounds stupid. But I’m really tired. And- I just need to sleep.”

“You can tell me.” Sana promised.

Dahyun sighed. “If I ask you to hug me, will you? I mean not if you’re uncomfortable, I don’t-”

“Of course.” Sana broke her off. But she didn’t move to hug Dahyun, just opened herself to an embrace. And every nerve in Dahyun’s body pulled towards Sana. Relaxed as she settled against the older girl. For a moment Dahyun tried to gather the courage, but Sana’s words cut off her thoughts. Almost as if she had sensed that Dahyun was about to speak a truth neither were really ready for.

“Sleep, Dahyunnie.”

So Dahyun merely turned in Sana’s arms and felt the older girl curl around her body. And Dahyun yawned. Let her eyes flutter shut. Knew that it was wrong but loved it anyway. Tried to push off the moment she would have to own up to everything. Or the day where she might not feel this bliss laying in Sana’s arms letting sleep drag her in.

God, she hoped that would happen soon.

Or that it never changed.

…

In retrospect, sleeping with Sana - no, not like that, get your head out of the gutter - wasn’t the worst idea in the world. Even if it might seem like it on the surface. Because of all the stupid ideas Dahyun had carried out in her life, this one made her days so much better. Gave her a chance to sleep with minimal nightmares and for longer periods without waking up. It wasn’t flawless, and it wasn’t
always easy to fall asleep, but there was just something utterly calming and comfortable about Sana. And when the shift two days later went by smoothly, Dahyun couldn’t help but think that proper sleep had something to do with it. Maybe also because neither Jeongyeon or Mina were at work, which meant that Yang-nim couldn’t harass them.

But whether it was sleep or a lifted pressure, Dahyun’s smile was effortless and her thoughts wandered back to the first movie night she had had with Chaeyoung and Momo the previous night. It had been wonderful and free, Momo and Dahyun claiming one of Chaeyoung’s shoulders each, her freeing laughter in Dahyun’s, Momo’s sleepy whine when Dahyun tried to stick a popcorn up her nose for nodding off during an important scene. The melodious taps of Chaeyoung’s fingertips on Dahyun’s arm whenever music played. Momo falling asleep in Chaeyoung’s lap when the credits played.

Just the memory made Dahyun feel lighter inside than she had in weeks.

And somehow, that lightness stayed with her from one shift to the next, and it was only the inkling that it couldn’t be this easy, that made her worry, as she opened her locker and grabbed the shirt off the hanger. Saw Jeongyeon buttoning her shirt out of the corner of her eye and changed out of her snoopy t-shirt. Okay, so maybe it was a t-shirt meant for sleeping in, but who cares? It was cute either way, and it wasn’t like anyone cared what she wore outside of work.

“Dahyun?” Jeongyeon asked, closing her locker just as Dahyun started buttoning her shirt.

The younger girl turned and watched as Jeongyeon tied her hair into a little ponytail, checking to make sure she didn’t leave any parts behind.

“Have you thought about what you want to do for your birthday?”

Dahyun pressed her lips together. The subject had actually been resting at the back of Dahyun’s mind for a little while now, and truth was that she had no clue. Except for one part.

“Not really, I just want to spend time with you guys.” Dahyun shrugged and finished buttoning the shirt, reaching for the tie inside her locker.

“Well, I figured that much. And it should be doable, since your birthday is on a Saturday.” Jeongyeon said enthusiastically, her expression almost immediately turning sheepish. Dahyun nudged her.

“I mean, I don’t know if it’s your style, but we could go to the sea? Take the train there?” Jeongyeon suggested casually, helping Dahyun with the knot of her tie. Let Dahyun fix hers afterwards.

“That... sounds amazing, actually.” Dahyun mused, imagining it for a moment. It was years since she had gone to the sea, even if it was only an hour away by train. Just hadn’t really found a reason or a timing for it. But this was pretty perfect.

“Well, I talked to Tzuyu. She’s trying to get someone to cover, and I should hear back tonight about getting someone to take my shift too. You and Mina are already off that day, so we just have to check with the rest.” Jeongyeon said enthusiastically, her expression almost immediately turning sheepish. Dahyun nudged her.
"We’ll make it. All of us. It’s nine or none, right?"

"Seems that way.” Jeongyeon nodded. “So you wanna bring Momo and Sana then?”

Dahyun frowned “Of course, why wouldn’t I?"

“No reason, I just thought maybe Sana, but no I’m glad they’re coming.” Jeongyeon tied the apron around her waist.

“Bet you are.” Dahyun smirked.

Jeongyeon’s expression immediately changed, and she sent Dahyun what was unmistakably a stink-eye. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing. Nothing.” Dahyun blew a kiss at Jeongyeon before heading out into the kitchen, leaving her stumped.

It seemed that Dahyun’s work life was slowly nearing a stable equilibrium. Not too bad, not excellent either. Good enough to get Yang-nim off her back. Off Jeongyeon’s too. And that was the most important thing.

Yet Dahyun still ran out of energy quite quickly. By eight pm she already felt how her body was slumping more than it should, how she longed for sleep. Felt the tug in her stomach when she realized it wasn’t going to be nearly as easy a shift as the previous. But it was nothing. No shift was even supposed to go as well as the last one right? This was nothing. Yet she still felt that fear take hold inside of her. That she was never going to get back the feeling of being successful that this job normally gave her. With a heavy sigh, Dahyun walked through the doors to the kitchen. The next order was already ready on the line, but she allowed herself ten seconds to rub her tired eyes and groan.

“You good?” Taeyang asked, poking his head out from the kitchen. How that man managed to hear her through all the noise coming from the kitchen, Dahyun would never get.


“Almost set the place on fire just now, but otherwise I’m good.” Taeyang shrugged.

“Well, I won’t complain if you do.” Dahyun grinned.

Taeyang’s laughter boomed through the kitchen and the sound made Dahyun liven up.

“Just tell me if you need a hand, if you ever decide for it.” Dahyun added, just to keep it going a little longer. Then she stuck her tongue out at him before walking off with the dishes for table 6, his laughter ringing in her head for almost half an hour, making her smile and stand up straighter.

…

The second weekly movie night took place at Chaeyoung’s place, but despite the promises that Nayeon was going to join, she ended up cancelling last minute because of a school project. But while Dahyun just found it unfortunate, Chaeyoung seemed downright vexed. And seeing as the only other reason for her grumpy mood would be Dahyun snatching the spot in Momo’s lap, Nayeon’s absence seemed a far more likely cause. It was understandable, but she really didn’t have to take it out on them. The entire time through dinner, she seemed downright jealous. Or at least
unapproving of them. Especially when Dahyun leaned further into her and felt Momo’s nose against her temple.

“Had a good day?” Momo asked quietly.

“Mhm,” Dahyun hummed lazily. “Finished the essay.”

“Good job.” Momo praised, patting Dahyun’s stomach until Dahyun couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Do you mind keeping it PG for once?” Chaeyoung interrupted them with a grumble.

“What are you so annoyed for?” Dahyun asked, maybe a bit too impatiently, but it was getting on Dahyun’s nerves by now.

“I’m not annoyed, you’re just gross.” Chaeyoung insisted, starting the movie, settling in the couch, though she made sure to keep out of reach.

“You’re being a grump.” Dahyun insisted.

“I’m tired. And I honestly just wanted to have Nayeon here so I didn’t have to be third wheel to,” Chaeyoung gestured exaggeratedly at them, “that.”

“If you come closer you can have cuddles too.” Momo offered gently, no jokes in her tone, merely honest concern.

“No thank you.” Chaeyoung crossed her arms and pulled her feet up on the couch, curling into a tiny ball of obvious dismay.

Momo stopped patting Dahyun’s stomach. Drew away completely. And Dahyun was stuck between the desire to reassure Momo that she hadn’t done anything wrong and the need to comfort her best friend for whatever had made her so despondent.

“Did Nayeon say something?” Dahyun asked, crawling down from Momo’s lap, to settle between her and Chaeyoung instead, her attention on the youngest girl rather than the opening scene of the movie. Chaeyoung shrugged, but didn’t resist when Dahyun wrapped an arm around her.

“I just wanted her here tonight.” Chaeyoung mumbled and sighed, shuffling to lean into Dahyun.

“Things still weird?” Dahyun asked. Knew that it had been a transition for the pair to move in together, as they now not only shared a major, but also an apartment, and often only saw each other and Jihyo during the day.

Chaeyoung shrugged. “We just never talk about anything but school.”

“You can always just move home.” Dahyun poked Chaeyoung’s cheek.

“My room is kind of occupied.” Chaeyoung said dryly as if she could ever consider leaving Nayeon just for a bit of miscommunication.

“I’ll throw her out.” Dahyun said without hesitance. Felt Momo shuffle beside her.

“Sure,” Chaeyoung snorted, “so instead of actually moving on then you’re just gonna throw her out? Not likely, miss bottom culture queen.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Dahyun drew back.
“I mean that you’re too whipped to ever throw Sana out.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes.

“Not if it’ll get my best friend back.” Dahyun insisted.

“It’s okay, Dahyun.” Chaeyoung’s tone changed “We’re gonna be okay, it’s just, I’m in a weird mood.”

“You don’t say.” Dahyun raised an eyebrow at her.

“Shut up.” Chaeyoung chuckled.

The air lightened with Chaeyoung’s laughter, and Dahyun turned to Momo whose eyes were very much fixed on the screen and whose lip was tucked between her teeth.

“Momo.” Dahyun said quietly, tugging at the older girl’s sleeve.

“You’re not gonna throw her out, right?” Momo asked, not taking her eyes from the screen.

“Of course not.” Dahyun reassured her.

With a nod, Momo faced them, a slightly sheepish smile on her lips, and Dahyun pulled at her arm until she settled with her head in Dahyun’s lap, the other arm still around Chaeyoung.

“Can I get a fish named Pudge too?” Momo asked from Dahyun’s lap a few moments later, as the little orange fish happily swam across the screen with a peanut butter sandwich in its mouth.

“Do you have any clue how to deal with tropical fish?” Chaeyoung asked from her place on Dahyun’s shoulder.

“Nope.” Momo admitted. “Can I get one anyway?”

“Then no.” Chaeyoung let her hand rest on Momo’s hair, chuckling under her breath when Momo’s grumble turned into a hum at the affection.

“We’ll get you a fish plushie for your birthday and you can call it Pudge.” Dahyun promised.

“But my birthday isn’t until November!” Momo huffed.

“Well, then you have something to look forwards to, won’t you?” Chaeyoung said, stroking lazily over the dusty pink hair, almost just brown by now.

“Mrph. I guess.” Momo mumbled and Dahyun wasn’t entirely sure if she was happy or complaining. But she was adorable no matter what.

They got through the first 45 minutes of the movie without any more problems. But slowly, almost as if just to punish her for having calmed both of her friends, the worries crept up on Dahyun, and she checked her phone to make sure of the classes she had tomorrow. Made sure when her shift was. Made sure she hadn’t gotten any more emails. Checked her schedule again.

“Should we pause?” Chaeyoung asked the third time Dahyun reached for her phone.

“No, it’s fine.” Dahyun mumbled, checking if anyone had texted her. No-one had.

“Give me that.” Chaeyoung said determinately, and Dahyun pressed her lips together, hesitating but
eventually handing the phone to Chaeyoung. She pocketed it and grabbed Dahyun’s hand instead.

“You’re ok.” She whispered, rubbing circles on the back of Dahyun’s hand.

Dahyun nodded. “I’m ok.”

…

Dahyun wasn’t ok. It was all shit and she was late on her assignment again, and when the hell did her life turn into this? She was right, it had all been too easy. It had been going so well and this was just the price because of course she wouldn’t just be able to recover just like that. And she was once again using Sana and it wasn’t fair to her and it wasn’t fair to Dahyun because she was just falling faster and harder and- And god, if she could just breathe! Just breathe! But she couldn’t even move. Couldn’t think. Just stared at the papers in front of her as the words swam and her throat closed up, hands in fists around fabric of her yellow pyjama pants. Felt how the glasses slipped further down her nose.

You’re ok.

Dahyun couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t think. Leaned forwards and rested her head against her knees. Shook terribly and wanted to escape the pain her heart kept sending through her.

You’re ok.

Breathing. Breathing was… Hard. And the glasses pressed against her nose at an odd angle, stuck between her nose and her knees. But somehow… Somehow it was easier to breathe. If she just focused on the glasses. How it felt.

She was late. Again. And she was a failure. Had given up on ever getting back to the thing she loved. And now she had nothing. Had nothing she was good at. And what was even the point in taking a degree in music if you couldn’t even play? Maybe she should just… The glasses pressed harder against her nose and pulled her from her thoughts.

You’re ok.

Dahyun took a deep shaky breath. Gasped and whimpered. Took another deep breath and held it. Maybe too long. But it was hard to count. And then another. Clutched her chest and focused on the feeling of her heart hammering through her ribs, into her palm. How her finger hooked around her collar bone. Breathed.

Breathed.

Was ok.

Even if she didn’t know what to do. Even if she was a failure.

No.

No, she wasn’t a failure.

She was ok.
Dahyun breathed.

…

Going to work with a post-panic headache wasn’t exactly the thing Dahyun felt most like doing. But there was no choice. So here she was, smiling politely as she listened to the customers at her table list their orders, nodding and noting down as they spoke. Read the list out loud for them, pointing at each member of the party according to the order and then asked for drink orders. Then took the order into the kitchen and handed it to the kitchen boy who immediately handed it to Taeyang.

With a tired sigh, Dahyun rubbed her temples, listening with half an ear as Taeyang boomed the order to the kitchen. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw how the door opened, and Mina’s back appeared, the older girl walking backwards with a load of dirty dishes, a strand of hair in her eyes. She blew at it impatiently and set the dishes on the table for another kitchen boy to handle.

For a second it looked like she was just gonna hurry back out, but then she stretched her arms above her head and leaned back, stretching her back.

“Mina?” Dahyun asked, grabbing the opportunity. “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure, what?” Mina said, breathing deeply before lowering her arms to fix her hair.

“I was thinking,” Dahyun started, “Jeongyeon suggested a little while back that we could go to the sea for my birthday. And I talked it over with Tzuyu and Chaeyoung and they think it’s a good idea as well. But I don’t want people to make a big deal of it. Like, I don’t want presents or anything. I just want to spend the day with you guys.”

Mina nodded. “I get that.”

“But I’m just scared they’ll ignore it and make a big deal about it anyway. Especially Jihyo and Nayeon. They always spoil me too much, and I’ve already been so much trouble for everyone… caused so much worry-”

“Dahyun. You’re not troubling anyone. But I can talk to them about the presents thing, if you want?” Mina suggested, rubbing her neck. Winced, apparently finding a sore spot.

“Would you?” Dahyun asked thankfully.

“Of course.” Mina nodded, rolling her head.

“Sleep bad?” Dahyun frowned.

“Maybe? I think I just slept in a weird position.” Mina huffed and shrugged. “But yeah, I’ll definitely talk to them.”

“Thank you, Mina. Really. I don’t think I’ll get through to them on my own, they’ll just think I’m being humble or something. But it’s not that. I just don’t think I’d deal very well with a lot of attention on me right now. And I know that’s coming from the ultimate party clown. But right now, I just want to make sure everyone has a good time and not be in the spotlight.”

“You have been on the front of everyone’s minds for a while. So I get it.” Mina smiled.
Dahyun opened her mouth to answer, to say sorry, but then Taeyang poked his head through the hole in the wall by the line and reminded them of the dishes that waited for them. With flushing cheeks Mina apologized and hurried over to take the ones assigned to one of her tables. There were two dishes waiting for Dahyun as well, and despite her fluster, Mina waited just the few seconds it took for Dahyun to grab her dishes, and they walked out of the kitchen together. Not even five steps into the restaurant, however, was their path blocked. Blocked in a way that made Dahyun’s heart skip a beat. In front of them stood the familiar face of a twenty-something year old man - one of the men who had gotten a habit of harassing Mina over the past few weeks. They were a crew of five guys who frequently visited the establishment seemingly with no other purpose than to get drunk and hit on Mina.

“Hey there.” He grinned, an aura of arrogance surrounding him in a way that made Dahyun slightly nauseous.

“Can I help you?” Mina asked politely, her eyebrow twitching and her arms visibly strained from carrying four dishes at once.

“I was wondering when you get off?” The guy shrugged.

“I’m sorry, that’s not really relevant information.”

“Then how about your number?”

“No, I’m sorry, I’m not gonna give you my number. And if that’s all, then I need to get these dishes to my table.” Mina’s smile didn’t reach her eyes anymore, frozen like a mask.

The man’s jaw clenched.

“Please let me pass.” Mina said.

“Oh, come on, why won’t you go out with me?”

Mina swallowed, then steadied herself despite the strain.

“I can’t date you, as I’m already seeing someone. Please don’t ask me out again.” Mina’s voice was too polite for what the man deserved, but before he could figure out an answer, Mina had walked around him and Dahyun followed her.

“Nice.” Dahyun praised. She had suggested that lie for a while but Mina had refused to use it up until now.

“Hopefully that’ll get them off my back for a while.” Mina sighed. Then she turned to her part of the floor while Dahyun continued ahead to her part.

If there was one thing she would give just about anything to change, it would be to have Mina be left alone. It was manageable the first months, but if it didn’t change soon, someone had to do something. It was way worse here than what Dahyun knew her to have experienced at the coffee house. It wasn’t just bordering on harassment anymore. It was.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or used #TWICEroomies
There were many amazing things about having Chaeyoung as a best friend. But nothing more so than the fact that she always had room. Room for your worries or your weirdness or just room. And right now, room was exactly what Dahyun needed. Somewhere to study that wasn’t her own apartment.

It had become a weird mix at home. Of Sana giving her too much space during the day, often disappearing for hours longer than her studies required. And then all the wordless hours during the night where she would open herself and let Dahyun in - even if only physically. Where she would hold Dahyun so tight the younger girl sometimes wondered if she was afraid Dahyun was going to leave. But the conversations in the mornings, during Dahyun’s study breaks, in the evenings before bed - those were practically gone. And right now Dahyun needed to not think about why Sana was acting so damn weird.

It turned out to be Dahyun’s luck, that she was so used to the noise from when she lived at home with her parents and brother and later living with Chaeyoung and partly by extension with Nayeon, because right now Chaeyoung’s place was in no way quiet. Not even by a long shot. While Chaeyoung barely made any noise, sitting in the opposite end of the couch with her own homework, Nayeon did. Loud singing came from the bedroom, the older girl practicing for an audition for a play downtown, with the same company that Jeongyeon’s sister had done plays with in the past before she moved to Busan a month ago.

But the sound of Nayeon’s singing wasn’t even the loudest part. The loudest was Momo. Momo who was for some reason already there when Dahyun showed up, sitting on one of Nayeon’s pillows with a batch of popcorn, watching a movie as if this was just her own place. And when Dahyun had asked why she was here, Momo had simply shrugged and commented that she had agreed to teach Nayeon some dance tricks for the audition and then came a bit early. Like four hours early according to Nayeon’s very meticulous schedule. But it didn’t really seem to bother Momo at all.

But it bothered Dahyun a bit. Because if Sana wasn’t in their apartment, and wasn’t with Momo like she had assumed, then where was she? Not- not that it was any of Dahyun’s business, but Dahyun just wasn’t under the impression that Sana had other friends, honestly. She never talked about anyone else anyways.

But Dahyun managed nonetheless. Wrote an entire essay, occasionally nudging Chaeyoung’s foot with her own just to make her smile.
The movie was almost over when Nayeon finally came out of the bedroom, settling on the floor beside Momo with a slightly disgruntled look on her face. Dahyun closed her laptop and watched as Chaeyoung did the same.

“Still not good enough?” Chaeyoung asked, leaning down to poke the tip of Nayeon’s nose.

“I can sing it just fine, but I can’t sing it like me. It doesn’t sound like me.” Nayeon complained.

“Well, maybe if you just let it rest for a while, do something else-”

“That’s sorta what I’m doing.” Nayeon said, an unexpected chill in her voice.

“I know, babe.” Chaeyoung said softly and drew back.

“Did you want to teach me some moves?” Nayeon asked, nudging Momo.

“What? Oh, yeah.” Momo drew her eyes from the screen and put the popcorn down on the floor, getting to her feet quickly. Helped Nayeon up by the hand.

“You two done with work?” Momo asked.

Chaeyoung nodded and Dahyun followed.

“Is it okay if I teach her in here then?” Momo was already finding the music on her phone. Chaeyoung nodded and grabbed the pillow from the floor, placing it in her lap.

“We’ll just go out if we get sick of you.” Chaeyoung shrugged and sent Nayeon a dimpled smile. For a moment Nayeon’s eyes flickered but then she just smiled back. Genuinely.

While Momo started the music, Chaeyoung huddled closer, pulling at the corners of the pillow. Dahyun tried not to listen to Momo’s instructions too much but instead let Chaeyoung tug her down until she lay with her head on the pillow in the younger girl’s lap, looking up at her face.

“So, any progress?”

“With what?”

“Any of it?” Chaeyoung shrugged. “Not just the roomie situation.”

“Well, definitely no progress there.” Dahyun said. Knew that it was a blatant lie as Chaeyoung was currently not informed of the fact that Dahyun was sharing a bed with said roommate.

“Ah well, can’t expect that much of you.” Chaeyoung shrugged. Dahyun reached up and flicked her nose. Chaeyoung whined.

“But it’s going better at work.” Dahyun said, then scrunched her nose. “For me at least.”

“What do you mean?” Chaeyoung frowned, glancing over at Nayeon and Momo.

“Mina’s getting a lot of attention again.” Dahyun sighed. The music stopped.

“I thought that died down.” Nayeon said in a worried tone.

“It did, for a while. But it just flared back up the past weeks.” Dahyun looked up. Both Momo and Nayeon were looking at her with concern.
“Is anyone doing something to stop it?” Momo asked, her frown deepening. She shifted slightly and crossed her arms.

“Yang-nim isn’t doing shit, and there’s not much the rest of us can do except try to solve the situations when they arise.” Dahyun pressed her lips together for a moment. “But at least she’s finally just saying that she’s taken.”

“Oh.” Momo looked surprised. “That’s-”

“She’s not, she’s just saying it to get people off her back.” Dahyun elaborated.

Momo nodded and shifted her footing.

“I just wish there was something more I could do.” Dahyun huffed, rubbing her temples.

“You’re there for her, right?” Momo asked.

Dahyun nodded. “Always.”

“Gay.” Nayeon rolled her eyes.

“Not for her, but accurate.” Dahyun grinned. Nayeon gave an acknowledging shrug and walked back to where they had been practicing before.

“True, keep to one girl at a time.” Chaeyoung poked her nose.

Dahyun’s eyes flickered to Momo but she too had gone back to the music. Dahyun stuck out her tongue and tried to reach Chaeyoung’s finger but she pulled away too fast, and Dahyun chuckled.

…

You know those days where everything is just… right? Yeah, me neither. They don’t exist. But there are incredible days. Sometimes it’s not even days where your life changes. For Dahyun it was just the fact the weather was amazing and Sana was home early for once, and didn’t immediately escape to her room for once. Maybe because of this, Dahyun had gathered the courage to ask Sana if she wanted to go get ice cream, and gotten to see the smile that lit up Dahyun’s world. And now they were here, in front of the big ice cream display, so many variants that Dahyun could barely contain herself. Could feel the sparks bouncing off Sana like they always did when she was the happiest.

“I’m incredibly tempted to get the biggest one and only do scoops with chocolate.” Dahyun said, captivated by the ice cream in front of her. Right now all she wanted was chocolate, but three scoops of that was a bit embarrassing to order, even for her. She had done it once and the lady had not been able to keep from laughing.

“You could do a mix though.” Sana suggested, sunshine in her voice but a serious tone, as if she really took it as a worthy dilemma. “You know, one with chocolate, one with vanilla and chocolate pieces, one with caramel and chocolate?”

“That’s- That’s brilliant.” Dahyun looked around at her, gaping. “You’re a genius, has anyone ever told you that?”

Sana chuckled and shrugged. “It happens.”
“Good, you deserve it. That’s pretty much the best idea I’ve ever heard.”

Sana’s smile grew, and she looked around at the girl behind the glass display.

“Two cups with three scoops each.”

Sana ordered for both, and Dahyun looked with unfazed gluttony at the massive scoops piling one on top of the other, filling every single wet chocolate dream she had ever had.

They found a table outside in the sun and Dahyun squinted, having forgotten her sunglasses. Sana quickly moved around so Dahyun got the sun in her back instead of her face. Dahyun shook her head, a grin plastered on her face as Sana put on a pair of huge sunglasses and started doing silly faces. Was this really all it took to get her in a good mood? Ice cream? If so, Dahyun should’ve done it days ago. But honestly, that wasn’t really the reason she had asked Sana to come for ice cream. It was mostly a need to get them both out of the apartment and away from the tension so Dahyun could say what she had meant to.

“So,” Dahyun began, allowing herself one wonderful scoop of pure chocolate ice cream before continuing, “it’s my birthday this Saturday.”

Immediately, a warmth that had nothing to do with the sun settled in her cheeks. At the exact moment she had mentioned the word birthday, her mind had gone to their tradition - between the friends - a tradition Chaeyoung had started and quickly carried over to all the others. And she remembered what Sana had once said about getting a kiss from Dahyun for her birthday. Wondered if she would get one from Sana. Hoped so. Even if it’d only be a kiss on the cheek, Dahyun missed them. They were less wet than Momo’s; softer and a lot more heart-racing.

When Dahyun looked up, she found that Sana’s head was tilted and Dahyun realized she must’ve overheard Sana’s answer.

“Well, we’re going to go to the sea and I was wondering if you wanted to come?” Dahyun talked to the ice cream on Sana’s spoon. It felt weird. She had just casually mentioned it to Momo the other day at Chaeyoung’s, and that had been it. But this felt so different. She took a spoonful of ice cream, waiting for Sana to answer.

“I was actually afraid you weren’t going to invite me.” Sana admitted quietly.

Dahyun’s head snapped up, spoon still in her mouth, Sana’s eyes hidden behind her sunglasses,

“What?” Dahyun’s words caught.

Sana chuckled and Dahyun realized she must look ridiculous. She took the spoon out before she spoke this time.

“Why would you think I didn’t want you there on my birthday?” Dahyun asked.

“Well, a few days ago, Momo asked if we should all take the train together and I didn’t know what she was talking about so I was afraid since you didn’t ask me that you didn’t want me there. I’m stupid, I know.”

Dahyun pointed her spoon at Sana. “Hey, you’re not stupid. It’s valid, I waited to ask you until last. I just... No, of course I want you there.”
“Then… Yes, I’d like to go.” Sana beamed, her cheeks pushing the sunglasses up slightly. Dahyun thought quietly, that nothing or no-one could make Dahyun feel this good just by being there, and wondered if she could be allowed to spend the rest of her life making Sana smile like that. Spent the next ten minutes making Sana laugh at her passionate speech about the difference between light, white and dark chocolate. And even if the day wasn’t flawless, it was definitely still wonderful. And Dahyun realized as they walked home, both a little too full, that perfect wasn’t flawless.

Perfect was a balance, just enough bad for the good to seem amazing and just enough good to handle whatever bad might come at you. The balanced scale.

…

It was little sparks; all these little moments of uplifting that made the difference. It wasn’t that she was all better. But slowly. Ever so slowly, it had helped. The anxiety had died down a little over the past month and she wasn’t fighting her own body nearly as much. Even the nerve bothered her less. Though this was easily attributed to the fact that she was both sleeping more and working less. But the best part, was that her friends were starting to relax more around her. Didn’t send her nearly as many worried looks and texts. Apparently just the fact that she had let them in, helped this.

But there was still one, who hadn’t backed down. One whose big worried eyes still rested on Dahyun every five minutes when she thought Dahyun wasn’t looking. Tzuyu.

There was still half an hour left of their class, and Dahyun had caught her for the third time with those puppy eyes and an involuntary pout, and Dahyun raised an eyebrow. It was all she could do as the lecturer never allowed talking when she was teaching - which was fair, but inconvenient when you just wanted to tell someone that it wasn’t necessary that they worried so much.

The fourth time Dahyun nudged Tzuyu and it made her smile somewhat. Dahyun made sure to return it, and noticed that Tzuyu’s phone lit up in her lap, a message appearing. Dahyun didn’t try to read, but had a funny suspicion that it was coming from Jihyo. Because if anyone was in cahoots with Tzuyu, it’d be Jihyo. And Jihyo also happened to be the one Dahyun had seen the least of in the past weeks, mostly out of embarrassment that she hadn’t really progressed as much as she would like. Not that she had stayed away entirely but- yeah, she might want to try and make time to see her soon. As in, today.

It had been Dahyun’s plan to up and leave, calling Jihyo on the way out so see if she could come over immediately, but Tzuyu stopped her in her tracks, fiddling slightly with the hem of her shirt sleeve.

“Do you wanna go for coffee?” Tzuyu asked, her eyes searching Dahyun’s face carefully.

“I… I mean sure, but I was going to check if Jihyo was home, can we just go to her place instead?” Dahyun asked.

“She’s at work.” Tzuyu said. “New trainee.”

“Again?” Dahyun frowned.

“It’s hard to replace Mina, I guess.” Tzuyu shrugged, a little smile on her lips. “Will you go for
coffee with me then?”

The smile turned into a pout. An actual honest to god pout. From Chou Tzuyu.


“Yeah?” Tzuyu made way for Dahyun to walk past, following her out of the lecture hall.

“We’re going to The Black Bean, I want to see Jihyo even if she’s working.” Dahyun insisted. This was the kind of day she wanted to share with Jihyo. Show that she was doing better.

“... Okay.” Tzuyu nodded. “And the other.”

Dahyun narrowed her eyes and raised an eyebrow, stopping Tzuyu to look her straight in the eyes.

“You are never ever allowed to pout at me again. Especially if Jihyo tells you to. Not even if the world is burning; it’s an unfair move and you know it.”

Tzuyu’s eyes moved as she smiled. “Okay.”

“We’re friends, you don’t have to use tricks to get me to spend time with you. When you do stuff like that, for Jihyo, that’s not you being my friend. I need someone who’s gonna help me keep Nayeon’s ego at a manageable level and someone who can distract the dogs while I run away, not someone who walks around with a net, ready to catch me. We got past that, right? I’m talking about things now, so I need you to adjust. I need my Chou-tzu, not Jihyo’s lapdog.” Dahyun explained.

“I’m not-”

“She’s been ordering you to look after me right?” Dahyun crossed her arms.

Tzuyu looked sheepish.

“And you’re just trying to do it well so she’ll be happy and not worry too much about me because she doesn’t want to push herself on me, right?”

“I-” Tzuyu averted her gaze-

“That makes you her lapdog. I won’t throw you under the bus to her, but I need you to be on my side as much as hers, okay?” Dahyun shook her head with a smile.

“... Fine.” Tzuyu sighed. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“So, this brother of yours, hold old is he?” Dahyun changed the subject, linking her arm with Tzuyu’s.

“Two years older than me.” Tzuyu said with a small smile as they walked out of the building.

“And he’s your only sibling?”

“Yeah, but I haven’t seen him a while. It’s not often I have time to go back.” Tzuyu’s voice was small.

“Wait, is that why you don’t talk about them? You miss them?” Dahyun asked, looking up at the younger girl.

Tzuyu nodded. “I have my family and my dog back home but I just... I rarely see them.”
“Why didn’t you stay in Taiwan then?”

“I always liked the culture here and I wanted to attend college somewhere that wasn’t Taiwan, so I took lessons to learn the language. It just wasn’t until I got here that I realized how hard it was being here all alone.” Tzuyu said quietly.

“Is that why you kept showing up at the coffee house? You were lonely?” Dahyun asked.

Tzuyu nodded. “Jihyo was so kind. It was easy to just try and stick with her.”

“Thank god for Jihyo, huh?” Dahyun chuckled.

Tzuyu shrugged timidly. “I think I would’ve gone home if it wasn’t for her.”

“Remind me to give her a huge hug. I love having my Chou-tzu here.” Dahyun nudged Tzuyu and changed subjects again. “Have you seen that video of puppies being plopped into deep snow?”

The smile on Tzuyu’s face told her that she had, but seemed more than eager to see it again.

…

You’d think Dahyun had been gone for months with how much Jihyo beamed at the sight of them entering the shop, and she swarmed around them when she could, making comments and otherwise smiling at them whenever she caught their eyes while serving the other customers.

They sat together for an entire hour until finally Tzuyu announced that she had to go home, leaving without much of a goodbye. It turned out to be really bad timing though, because five minutes later Jihyo came over, asking if Dahyun wanted to come out back while she had her dinner, and Dahyun accepted happily. Knew that she wasn’t supposed to be in the back room meant for staff, but as Jihyo was in charge it wasn’t too much of a problem.

“I’m glad you came.” Jihyo said happily as they settled at the little table, Jihyo with a plastic box of rice and curry. Took a big bite and sighed happily, humming as she chewed. Dahyun smiled.

“I thought it was time.” Dahyun said.

Jihyo nodded and pointed at her with the chopsticks. “So, how are things?”

“They’re good. I think. I mean it’s not perfect and I had a thing a few days ago but I solved it myself. But it just mostly seems fine by now?” Dahyun let her mind wander back over the past month. “Work is a lot better. I don’t screw up as much.”

“S’good.” Jihyo nodded, her mouth full of curry. It smelled delicious, and Dahyun couldn’t help eyeing it.

“Yeah, it’s… I mean I sometimes think I’m making no progress at all and then sometimes it seems too easy?” Dahyun shrugged. “I’m sleeping well and I’m getting my stuff done on time, and my body is just cooperating.”

“What about your head?” Jihyo asked, offering Dahyun a bite of the curry which the younger girl happily accepted.
“It’s a struggle, but just the fact that I’m here telling you stuff should be a sign that it’s at least getting easier.” Dahyun shrugged.

“I’m glad.” Jihyo smiled. “You don’t have to worry about it being easier though, that’s a good thing. Just take it.”

“Mh, I guess.” Dahyun accepted another mouthful of curry.

“Trust me. You take the good where you can get it.”

“Fine,” Dahyun swallowed and took a sip from Jihyo’s water bottle. “Did you find out if you can get off work Saturday?”

“I did! It took a bit of work but I managed to trade my shift.” Jihyo beamed.

“I hope it wasn’t too much trouble. But I’m actually a lot more excited than I had expected.”

“Finally enjoying the tradition are we?” Jihyo smirked.

“I haven’t got a clue what you’re talking about.” Dahyun said dryly knowing exactly what she was talking about.

It had been a while since Dahyun had gotten this feeling of excitement when thinking about Sana. Since she had invited Sana to the birthday, she had cheered up quite a lot, and had even given the occasional hug, though she still disappeared for large parts of the day and rarely spent time in the living room, preferring her room to Dahyun’s company apparently. But the prospect of getting to spend an entire day at the sea with all her friends - all of them - was enough to get through anything life might throw at her at the moment.

…

There was just the thing with life, that it didn’t actually seem to be in the business of screwing her over at the moment. Not that Dahyun was in any way complaining, but with three days to her birthday, Dahyun’s biggest worry had been looking at train tickets and getting further ahead of her study schedule so she wouldn’t worry too much about school during the trip.

Even working a shift with both Mina and Jeongyeon didn’t really worry her much, as Yang-nim was back to drinking whiskey in his office, never leaving it. The only thing that worried Dahyun was how tired Mina looked, and wondered if she’d make it to closing time. It was she and Dahyun who were closing up tonight. And Dahyun’s worries only multiplied when Mina walked through the doors to the kitchen and slumped against the wall with a sigh.

“You okay?” Dahyun asked with a frown.

Mina shook her head. “They’re here again. I can’t deal with it tonight. I already had to endure lunch with my parents today, I didn’t need this on top of everything.”

“What do you mean ‘endure lunch’, I thought you had a good relationship?” Dahyun asked.

“We do but- ugh, it’s complicated, I’ll explain later.” Mina pushed herself off the wall and walked over to the line, looking at the dishes belonging to one of her assigned tables like she wanted to
magically wish them away. Before she could grab them however, Jeongyeon joined them, an expression of pure revulsion on her face. It was obvious that she had noticed Mina’s harassers as well.

“I know.” Mina said before Jeongyeon had even opened her mouth.

“One day I’m going to kill them.” Jeongyeon grumbled.

“No you’re not.” Mina took the dishes.

“No I’m not. But I want to.” Jeongyeon huffed.

“Me too.” Dahyun added.

“Me three.” Mina sent them both a small smile and walked out.

“We could try and do something about it. You know, for real.” Dahyun suggested as Jeongyeon drew out a power bar and offered half to Dahyun. The younger girl took it gratefully, sighing at the taste of food.

“I wish, but you know Yang-nim isn’t going to do shit.” Jeongyeon said contemptuously.

“I hope it’s just a flare up.”

“They’re idiots, they’ll grow tired of tailing her around eventually. Kinda makes me regret recommending her for the job back then, though.” Jeongyeon corrected her bangs and rubbed a hand over her cheek and down her neck.

“She needed a job and this was an open position, it would’ve been wrong not to recommend her.” Dahyun reassured the older girl.

“I guess. Yeah, you’re right.” Jeongyeon rubbed her neck, finished her half of the power bar and washed her hands.

“Dahyun, you should get back out.” Taeyang broke the conversation.

“Right, sorry.” Dahyun said, standing up straight again, nodding to herself before walking out. Even if there were no dishes to be served there was still a floor to be maintained, so Dahyun headed back out, taking a round in her section, making sure everyone had enough to drink and were pleased with the quality of the food. Still, she couldn’t help keeping an eye on Mina who was on door duty, her lips slightly pink but a professional smile on her lips. It was obvious how tired she was, and Dahyun had endless amounts of respect for how strong she was.

“Excuse me, miss?” Said a kind female voice from a nearby table in Jeongyeon’s section, pulling Dahyun from her thoughts. Maybe it was Dahyun’s slightly distracted mind tonight, but she couldn’t help notice how pretty the lady who had called for her, was. She was around thirty, probably, with her dark hair in a bob around her face, sitting opposite a slightly younger woman with light brown hair falling onto her shoulder.

“May I help you?” Dahyun asked politely, drawing out her notepad just in case.

“Can we get another sparkling water for my friend? Your Kimchi is wonderful but very spicy.” She winked at Dahyun.

Dahyun nodded and smiled. “Plain or with taste?”
“Plain, but with a piece of lemon please?” The younger of the two women said.

“Of course. I’ll be right back with it.” Dahyun said, and turned from them.

But just as she did so, the sound of voices caught her ears and hatred burned immediately in the pit of her stomach. Four men stood by the little podium by the entrance where the reservation schedule always lay. They were standing too close to Mina, and looked like they were headed out, one of them busy putting on his cotton coat. Dahyun edged closer in case she needed to step in, close enough to hear their conversation. She looked around but didn’t see Jeongyeon, wondering if that might be for the best; not that she really believed Jeongyeon would ever actually hurt them. But you never knew. And the thunder that had rumbled in her voice when she had forced Yang-nim to change the schedule for Dahyun still rang in her ears.

Keeping one eye on the door to the kitchen, Dahyun stepped closer once more - close enough to hear the conversations.

“But-” The obvious leader of the group said, but was cut off by Mina, no patience left in her voice.

“No. My final answer is no. I’m not available and even if I was I wouldn’t want to go out with you.”

Dahyun took another step. Vaguely remembered something about sparkling water with lemon, but it’d have to wait. This was the kind of situation that made Dahyun wish the restaurant could be reclassified so they could be entitled to a bouncer.

“But I’d treat you better.” The man insisted. Dahyun held back the urge to smack him.

“I highly doubt that.” Mina said with obvious distaste and raised eyebrows. Dahyun frowned. It wasn’t an unjustified tone, but it definitely was unusual for Mina to be that obviously disgusted with them.

“Come on, he can’t be that amazing, your fella. Is he an idol or something?” The man grinned, just as the door to the kitchen opened and Jeongyeon walked backwards through it with a dish in each hand. Dahyun’s heart picked up, and she knew that she should probably do something. Anything. But she was frozen on the spot, as if in the eye of a hurricane forming visibly around her. Could taste it in the air.

“What about him then?” The leader gestured at one of the others. Jeongyeon’s direction was aimed right at them, coming closer and apparently not noticing, her eye on the bowl of soup in one hand, trying not to spill.

“No. I’m not dating you.” Mina said loudly, obviously losing his patience as the suggested suitor had come forwards. Jeongyeon stopped in her tracks, finally noticing. Dahyun allowed herself a split-second to notice the way Jeongyeon’s eyes narrowed, lightning bolts in her eyes.

The leader opened his mouth but Mina cut him off.

“I’m not dating you either. Or either of you two.” And then, to Dahyun’s complete disbelief, Mina turned her face and looked past Dahyun, at Jeongyeon. “You, I am dating,” then turned back to the four guys. “But none of you.”

Dahyun stared. Clearly her mind had stopped working. Obviously there had been something she had completely misheard. Except Mina’s pink cheeks had turned bright red. And turning her head, Dahyun found Jeongyeon’s face to be as pale as Mina’s was red. Dahyun looked back at Mina. Then at Jeong. And then at the four men. They too looked as dumbstruck as Dahyun felt.
Instinct took over for Dahyun’s stunned mind, and she gently pushed Mina out of the way, placing herself between Mina and the four men, barely reaching their shoulders. It didn’t matter. All that mattered was getting Mina away from them, even if it meant putting herself on the line.

“You heard her. Now, you’re very welcome to have a drink or some food at our restaurant, but you need to leave her alone. She’s not interested.”

The leader looked at her, then at Jeongyeon, and lastly at Mina, a disgusted expression on his face.

“Dyke…” The leader said dryly.

Dahyun wanted to scream. Clenched her fist, face hot with anger, but he walked out before she lost control, the other three following him obediently. There was nothing left to do now except just try and control her racing heart. And when she looked back to check on Mina, she wasn’t there. And neither was Jeongyeon. But Dahyun just managed to see the back of a head with blonde hair disappearing into the kitchen.

Her entire body shaking, Dahyun looked around, to see how many had noticed. It didn’t seem too bad. Didn’t seem like people minded it too much. But she was alone on the floor now, still trying to wrap her head around the events of the last five minutes. Then she remembered the sparkling water, and hurried around the bar, finding a glass and a bottle of sparkling water, grabbing a fresh lemon and a cutting board. Focused on cutting a slice without cutting into her own shaking hand holding the lemon in place. Then put ice and the lemon slice in the water and walked over to the pretty women at Jeongyeon’s table. Apologized for the wait as she poured but received only understanding smiles from the women. Years later, Dahyun would still remember those smiles, for the kindness they expressed, even if she was just a waitress to them.

More than anything, Dahyun wanted to check on her friends, still in the kitchen, but there was no time. So instead she let her body take over for her mind and made rounds on all three sections of the restaurant. She manned the place for a good ten minutes before there was a proper excuse to head into the kitchen, a load of dishes in each hand, and found her friends there, Mina clenching her water-bottle, eyes red and Jeongyeon with her back to Dahyun, hand rubbing Mina’s arm. Dahyun stopped in her tracks and suddenly wished she hadn’t come out here after all. It felt like she was somehow invading their space, even if they weren’t doing anything. Because the way they looked at each other proved without a doubt that it was indeed true. And honestly Dahyun felt more stupid for not seeing it than surprised that it was real. They didn’t seem to have noticed her, so Dahyun made a deal of stacking the dishes for the kitchen boy, as loudly as she could, and as intended, caught Mina’s attention, yet she looked mostly like she wanted to avert her eyes. Dahyun smiled. As softly and brightly as she could, and made sure to give her a thumbs up as well. Saw how Mina’s eyes glinted and crinkled at the edges as she gave a wet laugh, hiccuping slightly. The laugh made Jeongyeon turn as well, her cheeks flushed and a sheepish expression on her face. Dahyun rolled her eyes and walked over to the line without a word, taking the dishes for one of Jeongyeon’s tables. Saw her mouth thank you before walking back out. Dahyun just shrugged and winked at her even though it failed. Couldn’t very well salute with three dishes, but it made Jeongyeon smile and Mina giggle, so Dahyun didn’t mind.

…

It didn’t really come as a surprise to Dahyun that it was Mina who ended up leaving at eleven, and Jeongyeon who stayed behind. Mina had been exhausted at the start of the shift, and the outburst had
done nothing to make it easier for her. But now the place was quiet and closed, the last tables cleaned, and a silence had settled between Jeongyeon and Dahyun in the changing room. The only two left. Jeongyeon hadn’t talked much at all. And Dahyun hadn’t pressed the subject. It wasn’t any of her business, even if she had to admit that she was curious.

It was Jeongyeon who spoke first, just as Dahyun took off the tie, hanging it on a hook inside her locker.

“I’m sorry.” Jeongyeon sighed, pulling at her hair tie to let her hair down, running a tired hand through it to make it fall somewhat decently after having been pulled back for most of a day.

“It’s okay.” Dahyun said genuinely. “But are you okay?”

“Yeah, I just.. Dahyun. I’m sorry.” She looked up with tired eyes and ran a hand over her forehead, scratching at her scalp. “I… We didn’t want you to find out this way.”

“It’s okay, I get it.” Dahyun assured her and started working the buttons of her shirt.

“We wanted to tell you, but we never really got around to it. There was never a right time, and,” Jeongyeon’s face screwed up. “it was kind of nice, having it to ourselves? Not worrying about the consequences. But by now we should have said something.”

“Wait, never got around to it?” Dahyun frowned, taking the shirt off, grabbing the one she had worn before her shift and pulling it over her head. “How long has this been going on?”

“A while.” Jeongyeon sighed. “Longer than we intended. Originally we just wanted to take a few weeks to figure it out, then tell people. Tell-”

“Jihyo?”


Dahyun sat down on the bench besides Jeongyeon “When you say a while and dragged on , are we talking like a month or-”

“Three.” Jeongyeon sighed. “Little more than three.”

“Hold on. You mean to tell me you’ve been together since February and you told no-one?” Dahyun gaped at her.

“We should’ve.”

“No, I’m not judging. I’m impressed.” Dahyun snorted.

Jeongyeon looked sheepish, and this time she couldn’t help the smile that tugged at the corners of her lips.

“How the hell did…” Dahyun started but trailed off at the look of Jeongyeon’s smile. In that moment, several truths occurred to Dahyun at the same time, and she maybe turned to face Jeongyeon a little too fast, because the older girl flinched and scooted a few inches to the opposite side of where Dahyun was sitting. “You lied!”

“I thought we already established that.” Jeongyeon frowned.

“No, that morning! That morning when I had slept over, you said you were talking to Jihyo. You were lying! You’re wearing the same stupid grin as you are right now, you were talking to Mina!”
Jeongyeon studied her hands very thoroughly. “I was.”

“She stopped driving here,” Dahyun continued, “which means she’s been staying at your place?”

“Sometimes.” Jeongyeon shrugged, then grinned. “Most of the time.”

“But what about Momo?” Dahyun tried to put the pieces together.

“What about her?” Jeongyeon frowned.

“Well, she lives there, how did you- oh… she knows.” Dahyun felt completely out of the loop. Of course Momo knew.

“She found out the first night.” Jeongyeon chuckled. “Caught Mina in the kitchen midnight munching. But Mina got her to keep tight.”

“So all the teasing…”

“Is the exact same kind of teasing she’s giving you for not moving on Sana.” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow at Dahyun.

“She knows about- of course she knows about that.”

“Momo knows a lot of things.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“I’m gonna have to disown her.” Dahyun grumbled.

“Then you’ll have to disown Sana as well.” Jeongyeon said, more confident now.

“Sana knows?!” Dahyun yelled. Hadn’t meant to yell but honestly.

“That morning after Chaeyoung’s birthday party, she showed up at like seven, and honestly none of us had the energy to wriggle out a lie at that stage of the hangover. She didn’t really seem to care, just promised not to tell. We had wanted to tell Jihyo that night and then- I tried to get Jihyo one on one but she refused. Just wanted to get drunk. And then when Nayeon told us that Jihyo didn’t stay over we got paranoid and pushed it again.” Jeongyeon explained.

“Okay, so-” Dahyun started then cut herself off. “No, never mind.”

“What?”

“I’m just curious, but it’s none of my business.” Dahyun shook her head.

“You can ask, it’s about time I get used to talking about it anyway. It was fine when it was just Momo, and Sana to a degree, but now… it’s time.” Jeongyeon cringed. “So. What do you want to know?”

“How long have you liked her?”

Jeongyeon shrugged. “Not really sure. I mean there was the party right after she had started working there, back in October, and I sorta felt like something could’ve happened but then I just got back with Jiyeon for a while. But I kept thinking about her? So I broke up with Jiyeon finally a month after, and I’ve just been trying to get over Mina and get Jiyeon out since then.”

“Why get over Mina?” Dahyun asked without thinking, then answered her own question. “Jihyo, right, go on.”
“Well, there’s nothing more to it.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“Oh come on, you clearly didn’t get over her, so something must’ve happened, right?” Dahyun pressed, slightly worried that she was pushing too far now. But the dumb grin on Jeongyeon’s face was enough to tell her what had happened.

“Go Mina.” Dahyun said with an acknowledging nod. “Did she show up outside your window with a boom blaster and tell you you’re an idiot?”

Jeongyeon gave a single laugh. “No, but she called me thick, or slow or something. It was just after a shift and she was talking about wanting to get asked out and- honestly, I didn’t even know she liked me until she was kissing me all of a sudden.”

“Bold.” Dahyun said.

“Quite a lot bolder than you’d expect.” Jeongyeon agreed, studying her shoes very carefully all of a sudden.

Dahyun narrowed her eyes. “What do you-”

Once again, Jeongyeon’s eyes was enough to tell Dahyun the truth.

“Wow, go Mina.” Dahyun gaped.

“Shut it.” Jeongyeon grumbled.

“What, did you even bother to actually ask her out first?” Dahyun chuckled, Jeongyeon’s cheeks burning.

“Of course I did!”

“And that was your bright idea?” Dahyun snorted and shook her head.

“Shut up, it wasn’t my idea.” Jeongyeon looked utterly flustered, fiddling with the hem of the apron still around her waist. Dahyun examined her face in amazement. How had she not seen it? It was so obvious now that she knew.

“You love her.” Dahyun said quietly.

Jeongyeon looked up at Dahyun finally and nodded. “Yeah.”

Dahyun didn’t press the matter further, Jeongyeon’s cheeks still red though her gaze was firm. It was enough teasing, and it was late. Very late.

Dahyun got back up. “I’m happy for you, you know?”

“Thanks, Dahyun.” Jeongyeon smiled vaguely, running a hand through her hair. Sighed and got up as well.

Dahyun finally changed the lower half of her outfit, stepping out of the skirt and into her slacks while Jeongyeon gathered her stuff without changing. Dahyun looked into the depths of her locker, her mind drifting.

“Dahyun?” Jeongyeon asked.

“You asked once,” Dahyun started, talking into the locker, “if I would tell you if there’s someone I
liked. Really liked. And I know now you were talking about yourself, but I think I need to say this out loud, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course.”

“I’m in love with Sana.” Dahyun swallowed hard. “For real. We haven’t- I mean, we aren’t. We’re just friends. Almost, at one point, but no.”

Jeongyeon didn’t try to get her to elaborate when she failed to get more words out. Just waited.

Dahyun finally turned to face Jeongyeon. “It sounds so weird to say, but yeah… I’m in love.”

“It gets easier.” Jeongyeon reassured her. Dahyun grabbed her bag and closed the locker.

“I haven’t been taking my meds.” Dahyun admitted as they walked out, Jeongyeon making sure they had locked up properly. “I tried one night but I still couldn’t sleep. I just turned into a zombie. I couldn’t do anything, and it was quite scary to be honest.”

“So, you’re still not sleeping?”

“Oh, I’m sleeping fine, most days. Just. Not. In my bed.” This time Dahyun looked away.

“I thought you said you were just friends?” Jeongyeon asked dryly, stopping on the sidewalk where they went their separate ways.

“We are!” Dahyun said quickly. “I just- I mean it’s- it’s complicated. When Momo lived here I slept with Sana - not like that!” Jeongyeon was chuckling, but Dahyun kept rambling. “We’ve never even kissed. On purpose. But I slept in her bed because I couldn’t sleep in the living room and it was the best sleep I’ve gotten in my life, and then ever since I’ve been sleeping there on and off. But since we started this whole get-Dahyun-back-on-track thing... since then it’s been on.” Dahyun rambled.

“So, you sleep in her bed and she doesn’t mind?”

Dahyun shrugged. “No.”

“Is it intimate?”

“I just said we haven’t even kissed.” Dahyun grumbled, feeling her cheeks. Could’ve fried an egg on them.

“I mean is it you laying on one side and her on the other, or?”

“Or.”

“So you cuddle.”

“...Yeah.”

Jeongyeon nodded. Then without a warning turned in the direction of her own apartment and started walking. Turned her head and grinned back at Dahyun.

“Kiss her, Kim Dahyun.”

And she was gone.

Dahyun stared into the darkness and then up into the street light. Every single argument, every
reason not to act, seemed weak suddenly. Jeongyeon was right. It was time to try. Even if it didn’t end well, it was time to try.

...

Maybe it was the fact that Mina got to express her feelings in her mother tongue or maybe it was just Momo’s weight against her back, but it helped.

Momo had been asleep on the couch when Mina got back to Jeongyeon’s apartment. Instead of waking the older girl, Mina had snuck into Jeongyeon’s room, changed out of her waitress uniform and into one of Jeongyeon’s shirts - her favorite, and one of the pairs of sweatpants she had lying in Jeongyeon’s top drawer. Already had a third of her closet here, somehow, her own bed unused for almost a week now. But right now she wished that she had done everything differently. That she had been honest about her feelings for Jeongyeon from the start. That she had never quit the job at The Black Bean, that they had told people, that she hadn’t snapped tonight. But there was another part of her, the one who held much regard to the space-time-continuum, that knew that if she went back, she might not be sitting here on Jeongyeon’s bed, in her silly Calvin and Hobbes shirt, wishing she could see the stars from the windowless room. So instead, she merely drew the covers around her and stared into the mattress, trying not to overthink everything.

It didn’t go over very well. Mina had never been the best at being alone with her thoughts, with her fears.

Momo must’ve heard her. Heard her mumble her worries to the mattress and possibly the occasional snuffle. Because all of a sudden she was there, and crawled between Mina and the covers, hugging her from behind, providing pressure and comfort. Told her to tell the worries to her instead of the mattress. And Mina did.

In the darkness, Mina told Momo about her outburst in the restaurant and how she had just exposed them to god knows how many people and Dahyun. And her fears that they wouldn’t be able to keep it a secret for much longer. Her fear of what they would have to face when they told.

And Momo just listened. Didn’t leave, even when Mina had calmed down and started fiddling with the hem of the black shirt instead. At some point however, it became quite clear to Mina that the older girl wasn’t staying for Mina’s sake, as such. She had fallen asleep. With her arm limply around Mina’s waist, laying in her lap, and her cheek pressed against Mina’s shoulder, Momo was simply sleeping. There was something utterly apparent about Momo, and it was only now she realized why it hadn’t been weird for Dahyun that first time they all met Momo. That being stuck to Momo was never weird, but just welcoming. And Mina made a mental note to thank Dahyun for bringing Momo along that time.

A giggle bubbled over Mina’s lips when Momo gave a single quiet snore, and Mina reached down to wrap Momo’s arms tighter around herself. Felt Momo squeeze her waist. Then she drew out her phone, making sure the angle didn’t hit Momo’s face, and found the book she had been reading this morning. She was going to wait up for Jeongyeon anyway, so it wasn’t too bad to just sit like this. Even if it started to hurt her back after an hour. Nevertheless Mina stayed awake, watching how the time passed, waiting.
It was almost three in the morning when the front door finally sounded, and a few moments later, the door to Jeongyeon’s bedroom creaked open, and Mina sighed, a smile on her face as Jeongyeon looked at the two girls on the bed, a dumbstruck look on her face in the semi-darkness.

“The hell?” Jeongyeon whispered with a lopsided grin, crossing her arms.

“She was comforting me and fell asleep like this... I might need some help moving her.” Mina explained quietly. Jeongyeon covered her mouth, her body trembling with chuckles. And Mina had to do the same. Tried to control herself to avoid waking Momo. In two strides, Jeongyeon was by her side.

“Just lay her down.” Jeongyeon whispered, chuckles still bubbling under her voice. Mina nodded and moved out of Momo’s arms, getting her down on the bed by Jeongyeon’s help. Then they covered her with Jeongyeon’s blanket.

“Cat’s out, huh?” Jeongyeon settled on the edge of the bed, taking Mina’s hand between both of hers.

“I’m sorry.” Mina sighed heavily.

“I’m kind of relieved, actually.” Jeongyeon said quietly.

“Why?” Mina asked, feeling Jeongyeon shift on the bed.

“I think it’s time.” Jeongyeon smiled. “Take the leap.”

“Yeah?” Mina reached up and cupped the older girl’s cheek. Felt her turn her face in Mina’s hand and press her lips to Mina’s palm.

“Yeah.” Jeongyeon confirmed.

“I still didn’t mean to snap like that.” Mina said.

“There’s nothing we can do about it now. What’s done is done.” Jeongyeon squeezed her hand. “I cleared it with Dahyun as well. She’s not mad, just surprised.”

“I guess that means we hid it well.” Mina smiled.

Jeongyeon chuckled and nodded, pressing another kiss to Mina’s palm.

“At least we won’t have to arrive at separate times anymore.” Mina let her arm fall down to settle over Jeongyeon’s heart.

“Or listen to them teasing me about Momo.” Jeongyeon gestured towards the sleeping girl in the other end of the bed.

“That was kind of funny though.” Mina giggled.

“I mean, like I’d ever go for her.” Jeongyeon rolled her eyes.

“I would.” Mina joked.

“Right, sure, so I’m what? Burnt leftovers?” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow.

“No, you’re my girlfriend, and I love you.” Mina said softly, feeling how Jeongyeon leaned closer. Let the hand on the older girl’s chest wrap around her neck and returned Jeongyeon’s kiss chastely.
“Do you wanna borrow Momo’s bed or try to move her?” Jeongyeon asked when she pulled back.

“Nah, let her sleep, we’ll just huddle close.” Mina said, chuckling just as Momo gave a loud sigh and turned onto her side, almost as if to make more space for them.

“Alright, I’ll be back then.” Jeongyeon said quietly, pecking Mina’s lips before getting up, grabbing a clean night shirt from her dresser and the boxers neatly folded on the chair by the desk.

In another part of town, about at the same time, a girl watched another girl sleeping, making a choice before closing her eyes and letting sleep take her away, the side of her palm touching the side of the other girl’s.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Bonfires and Birthday Kisses

Chapter Notes

So it's not quite October 1st but you're getting it anyways because I'm busy tomorrow.

Thank you for waiting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dahyun woke to the smell of burnt toast.

With a scrunch of the nose, Dahyun turned onto her side and fumbled to find her glasses. The realization of what day today was, hit the now twenty one year old girl just as the room came into focus, dim lights shining from the edges around the blinds and from underneath the door. Tugging her lip between her teeth to contain her grin, Dahyun freed herself of Sana’s sheets. Then she stretched, corrected her shirt and walked out of the bedroom, masking a yawn.

It was weird, honestly, and at the same time not weird at all. She had been awake for maybe all of three minutes, yet her body was in a state of confliction already, sleep barely having left her body yet somehow every nerve on high alert, stomach jolting excitedly every few seconds. And it certainly did nothing to calm her down to find Sana in the kitchen, by the fridge, in Dahyun’s Kobe sweater - the one with the stain - and her pink shorts, hair in a lazy ponytail and glasses slid halfway down her nose. She was pouting. Not at Dahyun though, but at the toaster. And then at the burnt toast on a plate besides it. Dahyun chuckled. Couldn’t help it. How a girl who actually wasn’t that bad at regular cooking could get into such an endless fight with a piece of electronic equipment, Dahyun would never understand. But it didn’t matter. Because the self-aware amusement in Sana’s face as she looked around at Dahyun, was everything.

“I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.” Sana whined. “I wanted to make you a birthday breakfast; show you that I’d learned how to use this thing but it won’t cooperate!”

“Did you offend it or something?” Dahyun turned the burnt toast, holding back chuckles. Then grabbed the toaster and turned it upside down in the sink to get out any charred crumbs. There were lots.

“I don’t know, but it hates me. I should’ve just gone for scrambled eggs and bacon. That I can do.” Sana huffed.

“Well, how about I make toast and you make that? We have plenty of time before we leave.” Dahyun offered.

“But I was supposed to make you breakfast.” Sana complained. “It’s your birthday and- oh god, I haven’t even wished you a happy birthday.”

Dahyun’s stomach jolted excitedly and she couldn’t help the grin. “It’s okay, Sana.”

“No, I’m screwing it up already- I-I just wanted to be the first to wish you happy birthday.”

“You’re not screwing up anything. My mom hasn’t called yet so you’re good - you’re still the first.” Dahyun assured her.
Sana nodded and fiddled with the hems of the sweater’s sleeves. Pulled them over her hands. Then in one swift motion Sana wrapped her arms around Dahyun and hugged her tight, then quickly released her again. “Happy birthday, Dahyunnie.”

It took a few seconds for Dahyun to register what had happened. Or rather, what hadn’t. But it wasn’t like Dahyun had asked for a kiss. Or felt entitled for one. But she had hoped.

Sana quickly turned to the fridge, opening it to find eggs and a pack of bacon. Dahyun tried not to feel too down, but her stomach didn’t listen, a knot settling in it despite her best efforts. If this was another one of Sana’s attempts to give Dahyun space… But there wasn’t any use in just standing around.

“Should I still make toast or would it ruin your plan?” Dahyun asked Sana’s back.

“I- uh. Sure.” Sana said, cracking an egg into a glass and then another. Checked the glass for shells and then turned on the stove, heating a pan.

“You’re wearing my shirt again.” Dahyun stated, just trying to keep the conversation.

“Sorry.” Sana said. “I wo-”

“No, it’s fine, I didn’t mean you should stop,” Dahyun cleared her throat “I was just- you look cute. In it. My shirt.”

Sana turned her head, a wide smile on her face and her voice full of sunshine. “I look cute?”

“You always look cute.” Dahyun dug into the pantry for more toast. Didn’t look at Sana but heard her giggle. Then, just as she was getting up, Sana’s arms were around her once more, hugging her from behind. And Dahyun felt like she might just melt in Sana’s arms, the older girl’s giggle in her ears, wriggling them both from side to side.

If it hadn’t been for the phone, Dahyun might’ve turned. Might’ve taken her hand and asked. But the phone did ring, so Dahyun didn’t ask. Just felt Sana’s arms disappear and turned to pick up the phone.

…

The urge to run away threatened to take the best of Jeongyeon. It was really only the constant reminder of why she did it, that made her stay put. For almost three months she had managed to forget about the consequences, but it had gone on too long now. Everything past the first few weeks were too long, and anything past the day Mina told the older she loved her was definitely too long. But there was nothing to do now but swallow her pride and face her friend. One of her oldest, dearest friends. A girl with a bracelet matching Jeongyeon’s own, around her left wrist.

She saw Jihyo from a distance, a frown forming on her face when she recognized Jeongyeon. The older girl got up, trying to prepare herself. Dug her hands into the pocket of her jeans and took a deep breath. Faced the confusion in Jihyo’s eyes.

“Jeongyeon?” Jihyo asked, “I thought… Mina called and asked me to come. I thought- Is she okay?”

“Yeah, she’s good. Just-… Can we sit?” Jeongyeon asked. Jihyo’s frown deepened but she nodded
and sat down on the bench. Jeongyeon joined her. Looked over the river. Tried to find a place to begin. She knew how to end it, but it felt like her mind was an empty page and she didn’t know what the first word should be.

“Jeongyeon?” Jihyo asked, placing a worried hand on Jeongyeon’s arm.

Jeongyeon tried to ignore her racing heart. Groaned and leaned forwards, Jihyo’s hand slipping from her skin, burying her head in her hands.

“What-”

“Jihyo. I really need you to be okay with this.” She said, turning her head in her hands to look at Jihyo out of the corner of her eye. Couldn’t properly face her after all. But she had to.

With a sigh, Jeongyeon sat back up, looking straight into Jihyo’s worried eyes.

“I’m seeing someone.”

“What? That’s great!” Jihyo beamed, and Jeongyeon cringed, causing Jihyo’s brows to furrow once more. “Wait, why wouldn’t I be…” She trailed off. Searched Jeongyeon’s eyes.


It was as if Jihyo had sensed the truth but hadn’t quite put the reality of it together until Jeongyeon said Mina’s name. Her eyes flickered and she opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again. Looked away, out over the water. She squinted slightly.

“Jihyo.”

Jihyo shook her head, and Jeongyeon once again felt the urge to run. To run and hide behind Mina and bury her face in the soft black hair. But she couldn’t. She had wanted to do this on her own. It was Jeongyeon who had picked Jihyo off from the curb that night. Jeongyeon who had seen Mina running away. Jeongyeon who had carried Jihyo inside. Had stayed with her through all of the heartache. Never once had she imagined that she might actually fall of the girl who had caused so much pain in the heart of her best friend.

“Who asked who?”

“What?” Jeongyeon frowned and sat back up. It was the last question she had expected. She had feared questions like how could you and why did you do it, but not this.

“Uh. She asked me to ask her, I guess? It’s complicated.”

“But she made the first move?”

“Well, I mean, yeah. She- she kissed me.”

“I’m glad.” Jihyo said softly, staring out over the water again. Swallowed and nodded to herself. But there was still a melancholy in the air around her.

“Are you okay?” Jeongyeon asked, a confused chuckle tumbling past her lips as she spoke.

“You don’t have anything more you want to know?” Jeongyeon asked.

“It’s really none of my business, but… There’s one thing.” Jihyo looked down at her, an almost sheepish expression on her face.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Does she laugh?”

Jeongyeon couldn’t help it. She smiled.

“... All the time.”

For a moment, it was as if the peace of the world had settled on Jihyo’s face. She reached out, offering her hand to Jeongyeon. Yet the moment Jeongyeon took it, Jihyo’s eyes grew distant once more, but Jeongyeon felt the way Jihyo’s hand kept her close, reassuring the older girl.

“I was so scared to tell you.” Jeongyeon murmured as they walked along the river.

“Did Nayeon convince you to?” Jihyo asked quietly.

“She doesn’t know yet.” Jeongyeon admitted. “I couldn’t put her in that position. I couldn’t ask her to keep a secret from you.”

“That’s noble.” Jihyo said. “She’s going to kill you.”

“I’m aware, thank you.” Jeongyeon cringed.

Jihyo’s hand clenched a little tighter and Jeongyeon let the younger girl decide the path.

…

It was almost a sign. It really was; the sky being so everblue and the sun shining warm and bright down on them as they walked onto the platform as the first two of nine. Even if there was still half an hour until the train left, Dahyun had insisted that it would be thoroughly impolite to arrive last minute to her own birthday party.

It was only nine in the morning but Dahyun’s day had already been great. Sana’s scrambled eggs had been wonderfully tasty and the toast golden and crispy. Her mom had sung happy birthday over the phone and Sana had poked her cheek as they got ready in the bathroom, side by side, giggling at each others’ four-eyes. Had talked about their experiences with the beach, Sana rarely going there and Dahyun going often until she started playing piano seriously.

Side by side, Sana and Dahyun sat down on the bench, waiting for the others to show, knowing full well that the only one who was usually in good time was Mina.

“Are you excited?” Sana asked, timed to the exact second where the awkward silence had threatened to settle. As if she was determined for it not to do so. Dahyun loved that about her.

“Very much.” Dahyun nodded. “It’s been a while since I’ve done something out of the ordinary for my birthday.”
“How do you usually celebrate your birthday?” Sana asked.

“It depends. When I was younger it was just with my parents and my brother but the past three years I’ve mainly celebrated with the my friends.”

“Nothing big?”

“Nah, I mean my sixteenth was big because of the concert I showed you, but the other years have been pretty mellow.” Dahyun shrugged.

“Then why did you decide on going to the sea this year?” Sana was obviously trying to keep the conversation going, even if it wasn’t needed.

“It was Jeongyeon’s idea, actually. And I thought it’d be fun.” Dahyun said, and added with a nod in the direction of the stairs up to the platform “And speaking of Jeongyeon.”

The blonde hair had been hard to miss as Jeongyeon ascended the stairs, and Dahyun couldn’t help smiling at the sight of Mina slightly behind her, their fingers laced and a soft smile on her face, Jeongyeon’s head turned back to look at her. They were seemingly deep in conversation.

“Ah, they’re finally telling people!” Sana said in a hushed but excited tone.

“Yeah, I gue-” Dahyun’s words caught and she turned to Sana with narrowed eyes. “About that. I have a bone to pick with you.”

Sana looked mostly like a deer caught in headlights as she rambled her explanation.

“They asked me not to tell anyone, and I really didn’t know why they were hesitating but I just…” Sana trailed off as Dahyun started laughing. “You’re teasing me.”

“I am.” Dahyun admitted with a grin, getting to her feet just as Jeongyeon and Mina reached them. Out of the corner of her eye, Dahyun saw that Sana had gotten up too, but her vision was immediately blocked by Jeongyeon’s arms around her, wishing her a happy birthday.

“Thank you.” Dahyun said timidly as Jeongyeon held her a little longer than usual before drawing back, arm still around Dahyun’s shoulder as Mina stood on her toes, hands around Dahyun’s head and pressed a kiss to the younger girl’s forehead.

“Happy birthday, Dahyun.” Mina said in her usual quiet tone, pressing their foreheads together before drawing back, Jeongyeon’s hand immediately finding Mina’s.

Dahyun raised an eyebrow ignoring the shy blush settling in her cheeks. “So what, you’re using my birthday to tell people?”

“If you don’t mind?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Not at all.” Dahyun said, hesitated and then continued. “Jihyo knows, right?”

Mina pressed her lips together. Nodded. “I didn’t know that you knew.”

“She told me. You’re all good.” Dahyun sent her a grin. “Just don’t be grossly cute, I don’t want to barf up the birthday cake.”

“Hadn’t planned on it.” Jeongyeon said flatly.

Dahyun saw Sana shuffle beside her and maybe stepped half an inch closer to her. Discreetly.
Definitely without Jeongyeon noticing. Definitely ignoring her smirk.

“Well, you’ve already overshared so I don’t really trust you.” Dahyun picked up the conversation in an attempt to distract. Thankfully, Jeongyeon was good at dishing out but easily flustered when it came back to her.

“I didn’t overshare, you guessed!” The older girl huffed.

“Guessed what?” Mina asked, clearly not a part of the conversation.

Dahyun smirked, ignoring Jeongyeon’s slight shake of the head, the older girl retreating her arm from around Dahyun’s shoulders. Three months of secrecy deserve a bit of good teasing. So Dahyun turned to Mina with a shrug and a completely neutral voice.

“That your first date was you dragging her into bed.”

Mina’s eyes widened and she looked at Jeongyeon, swatting her arm in embarrassment. The older girl had clearly not told her about this.

“She guessed!” Jeongyeon defended herself.

“That’s not just something you guess. You must’ve said something to-”

“I just said you’re surprisingly bold.” Jeongyeon interrupted.

“It was actually more the fact that she clamped up when I asked for details, that gave it away.” Dahyun shrugged, having a little mercy on Jeongyeon.

“Mh…” Mina grumbled, but Jeongyeon just tugged her closer, pecking her lips until she started giggling, lips splitting in a grin that prevented her from keeping the kiss going.

“Okay, you’ve already broken my rule of not being gross, thank you.” Dahyun said as dryly as she could. “Can I uninvite you?”

“Nope, too late.” Jeongyeon grinned.

“Then why didn’t you bring some proper company at least? Where’s Momo?”

“Oh, she’s taking the bus, we slept at Mina’s.” Jeongyeon explained.

“Excuse me, who slept at whose now?”

Jeongyeon froze, her eyes wide at the distinctive voice. Mina’s hand slipped from Jeongyeon’s, but Jeongyeon fumbled and grasped again, looking halfway like she was gonna faint and halfway like she was planning her own funeral already. And sure enough, without the rest of them noticing, Nayeon and Chaeyoung had reached them, the younger girl a few steps behind the red haired girl. It was like seeing a crash about to happen. Except, to the surprise of everyone, probably herself included, Jeongyeon merely turned to face Nayeon and shrugged, her eyes firm on the older girl’s.

“I slept at Mina’s.”

Nayeon’s eyes narrowed and her brows knotted as the two oldest friends stared at each other. Then, to the obvious surprise of every member of the party, Nayeon shrugged.

“Okay.”
“Okay?” Jeongyeon asked, her face expressing the same confusion that Dahyun felt.

“Yeah, whatever. I mean, good for you, right?” Nayeon seemed completely unfazed.

“You’re just gonna let her off the hook?” Dahyun asked before she could stop herself.

“I’m just surprised she actually meant it when she said she wasn’t into me.” Nayeon shrugged again.

“Anyways, Isn’t this your day?”

“I... Yes, but-” Dahyun looked around to Jeongyeon but there was no help there. She merely shook her head in a ‘don’t tempt the fate’ kind of way, and Dahyun pressed her lips together. Let Nayeon and Chaeyoung hug her on turn, Nayeon placing a kiss on her temple and Chaeyoung on her cheek. The younger checked for lipstick marks for good measure as she wrapped her arm around Dahyun, waiting for the last three.

For a moment Dahyun merely observed as Mina tentatively asked Nayeon how the audition went. Listened as Nayeon complained about how prejudiced the instructor had been, and that she was still waiting to hear back. Listened as Chaeyoung tried to turn Nayeon’s worries around though without much success. But her mind kept slipping out of focus. And she kept trying not to look back at Sana who was standing a few steps behind them. She had stepped back to send a text but then hadn’t joined back up. If Dahyun could just catch her eye without the others noticing too much. But Jeongyeon’s eyes were constantly on her, a reminder that Dahyun had in fact not done what they had talked about. In the end, Dahyun gave up and checked the clock on her phone instead of looking at Sana. Still fifteen minutes until the train took off.

Tzuyu showed up a couple of minutes later, coming up the stairs looking like a model. She always did, but in a sundress and sunglasses she completely stole the scene. It wasn’t unnoticed by Dahyun that the youngest’s eyes flickered to Mina and Jeongyeon’s hands, lazily twined, but she didn’t comment. Merely walked around the group to wrap Dahyun in a hug from behind before settling with both arms around Chaeyoung’s neck. Rested her head on top of Chaeyoung’s to the shorter girl’s obvious ambivalence, caught between a smile and a frown. She could never really be mad at the younger girl, even when she made the height difference so obvious.

“Slept well?” Dahyun asked the youngest.

“Lots.” Tzuyu said calmly. “You?”

Dahyun nodded and dared to steal a glance at Sana. She just hadn’t expected Sana’s eyes to find hers, and definitely hadn’t expected the small smile that played around the older girl’s lips. But Dahyun didn’t shy away. For once. Merely nudged her head in a gesture for Sana to come closer. And she did. Took a few delicate steps, until she joined the circle. She stood so close to Dahyun, that a single shift would mean that their arms would touch. And she barely had to stretch to hold her hand. But Dahyun did neither. Just felt the warmth and light emitting from Sana as she smiled at Dahyun, and decided that it was good enough. For now.

With five minutes to the train leaving, Jihyo finally showed, her brown hair repeatedly getting caught in the wind and a smile on her face. Dahyun noticed how Mina’s hand slipped from Jeongyeon’s once more. Noted how Jeongyeon didn’t take it this time. Shifting her weight, Dahyun saw how
Jihyo looked from Dahyun to the others, ending with Jeongyeon. Tried not to notice how soft Sana’s skin was against her arm. Instead she watched how Jihyo swatted Jeongyeon over the back of her head as she passed her.

“Hey!” Jeongyeon glared.

“Get a grip, Yoo Jeongyeon.” Jihyo merely said, clicking her tongue, raising an eyebrow at the older girl’s hand, limply hanging next to Mina’s. Not touching.

“I just-”

“Yeah, I know. Get a grip before I take back my blessing.” Jihyo shook her head with a grin.

“Your blessing…” Jeongyeon muttered under her breath, yet couldn’t stop the dorky smile that spread as Mina’s hand once more found hers.

Jihyo’s smile faded as her eyes travelled across the faces of the rest of the party and Dahyun felt Tzuyu’s arm slip from around her neck and a gentle push at her back. Dahyun took a step forwards, towards Jihyo. Then Jihyo’s eyes found Dahyun’s and she stretched out her arm, grabbing Dahyun’s and closing the distance between them in a hug so warm and tight that it almost took Dahyun’s breath away. Made her miss Jihyo even if there was no space between them.

“Happy birthday, butterfly.” Jihyo murmured, lips brushing against Dahyun’s cheek.

“You ok?” Dahyun asked, arms around Jihyo’s back.

“Yeah. She told me this morning.” Jihyo muttered. “I’m happy for them.”

Dahyun nodded and held Jihyo tighter. Held her longer than she had done any of the others.

Jihyo had told her one night, when Dahyun had shown up without warning in the middle of the night, covered in snow with flushed cheeks and frozen tears on her cheeks. They had talked for longer than they ought to that night, and Dahyun had asked her if she had ever been in love. And Jihyo had. She calmly told Dahyun about being in love with Mina back in high school. How she had kissed Mina in a bathroom at a graduation party and how Mina had kissed her in front of the house a few minutes later. Then about Mina breaking into tears because she hadn’t returned Jihyo’s feelings after all. And Mina running off, leaving Jihyo on the curb with a broken heart.

It had been Jeongyeon and Nayeon who had gotten her through the heartbreak. Who had tried to freeze out Mina for what she had done, but Jihyo who had held on to Mina. Made them invite her to everything and made them love her.

But the story didn’t stop there. Time and time again Jihyo had managed to convince herself and the others that she was over it, that she didn’t blame Mina for her mistake. Got an apartment in the same building as Mina. Got a job together. Folded laundry together. Cooked together. Laughed together.

And then a girl had asked out Mina at the coffee house.

And Jihyo broke a cup.

After that, Mina had taken then consequence. Had accepted Jeongyeon’s offer to see if she could get hired at the restaurant. Had moved far away, to the other end of town. And eventually things seemed to settle down for real. But it had taken most of two years.
The memory of Jihyo’s story made Dahyun’s stomach turn uncomfortably. Would that be her story too one day - if she kissed Sana? Would she eventually have to see Sana holding someone else’s hand? Could she ever be happy for Sana and another person, like Jihyo was? The thought made her dizzy and she turned instinctively to look at Sana, Jihyo’s arms slipping from around her neck. Felt how she stepped back and saw her wrap her arms around Nayeon’s back instead, head on the oldest’s shoulder. But Dahyun’s attention was still on Sana. Saw the frown and then the smile that tugged at the corners of Sana’s lips as Dahyun smiled at her. Discreetly, Dahyun moved back to her original place in the circle beside Sana, Chaeyoung, and Tzuyu on her other side. Because in that moment, Dahyun couldn’t stand to be apart from Sana. It wasn’t a choice.

If someone later asked her when she knew, it would be this moment, when she let her index find its way into Sana’s palm and feel her hand close around it.

Momo arrived thirty seconds before the train did, meaning that they had to hurry to board the train - none of them willing to get on without Momo there - and that Dahyun had Momo hanging off her as they boarded, the older girl pressing kisses to her cheek and neck and shoulder.

As the doors closed behind them, Dahyun squirmed with embarrassment and Momo laughed into her skin before pulling back, looking around in the train carriage. She sat down in an empty seat, dragging Dahyun onto her lap, arms around her waist. Then Nayeon sat down next to them and Mina and Jeongyeon opposite, while the other four took the four-seat on the other side. Without really noticing it, Dahyun’s eyes fell on Sana, sitting by the window talking to Chaeyoung. Then Nayeon’s voice cut through Dahyun’s thoughts and she looked down, answering her question about how long the ride was.

Underneath Dahyun, Momo was already dozing off, forehead leaned against the window and a lazy smile around her lips.

…

The trip took almost an hour. Momo had slept the entire way, arms around Dahyun’s waist. Dahyun envied that ability; just to be able to sit down and decide to sleep. Who wouldn’t love that?

The first ten minutes, Dahyun and Nayeon had spent discussing overlapping curriculum in their respective classes and then pondered about whether Momo would wake if Dahyun stuck a mini-marshmallow up her nose. Dahyun was tempted to try, but opted against it despite Nayeon’s encouragement. Mostly because Mina had kept eyeing them, as if she might try and kick them if they tried. Not that she ever would. But Dahyun certainly had gained a lot more respect for her temper in the past few days. Definitely not a boundlessly patient angel.

After the decision to not test the width of Momo’s nostrils, they just sat peacefully together, basking in the sun streaming through the window. Still, Dahyun occasionally caught herself gazing at Jeongyeon and Mina. Mina was playing a game on her phone and Jeongyeon kept trying to distract her, blowing air in her face and poking her cheek. And Mina would grumble at her warningly but
couldn’t keep the smile off her face for very long.

When Jeongyeon started tapping the screen however, Mina huffed, waving her hand away from the screen. Jeongyeon pouted, a sight Dahyun had never expected to see and hoped never to see again, but Mina’s expression just softened at the sight. Still, she shook her head with a smile and asked Jeongyeon to go annoy Nayeon instead. For a moment Jeongyeon seemed to consider it, but settled for resting against Mina’s shoulder, trying to nap.

Dahyun let her eyes rest on them. Just as she had seen the possible devastation in Jihyo’s side, she saw in Jeongyeon’s the possibilities. Because Dahyun wanted nothing more than for Sana to look at her the way her two friends looked at each other. But then there was Jihyo again; the vision of Sana kissing someone that wasn’t Dahyun. The jealousy pulled at her stomach, rearranging the organs uncomfortably, knotting them together. She couldn’t really stop Sana from doing that. Kissing someone else. Dahyun wasn’t kissing her, so why couldn’t someone else? Dahyun’s organs tried to do a double knot around each other.

In the end Dahyun settled for trying not to think too much about Sana… Or Jihyo. Which was hard, as Jihyo’s voice was loud and Sana’s laughter cut through the buzzing conversation as if Dahyun’s ears were tuned just for that sound.

It wasn’t until the doors opened and they huddled out, met by the sound of seagulls and the smell of salt, that Dahyun actually managed to free herself of the worries that had crept up on her in the train.

Her arm linked with Jihyo’s, Dahyun walked until they reached the beach. Took off her shoes and let her toes dig into the warm sand, the group heading towards towards the water. They stopped about halfway down, depositing bags and towels in a pile. Some had brought bathing suits and others just settled for drying off their clothes later.

The wind played in Dahyun’s hair as she folded the shirt she had worn outside her bathing suit, and she could hear Jeongyeon and Chaeyoung joking around behind her. Then Jeongyeon came running at full speed, Chaeyoung chasing after her, first to reach the sea. Chaeyoung squealed loudly when Momo ran after them, catching Chaeyoung and almost toppling her over before they had even reached the edge of the sea. Jeongyeon’s laughter could probably be heard from a mile away, and so could Chaeyoung’s whine.

As she and Jihyo walked towards the water, Dahyun looked back and saw Sana talking to Mina, still by the pile. She was so quiet today, Sana. So calm. Not at all her giddy self. And Dahyun still hadn’t worked up the courage to ask for a birthday kiss. But it didn’t matter right now. All that mattered was that Jihyo had caught her staring and nudged her teasingly.

“Shut up.” Dahyun mumbled.

“Do it.” Jihyo whispered.

“What?”

“You know.” Jihyo made kissy lips and the sounds to match and Dahyun’s face flushed, pulling her hair in front of her cheeks to hide the red in them.

Jihyo laughed, but then squealed loudly when Dahyun decided to fight back, poking the older girl’s side and then pulling her arm, forcing Jihyo to run into the sea with her.

The water was too cold and absolutely wonderful and they ran without slowing, until they were
“Come on!” Jeongyeon called from further out, waving at them with both arms. She and Momo had thrown all caution away, their clothes soaked as they waited for the others. Chaeyoung wasn’t nearly as soaked, as she was currently safe from the waves on Momo’s back, legs around her waist and a grin on her face.

Looking back at land, Dahyun saw Mina and Sana walking slowly into the water, Nayeon staying behind with Tzuyu.

“It’s so cold!” Mina complained, though her smile was wide and her complaints were interrupted by giggles from both Japanese girls.

Momo and Jeongyeon were still calling for them. Eventually Jeongyeon grew impatient and walked in, pulling Sana and Jihyo out by the wrists. They both protested with loud yelps, but there was no mercy and out they went.

“Wanna go?” Mina asked calmly, standing by Dahyun’s side.

For a second more Dahyun watched the giggling girls further out, and then nodded. With Mina’s hand in Dahyun’s, the two walked further out together, gasping at the cold water whenever a wave hit them where they were still dry. About ten feet further out, Sana’s scream sounded and grabbed Dahyun’s attention. Sana was running as fast as she could through the heavy water, Jeongyeon charging after her, murder in her eyes. In an obvious attempt at gaining an advantage, Sana changed direction, heading straight for Mina and Dahyun, where the water wasn’t as deep. Yet about three feet from them her eyes revealed a change of mind and she instead hurried around Mina, using the younger girl as a human shield.

“Oi, Sana-ya!” Jeongyeon’s voice thundered.

Sana merely giggled and hid her face in Mina’s back, squealing as Jeongyeon grabbed a hold of her arm to pull her from Mina.

“What did you do?” Dahyun asked with a chuckle at Sana.

“I tried to kiss her and she got really mad!” Sana squealed, turning herself and Mina as Jeongyeon’s efforts to pull her away intensified. But Dahyun didn’t pay attention anymore, her heart having dropped into her stomach. Watched as if through a veil as Mina bravely defended Sana from Jeongyeon.

They spent another ten minutes in the water until suddenly Momo dropped Chaeyoung into the water, seemingly forgetting her in her attempts to avoid Sana and Jihyo’s attacks, Jeongyeon wrapping around Dahyun, Mina taking the liberty to do some actual swimming. From the water Chaeyoung reemerged with loud complaints and her black hair in her face, pulling a strand from her mouth.

“What the hell?!” Chaeyoung yelped, brushing her hair back.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” Momo apologized, Sana’s arms around her waist, trying to pull her down in an act of revenge for the injustice done to Chaeyoung.

It only turned into a small amount of fighting though, as Jeongyeon noted the goosebumps on Dahyun’s arms and started pulling her in, the others following naturally.
When they arrived back on the beach, Tzuyu and Nayeon had unpacked the food and towels, and Dahyun flopped down on hers, feeling the power of the sun on her cold skin, drying her off already. On her left, Nayeon was protesting as Momo was leaning on her, her clothes and hair wet against Nayeon.

“Go away.” Nayeon scowled, repeatedly nudging Momo, who just leaned harder.

“Well, you refused to get in so I’m bringing the ocean to you.” Momo insisted.

Nayeon didn’t seem impressed in the slightest, and eventually her voice cut through the conversation, cold and tired.

“Momo, I’m serious. Go away.”

And Momo did. Moved around to sit next to Sana instead, Sana’s arm immediately around Momo’s, offering closeness and a kiss to the older girl’s forehead. Dahyun tried not to look.

…

The sun threatened to set over the water, and Jeongyeon buried her feet further into the sand. Looked at the waves arms resting on her knees, fiddling with the bracelet on her left hand. Heard the steps though muffled by the sand and saw the feet to her left. Waited.

“Hey you.” Nayeon’s voice was soft as she settled in the sand next to Jeongyeon.

“Hey…” Jeongyeon muttered.

“I really wanted to let it go.” Nayeon stared over the water, hugging her knees. “I just…"

“I get it. It was wrong; keeping it a secret. I mean considering-”

“That she’s the love of Jihyo’s life?” Nayeon asked dryly.

Jeongyeon cringed. Nodded.

“I’m not mad about that.” Nayeon shrugged. “You can’t help who you fall for.”

“Then what?” Jeongyeon asked with a frown.

“I’m not mad at all, actually. But there’s something. I’m feeling something.”

“About your own life or mine?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Oh it’s definitely about you, but it’s not anger. It’s more… hurt?”

Jeongyeon’s heart skipped a beat and she looked at her best friend. Found her looking back finally, eyes flicking between Jeongyeon’s.

“You knew.” Jeongyeon concluded, heart slowly sinking into her stomach. Of course Nayeon knew. Nayeon always knew. Had known about the girl Jeongyeon had had a crush on when they were just kids. Had known about Jiyeon long before Jeongyeon even knew and had known all the bad things
about her as well without Jeongyeon ever telling it. Of course she knew.

“I was so mad.” Nayeon admitted, her voice small and fragile as it never was. “I kept trying to get you to tell me, but you never did. But the worst thing is that I was mad at myself too, for being mad at you. Because I knew why you didn’t tell me. I knew your reasons were… you being you - noble. But I was still so mad at you for not telling me. For not putting me in that spot you were trying to spare me from. But now… now I’m just hurt that you didn’t tell me one on one. That I had to find out in front of all the others.”

“I’m sorry.” Jeongyeon whispered. It was all she could do. Apologize.

“No secrets, remember?” Nayeon’s voice cracked as she took Jeongyeon’s hand, their bracelets bumping against each other.

Jeongyeon nodded.

“You’re such an idiot Yoo Jeongyeon.” Nayeon croaked.

“Yeah.” Jeongyeon sighed. “I really am.”

“But the worst thing is that you’re fucking allowed to be. You had every reason to be hesitant, every reason to spare me, to make sure Jihyo would be- wouldn’t be- damn it why did you have to fall for her?”

“So you are mad about that.”

“No I’m just- you always make things so damn complicated, I mean you just got away from Jiyeon and that thing was a wreck. And now this? You’re allowed to choose an easy life sometimes you know? Couldn’t you have tried not to fall for a friend?” Nayeon sighed.

“Trust me, I really tried.” Jeongyeon said.

“I know you did, you sappy fool.” Nayeon said the last part under her breath, rolling her eyes before she continued. “That’s how I found out. Your attempts to hide your goofy ass smile is a dead giveaway.”

Jeongyeon glared. “I’m not-”

“Yes you are exactly that obvious; to me. Chaeyoung and the others, they had no clue.” Nayeon held her hand a little tighter.

Jeongyeon didn’t protest. Knew there was no point anyways.

“No secrets Yoo Jeongyeon.” Nayeon repeated, her voice trembling.

“No secrets Im Nayeon.” Jeongyeon said, reaching over with the other hand to rub Nayeon’s arm as the older girl broke the eye-contact and looked down at her knees.

“It’s not getting better, is it?”

Nayeon shrugged. Then shook her head and gave a shivering sigh. Looked over the water again. “Can’t do anything to stop it either.”

“You’re gonna be ok.” Jeongyeon assured her.

“What do you know, you’re a goddamn idiot.” Nayeon grumbled. It wasn’t an insult. It was just her
way of saying that she knew Jeongyeon would always be there for her. Even if she hadn’t allowed Nayeon to do the same.

Through all the good days, and especially all the bad, most of their lives, it had been them. Nayeon and Jeongyeon against the world. Sometimes against each other too but never for too long and never for real. Even when they fought it took only a word or a pleading look and arms would wrap around shoulders holding the other safe. And Jeongyeon regretted having kept this from Nayeon. Even more than having kept it from Jihyo. Because it was only now that she realized how much she had missed being able to talk about this with Nayeon. How hard it had been to breathe with the secrets between them.

With a sigh, Jeongyeon wrapped the older girl in her arms and watched the sun slowly setting. Kept Nayeon safe from her worries; even if only for a while.

…

The sound of the waves and crackling of the fire accompanied the night, but were rudely interrupted by Dahyun’s disgruntlement, as the first round of judgment in Mafia went on.

“I’m not mafia! I promise I’m just a citizen!” Dahyun protested, staring across the bonfire at Chaeyoung with a stubborn scowl. She bit down on her smore and felt it stick to her lip and teeth.

“Because Jeongyeon totally wouldn’t make you mafia because it’s your birthday, right?” Chaeyoung said sarcastically, the bonfire reflected in her eyes as the two friends scowled at each other from across the slowly dying flames.

“Exactly!” Dahyun insisted, shifting in the sand. To her right she felt Momo snuggle closer and wrapped an arm around her instinctively. Felt how she laid her head in Dahyun’s lap.

“That’s the worst argument I have ever heard.” Chaeyoung glowered.

“I’m serious, I’m just a citizen! Look at Mina, she’s not talking and she’s always mafia.” Dahyun counter argued.

“Wh- I’m not always mafia!” Mina protested.

“Dahyun’s kinda right.” Nayeon shrugged.

“No she’s not, babe, be on my side please.” Chaeyoung looked like Nayeon had just betrayed her in the worst way possible.

“Nah, Dahyun’s right. I say we kill Mina.” Nayeon insisted, and Dahyun received a burning glower from Chaeyoung at which she merely grinned.

Dahyun survived the first elimination, but Mina didn’t and like always she blamed Jeongyeon. But the older girl merely sat down behind her, chin on Mina’s shoulder.

“Night has fallen.” Jeongyeon said over the disgruntled huffs of her girlfriend.
They all did as ordered and closed their eyes, but Dahyun quickly opened hers when the mafia was called. So did Sana. Really, Dahyun should’ve known. Should’ve known that they would be paired, and sent Jeongyeon a scowl. She looked thoroughly amused. So much so that she quickly buried her face in Mina’s shoulder to avoid laughing out loud. Dahyun made a note to kick Jeongyeon’s ass as soon as the game was over, but then looked at Sana who was pointing at Chaeyoung questioningly. Dahyun shook her head. It would be too obvious. Sana shrugged and then pointed at Momo, her head in Dahyun’s lap, but Dahyun said no to that too. If Momo was either policeman or doctor, Dahyun would find out from her movements. Instead, Dahyun pointed at Tzuyu, and Sana seemed to consider for a moment. Then she nodded and quickly closed her eyes. Dahyun followed.

Patiently they waited for the doctor to be called, and even longer after that for the policeman. Dahyun knew almost with a hundred percent certainty that it had something to do with the fact that Jeongyeon was sitting so close to Mina.

“Jeongyeon! Focus!” Dahyun eventually snapped.

The sound of a giggle from Mina and a snort from Nayeon accompanied the flustered voice as Jeongyeon called out the policeman, and then thirty seconds later called for them all to wake. Announced Tzuyu’s untimely passing. Dahyun watched as the youngest sighed and leaned back on her towel, hands behind her head, looking up at the night sky. The rest, however, did not share Tzuyu’s calm.

“I vote that we eliminate Jeongyeon.” Nayeon said dryly.

“I second that.” Dahyun agreed.

“Hey, I’m the MC, you can’t eliminate me!” Jeongyeon protested.

“You promised not to be gross.” Dahyun objected, combing through Momo’s hair, the older girl seemingly half-asleep.

“That was my fault more than hers, actually.” Mina admitted sheepishly.

“Then we’ll eliminate Mina.” Jihyo shrugged.

“You can’t eliminate her, she’s already dead!” Jeongyeon insisted.

“How many votes on Mina?” Jihyo asked, completely ignoring Jeongyeon.

They all voted to eliminate Mina again and Jeongyeon looked exasperatedly at them.

“You’re all fucking morons, but fine. Night has fallen.”

Dahyun waited, and this time opened her eyes to look straight at Sana when Jeongyeon called on them. Sana’s eyes glinted as she pointed up at Jeongyeon. Dahyun barely held back a chuckle when she followed Sana’s lead. Jeongyeon on the other hand looked like she was about to shout at them.

“The Mafias are reminded that they cannot kill the MC.” She said impatiently, thunder rumbling in her voice.

Jihyo laughed and so did Sana and Mina. Dahyun then pointed at Chaeyoung and Sana agreed.

Chaeyoung wasn’t dead when they all woke.

“Oh, so mafia tried to kill the doctor, right?” Jihyo asked.
“ Seems that way.” Momo shrugged and turned in Dahyun’s lap to look up at her. Dahyun poked the tip of her nose and felt Momo catch her hand. Twined their fingers and kissed the back of Dahyun’s hand. If she didn’t know that Momo was perfectly aware of Dahyun’s feelings for Sana, the younger girl might’ve been a lot more flustered. But now Dahyun just chuckled and let Momo do what she wanted.

“Would you two like a room?” Sana asked from across the bonfire.

Dahyun snapped her head up to look at them, but it was Momo who answered. “You could just join us.”

“No thank you.” Sana said dryly.

“So, who do we eliminate this time?” Jihyo asked, stopping the bickering before it had even begun.

“I vote Dahyun!” Chaeyoung said, quickly taking the cue from Jihyo.

“Why me again!?” Dahyun complained.

“Because I’m the doctor and you want me off because I tried to eliminate you in the first round!” Chaeyoung deduced.

“I second that!” Sana suddenly said, arm in the air, a complete change in her mood. “I vote Dahyun!”

“Stop trying to eliminate the birthday girl!” Dahyun groaned, scowling at Sana, but she was just beaming back.

Dahyun wasn’t as lucky this time, and was eliminated.

As Jeongyeon led the group through another round, Dahyun watched as Sana woke when the mafias were called, waving cheekily at her before killing Momo. Then Chaeyoung woke and saved herself for good measure. Nayeon woke last, the policeman, and asked to know what Sana was. She could barely keep from laughing, but Dahyun just scowled and played with Momo’s hair. She had used some of that washable color recently to make the pink more visible again. It suited her.

“It’s morning.” Jeongyeon said, her head still on Mina’s shoulder. “And Momo, you’re dead.”

Momo mumbled her accept and shuffled again to look away from Dahyun and instead look at the bonfire.

“I vote to off Sana.” Nayeon said as soon as the accusations began.

“Why?” Jihyo asked.

“Because it’s obvious Momo isn’t a threat and she still decided to kill her.” Nayeon argued with a shrug.

That was logic Jihyo could agree with. And thus Nayeon, Jihyo, and Chaeyoung won the first game. Mafias Nayeon and Tzuyu won the next and Mina and Chaeyoung won the third, both as citizens who somehow managed to get Jihyo eliminated in the final round. Momo fell asleep for real during the third and it became their cue to break it off and head home.

They threw sand at the embers and shook the towels, packed up empty marshmallow bags and used
plastic cups. Gathered bottles. Gathered containers with leftover food. Gathered the night in memories before they left; Took pictures over the water, all nine of them fitting in one frame somehow.

Dahyun walked between Jihyo and Nayeon, allowing both to place more kisses on her cheek than she had ever gotten before. And she knew that they were still worried about her, but at this moment, their worries didn’t trouble her. It just made her love them even more. With their arms around them, she watched as Jeongyeon carried a sleeping Momo on her back all the way up to the station. Watched as Mina and Sana talked enthusiastically about how close they had lived to each other in Japan and all the memories they had of places they had both seen. Watched Chaeyoung waddling awkwardly with Tzuyu hanging around her neck with drooping eyes.

Even if it wasn’t extremely late, the air and the salt had left them all more tired than usual. Still, it had inarguably been one of the best days Dahyun had had in a long time.

Almost perfect.

…

Dahyun closed the door to the apartment and took off her shoes. It was late, almost twenty to midnight, and she was so tired. Had almost fallen asleep several times on the train, safe in Jihyo’s arms. With a sigh she placed her shoes neatly beside Sana’s and followed her into the kitchen. Leaned against the jamb and looked at the older girl.

“Did you have fun today?” Dahyun asked, her lenses dry and cheeks flushed from being outside all day.

“So much fun.” Sana said calmly, pouring a glass of water for herself. “Thank you for inviting me.”

“You’re… welcome?” Dahyun felt awkward. Her mind was unfocused and her heart racing, as if trying to counteract the enervation. She checked the clock on her phone and read through a few messages from classmates and family, the phone unused for most of the day.

“I’m gonna go to bed.” Sana said, bringing her back to the small kitchen.

“Oh. Okay.” Dahyun pressed her lips. “Me too, I guess.”

Sana nodded and walked out of the kitchen, the half-empty glass on the kitchen counter. Dahyun followed her.

They didn’t talk. Just stood side by side in the bathroom, an unspoken-ness between them like a wall. Dahyun finished first, but lingered. Waited for Sana. Let her walk out of the bathroom while Dahyun changed to pyjamas, and then waited until Sana opened the door to her bedroom, she in pyjamas as well, her ponytail almost undone and the glasses propped on her nose.

For a moment Sana hesitated in the door, then opened it more then crawled into bed, her arm against the far wall. Dahyun took a deep breath. Chickened out and crept under the covers. Checked her
phone and put it in the charger on the nightstand and took off her glasses.

With her heart in her throat, Dahyun watched as Sana reached across her with her own glasses before settling back in her side of the bed. Almost ostentatiously far away. She was staring up at the ceiling, but Dahyun was staring at her. Stared at the way her mouth opened slightly and then closed.

Dahyun’s heart beat in her chest, trying to break free. Trying to get closer. And her pulse rushed so loud in her ears that she barely heard her own words as she said them.

“You didn’t give me a birthday kiss.” Dahyun breathed.

She had spent entire the day wondering if she’d ever have the courage to say it out loud, but now that she had, it felt like her entire body was about to implode. Felt her organs trying to rearrange themselves again, and felt like running.

For a few moments, Sana merely stared at the ceiling. Then she closed her eyes.

“No, I didn’t.”

Dahyun bit her lip and shuffled, turning onto her back. Stared at the ceiling, instead of at Sana. The fear was taking over. But then Sana spoke into the darkness with a voice so quiet that Dahyun barely recognized it.

“I didn’t think you’d want me to.”

Dahyun’s stomach jolted, instinctively turning her head to look at Sana. She was looking back. Mirrored Dahyun in her figure, though her eyes weren’t expressing the confusion Dahyun felt. Something barely visible in the darkness. Something that mirrored Dahyun’s. Fear.

“Why-” Dahyun’s throat closed up and she swallowed. “Why wouldn’t I want you to?”

Sana’s eyes softened. Glazed over. And Dahyun watched as she pressed her lips together and then exhaled, before speaking, her voice quiet.

“You never kissed me.”

Dahyun blinked, her mouth falling slightly open. Wasn’t it Sana who hadn’t kissed Dahyun? Had been completely fine with kissing Jeongyeon and Momo and had kissed Mina’s cheek in the train too. It wasn’t the other way around. Was it?

Sana’s voice trembled as she spoke. “I told you that you could kiss me if you wanted.”

Dahyun’s mind went completely blank for a second. “I thought- I thought you were kidding.”

“I wasn’t.” Sana whispered.

“Oh.” Dahyun breathed, her heart threatening to break her ribs as she realized exactly how much of a fool she had been. Immediately her mind started its usual train of explanations to make the truth seem less obvious. But it was right there, in Sana’s eyes.

No more what if’s. No more hesitation. No more fear.

Because there were four minutes to midnight.

“Sana?” Dahyun asked.
“Yeah?”

Dahyun allowed herself all of one breath before continuing. “Can I have a birthday kiss?”

Sana’s eyes flickered between Dahyun’s, but she didn’t smile. Just nodded and took a shaky breath. Shuffled closer and raised herself up on her elbow. Leaned in, aiming for Dahyun’s cheek, but the younger girl stopped her with a touch of her shoulder. Gently pushed her back and met the confusion in Sana’s eyes with a bravery she didn’t know where had come from. Had probably always been there, just never used very much.

“No.” Dahyun said. “Not- not that kind of kiss.”

“Then…” Sana’s voice died and she frowned.

“Sana.” Dahyun said firmly. “I’m asking you.”

Sana’s eyes narrowed for a second, then went big, shining as a smile spread on her lips. And then she giggled. Giggled until it turned into a laugh that ricocheted off the walls and rang in Dahyun’s ears, and her head fell onto Dahyun’s shoulder, blonde hair against the younger girl’s burning cheek. *Three minutes.*

“Why are you laughing?” Dahyun asked desperately. Could feel every second passing as Sana laughed.

“I don’t know-“ Sana said breathlessly, overpowered by a new fit of giggles. “I’m sorry- I just. This is so-“

“Well, it’s not like I’ve ever done this before,” Dahyun said in a fluster, “I get credit for even asking.”

Sana’s laughter died almost immediately, only a few breathy remnants of laughter as she raised her head and looked at Dahyun, confusion in her eyes.

“What do you mean you haven’t done this before?” Sana’s eyes searched Dahyun’s face.

Dahyun looked at Sana, begging her not to make her say it out loud.

“You’ve never kissed anyone?” Sana guessed.

*Two minutes.*


“Technically?”

Dahyun cleared her throat and resisted the urge to hide behind her own hair, then rambled.

“Well, Tzuyu says it doesn’t count, and I guess she’s kind of right, but you accidentally kissed me once, though not on the lips - I mean, yes, but not fully but- but I don’t think you even-”

“I remember.” Sana said quietly, a small smile playing on her lips.

“Oh.”

“But Tzuyu’s right; it doesn’t count. A kiss has to be… well, it has to be…”

“Sana,” Dahyun broke her off. “My birthday is almost over.”

Sana nodded and swallowed. Knotted her brows and stared at Dahyun so intensely, that the younger girl forgot how to breathe. “You’re asking me… to kiss you. Properly. On the lips.”

“If you want to.” Dahyun breathed. Felt how her inside turned to jelly as Sana inched closer.

“I really,” Sana cupped Dahyun’s burning cheek, her eyes soft, “really want to.”

One minute.

And then Sana took the last step. Closed the distance and pressed her lips against Dahyun’s so firmly, that every grain of doubt Dahyun had ever had about Sana’s feelings, disappeared. And even though Dahyun had suddenly forgotten everything she had learned from books and movies that you’re supposed to do when a girl kisses you, it didn’t matter. Her instinct took over. She angled her head on the pillow, moving her lips against Sana’s, feeling how the older girl inhaled sharply. Wrapping her arms around Sana’s neck, Dahyun savored in the softness of Sana’s lips and the intensity of the pressure, as if the older girl was afraid it would all go away if she let go. Tugged Sana closer and felt a smile spread on Sana’s lips that made it feel like fireworks had gone off inside of Dahyun’s heart.

Honestly, Dahyun thought she had known what to expect from a kiss, but it had never been this. She had always been focused on the technique, and never of the way it felt to be so close to someone. To have someone want you without words and for every single automatic function to go out of order to the point where Dahyun had to draw back just to catch her breath. Felt Sana’s nose against her own and her breath on Dahyun’s lips as she spoke quietly into the darkness.

“Happy birthday, Dahyun.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICERoomies
Taking Chances part 1: The Bonds of Friendship

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the long wait, hopefully it won’t be that long until the next chapter. I’m working hard!

Thank you for waiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jihyo pressed the button. Held it in. Watched how the screen turned black and swallowed the sob. Pressed her face into the pillow and let the phone fall to the floor, hearing it land with a thump on the rug. Then she let the darkness take her away.

…

“Happy birthday, Dahyun.”

Dahyun chuckled as Sana’s hand slid from the younger girl’s cheek, moving down to rest on waist.

“Not sure it’s my birthday anymore.” Dahyun murmured, squirming slightly, the hand on her waist making her aware of the fact that her shirt had crawled up. But Sana just tugged it back down over the hem of her pyjama pants, covering her.

“Late birthday present then.” Sana whispered shyly. “If you want me.”

“You-” Dahyun’s voice caught in her throat, “you have no idea how much I want you.”

“Yeah?” Sana’s voice was the sunshine that filled the dark room, thumb of her hand running over the fabric of Dahyun’s shirt.

“Yeah.” Dahyun confirmed. “I think I’ve been trying not to fall for you since the first night you fell asleep on me. If I’m honest.”

“Wait, really?” Sana drew back a bit, Dahyun’s hands slipping from around her neck, the younger girl settling for cupping Sana’s face. Her cheeks were warm, and Dahyun couldn’t help but feel the pride in knowing that she was the reason. Wanted to kiss Sana again, but didn’t. Just ran her thumb over Sana’s cheek.

“I think so. It’s hard to know exactly when… but you had me pretty much from the start.” Dahyun admitted.

“So it wasn’t just you being easily flustered by nature?” Sana asked, amusement in her voice.

“Well, yeah, I guess I do get… but still you were pretty much all I could think about.” Dahyun shrugged. “Channel Sana.”
Sana’s laughter filled the room, and she shook her head, a soft smile around her lips as her eyes found Dahyun’s once more. “Goof.”

“Mh, but a cute goof.” Dahyun shrugged. Moved one hand around to Sana’s back, the other tucking a hair behind Sana’s ear.

“Very cute.” Sana agreed.

Dahyun wanted nothing more than to just lean up and kiss Sana again. To lose all sense of time and place in the rush of Sana. To feel the need to get impossibly closer despite the complete lack of air between them. To feel Sana’s body against her own, and taste her on her lips.

But she didn’t. She just stared up at Sana. It was so complicated. And honestly not at all a clever move - kissing your roomie. But there wasn’t a choice anymore. She had done everything to avoid falling for Sana. Well, okay, not everything. Well, okay, she hadn’t tried very hard at all, or she wouldn’t be in Sana’s bed in the first place. But they had taken a step tonight (more like jumped off a cliff) and as long as Sana was there, it didn’t matter that it was messy.

“So… What now?” Dahyun asked quietly. Wasn’t sure what she wanted to happen, and definitely had no clue what Sana wanted.

“I don’t know.” Sana said honestly, sitting up properly, her hand still resting on Dahyun’s waist. “I mean we could just sleep and talk in the morning, but I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep.”

Dahyun nodded, propping herself up on her elbows, then realized Sana at this distance was only visible as a blurry dark figure, and she reached back for her glasses. Put them on and saw Sana clearly, though she wasn’t wearing hers.

“It sorta feels like the kind of situation that calls for hot chocolate.” Sana mused. “Maybe a blanket.”

Dahyun chuckled and nodded. “So no sleep?”

“You can try if you want?” Sana suggested.

“No, you’re right, hot chocolate is definitely needed.” Dahyun offered Sana her glasses and she took them with a smile.

“Isn’t that your base mood though? Chocolate?” Sana asked in an amused voice as she put on the glasses.

“I’d act offended at that accusation, but you’re right.” Dahyun shrugged, watching as Sana combed through her hair, gathering it to a ponytail, then nodded in the direction of the nightstand, at a black hair tie laying on the edge. Dahyun took it and handed it to her.

“Thanks.” Sana smiled, then stretched and crawled over Dahyun’s legs, out of the bed. Offered Dahyun her hand and tilted her head a little. Dahyun looked at her. Then at the hand. Hesitated for the smallest second but then reached out and took it, letting the older girl pull her out of bed.

On bare feet, Dahyun’s stomach jolting excitedly, they walked out of the bedroom and into the kitchen, Sana’s hand in Dahyun’s, the older girl’s grip loose and casual but still wonderfully there.

“I think I still have a few of those fancy hot chocolate on a spoon packs. Jihyo gave some to me for Christmas but I never got around to them.”

“Hot chocolate on a spoon?” Sana frowned.
“Yeah- here, let me show you.” Dahyun let go of her hand, digging into the pantry for two of the total five packets. Showed them to Sana. Each see-through pack contained a thick plastic spoon, the head halfway disappeared in a block of chocolate, one a layered white and dark chocolate with nougat sprinkles and the other milk chocolate, marshmallows and cinnamon.

“Fancy.” Sana noted, taking the white chocolate one.

“They taste really good. I just haven’t had any in ages because they’re best if you share them.” Dahyun smiled shyly, then opened the fridge. “No milk…”

“We can run down and get some at the corner-store?” Sana suggested, putting her pack with the spoon on the little kitchen table.

“It’s okay, I have regular cocoa powder we can use with water.” Dahyun quickly said.

“It’d take five minutes to get milk.” Sana raised an eyebrow.

Dahyun looked down at her pyjama pants for a second, then nodded. “Okay.”

“I’ll be right back then.” Sana said, rushing out of the kitchen.

When she returned a minute later, Dahyun still stood with the spoon in her hand, but Sana was wearing sweatpants instead of shorts and Dahyun’s Kobe sweater.

“You really like that sweater, huh?” Dahyun shook her head as Sana pawed her sleeves and dug them into the pockets of her sweatpants.

“Yeah, I mean…” Sana started, her voice dying and her cheeks tingeing, a shy smile on her lips as she met Dahyun’s eyes. “It smells like you.”

Dahyun’s cheeks warmed immediately, as well as her neck and ears. “... S-smells like me.”

“Yeah.” Sana nodded, giving a tiny shrug of the shoulders. “Plus you said yesterday I look cute in it.”

Dahyun chuckled and put the spoon besides Sana’s, giving herself a few moments to gather her bravery. “You always look cute. I said that yesterday too.”

“You did.” Sana said, then walked over and wrapped her arms around Dahyun from behind, just like yesterday morning. Didn’t move though, just held her tight, her lips close to Dahyun’s ear.

“We’re gonna be waddling to the store if you keep holding on like that.” Dahyun said quietly.

“Mm.” Sana hummed, head leaning more against Dahyun’s. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“ Asking me.” Sana mumbled. Then she leaned around and kissed Dahyun’s cheek, staying on her skin for longer than she ever had, her slow breath hitting Dahyun’s cheek before she drew back. “I owe you so many of these.”

“You don’t owe me anything.” Dahyun turned in her arms.

“I do. One for every time I wanted to but wasn’t brave enough.”

“Then I owe you at least a month’s worth of kisses.” Dahyun admitted. “But we don’t have to keep
track of anything. We can just… do whatever the heck we want.”

“Hm… well, then I want hot chocolate.” Sana grinned. “And kisses.”

“Both we can manage.” Dahyun said shyly, heart fluttering as Sana pecked her lips just for a second even though their glasses collided slightly.

…”

“I’m sorry. I need space. I need to think… I’m- I’m so sorry.”

…”

Dahyun adjusted on the couch, stirring the spoon around the warm milk, watching as the chocolate slowly melted off the spoon, coloring the milk.

“I really shouldn’t be letting you stay up this late.” Sana hummed. Grabbed the pink and yellow blanket off the armrest and laid it over both their legs.

“Letting me stay up…” Dahyun muttered under her breath, shaking her head.

“I’m supposed to be helping you!” Sana insisted. “You know, making sure your sleep isn’t bad.”

“Well, I’ve been sleeping just fine.” Dahyun grinned, stirring a little harder, until it made a little vortex in the middle, then disrupted it by randomly moving the spoon across it. Smiled slightly at herself.

“I noticed, you’re pretty much dead every time I try to wake you.” Sana judged the amount of chocolate left on the spoon to the color of her hot cocoa, then raised the mug to her lips and sipped.

“I like your bed. It’s soft.” Dahyun muttered, drinking a little even if it wasn’t quite strong enough yet.

“And here I thought it was my cuddles you liked.” Sana pouted.

Dahyun chuckled and stirred the spoon more.

“Well?! Isn’t this when you’re supposed to say but it is you I like, Sana ” Sana’s eyes glinted in contrast to her sulky expression.

“No, because if you know what I’m going to say, then there’s no fun in me saying it.” Dahyun teased.

Sana huffed and put down her mug, stirring the spoon, leaving the chocolate in a current. “You’re impossible, Kim Dahyun.”

“You sure?” Dahyun argued with a grin, holding onto her mug with both hands, keeping the contents from spilling over as she shifted to lean into Sana. The older girl’s arm was around her
immediately.

“Mh…” Sana grumbled.

“I do like your cuddles, Sana-chan.” Dahyun drank from her hot chocolate, holding the spoon off to one side with a finger. She had had one too many spoon related eye-pains in her life to let it happen again.

“I like your cuddles too, Dahyunnie.” Sana hummed, fingers playing with the sleeve of Dahyun’s shirt distractedly.

“Good thing Chaeyoung isn’t here right now.” Dahyun mumbled, feeling the cocoa and Sana’s touches lull her slowly into a state of languor.

“Why?”

“Because I’d have to apologize for every single time I made barf-noises at her and Nayeon being overly cute.” Dahyun nuzzled closer, masking a yawn.

“Tired?” Sana asked.

“Comfy.” Dahyun hummed, a lazy grin around her lips.

“We can go back to bed? Sleep?”

“No… No, we should talk.” Dahyun emptied her hot chocolate mug and put it down. Sana was still drinking from hers.

“About us?” Sana asked.

“Yeah. I honestly have no clue what to do here.” Dahyun admitted.

“Me neither.” Sana drank from her hot chocolate. “But we could just try it out? What you said - do whatever the heck we want?”

“Date?” Dahyun suggested.

“I-I mean,” Sana’s stuttered slightly, but then her smile filled with sunshine, “If you want? I’d like that.”

Dahyun nodded. She definitely wanted that. Definitely…

…

“Please don’t go. Please stay… I know I yelled, just please- please we can figure this out!”

…

Dahyun woke with a start, her leg buzzing uncomfortably. With a sharp inhale, she opened her eyes
to daylight, looking around the living room. There was noise. Low but definitely there. The TV was running, and she was on the couch. Must’ve fallen asleep at some point. What time it was, Dahyun had no clue. But it didn’t matter. Even didn’t matter that her back and neck were sore, and that her leg was still asleep. Because Sana was right there next to her, sleeping, hand resting on Dahyun’s waist. And she was Dahyun’s. Well... No, technically they weren’t- they were dating. Whatever that meant. Wait, was Dahyun expected to take Sana out on dates and stuff? Like to fancy dinners and that sort? Probably, as it was with dating. She’d have to ask Chaeyoung for advice on that though, cause honestly she didn’t have a clue how, and Chaeyoung was always brilliant at taking Nayeon out on dates, even now.

Right now however, wasn’t about dates and worries, but only about huddling closer to Sana, hearing her mumble in her sleep. About Dahyun settling her head in the crook of Sana’s neck and let her head fill with the smell of Sana’s skin and the smell of last night’s bonfire in her hair, masking the lemon scent that normally made her mind go blank. Then a sudden realization hit her. That she was now, for the first time, completely free to lean up and kiss Sana if she wanted. To finally give in to all of the feelings she had fought ever since the first night her lips had almost touched the skin of Sana’s neck, to the time they actually did, and every night after that. She didn’t have to hold back.

Yet somehow it still made her heart beat as fast as it usually did, looking at the skin, knowing it was okay to just give in. And she did it. Angled her face and nuzzled her nose against Sana’s neck before pressing her lips to the skin. For a split-second she almost drew back, as if she had done something wrong, but the next she merely recognized the bubbling in her stomach as excitement, drawing back only to adjust before pressing another kiss to Sana’s neck. Heard her hum and felt her fingers twitching at Dahyun’s side. Dahyun felt how the chuckle in Sana’s throat vibrated against her lips and then her free arm reaching over to hold Dahyun, twining her own hands at Dahyun’s side.

“Tickles...” Sana mumbled, sleep in her voice, giggling under her breath.

Dahyun just hummed as an answer and kissed the older girl’s neck once more, this time parting her lips just a little bit. Nibbled at the skin and felt Sana stretch her neck, giving more access.

“You’re gonna have to wake me this way every morning for the rest of our lives...” Sana said lazily.

“I’d promise to, but we both know you wake before me.” Dahyun drew back, finding her eyes.

“I guess I’ll wake you that way then.” Sana shrugged, and before Dahyun knew what had happened, Sana had angled her face and pressed her lips to Dahyun’s neck. She was right. It did tickle. Tickled and tingled and made Dahyun laugh and squirm and fill with electricity. But Sana drew back too soon, the mischief in her eyes making way for an obviously sudden thought, taking space in her head.

“What?” Dahyun asked.

Sana shrugged. “I’m just- I never really thought I’d get to do that.”


“Anything with you. I never actually... I had given up on you.”

“You what?”

“Yeah, after Chaeyoung’s birthday I did everything I could to get over you because I didn’t want to lose you as a friend and I didn’t want to risk losing the others - I mean, I know they’re your friends first so if things got awkward I just-”
“You were afraid to lose all of us?”

“I never had friends other than Momo.” Sana whispered, her voice shivering. “I was popular but I never had anyone I could count on or felt at home with other than her, and I always just thought it was enough, but then… I know it’s not a thing but I kinda fell in friend-love with all of you.”

Dahyun stared at her. She looked impossibly small, pawing her shirt, licking her lips nervously. And Dahyun wanted to comfort her. Wanted to keep her safe and wanted to make sure she knew that they weren’t all just Dahyun’s friends, that they were Sana’s friends too. But then she said something that made Dahyun’s heart sink.

“I’ve barely slept all night, scared that if this goes wrong - I’ll lose them all.”

...

“I’m sorry, I think I need to… I need to figure this out on my own. I’m gonna… I’m gonna go.”

...

In Dahyun’s defense- No, there wasn’t any defense, this was just a shit move. That much she was very well aware of, but it didn’t change her direction. Didn’t change the fact that she had in fact just nodded and said ‘oh’ when Sana had told her about her hesitations and fears concerning them - whatever they even were. Didn’t change the fact that she had made up an excuse to meet Chaeyoung as soon as she could and had hurried out of there, heart in her throat and stomach heavy as lead.

She shouldn’t’ve stayed. Should’ve listened and calmed Sana and tell her it’d be alright - that their decision last night wasn’t going to have any consequences for her friendship with the other girls. But she hadn’t stayed. Had fucked up, her mind so full of the truth she couldn’t lie about. That Sana was right. That if things turned ugly, most likely scenario would be Momo and Sana drifting away from the group again. And it wasn’t that Dahyun thought it would go ugly, but right now, walking away from the apartment and from Sana, it was just all a big fat line under the undeniable fact, that Dahyun was more than capable of screwing everything up for them.

She didn’t have a single clue how to date someone, much less be in an actual relationship. And what if it just turned ugly like Jeongyeon and Jiyeon? She knew perfectly well that crushing on your roommate was pretty much the biggest no go in college life. But downright falling in love with her? Kissing her? That was just... So damn stupid. Even if this - what she was doing right now, was definitely worse.

Still, she couldn’t stop her feet as they walked the last few blocks towards Chaeyoung’s place. And she knew. Trust that she knew very well what kind of a verbal can of whoopass Chaeyoung was gonna open when Dahyun told her this. But she needed some perspective. Needed someone who would yell but also take her concerns seriously and provide solid advice, judging but not letting it change anything between them. And that description only fit on Chaeyoung.

It felt so weird, so wrong, so completely misplaced to walk towards a place in the hopes that someone was gonna kick you back where you came from. But it didn’t change facts.
The walk seemed longer somehow, even if she was walking faster than she ever had. Had to stop herself from running. As if that wasn’t what she was doing. Just with one foot still on the ground.

As she reached the tall building, Dahyun hesitated. Considered walking away and never telling Chaeyoung any of this. Still, she walked right up to the front door, about to press the button just when a girl opened it from the inside, and Dahyun took the opportunity. Walked inside and up to the third floor. As she knocked, she became aware of the fact that it wasn’t even nine in the morning and that she hadn’t texted ahead of time. Still, even if nobody was home, she had to take the chance.

But someone was home.

“You can’t be serious! You can’t seriously be considering- you can’t just throw it all away!”

She really didn’t want to do this. Really wished she could’ve just solved it on her own. But she had to admit now, that it just wouldn’t do. She had to tell someone. One more text, one more call, and she was going to cave. To give in. And she didn’t want to. Well, that wasn’t the truth. She wanted nothing more than to give in, but she shouldn’t. Because it would never be what she wanted.

A sigh built all the way from Tzuyu’s stomach and fell from her lips as she turned around the corner. But her path was rudely blocked halfway through a step and she stepped back to avoid a collision. But it wasn’t someone walking the opposite direction, but rather someone who seemed to have stopped dead in her tracks in the same direction as Tzuyu.

“Wh- Chaeyoung?”

The shorter girl turned with a start and looked up, her eyes unfocused and her brows knotted.

“Tzuyu.” Chaeyoung said, a fragility in her voice that she was clearly trying to mask. “Hi.”

“Hi.” Tzuyu said, feeling the frown form on her face. “Are you okay?”

“What? Oh, yeah, I’m good. Just on my way to Dahyun’s place.” Chaeyoung gave a weak smile. “Actually, I should get going.”
Tzuyu considered for a moment to just let it slide. To go back home and stare at her phone, at the conversation that had led her on this path in the first place.

“... I was actually on my way there too.”

“Oh?” Chaeyoung’s eyes wavered and she scratched over the sleeve of her shirt. Adjusted the neck.

“Chaeyoung, are you sure you’re okay?” Tzuyu pressed. Knew already that she wasn’t but if it was only Dahyun who could do something in this situation, that was fair too. Wasn’t like Tzuyu had known Chaeyoung - or any of them - for very long.

“I’m-” Chaeyoung started, but froze in the middle of a shrug, her eyes searching Tzuyu’s face.

And when she spoke again, her words hit like a sudden gust, revealing the storm around them.

…

Somehow the streets seemed lonely despite the crowd, and Jihyo sighed. Wanted to go back to bed but her feet refused to carry her that way. Knew where they wanted to go and didn’t have enough strength in her to stop herself. Maybe if they could just talk it out? But would she have the courage to do so? Would she even be there?

…

“Nayeon? What-” Dahyun frowned as Nayeon opened the door slightly, her eyes red, clenching the door with both hands.


“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, nothing. Nothing. What did you want?” She smiled. It didn’t reach her eyes.

“I uh… I just needed to talk to Chaeyoung.” Dahyun hesitated. Something was definitely wrong.

“Are you sure you’re ok?”

“Of course. But it’s not a good time right now, I’m sorry, Dahyun.” Nayeon’s voice was high pitched.

Did Nayeon really think for a second that Dahyun believed her, looking like that? Did she think Dahyun was stupid? Whatever it was, she was absolutely terrible at hiding it. Like she was breaking right in front of Dahyun’s eyes. And Dahyun wanted to overstep. Wanted to pass every invisible barrier between the two of them, to take Nayeon in her arms. Make her better. Make it go away. Whatever it is that was causing her to look like this. But she had never passed that barrier before. It had always only been Nayeon caring for Dahyun. Nayeon rarely allowed anyone in. Never Dahyun.

“Nayeon-” Dahyun started.
“I’ll talk to you tomorrow.” Nayeon said, her voice still high pitched, a fake smile plastered on her face.

Dahyun wished that Nayeon would allow her. Would reach out and ask for Dahyun’s arms. But she didn’t. Didn’t reach out, merely grasping the edge of the door tighter, her eyes glazing over. Then she shut the door in Dahyun’s face and the lock clicked.

Dahyun stood perplexed and stared at the white door. The hell? It was barely nine in the morning and Nayeon was clearly upset. But not only that. It was barely nine and Chaeyoung was up, and out of the apartment, after getting home at around midnight? When in the world had that ever happened before? That younger girl only ever woke early if she had classes. But it was Sunday. Snuggle day. Pizza for breakfast day.

For a moment Dahyun considered her options. If Chaeyoung wasn’t here… then where the hell was she? Should Dahyun chase after her? Try to find her? She was Chaeyoung’s best friend after all, and something was clearly wrong. Very wrong. Yet she couldn’t take her eyes off the white door. Jeongyeon would surely be better at handling this. Definitely. It just wasn’t Jeongyeon who was here. It was Dahyun. And as much as she was Chaeyoung’s best friend, this was about Nayeon. About the way her voice cracked, the redness in her eyes and around her nose. The salt remnants on her jawline. Her swollen lips.

Could Dahyun overstep? Should she? Maybe she should just call Jeongyeon, even if Nayeon would probably hate her for it.

But just as she considered it, she heard it.

A sob.

Okay; to hell with boundaries and bonds and best friends and bubbles.

“Nayeon!” Dahyun said with as much force as she could muster without shouting, knocking insistently on the door.

No answer.

Dahyun hissed and knocked harder. “Nayeon! Let me in!”

“I’m fine.” Nayeon said through the door, her voice breaking. She was obviously standing right on the other side of it.

“Yeah, right.” Dahyun snorted and knocked again. “Let me in.”

“No.” Nayeon said.

“Why not?” Dahyun asked impatiently. “Nayeon, open the door.”

“Just go away.” Nayeon’s voice was barely audible anymore. “Please.”

Dahyun felt her stomach turn at the fragility in Nayeon’s voice, but she had learned a thing or two in her years of knowing Nayeon. There was only one thing that worked.

“You have exactly three seconds to open the door or I’m calling Jeongyeon.”
“You wouldn’t.”

“I will. Nayeon, I swear to god if you don’t let me in, I will.” Dahyun threatened.

“I hate you.” Nayeon’s voice shook worse than ever.

“No you don’t.” Dahyun said firmly. Knew that she had broken through, finally.

“No I don’t.” Nayeon sighed, her voice so low that Dahyun might’ve just imagined it.

Then without a warning, the door was unlocked and opened, and Dahyun barely had time to register the room before Nayeon fell into her arms.

“What the-” Dahyun gasped as all the air was blown out of her, trying to somehow wrap the sobbing girl in her arms.

Nayeon seemed to have broken completely, grasping at Dahyun’s shirt, wet tears falling helplessly onto Dahyun’s neck. Her body shook with every sob, and Dahyun could do nothing but attempt to close the door and slide to the floor without letting Nayeon fall. With every gram of the older girl’s body weight against her, and Nayeon’s knees giving way under her, moving was not an option. So really, this was the most she could do.

“It’s okay.” Dahyun tried, letting her own problems be cast aside.

Honestly, she was well aware that everything was probably as far from okay as they could be, but Nayeon at least didn’t object. Didn’t reject her. Just sobbed, clinging onto Dahyun for dear life.

“You’re okay.” Dahyun whispered, working a hand around to tug Nayeon’s hair behind her ear.

Nayeon shook her head, her cries turning inaudible from lack of breath. New tears still fell onto Dahyun’s neck and Nayeon’s shoulders shook horribly.

“You’re okay.” Dahyun said again. It was all she could think of doing. Remembered how Mina had held her own face and made her say it with her, but Nayeon was clinging so hard that it was completely impossible to get through to her.

“Nayeon…” Dahyun tried.

Nayeon shook her head again. And Dahyun nodded. Wrapped both arms around the older girl again and hugged her as tight as she could. Softly shushed her and rocked her ever so slowly. But nothing worked. She wasn’t enough. Wasn’t able to calm Nayeon down, much less make it hurt less. Whatever was hurting. Didn’t have a single clue how to help, and knew that Nayeon wouldn’t be able to to verbalize her needs. But Dahyun had to keep going.

“Nayeon.” Dahyun tried again, without really knowing what she wanted to say afterwards. But it didn’t matter. Because one single syllable from Nayeon’s lips made Dahyun know exactly what she needed. And it wasn’t Dahyun.

“Jeong-”

Nayeon’s voice broke halfway through, but it was enough.

But Dahyun wasn’t. Wasn’t enough. Couldn’t stop Nayeon from crying. Couldn’t make anything better.
It felt like something broke inside of Dahyun, and in that moment she was sure that it was something that wouldn’t ever heal. She wasn’t good enough. Wasn’t able to help. Couldn’t make a difference. Was always the one who needed others. But who needed her? And Dahyun hated that this was her first thought. That she was such a small person that she worried more about being good enough than being there for Nayeon. Because of course she needed Jeongyeon. They had been friends longer than any other member of their little group. And Jeongyeon had always been the best person to handle Nayeon, had always known what buttons to push and when to stop, how to make her laugh and how to make her smile even when she was crying.

And Dahyun didn’t.

She had never been able to get under Nayeon’s skin, see her soul. And the same with Jeongyeon. There was a part of those two reserved for only each other. And that had to be okay. Dahyun had to accept that. But still... Dahyun just wanted to be enough for once.

Now, however, wasn’t the time to dwell on that, because Nayeon was still sobbing into her neck, and Dahyun still had no clue what was going on.

Swallowing her hurt and all her bubbling confliction, Dahyun dug out her phone and called Jeongyeon.

“Hello?” Mina’s gentle voice answered.

“Mina… I-is Jeongyeon there?” Dahyun asked, trying her best to keep her voice under control.

“Dahyun? Are you ok?” The smile in Mina’s voice had faded and replaced by worry.

“No, I mean, yes, I’m fine. It’s Nayeon. I just- Is Jeongyeon there?” Dahyun asked, trying her best to remember to stroke Nayeon’s back, the older girl’s sobs somehow worsening all of a sudden.

“She’s in the shower.”

“Oh- I...” Dahyun didn’t know what to say to that.

“No, I mean, yes, I’m fine. It’s Nayeon. I just- Is Jeongyeon there?” Dahyun asked, trying her best to remember to stroke Nayeon’s back, the older girl’s sobs somehow worsening all of a sudden.

“She’s in the shower.”

“Oh- I...” Dahyun didn’t know what to say to that.

“Is someone crying?” Mina asked through the phone.

“Y-yeah.” Dahyun stuttered, Nayeon’s tears trickling down her skin, soaking the neck of Dahyun’s shirt. But her own cheeks were wet too. Hadn’t even noticed the tears.

“I’ll get Jeongyeon, hold on.”

Dahyun whimpered her thanks. Then there were steps. The sound of a door being opened. And Dahyun heard Mina’s voice call Jeongyeon’s name. A faucet being turned off. Then Mina’s muffled voice spoke, and Dahyun was almost sure she heard her own and Nayeon’s names despite Mina’s obvious hand over the microphone.

“Dahyun?” Jeongyeon’s voice sounded clearly through the phone. “What’s wrong?”

“Nayeon. It’s Nayeon. She won’t stop crying. I can’t- I can’t get her to stop crying. She’s asking for you.” Dahyun gritted her teeth, hearing the spite in her own voice. Hating herself for it.
“Shit. Do you know what happened?”

“I don’t know. I-” Dahyun’s voice cracked. “I don’t know what to do, I just found her like this and I- I can’t get her to stop crying.”

“Chaeyoung. She’s not there, is she?”

“No- I… Jeongyeon, what’s going on?” Dahyun felt completely lost. Hopeless and left in the dark. If something was wrong with Chaeyoung- god, if something was wrong with Chaeyoung, then why didn’t Dahyun know about it? Had Chaeyoung tried to spare Dahyun, like Dahyun had spared Chaeyoung about her nightmares?

“It’s- I’m on my way.” Jeongyeon just said.

“Thank you.” Dahyun heard the tremble in her own voice. Couldn’t blink away the tears. Felt useless.

“Dahyun?”

“Yes?”

“What about you? Are you okay?”

Dahyun stifled a sob. Even in all this mess with Nayeon, Jeongyeon still took the time to worry about her.

“Yes.” Dahyun whispered.

“I’m at Mina’s, so I’m half an hour out, but I’ll hurry.”

“Thank you.” Dahyun whimpered. Hung up. It was everything she could, just to try to stop crying herself, much less getting Nayeon to stop crying.

…

“I don’t know. I don’t know what to do here. I love you, you know I do, but I can’t just- I need to take it seriously.”

…

It wasn’t the direction Chaeyoung had counted on taking when she had left the apartment. Had planned on finally fessing up to Dahyun and get her butt kicked back to Nayeon like she wanted. But it just hadn’t turned out that way, and honestly, there was something about Tzuyu that made it easy - safe even, to confide.

“I saw her from my bus one day. Nayeon, I mean.” Chaeyoung looked down at the sidewalk, letting Tzuyu lead them, unaware of the direction. Didn’t care much.
“She was heading into the main building in the arts and music department at uni, but I got a glimpse of her and I just couldn’t get her out of my head.”

“Love at first sight?”

“No, she had a big ass stain on her shirt.” Chaeyoung sniggered, but her face fell almost immediately, a tug of the stomach reminding her of why she was currently heading further and further away from Nayeon.

Chaeyoung could still see it, as if it was just happening now. Nayeon’s hurried steps, the cute black plain skirt and the oversize t-shirt with some American rock band logo that Chaeyoung didn’t recognize at the time. The coffee cup in her hand and the coffee stain down her front. The way her nose scrunched and her smile when she recognized her classmate whom Chaeyoung later learned to have been Jihyo.

“The next time I saw her I hopped off the bus. Missed my class and snuck into one of the college lessons. And I had meant to watch her, find out who she was, but I ended up getting really interested in the lesson.”

“Is that why you chose it as your major?”

“Pretty much.” Chaeyoung nodded. “Jihyo saw me after the lesson. That girl knows everyone apparently. She asked if I was a high school student, and I admitted that I was. But then when Nayeon showed up next to her I completely failed.”

“How so?”

“I got really flustered and I think I asked how she got the stain off her shirt, even though she was wearing a completely different outfit.” Chaeyoung admitted shyly. “She looked so confused and I started rambling and I’m pretty sure she thought I was insane.”

“But you turned it around.”

“Actually, it was Jihyo. I was checking the time on my phone, because I knew I was late to second period, having already skipped first, and she saw my phone picture. Recognized Dahyun.” Chaeyoung explained.

“She knew Dahyun?” Tzuyu asked, and stopped in her tracks in front of a building Chaeyoung recognized as the younger girl’s dorm. Chaeyoung looked at her, but Tzuyu merely offered her hand, and Chaeyoung took it. Let herself be led into the building.

“They’d met once through Jeongyeon. Jihyo said they’d met when Jihyo was picking Jeongyeon up from a shift. Apparently they had a concert to get to some while away and drove there overnight, after Jeongyeon’s closing shift, to save money.”

Tzuyu nodded, leading Chaeyoung up the stairs. Then up another flight. “So it was love at first sight then.”

“I don’t think so. I think I just thought she was really beautiful and it freaked me out.”

Tzuyu nodded again.

“I fell for her quite quickly though. I don’t really remember how it happened but suddenly Dahyun
“and I were a part of the group, and it just escalated.” Chaeyoung smiled, even though she was losing her breath a little from the third flight of stairs.

“So you were together before you got out of high school?” Tzuyu asked.

“We got together a few days after I turned eighteen.” Chaeyoung nodded. “Where are we going?”

“The roof.” Tzuyu said calmly.

“The roof?” Chaeyoung asked.

“The roof.” Tzuyu confirmed. Chaeyoung frowned, but in Tzuyu’s face was only trust-invoking peace. And Chaeyoung let the younger girl lead her up and out into the air, overlooking the city. Felt the breeze blow through her, softly inciting the words from her.

“I knew she would never date me before I turned eighteen. And I didn’t see her on my birthday or I would’ve asked her out there, but the minute I did see her, I asked her on a date. Took her to a movie. It was a complete failure, and we were broke and it was pouring down when we finally got out, and I was sure it couldn’t get any worse. That I had completely lost any chance of impressing her. But even as we stood outside, getting completely soaked by the rain and I was trying to make the conversation drag out so she wouldn’t just leave, she kissed me. Told me I didn’t have to try so hard. And we ended up going to her place. She let me shower and get warm, let me borrow her clothes and sleep on her couch. My parents were absolutely pissed, but I didn’t really care. I was ride or die for her from that day, honestly.” Chaeyoung breathed. Then felt the tears welling up in her eyes. “I love her… More than I ever thought I would love anyone. I need you to understand; I never meant for any of this to happen.”

…”

“What do you mean? Chaeyoung I don’t understand. Because it sounds to me like you’re considering it - that you’re actually considering… Are you?”

…”

“Nayeon, please, tell me what’s wrong?” Dahyun tried, but Nayeon just sobbed harder.

They had been sitting on the floor of Nayeon’s apartment for the better part of ten minutes, but nothing was getting better. Maybe she should have never pushed. Maybe she should’ve just stayed the hell away.

It was embarrassing. That she couldn’t do anything. That the tears were still trickling down her cheeks into Nayeon’s hair. Because what kind of tears were they? Tears because her own pride was hurt, because she couldn’t be enough? Tears because she had never bothered getting close to Nayeon? Or tears because she too was scared? Not just scared for whatever was up with Nayeon, but for what was going to happen with Sana. Scared of the consequences. Scared of her own
reactions. Even now, with her sobbing friend in her arms, she still couldn’t let go of her own problems, and it made her stomach turn. Was she really that selfish? That pathetic? Probably.

But what good was pathetic when Nayeon was still crying and Jeongyeon was at least twenty minutes away? There was no use in being mad at herself, because Nayeon was hurt. And even if Dahyun wasn’t good enough, she could still do something. But what? Just hold her here? It hadn’t helped so far, and though her instinct was to just hold Nayeon tight and hope it calmed her, it wasn’t working at all.

There was another idea simmering in her head, even if it seemed almost ridiculous. It was just something she had seen in a movie once. Had afterwards read a little about how water affected the mind. But would it work? Did she even have it in her to do it? Just getting Nayeon on her feet seemed impossible, and there was no way she could carry the older girl. But she had to try something. Couldn’t just sit here for another twenty minutes.

With all the strength she could muster, Dahyun moved, feeling Nayeon cling to her. Tried to stand, knees threatening to give in immediately.

“Nayeon.” Dahyun whispered. Just to get Nayeon to do something. And miraculously, astoundingly, felt a bit of Nayeon’s weight lift. Knew that she was supporting at least some of her own weight.

“One step at a time.” Dahyun said, trying not to let her voice crack. “You’re okay.”

Nayeon didn’t answer, but maybe there was a sigh between the sobs. Somewhere. Dahyun liked to think there were. Tryingly, Dahyun took a step, and Nayeon did too. Slowly, Dahyun steered them into the bathroom, dragging the stumbling, trembling Nayeon along.

“I’m going to turn on the shower and put you under it.” Dahyun said. Mostly as a warning for the older girl.

Nayeon didn’t object, didn’t comment, just hung around Dahyun’s neck in the middle of the little bathroom.

“I’m going to take your phone.” Dahyun warned before reaching into Nayeon’s pocket, finding the phone, retrieving her own afterwards. Quickly sent a text to Jeongyeon telling her to just let herself in when she came. Jeongyeon had had the extra key since Nayeon and Chaeyoung moved into the apartment a few months ago.

“I’m turning on the water now.” Dahyun said.

Briefly, she wondered if she should take off Nayeon’s clothes first, but Nayeon clung to her so tight that it was impossible. Instead she just turned them around so Dahyun stood as a barrier between Nayeon and the shower head. Then she reached behind and turned the faucet. Immediately her body jolted in objection as the cold water hit her and she shielded Nayeon from it. It took everything for her to keep still as the cold water soaked her hair and back, waiting for the water to heat enough. Quickly however, the water got too hot, and she reached back awkwardly, blindly adjusting the temperature.

“I’m going to sit you down now.” Dahyun warned. She had halfway expected questions, protests,
anything. But Nayeon just nodded, clinging tighter as Dahyun dragged them both further under the showerhead, so it eventually hit Nayeon as well.

Dahyun’s thighs objected as she tried to slowly squat to gently sit Nayeon down, but she ignored the pain. Just felt her jeans soak through as she sat down on the wet floor. With difficulty, she bustled them until Nayeon was situated in her lap, the younger girl leaned against the wall under the water tap.

At first there was absolutely no change. Nayeon still seemed completely inconsolable. But then, little by little, it worked. And finally, Nayeon gave a shuddering sigh, and her breathing calmed. Little by little, the older girl relaxed, the water soaking them to the bone, washing the salt from their faces.

…

“You really want me to say it?” Chaeyoung asked, eyes seeking mercy as they found Tzuyu’s.

“I’m not asking anything of you.” Tzuyu insisted.

Chaeyoung nodded. She knew it was true. It wasn’t Tzuyu claiming the truth from her lips. It was the place. The concrete and the air and the white clouds. It asked for her utmost trust, giving nothing in return, and Chaeyoung found that the act of giving in brought relief to her soul as the words fell from her lips so easily that she realized they must’ve been begging to be let out all this time.

“I fell for Momo.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
It's finally time for one of my absolute favorite chapters!! I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chaeyoung sighed. Nodded. And then she felt it. How her body started to shake and her throat closed up. The inability to breathe and the tears that trickled mercilessly down her hot cheeks. All morning she had been calm. Collected. Through all Nayeon’s desperate yelling and crying, through the noise of her own mind and the buzz of the city as she walked through it. But now, in the quiet, she finally let her mind stop thinking and let her heart feel. Even if every second threatened to end her.

The water was cool on Nayeon’s burning skin, but she barely registered it. Wasn’t aware how long they had been sitting there, and only barely registered that it was Dahyun’s arms around her, Dahyun’s wet hair against her cheek. Just felt empty and confused. Never had she felt this much and this little at the same time. Like the constant breaking of plunging waves followed by the water drawing back in mercy - only for a new wave to rush over her. Constantly glimpsing unpredictable consequences in a chaos of lines and color that never really surmounted to anything but the sound of Chaeyoung’s laughter and the feeling of rain against her face and Chaeyoung’s wet lips. The feeling of a hand on her hip guiding her through a dance.

Another wave broke, and Nayeon buried her face, her body too tired to react but her mind trying to flee. And Dahyun read her somehow, wrapping her tiny arms tighter around the older girl. A feat, Nayeon would never since forget and would always love Dahyun for.

Nayeon was deaf and blind and numb in Dahyun’s arms, but it didn’t matter. She didn’t matter. Was nothing without Chaeyoung. Alone in the emptiness of her absence.

“I didn’t know what to do.” Dahyun’s voice said distantly, though Nayeon could feel her vocal cords vibrating, cheek pressed against the younger girl’s neck. And she was about to answer that it was okay, but she couldn’t get the words out.

“You’re doing well.” Another voice said, barely audible over the sound of the shower. A voice Nayeon recognized as if in a dream. It hadn’t been Nayeon that Dahyun had been talking to. It was Jeongyeon.

“I just couldn’t get her to stop crying.” Dahyun admitted, and Nayeon noticed that her voice broke. Sounded like it did those nights where she would lie in Nayeon’s arms, endless apologies falling from her lips and tears dripping onto Nayeon’s pajama pants.

“It’s okay. It’s a good idea.” Jeongyeon’s voice sounded again. Closer this time.
Another wave. What wouldn’t Jeongyeon demand of Nayeon? How could Nayeon ever live up to whatever they wanted from her. But she would have to. If they made her tell them, she would have to. Because it had been Nayeon who had asked for Jeongyeon. She who had opened the door and thrown herself and all of her problems at Dahyun. She owed them an explanation, but merely the thought made her want to cry and scream and throw up. But her body was void of energy. Empty.

A hand touched Nayeon’s arm. Softly. Undemanding. And Nayeon still flinched. But then it was gone and instead the water got warmer.

“I’ll make some food.” Jeongyeon’s voice said. Then the stream of water was interrupted and a shadow fell over them. Nayeon shivered and drew back enough to see Jeongyeon’s lips pressed to the top of Dahyun’s head, and the redness in Dahyun’s eyes. It was too much. All too much. And Nayeon closed her eyes again. Let her head empty of thought, waiting for the next wave. Felt lips on her temple and the weak sob that built through her throat and slipped past her, a last heaving effort from her body before it gave in and she leaned limply against Dahyun, completely at the mercy of her friend.

“What should I do about her?” Dahyun asked.

“That. Exactly what you did?” Jeongyeon’s voice sounded more distant now.

Nayeon felt how Dahyun nodded and then her arms once more tightening their hold on the older girl. Nayeon’s heart beat right for the first time in weeks.

“Nayeon?” Dahyun asked tentatively.

Nayeon tried to talk, to acknowledge her, but it was no more than a mumble.

“Jeongyeon is here.”

Another mumble.

“Do you want to talk to her?”

Nayeon shook her head ever so slightly, fingers fumbling to grasp at something, anything, and found the wet fabric of Dahyun’s shirt, making fists around it. She couldn’t yet stand to own up to her best friend. As if it made everything too real somehow. And Nayeon understood in that moment why Jeongyeon had kept pushing off the moment where she had told Nayeon about her relationship to Mina. Because telling Nayeon more than anyone meant owning up to the mistake it had been to hide the relationship in the first place. Because beneath the tangled hands and the beads around their wrists there was a soul-baring mercilessness that both of them needed from each other and both feared. And it was this that bound them together no matter what.

“Do you want to talk to me?” Dahyun asked, softly carrying Nayeon back to the bathroom, to the shower and to her arms.

Nayeon shrugged on reflex but then shuddered and huddled closer, whispering into Dahyun’s wet skin.

“We screwed it up…”

“We’re going to figure this out.” Dahyun promised. Didn’t demand an elaboration but merely kept Nayeon safe.

Then Jeongyeon’s voice was back, louder this time. But Nayeon still couldn’t acknowledge her.
“Do you want food now or later?” Jeongyeon asked.

“... Now. I think it’s time to get out of the shower.”

Nayeon tightened her grip on Dahyun. She wasn’t ready. Didn’t want to face reality yet.

“You’re okay, it’s okay. We’re just going to get you dry and warmed up, okay?”

Nayeon whimpered helplessly. Wanted to stay here.

“Jeongyeon?” Dahyun asked, turning her head in the direction of the door. Nayeon clung to her.

“Yeah?”

“We need dry clothes.”

“Oh, right. I’ll get some.”

Footsteps revealed that Jeongyeon had left once more, and again there was just the sound of Dahyun’s comforting hushes and the rush of the water from the shower head.

“Thank you.” Dahyun said a few moments later and once more there were footsteps. Nayeon knew that Jeongyeon had been there with clothes. Wondered if she would ever be strong enough to face Jeongyeon.

“I’m going to turn off the water.” Dahyun warned. As if she was scared that Nayeon would break at any sudden movements, and honestly, there was a risk that she would. Had absolutely no strength left in her body. But she nodded. Felt Dahyun stretching and then the force of the water lessen and disappear, only a few droplets landing on Nayeon’s head.

“Can you stand?” Dahyun asked. Nayeon nodded once more, but kept clinging to Dahyun for a moment. Then on trembling legs, using the wall and Dahyun’s shoulder for support, Nayeon stood up. For what felt like an eternity she stood there, wondering when she would fall apart, until Dahyun’s arms were once more around her.

“Good. You’re doing good.” Dahyun praised, and Nayeon could do nothing but nod and hope that there was just a tiny ounce of truth to the words.

For a moment, they just stood there, but then Dahyun’s hands found the hem of Nayeon’s shirt and tugged gently. Instinctively Nayeon took a step back, her entire body protesting to the movement. Dahyun immediately retreated her hand, an apologetic look in her eyes as Nayeon searched them in confusion.

“I’m sorry.” Dahyun hurriedly said. “You- you need to change. You can’t stay in the wet clothes, you’ll just get sick.”

Nayeon nodded, swallowing once. Felt her body fall back, emptiness rushing over her again.

“I can turn around or leave if you want?”

“No, it’s-” Nayeon’s voice broke and she shuddered. Felt her knees buckle and grabbed Dahyun’s arm for support. “You can help.”

“Okay.” Dahyun said, though she looked like she found it awkward. Nayeon did too. But there was no way Nayeon could muster the energy to get out of the clothes by herself. Could barely stand. But with the help of Dahyun, Nayeon got the shirt over her head. The air hit Nayeon’s clammy skin, and
she shuddered, but couldn’t move. Could just watch in a haze as Dahyun found the zipper in the side of Nayeon’s skirt and pulled it down. How she hesitated before tugging it down, the black fabric falling around Nayeon’s feet.

It was almost too much for Dahyun to see Nayeon stand there, shivering in the middle of the bathroom, clad only in underwear, soul bared.

“Dahyun?” Nayeon asked as Dahyun turned to grab a towel, wrapping it around Nayeon’s shoulders.

“Mh?” Dahyun asked, rubbing Nayeon’s arms and shoulders dry.

Nayeon looked at her for a moment. Saw the goosebumps on her arms and the red hair sticking to her face. The redness in her eyes.

“Thank you.” Nayeon breathed.

Dahyun stopped mid-motion, hands on Nayeon’s arms, holding the towel around her. Then she nodded and looked down at the floor, a smile on her face.

“Is this how it feels?” Dahyun asked quietly.

“Huh?”

“Your bubble?” Dahyun looked back up. “I always wanted to know how it felt.”

Nayeon couldn’t help it. Couldn’t stop the smile that tugged at her lips. And even if emptiness took over a mere second later, the memory would never fade. And maybe that’s what happiness is sometimes. A glimpse in the darkness, even if it never grows beyond that.

Little by little Dahyun dried Nayeon’s limbs, her back and her face. Wrapped a different towel around the long red hair and set it, preventing it from dripping down her back.

Then Dahyun hesitated, fiddling with the towel.

“Y-your bra. It’s- I’m gonna turn around and- uh.” Dahyun pointed to the dry shirt and underwear on the top of the hamper.

Nayeon looked with a frown as Dahyun turned her back on the older girl. How she shifted her footing and tugged at the neck of her own drenched shirt.

It wasn’t that Nayeon didn’t want to. But she just didn’t know how. Had lost the ability to get her body to connect to her mind, and just stood. Tried to at least twitch her finger but it didn’t get to more than that. Couldn’t even say Dahyun’s name to ask for help. And the feeling of incompetence threatened to knock the air from Nayeon’s lungs. As if all this wasn’t bad enough, she couldn’t even reach behind herself and unclip a damn bra? Was she nothing but a shell without Chaeyoung? How would she even manage?

“Nayeon?” Dahyun asked, when nothing happened.

“I-” Nayeon choked on her words. Felt the threatening waves in the horizon and wished that she could just keep feeling nothing. That she could stop thinking about Momo, about Chaeyoung, about anything. That she could just stay in the quiet of Dahyun’s arms, where it was safe. But there was nowhere warm. Nowhere safe.
“H-help.” Nayeon whispered. Let the wave crash over her and pull her down. Felt fresh tears burn her tired eyes and pool under her chin. Felt Dahyun’s hands on her arms, holding her up without hugging her.

“You’re ok.” Dahyun shushed. Quickly reached behind Nayeon and freed her of the soaked bra and the underwear as well. Covered her with the blanket and hugged her around it, so Nayeon remained dry and safe. Rubbed over her back and took off the towel wrapped around the red hair, letting it fall damp down Nayeon’s back. Ran her hand through Nayeon’s hair and pulled her to the surface with a force and a love that made Nayeon see clearly and made her calm despite the gravity of her realization.

“We got in a fight this morning.” Nayeon started, talking to the wall behind Dahyun. “Kind of. I hadn’t slept. At all. I kept seeing them in my head, being all cuddly and cute. And I... I guess it’s been coming for a while. We’ve been so busy, we’ve barely spent a minute not talking about school, so it makes sense that she-. The only time we actually got to be girlfriends was whenever we were all together. And I started noticing that she forgot to kiss me goodnight. And that she was always so happy when she came home from your movie nights. And they hung out here a lot too, and don’t get me wrong, I love having her here it’s just- I never imagined that I would- that she would- that we-. She’s just been here a lot and-”

“She-. Nayeon… You’re talking about Momo aren’t you?”

Nayeon jolted at the name, but nodded. Felt like she was about to fall from the cliff but kept steady. “She’s been helping me with my dance and basically just… hanging around a lot. But Chaeyoung, she- I’ve been so scared. That she was starting to slip away from me, even before you brought Momo and Sana into the picture and- and then yesterday.”

Nayeon heard the shivering sigh from Dahyun, as if she was preparing herself for the inevitable. And Nayeon knew the delicacy of the situation. That Nayeon was just now telling something that could change the entire way Dahyun thought about her best friend, if she didn’t do it right. But Nayeon didn’t have to say it. Just felt Dahyun nod and hush her. As if she didn’t want to hear the truth. Or maybe just wanted to spare Nayeon the pain of saying it.

But she said it anyway.

“I confronted her because I was terrified that she had fallen for Momo.”

“You don’t have to.” Dahyun tried.

“Yes I do.” Nayeon whispered. “Because I was right…”

Dahyun’s arms were stronger around Nayeon’s towel-clad body, and it was good they were, because Nayeon felt one last wave about to hit, threatening to wash away the pieces of her heart on it’s withdraw. Yet she kept talking.

“I got… so hurt. I’m not really sure what happened, it was over in no time, and then she was just gone? But the worst part is that I couldn’t even be mad at her for falling for Momo, I mean- I get it, it’s- it’s… But I took it out on her. I didn’t know what else to do, and I know it’s horrible of me- I just felt so hurt and alone and.”

“You’re not horrible.”

“I’m just so scared of losing her.”

“You love her. It’s natural.”
“But that’s the thing… I’m-” Nayeon finally drew back, holding the towel tight around her body. “I’m not sure I do. I mean, I love her, she’s- but I’m not sure I’m in love with her. But I’m so scared that I have to let her go, give her to someone else. That she doesn’t love me anymore. I-I got so jealous. But I don’t have the right to be if I’m not in love with her- If-”

“Nayeon.” Dahyun said. “Stop. You keep contradicting yourself.”

“What do you-” Nayeon looked at her, but couldn’t keep focus. Felt the plunging wave pull her under, the realization of her own heart too much to deal with. Would probably faint any second.

“You say that you’re not in love with her anymore. But you’re a mess at the thought of losing her and you got so hurt that she fell for Momo. That really doesn’t sound like someone who’s falling out of love. So why do you say that?”

“I… It’s so confusing. I’m so confused.” Nayeon whimpered.

“Why?” Dahyun pressed.

“Because I’m not sure who I was jealous of.” Nayeon breathed.

…

“I didn’t know yesterday! I only found out when she kissed Mina goodbye and I- I wanted her to kiss me goodnight too. But I’m not going to- I mean, I don’t- Nayeon, I don’t know what to do here.”

…

Sometimes Tzuyu imagined that if she just looked far enough into the horizon, that she could see it. Could see her home, the spacious apartment and her father’s humming as he cooked. The sound of the washing machine buzzing in the bathroom and the subtle thumps of the ball her mom threw gently across the room. Tiny toes on soft feet skittering across the hardwood floors and the sound of rubber caught between sharp teeth. The happy barks of her best friend when she came home from school and the feeling of his soft fur against her skin, his impatient pitter-patters on the floor when she made to go for a walk.

It was her secret - the roof. And here she had told many a secret aloud. Secrets about homesickness and frustrations and the worries she held for her friends. About love at first sight, and believing in fairytales.

“I don’t even know how it happened.” Chaeyoung sniffled, her back pressed against Tzuyu’s front, eyes on the horizon and Tzuyu’s arms around her frame. “I remember thinking she was stunning when I first saw her but nothing more than that. But then- the more time we spent together the more I liked it. Liked how calm and playful she was all at once. Liked the air of wisdom and lightheartedness she held. It was such a welcome change from all the stress at home that I just let myself lean on it. Especially when she started coming over. And I loved how she could make
Nayeon calm down even when I couldn’t. How she filled the place, like a breeze in a room that’s been closed too long.

“It doesn’t have to be some big gesture.” Tzuyu said gently, remembering how hard it had been to learn the written language here. Remembering the heart on the cup and the hand that drew it. “Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart.”

“That’s a quote from Winnie the Pooh.” Chaeyoung giggled hoarsely. Sniffled.

“I know. My mother used to read them to me when I was a kid. I always liked Pooh’s wisdom.”

“It’s very apparent. Like you.”

“Mh, I think I’m like him, more than he’s like me.” Tzuyu smiled, nosing Chaeyoung’s hair. Felt her shivering sigh and how she leaned closer.

“I just don’t know what to do. I mean, two years… And I do love her, I’m crazy about her, I just- I can’t deny that I like Momo too. But if I like Momo then doesn’t that mean I shouldn’t be with Nayeon?”

Tzuyu didn’t answer. Knew that it wasn’t her Chaeyoung was talking to. It was the roof.

“I want to be with Nayeon. I love her. I love every day with her, even if it’s hard. And I don’t understand why I fell for Momo in the first place. At first I didn’t think much of it because she just naturally fell in sync with all of us and I thought it was amazing to have another friend. I just feel like it’d be wrong to stay with Nayeon when- when I feel like this.”

Tzuyu hummed. Waited for Chaeyoung to keep going but the shorter girl just stared out over the city.

“This roof is kind of magical, you know?” Tzuyu then said quietly.

“Yeah, it demands your heart…” Chaeyoung sighed. “And now you know it too.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“What then?” Chaeyoung asked.

“It allows you to stretch the limits of your imagination. Like when I stand here I can see all the way back home. Even if I can’t, I can still see it. And I can see well. You should try it, try stretching the limits of your imagination. Imagine you can get exactly what you want even if it seems completely far fetched and impossible.”

Chaeyoung nodded. Looked down and kicked her feet into the concrete, before looking back up.

“I want Nayeon. And Momo.”

Tzuyu nodded. Held Chaeyoung tighter and kept her afloat as the truth washed over the shorter girl. It was probably impossible to know exactly how Chaeyoung felt in that moment, but for Tzuyu it was enough to merely know that she made it better by being there for Chaeyoung in all this confusion. Even if they hadn’t known each other too long, and even though Tzuyu had mostly stuck to Jihyo and Mina in the start, there was a natural confidentiality between her and Chaeyoung.

“Tzuyu?” Chaeyoung asked, her voice trembling. “Does it make me a bad person? T-that I want
them both?”

“No,” Tzuyu said. “None of what you want up here makes you a bad person. And even down on the ground it still doesn’t make you a bad person. It just makes you a person with an incredible heart, to love so much. Even if it hurts. Even if it’s hard. Even if it might not end how you want, I’m proud of you for owning up to your heart. So no. It doesn’t make you a bad person.”

“How can you know?”

“I have to believe that it’s brave to love. Otherwise I might not be brave enough to keep wanting what I want.”

Chaeyoung nodded and clutched Tzuyu’s arms tighter.

A breeze ran through their hair and souls and Chaeyoung’s voice accompanied it.

“What do you want, Tzuyu?”

…

“But you knew you liked her and you kept that from me! You probably knew yesterday as well and you still let yourself carry her around like-”

…

If Dahyun was asked to describe the current situation, she would honestly have a hard time doing so. Because after Nayeon’s last confusing words she had clamped up completely and in the end Dahyun had merely given up and helped Nayeon get into dry warm clothes before changing out of her own drenched ones. With a frown, Dahyun noticed that the clothes she was currently stepping into were not Chaeyoung’s - which she had initially expected as they were the same size. But the clothes were unmistakably Nayeon’s. Jeongyeon had probably known that any reminder of Chaeyoung might make Nayeon break. But honestly, at the moment it felt like just a breeze might make her fall and break into a million pieces. Or maybe she had already broken and was merely held together until someone removed a piece. Maybe there was nothing left but a shell. Dahyun couldn’t know. Nayeon had closed the bubble around her again, and Dahyun wasn’t sure how to get back in. But she had to keep trying.

“Come.” Dahyun said quietly when she was finally standing in Nayeon’s sweatpants and big t-shirt. Nayeon looked up at her with dead eyes.

Nayeon didn’t answer, but Dahyun led her out of the bathroom anyway, her own and Nayeon’s phone heavy in her pocket.

The hallway smelled wonderfully like soup and tea, and Dahyun felt her eyes burning with lack of sleep, her mind buzzing in an attempt to decipher the situation. To figure out what was going on in Nayeon’s head. It didn’t seem like she had much of a clue herself, honestly. But there was definitely something up. Something major.
“Do you want food?” Jeongyeon asked as Dahyun sat Nayeon down in the couch, tucking a blanket over her legs, covering her feet.

“I think so. Nayeon?”

Nayeon’s eyes were distant and her reactions slow as she found Dahyun’s. A tear fell silently down Nayeon’s cheek, and Dahyun wiped it away.

“Do you want food?”

“...Chaeyoung.” Nayeon whispered. “I… I want-”

“I know.” Dahyun said soothingly, tugging Nayeon closer. Felt the older girl’s head fall against her chest and shuffled for a better angle. Ran her hands through the red unkempt hair. Then turned to look at Jeongyeon. “I think we should try with food. Or maybe just tea?”

“I’ll bring both.” Jeongyeon said with a nod.

“Thank you.” Dahyun said, sending her a tired smile. “I didn’t know-”

“Just keep doing that.” Jeongyeon assured her. Then walked into the kitchen.

The distant sound of bowls and cups accompanied Nayeon’s shivering sigh. “I don’t know what to do.”

“We’re going to figure this out, okay?” Dahyun hummed. “Whatever this is.”

“Mh…” Nayeon mumbled.

“Can I ask you- I’m just trying to understand the situation…”

“It’s okay.” Nayeon nodded as Jeongyeon returned with soup, walking back and forth until the coffee table had three bowls of miso soup and three mugs of what smelled like lemon tea. Something jabbed at Dahyun’s heart. Guilt. In all the mess she had forgotten about the shit she had done to Sana and the reason she had come here in the first place. But there wasn’t anything she could do until she had things with Nayeon sorted. All she could hope was, that the idea that had been budding in her head wasn’t completely off. Even if it was a situation she had never personally come across before.

“Nayeon…” Dahyun started gently, feeling Jeongyeon settle on Nayeon’s other side, keeping a respectable distance to the older girl. “Nayeon, you said you didn’t know who you were jealous of. That you don’t think you’re in love with Chaeyoung anymore… Do you like Momo?”

Nayeon didn’t react. But Jeongyeon did. Shifted in the couch and caught Dahyun’s eyes, a bewildered expression in her eyes. A silent question formed on her lips but Dahyun just held up a hand to keep her from commenting out loud.

“Nayeon, please just- just think about it. Do you like Momo?”

Nayeon whimpered.

Dahyun tried to think back. “Yesterday at the beach, when you stayed behind with Tzuyu-”

Nayeon pressed herself closer to Dahyun and hid her face. Dahyun had definitely struck a chord, but it only convinced Dahyun even more, that she had to keep going.

“Who were you jealous of?”
“I don’t know.” Nayeon whispered against the Dahyun’s t-shirt. “I-I don’t-”

“It’s okay, Nayeon. You’re okay. Just think about it for a second. You say you don’t know who you’re jealous of. Are you scared of losing Chaeyoung or are you scared because you think both of you fell out of love with each other, and both fell for the same girl instead?”

This time Jeongyeon couldn’t keep quiet. “Dahyun, what-”

“Sh, I’m getting there.” Dahyun said quietly. Her mind was finally working at an appropriate pace.

“We both- I… fell.” Nayeon finally whispered. Dahyun felt the older girl’s tears seeping through the cotton and onto her skin under it.

“So you like Momo.” Dahyun concluded.

“I-I… I didn’t mean to. And if- I mean, Chaeyoung, she- they know each other much better, I shouldn’t-”

“You don’t want to stand in the way of them, because you think they mean more to each other than you mean to them?”

Nayeon nodded.

“So you’re trying to figure out how to take yourself out of an equation so the two girls you like can be together without it killing you?” Dahyun asked.

Nayeon nodded. “I… yeah.”

Dahyun reached down, taking one of Nayeon’s hands, running her thumb over the palm.

“Is there any possible way you can imagine the possibility that you’re still deeply in love with your small adorably cheesy girlfriend, and you two just happened to fall for the same girl as well as each other?”

The silence that fell after, seemed to last forever. Nayeon’s reaction was completely absent, almost as if she hadn’t heard it, and Jeongyeon sat with narrowed eyes, staring at the wall like she was trying to see the connection. Then her eyes widened and she looked from Dahyun to Nayeon and back again. Dahyun merely shrugged. It was the best possible explanation she had been able to come up with, when piecing all of Nayeon’s jumbled thoughts together. The only picture that made any sense. Except there was still the risk that Chaeyoung didn’t feel the same. That she had actually fallen out of love with Nayeon, though Dahyun highly doubted it. But that was a question for later. The first step was getting Nayeon to accept it.

“I’m… so confused.”

“Just try to imagine it. It hurts so bad to see Momo with Chaeyoung, right? But- but what if it weren’t just them. What if you could be there with them?”

“That’s… that’s not-”

“Just imagine it. If you could have both of them?”

Nayeon shuddered and then she finally raised her head. Looked around and found Jeongyeon’s eyes. For the longest moment they just looked at each other.

“No secrets, Im Nayeon.” Jeongyeon said quietly.
“I know.” Nayeon whispered.

“You always see the worst possible outcome.” Jeongyeon tilted her head a bit and tucked a hair behind Nayeon’s ear.

“I feel so stupid.” Nayeon whispered. “I had no clue.”

“That’s because you never think you’re allowed to be loved.” Jeongyeon hummed. “Idiot.”

“Jerk.” Nayeon mumbled, a tiny speck of light in her voice. Then Nayeon reached and let Jeongyeon take the older girl’s hand between both of hers, and turned her face to Dahyun.

“What if I am... what if I like Momo and love Chaeyoung still?” The tiny hope in Nayeon’s voice made it somehow even more fragile.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what will happen. But you need to talk about it. You and Chaeyoung. You need to tell her how you feel. You owe her that.”

“But what if she doesn’t love me anymore?” Nayeon’s voice shivered.

“Did she say that?” Dahyun asked.

“No,” Nayeon shook her head slightly. “But what’s the likelihood of-”

“Probability has no place in this.” Jeongyeon said.

“Of course it does, if she doesn’t feel the same then I’m kinda fucked.” Nayeon’s voice rose, regaining some of her strength somehow, even if the soup and tea both sat untouched on the living room table.

“Talk to her anyway.” Dahyun insisted.

“What am I supposed to say?” Nayeon asked desperately. “Hey Chaeng, do you happen to be poly?”

“I think so.”

…

Of course she was there. Of course she was sitting there with the wind playing with her black hair and a paper cup of tea in her hands. Jihyo should’ve known she would. And if she kept walking in Mina’s direction, she would surely notice.

So Jihyo turned. Walked back where she came from, leaving the seat next to Mina empty. What wouldn’t she have to admit to if faced with the gentle face she had loved so much once?

…
None of them had heard the door open. But there she stood, with swollen eyes and trembling lips, her hand clutched firmly in Tzuyu’s and the taller girl’s other hand on her shoulder. So small in her confusion, body trembling all over.

“Y-yeah, I think I am.” Chaeyoung whispered.

The room fell silent, all eyes on Chaeyoung. And she just stood there in the door, with tears streaming silently down her cheeks, and Dahyun felt the need to catch her. To wrap her up in her arms and keep her safe from all the hurt and confusion she was going through. But Nayeon’s grip was so tight on her arm, and the oldest was still so fragile in her manners that Dahyun feared she would simply shatter if Dahyun made any moves.

But Dahyun was wrong. Nayeon didn’t break.

“Chaeyoung… I’m- I’m so sorry.”

Nayeon’s croaking voice grasped the attention of everyone in the room, but even if every pair of eyes were suddenly on her, hers were locked firmly on the crying girl in the door.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” Chaeyoung whispered.

It’s amazing, Dahyun thought, how much the tiniest step can mean. Just those few words were somehow enough to let relief take over for the tension filling the air. As Tzuyu gently led Chaeyoung into the room, ignoring the fact that they both still wore shoes, both Dahyun and Jeongyeon made to get up, to give space for Chaeyoung. But Nayeon grasped them both so tight that Jeongyeon hissed and Dahyun winced. A complete contrast to the almost inaudible voice.

“Stay. Please.”

“We can’t fit four on the couch.” Jeongyeon said quietly.

Nayeon looked like she was about to burst into tears again, but then nodded. And to Dahyun’s complete surprise, let go of Jeongyeon, and not Dahyun. Chaeyoung didn’t take Jeongyeon’s seat however. Fiddled with the hem of her shirt, her eyes big and watery as they found Dahyun’s.

“You can do this.” Dahyun assured her. “Come.”

Chaeyoung gulped, staring at the seat beside Nayeon. “I don’t-”

“Chaeyoung. Please.” Nayeon whispered, shakily holding out her hand to Chaeyoung. Not insisting, just offering.

For a moment Chaeyoung just stared at it. Then she nodded and reached out. It was like seeing the last piece of the puzzle being set. The second their fingers touched, Chaeyoung let out a sob and grasped Nayeon’s hand, holding on as if she would never let go. As if she had never wanted to let go in the first place.

“I’m so sorry.” Chaeyoung said in a broken voice, trembling as she stood. “I’m so sorry, I never meant to- I never meant for any of it. I swear I never meant to fall for her, I didn’t-”

“I didn’t either, Chaeyoungie. It just happened.”
The mere fact that the words had actually left Nayeon’s lips seemed to come as a surprise to every single person in the apartment, including Nayeon herself. For a moment she just sat with her mouth slightly opened, then closed it tight, her eyes glazing over for god knows which time.

“You-”

“Apparently.” Nayeon whispered, the ghost of a smile playing at the corners of her lips.

Chaeyoung nodded. Then sighed. And then, without a warning, her knees seemed to give way under her, and she sank to the floor in front of Nayeon, leaning her forehead against Nayeon’s knees, their hands still clasped tightly. And for a moment Dahyun felt like this might be her cue to leave, but Nayeon’s hand was so firmly grasped around her own that it was impossible to do so. And then Chaeyoung’s hand found Dahyun’s free one, trapping her effectively with them, but found that she didn’t mind. If it offered them comfort and support to have something to lean on other than just each other, then who was Dahyun to deny them that.

“I should’ve told you the moment- I just didn’t know and I’m sorry I left. I should’ve talked to you instead of running.” Chaeyoung mumbled at the floor.

“I wish I had known too.” Nayeon mumbled. “I just miss us so much, and I think instead of realizing my own feelings I just saw all the things in Momo that I wasn’t offering you.”

“Nayeon.” Chaeyoung raised her head, lips trembling as she looked at Nayeon. “You offer me the world.”

Nayeon sniffled. “If… If you want her, and if she likes you back. Then- then it’s okay. I won’t mind.”

“What do you mean?” Chaeyoung asked with a frown.

“I mean- I just want you to be happy. And if she makes you happy then- then it’s okay. And if you want me still that’s okay too.”

“I don’t want anything without you.” Chaeyoung said immediately. “Nothing. And- and I don’t want her without you either.”

“What if she likes you?”

“It’s both of us or none.” Chaeyoung insisted. “I know that- that open relationships and all but… I don’t want that. I only want it if she wants both of us.”

Nayeon’s shoulders relaxed visibly and she nodded. Interlaced their fingers. Dahyun felt the grip on her own hand loosen, though it was still there. And Dahyun knew somehow, that Nayeon would let her know when she was ready to let go.

“What’s the likelihood of that though?” Nayeon whispered.

Chaeyoung shrugged. “Probably none.”

“I’d say it’s about the same likelihood as both of you falling for the same girl.” Jeongyeon shrugged, finally breaking into their conversation. “I mean if that isn’t fate or whatever, I don’t know what is.”

“Yoo Jeongyeon talking about fate? Who are you?” Nayeon raised an eyebrow and Chaeyoung gave a wet laugh.
Jeongyeon just shrugged and turned to Tzuyu. “Don’t you work on Sundays?”

“What? Oh- yeah, I just… I don’t know. What time is it?”

“Eleven.” Jeongyeon said. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good. But my shift starts in an hour and it’s at the other end of the city so I should probably get going if,” Tzuyu found Chaeyoung’s eyes, “if it’s okay with you?”

Chaeyoung nodded, leaning her head on Nayeon’s knees. “Thank you.”

“I could say the same to you.” Tzuyu said calmly. Then she looked at Jeongyeon. “Get her to eat something if you can.”

“Of course.” Jeongyeon nodded, giving the now lukewarm bowls of soup a glance. “I’ll just reheat these.”

Tzuyu nodded, then leaned down and pressed a kiss to the top of Chaeyoung’s hair before walking past them. With a hand on the front door she turned and found Dahyun’s eyes. “Let me know how it goes, okay?”

Dahyun nodded. And then Tzuyu was gone.

“So where do we go from here?” Chaeyoung asked as Jeongyeon started carrying bowls and cups back into the kitchen.

Nayeon shrugged. Both still held onto Dahyun’s hands, albeit loosely so.

“Can I suggest something?” Dahyun asked.

Both nodded and mumbled something in agreement.

“Maybe don’t ask Momo out yet? Maybe go back to just being girlfriends for a little, just at least the next week? Just the two of you, like you used to. Gross dates and everything. Just this time do it on your own couch instead of mine…” Dahyun trailed off, realizing she was sitting on said couch. “Actually, ew no, scratch that. But seriously, just try being the two of you and then if you still want to date her, then you can worry about all the probability stuff.”

Dahyun looked from one to the other, but they only had eyes for each other. So instead she settled for drawing soothing patterns on the back of their hands. Tried to glue them back together somehow, even if she was increasingly confident that they already were.

“I could be game for that.” Chaeyoung said quietly.

“Sounds good.” Nayeon agreed.

“And now?” Chaeyoung asked looking up at Dahyun.

“I vote that you find the worst straight rom-com and cringe at it together and promise me never to become the couple in those movies.” Dahyun grinned down at her.

“We can’t promise that.” Nayeon hummed.

“I know you can’t.” Dahyun squeezed her hand. “But will you promise me that if you still like Momo after all of this, you’ll at least talk to her about it? There’s no harm in asking her out, even if it’s risky. I mean I know she’s into girls, but even if I don’t know how many girls, there’s always the
Chaeyoung and Nayeon looked at each other, then nodded. Then Chaeyoung looked back at Dahyun. “Okay. But why are you so set on that?”

“Not sure.” Dahyun admitted. “I think I just want you guys to be happy. And Momo’s— well, she’s Momo. And if you guys like her and each other enough to get this upset about it, then I think it’s worth trying out? I don’t know why, but I just… there’s something about Momo. Makes me want the best for her.”

Both Chaeyoung and Nayeon smiled, and Dahyun used the moment to guide their hands together, removing herself from the equation. Watched with relief as their fingers tangled effortlessly.

“She gets under your skin.” Nayeon said softly, looking down at Chaeyoung.

“Very much.” Chaeyoung agreed, nodding against Nayeon’s knees.

“You two good?” Dahyun asked as she made to get up.

“Yeah…” Nayeon smiled, then looked up at Dahyun. “Thank you. I—I mean it. Thank you so much. I don’t think- I don’t think it would’ve been the same outcome had it been anyone else.”

Dahyun felt her cheeks flush and pressed her lips together. Nodded and got up. “Is it okay if I intrude a little longer? I’m starving. I hadn’t had breakfast.”

“Why not?” Chaeyoung frowned.

“Oh— I…” Dahyun bit down on her lip. “I just forgot.”

“Well get some soup before you leave then.” Nayeon insisted. Dahyun nodded.

…

“No! Of course not! Nayeon, I wouldn’t do something like that. You know me. I’m not a cheater.”

…

The tea was once more hot, and the soup warming on the stove. Jeongyeon had heated the tea in the microwave, and now Dahyun sat with the mug between her hands in Chaeyoung and Nayeon’s little kitchen. Looked down at the kitchen floor and clenched tighter around the ceramic.

“You ok?” Jeongyeon asked, sitting down opposite Dahyun. Tzuyu had left for work a few minutes earlier.

“I’m so tired.” Dahyun admitted. “And so confused.”

“About the whole…?” Jeongyeon gestured out towards the living room where Nayeon and Chaeyoung sat.
“No.” Dahyun sighed. Let herself remember the night before for the first time since leaving this morning. God, she had really just left, and just after Sana had revealed her own fear like that, trusting Dahyun. “About Sana.”

“What about her?”

“I…” Dahyun’s face screwed up in something that was both a smile and a cringe at the same time, but it was enough for Jeongyeon to realize the truth.

“You finally told her.”

“It’s- it’s more what she told me, actually.” Dahyun stared into the depths of the mug.

“Wait, she does like you, right?”

Dahyun nodded. “That’s kind of the problem.”

“Why would that be a problem?” Jeongyeon asked.

Dahyun looked up to see the frown on Jeongyeon’s face, but just then, the phone on the table buzzed, and Dahyun looked.

11:23 am Sana: Are you ok?

11:23 am Sana: I’m sorry, I don’t mean to pry, I just got worried.

Dahyun smiled. Couldn’t help it. Wanted nothing more than to go home and fall into Sana’s arms and let her wash away all of Dahyun’s fear. But Dahyun had done the exact opposite to Sana. Had left her alone with hers instead of soothing it. Instead of assuring Sana, she had just let her own panic take over. What kind of pathetic- no. No, this wasn’t the way to handle this. She couldn’t just tear herself down. The only thing she could do was face what she had done.

“Can I ask you something?” Dahyun asked.

“You already are.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“I mean-”

“I know. Go ahead.” Jeongyeon took a sip from her tea and encouraged Dahyun to do the same.

The taste of lemon felt like home.

“When you and Mina - when she kissed you…”

“Yeah?”

“Did you worry? I mean, you two were friends for so long before and it could get so complicated and with Jihyo and-”

Jeongyeon looked at her, obviously trying to read Dahyun’s face.

“All the time. The entire time we walked home together that night. The entire next day. But I just knew I wanted to be with her. I couldn’t imagine going back to not being with her. And even if things were so freaking complicated I had to try.” Jeongyeon said. “I had to take that chance. And even if there wasn’t Jihyo or anything else, there’s still the risk that it might not last. But even if I can’t be with her forever, I’m taking the chance that I might. I’m taking the risk of going through
what Nayeon was, by being as happy as I am now. It’s all just risks. But it’s all chances too. You just have to trust your gut.”

“I just… I thought I had every risk figured out, but now that I’m actually on the other side of it- god, I hadn’t foreseen this at all. I had been so focused on my own feelings in this that I never stopped to think.”

“What?” Jeongyeon frowned.

“She’s scared.” Dahyun hunched her shoulders.

“Of what?”

“Of all of it going wrong. Of losing us. Not just me, but all of us?” Dahyun shrugged.

“But she likes you?”

“… A lot, apparently.”

“And you kissed her?”

“I asked her to kiss me, does that count?” Dahyun asked, failing miserably at hiding the stupid grin on her face at the memory. It was unbelievable how her heart reacted so strongly just to that, but it did. Raced happily in her chest.

“Yeah, I mean you got a kiss, right?”

“… I did.” Dahyun nodded. Took a sip of tea and tried not to notice the smirk on Jeongyeon’s face.

“Shut up.”

“I’m not saying anything.” Jeongyeon grinned.

“Good because you’re going to have to yell.”


“I maybe sort of ran out on her this morning? After she told me she hadn’t asked me out because she was scared of losing you guys as her friends if things got awkward?”

Jeongyeon stared, for what felt like forever. “You did what?”

“I know, it’s bad. I just- I never saw this coming. That there might have been a reason- that maybe she actually did like me and just had hesitations and fears?! I don’t know why, but in my head I was the only scared one here. But I should’ve known, right? I mean Momo said it, that Sana hides behind her smile. And it’s not like I didn’t notice that she had acted different since Chaeyoung’s birthday-”

“What happened at Chaeyoung’s birthday?” Jeongyeon interrupted Dahyun’s rambling.

“She sort of maybe told me I could kiss her if I wanted to?”

“You-” Jeongyeon seemed completely lost for words.

“I’m a useless lesbian, we’ve established this at least ten times in the past two months, just help me out here please.” Dahyun groaned, letting her forehead lean against the kitchen table. Felt the cold surface soothe her warm skin. She was tired and embarrassed and mad at herself, and a cold kitchen
table was the last thing she had expected to help. Yet it somehow did.

“So the reason you were here this morning was to get Chaeyoung’s help?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Yeah.” Dahyun nodded into the table.

“Hang on.” Jeongyeon said. Then to Dahyun’s utter horror, she got up and walked around the table, pulling Dahyun up by the shoulder, ignoring her protests. And with a surprising amount of force for the designated weakling of the group, Jeongyeon heaved Dahyun from her chair and out into the living room.

“Chaeyoung?” Jeongyeon asked, hands firmly around Dahyun’s arms.

Chaeyoung looked up from the couch, having sat with her head on Nayeon’s shoulder. Her eyes were unfocused and her mouth slightly ajar.

“Can you please tell your best friend that she’s a dumbass who needs to go back and make good with Sana?” Jeongyeon asked impatiently.

“Huh?” Chaeyoung seemed completely out of it, her eyes traveling between Jeongyeon and Dahyun.

“Dahyun, you’re an idiot, go make out with your roomie.” Nayeon said, turning her head as well.

Dahyun pressed her lips tight together. Wanted to protest and give in all at once. Looked at Chaeyoung for help but found only an expression of light humoring.

“Make out? Are you finally getting some?” Chaeyoung asked.

“No cause she ran out on the girl who, surprise, likes her.” Jeongyeon tutted. Dahyun knew without looking that she was rolling her eyes.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake.” Chaeyoung yawned and looked Dahyun straight in the eyes. “Go home and talk to her.”

“You’re one to talk.” Dahyun grumbled.

“Hey, I’m here. We talked. You literally have no argument, get your butt out of my apartment.” Chaeyoung insisted.

“But how can I convince her that she’s not going to lose you guys if we don’t work out?” Dahyun asked.

“She’s afraid of losing us?”

“She… yeah? I mean I knew she didn’t have a lot of friends but I was surprised too. She really likes all of you.”

“Just tell her if you guys break up, we’ll date her.” Nayeon shrugged, as if the whole polyamory issue hadn’t caused her hours of heartache and complete disarray.

“Hell yeah.” Chaeyoung agreed.

“I’m not going to tell her that.” Dahyun said firmly, then turned to look at Jeongyeon. “But… I mean, if she actually kissed me then- then she must be willing to take the risk, right?”

Jeongyeon shrugged and nodded. “She’s perfect for you, and honestly you two fit so well it’s hard to
imagine you’d find someone like that again just around the corner. And you’re right; if she kissed you then she must think you’re worth it. Heck if I know why though, you’re literally just a nerd. She has weird taste.”

Dahyun scowled.

“Go. Now.” Jeongyeon nudged her.

“My clothes- they’re still wet.”

“Screw that, come get them later. Just go home.” Jeongyeon insisted.

“But-”

“Maestro?”

Dahyun turned at the name and looked at her best friend’s tired eyes. At the soft smile on her face.

“Go home.”

…

“Damn it. Damn it, Chaeng… Why did you- What did I do wrong? I don’t-... Have you kissed her?”

…

It was barely noon, but for all Dahyun knew it might as well be midnight. She felt jet-lagged and feverish. The sun was warm against her face and arms, and her entire body ached with the strain of supporting Nayeon.

Everything with her friends was so complicated and while it seemed like they had worked things out, there was no knowing if Nayeon and Chaeyoung would get through it. And if they did, then there was the next issue of Momo. What if she didn’t like them back? Or what if she only liked one of them? There were so many “if s” and it was too hard to foresee the consequences of it. But that wasn’t important. It wasn’t about the big picture.

It was just about the next step.

As she walked the familiar sidewalk back to her own apartment - to their apartment - it was these words Dahyun kept repeating to herself. Just the next step. The next choice. It was simple math. If
one choice had two options, and the next as well, then how fast wouldn’t she get to an almost unlimited amount of possible outcomes of her life? It would be completely impossible to foresee every one of them, to decide beforehand which path would give her the best life. All she could do now was choose what she felt was most right using what information she currently had and most importantly; her gut. And her gut seemed pretty damn sure of this one.

She had just refused to listen to it for the better part of two months.

... You’re not crazy. I wish you were, trust me. But you’re not crazy. I do... I do like her.”

Pressing her lips together tightly, she unlocked the door and stepped into her apartment. Their apartment. The living room seemed empty at first sight, but as she closed the door, she recognized the sound of feet on the wooden floors. Keeping her eyes in the direction of the hallway, Dahyun kicked off her shoes, nudging them aside with the side of her foot. Shifted her weight as Sana appeared from the hallway, the pink and yellow blanket wrapped tight around her shoulders and her glasses still on her nose. Hadn’t changed out of her pajamas. She didn’t speak. Just looked at Dahyun with slightly furrowed brows. Dahyun noticed with a jab of guilt that her eyes were red. Wanted more than anything to just wrap her arms around the older girl.

It was Sana who broke the silence.

“You never answered my text.”

Dahyun cringed. “I know. I-I didn’t really know what to say. Other than sorry. I don’t know. A lot of stuff went down and... It just seemed like a poor excuse at the time. Still seems like it. But I am sorry. So sorry... for everything. I shouldn’t have walked out on you like that.” Dahyun took a trying step towards Sana. She didn’t back away. “I should’ve stayed.”

“Yeah, you should have.” Sana nodded. “I was really worried.”

“I’m sorry. I panicked.” Dahyun took another step.

“I figured as much.” Sana said quietly. “I just wish you had trusted me to help you.”

Dahyun felt an uncomfortable jab in her gut. “Sana, I’m so sorry.”

“You’ve said that already.” Sana said, though she still took a step towards Dahyun.

“I know.” Dahyun cringed. “Can I explain?”

Sana nodded. Took another step. If Dahyun reached, she would be able to touch Sana.

“I have been so caught up in my own head, about the risks I would be taking by going for something more than friendship with you. And I never stopped to think that maybe you actually liked me as
much as I like you. That you had reasons not to try, just like I did. And I had definitely never
expected it to be the fear of losing our friends.”

“Our…” Sana said quietly, as if she was tasting the word on her tongue for the first time.

“Of course. And if it makes you feel any better, Chaeyoung and Nayeon offered to date you if I
screw up… and I now realize I have to apologize for telling them your worries without asking you.
God, I’m already screwing up.” Dahyun sighed.

“It’s okay. You went to Chaeyoung?” Sana asked.

“She’s the best at kicking my butt when I deserve it.” Dahyun crossed her arms, making fists around
the fabric of Nayeon’s shirt.

“So you guys have been talking all this time?”

“N-no, a lot of stuff went down- I… I didn’t have a chance to talk to them about you until about
twenty minutes ago.”

“Stuff?” Sana tilted her head.

Dahyun felt her body shiver and nodded. “But it’s okay now. The main thing is that I got scared, and
I handled it wrong, and I’m sorry for that. I mean, I can’t promise I won’t get scared again and I
understand if you don’t- if… but if you want, I can promise that I’ll try to tell you when I’m scared
instead of running.” Dahyun wanted to look away. Felt sick at the thought that she might have ruined
things with Sana in less than twelve hours.

But then Sana unfolded her arms, hands around the corners of the blanket. “I like that plan.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah…”

Dahyun sighed. Felt the relief flushing through her every muscle as she took the last few steps,
falling into Sana’s arms. Felt how Sana caught her, wrapping the blanket around them both.

“You look exhausted.” Sana muttered as Dahyun wrapped her arms around Sana’s waist, leaning
into her.

“I am.” Dahyun mumbled. “Nayeon cried on me for the better part of an hour.”

“What? Why?”

Dahyun told the entire story of Nayeon and Chaeyoung, leaving out only the identity of the girl they
had fallen for. Told it into Sana’s neck and felt how all the worries left her one by one, with each
word. And Sana hummed in response and ran her fingers through Dahyun’s still damp hair.

“You should probably try to sleep, maybe take a nap?” Sana suggested when Dahyun mentioned for
what was probably the fifth time how tired she had been.

“No…” Dahyun hummed.
“Why not?” Sana asked.

“I want ice cream.” Dahyun mumbled, probably not fully awake.

Sana giggled. “We have some in the freezer, I think.”

“No, I want to take you out for ice cream.” Dahyun drew back a bit, trying not to slump too much. “If you have time... If you want?”

“I’d like that.” Sana beamed. “After you’ve slept, you’re about to pass out.”

Dahyun stared at her, repeatedly blinking her eyes into focus.

“What?” Sana giggled.

Dahyun shook her head. Pressed her lips tight together.

“You promised you’d talk to me.” Sana tried to pout but she was smiling too much for it to really work.

“I really want to kiss you.” Dahyun muttered.

Sana giggled, her lips splitting in a shy grin. “You can.”

“O-okay.” Dahyun bit down on her lip. Sana raised her eyebrows, obviously trying to hold her giggles in.

Nothing happened. The reality that she could lean up and catch Sana’s lips was overwhelming. And it would have no other consequences than satisfying the butterflies that had filled every space of her body. Two months of daydreaming and going back and forth in her head. All that for this moment.

“Dahyunnie.” Sana said impatiently.

“Mh?” Dahyun’s eyes snapped up to meet Sana’s, warmth settling in her cheeks.

“Will you just kiss me?” Sana’s voice was sharp but her eyes soft.

Dahyun chuckled nervously. Nodded and leaned in. Felt her heart soar and Sana’s bubbly laugh against her lips.

…

“Chaeyoung? I know this is probably just my catastrophe thinking brain again, but I need to know something. And I need you to answer me as if I wasn’t crazy. Because the more I saw you tonight the more I started to believe that I’m not crazy. That- that.... Chaeyoung? Do you like Momo? Romantically?”

…
With a splutter, Dahyun turned off the faucet and reached for the hand-towel. Felt the fluffy fabric and held it to her soaked face, scrunching her nose in an attempt to avoid sneezing. She had very effectively gotten water up her nostrils while washing her face.

“Here.” Sana said in an amused tone, handing Dahyun a few pieces of toilet paper. Dahyun chuckled and took them. Blew her nose free of water, disposing of the toilet paper before washing her hands. Let the cold water run over her wrists for a little before drying them.

“Thank you.” Dahyun grinned.

“You looked like you needed it.” Sana giggled, brushing the blonde hair. “God, I need to go get my roots done. Or maybe dye it another color?”

“Honestly, I think anything would look good on you.” Dahyun grinned.

“Red?”

“Oh, definitely.” Dahyun said with a grin. “But I mean, I love the blonde too.”

“Yeah?” Sana looked at the tips, judging the amount of split ends before running a hand through it. “I think I might stick with blonde a little longer.”

Dahyun nodded, not really sure what to say, but instead busied herself taking out her lenses. It was a difficult balance, and she wasn’t really an expert in flirting. But Sana didn’t seem to expect an answer. Just unlocked her phone and set a reminder to make an appointment.

“Done?” Sana asked as Dahyun closed the lids to her lens case and propped the glasses onto her face.

“Yup.” Dahyun stared at the sink. Allowed herself a second before looking into the mirror, finding Sana’s eyes staring at her through the mirror. For a split-second it felt awkward, but then Sana bumped her hip against Dahyun’s and she crossed her eyes, sticking out her tongue. Dahyun couldn’t help but laugh. Felt the tension leave her body and offered Sana her hand.

“Goof.” Sana said under her breath as she gently forced Dahyun’s fingers apart to interlace them with her own. Then she leaned in, pressing her lips to Dahyun’s cheek. Stayed on Dahyun’s skin for longer than she ever had. Something inside Dahyun’s heart was trying to play a very exciting and unfamiliar song.

“I’m assuming I still get my cuddle buddy even if we’re also kissing buddies now?” Sana asked with a glint in her eye as she dragged Dahyun from the bathroom across the hall.

“I, uh-”

“kissing buddies? “Sure, I mean-”

“You don’t have to.” Sana quickly assured her, hand on the door to her room.

“No, I want to, it’s-” Dahyun cleared her throat. “Kissing buddies, I haven’t heard that term before.”

“Well, technically you haven’t asked me out yet so I didn’t want to assume we’re dating.” Sana shrugged as she opened the door, leading Dahyun inside, turning on the little nightstand light instead of the ceiling light. “Kissing buddies was the best I could come up with in the moment. Better than roommates with benefits I think.”

The way she said it was so casual, and maybe that was the entire reason Dahyun’s brain turned directly onto the white noise. Dating... asking her out... benefits?
“What benefits?” Dahyun asked without realizing what she had actually said before she said it. Then felt her cheeks burn as Sana let go of Dahyun’s hand and shook her head with a smile, stealing a chaste kiss. Then crawled onto the bed and shuffled under the covers.

Dahyun still stood in front of the bed with furrowed brows and her cheeks flaming. Stared at the spot she used to sleep in.

“I’m not going to jump you.” Sana clicked her tongue, “Come on, we barely slept last night and I need my cuddle buddy.”

Dahyun nodded slowly. Cleared her throat and crawled onto the bed, under the covers. Turned onto her side and faced Sana. Studied her face.

“I think this day might have been one of the weirdest days of my entire life,” Dahyun said.

“You did well though.” Sana said, shuffling closer under the covers.

“Not with you.”

“You owned up to it and apologized, and now we’re past that.” Sana smiled. Tapped a finger to the tip of Dahyun’s nose.

Dahyun nodded and smiled. Found that it was effortless. Then she too shuffled, until her knees met Sana’s and then she let her hand rest on Sana’s waist. Noticed how the corners of Sana’s lips twitched right before she angled her face, leaning in to kiss Dahyun. But she never got that far; because next second her glasses collided with Dahyun’s and she jerked her head back with a giggle. Took off her glasses and propped herself up on her elbow. Leaned over Dahyun to place them on the nightstand and then carefully took off Dahyun’s as well, placing them next to her own.

When she leaned back for the second time, she was still at an angle, leaning on her hand. And the way she looked down at Dahyun made the younger girl’s heart swell. But she didn’t get to take in the moment for long, as next second Sana’s fingers combed through Dahyun’s hair and she leaned in, properly kissing Dahyun this time. It sent sparks through Dahyun’s limbs as she closed her eyes, giving in to the feeling.

Everything was Sana. The taste of her lips; how they moved so softly against Dahyun’s. Her hand in Dahyun’s hair. The way she leaned into Dahyun, humming as the younger girl grasped at her shirt. And despite the fact that they had spent the better part of a month pressed closely together as they slept, Dahyun wanted more closeness, more of everything Sana was offering. Almost as if she had read Dahyun’s mind, Sana changed the angle. Deepened the kiss.

She tasted like mint and sunshine.

…

Jihyo let herself fall onto the bed. Grasped with her hand for the phone and felt the cool screen against her fingertips. Grabbed it and pressed the button. Waited for the screen to turn from white to the picture from last night that she had set as her lockscreen. The nine of them at the beach. Typed the password and opened her messages. Stared at the last conversation.
11:49 pm Tzuyu: I love you
11:50 pm Jihyo: I'm okay
11:50 pm Tzuyu: I know you are
11:50 pm Tzuyu: I still love you.
11:52 pm Jihyo: Please, Tzuyu
11:52 pm Jihyo: I'm giving you space...
11:52 pm Tzuyu: I appreciate it
11:56 pm Tzuyu: Make me give in
11:56 pm Tzuyu: Make me cave
11:58 pm Tzuyu: Just this once...
11:59 pm Jihyo: No

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Cotton-like white clouds soared effortlessly across the sky and the city felt alive around Dahyun as she walked the familiar street towards the restaurant. For some reason she kept looking up at them, as if she wanted to be taken away with the wind as well. The past day had just been so confusing and wonderful. With everything changing around her somehow being stuck in limbo, and it made her stomach tug every now and then. It was just about the last thing she wanted, to deal with her brain overthinking everything. Really, the only thing she wanted was to finish this shift and go crawl under the covers and nuzzle into Sana’s neck. To feel her arms holding Dahyun safe and listen to her calm breathing.

That reality however, was still eleven hours away.

Jeongyeon’s body was visible from a long way away, looking like a goddess in the bright summer light as Dahyun approached her. She was just sitting there, on their bench, leaned against the back of it, her long legs crossed and face turned to the sky. The sun shone in her blonde hair and she ran a hand through it before adjusting her bangs. Then, just as Dahyun reached her, she sighed heavily and closed her eyes.

“Long shift last night?” Dahyun asked.

Jeongyeon looked around at her and shrugged. “Worried about Nayeon mostly, but yeah, it was a long shift. Boss man Yang-nim was in a hell of a mood. Accused Mina of leading on some guys when he caught a bit of conversation between them on his way out.” Jeongyeon huffed.

“What?” Dahyun gaped. “She would never.”

“I know.” Jeongyeon nodded. “It’s complete shit.”

“It’s harassment.” Dahyun growled. “Is it the same guys?”

“Nope. Two new ones.” Jeongyeon cringed. “I’m gonna kill them.”

“No you’re not.” Dahyun said, reaching down. Put a calming hand on Jeongyeon’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

“You all keep saying that.” Jeongyeon grumbled.
“That’s because we know you.” Dahyun said as Jeongyeon got to her feet. Dahyun retreated her hand and changed the subject. “Nayeon’s doing okay though. I mean, I hope. I only talked to Chaeyoung a little yesterday but they seemed okay.”

“Yeah, I talked to her this morning.” Jeongyeon nodded as they walked around the building. “It’s still a bit awkward, but they’re going to go to a movie tonight just to get away from the apartment a bit.”

“That’s a good idea. Chaeng cancelled on movie night tomorrow, too.” Dahyun opened the door to the back entrance and held it for Jeongyeon. “I think she wanted to get a bit of distance from Momo while they figure things out. So it’s just Momo, Sana and I.”

Dahyun opened her locker and grabbed the black sneakers she wore at work. Kicked off the shoes she had worn on her way here and pushed down the yellow sweatpants she usually wore.

“How did the Sana thing go?” Jeongyeon asked, and Dahyun allowed herself a moment to appreciate the irony that Jeongyeon had actually literally caught her with her pants down.

“I uh,” Dahyun cleared her throat as she stepped into her skirt, zipping it at the side. “Good.”

“And?” Jeongyeon obviously wasn’t satisfied with just a wave-away answer.

“I don’t know?” Dahyun admitted, though omitting the mention of the term kissing buddies. It still made Dahyun blush. Instead, she pulled off the t-shirt and dug into the closet for her work shirt. It was a warm day, and Dahyun already dreaded the long sleeves in the hot restaurant.

“But you’re dating?” Jeongyeon asked as she started buttoning the white shirt.

“Technically, no?”

“You haven’t talked about what you are?” Jeongyeon’s voice was sharp. “Dahyun, you share an apartment. You’re legally bound to the same place, you better have a-”

“We did talk.” Dahyun interrupted Jeongyeon. Knew that she was only being like this because of her history with Jiyeon. “She wants me to ask her out, I think?”

“Why haven’t you?”

“I don’t know how. It’s not that I don’t know how, I mean, I know how, it’s just… I don’t want to make it some cheesy date? I asked her out for ice cream but I don’t think she understood it as a date?” Dahyun buttoned the shirt and started working the knot of her tie. “Maybe it’s just not the kind of date she wants to go on?”

“Ice cream sounds good, and it’s not about the date she wants, it’s about the date you want to take her on. So just ask her again and make sure she knows it’s a date.” Jeongyeon shrugged, teeth tight around a black hair tie as she gathered the blonde hair in a ponytail.

Dahyun nodded. Jeongyeon was right; it was just hard to keep it in mind. Hard to keep from overthinking things. But it didn’t have to be some big steak dinner for it to be a date. It just had to be something they did that was about them - about dedicating their time to each other in some setting.

With her mind on Sana’s huge goofy smile the last time they had gone for ice cream, she and Jeongyeon walked through the door to the kitchen. Jeongyeon stopped immediately, and Dahyun almost collided with her back. Walked around her and looked at the scene. At first glance there was nothing new about it, but then Dahyun noticed the two things that were very different. First was the
sight of Felix in a waiter’s uniform instead of his usual kitchen boy attire; a sight that merely pleased the girls. He deserved it, especially after having helped them out the night of Dahyun’s panic attack. But the thing that really changed things, was the sight of petite Joohyun in a tall chef’s hat.

“Wha-” Jeongyeon’s words caught in her throat. “Where’s Taeyang?”

“Out sick.” Joohyun said, a worried expression on her face.

“Oh, well, if you see him, tell him to get well soon.” Jeongyeon said.

Joohyun nodded.

Then Jeongyeon turned to Dahyun. “Rock paper scissors for door duty?”

Dahyun shrugged as if it wasn’t a big deal, but at a nudge from the older girl, she grinned and held out her fist.

Jeongyeon won, but it didn’t matter. She let Dahyun have it anyways. It wasn’t a secret that it had always been Dahyun’s favorite part, and maybe Jeongyeon knew that tonight, Dahyun had the energy to face the inevitable anxiety that came with managing the floor when it was as packed as it was tonight. Especially as it was the end of the month and nights like these always ended with people drinking away the last change at the bottom of their wallets.

But Dahyun managed. Somehow managed without a single mistake, finding energy from the almost constant happy bubbling in her stomach and the reminder that she would be going home to sleep in Sana’s arms afterwards. That thought in particular made it impossible not to smile. So who cared if the customers thought she was just being polite?

Honestly, with almost everything, Dahyun had feared for a worse night than it turned out to be.

They had expected the kitchen to be late, with Taeyang being out, but Joohyun stepped up that night in a way they had never expected. Taeyang had always taken extra care of her, for some reason that they had never quite seen coming. Not that she wasn’t talented, but she didn’t seem like an obvious choice as his right hand woman. She had always just been quiet and hardworking. But in his absence she had become a Taeyang in miniature, her voice impossibly louder than Jihyo’s. It demanded the respect of everyone around her. Every tall man and boy in that kitchen listened as her orders ricocheted off the walls like bullets.

…

The cinema was too cold, and while Nayeon had expected it, it was obvious that Chaeyoung hadn’t. There were goosebumps on the girl’s thighs and she kept shuffling in her seat.

Nayeon bit her lip. It had been obvious that she had wanted to bring back memories of their very first date, with dinner and a movie. Though this time she had chosen movie and dinner, and had chosen different places for both. A different genre for the movie. And it wasn’t raining this time. But she was still nervous. That much Nayeon knew for sure. And she could’ve just suggested that they leave
the movie and go sit in the shade - let the warm air outside heat Chaeyoung back up. But she didn’t. She couldn’t bear to ruin Chaeyoung’s plans. Knew the girl’s love of spoiling Nayeon and didn’t want to take that away from her.

Chaeyoung shuffled again, wrapping her arms around her knees. The man beside Chaeyoung sent her a look, and Nayeon felt like snapping at him. Instead she moved forwards a bit and pulled off the long-sleeve she had worn

“Here.” Nayeon whispered, gently tapping on Chaeyoung’s arm to get her attention. The younger girl looked around.

“No, it’s okay-” Chaeyoung started as Nayeon tried to hand Chaeyoung the shirt.

“I won’t have you coughing in my face the next week.” Nayeon merely tutted, swatting away Chaeyoung’s arms and pulling the shirt over her legs. Neither of them could help but giggle at the slightly ridiculous sight of Chaeyoung’s legs clad in the shirt, the knees peeking out of the neck and the arms hanging limply at the sides.

“Won’t you be cold?” Chaeyoung asked, relaxing visibly at the warm shirt.

“I’ll just hold your hand for warmth.” Nayeon said. Reached over and took the younger girl’s hand, kissing the back of it before interlacing their fingers. “Relax, Chaeyoungie. Don’t try so hard.”

Chaeyoung chuckled nervously and leaned closer, their bare arms leaned against each other.

Nayeon turned back to the movie. Felt the thumb running over her skin and the way it made her heart beat faster. It always beat faster for the girl next to her. Always had. And it occurred to Nayeon how ridiculous she had been to think that she had ever for a moment loved her less. But if Dahyun hadn’t mentioned the possibility of having a heart that held more than one romantic connection, she would’ve probably still have believed her mind telling her that it wasn’t possible. But honestly, she wouldn’t have minded it if it was Momo and not some stranger on Chaeyoung’s other side. And for a moment Nayeon imagined it. Imagined Momo there in the man’s seat, holding Chaeyoung’s hand. Helping Nayeon keep her warm.

It was hard to decipher exactly what kind of feeling it was that surged through Nayeon. But it made her tighten the hold on Chaeyoung’s hand.

“You okay?” Chaeyoung whispered.

Nayeon nodded. Leaned in and pressed her lips to Chaeyoung’s cheek in the darkness. It didn’t matter that the world was falling apart on the screen in front of them. It was coming together in theirs. With Chaeyoung’s cheeks puffing under Nayeon’s lips.

There were probably a million things Nayeon could’ve said in that moment. But she didn’t have to. It was enough just to hold her.

…

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re annoying?” Dahyun said as she dodged the tip of the broom
aiming for her side. It was slightly past two, and Jeongyeon had just effectively gotten the last two
guys out of the restaurant, locking up after them. Dahyun had been cleaning for the past half hour,
though only the section used specifically for dining guests.

“So do you forget I grew up with Nayeon?” Jeongyeon asked with an unapologetic grin.

“I don’t get how she could stand you all those years.” Dahyun rolled her eyes. Jumped aside as the
broom came for her once more.

“Have you met Nayeon? Not like she had a lot of options.” Jeongyeon said dryly. Dahyun chuckled,
knowing it was a lie. No matter how much they actually needed each other, neither of the two oldest
ever admitted it. Always held onto the story that they were only friends out of pity of the other. But
the bracelet on Jeongyeon’s wrist told a different story. Never once had Dahyun seen Jeongyeon
without it. Nayeon and Jihyo either for that matter.

“How many tables left?” Dahyun asked, curling a paper table cloth into a ball, attacking the table
with a wet dish cloth.

“Six, I think. Then the floor, but I’m almost done sweeping so I’ll wash it in a minute.” Jeongyeon
made an almost softball-like sweep with the broom at a napkin under one of the round tables. A
leftover from her high school days. Then she turned to Dahyun again. “Did you count the bar?”

“Yup, it’s all there.” Dahyun confirmed. They had to check the bar each night to make sure that all
the bottles of hard liquor was still there.

“And the register?” Jeongyeon counted on her fingers, obviously going through a checklist in her
mind.

Dahyun frowned. “I think… no, I forgot that.”

“I got it.” Jeongyeon said quickly and leaned the broom on a table and walked around the counter to
the bar.

“Did you know that Taeyang was sick?” Dahyun asked as Jeongyeon opened the register.

“Nope.” Jeongyeon shrugged. “But I’m sure we’d be notified if it was something serious.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.” Dahyun mumbled, letting Jeongyeon count the money. Instead she
made herself useful, and grabbed the paper table cloths from the remaining few tables. She hummed
along to the music playing from the loudspeakers as she wiped the tables clean, gathering everything
up and carrying a big load out into the black trash-can in the kitchen. Returned and grabbed the mop.
Danced stupidly with the broom, singing whatever song played in the background. Just to make
Jeongyeon laugh. Felt like she could fly when it did. Then Jeongyeon swatted her lovingly over the
head and told her to be quiet while she finished counting.

“You want to get home soon too, right?” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow.

“Shut up, I’m allowed to be happy.” Dahyun grumbled and lifted a chair she had missed at one of
the last tables she had cleaned. Turned it upside down and sat it on top of the table with the others.
Then mopped the floor underneath it.

Jeongyeon didn’t comment. They both knew she was right. The prospect of getting home quickly
made her thoughts stray to Sana. And every thought was an exhilarating, terrifying realisation that
Sana was hers somehow. That she could make Sana smile, make her heart flutter, make her giggle
and blush. Really, how anyone could get anything done when in love was a mystery to Dahyun.
People used to say it was just because it was a new thing, and maybe it was. But honestly, as
distracting as it was, it was also the most wonderful feeling and Dahyun doubted that she had ever
felt as good as she did right now. Even with everything else going on. It just didn’t feel that
important right now. Like it would all work out. With her classes, and the job. Even her friends
seemed to be in good places again despite the scare with Nayeon and Chaeyoung. And Dahyun too
was in a good place, with Sana.

“Dahyun?” Jeongyeon asked, pulling Dahyun back to the restaurant.

“Yeah?”

“You seem better.”

“I am. I’m… I’m ok.”

And she really meant it.

…

The lights were off in the apartment when Dahyun came home and Sana’s contacts case was closed.
A part of Dahyun was glad that she hadn’t waited up. Even if it would’ve been nice, it wasn’t good
for Sana’s sleep schedule to stay up every time. So instead of Sana waiting up, Dahyun simply tried
to hurry as much as she could in getting to bed. Which, turned out, was not the brightest idea she had
ever had in the middle of the night. Changing clothes with a toothbrush in her mouth definitely was
not a thing Dahyun was going to attempt again. The toothbrush caught in Sana’s shirt and stuck
under her tongue uncomfortably as she tried to put it on, nearly spilling toothpaste on it. Quickly
leaning over the sink, she pulled the neck of the shirt over the handle of the toothbrush and grabbed
it, spitting out the excess toothpaste before pulling the shirt down properly. Then rolled her eyes at
herself in the mirror and took out her lenses. They stuck to her finger, and she felt how her eyes
drooped.

Even if both she and Jeongyeon had been eager to get home, they had still sat on the bench for a few
minutes, talking. And Jeongyeon had acknowledgingly told that other than Jihyo and Chaeyoung,
no-one had gotten under Nayeon’s skin like Dahyun had yesterday. That getting to the point, where
Nayeon opened up about something that scared her that much, meant that Dahyun had forever
earned a special place in Nayeon’s heart.

But her praise had come with a warning. That Nayeon’s trust was not to be taken for granted; that it
was something entirely special. Dahyun knew that already. She had always wanted that trust, always
been compelled by the push and pull of Nayeon’s personality, but had never known how to go about
it.

For a while Dahyun had been sure that she had gained Nayeon’s confidentiality those nights when
she would talk Dahyun back to sleep, but it got obvious within a few weeks that there was still a
bubble around Nayeon that practically no-one had access to. But Nayeon was the kind of person that
made you wish you had. And now that she did, it made Dahyun swell with pride. Made her feel
useful. Made her feel like she was finally once more strong enough to be someone else’s support.
And it was this that held off all the monsters at the back of her head telling her that she still had exactly zero percent of her life figured out.

Because it was wrong. She had this. Had her friends. Had Sana.

Dahyun smiled at herself in the mirror at the thought. Propped the glasses up on her nose and combed through her hair. Then she remembered that she was supposed to send Jeongyeon the habitual “I’m home. Goodnight!” text and quickly typed it up. Noticed that Jeongyeon had sent hers ten minutes earlier and added a “Sorry, I forgot to text”.

Then she tippy-toed across the hall from the bathroom to Sana’s room. Crept under the covers and was almost magnetically pulled towards the warmth that Sana’s sleeping body emitted. The older girl hummed in her sleep as Dahyun pecked her lips once and whispered a goodnight before turning onto her side. Gently she pushed her back against Sana’s front, and felt how Sana’s arms wrapped around her waist.

She fell asleep almost on the spot.

Woke less than five minutes later.

How the hell could she have forgotten about Tzuyu? About the pact? And they had even seen each other after the kiss. Albeit not in Dahyun’s proudest moment but still. She had promised. Her only hope was that no-one had accidentally told the younger girl by accident.

She cursed under her breath at her own forgetfulness and reached for her phone and glasses, trying not to let the light hit Sana’s face as she opened the chat with Tzuyu.

3:12 am Dahyun: I did it, Chou-Tzu! I kissed Sana!

Dahyun bit down on her lip, allowing herself five seconds to stare at the message before turning off the screen again and reaching to put it back in the charger, placing her glasses on top of it. But just as she moved back into Sana’s arms she heard the breathy giggle. Felt lips brush over the skin of her neck. Shivered.

“You’re really cute, do you know that?” Sana whispered.

“I thought you were asleep.” Dahyun murmured, her skin burning where Sana’s lips brushed. What exactly was the point of having that many nerves in the nape to cause this amount of reaction?

“I was until you kicked my leg.” Sana giggled.

“Sorry!” Dahyun grimaced.

“No worries, it wasn’t very hard this time.”
“This time?” Dahyun asked in a slight panic, turning in Sana’s arms to face her. “I’ve kicked you before?”

“Only when you have nightmares.” Sana hummed, reaching up to let her fingertips run along Dahyun’s hairline.

“Oh,” Dahyun bit her lip. “I thought… You told Tzuyu that I didn’t kick?”

“You didn’t back then. It’s only been the past month maybe? I think after that night at Jihyo’s?” Dahyun nodded. “I’m sorry still. Jihyo says I bike in my sleep.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right.” Sana mumbled. Leaned up and pressed her lips to Dahyun’s forehead. Dahyun couldn’t help but tug at Sana’s shirt, wanting her closer. Every move was so gentle and caring, and Dahyun longed for her safety.

“I’m still sorry for kicking you though.” Dahyun said quietly.

“You don’t have to apologize for something you don’t have control over. At least not when it’s not hurting anyone.” Sana said as she drew back, finding Dahyun’s eyes. The hand previously in Dahyun’s hair travelled down her arm, under the sheets. Settled on Dahyun’s hip. Dahyun kissed her; just once. Properly but not deep.

“Do you still want to go for ice cream with me?” Dahyun asked.

“Midnight munching?” Sana asked with a slightly comical grin. “You crave ice cream at the weirdest of times.”

“I can’t deny that, but it wasn’t what I meant. I meant- I meant a date. Ice cream; but as a date?”

“You’re asking me out?”

“I actually did before but I don’t think you saw it as that.” Dahyun muttered shyly. “So yeah. I’m asking you out.”

“I’d like that.” Sana smiled. “But not tonight.”

Dahyun tutted. “I didn’t mean-”

But she never got further. Sana had just giggled and kissed her in a way that made it very hard to think. At least think about anything but the need to keep kissing her. Except Sana drew away, having the audacity to laugh when Dahyun hazedly tried to keep the kiss going.

“Sleep, you goof.” Sana insisted, stroking Dahyun’s cheek and kissing the tip of Dahyun’s nose.

“Fine…” Dahyun huffed. “Goodnight, Sana-chan.”

Sana grinned and shook her head. “Goodnight, Dahyunnie.”

Shuffling, Dahyun managed turn back onto the other side, Sana tugging her close until they were huddled together, Sana’s hand once more on Dahyun’s hip. But just as Dahyun closed her eyes, the hand on her hip found the edge of her shirt and a finger stroked over Dahyun’s skin.

“Okay?” Sana’s voice asked.

Dahyun nodded. Felt her heart against her ribs and tried very hard not to appear as flustered as she
was when Sana’s hand crept under her shirt, settling on her waist. Honestly, Dahyun wasn’t sure if it had been meant as a calming gesture for Dahyun, but it most certainly wasn’t. But it seemed to be for Sana. Because before Dahyun managed to gather her thoughts enough to form an actual sentence about the matter, she could hear Sana’s deep calm breath near her ear, feel the warm puffs in her hair and the slow rise and fall of Sana’s chest. So instead of Dahyun saying anything, she merely listened to Sana’s breath and tried to follow it. Closed her eyes. Felt the slight twitch of Sana’s hand and smiled into the pillow.

…

The kettle clicked, and the sound of boiling water quieted. Tzuyu turned her head on the pillow to look at it. Hazedly she sat up, the phone previously on her stomach, slid into her lap and the screen turned on. She couldn’t help but autoread the messages on the locked screen.

11:43 AM Jihyo: Sorry, I’m working today.

11:46 AM Jihyo: But you could stop by?

Tzuyu cringed. The message was a response to Tzuyu’s earlier message asking if she had time today. It wasn’t that Tzuyu didn’t know it was stupid to keep asking. To keep letting Jihyo pull her in and to keep hoping. She knew the outcome already, had known it for over a month, but it didn’t make it any easier to stay away.

She had always been a hopeful child. The kind of child who believes the best, and that everything would work out in the end, if she just kept going. And maybe that was why it had been so hard to stay away; to keep her own promise to take some space to get over the older girl. Which was why the best possible decision here would be to pour the boiled water over the cocoa powder in the mug beside the kettle, and not walk out the door towards The Black Bean.

But sane decisions and a hopeful heart sometimes don’t really work together. And often it’s the heart that wins.

“Tzuyu!” Jihyo’s smile was brilliant and beaming when Tzuyu opened the glass door to the little coffee house ten minutes later. The bell above the door plinked happily. It didn’t know better. And apparently neither did Tzuyu, or she wouldn’t be here.

“Hi.” Tzuyu said, trying not to let it show how her heart swelled at the smile on Jihyo’s face.

“The usual?” Jihyo asked, but Tzuyu shook her head and nodded in the direction of the little queue by the register. Jihyo grinned apologetically and pinched the bridge of her nose. It seemed she had completely forgotten about it.

Tzuyu joined the queue. It gave her an excuse to watch Jihyo work. She had always loved that. Seeing how Jihyo managed so many things at once without ever missing a step. It was one of the things that had drawn Tzuyu to her in the first place. The desire to know what went on in the girl’s
brain to make her able to multitask at this level.

The queue moved forwards and Tzuyu watched at a new angle. Watched the muscles on the girl’s arms work as she rustled the ice blender. How the brown ponytail whipped softly around her face as she turned, and the chest rising and falling at a pace that revealed that she was hurrying. She always did. Always worked as fast as she could and then fell apart when she came home. Not that many people knew that. Tzuyu hadn’t known it either for the first few months. But then one time Tzuyu had stuck around until closing, and Jihyo had let her sit there while she closed up. Had taken Tzuyu home with her when she was done and had fallen asleep on Tzuyu’s arm almost immediately. Of course she had apologized profusely when she had woken an hour later, but Tzuyu had just shrugged and told her about the drama she had watched on her phone in the meantime. They watched the next episode together. And the next. And Tzuyu thought she could watch every episode of anything if Jihyo leaned on her arm meanwhile.

But she wasn’t leaning on her. Had stepped back and let Tzuyu get the space she needed but didn’t want.

The queue moved again, and Tzuyu’s stomach tugged. Space.

“The usual?” Jihyo asked when it was finally Tzuyu’s turn.

Tzuyu nodded distractedly. Then took a deep breath. “To go.”

Jihyo’s smile faded and made way for a frown. “I thought-”

“Something came up, I just wanted to stop by anyways.” Tzuyu lied. Hated the way Jihyo’s face fell. Wanted to find a way to make her smile again. But she didn’t. The thing in her stomach that knew the truth wouldn’t let her.

“Tzuyu…” Jihyo’s voice revealed that she knew it was a lie. “It doesn’t have to be like this.”

“It does.” Tzuyu said. “Because you–”

“I know. But I miss you as my friend.” Jihyo said quietly. Then she took one of the plastic cups and wrote on it.

_Tzuyu_

No heart.

…

“How long until Momo comes?” Asked Dahyun loudly from the couch, turning her head in the direction of the hallway.
“Ten minutes-ish.” Sana replied from the bathroom. “How far are you?”

“Still an entire piece left to analyse, but I’ll do it tonight when she’s gone.” Dahyun closed the laptop, the sheet music lying between the screen and keyboard. A door closed and the soft sound of bare feet on wooden floors revealed that Sana was coming back.

“Have you heard from Chaeyoung?” Sana asked, plopping down on the couch next to Dahyun, eyes glued to her phone. Crossed her legs on the couch and typed.

“Uh, I talked to her a bit around lunch, she said their movie date went well.” Dahyun smiled, then frowned as Sana’s eyes were still flitting across the screen of her phone. “You ok?”

“Yeah, mom had a check-up but it didn’t show anything. I’m just answering my dad, he never tells me anything unless I make him. Doesn’t want to worry me.” Sana glanced up at Dahyun and sent her a shrug and a smile before turning her eyes back to the phone.

“They sound like good people, your parents.” Dahyun hummed, grabbing her own phone as well. Tzuyu hadn’t answered, but Chaeyoung had sent her a meme and she snorted at it. Answered it with the shake of her head.

“They’re really good people, I’m fortunate.” Sana said, shutting off the screen on her phone and shifting to lay her head in Dahyun’s lap. “I’m actually thinking about going back soon. When the semester ends.”

“That sounds like a really good idea.” Dahyun put away the phone, and looked down at the girl in her lap.

“I know… like, I know it’s fast, but I don’t go back that often, and I was thinking, maybe… Would you like to come with me?” Sana asked.

“What? Go to Japan with you?” Dahyun frowned.

“Yeah. Once exams are over.” Sana shrugged, a shy smile on her face. Dahyun’s heart soared. Then her stomach turned and she sent Sana an apologetic look.

“I signed up for summer classes with Tzuyu.” She pressed her lips together.

“Oh… Well, next time then. If you want.” Sana poked Dahyun’s cheek and tickled distractedly under Dahyun’s chin.

“Yeah, I mean really do want to go, it’s just with classes and-” Dahyun said apologetically.

“Maybe around Christmas if I can save up for it?” Sana asked, sitting back up, her eyes shining hopefully.

“Y-yeah, I think I’d like that. Besides, if you go home for Christmas, I’ll have to go with you, or you won’t get a birthday kiss.” Dahyun teased, wiggling her brows at the older girl.

“I get a birthday kiss?” Sana asked hopefully.

“Of course. I got mine, right?” Dahyun grinned.

“Mh, you did. But my birthday is so far away.” Sana murmured with a pout.

“It is.” Dahyun went along, the butterflies in her stomach telling her where it was going.
“But until then what am I going to do?” Sana legit stuck out her lip this time, batting her eyes at Dahyun.

Dahyun laughed and leaned in until there was only a few inches between them. “You’ll have to manage I guess.”

Then she drew away.

“Meanie…” Sana grumbled.

“Oh, come on, you’ll live.” Dahyun chuckled.

But before Sana got to answer, a knock on the door pulled them back to reality. A second later, Sana had jumped to her feet, though her expression made Dahyun frown. She looked almost… nervous? But it was just Momo right?

...

“You forgot about the dumplings?” Momo whined.

Dahyun turned on the kettle and leaned against the kitchen table. Momo was pouting at her.

“I’m sorry. I meant to go get them but I had trouble finishing my analysis and it’s due tomorrow at noon.” Dahyun said as Sana opened the pantry and started digging out cup-a-soups and snack bags.

“Can you find one with chili for me?” Dahyun asked and Sana nodded, sticking her head into the pantry, shuffling the bags and packets around to find it.

“Can’t we just skip the dumplings?” Sana asked.

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t just say that.” Momo grumbled.

Just as Dahyun was about to make an attempt at consoling the disappointed Momo, Sana gave a shriek. Two packs of choco pies and a bag of shrimp chips fell to the floor and Sana jumped back. Dahyun knelted to pick up the packs, handing them to Sana who was chuckling at herself.

“There’s not gonna be enough food in a cup-a-soup.” Momo complained when Sana started putting soups on the kitchen counter.

“Make two?” Sana suggested with a shrug.

Dahyun got up, and Sana did too, handing Dahyun a packet of chili soup.

“I’ll buy double dumplings next time, ok?” Dahyun offered. Momo scrunched her face, then agreed.

The water was almost at boiling point and Momo found mugs.

“Do you have more kinds?” Momo asked as Sana closed the pantry.

“Nope, just these.” Sana nodded at the packs. “But the chili one is for Dahyun. Not that you like those anyways.”
Momo turned the soups and Sana took up a vegetable soup one. Dropped it. Dahyun picked it up before Sana could get to it and got an apologetic smile. But Dahyun just nudged her. Not that this seemed to make her any less fidgety. Definitely nervous. If only Dahyun had a clue why.

Momo didn’t seem fazed, just chose a chicken noodle one.

“Have you heard back about the audition?” Sana asked as she placed the vegetable soup back on the counter and took a minestrone one instead.

Momo shook her head, peeling the plastic off the cup soup. “It’ll be a few weeks until the actual announcement, it was an inside scoop. But should be late July.”

“Audition?” Dahyun frowned, leaning against the kitchen counter, opening hers too.

“Yeah, a senior at school told me about an audition held each summer for this really amazing dance team. They take in seniors every year and most join the squad full time afterwards.” Momo smiled shyly. “It’s this mix where you do back-up dance for different groups as well as performances as a dance crew. And they teach dance as well.”

“Wait, so they want you to audition?” Dahyun asked.

Momo nodded and bit her lip to keep from smiling too hard.

“That’s awesome! And that they approached you personally too!” Dahyun nudged her, and the smile grew.

“I’m not the least bit surprised.” Sana said with a smile in her voice. “I’m actually surprised you weren’t asked last year.”

“But I was only a sophomore then! And they’d never allow juniors on the team anyways” Momo argued. “I wouldn’t have gotten in even if I had tried out.”

“But-” Sana frowned and seemed to taste a sentence on her tongue. Then narrowed her eyes. “Did they ask you?”

“I-” Momo seemed caught, her cheeks tinged. She suddenly got very busy opening the lid to her soup and staring at the water heating in the kettle.

“Hirai Momo, why didn’t you audition last year if they asked you to?! And why the hell didn’t you tell me about it?” Sana’s voice cracked a bit at the last sentence, and the tone made Momo look up.

“I didn’t think I was good enough then. I would’ve stood out so much on that team.”

“You’re better than half the full timers on the squad, were back then too!” Sana’s voice was soft even if her words were sharp, and she tugged at Momo’s arm. “Damn it, you could’ve been that legend who people talk about. The only junior to ever join the squad. If you’d just for once believe that you’re good enough. That you’re better than good enough.”

Momo looked at her feet, kicking the floor gently. “I just didn’t feel ready to be that girl.”

“Momo…” Sana muttered. Then took the girl in her arms and held her tight. “You have to bloody promise me you’ll take the audition this time. Okay?”

Momo nodded into Sana’s shoulder. Sent Dahyun a shrug and a careful smile.

“She’s right.” Dahyun just said.
They waited until the water boiled and Dahyun opened her packet, emptying the contents into a large blue mug with Eeyore that Jihyo had gotten her a few years ago. Side by side they prepared the sups.

The domesticity of it made Dahyun miss Momo more than she had expected. Afterwards, they settled in the couch, with soups and snacks - Dahyun had argued in favor of choco pies and Momo had grabbed a bag of tako chips and spicy rice cakes.

Dahyun somehow ended up in the middle, squashed between Momo and Sana; Sana got the blanket - Momo got Dahyun. Not the worst thing to happen, Dahyun thought with a chuckle settling for being Momo’s cuddle buddy. At least this could maybe make up for the lack of dumplings. Had it been any other day, they would have just pushed the schedule and gone down to get some, but she had to finish the analysis tonight. Exams were right around the corner and she couldn’t afford to start pushing the study schedule she and Tzuyu had worked out. There was so much to study still. So many exams, and for what? A career she would probably never get anyways? With a gulp Dahyun reached for her soup. Just to distract herself from the way her heart started racing. Exams weren’t exactly as hard for her to manage as they were for some of the others (Nayeon), but recently the thought of exams had been harder to deal with than usual.

But then the movie moved past the opening credits, and the sound of Sana wincing brought her back.

“Careful!” Dahyun said instinctively, looking over at Sana who sat with a pained expression and the cup in her hand.

“It was warm.” Sana complained, feeling her tongue carefully. She looked absolutely ridiculous, squinting in an attempt to look at her tongue. Dahyun smiled at her. How could anyone look so adorable and so ridiculous at the same time? Sana noticed her and scrunched her face.

“You never learn.” Momo rolled her eyes at Sana and shuffled under Dahyun to wrap an arm around the Dahyun’s waist. Sana frowned but Dahyun reached over with her foot, sneaking it under the blanket and poking at Sana’s side with a toe. She giggled and squirmed, but it faded sooner than usual. Sana’s weird mood was back. Dahyun let the chili taste burn down her throat and leaned more into Momo, feeling her fingers tap over Dahyun’s waist. It felt odd. She knew that Momo never meant anything romantic about her advances on Dahyun, there was something in the mood that made her take Momo’s hand and hold it instead of letting it rest on her waist. Momo didn’t seem to mind.

Without really meaning to, Dahyun’s thoughts fell on Chaeyoung and Nayeon and she wondered if Momo ever meant anything romantic about any of her advances. She knew that there had never been a romantic undertone with Dahyun, but what about Chaeyoung? Had Momo even considered either of their two friends as a possible love interest?

Momo moved slightly underneath Dahyun and grabbed the second cup of soup. Dahyun took the moment to gaze at Sana, but she was avidly following the movie, drinking from the soup. It didn’t seem to be as hot anymore.

“I like this part.” Sana said with a hum.

“I know.” Momo hummed.

Dahyun had never watched the movie before, but obviously the other two had.
As soon as she had finished her soup, Dahyun put the cup down and adjusted herself in Momo’s lap. Stole a glance at Sana and found her looking back. The expression on her face was unreadable, but as then her eyes was back on the movie, lip between her teeth. Dahyun frowned.

“Oh god, do you remember how much you used to like her?” Momo asked Sana, when one of the minor characters got some screen time. Sana nodded and hummed.

“Who, her?” Dahyun asked, pointing at the screen in the direction of a blonde girl.

“Yup.” Sana said neutrally.

“She’s cute.” Dahyun noted, trying to catch Sana’s eyes. It didn’t work.

“You’re cuter though, Dahyunnie.” Momo said, her voice so close to Dahyun’s ear, it made her squirm and giggle.

“Do you mind?” Sana murmured at Momo, not looking at her.

“I can’t help it, my Dahyunnie is just too cute!” Momo moved Dahyun’s hair to the side and rested her head on Dahyun’s shoulder.

“Your Dahyunnie?” Sana asked, her brows raised but her eyes glued to the screen, almost defiantly so.

“Sana.” Dahyun said quietly. There was definitely something up.

“Well, she would be my Dahyunnie if she would just let me.” Momo kept going.

“Well, maybe you should just stop trying.” Sana said coolly.

“Well, maybe you should start trying.” Momo grumbled. Dahyun blinked once. Twice. Looked from Momo to Sana and then understood.

“Momo.” She said, just as quietly, letting Momo’s hand go. “Let her be.”

Sana hadn’t told Momo. For whatever reason, Sana hadn’t told her best friend about them. And it wasn’t Dahyun’s place to do. But she couldn’t just do nothing. Couldn’t bear to watch the way Sana’s nostrils flared and her eyebrow twitched. So as discretely as she could, Dahyun crawled off Momo’s lap, ignoring the older girl’s confused pout, and settled between the two girls, slightly squashed.

That was the first step. Next was waiting until the right moment before shifting to lean a little closer to Sana. Not enough to make Momo suspicious but enough to catch Sana’s attention.

“Can I?” She asked Sana quietly, tugging at the blanket.

Sana nodded, expressionless, but helped adjust the blanket so it covered Dahyun’s legs as well. Sana’s shoulders relaxed a bit, and Dahyun waited again. Momo had stopped looking at Dahyun, returning to the movie, though the mood was definitely tense.

It felt like she had waited for hours, though according to the lack of change in plot it was only minutes. But finally, Momo’s face revealed that she had engrossed herself in the movie enough, and Dahyun quickly ran her fingers over Sana’s arm. Less than a second. But it caught Sana’s attention and she looked around at Dahyun. Silently, Dahyun raised her eyebrows and nodded her head ever so slightly in the direction of Momo. Sana shook her head quickly and then pressed her lips tight
together.

“Okay.” Dahyun breathed, barely a whisper. Whatever reason she had to hold back, Dahyun respected it.

Instead, Dahyun tried to focus on the movie. Tried not to console and hug Sana like she wanted to. And Momo was still pouting slightly next to her. Honestly, Dahyun wished someone would do something.

Anything.

And then Sana did.

She sighed so loudly that both Momo and Dahyun turned to stare at her. Then she placed a hand swiftly but delicately around Dahyun’s neck, her thumb brushing at the skin behind Dahyun’s ear.

“What’s- what’s going on?” Momo tried, but Dahyun barely heard her. Just stared into Sana’s eyes as they looked for confirmation. And Dahyun nodded, almost too subtly to notice. But Sana took a sharp inhale through her nose and leaned in to kiss Dahyun. Firmly so.

This time there was no way of overhearing Momo’s outburst.

“What the-! Wait!” Momo said loudly, shifting in the couch so fast that Dahyun felt it and lost track of the kiss. But Sana had already drawn back before Dahyun got to adjust. Her cheeks were flaming red.

“What the hell was that?!” Momo asked in disbelief.

Sana shrugged and her voice was so small that Dahyun barely recognized it. “I-I did something about it.”

“When?! You didn’t tell me about it!” Momo asked, obviously offended. “Unless - wait this isn’t your first kiss is it?”

“No of course not.” Sana snapped, her voice gaining in strength. And almost as if to prove a point she wrapped her arms around Dahyun and tugged. Dahyun chuckled and obliged, lifting herself onto Sana’s lap, mirroring how Dahyun had sat with Momo before. Except she didn’t move the hand Sana placed on her stomach.

“Then why haven’t you told me?!” Momo crossed her arms with a pout.

“Well, I was going to tell you tonight if you hadn’t been so flirty with her!” Sana’s voice was back to it’s normal volume and she pressed her hand harder against Dahyun’s stomach. Almost possessively. Strangely, Dahyun found that she didn’t mind this side of Sana. At all.

“I was trying to make you jealous!” Momo continued the argument.

“And why would I be jealous of that?” Sana asked dryly.

“You were so jealous!” Momo snorted.

“Was not.” Sana insisted.

Dahyun’s chuckled. Couldn’t help it. They argued like sisters fighting over a toy, except they were fighting about Dahyun. But they were sisters. That much Dahyun was aware of by now. Maybe not by blood, but most definitely by bond.
“You’ve been rambling about her for weeks and you never did anything!”

“That doesn’t mean you have to be so lovey-dovey, it was disgusting!” Sana grumbled

“So you were jealous.”

“Shut up.” Sana pouted. Dahyun took one of Sana’s hands not on Dahyun’s stomach and tangled their fingers. To her joy, Dahyun felt Sana’s body relax at the gesture.

“Well, I had to do something.” Momo said, a pout in her voice “You two were getting nowhere, and I accidentally overheard Mina and Jeongyeon talking about Dahyun liking you, so I figured if I made you jealous enough you’d either punch me or do something about it.”

“Well, you were too late, I already did something about it.” Sana’s hand in Dahyun’s tightened.

“I can see that.” Momo said, visibly deflating. “When?”

“After we got home from the beach.” Sana said.

“You were going to tell me tonight?” Momo asked.

“Of course.” Sana said. “You’re my best friend, and you listened to all my rambles. I wasn’t intending on keeping it from you, I just… I’m telling you now.”

“I don’t understand why you didn’t tell me immediately, though.” Momo sounded hurt.

“You don’t have to understand.” Sana said dismissively. Dahyun felt a knot in her stomach, realizing just how much Sana probably liked her. Realizing just how much she must’ve hurt, to not turn to Momo for help. But then Sana’s lips pressed against her cheek, and she whispered in Dahyun’s ear.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you now, that’s all that matters.”

Dahyun nodded and took a deep breath. It was still scary though, having someone like you so much. It was a huge responsibility, a huge risk.

“Relax.” Sana said quietly. “You’re okay.”

“Okay?”

Dahyun pressed her lips together. Then sat up a big and looked at Momo. “It’s my fault that she didn’t tell you. We- I sort of freaked out.”

“Oh.” Momo said, her brows knotting

“Don’t.” Sana immediately said, a warning in her voice. “She’s good to me. Amazing. She just got scared. She’s allowed and you can’t love her any less for it. Especially seeing as I chose not to tell you because of that exact look right there. But she owned up anyways. Knowing how protective you are of me. So don’t.”

Momo exhaled, then nodded. “Okay.”

“Forgive me for not telling you?” Sana asked.

“Mh, I guess.” Momo raised an eyebrow. Then her lips spread in a soft smile.

“Good, then I forgive you for trying to smooch my girlfriend.” Sana grinned.
Dahyun’s stomach did a somersault, and she clenched Sana’s hand hard, turning in her lap to stare at her. “Your what now?”

“Well I know we’re dating and stuff, but girlfriend just has a nice ring to it. I mean, if you want to be my girlfriend?”

Dahyun’s body threatened to burst with butterflies, and she cleared her throat several times before managing words. “I-uh. I… yes? Yes.”

“Good!” Sana beamed, pecking Dahyun’s warming cheek.

Dahyun grinned stupidly. *Girlfriend...*

“Can I still kiss her?” Momo asked, genuine concern in her voice, pulling Dahyun from the fifth repetition of the word inside her head.

“That’s not my decision” Sana shrugged and looked at Dahyun. “I don’t own her.”

“Cheek kisses and stuff is ok by me.” Dahyun grinned. Momo beamed and immediately scooted closer, leaning up to plant a wet kiss on Dahyun’s cheek. Dahyun dried her cheek with a huff and ruffled Momo’s hair.

The movie had progressed too much for Dahyun to get back into it, but it didn’t matter. She was kept plenty busy with Sana and Momo trying to get prime cuddle rights.

They were still just sisters fighting over their favorite toy. And Dahyun laughed. Let them bicker. Because they all knew that there was no fight. Dahyun was Sana’s. Had been from the first night they both called this apartment theirs.

…

Chaeyoung sighed. Shuffled under the sheets and stared up at the dark ceiling. It was all so confusing, and she felt like running back to the rooftop just to talk it out with the fresh air up there.

“Talk to me?”

Chaeyoung started and turned her head.

“Did I wake you?” Chaeyoung asked quietly.

Nayeon shook her head, shuffling until her head rested on Chaeyoung’s bare chest. “I didn’t fall asleep.”

Chaeyoung closed her eyes and sighed heavily. It was the last thing she wanted to admit after the night they had just had.

“You still like her.” Nayeon breathed.

Chaeyoung nodded and opened her eyes. Looked down at her girlfriend and felt like crying. But Nayeon’s eyes weren’t sad. In fact, there was a soft smile on her lips and a glint in her eyes from the
streetlights forcing through the edges of the blinds.

“I do too.”

Chaeyoung sighed. “I just really hoped I didn’t.”

“I know.” Nayeon said comfortingly, shifting under the sheets to lie better halfway on top of the younger girl, head resting over her heart. Chaeyoung knew she was listening to it.

“Do we act on it?” Chaeyoung asked. Didn’t know what answer she would prefer.

“Do you want to date her?” Nayeon asked peacefully, drawing heart’s on the skin of Chaeyoung’s shoulder.

“Yeah. I mean… Yeah I do.” Chaeyoung swallowed hard. “But both or neither. I mean I’d be fine if—”

“No. Both or neither. That’s the deal.” Nayeon said before Chaeyoung got further.

“How long should we wait to ask her?” Chaeyoung asked, warmth creeping up her neck as Nayeon turned her head to kiss the skin on Chaeyoung’s collarbone.

“I don’t know. I know Dahyun suggested a few weeks, but honestly I’m not even doubting this anymore.” Nayeon said before moving her lips to the crook of Chaeyoung’s neck.

“I agree. But how—” Chaeyoung trailed off breathily as Nayeon’s lips reached the pulse point right under Chaeyoung’s jaw. “How does it even work, if she— if she wants?”

“No clue.” Nayeon shrugged, adjusting herself to kiss Chaeyoung’s lips once. “I just know that I like her. And I love you. And I think as long as we hold onto that, it’s just taking a step and seeing where it leads us. And then the next.”

Chaeyoung nodded. “So we’re doing it? Asking her out?”

“I think we should, yeah.” Nayeon nodded, kissing the tip of Chaeyoung’s nose before settling next to her, laying on her side, facing Chaeyoung.

Chaeyoung turned as well. Felt Nayeon’s knees against her own and shuffled closer. “I just wish I knew if she’d even be into that. You know… More than one partner. It’s not so much whether she likes us, I just don’t want her to feel uncomfortable…”

“I worry if she likes us.” Nayeon admitted. “I worry that you won’t like it if I want to kiss her.”

Chaeyoung smiled softly. Leaned her forehead against Nayeon’s and tugged at her waist. Tangled their legs together. Needed her closer.

“I can’t imagine how I could ever not like it if you wanted to kiss her.” Chaeyoung murmured. “I think, as much as I want her, I want you to want her too.”

“I really do.” Nayeon admitted timidly. And Chaeyoung felt free and wonderfully not, all at the same time. Then she caught Nayeon’s lips. Tried to express all of the love that was threatening to burst her heart, in that one kiss. In the urgency of her lips and the fingers that dug into the skin of Nayeon’s waist. Then she drew back. Found the eyes of the girl she loved more than anything.

“Let’s say that everything goes well,” Chaeyoung muttered, “that she does want to go out with us. How do we- you know- if she wants to kiss?”
“It’s Momo, of course she wants to.” Nayeon joked, but then added in a more serious tone, “You should kiss her if she wants to.”

“I love you.” Chaeyoung murmured, her stomach tugging in a way she couldn’t figure out the reasoning behind. Nervousness? Fear? Maybe just excitement.

“I know. You should still kiss her.”

“Promise you will too, if she wants?”

Nayeon nodded. “I promise.”

“God we’re talking about this like she actually even once thought about it.” Chaeyoung chuckled breathily.

“Well if she doesn’t want to, she’s missing out. We’re awesome.” Nayeon said steadfastly.

“I can’t deny that. I mean—” Chaeyoung gestured not at all shyly at the lack of clothes under the sheets. Nayeon snorted and shook her head with a grin. Then her arms tugged Chaeyoung closer and she sighed against the younger girl’s chest.

“You’re the best part of my world, you know that right?” Nayeon’s words were muffled and sleepy, but Chaeyoung heard it.

Chaeyoung could’ve said it back, but knew that it hadn’t been Nayeon’s intention. So instead Chaeyoung just leaned down and kissed the top of the tousled red hair and then leaned her chin on it. A peaceful sigh hit Chaeyoung’s chest. Then Chaeyoung’s mouth moved, quiet words in melody falling from her lips without really realizing it. Nayeon moved closer. And Chaeyoung sang her love to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
When she was four, Dahyun fell from a tree. She had crawled as high as she could, like any kid does when they’re four and it’s almost the end of summer and you’re in denial about things like school and the leaves falling soon. But the branches at the top had been frail and it snapped under her. She had broken her wrist then, and her mother had scolded her. Ten weeks later, the moment her wrist was okay, she fell from the same tree and broke her leg. When her father asked her why in the world she got back up there, Dahyun explained that she wanted to try flying. And really, how do you argue with a four year old who just wants to see the world? That year for Halloween Dahyun sat in a wheelchair with a bird costume, her leg in a cast and her father cawing along with her as he wheeled her around.

For Dahyun’s fifth birthday, her parents had bought her a cheap plastic keyboard. Pink and cute with buttons that made funny sounds. It wasn’t an instrument she had been introduced to before; she had just seen it in the toy store and liked pressing the little hearts. But somehow the sounds made by the white and black keys woke something in the little girl. A calm and an escape that she had never found before.

She had broken the keyboard from wear within a year.

The day she had shown up in the kitchen with snot and tears on her little face, holding the keyboard tight and announced that it had broken, her parents made a decision. Took her to a teacher and was immediately told to invest in a piano. Somehow the little goofy girl had taught herself to play, and that she had, as the teacher called it: perfect pitch. Shyly the girl had told her parents and the teacher that her brother had taught her the do-re-mi song, and then she had just tried playing.

When her parents couldn’t afford a piano, the teacher had allowed them into her own home. Had let the little girl sit in her living room for hours on end, playing with fingers too small for the heavy keys but a focus and talent she had never seen.

The teacher’s house became Dahyun’s freedom, and she would go almost everyday after school to forget. To let the music swallow up every bad word said to her from the other kids at school. They called her weird. Called her stupid. Called her a four-eyed loser, a goodie-two-shoes, a nerd. But the piano took all of that pain away.

When her teacher moved away, Dahyun moved into the school’s music room. Let the unfamiliar keys take away her frustrations and longing for the smell of lemon tea that always filled her teacher’s living room. And for years, passing from one grade to the next, even to the new school, Dahyun found consolation in the solitude of the piano.

Until someone sat down next to her. Told her she was good and asked to be taught.
Chaeyoung was perfect in every way imaginable, in Dahyun’s opinion. She was small but fierce, yelled at older kids for hurting younger ones. Didn’t care that she was shorter than both. Drew pretty pictures for Dahyun on post-it notes and brought cookies and kimbap from her grandma. And it didn’t matter that they were a year apart. They fit like puzzle pieces.

Most importantly though, was the fact that Dahyun made her laugh. For the first time, there was someone who wasn’t her parents or her brother, who found her funny. And Chaeyoung laughed. Sometimes laughed until she cried. Clapped her hands excitedly when Dahyun left the keys behind and started doing her Mask impression. When she showed a new dance move that had gone viral. The sound of Chaeyoung’s laugh bouncing off the walls in the music room became Dahyun’s favorite sound.

But somewhere along the road, Dahyun had stopped being that person. The one whose day had failed if she hadn’t gotten a friend to choke on their soup or accidentally get soda up their nose from laughing. Somewhere along the road it had just become a matter of getting through the day. Since the day she lost the feeling of her fingers against the heavy keys. Since the day her world shattered with the sound of bones breaking against a storm drain.

Yet, right in this moment she was sure that she could get to the day where she could live happily without it. Maybe. Because right now she was sitting in Sana’s bed and Chaeyoung was laughing so hard through the phone she could barely get a word out.

“I’m serious!” Dahyun insisted. “He was staring me down, and I got so intimidated!”

“Y-you can’t be scared of a ten year old!” Chaeyoung laughed, trying hard to catch her breath every few words.

“I’ve never seen a kid get so offended over being handed the kids’ menu!”

“Are you serious?” Chaeyoung sounded like she was about to keel over.

“You weren’t there, you can’t judge me!”

Chaeyoung just kept laughing until she finally seemed to regain some self-control. “I can judge all I want. I have best friend privileges.”

“You can’t use those for everything.”

“Sure I can. Like I’m using my best friend privileges tonight to make sure that you come over tomorrow night.” Chaeyoung said casually.

“I… uh, sure, but it’ll have to wait until after dinner. I’m meeting up with Tzuyu after class and according to the revision schedule we’re going to kick a good piece of Miranda-butt tomorrow.”

Chaeyoung snorted. “Well, you have fun with that.”

“I will. So, eight-ish at your place tomorrow?” Dahyun asked.

“Yes. Oh, but actually,” Chaeyoung added, “I’m not inviting you unless you bring Sana.”

“Am I not good enough anymore?” Dahyun feigned offense.

“No, I definitely prefer your girlfriend over you.” Chaeyoung said dryly. Dahyun’s stomach jolted at the mention of girlfriend. Dahyun hadn’t gotten used to it at all. Somehow it hadn’t been completely real until she had told Chaeyoung half an hour ago.
“Dahyun?”

“Huh?” Dahyun realized that she had zoned out.

“Useless lesbian…” Chaeyoung muttered under her breath before repeating the last sentence that Dahyun had apparently overheard. “I said I’m guessing she’ll find it weird if I just invite her over without you.”

“Oh. Why do you need her to come?”

“We uh…” Chaeyoung’s voice died but the shyness told enough.

“Oh, right. Just a sec.” Dahyun said and covered the microphone. “Sana?”

“Hm?” Sana said, looking up from her phone. She was sitting on the chair by her desk, cross-legged in shorts and a slightly sweaty t-shirt. She had only just returned from a run five minutes earlier, and was just waiting to cool down before showering. And honestly? Dahyun didn’t mind the sight at all.

“Oh,” Dahyun cleared her throat. “Chaeyoung wants me to bring you with me to her place tomorrow night.”

“Sure? We should be done at the studio by seven.” Sana nodded, brows furrowing for a second before putting her phone down on the desk.

“Can you make it by eight or should we push it?” Dahyun asked, adjusting the pillow behind her back slightly.

“No, eight is fine, I’ll just need to shower before we go.” Sana shrugged, turning in her chair to face Dahyun fully.

Dahyun returned to Chaeyoung, though her eyes were still on Sana. “She’s game. We’ll be there.”


“Some. Not every detail, and not who it is. But I did tell her, you know, the terminology. I’m sorry, I didn’t think to ask you, I mean-”

“No, you’re good. It makes this easier, actually.” Chaeyoung said. For a moment neither said anything, but then, out of nowhere, Chaeyoung yelped. “Fuck, I gotta run. We have class in like twenty minutes.”

“Then hang up and run, you fool.”

“You’re the fool” Chaeyoung retorted.

“Bye!” Dahyun insisted, chuckling.

“Right, bye!” Chaeyoung said quickly. Hung up.

Sana giggled from her chair as Dahyun muttered a few pretense-insults at the ended phone call.

“What?”

“You’re absolutely ridiculous…” Sana shrugged, getting up from her chair, correcting the shirt.
“Chaeyoung said the same thing, but I really don’t get it.” Dahyun said with feigned innocence.

Sana shook her head with a smile, and walked across the room, staring down at Dahyun with an unreadable expression.

“Your class is at ten, right?”

“Yup. Just-aah!” Dahyun yelped as Sana had tuged her down by the hips and snatched her phone. Before Dahyun had managed to react, she felt the bed dip on either side of her and Sana’s lips on hers. She tasted like salt and her skin was warm and clammy, but Dahyun didn’t mind.

Dahyun’s hair was still damp as she stumbled into class thirty seconds before the lecturer did.

“You ok?” Tzuyu whispered with a frown as Dahyun sat down, her cheeks flushed and her brain stuck on channel Sana.

“Huh? Oh right, yeah, just overslept.” Dahyun pressed her lips together and found her pencil case, the notebook with sheet music lines, and her laptop, trying to balance everything on the small table in front of her seat.

“Really?” Tzuyu asked with a frown.

“Y-yeah.” Dahyun found Tzuyu’s eyes, the younger girl’s eyebrows raised discreditingly.

“Right. If you say so.” Tzuyu said dryly and turned her head as the lecture started.

“What do you mean?” Dahyun whispered, leaning closer.

“You have a hickey.” Tzuyu rolled her eyes, placing a finger on her own neck, right below the jaw, near the ear. But she didn’t look at Dahyun.

“Oh.” Dahyun felt her ears and cheeks heat up immediately, and she felt the point on her own neck, but couldn’t feel anything. Didn’t doubt for a second though, that Tzuyu was speaking the truth. The memory of Sana’s mouth finding its way around to that exact point, and staying there for quite a while, was still vividly playing on channel Sana. It really made it hard to focus on the teacher, and in the end she gave up and focused on twirling the pen in her hand instead. A compromise between Sana and the lecture.

This, however, did not change the fact that the second the lecturer announced a ten minute break, Dahyun grabbed her phone. She had felt it buzz twice during class. She bit down on her lip as she read.

10:25 am Sana: Momo told me to scold you for making me dance the wrong steps.

10:55 am Sana: Won’t make it home before you head to work, so just telling you now that you’re super cute and I’ll wait up for you.

Dahyun grinned and answered.

11:03 am Dahyun: Just telling you now that you’re on your way to earning the award for cheesiest girlfriend.

11:03 am Dahyun: You don’t have to wait up though, I’ll just join when I get home.
“Ew.” Tzuyu said dryly.

“Reading my texts?” Dahyun asked with a raised brow looking around at the taller girl.

“No, your face.” Tzuyu noted dryly, no hint of amusement on her face, which was unusual. Though she might tell some hard truths, Tzuyu was usually always just a happy and soft kid. But this seemed to honestly bother her for some reason. There just wasn’t time to ask her now, and Dahyun settled for sending Tzuyu an apologetic smile before writing a final text to Sana.

11:05 am Dahyun: Oh and next time you decide to give me a hickey, please let me know.

“Sorry.” Dahyun said when Tzuyu clicked her tongue, “I just- sorry. I did promise not to turn into one of those people, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did.” Tzuyu nodded, but a smile played around her lips, adding; “But it’s okay. I can’t blame you.”

“It’ll probably pass, it’s just new and- yeah…” Dahyun grinned shyly.

“I get it. Just do like this,” Tzuyu reached around Dahyun and arranged her hair so it fell down her front on one side instead of down her back. “Then you can’t see the mark.”

“Thank you, Chou-Tzu.” Dahyun sighed, then dug into her laptop case and drew out a piece of paper full of notes. “You know the schedule we came up with yesterday…”

“Yeah?” Tzuyu looked inquisitively at her.

“We have your birthday packed with classes and studies. I know it’s the last day of classes but are you sure you don’t want to at least take the night off and have a dinner or something? Get people together?” Dahyun asked.

“Everyone’s going to be busy with exams by then.” Tzuyu’s said with a shrug.

“But I’m sure Chaeyoung and Jihyo and-”

“Dahyun,” Tzuyu interrupted, “I think it’s best if we just stick to the schedule.”

“Can I at least celebrate with you? We can cook dinner together.” Dahyun tried.

Tzuyu didn’t react. It almost seemed like she was dead set on no-one celebrating her.

“You always care too much about not being a bother.” Dahyun sighed, taking her hand. “Let me celebrate you at least. I mean, I know everyone would love to; you’re our baby, and you’re turning twenty. It’s an important birthday.”

Tzuyu smiled shyly. “I guess.”

“So, can we have a birthday?”

Tzuyu nodded. “Just you… not.”

“Not anything fancy. Just you and me and dinner.”

“Okay.” Tzuyu finally agreed.

“And Jihyo and Chaengie?”
Tzuyu shook her head fast, “No, just you.”

“Okay. Okay, Tzuyu. Just me.”

Dahyun’s phone buzzed again, and Tzuyu withdrew her hand. Grabbed her pen and clicked it. For a moment Dahyun hesitated, then turned the phone and looked at the messages.

11:10 am Sana: Sorry! I won’t do it again!

11:11 am Sana: Without telling you.

Dahyun felt her face split in a wide grin as she hurried to answer. Heard Tzuyu huff.

When Dahyun turned to look at Tzuyu again, she was staring straight ahead, but before Dahyun got anywhere, the lecturer cleared his throat, a steaming cup of coffee on the desk. For a moment Dahyun considered taking Tzuyu out for coffee after the last lecture, but then she wouldn’t make it to work on time. It’d have to wait.

…

7:15 PM Tzuyu: Hey?

7:15 PM Jihyo: Hi

7:18 PM Tzuyu: You busy?

7:18 PM Jihyo: About to have dinner, why?

7:19 PM Tzuyu: Just found a movie I want to watch. If you want?

7:23 PM Jihyo: I thought I was giving you space?

7:23 PM Tzuyu: I know.

7:27 PM Tzuyu: I miss you.

7:28 PM Jihyo: I miss you too.

7:28 PM Tzuyu: That’s a no then?

7:28 PM Jihyo: Yeah…

…

The sun was slowly setting as Dahyun pressed the doorbell to Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s apartment on the outside of the building. Sana squinted as sun rays hit the glass in the door and shone too brightly into her face.

“Eeyup?” Came Chaeyoung’s voice from the voice panel above the doorbells.

“Hi!” Dahyun said, angling her face towards the voice panel. Knew from experience that it didn’t work too well. “I brought Sana, like you asked!”

“Good, she can come in.” Chaeyoung said.

The door buzzed and Dahyun pushed. Sana giggled at god knows what as they walked side by side up the stairs. The sound never failed to make Dahyun smile. In fact, she might love that sound just as
much as Chaeyoung’s laughter. Not that she’d ever admit either.

“Do you know why they asked me to come?” Sana asked as they came up the stairs.

“Yeah, I do, but I think it’s up to them to explain.”

“... Okay?” Sana frowned.

“It’s nothing bad. I can promise that much.” Dahyun reassured her, nudging her as they walked along the hallway towards the girls’ apartment. Sana nodded and hummed.

The door was already open, Chaeyoung leaning against the jamb.

“Hey, maestro.” Chaeyoung said with a dimpled smile. “Hi, Sana.”

“Hey, champ.” Dahyun grinned back, letting Chaeyoung hug her.

“Ouch, champ? What am I, terminal?” Chaeyoung grimaced as she let Dahyun go and hugged Sana too.

“Okay. Hey, Son Chaeyoung, you big idiot.” Dahyun shrugged, heading inside, the other two following her.

“Go home.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes, closing the door behind the three of them.

“Where’s the missus?” Dahyun asked.

“Uh, kitchen probably.” Chaeyoung shrugged, looking around the living room, her lower lip sticking out before she called out, “Babe?”

“Kitchen!” Nayeon answered.

Chaeyoung tilted her head and shrugged at Dahyun, a grin on her face.

“So, how do we avoid this being incredibly awkward and really formal?” Asked Dahyun with a grin as she and Sana followed Chaeyoung into the kitchen. Nayeon was standing in Chaeyoung’s sweater, watching the kettle boil. On the counter stood a pack of tea-bags and a bowl of strawberries, washed and with the stems removed.

“I don’t really think there’s any way around awkward.” Chaeyoung shrugged and started pouring the boiling water into four mugs. Nayeon grabbed the bowl from the counter.

“Avoid what being awkward?” Sana asked with a frown. “The thing they want to talk about?”

Nayeon and Chaeyoung looked at each other. Then at Dahyun.

“Uh, let’s sit down first.” Dahyun said, pulling Sana gently out of the kitchen, to the couch, the other couple following with tea and strawberries.

Sana looked like she was about to say something, but decided against it. Just settled in the couch next to Dahyun. Her gaze fell briefly to Dahyun’s neck, and she corrected Dahyun’s hair, a smile pulling at the corners of her lips. Dahyun pressed her lips together tight and determinately looked anywhere but at Sana. Even now, in this atmosphere, Sana still managed to power through to the front of Dahyun’s mind. But this wasn’t the point. The point was dealing with the two obviously nervous girls next to them; Chaeyoung sitting on the coffee table and Nayeon on the couch. Nayeon’s hand rested on Chaeyoung’s knee and she shuffled in her seat. Chaeyoung cleared her throat.
“So…” Dahyun said, breaking the silence when none of them did. “I thought you were going to wait to ask her?”

“We did.” Chaeyoung nodded. “But we talked it over a lot and honestly, as soon as we both addressed our feelings, it turned out there was nothing to solve between the two of us. We’re still us. And we might as well get it over with if she’s not interested, instead of waiting around and making it more awkward.”

Dahyun looked from Chaeyoung to Nayeon and back again. “Mh… I mean, you have a point but-”

“This is what we want.” Chaeyoung insisted, taking Nayeon’s hand.

When just observing them, it was obvious that they were back to their old gross selves, but Dahyun still couldn’t help but comment. It really wasn’t meant as nagging. She just worried. About them. About Momo. If they dragged Momo into something and then it turned out they weren’t stable after all… Dahyun could hardly bear the thought of all the misery it could cause.

“I just don’t want to risk you getting hurt. Or M-... her.” Dahyun said. Had almost said Momo’s name. It wasn’t her place to do.

“Dahyun.” Nayeon said, touching Dahyun’s arm gently. “We can’t ever undo it and we won’t be the same people, but it feels right again. It feels like we’d be good, that we’d be us with or without her. We’d just prefer it be with her.”

Dahyun nodded. “Okay then.”

Nayeon smiled and then looked back at Chaeyoung, suddenly grinning. “And I know we didn’t really break up and I don’t recommend it as such, but make up sex is amazing. A few hours of that and-.”

“Oh, come on. I understood back when you were single and pure, but you’ve got a girl now too, it’s about time you learned to talk about it.” Nayeon clicked her tongue impatiently. Sana shuffled beside Dahyun and then her hand very gently wrapped around Dahyun’s arm.

“I know all there is to know about that, thank you very much,” Dahyun grumbled. “I just don’t like to picture you two doing it. I already have your bare butt burned into my retina. I really don’t need any more details than that, thank you very much.”

“We didn’t know you were home, ok!?” Chaeyoung tried, her cheeks almost half as red as they had been that day.

“You still didn’t need to have sex on the couch!” Dahyun huffed.

“Okay, Sana, please teach that girl a bit less church girl attitude.” Nayeon rolled her eyes as Dahyun’s face flushed. “It’s just sex. When you have it you should be able to talk about it.”

Dahyun didn’t answer. But Sana did. In a voice so small and shy Dahyun barely recognized it. “We haven’t- uh, we haven’t gotten to that part yet, actually.”

Sana hid her face in Dahyun’s hair, and Dahyun felt the warmth of Sana’s face on her neck.

“Oh, sorry, I just assumed the hickey and-” Nayeon cleared her throat. “Anyways.”
Dahyun felt like burying herself. One thing was knowing about Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s sex life, but something entirely different was her own. It hadn’t ever been something she had considered seriously. Not to say that she hadn’t daydreamed or-. But- but there was a very long way from that to actually considering the prospects of sex. She just hadn’t put those particular pieces together yet. That at some point she might actually have sex. With-. Yeah, no. She definitely hadn’t thought that far. Not until now at least. And as soon as it was there, the picture of what Sana looked like under her clothes, was extremely hard to get out of Dahyun’s head. As in, quite impossible.

“Yo!” Chaeyoung called, pinching Dahyun’s knee so hard she yelped and jolted. “Earth to Kim Dahyun.”

Dahyun whined and rubbed her knee, scowling at her best friend. The sudden movement had caused Sana to draw back but the moment Dahyun calmed, Sana’s chin found Dahyun’s shoulder.

“Oh!” Sana’s voice asked in a whisper. Dahyun nodded subtly. Had Sana sensed what had just gone on inside Dahyun’s mind?

“Let’s just get back on track.” Chaeyoung’s voice badly masked her amusement. She had definitely sensed Dahyun’s sudden train of thought. Then again, Dahyun was sure it had been as visible on her face as if it was a billboard commercial for gay panic.

“So. Sana.” Nayeon started, turning in the couch, her knees bumping against Chaeyoung’s.

“Yeah?” Sana asked quietly from Dahyun’s shoulder. Shuffled a little closer.

“We know Dahyun has told you about our… our… situation.” Nayeon bit her lip.

“It’s awkward!” Nayeon complained but then sighed. “Fine. We like Momo. As in… Like her. Romantically.”

Sana took her time answering, but eventually let out a soft “Oh.”

“Yeah. And this is where it gets awkward. Because to be honest, we don’t really know her that well. I mean, she’s our friend and we do know her, but we don’t know her like you know her.”

“You want to know if you think she’d say yes if you asked her out?” Sana asked, raising her head from Dahyun’s shoulder and shuffled, her hand sliding down Dahyun’s arm. Found her hand and let a finger rest in the palm of it.

“Basically, yeah.” Chaeyoung breathed.

“Well, I’ve never seen Momo have more than one girlfriend at a time. I don’t really know though. She’s never expressed herself as polyamorous. But I think-. I think if anyone would be open to it, it’d be Momo. If worse comes to worse, she’ll just be flattered. She doesn’t ever get awkward with people. She’s very open. She’s quick to dislike if someone does shit, but she’s never really awkward. So if it’s the friendship you’re scared of losing, there’s no reason to. She hasn’t expressed openly that she likes you guys romantically, but I know she thinks you’re both really cute and sweet and she likes you a lot. At least platonically. So I think it’d be worth a chance?

“But you think we should ask her?” Chaeyoung looked cautiously hopeful.

“Oh, totally! I mean, if nothing else you’ll have it out in the open.” Sana said encouragingly. Dahyun tugged at Sana’s finger and laced their fingers together.
The relief on Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s faces were more than just noticeable. It was obviously an important stamp of approval to get.

“What- I mean, if she says yes, what do you think she would like, for a… date?” Nayeon asked, her hand so tightly in Chaeyoung’s that it made her knuckles whiten.

“Food.” Dahyun said immediately.

“Yes, definitely food.” Sana grinned. “If she ever seems shy or anything, just feed her.”

“Okay. Well, we almost figured that one since we’ve learned that a restock is necessary when she’s been over. But is she more casual or into fancy dates?” Chaeyoung asked.


Cold water trickled down Dahyun’s wrists. She wasn’t sure how long she had been standing there. Just listened to the water and her own breathing. Tried to change the channel inside her head but it didn’t work.

“Dahyun?” Sana knocked on the door, making Dahyun jolt. She shut off the water and dried her hands, allowing herself a few breaths before opening the door for Sana.

“Yeah? I’m done if you need-”

Sana shook her head, cutting her off. “You’ve been in there for twenty minutes.”

“Oh.” Dahyun looked down. She must’ve zoned out. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s okay. But… Can we talk?” Sana asked nervously.

“Yeah.” Dahyun nodded, frowning slightly.

She felt Sana’s hand gently grabbing around her wrist, tugging her along. And Dahyun let her. It was almost eleven o’clock. They had only gotten home from Chaeyoung and Nayeon’s place half an hour earlier, but Dahyun had immediately excused herself to the bathroom under the pretense of needing to go to bed fast. Couldn’t find out how to sort through the images in her mind that somehow both excited and scared her. Channel Sana had gotten a very different meaning all of a sudden. But right now, as Sana settled them on the edge of the bed, Dahyun’s mind filled with worry instead. It wasn’t like Sana at all, to make no noise at all.

Sana looked down at her hands. “What Nayeon said. I need to talk about that.”

Dahyun felt heat creep up her neck. “About-”

“I’m not ready.” Sana said it so fast, the words seemed to trip over each other. “I know I play a good game and all but I’m not ready.”

Dahyun looked at her. There was worry and insecurity in Sana’s face, her eyes flickering between Dahyun’s and her lips pressed together so tightly the skin around them turned white.

“Oh.” Dahyun breathed. Saw how Sana’s face fall and couldn’t stop herself from reaching around, cupping her cheek. She felt stupid for once again forgetting Sana’s side of this. Hadn’t even considered that she might not be the only one who wasn’t a hundred percent sure of the pace.
“Sana. It’s been five days. And I don’t know how this normally works, but honestly, I’m not in a hurry.”

Sana’s face relaxed as Dahyun spoke, leaning into Dahyun’s hand, her eyes softly glistening. She turned her face slightly and pressed her lips to the edge of Dahyun’s palm, and it made Dahyun’s world stop for a second.

“I just don’t want to let you down.” Sana whispered. Dahyun turned on the bed, holding the other hand to Sana’s face as well, her cheeks squishing slightly. A breathy giggle slipped past Sana’s lips. There was something in the way she looked at Dahyun that made the younger girl feel dizzy. There was a tender-hearted unspokenness in her gaze that made Dahyun feel like she meant everything to Sana in that moment. Like she held all of Sana’s trust somehow.

“Do you want to slow it down?” Dahyun asked rubbing her thumbs softly over Sana’s cheeks.

“No.” Sana shook her head slightly in Dahyun’s hands. “No. But we should talk about it again. Before anything happens. Maybe just let whatever happens, happen. I mean, I want to it’s just… not quite yet.”

“Like I said, it’s not even been a week. I hadn’t even considered it, honestly. I know we’re adults and we can do what we want and there’s no rule to the steps and the pace, but I’m honestly not in a hurry.”

“So we’ll just… stay here a little?” Sana asked hopefully.

“For as long as you want.” Dahyun smiled.

Sana sighed, closed her eyes and her trembling lips parted in a smile. Dahyun moved her hands to rest around Sana’s neck instead. “I think I’m scared because I like you so much. And because… well. I know it’s an outdated heteronormative social construct with no actual meaning to it, but somehow it still has some meaning in my head, and it’s so silly that I care but it does make things scarier, makes me feel more responsibility that you’re- that…” Sana trailed off and swallowed.

“That I’m a virgin?” Dahyun said outright, feeling the warmth on Sana’s neck.

“… Yeah.”

“I get that.”

“I just don’t want to take something from you that you don’t want to give, and I know it’s the same every time you’re with someone but in my head it’s still special.”

Dahyun nodded. Didn’t stop Sana but merely let her speak until she finally looked down at her hands. Gently Dahyun slid her hands down to hold Sana’s.

“Can I ask you something?”

Sana looked up and nodded.

“So, you know quite well by now that you’re the only person I’ve ever done anything with. But if I’m to take this right- just- well, Momo said something and I’m not assuming but-”

“Am I gonna have to kick her butt?”

“No, she just mentioned once that you two had kissed because you were afraid that you wouldn’t be
good at it.” Dahyun muttered.

Sana huffed, puffing her pink-tinged cheeks. “I am gonna have to kick her butt.” She muttered under her breath.

“No, I just wanted to know. Seeing as you’re worried about my virginity, am I to take that as a note that you’re not?”

Sana nodded. “Yeah.”

“So you’ve had other…” She wanted to say girlfriends but didn’t want to assume. “partners?”

“As in sexually?”

“As in romantically.” The shells of Dahyun’s ears felt like they were burning again.

“Oh. Well, yes.” Sana nodded.

“Okay, I was just curious.”

“You don’t want to know details? Like how many or something like that?”

“If you want to tell me, sure, but it’s not something I’d ask you to say if you don’t want.” Dahyun shrugged and was happy to find that she meant it. She had always feared that she would be the jealous type, but it didn’t matter at all that Sana had had other partners. It just mattered that she was Dahyun’s now.

“I don’t mind telling you.” Sana said quietly.

Dahyun nodded and shifted on the bed to face Sana fully. “Okay.”

“Well,” Sana looked up with a small shrug, “I’ve had four partners before you. Three of them, I dated. The first when I was sixteen. That was quite serious on my part. I loved them a lot. But there were things they wanted to go through alone, with their identity, and when they found themselves I wasn’t a part of their life anymore. Then there was a girl at seventeen, mostly casual, easy, as opposed to my first love, but in the end she wasn’t good for me. And then a boy shortly after moving here, only for two months though. He, on the other hand, was good to me.”

Dahyun nodded. “Why did that last one end then?”

“I never got past the initial crush. And when I found myself choosing Momo over him every time, I broke it off. He felt more than I did and it wasn’t fair to string him along. I want someone I’m crazy about. Someone who makes my world spin.”

The soft smile around Sana’s lips and her intense eyes staring at Dahyun was enough to take the younger girl’s breath away. Dahyun looked down at their hands, a grin spreading on her lips, heart swelling in her chest.

“And me?” Dahyun asked, heart pounding.

“Yes.” Sana said quietly, tangling their fingers. “You. And I’m definitely crazy about you. This is a lot more than just the initial crush. Was that way sooner than I had expected. Honestly don’t think I’ve ever liked anyone that fast. And right now, I’m just really glad you asked me to kiss you.”

Dahyun felt her heart soar and grinned stupidly, finally looking up at her. “I’m sorry I didn’t figure it out sooner.”
“Who cares.” Sana shook her head. “You can kiss me all that you want now.”

“Yes I can.” Dahyun bit the inside of her cheek and gave her most charming smile. “I actually think I’d like to do that that right now.”

“Yes?” Sana giggled but then drew back as Dahyun leaned in. “But… I really need to pee first.”

Dahyun laughed as Sana pecked her lips and hurried up, stopping in the door, looking back at the younger girl.

“You make my world spin, Kim Dahyun.”

…

1:34 AM Jihyo: You up?
1:34 AM Tzuyu: Sadly yes.
1:34 AM Jihyo: Can’t sleep?
1:35 AM Tzuyu: Nope…
1:35 AM Jihyo: Can I call?
1:38 AM Tzuyu: Sure

…

“But I don’t want to drop out or change majors.” Dahyun felt her heart pounding in her chest.

“Are you sure? Don’t you think it might be worth considering, honey?” Dahyun’s mother said through the phone.

“I have considered, and this is what I want to do.” Dahyun said desperately. Wasn’t even sure who she was trying to convince anymore.

“When you were four you wanted to fly. Some dreams just don’t happen. And dreams can change too.” Dahyun’s mom argued.

Everything had been fine. The day had gone so smoothly. And now? Now it was getting increasingly hard to breathe. She had called her mom, just to catch up. They had talked about everything and anything; about Dahyun’s brother and the next family dinner. Dahyun had even almost told her about Sana, but then the subject had switched to the subject of exams instead.

“Flying was a child’s dream.” Dahyun said as calmly as she could muster.

“So is this. You’ve held onto it since you were seven.”

“I can do this.” Dahyun insisted.

“I know it’s hard to admit, sweetie, but you have to acknowledge that a composer has to be able to play. You can graduate but you’ll never get a job creating music if you can’t play.”

“I’ll figure something out, okay? I-I need to leave, I’m sorry, my roommate is back with dinner.”

It wasn’t a lie. The door had in fact just opened, and Sana had stepped through with a bag of take
out. Dahyun didn’t wait to say goodbye. Merely hung up, knowing it was wrong. But she couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t hide the way her face crumbled as the phone dropped limply into her lap.

“Dahyun?” Sana asked, leaning down to take off her shoes, placing the bag of takeout by the door. “Are you ok?”

Dahyun opened her mouth. Tried to speak but felt her throat close up uncomfortably. Then she shook her head. And in one second Sana had left the shoes and the food behind and hurried to kneel in front of Dahyun, hands cupping her face as Dahyun broke in her grasp.

It was too much.

She knew that the issue of her future was there, in front of her. Had let it simmer under the surface for a while but ignored it. Yet with her mom’s voice ringing in her ear it just got much too real. It was like her brain was trying to figure out her entire future in one moment, not having a single clue what she was going to do about any of it. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t see any options, couldn’t wrap her mind around a single thought. The only thing she could register, was that her body was slipping forwards. Next thing her senses were taken over by Sana’s body around hers, pushing her back onto the couch.

“Sh…” Sana’s voice was somewhere to her left, but she couldn’t figure out which part of Sana was which. Just grasped blindly, the tears forcing through closed eyelids. Fabric. Dahyun made fists around it and felt tighter pressure. Then a movement of her own body and Sana’s voice in her ear.

“You’re okay. Just breathe.”

Just breathe. That was all she had to do. Just breathe. She should’ve given up back then. Should have admitted defeat. Changed while she still could. And now she was too far in to switch. Just breathe. If she didn’t have music, what was she? Just a goofy girl with a weird brain. A brain wired to music, to see music in every aspect of life, her soul connected so effortlessly to every tone that channeled from her mind through her fingers. And who was she if she couldn’t be that girl anymore?

Dahyun gasped, her lungs forgetting how to breathe for her. Felt how her ribs were threatening to break. Felt pathetic. Wasn’t she supposed to have gotten past this? Wasn’t she supposed to be better?

“Breathe.” Sana said softly. “Come on, Dahyun, just breathe with me.”

A hand closed around one of Dahyun’s wrists and pried it off. Then placed it higher on Sana’s shirt so Dahyun’s palm was flat against the fabric and Sana’s own on top. Sana’s chest rose and fell under Dahyun’s hand.

“Breathe with me.” Sana repeated.

Dahyun nodded and felt hair against her forehead and cheek. Was she leaning on Sana’s shoulder?

“Breathe.” Sana reminded her.

Right, breathe. Dahyun tried. Sobbed and gasped and tried again. Felt the rapid heartbeat under her palm and the steady rise and fall.

“Breathe.”

Dahyun nodded again. Tried to follow the rhythm set by Sana’s ribcage. She felt dizzy and disoriented, but focused all her energy on Sana. On her voice. Her hand insistently pressing Dahyun’s against her chest and the gentle nuzzle of a nose against her ear. Breathe. Breathe. It
couldn’t be that hard. It was just breathing. Just… breathing.

“I’m-”

“Sh, breathe first, speak later.” Sana insisted.

Dahyun nodded into her hair. It was so stupid, so pathetic, to react this strongly to something she knew was coming. But it wasn’t a choice. She didn’t choose the jabbing pain in her heart or the way her body trembled. And all she could do was just keep breathing. Sana’s heart rate seemed stronger than before, but somehow slower too. And Dahyun focused on the light rhythm against her palm. Breathed. Breathed.

“You’re okay.” Sana whispered. Pressed her lips to Dahyun’s cheek. “You’re okay.”

“I’m okay.” Dahyun nodded.

“You’re okay.” Sana’s voice was full of pride and comfort, and Dahyun tugged her closer. She was still on the floor, though awkwardly, her shins against the floor but otherwise leaned over Dahyun.

“I-I’m not ready to give up.” Dahyun’s voice trembled as she spoke.

“Then don’t.” Sana muttered.

“I don’t want to.” Dahyun felt another wave threatening to crash. “But I can’t play.”

“You can play some, right?” Sana asked, finally moving off the floor, albeit awkwardly, keeping Dahyun’s hand on her chest as she sat down next to Dahyun instead.

“Y-yeah.” Dahyun nodded and opened her eyes slightly. Looked at the hand over her own on Sana’s chest.

“Then don’t give it up. Keep playing what you can.” Sana insisted.

“What if it’s not enough?” Dahyun whispered.

“Then you keep playing anyway.” Sana said quietly. “Even with a limp, you can still walk.”

“What?” Dahyun asked hazedly.

“Nothing.” Sana shook her head.

…

“What do you mean we forgot an entire day?” Dahyun whined.

Tzuyu compared the calendars. Looked down the curriculum list and pointed out the mismatch.

“We’re so screwed.” She muttered under her breath.

“So you’re telling me that our exams start in less than two weeks and we’re a day behind?” Dahyun buried her head in her hands. It was hard enough to keep up with schedule as it was when she wasn’t allowed to study as much as she felt like she had to, but to have forgotten an entire day’s worth of studying in their plan made it all seem completely impossible.

“We’ll just have to draw up a new table, maybe skip lunch with Jihyo and a movie night.” Tzuyu suggested.
“No way, I can’t skip lunch with Jihyo, I haven’t seen her since my birthday. I promised! Movie night, yes, and we can use a few nights here as well,” Dahyun pointed at one of the so-called buffernights they had fit in “but please, can we just fit in Jihyo?”

Dahyun couldn’t bear the thought of cancelling on her. She finally had good news and then she was just going to blow her off? No way. Even if she had to work half the night away she would do that rather than miss out on Jihyo’s tight embrace and bright smile. Dahyun even had the perfect plan to bring out the laugh that sounded so much like a crackling fire. There was just no way.

“There’s no room, Dahyun."

“Tzuyu. There has to be. We have to fit her in.” Dahyun begged.

“Fine. But do I have to come as well?” Tzuyu asked.

“Do you not want to?” Dahyun frowned.

“I… Of course, but I just think I should study instead, that’s all.”

“You’re coming. I’m not picking you up from a breakdown in two weeks because you haven’t done anything but study. It’s good for the brain to get out a bit! And other than your birthday, it’s now the only unscheduled time for the next month.” Dahyun kept begging.

“I just—... no, you know what? Fine. You win. I’ll go but then we’re studying on my birthday after dinner too.” Tzuyu said, her voice almost overly stubborn.

Dahyun frowned at her. “Are… you okay?”

“We’re a day behind, do you think I’m okay?” Tzuyu asked impatiently.

“No, I mean other than exams.” Dahyun said.

“I’m fine. I’m fine, I promised.”

They moved things around for almost half an hour, but eventually they had a schedule that fit all of their classes, including the two extra Tzuyu took. At the look of it though, Dahyun felt bad for insisting on dragging her to Jihyo’s after seeing how busy Tzuyu’s schedule was.

“So we’ll study tonight and then figure out if we need this buffer night.” Dahyun said finally, pointing at the last empty spot on Tzuyu’s schedule.

“That’s the plan.” Tzuyu said mutely.

“Good, then just let me text Sana that I won’t be home until late, then I’m all yours.” Dahyun drew out her phone, finding her chat with Sana. Automatically reread the past two messages and grinned.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Tzuyu blurted suddenly.

“What?” Dahyun looked up, halfway through the text.

“You promised to tell me when something happened with Sana.” Tzuyu put her mug down.

“I… What? But I did tell you.” Dahyun put her cup down as well and looked Tzuyu with a frown.

“After you told Chaeyoung. And probably Nayeon and Jeongyeon too.”
“How…”

“I called Chaeyoung that night to make sure she was okay, and she accidentally mentioned it. She didn’t mean to, but I pretended to know already so she wouldn’t feel bad.” Tzuyu looked down at their notes, her voice flat.

Dahyun just stared. Wasn’t sure her brain was working properly. Surely her sensible, happy, wonderfully reliable Chou Tzuyu wasn’t sulking because Dahyun forgot to tell her about a kiss for one day. It couldn’t be. But here she was. In what was obviously someone else’s reality.

“I’m sorry. Everything was just so hectic with Nayeon and I just- I didn’t know it was that important to you. I honestly didn’t. I texted you as soon as I remembered.”

How was this even an issue? Maybe if they had been twelve. But they were adults! Or pretending to be adults at least.

“Mh. I guess.”

“Tzuyu.” Dahyun reached across the table. Took her hand.

Tzuyu didn’t pull away.

Instead she did was was impossibly much worse, and almost unbelievable.

She fell apart.

“Whoa, hey, it’s okay!” Dahyun exclaimed as Tzuyu’s face crumbled. As fast as she could, Dahyun moved around to her, wrapping her arms around her as best she could from the awkward angle.

“I’m just tired, I’m sorry.” Tzuyu murmured into Dahyun’s stomach, trying not to sob. “I’m just tired and it’s exam nerves. I just don’t know how I’m gonna make it. I don’t even know why I got so hurt that you didn’t tell me, I think I haven’t done anything but study for days on end and then dealing with Chaeyoung, which of course I’m happy to do but-”

“Tzuyu, you’re rambling.” Dahyun couldn’t help but chuckle slightly, at the incomprehensible situation of her Tzuyu crying into her shirt, at their go to coffee shop.

“I just wish I didn’t feel like everyone was slipping away from me.” Tzuyu mumbled.

“We’re not.” Dahyun insisted. “We’re right here, it’s just exams and stuff piling up.”

“It feels like it, though. And I don’t know how to- I’m so- I don’t know.” Tzuyu seemed completely unable to gather her thoughts.

“If you feel like this why do you keep insisting not to have a birthday, not to go to Jihyo’s with me?”

“It’s nothing, just-. Just don’t slip away, okay?” Tzuyu said quietly.

“You sure? I’m not going anywhere.” Dahyun hugged her harder.

“Good.” Tzuyu sighed shakily. “That’s all I need.”

“We’re gonna get through this. Summer classes won’t be very hard at all and you and I are going to go for iced coffee and we’ll have movie nights, all of us! And I’m gonna teach you this new amazing dance” Dahyun tried to reassure her.
“Please, not the backpack kid.” Tzuyu hiccuped.


“Anything but the backpack kid.” Tzuyu insisted.

“Can I at least teach you to do a proper dab?”

“No.”

“I’m offended, like to my very soul, Chou Tzuyu.” Dahyun drew back to look down at her. Wiped away a single tear and momentarily wondered how she managed to look flawless even when distressed like this. “But I guess I’ll survive. I’ll have to live with never seeing you dab. But then again. I have all summer to convince you.”

“Thank you, Dahyun. There’s so much on my mind right now. Not just fear of losing you guys. And it’s making it so hard to focus.”

“What things? You know you can tell me about it.”

“It’s… I’m not ready to talk about it. I don’t know, it’s just… I’ll find a time when I’m ready, okay?” Tzuyu tucked her hair behind her ears.

“Okay.” Dahyun said. “But you know I’ll never judge you, right? And I’ll always be here.”

“I know.” Tzuyu smiled, making her eyes crinkle. Sniffled again.

“But if you ever decide you want to talk-”

“I know. Thank you. We should get started though.” Tzuyu said with a deep breath.

“Yeah, we should.” Dahyun smiled and finally finished the text. “You’re an odd one Chou-Tzu.”

“I know.” Tzuyu smiled. And despite the fierce determination that settled on her face, there was nothing intimidating about her. Just puffy red eyes and ears sticking out like an elf’s.

“Okay then. Well, are you ready to kick some exam butt?” Dahyun asked, moving back to her seat.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m ready.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter via @dajeongmi or using #TWICEroomies. <3

Stream YES or YES
All The Things You Tell Your Pillowcase

Chapter Notes

Another chapter is HERE!
I hope you love it!

Thank you for waiting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the moment she stepped inside, it was unclear to Tzuyu why she did it. But immediately there was something about the little coffee house that reminded Tzuyu of home. Something about the yellow cushions on the chairs, the shape of the little tables and the smell of freshly baked bread. Reminded Tzuyu of her mother’s cafe, of her smile and the soft barks of her dog running up to her. But most of all there was something about the girl behind the counter that made Tzuyu do something she’d never done so far in all the months she’s spent in this country. Something that made her walk up to the girl with the intent of talking. Practiced the words in her head. It was just coffee. Just coffee.

“Hi, may I help you?” The girl asked as soon as Tzuyu reached the little counter. Her smile was wide and genuine, and her eyes glinted and crinkled around the edges. Warmth; as immediate as stepping outside from a cool room into the burning sun. Almost too overwhelming but at once addictive. Never had Tzuyu experienced a presence as strong as the one of the girl in front of her. It made her forget her purpose, and she fumbled with the zipper on her bag, trying to remember what she had practiced in her head.


“Frappuccino?”

Tzuyu nodded. “Uh. I- Cookies and cream… please. To go.”

“Do you want whipped cream on it?” The girl asked, kindness pronounced in every syllable.

Once again, Tzuyu nodded.

“And what name should I write?”

“Tzuyu.”

“How do you spell that?” The girl scrunched her nose slightly.

Tzuyu tried to explain, but failed once again. She hated this language. Hated how it made her seem stupid. She wasn’t stupid. Sure, a little airheaded and naive sometimes, but not stupid. It was just that these characters didn’t come natural to her. It was easier when everything was a picture. Not this spelling thing. She tried to remember the characters but even then it was hard to explain how to write it.

Eventually the girl took mercy on Tzuyu and wrote a heart on the cup instead. Tzuyu felt her cheeks flush and the girl chuckled.
“Feel free to sit down, I’ll call you when it’s ready.” The girl said kindly.

“Thank you.” Tzuyu said. It felt like her tongue curled the wrong way and was about to get stuck, but the girl merely beamed at her.

As she waited, seated at one of the tables closest to the counter, she felt her eyes trail the girl. Felt how her heart skipped when the girl caught her eye, and almost jumped when her name was called. Too soon.

“Tzuyu?” The girl called. And Tzuyu wondered how she could hear that sound again. Her name on the tongue of a voice that wonderful. And only when Tzuyu took the plastic cup did she remember that there was no name on it. Just the heart. She had remembered it.

Tzuyu didn’t leave. Instead she sat for nearly an hour in the little coffee shop, watching the girl, trying to remember every single korean word at once and coming up empty. But it didn’t matter. It was enough just to be in her presence. Especially when she laughed; because her laugh didn’t follow any rules. It rose and fell in volume and frequency, out of rhythm, like the crackles of a fire.

The next day, she gave the girl a piece of paper with two character written on it.

The girl wrote it on the plastic cup. Then drew a heart. Grinned and grabbed a pen from a little holder beside the register. Then she turned the paper and wrote two different characters and handled them back. Jihyo.

“I already remember your name, Tzuyu.”

It had been instantaneous. Not like a flower that slowly breaks through the ground, growing and budding into a sudden bloom on the first warm day of spring. It was more like getting hit over the head with a baseball bat.

…

There was a cherry tomato in Dahyun’s salad. It stared at her. Or maybe it was Jihyo. Honestly, Dahyun wasn’t quite sure. But someone was definitely staring at her. And she preferred the idea that it was the tomato. Because telling the story of how she got Sana to kiss her got more and more embarrassing every time, and the smug expression on Jihyo’s face was almost more than Dahyun could bear.

Then her expression changed and her fork clattered onto the plate.

“What?” Dahyun asked, finally stopping her staring contest with the tomato.

“I’ve got to pay up to Jeongyeon.” Jihyo noted. Her face transformed slowly from a frown to an almost impressed expression, eyebrows disappearing up behind her bangs and lips splitting in a disbelieving grin.
“Excuse me?” Dahyun asked. “Pay up to what?”

“I bet her a bottle of wine that Sana would make the first move. She bet you would.” Jihyo snorted.

“Thanks for the confidence.” Dahyun said dryly.

“Oh no, I just thought Sana would be a lot more upfront about her feelings.” Jihyo explained conversationally and sipped from her water.

“Yeah, well, she was. I just didn’t get it at first and, no. It’s a long story.” Dahyun shrugged and then grinned. “But anyhow; good news for once.”

“I’m happy for you.” Jihyo smiled, then shook her head. “Dahyun with a girlfriend, who would’ve thought? And such a catch. You do know how insane that is, right? The universe really paid back for all the shit with her.”

Dahyun just cleared her throat. “Yeah…”

“Not just that though, like the girlfriend thing is definitely good news. But you’re being our stupid little Dahyunnie again. All of your dumb jokes - yes, they are dumb don’t give me that face. And your smile too. It’s all coming back. That infectious energy we all missed.” Jihyo said warmly. Reached a hand over and grabbed Dahyun’s bad one. Rubbed her thumb over Dahyun’s. Tzuyu twitched slightly in her seat, then looked at the clock on her phone. There wasn’t much time left until they had to get back to Tzuyu’s dorm to revise, and Dahyun knew she was getting antsy about it. Had been on the edge about the lunch even before they had left for Jihyo’s place, but had at least hidden it well as soon as they had arrived.

“It’s okay.” Dahyun said quietly, reassuring Tzuyu. “I’ll just stay with you for dinner, then we don’t have to hurry out now.”

Tzuyu nodded, her eyes shifting to look at Jihyo, her brows furrowing slightly.

“Please promise you won’t take so many subjects next semester?” Jihyo pleaded at Tzuyu. “Not while you work as well.”

Tzuyu gave a half-smile, but it didn’t reach her tired eyes. “I’ll consider it.”

“I just don’t want to see you break.” Jihyo’s voice cracked. Her hand squeezed tighter around Dahyun’s and then let go. Dahyun watched as Jihyo reached instead for Tzuyu’s, moving her chair slightly as to better reach. Tzuyu eyed Jihyo’s arm for a second, her fingers jolting slightly before letting Jihyo grab them. Dahyun frowned.

“When is the last exam?”

“June 22nd for me. 19th for Dahyun.” Tzuyu said.

Dahyun blinked, observing the scene as if from behind a lens. As if she had been set outside of the scene the second Jihyo’s hand had touched Tzuyu’s. And Tzuyu’s voice trembled slightly as she spoke, and she leaned away, her eyes darting to the clock on her wrist watch. Was she really that stressed? Well, she had broken down over nothing just a few days ago, but this was almost an unrecognizable Tzuyu.

Dahyun reminded herself to stay with Tzuyu until she slept tonight. It had been stupid of her to accept Tzuyu’s offer to take summer classes together, but she only realized that now. She should’ve insisted that Tzuyu take a break, go back home, spend some time with her family for once. Jihyo
seemed to have noticed the odd behavior as well, for she leaned towards Tzuyu, her face full of worry. It wasn’t a secret that Jihyo had a soft spot for the youngest girl, but in that moment, Jihyo’s gaze felt almost intimate.

A part of Dahyun wanted to look away, but she couldn’t. Was so puzzled by the scene, that she just kept looking from Jihyo to Tzuyu and back again.

“How about we all go out on the 22nd then, when you’re done with the exam?” Jihyo pleaded. “We can go dancing or to karaoke? Maybe just have a game night?”

Tzuyu shrugged. Then she retreated her hand, grabbing at the hem of her shirt instead, pulling it further down. For a moment, Jihyo’s hand looked empty, as if its sole purpose was to hold Tzuyu’s. But the next moment the air changed and Jihyo nodded, moving the chair back to its previous position around the table, and Dahyun was once again a participant in the scene and not just an onlooker.

“When do Sana and Momo leave?” Jihyo turned to face Dahyun, moving her chair back.

“Uh,” Dahyun tried to gather herself, “I think they were aiming for the 30th? But Momo has to be back for an audition though, so it probably won’t be more than a week.”

Originally it had just been Sana planning to go home to Japan, but seeing as Momo had been mumbling for weeks about missing her sister, Sana had suggested they both go home. And Dahyun was happy for them, really. She was. It was good that they were going back to see their families, and one week was nothing, nothing at all. Yet the thought made something grab a hold of Dahyun’s heart.

It was like Jihyo had said. She was getting back on track. She could feel it. And a lot of it was Sana’s doing. Despite knowing it wasn’t an ideal solution, Dahyun had used Sana as her comfort, had used her to sleep properly instead of taking her meds like she was supposed to. But she hated those pills. And she loved sleeping with Sana. So really, what was the big deal? Well, this. The fear in her heart so strong it made her lose her appetite, just at the thought of Sana being gone for a single week. It wasn’t how it was supposed to be. So maybe… maybe she wasn’t better at all.

“Dahyun?”

“Huh?”

“I asked about Mina and Jeongyeon. Weren’t they going somewhere?” Jihyo asked with a frown.

“Oh, right. Yeah, Jeongyeon is taking her home. Me and another kid at the restaurant took their shifts. From the 28th until the 2nd I think?”

“They’re getting serious then.” Jihyo noted.

“Those two have been serious from the start.” Dahyun noted, finally sticking a fork in the tomato and eating it.

“I wouldn’t know.” Jihyo shrugged, her eyes stuck on a point behind Tzuyu’s head.

“I didn’t either, I just know what Jeongyeon told me the night I found out.” Dahyun said, touching her arm to get her attention, but she didn’t look.

“They barely told me anything.” Jihyo muttered. “I think they were afraid I was still in love with Mina.”
“They were.” Dahyun confirmed. Judged the need to comfort Jihyo over the need to protect their privacy.

“But I’m not. I’m… I’m not in love with her.” Jihyo said, her voice almost pleading. “I haven’t been for a long time. I promise.”

“It’s- Jihyo, it’s fine. You don’t have to defend yourself. It would be okay even if you were.” Dahyun reassured Jihyo.

“But I’m not.” Jihyo insisted.

“Okay. Okay, then just talk to them.” Dahyun said. “Jeongyeon is one of your oldest friends, you’ve known each other what? Ten years? Twelve? Just talk to her.”

“And say what? Hey, so I know I said I was fine but it really hurt that you didn’t trust me?” Jihyo said sarcastically.

“Yes.” Tzuyu said, entering the conversation with a steadfast expression. “Tell her exactly that. Without the sarcasm. It’s a valid feeling.”

And once again there was a moment, a single second, where Dahyun felt like she shouldn’t be a part of this, that she was butting in on their moment. Because there was such a tenderness between them, that it made the room feel smaller. And Jihyo’s voice filled it just with a sigh.

“I wish it were that easy.”

The next second everything was back to normal.

…

“And what about you?” Mina asked as Dahyun told the night sky about her worries for Tzuyu. The stars glinted and cool night air breezed through Dahyun’s hair, helping her aching roots recover from eleven hours of a tight ponytail.

“Me?” Dahyun asked, still staring at the stars, until she felt a hand cover hers and squeeze it. Then turned to return Mina’s gaze.

“Your stress, your anxiety, everything?” Mina asked directly.

Dahyun tried to keep Mina’s gaze fixed. Managed somewhat.

“It’s not that bad anymore.”

Mina didn’t ask her to elaborate. Dahyun did anyways.

“I think the fact that I can sleep without being exhausted helps the most. It’s like when I’m exhausted everything hurts much more. But by now I can pretty much handle it. Breathing deep, a hand to hold, cold water. I try to make routines about it. Emphasis on try.”

“And panic attacks?”
“Two this past month, neither very serious. So barely anything.” Dahyun shrugged.

Mina hummed sceptically.

“But… I do think I need some advice if you have time?” Dahyun looked at her.

“Sure.” Mina leaned back, crossing her legs, looking at the clock on her phone before pocketing it.

“Well, I talked to my mom recently. She…” Dahyun felt her throat close up, cleared her throat several times. “She suggested that I switch majors. I’m just not sure. But she has a point, I mean, who ever heard about a musician who can’t play music? And Sana said I should keep trying, but the more I think about it the less sure I get that I’m actually able to. I mean, I haven’t played in months and I don’t even know if I could get back to half the ability I used to…”

“What would you change majors to then?”

“I don’t know. I have no clue what my life is supposed to be if it’s not about music.” Dahyun whispered. She looked down at her shoes, leaning her arms on her knees.

“What about singing?” Mina asked. “I mean, I know you can drum as well but I’d imagine that’s the same problem, holding the drumstick? But singing won’t have that problem.”

“What? Like Jihyo? Or changing over to the musical theater line?” Dahyun turned her head to Mina, frowning.

Mina pursed her lips before answering. “No, not that exact way but-”

“Good, cause I don’t have half as good a voice as her.” Dahyun interrupted.

“You have perfect pitch, Dahyun. That’s a gift. And you understand music. In here.” Mina held a hand to her own heart. “If you keep taking all of the musical history lessons and composing classes that you can without having to play, and then fill the rest with vocal training and creative writing classes, you might be able to make a stronger case for yourself later? You know, compose that way?”

“Song-writing?” Dahyun frowned.

“Yeah? Maybe? I’m not saying it’s the only solution, I’m just saying, keep your eyes open. You can still be a composer if that’s what you want.” Mina smiled. “Or maybe take classes that could lead you more in the direction of producing?”

A cold wind blew Dahyun’s hair into her face and she tugged it to one side. “That’s… something to think about. But I’m not- I’m not a poet like Chaeyoung. I’m weird, lopsided. I’m not deep.”

“That’s not true. I’ve heard you play your own stuff.” Mina gave her hand a squeeze. “You’re definitely a poet. It just hasn’t been translated to your words. Chaeyoungie is very poetic in the classical sense, descriptive and romantic. You’re lopsided, yes, but that’s needed. Someone who can tell the stories that don’t stay inside the lines.”


There was hesitation in Mina’s voice when she spoke. “I know. But your life is already different, you just haven’t chosen which path to follow yet, in this new life. Trust me, I know.”

“I know you do, that’s… that’s why I wanted to ask you.”
“Oh.” Mina licking her lips nervously.

“Can I ask- I mean-. How did you know when to stop?”

“Ballet?” Mina leaned forwards, looking at her feet pointing out in almost perfect 90 degree angle. “I never really stopped. I still do it. For myself. That’s when it got fun again. I just found something I liked more.”

“But why not stick to that dream instead?” Dahyun frowned. “I mean, I know things kind of went weird after high school, but you could’ve still applied for the ballet academy?”

“I could, but it honestly wasn’t Jihyo that made me change my life. I just changed, by myself. It was scary, I mean, I had never chosen to quit anything. And I was perfect at this. I know it sounds arrogant but I really was. Ballet was the thing I knew how to do perfectly. But I wouldn’t have been me if I had stuck to an old dream instead of letting me live my new one.” Mina said.

“And you don’t regret it?”

“In the darkest hours, sure. But most of the time, not at all.” Mina said. Then she lifted the balls of her feet and gently tapped the tips of her shoes into the asphalt a few times. Smiled to herself and looked around at Dahyun. “You’re going to be alright, Dahyun. Whether you fight from here or change to become someone new. It’s just a matter of taking the decision.”

“That’s the hardest part though.” Dahyun sighed.

“I know.” Mina said.

Dahyun yawned. Stretched and blinked down at the pages she was currently not doing very well at reading. Yet just as she picked up the pen and made to write down a note in the margin of the book, her phone started beeping in the couch next to her. With a groan, she put down the pen and picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

“Dahyun?” Chaeyoung’s voice sounded through the phone.

“No, it’s Santa, what do you want?” Dahyun yawned again. She hadn’t slept too well last night. Had gotten home late and gotten up too early.

“Well, Santa, I have to go on your naughty list-”

“Christmas cancelled, I’m hanging up, bye.” Dahyun interrupted quickly, grimacing.

“No! Wait, I do have to talk to you.” Chaeyoung said.

“... Fine. What’s up?” Dahyun said, pretending like she actually would’ve hung up on the younger girl.

“I’m going to have to cancel today.”
“What?” Dahyun sat up more in the couch. “Why?”

“I’m not even halfway done for the day, and I know we agreed just to have it be this afternoon so we can study tonight, but there’s just.. No way. I’m sorry.”

“I mean, I can’t really argue with that.” Dahyun grumbled. “It’s fair.”

“I’m sorry.” Chaeyoung said again. And she really sounded it.

“It’s fine. Just take care of yourself, okay? And say hi to Nayeon from me.”


Dahyun groaned and ended the call. Then she returned her attention to the book and continued writing notes for the chapter she was reading. Only three more and she’d be done. There was so much theory, so many dates to remember and composers and important lyrical and musical breakthroughs. However, just as she was trying to find a section about a hundred pages earlier, the sound of a key in the lock distracted her and she looked in the direction of the front door as it opened. Sana’s laughter burst through the door before she did herself. Momo followed. A bright smile spread on Momo’s face as Dahyun caught her eye. She threw her bag onto the floor, kicking off her shoes, and ran the length of the room to the couch. Dahyun barely managed to close her book and stow it away before Momo was over her, her skin clammy from dancing and her bangs sticking to her forehead.

“Ew! Get off!” Dahyun laughed and tried to keep Momo at a distance, but the girl was too strong for Dahyun who eventually had to give in. With a happy chuckle, Momo wrapped her arms around Dahyun’s neck and nosed her cheek.

“I guess I’m showering first then since you’ve decided to steal my girlfriend.” Sana noted as she put her shoes neatly by the door, picking up Momo’s stuff too, arranging them.

“Fine by me.” Momo grinned as Sana walked towards them.

“Behave.” Sana swatted Momo over the hair with a playful smile, getting her to draw back from Dahyun a little. Dahyun grinned as Sana gently tucked her face upwards by the chin and kissed her firmly. Almost as if proving a point; one that Dahyun definitely didn’t mind, as the tip of Sana’s tongue ran over Dahyun’s lip. Next second she had drawn back. Then she turned on her heel and walked into the hallway. It wasn’t a choice to stare as she walked away. Especially when she turned her head at the corner and sent Dahyun a smug grin. She was definitely way too aware of what she was doing to Dahyun.

But then she was gone and the door to the bathroom opened and closed. Dahyun turned to Momo; found her patiently waiting with a soft smile on her lips.

“What?” Dahyun snorted.

“You really like her, don’t you?” Momo asked softly.

“Yeah... I do.” Dahyun grinned shyly.

Momo hummed happily,

Dahyun chuckled. “Had a good day?”
“Mmm, we’re almost ready. We added a really hard move, and it worked super well.” Momo grinned as Dahyun wiped Momo’s bangs away from her forehead.

“When is the exam?” Dahyun asked

“Two on the seventeenth and then this on the nineteenth. So we’ll have lots of time to work on it still.” Momo adjusted and stretched, the shirt creeping up. Dahyun poked at her exposed abs and Momo whined, pulling the shirt back down with a pout. Dahyun just chuckled.

“Is Chaeyoung coming?” Momo asked, reaching for her phone.

“No, she cancelled last second.” Dahyun said. “Why?”

“Nothing. Just wondering why she wasn’t here yet.” Momo shrugged and released Dahyun’s neck, laying down with her head in Dahyun’s lap instead. Looked up at her with curious eyes.

“Have you…?” Dahyun considered not asking, but there was something in Momo’s eyes that made her continue. “Have you talked to them lately? Nayeon and Chaeyoung?”

Momo shrugged. “Not much. I asked if I could come over a few times but they were busy. I mean, it’s not like they have to hang out with me all the time, but I like being there. I miss them a bit?”

“Huh.” Dahyun raised an eyebrow and grabbed her phone.

“Huh what?” Momo asked.

“Just… Give me a minute.” Dahyun lifted Momo’s head and got up, leaving her confused in the couch as she grabbed her keys and put on Momo’s flip-flops before heading outside. Walking down the stairs, Dahyun pressed the last call and sat down on the last step in the hallway.

“Dahyun?"

“Chaeyoung. I need a very honest answer.”

“To what question?” Chaeyoung sounded confused.

“Have you asked out Momo yet?”

Silence. Long, heavy silence.

“We- no. Not yet.”

“Okay. Next honest answer.” Dahyun narrowed her eyes at the sky. “Are you actually busy tonight?”

A pause. Then Chaeyoung sighed. “No.”

“Is Nayeon?”

“No.”

“Thought so. Is there any way I can convince you two fools to come over and have movie night with us?” Dahyun asked.

“But we-"
“Momo misses you.” Dahyun said softly.

“I… we- okay.” Chaeyoung gave in. Dahyun tried not to laugh out loud, but shook in silent amusement at her lovestruck best friend. “Okay, you win, we’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“Thank you.” Dahyun turned off the call and shook her head at it. Of course it was a delicate situation, but honestly, pulling away from Momo entirely wasn’t a way to handle it.

…

The sky looked like it might give up holding all the water in and just burst open, but for now it was still dry, even if it was grey. For a second, Jeongyeon considered walking back upstairs for an umbrella, but in the end decided just to hope that the clouds would hold it until they were got to work.

“Do they know about me?” Mina asked, as they turned the corner.

“Seongyeon and Soyeon know a lot, but my parents don’t. I mean, they know I’m dating you but I haven’t told them much about you as a person.” Jeongyeon said.

“Well, I’m glad I’m not brought home as some surprise element.” Mina giggled, taking Jeongyeon’s hand. Twined their fingers.

“I wouldn’t do that to you.” Jeongyeon scrunched her nose.

“So that means using you as my reason to finally come out to my parents is a no?” Mina asked, insecurity in her voice. Had she been planning exactly this?

“No, I don’t mind at all. I just mean that my sisters can be a bit much and I don’t want them to embarrass you.”

“Oh, come on, your sisters are lovely, I have met them once. And Seongyeon was a senior when I was a freshman, so it’s not like you’re introducing me to total strangers.”

“Mm, true. But were you planning on bringing me home?” Jeongyeon inquired.

Mina shrugged. “Maybe? I mean, it’s not like I haven’t considered telling my parents, it’s just that I never really had a reason to.”

“I wouldn’t mind it.” Jeongyeon said, holding Mina’s hand maybe a little tighter at the thought that she was a reason.

“Good. I might then… Did you hear back from Jihyo, by the way?” Mina asked.

“Nope. I mean, yeah, but not anything substantial.” Jeongyeon cringed. It was all just weird. She had seemed completely fine with everything, but slowly, Jeongyeon had gotten the sense that maybe she actually wasn’t. It wasn’t a secret that they had definitely handled it wrong, their relationship, but it was almost like there was more to the matter than just Mina falling for Jihyo’s best friend instead of Jihyo herself. She seemed almost… bitter? And that trait was one Jeongyeon had never experienced with her oldest friend before. And it was definitely one that made the beads on her bracelet feel heavier.
“You ok?” Mina asked as they stopped to wait at a red light.

“Yeah, just wondering.”

“About?”

“Jihyo. I’m going to try to talk to her soon - really talk to her.”

“Yeah, I think you should.” Mina nodded.

The lights turned green.

...

It took exactly nineteen minutes from the call ended until Dahyun let Chaeyoung into the apartment, Nayeon trailing after her sheepishly.

“Oh, look what the cat dragged in.” Dahyun grinned at them, wrapping an arm around Chaeyoung’s shoulder.

“That makes you the cat, then?” Chaeyoung asked, raising her eyebrows, then added a “Hey Sana.” at Sana in the couch, getting a happy wave back.

“Well, I definitely had to drag you he-” Dahyun jolted. Arms wrapped around her from behind and Nayeon’s head rested on her shoulder.

“Sorry.” Nayeon muttered.

“It’s fine. You ok?” Dahyun asked quietly. Nayeon nodded and hugged Dahyun tighter. Chaeyoung on the other hand, wriggled out of Dahyun’s hold and kicked off her shoes, nudging them with her feet until they stood next to each other.

“Your hair smells like lemons.” Nayeon noted quietly.

“Oh, yeah. Well, five minutes earlier and you would’ve caught me in the shower.” Dahyun said, reminding herself to tie her hair into a bun later. She could feel the damp stain on her back where Nayeon’s shoulder pressed the hair against Dahyun’s shirt.

“No thank you.” Chaeyoung noted dryly as they walked further into the room. “I’ve seen enough of your pasty butt to last me a lifetime.”

“Don’t judge my pasty butt, thank you very much, it’s sensitive to critique.” Dahyun huffed, earning a chuckle from Nayeon and a last squeeze before she let go to take off her shoes as well.

“I think you have a cute butt.” Sana noted from the couch, getting up to greet both Nayeon and Chaeyoung with a hug. “Very cute.”

“Uh, I, well-” Dahyun tried, but never got further as Sana chose this exact moment to pat said butt and walk away chuckling.
“How you managed to tap that with those skills, I will never understand.” Chaeyoung noted dryly as they slowly made it to the couch.

“You and me both.” Dahyun noted with a snort.

“She’s actually quite a skilled flirt when you’re not there.” Sana called from the kitchen.

“I… Thanks, babe!” Dahyun croaked as loudly as she could muster. Felt how her cheeks burned.

“Always here to help!” Sana chuckled.

“Dahyun? A flirt? There’s a sentence I don’t believe.” Chaeyoung said.

“Would you like to be uninvited, because you’re on thin ice.” Dahyun stared her down as best she could. Which wasn’t really very impressive considering that she was in fact, if all truths were to be told, an eighth of an inch shorter than Chaeyoung. Not that she’d ever admit it.

“Wasn’t it you who made us come here in the first place?” Chaeyoung complained.

“Well, yeah, because you’ve been pulling back from Momo,” Dahyun said the last part in a low enough voice that only the three of them heard. Nayeon tugged her lip between her teeth and looked smaller than ever.

“Okay, how about we make a deal?” Chaeyoung offered, reaching for Nayeon’s hand. “I don’t talk more about your insane luck with that girl-”

“Oh, by all means, keep talking about that!” Sana called from the kitchen. Dahyun rolled her eyes.

“Just try not to embarrass us too much?” Chaeyoung asked.

“Of course, wouldn’t dream of talking about your own pasty butt in front of Momo.”

“Whose pasty butt?” Asked Momo, appearing from the hallway, drying her hair in a Doreamon towel.

“Mine!” Sana called from the kitchen but Momo’s attention was on the guests.

“Aah, you came!” She beamed at Nayeon and Chaeyoung before turning her head in the direction of the kitchen, talking to Sana, “Your butt isn’t pasty. It’s hot.”

“I know.” Sana called with a chuckle. “Help me out?”

Momo shrugged, turned to Chaeyoung and Nayeon and said “I’m glad you’re here.” before disappearing again. Both girls addressed looked both sheepish and slightly flustered and Dahyun couldn’t help but smile at them. It really… really could be good if Momo liked them. If.

Chaeyoung excused herself to use the bathroom while Nayeon just stood. Dahyun walked back and tugged at her hand, pulling her with. The oldest still hadn’t said a single word, and Dahyun sat her down in the couch, settling beside her. Wriggled slightly against her to relieve some of her tension. It earned her a laugh and an arm snuck under Dahyun’s.

“Nothing has changed. She’s still just Momo. You still have the same feelings as you did before. She’s still just goofy, cuddly, meat loving Momo.” Dahyun said quietly. Nayeon nodded, leaned her head on Dahyun’s shoulder.
“I’m glad you’re here.” Nayeon mumbled.

Dahyun chuckled and adjusted so Nayeon leaned more comfortably on her.

...

“Chaengie, hand me the rice cakes?” Momo asked.

Chaeyoung nodded, and freed herself of Sana’s arm around her shoulder to hand Momo the bag of spicy rice cakes in her lap.

The movie progressed in song and color, Nayeon’s eyes fixed on it. Dahyun almost felt sorry for her, squashed between herself and Momo, but her hand was in Dahyun’s and it seemed to relax the poor girl somewhat. It was a rare sight indeed, to see Nayeon so out of it. She must really like Momo.

“Want one?” Momo offered the bag to Nayeon and Dahyun. Momo didn’t seem to notice anything. She just seemed perfectly content, her head bobbing along to the song, munching on a rice cake as Dahyun dug in for one too, taking the bag from Dahyun.

“You’re forgetting the dumplings, Momoring.” Sana noted just as Momo reclaimed the bag.

“Oh, right!” Momo grinned and put down the bag, reaching for the box of dumplings. Momo grinned and opened the pack. Dahyun grabbed chopsticks and offered them to both Momo and Nayeon.

“Oh, are we sharing with others tonight?” Momo teased.

“I think we can manage. I got double like I promised.” Dahyun shrugged.

“What are-” Nayeon frowned but Chaeyoung interrupted her.

“Don’t question the dumplings, babe. Just take it.”

“I… ok.” Nayeon still looked confused but accepted the chopsticks and the box. They settled for keeping it in Nayeon’s lap so everyone could reach comfortably. Maybe except for Nayeon whose arm, Dahyun noticed, rubbed against Momo’s, when she moved.

“This is the best song in the entire movie.” Momo noted with a nod at the movie, her mouth full of dumpling.

“I agree.” Nayeon noted. Then she stared at the gyoza between her chopsticks. Furrowed her brows.

“They’re not poisonous, come on, try them!” Momo insisted watching Nayeon’s grimace.

“It’s not like I’m taking your dumpling virginity.”

Nayeon mumbled something unintelligible but then put the gyoza in her mouth and started chewing.

“See? Not poisonous. And you’re officially a part of the dumpling squad now.” Momo grinned.

“Wait a minute,” Chaeyoung complained from the cushion on the floor. “I’ve been begging for weeks and the moment she smiles cutely, you just let her in?”
“Sorry Chaengie, you can join starting next week.” Momo grinned, but her actions contrasted her words as she handed the box and her own pair of chopsticks down to Chaeyoung and Sana. Then she she settled back on the couch and leaned on Nayeon. The oldest didn’t seem as bothered by it anymore, her mouth full of dumpling, but Dahyun still saw how her cheeks pinked.

The movie ended without Dahyun having understood half the plot. Not that it had been hard. But it was completely impossible for her not to observe her friends, especially Nayeon. Little by little she seemed to relax, and by the end of the movie she was resting her head against Momo’s shoulder, her hand only limply resting in Dahyun’s. But the minute Sana pressed the off button, Nayeon sat right up, grabbing Dahyun’s hand so hard the younger girl winced.

“Sorry, sorry!” Nayeon said, letting go of Dahyun’s hand completely.

“It’s fine, no worries.” Dahyun rubbed her hand.

“You okay?” Momo asked, and Dahyun was about to say that she was, but then looked to see Momo’s eyes on Nayeon.

“What? Y-yeah, I’m…” Nayeon trailed off, then smiled nervously. Almost as if just to cover up, but it certainly didn’t work very well.

“You don’t seem like yourself.” Momo frowned, turning slightly in the couch.

“Oh, well- It’s e-exams and stuff. Y-you-”

“Babe.” Chaeyoung’s voice was soft but insisting as she turned on the cushion and found Nayeon’s eyes. “Ask her.”

Nayeon shook her head, but Chaeyoung kept encouraging her.

“What?” Momo asked.

“Would you... like to go on a date?” Nayeon’s voice was shrill with nervousness.

“What?” Momo frowned.

“A… a date. Would you like to go on a date?” Nayeon elaborated, calmer.

“But aren’t you two dating?” Momo seemed completely confounded, looking around at the other girls in the living room on turn, finally coming to a full circle at Nayeon.

“We are. But-” Chaeyoung stopped. Cleared her throat and looked at Dahyun, but Dahyun could do nothing but shrug.

Silence filled the room, and nothing challenged it. Momo just looked confused around the room.

“We… are.” Chaeyoung finally said, then took a deep breath. “We are dating. Nayeon and I. But we still want to… To take you on a date. Both of us. All three, I mean.”

“Oh.” Momo said. Looked down at Sana and so did Dahyun. She nodded. Momo swallowed and then looked back at Nayeon. “Can I think about it?”
“Sure, all the time you need. I mean.. I mean, don’t leave us hanging too long. But of course.” Nayeon said, her voice shaking slightly.

“Thanks. I mean, it’s not that-”

“We get it. It’s complicated.” Chaeyoung nodded.

“No, I mean, it’s not complicated, I just haven’t considered it more than friendship, I think because I don’t ever really consider possibilities in people in a relationship. But… I think I just need to think.” Momo explained, a slightly confused expression on her face. As if she was trying to solve a really hard math piece. Which, fair, she was, if she had been told that a couple was two and they already had one and one and now asked to add another one.

“Yeah, just think about it. And no pressure if you don’t feel like it. We just had to ask.”

“But… that means you like me?” Momo frowned.

Nayeon bit her lip. Nodded. Looked for a moment like she was about to say something but then went quiet. Nodded again.

“Oh…” Momo said.

“We should probably get back, I mean… exams.” Chaeyoung said, clearing her throat.

“You don’t have to leave because of me.” Momo said hurriedly.

“We’re not.” Chaeyoung put a hand on her knee and sent her a calming smile. “We both have exams in a few days and we hadn’t planned on staying for dinner anyway.”

“Oh, okay good.” Momo said.

“Nayeon?” Chaeyoung turned to the eldest.

“Huh? Oh, right, yeah.” Nayeon cleared her throat and got up from her squished spot in the middle of the couch. Then helped Chaeyoung up.

“Oh, no, you don’t have to get up.” Chaeyoung said quickly as Dahyun made to get up too. With a nod, Dahyun sat back down, but Momo didn’t. She got up. And before anyone really saw what had happened, her arms were around both Nayeon and Chaeyoung at the same time, hugging them tight.

“I’ll think about it. I’ll really think about it.” Momo said, her voice so low that Dahyun barely heard. But the words weren’t meant for her anyways, so it didn’t matter.

…

A wonderful breeze flew through the window as Dahyun turned the last page of the curriculum. Exams started tomorrow, and the first subject would be done in three, two, one.

“And it’s officially the birthday of Chou Tzuyu!” Dahyun shut the book.
Tzuyu smiled down at the pages of hers before shutting it as well. Barely managed to compose herself before Dahyun had grabbed her face and pressed a kiss to her forehead. Tzuyu’s cheeks puffed under Dahyun’s hands as her lips spread in a wide smile.

“Now, what do you want to make for dinner?” Dahyun let her go and got up from Tzuyu’s bed.

“Kimbap?” Tzuyu’s eyes shone. “I bought the things we need to make it already.”

“Oh, so you have been looking forwards to your birthday!” Dahyun grinned and followed Tzuyu over to the little corner of her room where a half-sized fridge and a double hotplate stood next to a tiny counter. While Tzuyu started digging ingredients from the fridge and filling the kettle with water for boiling, Dahyun walked into the bathroom to wash her hands. Her phone buzzed just as she had dried her hands.

7:14 pm Jihyo: Are you guys done yet? Can I join? I feel bad that Tzuyu doesn't get a proper birthday party.

Dahyun frowned and walked back into the kitchen. “Tzuyu?”

“Yeah?” Tzuyu asked, staring down the kettle, in an apparent attempt to get it to boil the water faster.

“Jihyo wants to come over.” Dahyun said.

“Huh? Oh. Can’t it just be you and me?” Tzuyu tore her gaze from the kettle.

“But why?” Dahyun pressed. What was so bad about having Jihyo join?

“I just can’t handle any more people. I’m so tired. I just want to make food and eat it with you and watch silly dog videos. We have our first exam tomorrow and I really just… Can it just be you and me this time?”

Dahyun frowned, but feeling like they’d had this conversation before, she nodded.

7:16 PM Dahyun: Sorry, we’re going to be going all night.

7:17 PM Dahyun: Don’t worry, I’ve got her. She’s good.

Tzuyu looked at her gratefully and went to wash her hands. She didn’t return until Dahyun had poured the boiling water into the pot and added rice vinegar.

For almost an hour, they goofed around, cooked dinner, played loud music and laughed until their sides hurt. Did their best to forget about the exam and focused on perfecting their performance of the apple-pineapple song. If only Chaeyoung had been there they might’ve gotten it just right, but this would have to do. Dahyun didn’t have it in her to suggest inviting Chaeyoung.

They ended up eating every last piece of kimbap, and then slumped back onto the bed. Dahyun felt
how the blood ran from her head into her stomach, leaving her tired and warm, half sitting, half lying
down next to Tzuyu.

Dahyun sighed contently and rested her head on Tzuyu’s shoulder.

“She won’t let herself love me.” Tzuyu said without warning.

Dahyun’s head snapped up faster than was probably advised, and she immediately felt dizzy. Blinking a few times, she tried to get Tzuyu’s expression into focus, but the younger girl was merely looking at the ceiling.

“Excuse me, what now?”

“She confuses me so much.” Tzuyu continued.

“Who?”

“I know she loves me. But she won’t let herself.”

“Tzuyu, who?” Dahyun bent down and took up Tzuyu’s field of vision, but Tzuyu merely closed her eyes.

“She seems almost terrified that someone could want her.”

“Who?” This time Dahyun took Tzuyu’s hands in hers, but still Tzuyu’s eyes were firmly closed.

“And then she does stuff like this.” Tzuyu sighed. “Pulls me back in. I mean, I know I’m just as bad at staying away from her but… She still doesn’t keep her part of the deal. And maybe that’s why it’s so hard to stay away. Because I know she doesn’t really want me to.”

“Wh-. Wait. Tzuyu.” There was a puzzle and it was so easy, but she couldn’t fit the pieces. Maybe because she had never seen the picture before getting the pieces.

“I need her to stop sending me mixed signals.” Tzuyu finally opened her eyes, and Dahyun was shocked to find them watery. The look in them gave the last piece of the puzzle. Dahyun understood. Pulled Tzuyu up until she was sitting upright in the bed and then wrapped her arms tight around the taller girl.

“Jihyo?”

Tzuyu nodded into Dahyun’s neck and she sniffled.

“How long has this been going on?” Dahyun asked.

“How long I’ve liked her or how long since anything actually happened?”

“Since- wait, something happened, I’m- when?!”

“Chaeyoung’s birthday.” Tzuyu muttered

“I… What?”

…
“Okay, so the thirtieth we can get a flight out around 10, that’s actually decent.” Sana said.

“Yeah, that’s good.” Momo said distractedly. Tried to get her mind to actually notice what Sana was saying, but it was hard. She couldn’t stop thinking about the idea of going out with Nayeon and Chaeyoung. It wasn’t something she had considered. But now that the possibility had been opened to her, she just couldn’t get it out of her mind.

“Momo?” Sana’s voice forced through her thoughts, and Momo looked around at her. “You didn’t hear a word of what I just said, did you?”

“Uh, no.”

“What’s on your mind then?” Sana asked, minimizing the website on her computer.

“Nayeon and Chaeyoung.” Momo said honestly. Leaned her arms on the desk and rested her cheek on her arms, looking up at Sana.

“Still haven’t given them an answer?”

“Nope…” Momo pressed her lips tight together.

“But you know what you want to answer?” Sana asked.

“Yeah.. I think so. I mean… I do know.”

“So it’s a no?” Sana frowned.

Momo shook her head in her arms, trying not to smile too wide.

“It’s a yes? You want to try?” Sana’s lips spread in a grin.

“... Yeah.” Momo breathed.

“Tell them then! God, Momo, please tell them!” Sana said excitedly.

“How?” Momo asked, sitting back up, pulling her legs up, hugging them shyly.

“Call them! Now, please, please call them now!” Sana was practically bouncing in her seat.

“Why are you so excited about this?!” Momo asked, slightly amused and slightly more panicky than before. She knew already that there was no way out of it once Sana had set it in her mind that it was happening now.

“I just want you to be happy!” Sana pouted, though she was still bouncing slightly.

“Ew.” Momo scrunched her nose.

“Oh, stop it, just call them!” Sana giggled.

“... Fine. Fine, will you just sit still, I’ll call them.” Momo sighed. With slightly clammy hands, Momo took her phone from the desk and went into the contacts. Found Chaeyoung’s number and pressed the call button, Sana’s hand slapping against her upper arm excitedly. Momo grumbled and moved away, getting up and settling in Sana’s bed instead.
“Hello?” Chaeyoung’s voice was audibly nervous. Of course she knew that it was Momo calling.

“Hi…” Momo said, then took a deep breath.

“So you’re… uh you’re calling about-”

“Yeah.” Momo breathed.

“Oh.” Chaeyoung swallowed. “Oh, ok.”

“No, no. Chaeyoung, I’m saying yes. I’m just… I’m nervous, but I’m saying yes. I would like to go on a date with you. And Nayeon. You and Nayeon. Together.”

There was complete and utter silence on the other end.

“Chaeyoung?”

“Yeah? Oh, right. Good. Yes, good. Should we… uh, I mean, Nayeon isn’t here right now but-”

“We can just text together about the details?” Momo suggested. “But maybe we should wait until we’re done with exams.”

“Right, exams. God, okay, yeah. After exams… date.”

“Chaeyoungie… Breathe.”

Chaeyoung took an audibly deep breath, then chuckled once. “Thank you, Momo…”

“Hey, you’re the ones asking me out, I should be thanking you.” Momo grinned. She could feel Sana’s eyes on her, but focused on the sheets.

“Well then, you’re welcome I guess?”

Momo gave a laugh and then bit her lip. “I’ll see you soon then?”

“Yeah. See you soon…” Chaeyoung sounded both happy and relieved, and it made something inside Momo bubble. Made her smile down at the sheets.

The call ended, but the bubbles didn’t.

…

Dahyun chuckled, and Sana drew back. Took off her glasses and put them on the nightstand. Then gently removed Dahyun’s as well and put them next to Sana’s.

“One day my optician is gonna ask how I got my glasses bent out of shape and I’m gonna have to tell her that I knocked them while making out with another four-eyes.” Sana tutted, pecking Dahyun’s lips before laying down on the pillow, shuffling onto her side to face Dahyun.

“Did you have fun tonight?” Sana asked sweetly.
“Mh, she’s really good at making kimbap, she tried to teach me but I don’t know how to roll them tight enough.” Dahyun scrunched her nose, shuffling close enough to Sana for her eyes to come into focus. Which was, luckily for Dahyun, quite close.

“And she seemed to be in a better mood?”

Dahyun frowned. “Well, yes and no. She finally told me what’s been going on.”

“What do you mean?” Sana asked, tucking Dahyun even closer, sneaking her hand under Dahyun’s shirt to rest on her hip.

“You know how I said lunch was kind of weird the other day? Like it seemed like something was up?” Dahyun asked, feeling how Sana’s thumb stroked over her skin. Then felt the hand travel up just a little bit, resting on her waist instead.

“Yeah?” Sana asked.

“Well, there’s a reason. Apparently they had a thing? Or have a thing? Tzuyu wants it to be a thing at least, and Jihyo does too but she’s hella scared, so it’s just sort of push and pull at the moment. Like she won’t let Tzuyu love her but she won’t let her go either.” Dahyun said, shuffling closer and closer until their knees bumped together.

“Wait, so Jihyo and Tzuyu are in love?”

“... Yeah.”

“Wow.” Sana hummed. “It’s all a big mess then, isn’t it?”

Dahyun chuckled and followed as Sana turned onto her back. Then she nuzzled into her favorite spot by Sana’s neck and lifted her leg over Sana’s thighs. Sana’s hand disappeared higher up on Dahyun’s waist.

“Definitely a mess.”

“Mm… then there’s only one thing left here to do.” Sana said in a mysterious voice.

With a frown Dahyun lifted herself up on her elbow to look down and her. “What?”

Sana’s eyes glinted and her hand disappeared from under Dahyun’s shirt to cup her cheek instead.

“Kiss me.”

…

“Can we talk? If you have a moment…”

“Sure. Sure, I’m-” Jihyo looked around at Dahyun.

The younger girl nodded and seemed to lose focus, “It’s ok, go.”
And so Jihyo got up and followed the taller girl out of the kitchen. Didn’t know what to expect, but certainly hadn’t expected being led into Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s bedroom. Without a word, Tzuyu closed the door, leaving them in darkness.

“Tzuyu-” Jihyo fumbled to find the switch, but a hand wrapped around her wrist. The darkness was still too heavy, and Jihyo’s eyes hadn’t gotten used to it yet.

“Jihyo…” The name fell from Tzuyu’s lips so gently, so softly, that it made Jihyo’s breath catch. Without knowing it, she had somehow waited her entire life for someone to say her name like that. Knew immediately why they were standing here in the dark room, just the two of them and the sound of Jihyo’s hammering heart, threatening to break her.

“Sit with me?”

“But, what about-”

“I-I think I need the darkness... for this.” Tzuyu said, her voice trembling as she tugged tenderly at Jihyo’s wrist. The older girl followed, letting Tzuyu lead her to sit on the edge of the bed. Felt the bed shift underneath her and knew instinctively that Tzuyu was turned in her direction. Every cell in Jihyo’s body was fighting itself.

“I’m in love with you.”

There was no hesitance; no big speech. No mention of why or when or how. And it was so much like Tzuyu, but it still took Jihyo by surprise. Even if she had somehow known it from the moment Tzuyu had closed the door and given them both to the darkness.

“And… I need to know something.” Tzuyu continued, quieter now. As if her courage was slowly taking away her voice.

“What?” Jihyo asked. Knew already what Tzuyu wanted to ask, but still waited for the words to form between them.

“In… In all the time you’ve known me, have you ever- have you ever thought… that there could be more than just friendship in what you felt… for me?”

Jihyo bit her lip, blood racing in her ears and chest hurting with the pace her heart was beating at. Wasn’t sure whether she’d be able to say the answer out loud. Admit it to anyone but her pillow.

“Yes.” Jihyo breathed. Felt Tzuyu’s grip on her wrist strengthen for a second and a breath that caught. Maybe it could happen. Maybe there could be more between them. Maybe Jihyo could be brave, for Tzuyu. And then Tzuyu’s hand let go of her wrist, tracing up her arm instead, over her shoulder and finally found the older girl’s face, cupping it with one hand, and then the other.

Jihyo felt no fear.

Felt only how Tzuyu pulled her closer, how the warmth emitting from her body was suddenly so close, and then breath hitting her lips.

“I’m going to kiss you.” Tzuyu said gently. Stroked her thumbs over Jihyo’s cheeks.
“Okay.” Jihyo breathed. Waited for Tzuyu to lead her off to whatever blissful ignorance she could offer.

And for a second - that first second where Tzuyu’s lips pressed against her own and Jihyo’s mind went blank, everything was just that. Blissful ignorance. But then there was the taste of alcohol and the knot in Jihyo’s stomach, and she couldn’t get herself to move against Tzuyu’s lips. But couldn’t get herself to pull back either. Just felt the tears fall from her eyes and her lips tremble. Felt the panic in her chest and the sound of a cup breaking against the floor of the coffee shop. The distant noise from a party and the feeling of a cold curb. The sound of her heart breaking into a million pieces and every single bit of effort it had taken her to glue it back together. And here Tzuyu was, threatening to break it all over again, and Jihyo didn’t have the strength to go through it all over again.

The sob that left Jihyo’s throat was involuntary, but by then, Tzuyu had already pulled back, her hands gone, her warmth gone.

“I’m… I’m sorry.” Jihyo cried quietly. “I can’t. I’m not… not like this.”

“Then like what?” Tzuyu asked, her neutral voice and the darkness keeping Jihyo from reading her.

“I don’t know.” Jihyo sobbed, letting the tears pool under her chin and fall into her lap. Didn’t have the strength to wipe them. “But not like this.”

“Okay.” Tzuyu said.

If she had just gotten mad. Or sad. Or frustrated. Anything that would tell in her voice. But Tzuyu just sat there, accepting Jihyo’s fears as if it was no big deal.

“I don’t… I’m not sure I can ever…”

“Okay.” Tzuyu repeated.

“Please…” Jihyo begged, not even sure what she was begging for. Forgiveness? Closeness? The chance to get her heart broken?

But Tzuyu didn’t speak. Just got up, the weight of the bed shifting to Jihyo alone. And then the door opened, revealing Tzuyu’s back.

She was gone. And there was nothing left but Jihyo and the darkness and the need to prevent herself from falling apart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or on the hashtag #TWICEroomies
A Table for Three, Please

Chapter Notes

Aaaaaa, I got +1000 Kudos, I feel so blessed oh my god ;; thank you so much for reading, I hope you'll enjoy this chapter even if it's late!

Thank you for waiting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One day, Nayeon hoped, she would look back on this day and think of the good that came from it. But right now she was just trying not to puke. It was all too much, and her instinct was telling her to run and pretend none of it ever happened. That it was too much of a change - too much of a risk. And the only thing she could do now was to keep attacking the coffee cup with the dish brush, even if it was long clean. Even if it was only six in the morning and she was shivering slightly from the apparent brain bleed that meant she was standing here in underwear and dirty dishwater, trying to gain control over some aspect of her life. Which honestly wasn’t going very good. Why had she agreed to ask Momo out in the first place? And why in the name of all that is good and pure had she let Chaeyoung talk her into going on a date the same day of the last and most important exam of the semester?

Nayeon only managed enough clear-headedness to take a new cup instead of cleaning the same one for another five minutes. But she barely grasped it before a voice startled her and made her drop the cup into the water-filled sink.

“Babe?” Chaeyoung’s voice was hoarse with sleep, and Nayeon turned, immediately covering up her front out of instinct. Chaeyoung’s face revealed both puzzlement and amusement, as she looked at the arms covering Nayeon’s chest. “Really?”

Nayeon grumbled, quite aware that she now had dirty dishwater on her chest and had just given Chaeyoung another weapon to tease her with. But she didn’t know how to gather herself after this. Just stood there like a deer in headlights. But Chaeyoung didn’t mock her. Didn’t even tease. Just grabbed the dish towel and gently took one of Nayeon’s arms, drying it off. Then took the other, and then dried off Nayeon’s chest as well.

“Come on.” Chaeyoung merely said, pulling gently at one of Nayeon’s arms.

Nayeon didn’t move. “She did say yes, right? You didn’t make it up?”

Chaeyoung tilted her head slightly, then smiled. “Yeah, she did. She said yes.”

“Oh, Okay, good.” Nayeon took a deep breath, then shivered. Even if it was the middle of June it was still a little chilly at this hour. Nayeon just hadn’t noticed it until now. The urge to cover her chest was once more present, but she didn’t.

“Were you this much of a mess when I asked you out?” Chaeyoung asked, eyebrows raised.

“No…” Nayeon tried. Then shrugged. “Yeah, I was… Jeongyeon got to sick of me in the end, she blocked my phone the day I went on the date with you to stop me from calling halfway through.”
Chaeyoung laughed and stood up on her toes, pressing a kiss to Nayeon’s hair.

“You’re like a storm sometimes, but I love you for that. Because I know it comes from you feeling so much. And I love how much you love.”

“I’m glad you can at least find it poetic.” Nayeon mumbled, wrapping her arms around the shorter girl’s shoulders.

“I find everything about you poetic. Except how long you take to pee, that I find annoying.”

Nayeon snorted.

“Now it’s not that I don’t appreciate your boobs, but you really have to go dress or we’re going to be late for the exam.” Chaeyoung drew back and put her hands on her hips, leaning on one leg and smirking.

“But there’s lots of...” Nayeon trailed off as Chaeyoung raised an eyebrow then she sighed and walked around Chaeyoung, out of the kitchen. Felt Chaeyoung’s eyes on her back as she disappeared. Honestly, Nayeon hoped that she never got used to the feeling of her girlfriend checking her out as she walked away. Even in a situation like this.

She took a while to dress, as she had to find something appropriate for taking an oral exam and going on a date, however casual the latter might be. For ten minutes she tried to decide, never wearing anything, just staring at the closet. Maybe this was why Chaeyoung had argued they might be late.

In the end Nayeon had no choice but to just pick something. Went with a skirt and top that she had bought as a set, the white shirt frilly and with a black ribbon. The shirt came on just fine and she even tied a pretty bow with the ribbon, but the zipper of the skirt stuck, and Nayeon cursed under her breath. But next thing her hands were swatted away by smaller ones, and the zipper freed from the piece of the shirt it had been stuck in.

“Hot.” Chaeyoung hummed as she zipped up the skirt and walked around Nayeon to look her up and down. “Yes, hot but not dirty. Very appropriate.”

“For an exam too, though?” Nayeon asked, watching as Chaeyoung opened the closet, looking inside it for something for herself to wear.

“You’ll score some cheap points,” Chaeyoung said, going through the hangers. “but heck, go with it. And Momo will definitely love it.”

Nayeon stood up a little straighter. Then stopped Chaeyoung as she was going past an outfit from her more peculiar collection. Pulled at the shirt of it.

“This one.”

“Yeah?” Chaeyoung grabbed it.

“Definitely, it looks amazing on you.” Nayeon kissed her cheek, trying to stay calm. It helped somewhat just to act it. Still, she couldn’t help but correct the ribbon and consider the possibility that their outfits were too matchy-matchy. Would Momo like it? Would she even like them? Would she like this; what they were doing?
Nayeon’s stomach turned uncomfortably. She tried to distract herself from the thought by watching Chaeyoung change clothes, but still couldn’t fully shake the nervousness.

“I’m gonna have to find a way to settle you down before the date, you look like you’re about to turn from storm to tornado.” Chaeyoung noted, clipping her bra shut and pulling the shirt over her head. “It’s just Momo. And an exam. But the last one. And after this it’s summer and we’re free.”

“It’s not just Momo, babe.” Nayeon fiddled with her hair while Chaeyoung grabbed a pair of jeans from the closet.

“I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant she’s not all that scary.” Chaeyoung stuck a leg into her jeans and then the other.

“You’re five foot two and you scared me, I’m not exactly hardcore!” Nayeon whined.

“Mh, that’s true. But I think you’re pretty damn awesome even if you’re a big softie.” Chaeyoung shrugged and buttoned her jeans. “And hey, I thought we agreed that I’m five foot two and a quarter of an inch.”

“Okay, fine, miss five foot two and a quarter of an inch, I accept your praise.” Nayeon grinned, feeling a little lighter. “I am pretty awesome, aren’t I?”

“Hah, there’s the Nayeon I know.” Chaeyoung said proudly, letting Nayeon pull her in by the belt loop. Even if she couldn’t rid herself of the nervousness completely, she could still let Chaeyoung provide a solid distraction. At least for the next ten seconds before Chaeyoung pulled back rudely and announced that it was time to leave.

…

There were probably people who would roll their eyes and tut at Nayeon’s fears, but until she actually stood in that room with her examiners looking her up and down, she legitimately feared failing. Nothing and no-one could’ve convinced Nayeon that she would actually be able to hit the notes she needed to, much less hold them there. Had spent the past days worrying that the song she had submitted as her test choice was too ambitious, that she should’ve gone safe. That her voice would crack and she would forget the words.

But she didn’t.

*Of course she didn’t*, the others would tell her later, but in that moment she felt lucky, felt accomplished, and that was a feeling they would not get to take away from her with statements of privilege and talent. This was hard work - not just effort to learn the song, but the hard work of fighting for something while fighting against yourself at the same time. And this process, while always hard, had only gotten more difficult in the past months with the arrival of Momo.

“Miss Im?” The female examiner’s voice was soft but insistent.

“Right, yes.” Nayeon said, bowing for them and thanking them for listening to her before she walked out of the room to let them elaborate. The entire world seemed to spin around her, as if she was to be found at a different frequency, a different level of reality.

Until her world was set back where it belonged by the slight tug of her shirt from behind before arms
wrapped tightly around her waist and a head rested against her shoulder blade.

“I did good, Chaeyoungie.”

“I’m proud of you.” Chaeyoung just hummed and held her tighter.

But that was all they had time for, as in the next moment the door to the exam room opened anew and called her in. But Nayeon was present now - was there in the real world where she belonged - in Chaeyoung’s world.

She barely heard the grade. Just managed to realise that her hard work had paid off and then zoned out. The reasons didn’t matter. Any other day they would’ve, but not today. Today was only about one thing - Nayeon’s worth, set by herself. And her worth was that A. And her worth was staying at the school until Chaeyoung would go in. And her worth was being Momo’s date. She was worth Momo. Worth Chaeyoung. Worth the slight bow of the head in respect from the examiners.

As she exited the exam room with her perfect grade and slightly flushed cheeks, her eyes fell on Jihyo standing with her sheet music in her hands, curling it slightly, her knuckles white. She leaned against the brick wall, slightly slumped. Nayeon frowned, the feelings of pride and accomplishment made way for worry.

“You’re up next?” She asked as she came to stand behind Jihyo, nudging her shoulder.

“Nayeon? Oh, yeah, I am. How did yours go?” Jihyo’s eyes flickered slightly between Nayeon’s before she looked down again.

“Good, I mean I got my A, but I was so nervous. Still am”

“Still? Why.”

“It’s the 19th.” Nayeon mumbled

“19th… wait, is it the date with Momo today?” Jihyo asked, looking up again.

Nayeon pressed her lips together and nodded.

“Park Jihyo?” Called a voice from the door Nayeon had walked out of a minute earlier. Jihyo stood up straight and nodded.

“Good luck, Park.” Nayeon said softly.

“You too, Nadong.” Jihyo smiled.

Just as the door shut closed behind one of Nayeon’s oldest friends, Chaeyoung came walking around the corner, a box of food in her hands and two bottles of water under her arm. It wasn’t lunch as such, just a half meal, as they would be having quite late lunch.

“I knew you could do it.” Chaeyoung chuckled when she reached a beaming Nayeon and sat down on one of the hallway benches for waiting students, leaning against the brick wall. “I mean I’m proud of you and all your hard work paying off, but as opposed to you, I never doubt your skills.”
“I know you don’t. That’s one of the reasons I love having you around.” Nayeon said, joining her girlfriend on the bench.

“To feed your ego?” Chaeyoung joked.

“Exactly.” Nayeon grinned, then noticed Chaeyoung fiddling with her necklace. “You nervous?”

“Just annoyed.” Chaeyoung let go of the necklace and grabbed the box of food which she had put down beside her. “I forgot the blanket.”

“We’ll just sit on the grass, it’s okay. It’s warm and dry.” Nayeon said calmly as Chaeyoung opened the box and handed Nayeon a plastic fork. Chaeyoung nodded and mumbled in a consenting tone. Then dug into the rice and hummed. Nayeon couldn’t help but look at her instead of eating.

By the time Jihyo came out from the examination room, Nayeon and Chaeyoung had almost finished eating. She didn’t join them immediately, merely walking over to stare out of the window down at the sunlit courtyard while she waited for her grade. Neither Chaeyoung nor Nayeon tried to talk to her, but merely kept an eye on her.

When she was called in again however, she did acknowledge them, sending them a smile that Nayeon immediately read as an extremely nervous one. Had she missed a note?

Jihyo’s expression was unreadable when she got back out, but she did join Chaeyoung and Nayeon on the bench instead of just walking away. Not that Nayeon necessarily read that as a good sign but rather that she was - as always - too good a person to just ignore her friends.

“How did it go?” Nayeon asked tentatively.

“I’m satisfied with the result.” Jihyo nodded.

“Is that code for A plus?” Chaeyoung chuckled.

Jihyo winced. It was barely a split-second and followed by a warm smile and wink. But Nayeon saw it. She just didn’t note on it. If Jihyo didn’t want to tell, then that was her business.

“Any plans for the rest of the day?” Nayeon asked, taking mercy on Jihyo. She would tell eventually - probably tonight when she had had time to let it all sink in. It wasn’t common knowledge, but of the two, Jihyo was the bigger perfectionist - believe it or not.

Jihyo rolled her eyes. “I have work tonight, we’re keeping the shop open at nights too at the moment, to accommodate the students.”

“You are the shop with the most student friendly prices by the STEM campus.”

“Exactly.” Jihyo groaned. “And it’s good money, we can see that on the sales already, but god, at what cost?”

“Wasn’t it your idea with the extended hours?” Nayeon asked with a frown.

“It was, but that was before I realized that it would entail actually serving coffee to overly stressed STEM students. I had one walk in yesterday in boxer-shorts, sunglasses and a fanny pack asking if
we served quadruple espresso shots.” Jihyo’s expression revealed a slight grin when she described the student.

“Interesting combo. Do you serve quadruple espresso shots?” Chaeyoung asked.

“We do now.” Jihyo shrugged and got up. “I have to go, but good luck with Momo! And the exam!”

“Thank you, good luck with the fanny pack man!” Chaeyoung hollered.

Jihyo’s laugh filled the hallway as she walked away, waving at them.

Nayeon and Chaeyoung stayed. Waited; Chaeyoung’s nerves only showing by the increasing hold on Nayeon’s hand until she was finally called in. But there had been no reason for nerves. Chaeyoung’s exam went off without a hitch. Although she didn’t have as wide a vocal range as Nayeon or Jihyo, she had picked songs perfect for her and it had scored her a good grade. And best of all - it was finally over. No more classes until September. Just her and Chaeyoung and hopefully Momo.

Hopefully.

…

The entire living room was a mess. Tzuyu was situated in one end, Dahyun in the other and what most looked an exploded library between them. Gen ed was probably the worst part of college and chemistry was Dahyun’s worst enemy. Numbers, yes, fine. History, also fine. Music and actually cool things, hell yeah. But chemistry? Who the hell had even invented Le Chatelier’s Principle anyways? Right, probably a guy named Le Chatelier. But honestly, fuck him. Or her. Or them. But with the misogyny surrounding science, probably him.

They had been studying since before dawn. Tzuyu had shown up at ten in the evening asking if she could sleep over, and Sana had taken pity on her immediately, pulling her inside before Dahyun could even comment. Not that Dahyun minded at all. She was more than happy to let Tzuyu stay, and it meant that they didn’t have to count transport into their study plans.

But chemical equilibriums? Those she did mind. It was just math. Somewhere deep down. Very… very deep down. It was supposed to make sense, but it didn’t. And just as she was about to try and make sense of the substance factoring for the fifth time, a key rustled in the front door and it opened to reveal Sana with take-out, sucking on a straw to win against the stubborn last droplets of what looked like mango juice at the bottom of a clear to-go cup.

Dahyun looked up at her from the floor, grinning sheepishly at the mess.

“You two gonna survive?” Sana asked, amusement in her voice as she rustled the cup, evaluating the contents.

“Not sure, honestly. It’s me or this equation.” Dahyun said. “And right now the equation is winning.”

“Tell it to stop, it’s not allowed to take my girl away.” Sana chuckled, walking over to stand behind
Dahyun, looking down at the problem.

“Will do.” Dahyun grinned, then turned to the paper, pointing sternly at it. “Hey, Le Chatelier? You need to let me win, Sana needs her girl alive.”

“Damn right.” Sana said, giving Dahyun’s shoulder an affectionate squeeze before walking away.

“Hey, Sana?” Dahyun turned her head. Sana stopped in her tracks. “How did the exam go?”

“Really well. Not perfect, but I’m happy.” Sana smiled. “Momo was perfect though, I think one of the examiners was tempted to propose to her.”

“I’m glad, you both deserve.” Dahyun said.

“Thank you, Momo sends her love and told me to lick your ear for her. I told her to go to hell.”

“Ew.” Dahyun snorted. “Tell her I love her too.”

“I will, but first I’m gonna shower. Don’t let the chemistry kill you.”

“I’ll try not to.” Dahyun promised and returned to Tzuyu and her work. Sana walked off, and Dahyun looked over at Tzuyu.

“What?”

“Does she actually lick your ear?” Tzuyu asked.

“No, it’s just her way of getting a reaction from Sana. They bicker like sisters.”

“Oh, good. It’s kind of gross.”

“What, you’ve never been seduced by the urge to lick someone’s ear?” Dahyun joked, her eyes on the chemistry equation once more.

“Never.” Tzuyu said dryly. “I don’t like the taste of earwax.”

Dahyun snorted. Then laughed. And then her elbow slipped from the edge of the table as she keeled over, her tired mind giving in to Tzuyu’s deadpan in a convulsing laughing fit, her face against her chemistry notes and a hand on her chest, trying to breathe through the laughter.

…

Every single worry about whether or not this date was a mistake, disappeared as Momo came running around the corner. And she really was running, seemingly under the impression that she was late. The high ponytail swung from side to side as she ran, the bangs bouncing slightly. She wasn’t overdressed, nor lazily so. In fact, there wasn’t really anything about her that wasn’t perfect. And honestly, Nayeon wasn’t late to enjoy the sight of the girl as she came to a halt in front of them, tucking down her blouse and correcting the strap of her bra that had fallen down over her shoulder.

“Hey,” Momo said breathlessly, her cheeks slightly pink and the hair visibly damp. “Am I late?”

They had agreed to meet around two in the afternoon, due to the fact that Momo’s practical exam
was at noon that day and she wanted to shower before, which fit well with Chaeyoung’s exam finishing around one.

“No, you’re perfect. On time. I mean- no, you’re not late.” Chaeyoung said, her cheeks pinking visibly. Nayeon gently nudged her. Momo just smiled shyly.

“How did the exam go?” Nayeon asked, noticing that Momo had worn a darker shade of lipstick than usual. It suited her.

“Good! We were fortunate, no big mistakes.” Momo said happily. “Yours?”

“Passed.” Nayeon said.

“What do you mean passed? You got an A.” Chaeyoung interjected.

“You did? That’s awesome!” Momo beamed.

Nayeon felt warmth creep up her neck at the two girls staring at her. “I just don’t want to brag.”

“Yes you do.” Chaeyoung snorted. “And you should. It was a hella hard song and you knocked it out of the park.”

“Fine, I was awesome.” Nayeon said finally.

“I don’t doubt it.” Momo smiled. “You worked so hard.”

Something moved inside of Nayeon at that comment, and she felt the urge to move closer to Momo. But she didn’t act on it. Instead, she looked through the window of the cafe they were standing outside of.

“Should we go in?”

“Oh, yes please, I’m starving.” Momo said, holding a hand to her stomach as if she had only just noticed this fact now. Which was an unlikely situation for Momo.

The cafe was small and artsy, and not one that Nayeon had ever even heard about. Momo had been the one to suggest it. Had said she had been here once with Sana and their old roomie, and Chaeyoung had quickly commented that she had always wanted to try it, so the choice had fallen on this place. Sure, they could’ve just taken Momo somewhere, but they didn’t want it to be them taking her out, but more evened out between the three of them. It felt most right this way.

“This place is so nice...” Chaeyoung said as they sat down around a small round table by the window; one of those seat-yourself places. It was corny and cute, full of paraphernalia, and with paint brushes and pencils instead of flowers on the table. Nayeon noticed a stack of notebooks and cardboard paper in the window sill and wondered if Momo had initially suggested this place because of Chaeyoung. She hoped it was the case.

As Nayeon had predicted, it wasn’t long until Chaeyoung had grabbed one of the notebooks and a pen from the jar in the middle of the table. With the shoulder length black hair tucked behind both ears and the tip of her tongue stuck between her teeth, Chaeyoung started doodling. It was hard to figure out if she was doing it because she already felt completely comfortable or if she was actually more nervous than she let on. Only the fact that she blinked a little more than usual made Nayeon suspect the latter.
For a few moments Nayeon allowed the silence to settle between them, but something made her tear her gaze from Chaeyoung. And looking up, she found that the thing that had made her look up, was Momo. Momo’s eyes on her. But it wasn’t awkward, and Nayeon didn’t blush. Didn’t feel caught. Just felt her own smile widen as Momo’s did, and then looked as Momo’s eyes fell on Chaeyoung. The smile faded to a soft one, and Momo’s eyes shone. She had definitely chosen this place for the sake of Chaeyoung.

“What are you doing?” Chaeyoung asked with an awkward chuckle, looking up at Momo.

Momo shrugged and nodded at the sketchbook, “Can I see?”

“No, it’s just- can I show you when I’m done?” Chaeyoung asked.

Momo nodded and her eyes found Nayeon’s, looking like she was about to say something. But in the next moment the waiter was there with menus, asking if he could help anything. Nayeon quickly waved him off.

Chaeyoung folded up her sketchbook and placed the menu on top of it, looking down the list of dishes, all non-asian cafe dishes. She twirled the pencil in her hand.

“I’m normally not much for sandwiches, but this place makes the most amazing chicken bacon sandwich.” Momo noted.

“What about the salmon one? Is it any good?” Nayeon asked, looking down at the menu.

“Don’t know, I only went here once with Tsu-chan and Sana.”

“Tsu-tan, is that the girl you and Sana lived with before?”

Momo nodded. “Tsukiko, yeah. She was the only other japanese girl in our year. In fact, she got the other full ride that Sana was competing for before we came here. But Sana’s parents agreed to help pay for it when she didn’t get it.”

“Wait, other full ride. Does that mean you’re here on a full ride?” Chaeyoung asked.

Momo nodded and grinned shyly.

“That’s really impressive.” Nayeon noted. “But Sana isn’t?”

“No. But in the end it didn’t matter who was here on a full ride and who wasn’t.” Momo shrugged. “Sana worked her way up to a talent scholarship and Tsu-tan broke under the pressure. She went home in February.”

“Were you good friends?” Nayeon asked.

“We all danced together for years back in Japan, but Tsu-tan was never a part of the family. Sana was, almost for as long as I can remember. Not even sure I had a life before Sana”

Momo’s entire body seemed to melt a little at the memory, and it made Nayeon’s heart flutter and a smile spread on her face.

For a moment Momo looked like she was going to elaborate, but then the waiter was back.
Dahyun sighed as she closed the door after Tzuyu.

“Did you and Los Ataliér have fun?” Sana asked, leaning against the wall by the small hallway in the other end of the room.

“Le Chatelier,” Dahyun corrected with a grin as she dragged her tired feet towards Sana. “and yes, I think I won the war of equilibrium chemistry, finally.”

“I’m proud.” Sana smiled, pushing herself away from the wall, rubbing at her arm. She must be sore from the exam. “You tired?”

Dahyun shrugged and hummed happily as Sana wrapped her arms around Dahyun’s neck. The air of her immediately filled Dahyun’s entire conscience.

“Are you going to study more now?” Sana asked, breathing in deeply, obvious from her face that she was swallowing a yawn.

Dahyun shook her head and wriggled an arm between Sana’s to feel her cheek. It was warm, even if it wasn’t red. “Not until we’re done with dinner, I need to rest my head. I mean I want to study more, or at least my overachieving brain does. But I promised I would take time to rest as well.”

“Sounds smart. Are you in the mood for a movie then?” Sana asked.

“More like ramen and chill.” Dahyun tried to keep a straight face.

This however proved hard as Sana giggled like no tomorrow. But Dahyun just dragged her by the hand to the couch, settling almost too comfortably on her lap in the couch, hands travelling up to rest on Sana’s shoulders.

“You didn’t offer me ramen first.” Sana noted, trying her best to pout and failing miserably.

“Chill and Ramen then? I’ll make it worth your while.” Dahyun shrugged and wiggled her eyebrows, adjusting on Sana’s thighs, a knee on either side of her. With a hand, she softly stroked across Sana’s warm cheek.

“And they wonder how you managed to get me to fall for you.” Sana clicked her tongue, her eyelids drooping slightly.

Dahyun shrugged, set on using her break time to make Sana smile. “You like tiny cheesy dimwits, apparently.”

“I like one tiny cheesy genius.” Sana corrected and angled her head, pressing a kiss Dahyun’s neck, Dahyun whining and moving her neck with a scrunch of the nose. It tickled.

“I thought you were asking for chill and ramen.” Sana pouted.

“It tickles.”

“Didn’t sound like it tickled when I gave you the hickey.” Sana said unashamed.
Dahyun felt her cheeks warm. “That was different.”

“Different how?”

“I-” Dahyun cleared her throat, not really sure she was ready to say out loud the feeling that had gone through her body at the time. Not that she had connected the dots at the time, but she definitely had by now.

“Oh.” Sana breathed. “You can tell me that, you know. If I need to- to not.”

“No, it’s okay, I don’t mind.” Dahyun said honestly. It wasn’t like this all or nothing thing, where they had to go all the way the moment something moved inside Dahyun. Because then honestly, she shouldn’t even be sitting like this in Sana’s lap.

“You sure?”

“Hundred.” Dahyun promised.

“So that means if I really want to touch your butt right now, I can?” Sana asked, a glint in her eyes.

Dahyun couldn’t help the nervous chuckle that slipped past her lips, but she nodded. “You can touch my butt if you want, yes. It’s not like you haven’t before.”

“I know that,” Sana said playfully before running her hands around Dahyun’s waist to the back of her shorts, sneaking into the back pockets of Dahyun’s shorts. “But I haven’t done this before.”

“I- true.” Dahyun said, heart in her throat as Sana squeezed. But she didn’t do more than that. Just rested her hands in the back pockets, and looked up at Dahyun. Dahyun tilted her head, brows furrowed. Tried to read the expression in Sana’s face.

“I’m so tired.” Sana just answered to Dahyun’s silent question. “The exam was really hard, and even if I’m happy with my grade, I always feel like I could’ve done more.”

Dahyun nodded. “It’s hard not to feel like that. But there’s no way back, and if you’re not happy with your work effort, that’s a matter for the next exam. Though I’m pretty sure that you did all you could. It wouldn’t be like you to half-ass it.”

“Mmh, no, I usually whole-ass it.” Sana said, giving Dahyun’s butt another squeeze.

“I’ve noticed.” Dahyun chuckled.

“I just think I always compare myself to Momo because she’s such a natural. I’m talented, I know that, but Momo’s…. Incomparable.”

“Yet you still compare.” Dahyun noted, stroking softly through Sana’s blonde hair. The roots barely showed. She had just gotten them done a few days ago.

“Why must you be so smart?” Sana asked with scrunch of the nose.

“Because someone has to make sure you know how amazing you are.” Dahyun noted.

“Aren’t you smooth today?” Sana chuckled, looking adoringly up at Dahyun.

“It’s just the truth. Momo is Momo and you’re you.” Dahyun removed a blonde hair from Sana’s shoulder.
“You’re right.”

“You’re allowed to not be fine with the grade though. Even if you can’t change it.”

“I’m good with the grade, it’s my effort I’m unhappy with. They obviously didn’t notice as many mistakes as I did.” Sana said. “But you’re right, I can’t change it, and it’s summer now, that was my last exam and now I get a whole two months off before I go back to school.”

“That’s a good way of looking at it.” Dahyun smiled. The hands in her back pockets squeezed gently again, and Dahyun took a deep breath.

“And I get to spend most of it with you.” Sana hummed.

“Well, you get to spend most of your time with me anyways, we’re kind of stuck on a lease together.” Dahyun said. “As long as you don’t mind being my roomie.”

“Do I currently look dissatisfied with my situation?” Sana asked in an amused voice, leaning in to kiss Dahyun’s jawline. Then her neck. Then further down her neck.

“Nope… n-not particularly unhappy, no.” Dahyun huffed.

“You’re right. In fact, I think I quite like it. Especially when you so willingly sit on my lap.” Sana mumbled against Dahyun’s skin. Then opened her mouth and sucked at the skin instead of kissing it.

Warmth spread in Dahyun’s body, not at all helped by one of Sana’s hands travelling from Dahyun’s back pocket, under her shirt and up her back, fingers scratching slightly at the skin.

“Remember the hickey rule.” Dahyun gasped as teeth scraped over her the skin on her neck.

“Mh, right. No hickey then.” Sana mumbled, looking innocently up at Dahyun. “Ramen then?”

“Ramen.” Dahyun agreed, slightly out of breath, feeling how Sana’s hand slid down her back, then tugged the shirt back down. “I’ll make the ramen, you find a movie.”

Sana fell asleep within ten minutes of the movie, but it didn’t matter.

Dahyun just watched her sleep, legs across Dahyun’s lap, the older girl snuggled under the pink and yellow blanket.

…

Thankfully it turned out that Nayeon had been right about not needing the blanket. The sun was warm and the grass dry in the little riverside park. While it had become increasingly obvious in the first half hour, that Chaeyoung was a lot more nervous than she had let on, she had gotten past it as soon as Momo started rambling about how good the chicken bacon sandwich was. And by the time they finished lunch, there were no nerves left with any of them, at least as far as Nayeon could see.

“Do you have anything you want to listen to?” Chaeyoung asked, laying on her stomach in the grass, going through the music on her phone, feet swinging in the air.
“Mh, something upbeat.” Momo suggested, leaning over to look down at the phone.

Nayeon sent them a shrug and gestured that they could decide, while she dug out the snacks and juice they had brought.

“Here.” Chaeyoung said, handing Momo the phone.

“Wait, you’re letting her choose? Really?” Nayeon turned to them halfway through opening a bag of chips.

“Are you insinuating something?” Chaeyoung asked dryly.

“No, I’m stating one hundred percent that you never let anyone choose. Jeongyeon, yes, but you’re so whipped for her it’s not even funny.” Nayeon noted.

“I’m not-”

“You are.” Nayeon interrupted steadfastly.

“Well, who knows, maybe I’m just whipped for Momo too.” Chaeyoung huffed, her cheeks pink.

“I don’t doubt for a second that you are, but what does that make me? Leftovers?”

“It makes you IU’s biggest fangirl and some of us like a little variation in our musical palette.” Chaeyoung teased.

Nayeon scrunched her nose and grumbled, but next thing grinned as a familiar song flowed from the loudspeakers on the bottom of Chaeyoung’s phone. Momo had put on IU for her. With a soft smile Nayeon nuded Chaeyoung and kissed her temple before laying down next to her, head on Momo’s thighs. And there was an immense joy bubbling in her from the realization that it didn’t feel wrong at all. It just felt natural. And Momo even shifted to better accommodate the angle at which Nayeon lay. Nayeon lifted her head and sent Momo a grin, receiving a boop on the nose in return.

“Can you sing this register?” Momo asked curiously.

“Oh yeah, she loves it.” Chaeyoung answered. “She’s hella good too, I always told her she should upload covers so IU might find them, but she never does.”

“It’d be so embarrassing!” Nayeon whined.

“Why? I once uploaded a dance choreo with Sana and it got us the invitation to tryout for the scholarship.” Momo said.

“Really?” Nayeon frowned. “What song?”

“It was a Beyoncé one. 7/11?”

“Oh, I love that one.” Chaeyoung looked up. She had been busy scanning the lawn, picking little lawn daisies from it. She was currently twisting the stem of a particularly big one. “Do you still remember the choreography?”

“Yeah, we made it up ourselves.” Momo grinned.

“If I play it will you show us?” Chaeyoung asked, reaching over to grab Momo’s hand, pulling it slightly towards herself and turning the palm down. Momo didn’t answer, a frown on her face as she watched how Chaeyoung evaluated her fingers, then put the little daisy ring on her 2nd finger.
“I-” Momo cleared her throat, studying the ring. Chaeyoung looked quite unfazed, grabbing the phone and finding the song Momo had mentioned before.

“You don’t have to.” Nayeon said, looking up at Momo from her lap.

“It’s- no, it’s okay. I want to. It’d be fun to try it again.” Momo said, her voice growing in confidence as she spoke. Then she nodded and ran her hand through Nayeon’s hair once before wriggling out from underneath the older girl and getting to her feet.

Nayeon’s hair stood on end where Momo had touched. But it was nothing compared to the excited bubbling in her heart and limbs as Momo’s shy expression turned professional, her entire body tuning into the music effortlessly. No, not effortlessly. It just looked like it, when you didn’t know her. But when you did, you saw the effort. All the years and years of effort that had led to the ease with which she now moved. And somehow, with each movement, Nayeon could see every single hour Momo had spent practicing, as if she gave all of it for this one performance. But she always did. Always gave everything she had, even if just for a moment like this.

Especially for a moment like this, Nayeon realized.

…

The smell of coffee and chocolate and freshly baked bread surged through Tzuyu as she stepped into the coffee shop. It was positively packed with people, mainly around Tzuyu’s age. STEM students, Tzuyu knew from what Jihyo had told her. At first glance it didn’t seem like there was any staff there, but next second Jihyo’s head popped up from behind the counter. Almost as if she had heard Tzuyu, her eyes found the younger girl immediately despite the crowd. There was confusion in her eyes, but she quickly averted her eyes and started helping customers. Tzuyu nodded to herself and clutched the paper tighter in her hand. Then joined the queue.

It took almost ten minutes for Tzuyu to reach the counter, and the entire time she could hear Jihyo helping the customers, even though she couldn’t always get a good look at her. Not that Tzuyu was even supposed to look. The first few minutes it seemed like Jihyo was alone in the nightmarish crowd, but she was soon joined by Minho. He had only worked there a few months, but from what Tzuyu knew, he had grown quite good after a little while. This was good, as one of the girls had recently quit as she was done with school. Maybe also because she had been salty that Jihyo had gotten the manager position despite not being the oldest employee, but Jihyo never really elaborated on it. Not that she ever would. She was too good for that.

“Hi.” Tzuyu said when it was finally her turn.

“Tzuyu…” Jihyo said, her voice revealing an unsaid you shouldn’t have come. And Tzuyu knew it was true. After her birthday, Tzuyu had been the one to remind Jihyo of their agreement, but three days of radio silence was all Tzuyu could take. And now she was here. Clutching the paper.

“Can I have a frappuccino with cookies and cream? To go?” Tzuyu asked.

“… Sure.” Jihyo said, grabbing a clear cup and a marker.

“Wait.” Tzuyu said. Felt her arm resist but then Jihyo frowned, her hand frozen, the tip of the marker
“What?”

“Here.” Tzuyu said, and with the most strength she had ever mustered, Tzuyu opened her palm and put the piece of paper on the counter in front of Jihyo.

For a moment, Jihyo just seemed more confused. Then there was a split second where it looked like she was about to cry. And then she looked up at Tzuyu, her eyes darting between the younger girl’s.

“I miss you, Jihyo. All the other things I can deal. But I miss my best friend.”

Jihyo looked at the paper.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure. We tried the other thing and neither of us managed that very well, and the past three days have been... I miss you.”

“I miss you too.” Jihyo said quietly. Then she swallowed hard and nodded. Grabbed the pen a little tighter and wrote.

Tzuyu sat in the overcrowded coffee shop for the next hour. Held onto the cup and looked at the name Jihyo had written.

Friend.

...

Mina paused the game. Put the controller down and looked at the door. She felt Jeongyeon’s eyes on her.

“Momo.” Mina said quietly, having heard the footsteps.

And right she was, as a key was inserted and the door unlocked. Jeongyeon put her controller down as well, getting up.

“Want tea?” Jeongyeon asked. Mina nodded, her eyes flicking up to meet Jeongyeon’s before they fell on Momo. She looked tired and warm, her cheeks and arms flushed as she closed the door behind her. Kicked off her shoes lazily. In the meantime Jeongyeon got up and walked around the couch.

“Hey.” Momo said heavily, walking over to the couch, taking Jeongyeon’s seat after having moved the controller out of the way.

“Did you have a good time?” Mina asked, jolting slightly as Momo leaned on her unexpectedly. But Mina let her. Wrapped an arm around her and patted her hair. Mina was never good at being the one to initiate physical contact, and always felt surprised whenever Momo did. Whenever anyone did. Even Jeongyeon. It was only when someone was hurt that her cautions gave way. Only when she couldn’t help herself. And even then she always doubted herself afterwards. But Momo just hummed
lazily and adjusted so she leaned even more into Mina. She never seemed to doubt herself, and Mina admired that about her.

“It was so much fun.” Momo murmured and fiddled with a little daisy ring on the 2nd finger. Obviously one of Chaeyoung’s creations, Mina recognized.

“That’s good.” Mina said quietly, but frowned as Momo sighed heavily. “You okay?”

“I just wish… I don’t know.” Momo shrugged.

“Wish what?” Mina asked as her fingers got stuck in Momo’s hair and she tried to untangle them without pulling at Momo’s hair.

“We didn’t agree on a new date. I think they think I felt awkward, at the end. It was fine all the way to the end. But then, I don’t know. And now I think they think I don’t want to go out again.”

“Why would they think that?”

“I didn’t kiss them.” Momo said shyly, fiddling with Mina’s hand distractedly.

“Did you want to?” Mina asked as casually as she could. It wasn’t really a subject she knew much about, when to do what on a date. Didn’t really know dating at all. She and Jeongyeon never dated as such. Not that Mina minded at all, she really preferred it like this. The few times she had been on dates it had always been awkward. She moved her hand from Momo’s hair to her back as Jeongyeon came back out carrying two mugs of tea in one hand and a large glass of water in the other.

“Drink.” Jeongyeon instructed softly and placed the glass on the little side table they used as a coffee table. Momo groaned and mumbled her distaste for water before freeing herself of Mina enough to grab the glass. Then slumped back against her. Jeongyeon settled on the armrest by Mina, handing her one of the mugs. The one with the shark wearing a bib and pacifier that Mina had brought from her place. It had been a birthday present from Dahyun.

“I think.” Momo said and took a gulp of water, grimacing at the taste. Mina still didn’t fathom how water could taste bad, but then again, nothing was normal about Momo. And Mina loved that about her. Momo took another gulp before speaking again. “I think… I think it would be fun to kiss them. Not like - I don’t mean fun like not serious… I mean I’d like.”

“How does that feel?” Jeongyeon asked curiously. “I mean wanting to kiss more than one person at a time?”

“I don’t know.” Momo pondered and drank more water. Mina mimicked her movements, sipping on her tea. “I just look at Nayeon and I want to kiss her. And then I look at Chaeyoungie, and I feel the same?”

“Then why didn’t you?” Mina asked.

“I don’t know.” Momo sighed, a whine in her voice. She emptied her glass and put it on the side table, leaning back into Mina, careful not to make her spill the tea. “I got overwhelmed and then it was just over - the date I mean. And now that I know I do want more, I think I scared them off because I didn’t kiss them. Not that I’m required to but there was a moment when I could’ve. Where it would’ve made sense, and I didn’t. Isn’t it normal to make a new date if you want to go out again?”

“Sometimes, I guess? Did you ask them?” Mina inquired. She felt Jeongyeon’s hand on her shoulder and smiled.
“No…” Momo admitted.

“I think you should be talking to them about this rather than us,” Jeongyeon said. “Not that I don’t want to talk about it with you, but they should know this. All of what you just told us.”

Momo nodded and mumbled something unintelligible. Then got up so fast Mina did spill her tea.

“Sorry, sorry!” Momo apologized quickly grabbed a napkin from the coffee table, putting it on Mina’s knees before hurriedly walking to the door and putting her shoes back on.

“Wait, where are you-” Mina asked but Jeongyeon nudged her into silence.

Momo was already gone again.

Jeongyeon put her cup down and moved around the couch to take back her seat. Mina was still drying the tea-stain on her shirt, but it was too big. In the end she gave up, put her cup beside Jeongyeon’s and got up.

“I’ll be right back, if you start the game-”

“I would never.”

“You have.”

“Once.”

“Enough that I don’t trust you.” Mina argued as she walked away.

“You’re gonna have to trust me if you move in.” Jeongyeon called loudly after her.

Mina just chuckled and disappeared into Jeongyeon’s room, pulling the wet shirt over her head. Then she opened the top drawer of Jeongyeon’s drawer. Purposely took her favorite of the shirts Jeongyeon used to sleep in. It had a three-panel cartoon of Calvin and Hobbes that, like Jeongyeon, you’d expect to be funny, but was actually just really sappy and cute. Then she took the wet shirt into the bathroom, filled the sink with water and put it in to let it soak. A yellow tea-stain never suited a white shirt. She reminded herself to put vinegar in it if the water didn’t take it on its own.

“If we ever break up, that shirt is gonna be the cause of a custody fight.” Jeongyeon chuckled as Mina settled back down beside her. Jeongyeon was already halfway through her tea.

“Then we never break up. I will stay with you just to keep this shirt.” Mina insisted, grabbing the controller. Jeongyeon put her cup down and grabbed her controller as well, scooting closer to Mina. “You know you don’t have to, right?”

“What?” Mina asked, pausing with her finger over the button to unpause.

“Move in. I know you said you would but it’s so early and-”

“It makes sense. Everything Momo said just… It makes sense.”

“I know, but it’s more than that. It wouldn’t just be like roommates, and you have to want to.” Jeongyeon said, obviously trying to be casual about it.

“I spend ninety percent of my time here anyway, I hate being in my apartment. It’s far away and I
could get rid of the car and I want to be here. With you.” Mina nudged Jeongyeon.

“Yeah?” Jeongyeon asked quietly.

“Yeah. But not right now.” Mina said determinately, but Jeongyeon looked completely confused, and Mina had to elaborate. “I just mean right now I’m gonna beat your ass at Mario Kart.”

“Oh.” Jeongyeon grinned. “Good luck.”

“Good luck to you. Oh, and I call dibs on Princess Peach after this race.” Mina grinned.

“Why!? I’m only really good as Peach and it’d be boring to play Peach against Daisy.” Jeongyeon complained as Mina unpaused the game.

“You can be Rosalina or Yoshi?” Mina suggested, turning Yoshi sharply around a turn to grab an extra bonus.

“Rosalina is too slow in acceleration, and playing Yoshi would be downright stupid, you know him by heart.” Jeongyeon argued and overtook Mina. Mina nudged her but Jeongyeon just nudged her back.

“Pick Baby Rosalina then.” Mina said, trying to focus on Jeongyeon’s car. “She’s almost like Peach and Daisy, just a little different in traction. Enough to make it interesting.”

“Mh. Fine.” Jeongyeon grumbled and cursed as Mina hit her Princess Peach car with a turtle shell.


“Stop throwing turtle shells at me then!” Jeongyeon whined.

“You’re such a sore loser. I don’t even know why I play with you.” Mina laughed as she won the race. Yoshi triumphantly showed on the screen as the winning racer.

“Simple; you love me, that’s why. Plus I’m the only one who doesn’t mind dealing with you when you get overly competitive.” Jeongyeon said.

“True and hey, I do not get overly competitive!”

“You so do. But it’s okay, I still love you.” Jeongyeon grinned, turning her head to kiss Mina’s cheek.

“Good.” Mina said firmly and started selecting a new course, her heart rate increasing as she stole a sideways glance at Jeongyeon.

She might never really get used to hearing her say that.

…

The sun threatened to disappear behind tall buildings, and Chaeyoung closed the notebook. She couldn’t focus. Couldn’t stop thinking. There had been a moment there, right? There was. But Momo hadn’t done anything. And Chaeyoung hadn’t either. And now… now all Chaeyoung could think about was- was, who the heck was hammering on her door? With a frown, Chaeyoung placed
the pen she was twirling beside the notebook and got up. Another knock. For a moment she let herself hope that it might be Momo, but then remembered that there hadn’t been a buzzer which meant it had to be one of the residents. Jeongyeon would’ve just let herself in.

But it was Momo. Momo, completely out of breath with wide eyes and flushed cheeks, leaning against the jamb of the door.

“Momo? Are you okay?” Chaeyoung frowned.

“Chae- … Chaeyoungie. I…I-” Momo heaved to steady her breath, putting a hand to her chest.

“Wait, Momo, breathe.” Chaeyoung said hurriedly and made way for Momo to step in. Momo did, but immediately leaned down, hands on her knees, the rosy hair falling in front of her face.

“I want-. I... God, why is it so warm outside?” Momo whined.

“Wait here, I’ll get you water.” Chaeyoung said quickly. Momo nodded, her hair waving along comically. Chaeyoung noticed that it wasn’t in a ponytail or a bun as it usually was when she ran. Because it was obvious that she had been running. But she hadn’t changed clothes either since this afternoon.

As Chaeyoung walked into the kitchen she knocked on the door to their bedroom where Nayeon was sitting, preparing for work. Nothing happened, and Chaeyoung guessed that she was listening to music while working. In the summer she usually tutored theatre students who were training for the college entrance exam. Chaeyoung knocked again, but nothing happened this time either, and finally Chaeyoung simply opened the door. The music from Nayeon’s earphones was loud enough to be clearly audible all the way across the room.

“Nayeon!” Chaeyoung called and Nayeon jolted. Turned around and pulled the earphones out.

“Momo. She’s here.”

Nayeon frowned then stopped the music and hurried out, past Chaeyoung and into the living room. Chaeyoung however went into the kitchen and grabbed a glass, filling it with water from the pitcher in the fridge.

When she got back out, Momo and Nayeon had moved further into the room than where Chaeyoung had left Momo; now standing by the table partly serving as a desk and partly as their dinner table. Momo was standing straight now, though still panting and tying her hair into a bun. Her bangs stuck to her forehead and the minute her hair was up she started pulling at the shirt to circulate some air to her front. Nayeon just watched. Wordlessly. Stood at a respectable distance, looking more than puzzled.

“Here.” Chaeyoung said with a nervous smile.

Momo took the glass and drank greedily, emptied the glass in no time. Something neither Chaeyoung or Nayeon had ever seen before nor would come to experience ever again.

“Thank you.” Momo said breathlessly, holding a hand to her heart again. Placed the empty glass on the dinner table. Then Momo looked from Chaeyoung to Nayeon and back again. Hesitated. Then spoke.

“I... I want to go out again.” Momo said insistently.
Chaeyoung’s heart leapt, settling in her throat uncomfortably and excitedly all at the same time. She looked around at Nayeon whose eyes were wide. She opened her mouth and closed it again.

“You do?” Nayeon finally said, her voice small.

“Yes.” Momo slowly regained control of her breathing, her gaze wavering slightly. “Well, I want to go out, period. I… I totally understand if-. I just. I’d like to try dating you. Both of you, I mean.”

Chaeyoung’s entire body felt light and she shivered. Almost too light, almost a little dizzy. As if her body was trying to react in too many ways at once. With a racing heart, she watched as Momo shifted her footing.

“I just. I think I made it seem like I didn’t have that good of a time, but I did. I really did. And I regretted it the moment I got home, that I didn’t tell you, I mean.” Momo stumbled on her words, clearly nervous. Chaeyoung reached out instinctively. Grabbed her hand and squeezed it. It seemed to relax her, but then she looked down at her hand.

“My ring fell off. When I ran here.” Momo murmured.

“I’ll make you a new one.” Chaeyoung promised, a sense of pride in the way Momo smiled shyly at her and nodded.

“I really had fun. I just want to go back there, and this time maybe manage to find one of those four leaf clovers for you, or maybe just not look for them in the first place but- but I had fun. I-”

“I had fun too.” Said Chaeyoung quietly, trying to catch Momo’s eyes. It wasn’t necessary to keep going. And she was definitely nervous, putting that much pressure on the detail of the fact that they had spent nearly ten minutes going through the surrounding lawn looking for four leaf clovers because Momo had wanted to. As if that was something bad. As if Chaeyoung hadn’t wanted more than anything to make Momo’s face light up when they found one. They just never did.

“I had fun too, Momo.” Nayeon said, breaking through Chaeyoung’s thoughts. Then she moved slightly behind Chaeyoung, wrapping her arms around her waist. It was like Nayeon knew what was about to happen and she still needed a little safety from it. And Chaeyoung was happy to provide that. To make it okay.

Momo moved closer, the angle of their hands changing, and then Momo moved hers, not away, but inside, her fingers fitting perfectly in the spaces between Chaeyoung’s. Then Nayeon’s lips brushed over the shell of the youngest’s ear. It was all so overwhelming. Momo was still coming closer, and Nayeon’s arms tightened around her shoulder.

“I… I would… like to-” Momo breathed as if she barely dared speak the words, her eyes on Nayeon. They flickered to Chaeyoung, and she felt herself nod, blood rushing in her ears. Nayeon’s arms held tighter around Chaeyoung’s waist. But Chaeyoung could also hear how Nayeon’s breath hitched and turned shallow. She definitely knew. Knew that it was her.

“Can I?” Momo asked quietly.

Chaeyoung felt how Nayeon nodded her okay, and adjusted naturally, not too much, but enough to make room for Momo.

Then Momo’s free hand found Nayeon’s cheek and the other held Chaeyoung’s tighter, almost as if asking for permission.

“It’s okay.” Chaeyoung breathed.
When her girlfriend’s lips met Momo’s it was as if something was threatening to burst inside Chaeyoung’s chest. But not in a bad way. More like a truth that had burst through the doors and swung them wide open, allowing for the breeze to fill the entire room. As if Chaeyoung had waited her entire life for this, for someone who could share her love for Nayeon. For someone who could make her feel so much. It was in the way Nayeon’s fingers dug into her waist and Momo’s fingers grabbed so tightly around Chaeyoung’s skin. Of how she was suddenly whole with them.

They had never made complete sense before, Nayeon and Chaeyoung. Not really. Everyone knew it. Everyone had called them that weird match. And they were. But they had also always been enough for each other. Had been happy and healthy. They were good for each other and fought for their love but they had never been easy and apparent.

Until now.

Chaeyoung saw how Nayeon’s lips moved under Momo’s and knew that everything they had fought for was for this one purpose. Because even if they had been enough, just the two of them. It wasn’t the best they could be. Momo made them the best. Completed them. And then Momo drew back and Nayeon leaned her head against Chaeyoung’s, a whimper escaping the eldest girl’s lips. Chaeyoung closed her eyes and covered Nayeon’s heartbeat against her back, hammering.

“Chaeyoungie?” Momo asked. Chaeyoung’s eyes opened, her entire body on fire. Momo was close.

Chaeyoung nodded instinctively, and her breath hitched as Momo kissed her. It was definitely intended as soft. Momo’s lips were so gentle and her thumb was running over Chaeyoung’s. But Chaeyoung was immediately overpowered by the sensation. Of being safe between the two girls yet finally, finally getting to be as close to Momo as she wanted, and the need got the better of her. With a whimper she deepened the kiss, untangling her hand from Momo’s to wrap it around her neck instead. She felt Nayeon steady her, and Chaeyoung felt like she was melting under their touches. Kissing Momo was nothing like kissing Nayeon. It wasn’t playful, but rather calm and welcoming and deep. Seemed to last forever.

When Momo finally drew back for air, Chaeyoung’s tears spilled over, her lip quivering.

“You’re okay.” Nayeon whispered reassuringly, kissing her wet cheek. Chaeyoung sniffled and nodded, drying her cheeks with the back of her hand. But then Momo’s hand was there instead, and her lips on Chaeyoung’s forehead, and the youngest could do nothing but grasp at Momo to get her closer.

“I-I don’t usually cry. When k-kissing.” Chaeyoung stammered apologetically. Looked up and found Momo’s eyes softly on her. Felt Nayeon’s lips on the shell of her ear and took a shivering breath.

“It’s alright.” Momo said quietly. “This… this is right.”
Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Rain poured onto the glistening asphalt and thunder rumbled in the far distance. Dahyun couldn’t run. Couldn’t escape. Couldn’t see in the darkness, the rain blurring the lights of the city. Then more lights. Headlights. Everything moved in slow motion, and she wanted to scream. Wanted to wave her hands and scream for the car to stop, to call attention to the girl in front of the car. To herself. If she could just get her voice to work. But every scream was useless, soundless. Too weak to overpower the pouring rain and the noise of the world around her.

“Dahyun.”

The voice was distant, like an echo or a memory.

Like a dream.

Dahyun woke with a kick of her leg. Then yelped, her pulse rushing in her ears and her heart racing. Blinking, Dahyun looked around, but nothing came into focus. It was still dark, though not as dark as the dream. Because now she knew that it had been that; a dream - a nightmare.

“Dahyun.”

Sana.

Quickly, Dahyun turned her face towards the sound, feeling how a lump settled in her throat, eyes itching with the urge to let out the pressure building inside her.

Sana.

Dahyun’s breathing hitched and she swallowed. Tried to focus on the somewhat clear outlines of Sana’s face.

“You’re okay.”

Sana’s voice was gentle, her blonde hair sprawled on the pillow and her eyes soft. But she didn’t touch Dahyun. Just lay with her palm open between them. And Dahyun took it. Grasped it with both her hands and tugged, still heaving for her breath.

“Nightmare?” Sana asked, scooting closer.

Dahyun nodded, trying to get her body to react, to let her shuffle into the safety of Sana’s arms like she wanted to. But she couldn’t move, her body too warm and shaky. But Sana read her right, moving closer until she could properly pull Dahyun into her arms. Until the scent of sleep and feel of soft skin filled Dahyun’s conscience, and she buried her head into Sana’s neck.
“What time is it?” Dahyun asked, her breath still shallow.

Wasn’t it the 19th today? It was. Which meant exam day. Which meant - god, if she had overslept if she-

“Hey, stop.” Sana hushed, obviously feeling Dahyun’s uncalm. “It’s only six thirty. You have an hour until the alarm sounds.”

Dahyun nodded and closed her eyes, trying to get control of her breathing again. Then a hand was on her cheek, stroking gently before moving under her chin, guiding her head up.

“Go back to sleep.” Sana muttered.

“Yeah...” Dahyun sighed, feeling Sana shift and then the sensation of soft lips against her forehead. She still felt warm and clammy, but Sana didn’t seem to notice, or at least didn’t mind.

“Sleep.” Sana said against Dahyun’s skin, a warm puff of air hitting Dahyun’s forehead. “You have to be rested for the exam.”

“Mm.” Dahyun mumbled, letting Sana adjust around her so she once again lay in the crook of Sana’s neck. Felt Sana adjust the covers and then felt a leg wedging between her own, tangling them together. The sensation of being so tightly entwined with Sana made Dahyun calm. For a while. And Dahyun really did try to sleep. But then Sana’s hands moved to stroke Dahyun’s back - probably with the intent to soothe the younger girl. But Dahyun’s senses were on high alert from the nightmare, and Sana’s strokes did nothing to calm her down. Normally it would have, but for some reason it was just waking Dahyun up even more.

“Sana...” Dahyun mumbled, her lips brushing against the skin of Sana’s neck. Just that, made a jolt surge through Dahyun’s stomach.

“Mm? I thought you were sleeping.” Sana’s voice was dazed, as if she herself was halfway asleep.

“I can’t.” Dahyun said quietly. Swallowed and squirmed slightly under Sana’s hands.

“Keep trying. Just close your eyes.” Sana breathed, her words slurring slightly.

Dahyun nodded and closed her eyes. Tried not to focus on how Sana’s hands habitually crawled under Dahyun’s shirt, settling on Dahyun’s back under the fabric. Which, honestly was absolutely impossible. Was she always this sensitive? No, it had to be the remnants of the nightmare that made her this alert. Made her aware that Sana’s hands rested higher than usual, and that the shirt had crawled up around front as well, leaving her stomach exposed. But Sana seemed almost fast asleep by now and her hands barely moved now. Just lazy movements of her fingertips over Dahyun’s spine told Dahyun that the older girl was still a tiny bit conscious.

But then Sana shifted. And next thing Dahyun knew, a sound left her throat before she could stop it, the sensation in her stomach overwhelming. Because with the shift of Sana’s leg it had moved up, just a tiny bit, but enough to press against Dahyun. Not a lot, but definitely enough. Worst of all, however, was that there was not a single doubt that Sana had heard the moan. The hitch in her breath and her frozen frame told Dahyun that much. And Dahyun didn’t dare to move. Just felt the pressure against her, not really sure what she wanted Sana to do. Well, it was quite obvious what her body wanted, but it was definitely not something Dahyun was used to. At least not to this level. But Sana didn’t move. In fact, she stayed motionless for so long that Dahyun almost broke the silence.

Yet, in the exact moment Dahyun opened her mouth, taking a deep breath in, Sana’s hand moved. And Dahyun’s breath stuck.
With one still on Dahyun’s back, Sana’s other hand moved down to Dahyun’s hip and up her side. Then stopped.

“Is this okay?” Sana asked quietly, no hint of sleep left in her voice.

Dahyun nodded into her neck, finally exhaling, though shakily. Couldn’t get her voice to sound, her skin on fire under Sana’s touch and her stomach curling. She still couldn’t get out of her head that Sana’s thigh was currently very much pressing against her. Except suddenly there was a different sensation that took center. Sana’s hand had proceeded the upwards travel until a thumb brushed against the side of Dahyun’s breast. Just that. Just that tiny touch was enough for Dahyun to grasp at Sana’s shirt, her breath unsteady.

“Dahyun.” Sana said, her voice throatier than usual. The sound and another gentle brush of Sana’s thumb made Dahyun shiver. She could feel how Sana pulled back, the lack of pressure between her legs making it a little easier to breathe. A little.

“Look at me?”

For a moment Dahyun considered not giving in to Sana’s request, to keep hiding in Sana’s neck. But she did as Sana wanted, drawing back enough for Sana to find her eyes. Found them dark and unfocused, travelling between Dahyun’s. Saw how Sana bit her lip and took a deep breath.

The hand moved again, and this time there was no doubt about what the feeling travelling through her body, was. Sana’s hand had moved inwards and her thumb had travelled over Dahyun’s nipple once, before cupping her entire breast softly under the shirt. Dahyun swallowed. She kept fighting the urge to close her eyes, but Sana’s gaze burned into her, trapping her there, even as she adjusted, retreating the arm she had under Dahyun’s torso. Even when she moved her hand down to press the palm against Dahyun’s ribs, to get her onto her back, she wouldn’t let Dahyun look away. As if she needed the constant confirmation that what she did was okay.

Then the bed dipped slightly as Sana moved, retreating her hand in the process. But next moment she was straddled across Dahyun and both hands were right at the hem of Dahyun’s shirt, and her eyes found Dahyun’s again.

“Can I take it off?” Sana’s voice was quiet but clear.

Dahyun nodded, not trusting her voice to speak for her. How they had gotten here, Dahyun didn’t really fully understand. But it didn’t matter. All that mattered was Sana’s hands tugging the shirt up, exposing Dahyun’s chest. How Dahyun naturally pushed herself off the pillow to let Sana pull the shirt off completely. How Dahyun laid back on the pillow and watched as Sana’s eyes travelled down her body, fingers curiously moving over the newly exposed skin. For a second her eyes seemed to waver, but the next she leaned down and caught Dahyun’s lips so fast it stole the air from Dahyun’s lungs. There was urgency in Sana’s lips as they moved and it was inebriating. It didn’t matter that she tasted slightly like sleep still, because the way her lips moved was making every other thought in Dahyun’s mind go far, far away. There was only Sana left. But a very different channel Sana than the white noise. Instead of feeling dizzy, Dahyun felt like she was on fire. Felt like someone was running too high a current through her veins. Wrapped her arms around Sana’s neck, grasping at her shirt to keep steady as Sana’s hand once more found Dahyun’s breast. As she hummed against Dahyun’s lips, the younger girl’s chest rose to meet Sana’s hand.

But the heat was clouding her mind, and she felt warmth pool when Sana’s teeth dug into her lip a little harder than usually, sucking at it before moving around to her ear. Dahyun couldn’t breathe. Could just grasp harder at Sana’s shirt, trying not to let out the sounds that were pressing against her chords.
“Dahyun.” Sana whispered, her voice throatier than usual. It made Dahyun shiver.

Dahyun couldn’t speak. If she tried, she would definitely moan again. So she settled for a whimper.

“Relax…” Sana said, as if she had sensed how Dahyun was about to implode underneath her.

Dahyun nodded and swallowed hard, trying to get her breathing under control. Tried not to let the warmth in her stomach take over. Even if it was really hard not to.

“Do you want to stop?” Sana asked, moving around to face Dahyun once again.

Dahyun shook her head, another whimper escaping her before she could stop it. Dahyun pressed her lips together, hard. If she could just stop making these sounds it’d be okay. It was so embarrassing.

Sana frowned, eyes darting down to Dahyun’s lips before she looked softly into Dahyun’s eyes. “You don’t have to hold back. You can be loud.”

Dahyun felt her cheeks burn, but still kept her mouth closed. She hadn’t ever tried. Had always swallowed her sounds in the dead of night, but now? Now it was almost impossible to hold back.

Sana tilted her head slightly, a smile playing around her lips. Then she moved around to Dahyun’s ear again, her fingers trailing over Dahyun’s ribs, scratching lightly at the skin.

“It’s okay, Dahyun. I like it.” Sana mumbled, her lips brushing over the shell of Dahyun’s ear.

“Y-yeah?” Dahyun gasped.

“Mm,” Sana hummed. “It’s hot.”

Dahyun nodded and closed her eyes, her heart trying to beat it’s way out of her chest, and she made fists around Sana’s shirt as Sana moved down to kiss at Dahyun’s pulse point. But she was gone too soon, and Dahyun whined. Sana merely chuckled and kissed Dahyun right on the lips. Next moment however, Sana’s hands moved, away from Dahyun’s body, and Dahyun felt how her hands were tugged away from around Sana’s shirt. Then Sana moved back, sitting on Dahyun’s thighs. With a single look at Dahyun, Sana gripped the hem of her own shirt, pulling it over her head with no hesitation, dropping it in the corner of the bed and running a hand through her hair. Maybe just to adjust it or maybe to give Dahyun a chance to look at her before she leaned down, finding Dahyun’s pulse point again. But she didn’t stay this time either. Instead she moved down, lips and tongue trailing down Dahyun’s neck. The bed shifted as Sana repositioned herself, and then a hand was back on Dahyun’s breast, flicking over the nipple. Maybe Dahyun was being slow - or maybe just too caught in the moment; but it still took her by surprise when Sana’s kisses trailed over her collarbone and down her chest, until her lips closed around the other nipple.

Dahyun moaned. Couldn’t help it. Tangled her fingers in the blonde hair and felt her back rise slightly to meet Sana’s lips and hand. Felt herself squirm, the heat in her stomach building. And Sana seemed to read her. Pressed her tongue flat against Dahyun’s nipple before letting it go, moving back up to kiss Dahyun while her hand moved from Dahyun’s breast, down her ribs and over her stomach. Sana drew back with a final peck, her eyes searching Dahyun’s before pulling at the waistband of her pyjama pants. Wrapping her arms around Sana’s neck, she nodded and tried to prepare herself, knowing it was no good. The second Sana’s fingers slipped into the shorts, running over her underwear, Dahyun’s body responded. Her hips bucked to meet Sana’s hand and she moaned against Sana’s neck. Her heart was gonna burst out of her chest. She knew it would.

But then Sana’s hand was gone and Dahyun felt her attempt to draw away. Confused, Dahyun released her and looked into her eyes, but they were cloudy and wavered. Sana bit her lip and
averted her gaze, staring at the wall above Dahyun. And with a shock, Dahyun realized that they were glazing over, her breath shallow.

Quickly Dahyun took her face between her hands, trying to catch her eyes, but Sana just shut them tight, teeth digging into her lip. “Hey. Look at me. It’s okay.”

Sana nodded, her lip trembling. Then she leaned down and buried her head in Dahyun’s neck, her body flush on top of Dahyun’s, breathing hard. Whatever was going on, Dahyun didn’t know. But she just wrapped her arms around Sana’s back and held her tight.

“I’m sorry.” Sana muttered. “I’m… I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Dahyun assured her, running her hands along Sana’s back calmly, soothing her. Felt the warmth wash away, the need to comfort Sana taking over.

Sana didn’t elaborate. Didn’t talk more. And Dahyun didn’t ask. Merely felt how Sana’s heart slowly steadied, and her skin cooled. How she pressed her lips to Dahyun’s neck and then nuzzled into it. How she sighed when Dahyun took her hand and tangled their fingers.

When the alarm started, Sana jolted against Dahyun and giggled into her neck.

…

“Let me just try one more time.” Mina said, sitting up straight on the kitchen chair. It was still early, but an hour of tossing and turning had made Mina give up on more sleep and go make breakfast. Jeongyeon had joined soon after, grumpily complaining that she couldn’t sleep without Mina. Mina had just giggled and called her cheesy, even if Mina knew it was the truth. Jeongyeon never slept well alone. Of course, soon she would never have to, even though she already rarely did.

“It’s not an exam, Mina, you don’t have to have a battle plan.” Jeongyeon said calmly, taking a bite of the banana pancakes she had made them for breakfast.

“I know, but I just can’t get the wording right.” Mina whined “How did you tell your family?”

Jeongyeon pursed her lips and frowned. “Not really sure. Seungyeon downright asked if I was in love with Jihyo at some point, I don’t really remember when.”

“Jihyo? Not Nayeon?”

“Nah, she always knew Nayeon and I are friends and nothing more, as opposed to others who don’t know us as well…” There was a hint of bitterness in Jeongyeon’s voice.

“Jiyeon?”

Jeongyeon grimaced and shrugged. “Yeah.”

“Sorry.”

“No, it’s okay, I’m way better off without her. I’m mostly just mad at myself that I didn’t leave her sooner. But anyways, no, Seungyeon asked and I told her no but asked if it’d be okay if it was a girl
I dated. And that was sort of it. I think for the rest of my family I was just not very subtle. Rainbows and gay posters and a lot of SNSD fangirling I think did the job."

“I remember you were so quiet about liking them in high school and when you finally told me how much you loved their music I was taken aback. It was always Nayeon who was so loud about it, but you really loved them.”

“Oh, don’t remind me.” Jeongyeon huffed.

“So you never really came out, in that proper ‘hey, I’m gay’ style?”

“Nah, I just took Jiyeon home one day and introduced her and really no-one was surprised.” Jeongyeon took another bite of pancake.

“That’d never work with my parents. I mean my dad might be cool but my mom is very traditional. She’s planned my wedding since I was three, and honestly I’d rather have my spouse in a dress than a suit.” Mina sighed.

“Hey, I happen to rock a suit, but yeah, I get what you mean. I’d rather wear a dress too.” Jeongyeon shrugged. And for a moment they both seemed just a little bit taken aback by where the conversation had gone, until Jeongyeon cleared her throat, cheeks slightly pink, took a gulp of water and gestured at Mina. “Okay, but you can practice coming out as much as you want, I’m here to listen.”

“R-right. Okay.” Mina said. Then put down her fork and took a deep breath. Tried to word it with the use of the wedding dress euphemism this time, and felt it become more and more natural with each repetition of the word, even if she still cringed a bit at the use of the word gay in this setting. Not that she ever minded using it in casual terms. But the thought of having to say it out loud to her parents made her stomach turn. But with the lease officially changed she would have to explain. Especially the part about moving into a two-bedroom apartment when both bedrooms already had occupants.

Tonight.

…”

It wasn’t as if Dahyun blamed Sana for anything. At all. But she did wish that the image of sitting bare-chested on Dahyun’s thighs would maybe not take front and center in Dahyun’s mind. It all made it incredibly distracting when trying to remember which chemical reaction followed Markovnikov’s rule and which didn’t.

She kept feeling warmth creep up her neck and prayed that no-one in the lecture hall could read minds. Not because she minded people knowing she had such thoughts. But because that image was one she didn’t feel like sharing. It was hers. Sana was all hers. And Dahyun was definitely going to fail if she didn’t get a grip. She bit down on the inside of her cheek hard and twirled the pen in her hand. Reread the question. Chose the most likely answer. Then looked at the next question. And the next. And an hour and twenty minutes later she stepped into the hallway with Tzuyu, feeling like she, if nothing else, had done the best she could with what she had. Had definitely passed, but what grade, she wasn’t sure of.

Just as she was about to text Sana to let her know she was on her way home, she picked a face from
the crowd and froze. Tried to decide whether to steer Tzuyu away or to just leave her behind and drag Jihyo away. But it was too late. Jihyo’s eyes found Dahyun’s in the crowd and then travelled to the right of her. To Tzuyu’s.

“We can leave.” Dahyun whispered.

“No, it’s fine.” Tzuyu said quietly.

“Sure? I mean after what you told me I thought-” Dahyun started, but Tzuyu just shook her head.

“We’re fine, it’s okay. Really.” Tzuyu moved closer as people walked around them, desperate to get away from the smell of nervous students and fail grades. The only one walking in the opposite direction was Jihyo. And she was close now. Of course Dahyun wanted to believe Tzuyu when she said it was fine, but there was just no way. Not when it had only been five days since she had broken down and told about what had been going on the past months.

Too soon, Jihyo was there, looking at them as if nothing was wrong. As if she wasn’t in love with the youngest, as if she wasn’t denying herself a love that they all knew Tzuyu was more than willing to give her. Just said “Hi.” like nothing was wrong.

And Tzuyu greeted her the same - like nothing was wrong. And then, before Dahyun could do anything, Jihyo’s arms were around Dahyun in a tight hug that warmed Dahyun’s heart even if she didn’t understand any part of the current situation. Especially didn’t understand how Tzuyu just let Jihyo hug her afterwards, the same closeness and warmth in their hug as in the hug Jihyo had just given Dahyun. And for a moment Dahyun considered the possibility that they were actually together now, an air of intimacy in the second longer it lasted. But then they drew apart and the awkward look on both their faces told a different story. Definitely not together. Which meant that Jihyo was still not giving Tzuyu space.

“How did it go?” Jihyo asked, clearing her throat. Looked at Tzuyu and then turned to Dahyun again.

Dahyun remained neutral. “Good, we think.”

“What are you doing here?” Tzuyu asked. “Didn’t your exams end yesterday?”

“Yeah, they did but I was in the area and I just- Well, I just wanted to say hi. And Jeongyeon called for a group night tonight, if you’re in? She got a new game and, well, if you want it might be fun.”

“Sorry, I have exams still.” Tzuyu said, and she really looked sorry.

“I’ll be there.” Dahyun quickly said. Knew that Momo and Sana were going to the movies and really, she could use a distraction from overanalyzing the situation this morning. And maybe it would even provide her with a chance to talk to Jihyo about Tzuyu.

“Good. Seven o’clock at Jeongyeon’s.” Jihyo said, then looked up at Tzuyu again. Opened her mouth but then shook her head a little. Looked back at Jihyo. “I’ll see you then, I have to run again. Glad your exams went well.”

“See you tonight.” Dahyun nodded. Smiled at her the best she could despite the hurt emitting from Jihyo. It was obvious that she had hoped that Tzuyu would join them. It was a valid excuse though, Tzuyu’s schedule would be packed dead until the 22nd. Jihyo stood for another second, her eyes on Tzuyu. Then turned and walked away the same way she had come.

Tzuyu shuddered beside Dahyun.
“You good?” Dahyun asked quietly.

“I’m good. We’re good.” Tzuyu said. Her cheeks were tinged and her eyes big.

“You keep saying that, but I’m really not sure I believe you.” Dahyun said with a frown.

“I got it under control. We’re friends, it’s okay.” Tzuyu insisted.

Dahyun was about to say something to argue further, but in the end decided not to. Closed her mouth and nodded.

She wouldn’t be able to talk sense into Tzuyu anyway.

Can’t talk sense to a broken heart in love.

...

“So not that much of a group night, huh?” Dahyun said, raising an eyebrow at Jeongyeon. They were sitting in a circle on the floor in front of the couch, just Jeongyeon, Nayeon, Jihyo and then Dahyun. A year ago Dahyun might’ve felt out of place with the three old friends and only her - without the safety of Chaeyoung or Mina, but now it wasn’t a problem. So much had gone down since November that she couldn’t imagine living without any of them - couldn’t imagine sharing her life with anyone else.

“It was short notice,” Jeongyeon shrugged as she opened the lid of her newest game, “I couldn’t really expect many people to show.”

“I’m surprised your own girlfriend ditched you, what happened?” Nayeon asked, the blue beads of her bracelet reflecting in the light as she ran a hand through her hair.

“I’m surprised you’re not an old single cat lady, what happened?” Jeongyeon retorted dryly.

“Where is she anyway?” Jihyo asked, interrupting Nayeon just as she opened her mouth to get back at Jeongyeon.

“Dinner with her parents.” Jeongyeon said.

“And you’re not invited?” Nayeon asked, all hints of malice gone from her voice.

“Not that kind of dinner. She’s not exactly… out.” Jeongyeon looked determinately at the couch behind Nayeon. “She’s gonna tell them tonight. That she’s… with me.”

“Oh.” Nayeon bit her lip. “So you’re nervous?”

“Obviously.” Jeongyeon said, looking through the rules to the game.

“So this was just an excuse to get drunk?” Nayeon asked as she leaned back in her chair.

“Pretty much.” Jeongyeon admitted. “But we can do it with soda if-”
“No, I’m here for the booze. Do you not know me at all?” Nayeon looked downright offended.

“I’m not, I’m on soda tonight.” Dahyun said. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to drink, but she probably shouldn’t considering her later plans.

“Okay, well, the rest of us then.” Jeongyeon shrugged. “Jihyo? Beer?”

“Sure.” Jihyo said. “So how do we assign characters in this?”

“Highest die chooses first, and so on.” Jeongyeon said, getting up to get beer and soda.

Jihyo rolled a five. Nayeon a three. Dahyun a one. When Jeongyeon got back she rolled a four.

“That one, she looks hella cool.” Jihyo grabbed a pile of cards belonging to Fiona the Volatile.

Jeongyeon chose the priestess. Deirdre. Nayeon made a comment about her being way too pretty for Jeongyeon and earned a flick on the forehead. Then Nayeon chose Gerki the Sneak, at which Jeongyeon snorted something about Nayeon being a weakling, asking her what she contributed to a relationship with two buff girlfriends. Then Jihyo changed places, sitting between them. Mainly because Nayeon looked like she was going to lunge at Jeongyeon.

Dahyun was left with Zot. Zot the wizard and his insane rabbit Pooky.

Each of the girls grabbed a mat and tokens, shuffling their cards while Jeongyeon handed out drinks. Started explaining the rules of each turn. Dahyun listened mostly, but also read the cards she had drawn. It was all about getting the characters to drink and not drink themselves. And about not getting beaten up. Basically a bar brawl. There were drinks that instructed how much damage or heal would come from them, and then there were action cards. Dahyun especially appreciated the cards where her wizard Zot simply blamed the rabbit and ignored the drink she was being handed.

They played for nearly two hours before Nayeon announced that she was beyond done with Jeongyeon’s excuse that her priestess was praying and therefore couldn’t drink. The eldest therefore set all her stakes on taking down Jeongyeon, those two being the only ones left in the game. Dahyun had gotten beaten out by Jihyo who in turn had gotten taken out through drinks courtesy of Nayeon. After this, Jihyo had shifted in her chair, wrapped her arms around Dahyun and leaned against her. And there she had sat for a good twenty minutes, not speaking, just fiddling with the fabric of Dahyun’s shirt.

And the two eldest were still bickering. Still trying to take each other down, with minimal luck. Maybe the cards just didn’t approve of them fighting.

“Come.” Dahyun mumbled and freed herself of Jihyo’s arms, taking the chance when Jeongyeon got particularly rowdy.

“Huh? Why?” Jihyo asked tiredly as Dahyun got up.

“Just come.” Dahyun said, reaching a hand out to Jihyo.

With a frown, Jihyo took Dahyun’s hand and followed her into the kitchen, Nayeon and Jeongyeon
laughing so hard at something Nayeon had did that failed horribly. They barely noticed the two youngest leaving the party.

“Dahyun?” Jihyo frowned, but Dahyun just sat down on Jeongyeon’s kitchen floor and patted the spot next to her. “Dahyun… Are you okay? Are you and-”

“Jihyo. Sit, please.” Dahyun insisted.

And she did.

“What is it?” Jihyo asked quietly.

“It’s you. It’s about you.” Dahyun sighed and found Jihyo’s eyes. Remembered the way Tzuyu shuddered against her, how she cried, when she told about the kiss. About the endless back and forth, and how hard it was to stay away. And this afternoon had been the last straw. The constant insisting from Tzuyu that she was alright. It might not be Dahyun’s place, but she had to do something. Couldn’t stop herself from butting in.

“What?” Jihyo asked when Dahyun didn’t elaborate. “What about me?”

Dahyun sighed. “You need to do something about Tzuyu.”

Jihyo’s eyes tried to waver, but she didn’t let Jihyo look away. Didn’t take mercy in the way Jihyo’s brows furrowed or the way her mouth fell open just a bit. How her cheeks tinged.

“She-”

“Jihyo, I know it’s hard. But you need to either do something about your feelings for her - yes, I know they’re there. Or you let her go. It’s breaking her. I know it’s hard to stay away, but if you can’t - and I seriously don’t understand why - but if you can’t be with her then you need to give her space to get over you. No matter what she says. You’re the one choosing not to be with her, it’s your burden to step back.”

Jihyo didn’t react, her entire frame frozen, only her eyes darting between Dahyun’s.

“You just can’t keep doing this to her. Not…” Dahyun bit the inside of her cheek. “Not like this.”

Jihyo’s eyes seemed to hood at the words, and then slowly, as if the weight of the world was on her shoulders, Jihyo nodded.

“I know.” Jihyo said quietly. Then she got up and walked out of the kitchen without another word.

Several times throughout the next hour, Dahyun tried to catch Jihyo’s eye, tried to get a sense of what was going on inside her, but Jihyo refused every approach. Wouldn’t touch the subject again. Didn’t even hug them goodbye before she left with Nayeon after an episode of some drama Nayeon was into and wanted to show Jeongyeon. Of course Jeongyeon had called it cringely heteronormative. But she watched anyway. Dahyun quietly agreed with Jeongyeon; while Nayeon had impeccable taste in girls, she had horrible taste in TV and movies.
“I’m really trying not to be rude here, but tonight of all nights, I can’t offer you to stay over.” Jeongyeon said as they did the dishes together when Jihyo and Nayeon were gone. Momo had come home half an hour earlier, and was now watching a movie on the couch, eating whatever snacks were leftover.

“I didn’t ask you to offer me.” Dahyun said with a frown.

“I know, but you’re stalling, and you were weird earlier when I asked about Sana.”

“I’m good. I just didn’t want to leave you with all the mess.” Dahyun shrugged.

Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

Dahyun cringed. “No. I am stalling.”

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to touch the subject of this morning, but more that she was afraid of the answer. Afraid that somewhere along the way, she had done something wrong. That it was Dahyun that had made Sana stop. That she was wrong.

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Not… as such.” Dahyun felt warmth settle in her cheeks. Focused on the plate she was drying.

“O-kay?” Jeongyeon frowned. “You know you can always talk to me if you need to, right?”

“I know. I think maybe I should just go home and face it.” Dahyun put the plate down and the dish towel beside it. Cleared her throat and distractedly tied her hair into a bun. Made to turn around, but Jeongyeon grabbed her arm.

“Dahyun-”

“Don’t worry, it’s not serious. I promise.” Dahyun said.

Jeongyeon just smiled at her and shook her head. “Goodnight then. Text when you’re home?”

“I will.”

Dahyun saluted her and bowed theatrically as she walked backwards out of the little kitchen and through the door to the living room. Walked over to the couch and wrapped her arms around Momo’s shoulders from behind.

“Hey, squishy cheeks.” Momo hummed, reaching up to poke Dahyun’s cheeks.

“Hey. Just wanted to say bye before leaving.” Dahyun hummed happily. “Did you have fun tonight?”

“Mm, a lot. I love musical movies.” Momo said lazily, a smile on her face, from what Dahyun could feel on her cheek.

“Sleep well, and cuddle Bearring for me.” Dahyun said, turning her head to kiss Momo’s cheek. The older girl gasped theatrically and grinned widely. Then she nodded and turned her head.

“Talk to Sana?”

Dahyun made to draw her arms away but Momo trapped them. Of course Momo knew. Of course Sana had told her.
“Dahyun. Just talk to her.”

Dahyun sighed. “Fine. I just don’t know what to say. I don’t even know what happened.”

“Which is why you ask her.” Momo said.

“You have to stop being such a smartass, it’s not good for my ego.” Dahyun groaned.

“Well, you have to learn to talk about sex.” Momo chuckled. “It’s that simple.”

“We did talk and she said she wasn’t ready and-” Dahyun complained.

“It’s not a one-time-talk. It’s something you talk about over and over. Even when you’re together.” Dahyun sighed. “I should’ve learned how to date before dating Sana.”

“Nah, you’re doing great.” Momo said quietly. “You just have to learn how to handle that she has the hots for you.”

“Hots for- Okay, bye.” Dahyun tugged her arms away again and this time Momo let her. Laughed and bid Dahyun farewell as she walked away, towards the door.

…

Dahyun had barely been gone five minutes when the door clicked, and Mina locked herself into the apartment.

One look was enough to tell Jeongyeon that something was wrong. Mina could barely meet Jeongyeon’s eyes before cringing and averting her eyes. Busied herself taking off her shoes and kneeling to put them neatly by the others. Jeongyeon let her.

Waited patiently as she sat staring at the shoes for a good half minute before getting to her feet and walking on tired feet towards the couch, flopping down between Momo and Jeongyeon. Didn’t speak. Just took Jeongyeon’s hand, twining their fingers before leaning into Momo’s side. Then she said something in Japanese, her eyes closing. Momo answered her and wrapped an arm around her. Jeongyeon didn’t ask what was going on, but caught Momo’s eyes. And Momo said something in Japanese to which Mina sighed and nodded.

“I chickened out.” Mina sighed.

“Oh.” Jeongyeon breathed. Shifted and closed her other hand over Mina’s. “Well, that’s okay.”

“It’s not.” There was a pained expression on Mina’s face and she opened her eyes to look at Jeongyeon. “I want them to know you. To know me. But I didn’t know how to tell them. I mean I knew how, you know I knew. But I froze. It was the hardest hours of my life. And they could definitely tell that something was up. Kept asking if I was okay, if I was ill. I should’ve said something. But I just said ‘I’m fine’ or ‘I’m tired’ every time.”

“It’s a big deal, it’s okay that you couldn’t do it tonight.” Jeongyeon reassured her.

Then Momo said something in Japanese, to which Mina shrugged and then nodded. Ran a hand over her face and sniffled once. Then said something in Japanese again and this time Momo chuckled.
Removed a hair from Mina’s shirt and answered her.

“If you guys are talking about the length of my roots I’m gonna kick both of you out.” Jeongyeon said.

Both of them chuckled.

“I just told her she could’ve done like me and yelled it while running away.” Momo said.

“That’s how you came out?”

“Yeah, to my dad. Sana and I were late to the plane and he was seeing us off in the airport, and the second I got past security, Sana dragged me along and I yelled back at him that I was into girls. Then Sana yelled the same, and I got a text asking how long we had been dating.” Momo sniggered.

“What did you text him back?” Mina asked with a grin on her face. Shuffled and shifted to lean into Jeongyeon instead. Leaned up and pressed a kiss to her jaw. As if reassuring Jeongyeon for something Jeongyeon needed no reassurance. She got it. There were things that were easier to say in your own language - your own words. And she found that with Momo.

“I texted him that we never had and never would. Then he called me and told me to reconsider, he’d like to have a daughter-in-law like Sana.” Momo smiled softly. Legit for a moment it looked like she would melt.

“I’ll try again next time.” Mina said, looking up at Jeongyeon. “For you.”

“Do it for yourself, not for me. You said it yourself, you want them to know who you are.” Jeongyeon said.

Mina nodded. “You’re right. And this,” Mina shook their twined hands slightly. “this is who I am.”

Jeongyeon hummed her approval and then chuckled as Mina kissed the back of her hand before leaning around to kiss her lips. It wasn’t deep. Just soft kisses, one after the next until Mina sighed and nuzzled into Jeongyeon’s neck, ignoring the sound of an incoming text on her phone.

She was asleep within five minutes, curled into Jeongyeon’s side.

…

Why Dahyun kept expecting Sana to be asleep when she got home, was a mystery, because she never was. She always waited for Dahyun. And tonight was no exception. Dahyun found her in a blanket in the kitchen with a cup of tea and her nose buried in her phone, eyes moving back and forth across the screen, head bopping to the sound of the music in her headphones. Dahyun gazed at her for a moment, leaning on the door jamb until Sana jolted and looked up, noticing her. Hurriedly she stopped the music and pulled out the headphones and Dahyun pushed herself from the jamb. Sat down opposite Sana.

“How was the movie?” Dahyun asked, not wanting to jump right into it.

“So good. Though Momo couldn’t stop dancing along, I think it annoyed the people behind us.”
Sana scrunched her nose and offered Dahyun the cup of tea.

Dahyun accepted and took a sip. It was only half full and lukewarm by now but the taste of honey and lemon was soothing.

“What about the game night?”

“I had a bunny.” Dahyun shrugged and handed the cup back to Sana.

“A bunny?” Sana giggled and tilted her head slightly.

“We played some role playing game Jeongyeon found at a flea market and my character was a wizard who had an insane rabbit named Pooky.”

“Oh. Well, was it a fun game?”

“Yeah, definitely. Nayeon and Jeongyeon got overly competitive, as always. In the end Nayeon got so desperate to beat her that she forgot about her own character.” Dahyun snorted.

“I’ll have to join next time.” Sana noted and emptied the cup of tea. “It sounds like a fun game.”

“It really was.” Dahyun nodded.

Dahyun hesitated. Let the silence settle between them. Gave Sana a chance to talk first, but she just looked into the cup.

“Sana?” Dahyun asked quietly.

Sana didn’t look up, but she reached halfway across the table and opened her palm. Looked at the hand. And Dahyun took it gently.

“What happened? This morning?” Dahyun asked, heart in her throat. Feared the answer.

“I got scared.” Sana whispered. “I really do want to but I just got scared.”

“Of what?”

“Liking you too much? It’s scary. I haven’t felt this way about anyone in years. And never this fast. I mean I know it’s intense because we live together and you never use your own bed - I checked this morning there’s an actual layer of dust on it - and it’s a lot.”

“We can step back?” Dahyun offered, but Sana just grabbed tighter around Dahyun’s hand and shook her head.

“It’s not that. It’s the opposite.” Sana finally looked up, a sheepish expression on her face. “It scares me that I keep wanting more. I keep wanting more steps forwards. As if we’re running so fast and I forget to check if the world around us is keeping up. But I want it like that.”

Dahyun bit down on her lip. Nodded. “So you want..”

“Well, yeah, or I wouldn’t have initiated it.” Sana said with a soft smile. “Maybe not tonight though, I’m so tired.”

“Yeah, I didn’t mean we had to.” Dahyun cleared her throat, but Sana just chuckled and got up, leaving the blanket on the chair.
“It’s late, goof. Are you ready to head to bed?”

Dahyun nodded. Let Sana pull her up and followed her.

For about ten seconds, Dahyun feared that it might get awkward now - with the mutual knowledge that at some point something would happen, but it didn’t get awkward at all. There was no change in their routine as they got ready for bed. No further distance between them. There was just that tranquility that Dahyun liked so much. And Sana still caught her eye in the mirror and grinned at her. Still giggled when Dahyun bumped her hip to make her scoot over. Still almost forgot to turn off the lights as they exited. Still dragged Dahyun by the hand into her bedroom. But when Dahyun made to turn to her side, eager to feel Sana’s body protectively curled around her, Sana tugged at her arm instead. With a frown and a suddenly racing heart Dahyun faced Sana. She had said *not tonight* right? So what was she doing? But Sana didn’t do anything. Just looked at her. Searched her entire face several times. Then smiled.

“I really like you.”

It was barely a whisper, and as she spoke, her eyes fluttered close, an expression of the utmost peace in her face. A nervous breathy giggle escaped Dahyun’s lips before she could stop it, but she merely shuffled closer, leaning her forehead against Sana’s. Let her hand rest on Sana’s hip and heard her hum happily.

“I really like you too.”

…

It had been months since Mina had last stepped into this particular coffee house, and it immediately made her shoulders tense up. The memories alone were enough to make her throat close up. If it wasn’t because Jihyo had asked her to come after closing, Mina wouldn’t have been here at all.

She had never really wanted to set foot in this place again.

Gnawing on her lip, Mina watched as Jihyo put down the coffee pot and walked over to her.

“Hey.” Jihyo said, her voice unsteady.

For a moment Mina wanted to run, but the next, Jihyo’s arms were around her, as welcoming as ever. Jihyo didn’t hurry the hug, but let Mina melt into her embrace. Tightened her arms around Mina and sighed into her shoulder. It was only when Mina pulled away that Jihyo drew back too.

“Thank you… For coming.” Jihyo said.

“Well, I mean, I still don’t know why you asked me here, but.”

“It’s…” Jihyo started, but then shook her head and walked around Mina. Locked the door. She had only kept it unlocked for Mina.
Mina didn’t move, but watched as Jihyo moved around her again and behind the counter. Didn’t talk. When she returned, she was carrying a bucket and a broom.

“Do you want help?” Mina broke the silence.

Jihyo shrugged and nodded. Then she took the dishcloth from the bucket and twisted it to get the excess water out. Threw it at Mina, who caught it with a surprised giggle. A hint of a smile played around Jihyo’s lips, and she walked back around the counter. Started doing the last dishes by hand, as the dishwasher was already rumbling away, probably stocked. There were so many customers around exam time, and Mina could only imagine how packed it was now with the extended hours.

Almost routinely Mina started brushing crumbs off the chairs and washing the tables, lifting the menus and putting them back, trying her best to ignore the silence. Did the same to the basket with sugar and sweet spices for the customers to use as they pleased. But eventually she had to say something. Because Jihyo had been washing the same cup for a while now, her knuckles white around the dish brush.

“Jihyo… Is there a reason you wanted to talk?” Mina asked quietly as she walked over to the next table. Of course there was. If it had been about Dahyun or Tzuyu or Nayeon they would’ve talked on the bench. But this place. This was about Mina. And she feared it. But there was no way out of it.

“Yeah. I need to know.” Jihyo said, staring into the sink.

“Know what?” Mina asked, wiping the next table. It was better than just looking at her.

“Well, several things. But most important. I… I need to know if you love her.” Jihyo finally placed the cup on the drying rack and took another one. Bigger.

“Who?” Mina asked, her stomach turning.

“Who do you think?” Jihyo asked, a bitter smile on her lips.

“Jeongyeon.” Mina said, forgetting the crumbs she was brushing into her hand. They fell to the floor.

“Do you love her?”

“Yes.” Mina nodded. Feared the worst. Had her suspicions been true? That Jihyo still held onto her feelings after all this time? Of course she had held on to them for four years before even telling Mina so there was a risk.

“Good.” Jihyo said mutely. “That’s good.”

Mina didn’t know what to say. Just lifted the basket with sugar and spices from this table and wiped underneath.

“Mina…” Jihyo said, and when Mina looked up, she found Jihyo’s eyes on her. “Don’t break her.”

“What do you-”

“There’s something incredible and soul baring about loving you.” Jihyo said, her voice almost too neutral. “It made me want to be vulnerable and expose all of myself to you. You held my entire heart in your hands and you didn’t even know it. I hope you know that you’re holding hers now.”

Mina frowned and waited, Jihyo taking several breaths, as if she wanted to elaborate.

“Don’t break her.” Jihyo muttered finally. “Don’t break her like you broke me.”
Mina’s stomach turned uncomfortably, warmth settling in her face and on her neck.

“I never meant to hurt you, Jihyo.” Mina said, the need to explain herself overpowering her. “I never meant to.”

Jihyo cringed. “You knew that you didn’t like me. You knew it and you kissed me anyway! And it wasn’t just a second, not just a little thing. It was minutes. Minutes after I had confessed to being in love with you. You took my heart and you… you just. Didn’t give a shit.”

It wasn’t fair. Jihyo wasn’t being fair. It hadn’t been just her. It took two people… But. But it had been Mina’s decision. Tears pricked in the corners of Mina’s eyes, and it made her mad that she got affected so fast.

“I thought I might like you.” Mina tried, her voice feeble. “I hoped it. I was a kid, Jihyo, I didn’t-”

“We were eighteen!” Jihyo snapped.

Then it happened. Just like it had happened months ago. The sound of a broken cup reverberating off the walls as it hit the hard stone floor behind the counter. It made Mina’s entire body shudder and the tears fell before she could stop them. They were eighteen again, and she hugged her stomach, nails digging into the skin where she knew the three characters showed under the shirt. A drunken decision a few days after their graduation party. For the sake of irony, she had thought as she walked into the tattoo shop with dead eyes and lifted up her shirt for a stranger to mark her with the one word she had been raised to fulfill, and never could.

Perfect.

“I’m sorry, Jihyo.” Mina felt like someone was strangling her. Hugged herself tighter. “I’m so sorry. If I had known the outcome I never would’ve-. If I could just have gotten a do-over. If I could’ve gone back, I never-”

“You can’t go back!” Jihyo was shouting by now, and her entire frame was shaking, but Mina didn’t dare come closer. There might as well have been a wall between them. Might as well have been half a world. “God, Mina, you always want to just try again, to do it better next time. But you don’t get it! Your actions have consequences here and now, and I can’t- you can’t keep breaking everything. You can never go back! And… I don’t know if… If I’m ever gonna be able to trust someone again. Because of you.”

She was going too far. She didn’t mean it. Jihyo didn’t mean it. There was something else here, and she was just taking it out on Mina, right? She was just letting out steam and this was just another crack. They had been so good since Mina had started working at the restaurant. It had almost felt like old days for a while. But now? Now this? This couldn’t be right. Jihyo couldn’t honestly be feeling like this, or what had they been the past years? Just a lie?

“You will.” Mina tried. Sniffled and wiped the tears from her cheeks. “You’re going to fall in love again, Jihyo, and you’re going to be happy with-”

“I’m already in love!” Jihyo’s voice broke, and she stepped in the broken pieces of the cup.

Mina stopped dead, staring at her oldest friend.

“I am in love and still, I can’t get past what you did. If I was just- If I was just stronger.” Jihyo muttered, then looked at Mina, a darkness in her eyes. “You know what I did when she kissed me?!”

“… No.”
“I pushed her away. I felt betrayed. I told her not like this and walked away. Made her think I don’t want to be with her but I do. I want her so much. But you. You broke me. And I just- I couldn’t do it. Because all that went through my mind was how you stopped kissing me. How you ran away and left me.” Jihyo’s eyes spilled over but she wiped her cheeks angrily. “I need to know why. I need to know what part of you thought it was okay to kiss me like that if you didn’t like me. Knowing that I loved you - knowing that I was desperately in love with you.”

Mina felt sick. Dug her fingers into her arms. “I don’t know. Like I said, I just- I hoped I might like you and god… Jihyo, I wanted to love you. I had never wanted anything more in my life than to love you the way you loved me. You were my best friend and I-I wanted to want you.”

“But you didn’t.” Jihyo spat.

Mina shook her head, silent tears still trickling down her cheeks. “No, Jihyo. I never did. I questioned time and time again if I might’ve liked you and just been scared. But after-”

“Jeongyeon.”

Mina nodded. “After Jeongyeon I knew that I never loved you like that.”

“I want to love Tzuyu like that.”

“Wait… Tzuyu?”

Jihyo didn’t confirm. Just stared, her gaze daring Mina to comment. “I want nothing more than to trust that she won’t ruin me, but I don’t think I could survive this one more time.”

Mina fiddled with the hem of her sleeve, and spoke to the floor, tears still falling helplessly. “She won’t break you.”

“How can you know?” Jihyo asked, her voice full of spite.

“She’s a much better person than I am.” Mina muttered, looking up to meet the darkness in Jihyo’s eyes. “She’s the only girl I know who holds more unconditional love in her heart than you do.”

“I really wish you had never kissed me.” Jihyo said, her voice empty. “That I had never told you. I wish I had never fallen for you. I-… There’s a part of me I wish we hadn’t ever been friends. That you had just stayed in Japan and never come into my life. Or at least that you had stayed away from Jeongyeon, because one thing is breaking me, but god, she’s the best person I know and I can’t help but think that you’re going to fuck it up and I can do nothing but look as it happens.”

It wasn’t fair, and Mina knew it. Knew that it was just something Jihyo said because she was hurt. Objectively she knew. But it still broke something in Mina and turned to dust. A part, she realized in that second, she would never get back. Maybe a part that had already been lost that night. But it didn’t matter. If it somehow helped Jihyo to get her thoughts out, then it was a small price to pay.

“I never meant to hurt you. I’m sorry. I hope you know I never did it to hurt you.” Was all Mina managed before her voice broke.

“I know…” Jihyo’s voice changed. Was no longer a hateful yell, but rather a terrified whimper. “But you did. And now… I’m just so afraid.”

Then she sank to the floor behind the counter.
As if instinct had taken over, Mina left the dish cloth on the table and hurried around the counter. Then she froze. The sight of a sobbing Jihyo, crumbled against the counter was almost too much. Then Mina saw the blood on a piece of the broken cup. Saw how Jihyo was clutching her hand, blood trickling down the inside of her arm and staining the white shirt.

Blind panic took over, and next thing she realized, Mina was on her knees on the floor in front of Jihyo, a clean cloth pressed into the palm of Jihyo’s hand, not even knowing if it was a deep cut or not. It could just be a tiny scratch. But she didn’t know what else to do. Just knew that she had to do something. And Jihyo let her, her face swollen, cheeks and jaw wet with tears, that neither of them probably knew the real cause of. And Mina knew that she looked exactly the same. Could feel the heat in her face and the oncoming headache already.

Even now, years after their graduation, Jihyo was still broken from Mina’s selfishness. Was so broken by Mina’s stupid decision that she couldn’t let herself love someone else. Broke over and over because of Mina, and all Mina could do was stop the bleeding. Couldn’t stop the pain.

The realization of just how much damage she had caused threatened to destroy Mina. She could barely breathe.

“Whatever happens, you’re going to survive it.” Mina whispered. It was all she could manage. “You’re going to survive it.”

Jihyo took a shaking breath. “I-I don’t know… if I’ll ever be able to take a chance.”

“But isn’t Tzuyu worth the chance?” Mina asked, softly lifting the cloth to judge the size of the wound. Not deep, just long.

“Of course she’s worth it.” Jihyo hissed. Closed her hand around the cloth to pull it away, but immediately winced.

With no hesitance, Mina took her hand and forced it open. Feared suddenly that there was porcelain in there. But another look showed that it was clean.

Angrily, Jihyo withdrew her hand and looked at Mina. “Of course she’s worth it!”

“Then love her.” Mina said desperately. “Take a chance on her. Be happy, despite me. Please.”

Selfishness was burying Mina as they sat there. Mina’s need for someone else to fix what she had broken in Jihyo. Mina’s need to be free of the guilt that was breaking her in two; the part that knew that Jihyo was out of line, and the part that believed her.

The memory of the broken cup rang in Mina’s ears and sent shivers down her spine.

She should’ve run the first time. Should’ve left them all alone when she had the chance. Yet the moment Jihyo called her after that night - Mina answered. She hadn’t been able to leave Jihyo alone. Hadn’t been strong enough to run away. Had let Jihyo pull her back in. Had let her defend Mina to Jeongyeon and Nayeon when they wanted to freeze out Mina. Had let her drag Mina along in Jihyo’s life, into a group of friends and made each and every one of them vital for Mina’s existence. And Jihyo had done it for Mina’s sake. Because Mina was alone without them.

This - trying to fix Jihyo, to make it better; this, Mina was doing for herself. For the peace of her own heart. Holding on for her own good. And Jihyo would be so much better off without Mina. That much Mina knew by now.

That loving Mina was would just lead to heartbreak.
“I want to try. I just don’t know if I’m brave enough.” Jihyo’s voice broke the silence.

“Of course you are.” Mina whispered automatically.

“What if it’s too late? What if I already pushed her too far away?”

“You never push anyone away. Even if they deserve it. You hold—... hold on.” Mina’s voice gave in.

For a moment Jihyo just looked at her, eyes red and unreadable. Then she got up, clutching the cloth in her hand. Looked down at Mina, a mercilessness in her voice as she spoke.

“When you break her, we’re over.”

Then she was gone. Had left her own store and Mina in it. And there was nothing more protecting Mina from the world. No warmth. No safety. No Jihyo.

There was just the sound of her steps as she walked away.

For the longest minute of Mina’s life, she sat on the floor of the coffee shop. Then, almost in a trance, she took the pieces of the cup one by one, into her palm. Got to her feet and tried opening the door to the bin with her foot. But in the end she poured all the pieces into one hand to open the door properly. Next moment the pieces fell to the floor once more. Broke into even smaller pieces as Mina winced. A piece had pierced her palm, right by the thumb, and a tiny piece of porcelain sat in the wound. With pain jolting thought her, Mina took the piece by the nails and pulled it out. Let it fall into the sink.

And looking down at the blood running across her palm, Mina made a choice.

Swore that she would never again cause this much pain. Even if it cost her everything she had. That after today, she wouldn’t break a heart ever again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed it! Feel free to leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using #TWICEroomies on twitter.
Chapter Summary

She stays

Chapter Notes

I finally managed to finish this chapter, even though it took way too long, and for the delay, I apologize. But it's here now and I'm so grateful for all of you still sticking with the story.

Thank you for waiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

People always said that Jihyo was one of the good ones. Had warm arms and knowing eyes. Had space of heart for everyone and never stepped off the road for her own benefit.

And they were all wrong.

She tried, always tried so hard, to be positive and have patience for the world around her. But every once in a while something would get under her skin. She just never let anyone know. Not until it was too late and it was eating her up and there was nothing left but action. And it wasn’t like Jihyo had meant to go off like that. She had just wanted to make sure that Mina was serious about Jeongyeon - that her feelings were genuine. Had called her there to admit that the blessing she had given hadn’t been heartfelt, but that it was now. That she was ready now to accept the reality that they had found each other. Because before she could be ready to be with Tzuyu she knew that she had to look Mina in the eyes and forgive her completely. Yet the only thing she felt when she found Mina’s arms, was fear. Mina’s fear of what Jihyo would do. Her own fear of what Mina would.

“You’re wallowing.”

Nayeon’s voice pulled Jihyo from her thoughts and she looked up. Realized the coffee had gone cold in her hands and put the cup down on the kitchen table.

“I’m fine.” Jihyo sighed, running a hand through her hair. Maybe she ought to cut it.

“Bullshit.” Nayeon said dryly. “You’re not okay, or you wouldn’t have come over just to clamp up. There’s something you want to tell me but aren’t.”

“Nayeon.” Jihyo tried. “Please.”

“Is it Tzuyu?” Nayeon asked.

Jihyo’s eyes snapped up to meet Nayeon’s, her heart in her throat. She couldn’t speak. Not because
Nayeon had somewhere along the way quite obviously deduced Jihyo’s feelings for the youngest. It was the fact that even if it wasn’t about Tzuyu as such, it was somehow all about her. Because it was the bitterness over her own fear, that had made her say all those horrible things to Mina. The confrontation with the risk of actually losing Tzuyu over her own cowardice, that had driven the fear. And now she was here, and she couldn’t get herself to say it. Couldn’t get herself to admit just how royally she had screwed up.

So Jihyo just nodded. Let Nayeon come to her own conclusions.

Nayeon’s eyes narrowed for a second, then softened. And a hand found Jihyo’s. It hurt, the wound still fresh under the band-aid hiding it. Still, the feeling made something click inside Jihyo. Something that made her talk before she properly thought it through.

“I love her, Nayeon.” Jihyo whispered. “I love her and I fucked up.”

*When you break her we’re over*. God, she had really said it, hadn’t she? And to Mina of all people. Mina who always put so much on herself, who never allowed mistakes. Mina whom Jihyo had been drawn to because her perfectionism was so relatable. Because Jihyo understood just how scared she was of the world - because of its unpredictability. Because you never knew if the choice you made was right. And Jihyo had wanted to be her faith.

“What did you do?” Nayeon asked, draggin Jihyo back to reality.

Jihyo pressed her lips together.


“I can’t say.” Jihyo croaked.

“Because it’ll put me in the middle of something?” Nayeon deduced.

Jihyo swallowed. Closed her eyes and felt Nayeon’s hands safely cover her own. “I can’t tell you.”

“I know. You don’t want me to stand on your side in this. You want to live with what you did, but you seem to be under the impression that I’ll let you off the hook for whatever it is you did.”

Jihyo looked down at their hands. “I’m sorry. Not this time.”

“Just.. just give me something, because I know this has something to do with Jeongyeon or you-” Nayeon stopped dead and stared at Jihyo, a pained expression in her face. “Jihyo, no. Please tell me you didn’t.”

Jihyo pulled her hands back before Nayeon could stop her. Got to her feet, tears pressing at the corners of her eyes. “I have to go.”

“Jihyo.” Nayeon got up as well, but she wasn’t fast enough. Jihyo was already gone from the kitchen, only saw the movement. Heard the footsteps, but knew already that Nayeon would never physically stop her. But Jihyo had to get out. She had already said too much. She never meant to let her know this much. Had just slipped up like she had last night.

*There’s a part of me I wish we hadn’t ever been friends.*

There wasn’t a single word that night that Jihyo didn’t regret. But it was a long way from regret to redemption, and she didn’t have a clue how to take the first step. So instead she did the only thing she knew how. Walked away. Walked out of Nayeon’s apartment. Waited for Jeongyeon to come
flying at her throat like she deserved. Waited for the world to claim her for her choices.

For her words.

For her fear.

…

Dahyun blinked. A star blinked back. Then Dahyun smiled and the star seemed to shine a little brighter. There had always been something about looking up at the sky that made everything else seem a little less important. As if the infinity of the universe demanded so much of her that it was impossible to see the same relevance in whatever was going on in her own life. Even when it was fear.

The cup was still hot in Dahyun’s hands as she sat on the steps in front of her buildings. There was only the cars, the streetlights and the stars. But Dahyun wished for only stars. Stars and sun. Wished for the night to end and doubt to go with it.

Next second Dahyun jolted, as the door behind her opened.

“Can I sit?” Sana asked, standing in the door with a mug in her hands and a pair of Dahyun’s red fuzzy slippers on her feet. The heel of the shoe stuck out a bit at the end. Sana did have quite tiny feet, but she looked comfy anyhow. And Dahyun pondered for a second about the irony of Sana walking in Dahyun’s shoes, but the next, there was another thought that had occurred to her. The thought about whether Sana had just noticed that she was gone or if she had heard Dahyun’s thoughts calling out for her; for the safety she provided.

“Please.” Dahyun nodded and made room for Sana beside her.

With the smallest breathy giggle Sana changed the mood, and Dahyun closed her eyes. Leaned against Sana and rested her head on the older girl’s shoulder, finally letting out the shivering sigh that had been building all night. A star glinted.

“I’m afraid.” Dahyun breathed.

“Mm, I had a feeling.”

Dahyun took a sip of tea. Felt how it warmed down her throat. Sana mirrored her.

“What if I’m not better? What if- What if you’re the one who fixed me?”

Sana frowned. “Would that be wrong?”

“Yeah.” Dahyun nodded. Looked into the cup. “Because then I’ll break when you leave.”

A soft hum made Dahyun look up at Sana. Made her meet the stars in Sana’s eyes, an expression of such unmasked adoration that it made everything else disappear. Even her fear.

“You won’t break, Dahyun.” Sana said, her voice sweet and melodic.
“How can you know? I never did what Chaeyoung asked. I never did what Jihyo said. I didn’t get better first. Before-”

“Before what?” Sana frowned, and Dahyun leaned on her shoulder again.

Dahyun felt warmth creep up her neck. Looked back into her cup. Drank slowly before she spoke.

“I promised Jihyo I’d get better before doing something about my feelings for you. I didn’t want to drag you into a mess.”

“That’s honorable.” Sana said quietly.

“But I didn’t do it. I didn’t get better first. I just let you hold me. Well, I asked you to, and then you did. I let you carry me.”

“That’s because I wanted to.” Sana’s said. “I knew what I exposed myself to, by taking you in. But you’re wrong. I didn’t carry you. I just let you lean.”

Dahyun smiled into her tea. Held the cup with one hand. Offered the other to Sana. Felt Sana’s fingertips against her palm and then her fingers fitting effortlessly in the spaces between Dahyun’s.

“I know you’re scared. You can’t know if you can do this, until you have to. But if it’s worth anything, I think you can.” Sana said and took a sip of tea.

“I hope you’re right.” Dahyun sighed. Felt Sana’s thumb over her skin. Over her scar. “And anyways, a week is nothing. I don’t even know why I’m so scared. It’s normal to be apart, right? Just because we’re dating and everything it’s still more normal to be apart a lot, right?”

“You know, for someone who prides herself on being an A-plus weirdo, you certainly do care much about what’s normal.” Sana noted, amusement in her voice.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you could maybe try to stop worrying if it’s okay to feel how you do, and just feel it? People don’t work the same way; don’t run at the same pace. And honestly, nothing about us is normal anyways.”

“Lots of people fall for their roommate.” Dahyun noted.

“Not a lot of people spend weeks in said roommate’s bed beforehand.” Sana said neutrally.

“... True.” Dahyun cleared her throat.

“It’s okay if you have a hard time, and I don’t mind that you lean on me. Okay?”

“I just want you to have fun when you’re home.”

“I will. Momo’s sister is taking us to Universal Studios if she can get someone to cover for her shift.”

“I’m gonna ditch school and go with you.” Dahyun grumbled, knowing she could never.

“Oh, please do.” Sana played along.

They both knew there was no way, but it was nice to dream. But some day, hopefully for Christmas, Dahyun would get to go home with Sana. Which reminded Dahyun, that she had yet to tell her own mom about the new constant in her life. But that was a matter for when Sana got back. When
Dahyun’s mind wasn’t constantly trying to tell her that a week was forever and that she would never do without Sana. That she would fail the moment she was without the safety of the older girl. Still, she couldn’t help but hold on to Sana’s hand a little tighter, and she let herself float away in the sound of Sana’s low humming and the feeling of her lips in Dahyun’s hair. And for now, she let Sana calm her.

There had always been something about looking up at the sky that made everything else seem a little less important. But there was something about the way Sana’s thumb stroked over her skin that made Dahyun feel a lot more significant.

“I wish I could see the stars from here.” Sana whispered.

“But you can see them?” Dahyun frowned.

“Only the brightest ones.”

9:19 AM Tzuyu: Morning
9:19 AM Jihyo: Morning, did you sleep well?
9:20 AM Tzuyu: Yeah, summer is good for me
9:21 AM Jihyo: And you didn’t take those extra shifts?
9:21 AM Tzuyu: You told me not to, so no.
9:21 AM Tzuyu: Do you want company today?
9:23 AM Jihyo: Today isn’t good, I’m busy
9:23 AM Tzuyu: I thought today was laundry day?
9:24 AM Jihyo: I have other plans.
9:24 AM Tzuyu: Plans?
9:25 AM Jihyo: Just stuff
9:25 AM Tzuyu: Oh, well have fun then.

9:33 AM Jihyo: If I’m not busy but also not good at balancing the whole friendship thing, are you gonna get mad at me?
9:33 AM Tzuyu: Depends on whether you’ll let me help with laundry.
Jihyo sighed. Let the phone fall onto the bed and groaned. Why couldn’t she just have kept to her story? Why couldn’t she just have kept it formal like she ought to. Just because Tzuyu gave in didn’t mean Jihyo should let her. Just because they were friends didn’t mean Jihyo had any right to lean into the friendship Tzuyu offered. But it was all she could get herself to accept of the younger girl, even if she offered much, much more. But there was no going back now. She would just have to keep it friendly.

*When you break her, we’re over.*

What right did Jihyo have to say that, when they had been nothing but loving with each other. When it was *she* who was breaking people. All the time.

…

The cool night was replaced by a warm day. And warm was probably the rudest understatement of the century. And fate, or god or whomever decided the not-so-funny coincidences of this world, made the air conditioner break two hours into Dahyun’s eleven hour shift. As if it wasn’t bad enough that Taeyang was still out and no-one said a word about why. As if the shift wouldn’t have been hard enough just because the place was packed with happy-go-lucky students celebrating the arrival of summer. No, the kitchen really had to have the temperature of Satan’s butt hole.

Four hours into it, Dahyun felt like she might just faint from the heat. Knew that the warmth was visible on her uniform and her skin, sweat piling on her forehead every time she opened the door to the kitchen, met with a wall of heat and the smell of fried meat. It really was enough to make you consider quitting food and your job and possibly life, all at once.

“Dahyun!” Joohyun called from the kitchen. Dizzily, Dahyun turned to look at her, blinking her into focus. Then Dahyun saw the glass of water in her hand, held out to Dahyun.

Dahyun whimpered thankfully, hurrying over to the line.

“You looked like you needed it.” Joohyun said her soft voice a complete contrast to the stern expression on her face.

“You’re a saint.” Dahyun sighed as she took the cool glass from Joohyun. It was wet with condensation and Dahyun almost felt like crying at the relief. Then, with long gulps she emptied the glass and looked at Joohyun again. “Thank you… so much.”

Joohyun just nodded. “Tell Jeongyeon to come get water too, okay? She seems tired.”

“I got you, Kim.” Joohyun winked at her before turning around. And the next second, the hot kitchen was filled with the sound of Joohyun’s voice booming orders and calling for the staff to remember to stay hydrated. Somehow, she managed to care for her staff and manage the kitchen. Not that they weren’t under pressure with Taeyang’s absence and Yang-nim’s completely ignoring the fact that they were a man short, but Joohyun had stepped up day after day, and by now she ran the kitchen as well as her teacher.

“Dahyun.” Joohyun’s voice pulled her back to the kitchen, gesturing at the plates now ready on the line.

“Right, sorry.” Dahyun shook her head and blinked her contacts into focus. Had she remembered to change them this weekend? Probably not. As she took the dishes, Dahyun felt her hand strain prematurely compared to how long it usually took. An unwelcome reminder of the days to come. Or rather, the nights to come.

“There we go.” Dahyun forced a smile as she placed the dishes in front of her guests, not even having to ask who had ordered what. She knew. The pride in that feat made the smile a little more genuine. It was really just going to be one of those shifts, huh?

“And if there is anything feel free to call out for me or ask another waiter. Again, my name is Dahyun and I hope you enjoy your meal.”

The party nodded and smiled at her, and she turned on her heel, trying to ignore the increasing dizziness. Reminded herself to grab a power-bar later. Even if she had a dinner break, she rarely used it and especially tonight there probably wouldn’t be time.

They managed the shift somewhat, despite being understaffed. Honestly, the kitchen ended up not being Dahyun’s biggest concern. Ever since Joohyun had mentioned that Jeongyeon looked tired, Dahyun had noticed it too. Noticed that she had worn vans instead of sneakers to work, and noticed how her feet started giving way for her exhaustion. It was the last shift before she was going home to her parents, and she really looked like she needed it. And as the last of the dining guests flittered out, Dahyun even caught Jeongyeon sneaking into the changing room, dropping down on the bench and kicking off a shoe. With a wince she examined a blister, and then looked up at Dahyun.

“I’ll be right out.”

“I got you, take ten minutes, go outside and get some air.”

“You sure?” Jeongyeon asked, a her voice cracking as she spoke.

“Hundred, go.”

Jeongyeon nodded and thanked her before limping over to the door, opening it and sighing at the fresh breeze, even if the night was still warm. A few seconds was all Dahyun allowed herself to look at her friend, and then she turned on her heel and shut the door between the kitchen and the changing room. Walked back through the stuffed kitchen, noticing Joohyun’s worried gaze. She had let most of the staff go home, so now it was only her, chef Kang and one of the kitchen boys left to clean and serve the last desserts.

“She good?” Joohyun asked.
“She’ll be fine.” Dahyun nodded.

“Take Seungmin, he’ll help clean the tables.” Joohyun nodded in the direction of the kitchen boy, busy with the oven. He turned with a confused expression.

“Go with Dahyun and help her with whatever she needs.”

“Yes ma’am.” Seungmin bowed to her and followed Dahyun back out into the restaurant.

It was that turning point of the night where no-one really knew if they’d get packed with drinking customers or if they’d be kind enough to stay home. But it was the end of the month and people usually came to drink away their sorrows. Or the last money on the bottom of their account. But most likely the money they didn’t have. It varied.

When Jeongyeon returned ten minutes later, her cheeks were flushed from being outside and her eyelids drooped. She sent Dahyun a tired smile as she headed to the back section only used for dining, sending Seungmin back into the kitchen, thanking him for his help. And it really did end up being a help in the end, to have started early.

Despite the chaos of the broken air conditioner, the massive amount of drunk guys - including some asking for Mina - they were done cleaning up and counting the bar barely twenty minutes past closing. Plenty of time to make it back to their apartments in decent time - which was exactly what Dahyun had planned until Jeongyeon accepted Joohyun’s offer of half a bottle of wine. A generous amount left-over, but often the wine couldn’t be used the next day, and this was one of the few goods about being on the closing shift. Even if they weren’t technically allowed to drink it.

“We don’t have to sit, if you wanna go home.” Dahyun sat down besides Jeongyeon, leaning forwards to rest her arms on her knees. Looked around at Jeongyeon, watching as she took a long drink of wine.

“I know.” Jeongyeon sighed. “How are the summer courses?”

“It’s gen ed, it’s not really that exciting. Besides, I’ve only had one lesson in either class so far.”

“Yeah, I don’t miss gen ed, it’s a waste of time. I took journalism because that’s what I want to do. Not to be taught algebra again.” Jeongyeon huffed. Placed the bottle on the ground by the bench.

Dahyun yawned.

“What about Tzuyu?” Jeongyeon kicked off a shoe and rubbed at her heel. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be there for her birthday. Did you at least celebrate a bit?”

“Yeah, a bit. Made kimbap and watched dog videos.” Dahyun leaned back and rested her head on Jeongyeon’s shoulder.

“That’s Tzuyu, alright.” Jeongyeon said, absentmindedly running her fingers down Dahyun’s arms. Then she took another gulp of wine and offered it to Dahyun.

“You’re going back to your parents’ place tomorrow, right?” Dahyun asked as she took the bottle.

Jeongyeon nodded and freed herself of Dahyun to put her shoe back on. “Yeah, Seongyeon too.”

“So it’s the big meet the in-laws round then?” Dahyun asked.
“I guess, yeah.” Jeongyeon shrugged, struggling to get her shoe back on. Then she leaned back and looked up at the sky.

“Are you sure you don’t want to just go home?” Dahyun asked again.

“It’s fine.” Jeongyeon insisted, taking the wine bottle again and emptying it in three greedy gulps. Then she looked at the label on it and closed her eyes. “No, you’re probably right. Home is… Home is a good idea.”

“Nothing’s wrong, right?” Dahyun said as Jeongyeon got to her feet, wincing immediately and sitting back down.


“Jeongyeon.” Dahyun touched her arm. But instead of the intention of calming Jeongyeon, she jolted, head snapping around to look at the younger girl. Dahyun frowned. “Are you sure you’re ok? Do you need me to get you home? Call Mina?”

“No! No, I’m fine.” Jeongyeon insisted, clearing her throat before running a hand over her face. “I’m just so tired tonight from all that heat and these damn shoes.”

“You sure?” Dahyun pressed.

“Sure. Just gonna finish.” Jeongyeon looked down at the bottle in her hand, then frowned and shook her head “Right, I did that. Home then.”

“Send me a text when you get home?” Dahyun asked. Jeongyeon nodded and saluted her with a yawn before walking away.

Dahyun stayed until she saw Jeongyeon turn the corner. Then got to her feet and walked in the opposite direction. Sighed as she crossed off another night in her head. The fear had come like a wave the second Jeongyeon had disappeared from sight. Made Dahyun feel absolutely pathetic. It was just one week. She seriously couldn’t be that clingy, could she? She had to allow Sana space. And one week was just… Terrifying.

…

If there was one year in her life that had been more unforeseeable than any other year of Momo’s entire life, this one was probably a strong contender. And that was saying a lot considering it was only July. But the past months had somehow given her a completely different life than she had expected when she had sat around the table with Sana and Tsukiko at new years. Back then she had never expected a reality where she wouldn’t end the year the same way they started it, together, in their apartment in the other end of town. Yet here she was with no Tsukiko, without Sana by her side at all times, but instead with Jeongyeon and soon Mina as her roommates and two girls out in the living room whom she was somehow dating. The funny thing was, however, that this was a reality she didn’t mind in the slightest. She just hadn’t ever expected that finding a random advertisement on campus would’ve led to anything more than losing Sana. Not that she was a pessimist; in no way. But gaining six friends and two girlfriends from one advertisement not even meant for her was a bit further than she could stretch her imagination.

Momo shook her head with a smile and opened the pantry, looking into the depths of it for
something edible. There couldn’t be long time left of the commercial break but she couldn’t keep her mind from wandering for some reason. Probably because she was going home soon.

Honestly, Momo thought as she grabbed a bag of chips, this wasn’t the life she had imagined ever. When she was younger she had always imagined some handsome guy sweeping her off her feet like Tuxedo Mask, but soon realized that she’d much rather date Ami than Mamoru, and suddenly she had started waiting for the day she would fall for Sana. Started imagining herself and Hana and Sana and preferably a dog, travelling the world, dancing together for the rest of their lives. But she and her sister took different choices. And she never fell for Sana. The dog she never got either.

Momo smiled and closed the pantry.

She preferred this life.

“Momo?” Nayeon’s voice was soft, and Momo turned on her knee to look up at the older girl in the jamb. A playful smile spread on Nayeon’s face and Momo grinned sheepishly.

“Sorry, I zoned out. Did the show start again?” Momo asked.

“Yeah, but only just.” Nayeon said, then snorted. “You look like you’re going to ask me to marry you. You know, on one knee like that.”

Momo chuckled and shrugged. “It’s a bit early, but if you insist. Though I think we’d have to dig a little to find a suitable potato chip to turn into a ring.”

Nayeon’s face split in a grin and she laughed. It rang wonderfully in the little kitchen. Then she pushed herself off the jamb and walked across the kitchen digging into one of the overhead cupboards, Momo finally getting to her feet, opening the bag of chips.

“Wait, is this your mug? I haven’t seen it before.” Nayeon asked taking down a mug with soot spirits on it.

“No, it’s Mina’s. She brought a few, there’s a Daisy Duck mug in there that’s hers too.” Momo explained. “Why?”

“Oh, I’ll take another one then.” Nayeon quickly put Mina’s mug back up and settled for one of the regular ones belonging to Jeongyeon.

“I don’t think she’d mind you using it, she always insists I use hers if I want.” Momo noted, watching as Nayeon poured water in the boiler and turned it on.

“Are you two coming back or what?! Chaeyoung hollered from the living room.

“I’m making tea!”

“You’ll be waking up three times to pee tonight if you make another cup, mark my words!” Chaeyoung insisted.

Momo chuckled as Nayeon pouted, and Nayeon tried to glower at her; emphasis on tried, as she immediately had to press her lips together to keep from grinning.

“Use her mugs if you want.” Momo said once more before walking back out into the living room with the bag of chips.

“Proposing to my girlfriend already, Hirai?” Chaeyoung asked, digging into the bag of chips as soon
as Momo had settled against her side, head on her shoulder and Chaeyoung’s arm around her waist. Immediately Chaeyoung’s lips pressed against Momo’s hair before turning towards the movie again.

“Didn’t you propose to me on the very first date with that ring, Son?” Momo asked neutrally. “I’d think it’s only fair to include Nayeon in the engagement if we’re all dating anyways.”

“Yeah, I guess you have a point.” Chaeyoung said, fingers scratching lightly at Momo’s side, making her squirm and giggle.

“What are you- ya!” Momo whined when the light scratching turned to intentional tickling.

Chaeyoung ceased. Hummed innocently and then scratched again.

“Oh my god, stop!” Momo jolted and slapped Chaeyoung’s thigh, wriggling out of her hold and scooting over to the far side of the couch, but Chaeyoung immediately sent her sad eyes.

“No way, I won’t cuddle if you tickle me.” Momo huffed.

“Please, Momo… Pretty please?” Chaeyoung pouted.

Momo narrowed her eyes. “No tickling.”

Chaeyoung seemed to consider, her nose scrunched and lips pursed. Then she nodded. “Fine.”

It took less than ten seconds for Momo to once more rush away from Chaeyoung’s tickling fingers, this time calling for Nayeon to get Chaeyoung to stop.

“Just kiss her! It’s what she’s fishing for!” Nayeon called from the kitchen.

Momo looked dumbstruck around at Chaeyoung who very obviously tried to look like she had no clue what Nayeon meant by that.

“If she’s tickly or pokey she just wants attention!” Nayeon added from the kitchen, as if she had seen Chaeyoung’s expression from in there.

“Oh.” Momo breathed. Then slowly crawled back and settled against Chaeyoung, not unaware that Chaeyoung’s skin felt warmer now than it had a few minutes ago. Probably being called out for her methods.

“Can I?” Momo asked carefully, still not completely used to it despite the frequent casual conversations about it.

But Chaeyoung just nodded and smiled sheepishly, angling her face towards Momo to let the older girl kiss her.

…

Dahyun sighed. This was beyond pathetic. Not just worrying but the fact that she had stood here for the better part of twenty minutes hoping somehow that she could get the stomach ache to go away, even if she knew very well that it wouldn’t. It was the conflict of heart and mind. Because her heart
kept telling her to just go back into the living room and join Sana and get the best of the night and forget her worries. But her mind wouldn’t allow her. Kept telling her how wrong it was to let Sana soothe her; that if she already now felt so anxious about her leaving, then maybe she hadn’t learned a single thing since she had succumbed to the safety of Sana.

So she just stood here. Waited for Sana to come looking for her, to make the choice for her instead of having her mind yell at her for being weak when she eventually joined Sana. Because she knew she would have to. It was just so much easier hoping for someone else to make that decision for her. Sometimes it just felt like Dahyun was always waiting. Waiting for things to change. Waiting for Sana to make a move. Afraid of making a choice; of choosing a path. Afraid of the consequences. But she had already chosen this path that night of her birthday, and it wasn’t like it was going to end just because she would have to sleep alone for a week. She would just have to prove that she had improved. That she was better. Because she knew that she was. Hadn’t had a single panic attack since talking to her mom. Barely got that feeling of constriction in her chest. It was just irrational fear.

But that’s the thing with fear. It doesn’t care if it’s irrational. It just settles like stones in the parts of your body that’s supposed to fill with butterflies and sunshine. But right now, imagining Sana’s face, all she could see was sleepless nights and headaches and fists clenching hearts. Like a shadow, fear had somehow started changing how Sana looked inside her head. Had lowered the radiance and the air of her that filled Dahyun’s lungs even just from the memory of her laugh. And this, more than anything, made Dahyun push herself from the window sill of Sana’s bedroom, anger simmering under her skin. This wasn’t what their story was supposed to be. True, Dahyun might not know what the alternative was, but this was not what she wanted. She just wanted Sana.

With a sigh Dahyun walked out of the bedroom and found Sana in the couch, in their blanket, nose in her phone. She looked up at the sound of Dahyun’s dragging footsteps, turning her head to look over the back of the couch.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.. I think so.” Dahyun nodded, reaching the back of the couch.

“I didn’t want to disturb in case you were dealing with- I mean, you’ve been quiet all day.” Sana explained quietly as Dahyun walked around the couch.

“I’m still just scared.” Dahyun sighed, running a hand through her hair and tilting her head at Sana with a slight frown.

“That’s fair.” Sana nodded, making to get up. “You ready to go to bed now?”

“Not yet. I-I know it’s late, but can we maybe wait a bit to sleep?” Dahyun quickly said. “If it’s okay by you?”

“... Sure.” Sana said, a slight frown on her face as she sat back down on the couch, placing the phone on the coffee table. She shuffled slightly as Dahyun sat down beside her, offering arms and a blanket. But Dahyun didn’t curl into her arms. Just turned in the couch, and faced Sana fully. Because fear, like shadows, can make way for light eventually. It just requires you to wait long enough. Or step into the light yourself. And Sana was the sun, making all the shadows stay where Dahyun couldn’t see them. Especially when it made her chuckle like she did now.

“What are you doing?” Sana asked in an amused tone.

Dahyun shrugged and Sana’s laugh died out, her expression curious. But Dahyun merely reached out, tucking Sana’s hair behind her ear and touched the point on her neck that Dahyun loved so
much. Ran her thumb over the skin distractedly as she tried to store every detail of Sana’s face. Not that she hadn’t ever stared at her before, but she had never really kept staring. Had always deflected when Sana caught her, but not this time. This time she just swallowed up every detail. And Sana let her. Let her stare, a smile tugging at her lips, but surprisingly without breaking down in giggles as she often did. It was nothing like staring at the sun; you never got blinded. You just felt safe in her luminance. And Dahyun knew that she would never be done staring, but she didn’t have to. She had the rest of their lives to stare.

The stroke of Dahyun’s thumb over Sana’s cheek made the older girl smile. Made her radiate stronger and her shoulders shake slightly with the giggles she was obviously trying to hold back. But for whatever reason, she just let Dahyun take in her features for as long as she needed, until finally, with a deep exhale, Dahyun crept into Sana’s arms and closed her eyes.

They didn’t talk. Not for the longest time. And neither slept. Dahyun merely lay, head against Sana’s shoulder, Sana’s hands gently playing with her skin wherever she found any, leaving Dahyun in an almost trance-like state of calm. She couldn’t see Sana’s face from the angle. But it didn’t matter. Because imprinting Sana’s features was more than just the way her eyes crinkled when she smiled and how her nose scrunched slightly when she frowned. It was more than the freckle on her cheek and the black roots showing once again under the blonde. It was the way her hand felt on Dahyun’s waist, her steady breathing, her fingertips on Dahyun’s cheek. The way their legs tangled naturally, as if they had done it hundreds of times.

“We should go to the beach when you get back.” Dahyun sighed peacefully.

“Yeah. I’d love that.” Sana hummed.

“I was thinking maybe I’d spend more time at Chaeyoung’s while you’re gone. Maybe give it a good try with piano. I’ve been putting it off for so long.” Dahyun said.

“Good, plus you’ll have company. She probably misses having you around.”

“What do you mean?” Dahyun asked, adjusting to look at Sana.

“Well, I’m just thinking if I went from having you close every day to not seeing you very much, I’d miss you so much.” Sana said earnestly, chuckling slightly as Dahyun hid her face in Sana’s hair, a blush creeping up her neck at the compliment. “And I’m not just saying that as your girlfriend, it’s in general. You make people happy, and even if it’s not like she’s alone without you, you’re best friends and I’m sure she misses you lots. Even if she doesn’t say it.”

Dahyun didn’t know what to say. Settled for pressing her lips to Sana’s neck and shuffling closer. Felt how Sana wrapped the blanket tighter around her.

“I know, because I’m going to miss you lots the next week.” Sana added quietly, pinky finding its way between the shirt and sweatpants on Dahyun’s waist.

“I’ll miss you too.” Dahyun said, pressing another kiss to Sana’s skin. “Just promise me something?”

“What?” Sana asked.

Dahyun shifted again to find Sana’s eyes. “Don’t miss me too much. Have fun when you’re there. And don’t worry too much. Even if things don’t turn out magically amazing with my stupid head, I have a support system here, and you should focus on spending time with your folks now that you have the chance. And with Momo and her sister.”
“I promise. Plus Hana got the shift covered so she’s going to take us to USJ” Sana said, a smile in her voice as the rest of her hand found its way to the skin on Dahyun’s waist.

“Bring back a weird cup for Mina, okay? She loves them.” Dahyun said.

“I will. What about for you? What do you want?” Sana asked.

Dahyun chuckled once before pressing her lips together, trying not to let her cheesy mind ruin the mood.

“What?” Sana insisted.

Dahyun considered it for a moment, then gave hell to it.

“... You.”

Sana’s lips immediately split in a wide grin and she shook her head. “You’re such a cheese. You already have me.”

“I know.”

“I guess I’ll wrap a ribbon around myself when I come back, and I’ll be your present.” Sana teased.

“You-” Dahyun’s voice caught in her throat.

“Oh, get your mind out of the gutter. I’d be wearing more than just a ribbon.” Sana clicked her tongue, scratching lightly at the skin on Dahyun’s waist.

Dahyun just mumbled into Sana’s neck, her cheeks warm. Then felt how Sana’s hand disappeared from her waist, though the next moment it was back on Dahyun’s skin, this time her on cheek, stroking it softly with the back of her hand. She didn’t say anything. Just stared, utter adoration emitting from every fiber of her. There couldn’t possibly be a better feeling than having someone look at you that way, like you were everything to them. And maybe it was somewhat like that Sana had felt before when Dahyun had stared at her. She hoped it was. She would like to think she made Sana feel something along the lines of what Dahyun felt right now. Adored.

“Can we try again?” Sana asked quietly, no warning behind her words.

“What?” Dahyun frowned.

“You know, try again?”

“Wh- oh… oh. Now?” Dahyun asked, wondering momentarily what time it was. It could be anywhere between midnight and three in the morning, she really didn’t have a clue.

“Yeah. I mean, if you want?” Sana shrugged, as if didn’t matter much to her. But the fact that she had asked now, despite the lateness of the hour, told Dahyun that it probably wasn’t a thought that had just entered her mind right now.

“Are you sure? We don’t- just because I-”

“I want to.” Sana said steadfastly.

Dahyun felt her throat close up slightly. Didn’t know what to say. So instead, she just leaned in and pressed her lips to the corner of Sana’s mouth. Felt Sana shiver under the chaste kiss and turn her head just an inch to reciprocate fully.
It was one of those wonderfully lazy kisses that seemed to go on forever. Completely unhurried, as if they had no road to travel - as if the morning would never come. For minutes there was nothing but calm breathy chuckles and the back of Sana’s hand softly stroking her cheek. Honestly, if Dahyun could just lay here all night, kissing Sana like this, it’d be enough. But just as this thought materialized, Sana hummed, sending vibrations through Dahyun’s lips. Then she angled her head. Deepened the kiss.

“Sana.” Dahyun said quietly as she drew back. But Sana merely shook her head and leaned back in. Kissed Dahyun so deeply that the younger girl momentarily forgot her own name. Just felt her stomach jolt as teeth dug into Dahyun’s lip before Sana drew back, her breath hitting Dahyun’s lip.

“I want this.” Sana whispered, hand travelling back down to the hem of Dahyun’s shirt, moving under it without hesitation. “I want you.”

Dahyun swallowed, warmth spreading across her skin treacherously. Why did she have to react so strongly every time? With a steadying exhale, Dahyun nodded and closed her eyes. Then a hand cupped her cheek and she opened them again, finding Sana’s eyes boring into her own.

“Just say stop, okay? Stop means stop, and tell me if something doesn’t feel good.” Sana said.

“Okay.” Dahyun nodded, her breath catching as Sana’s other hand on her waist scratched over her skin. It was dizzying and distracting. “I just-”

“What?” Sana held the hand still.

“I don’t want you to think you owe me anything.” Dahyun said, her breath unsteady. “Because of the time- you know. You don’t owe me anything.”

Sana’s lips spread in a smile and her thumb stroked over Dahyun’s cheek. “I know.”

Okay. Good.” Dahyun nodded. Then Sana’s hand tugged her closer and Dahyun let her melt them together. Lost herself in the softness of Sana’s lips and the taste of her tongue. In the way her skin burned under Sana’s hands as they travelled up her shirt, exposing her back bit by bit in the process as said shirt crawled up. Then both feelings were gone and Dahyun almost whined. Until she noticed hands around the hem of the shirt at her sides.

“Can I?” Sana asked against her lips.

“Yes.” Dahyun breathed, sitting up slightly to allow enough space between them, her heart stuck in her throat.

There was a gentleness in every movement as Sana pulled the shirt off. Then, before Dahyun had realized what was happening, Sana had moved the bra straps from Dahyun’s shoulders to hang off her arms. A single look of confirmation was enough this time, before Sana reached around, unclasping the bra almost effortlessly. Dahyun didn’t notice what happened to it. She was quite a bit too busy dealing with the sensation of Sana’s eyes eating her up quite unabashedly. It wasn’t that she minded, but it was still so new and slightly embarrassing that Dahyun had to resist the urge to bury her face in the couch cushion.

“I really don’t think I tell you this enough…” Sana mused, a finger trailing a line up Dahyun’s arm, over her clavicle and down over her sternum. “Well, actually, I don’t think I’ve ever told you this. But you’re really beautiful.”

And that was all that Dahyun could handle. She leaned forwards, kissing Sana for all that she was worth, mainly just to hide her own embarrassment, but Sana just chuckled and returned the kiss
happily.

Every single worry about tomorrow was gone, and there was just Sana. Her hands on Dahyun’s stomach and her tongue in Dahyun’s mouth.

Then Sana moved. And before Dahyun had managed to comprehend what was happening, she was on her back on the couch, and Sana still fully clothed, enveloped in the blanket, hovering above her. Their eyes met for a second, and Dahyun stopped breathing at the intensity of Sana’s stare as she leaned back, resting on Dahyun’s thighs, blanket pooling around their legs.

“Sana…” Dahyun gasped.

“I want this.” Sana repeated, grabbing her own shirt determinately, pulling it over her head.

Her chest revealed how hard she was breathing, as she moved her hair around to one side before leaning back down.

“I want this. I want you.” She whispered, nose touching Dahyun’s. Kissed her once and moved around to Dahyun’s jaw. For a second, Dahyun wondered if she was supposed to do something in return. But she never furthered in that train of thought, as Sana sucked at the point beneath Dahyun’s ear. It claimed every coherent thought in Dahyun’s mind, suddenly unpreparedly back on static noise; channel Sana. All she could register was Sana’s lips moving down her neck, the warmth in her stomach and her heart beating against her ribs. And hands. Hands that crept over Dahyun’s stomach and one that moved up, cupping her breast gently. But then another sensation was annoyingly taking over her focus.

“Sana.” Dahyun said breathlessly, squirming slightly.

Sana drew her hand away. Looked up.

“Sorry. I should’ve-”

“No. It’s not that.” Dahyun felt her cheeks burn. “My leg is asleep.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Sana giggled. She shuffled slightly, then froze.

“What?” Dahyun felt the worry well up immediately, soon to be replaced by bemusement when Sana flushed bright pink.

“I guess I just. Might as well. Uh-” Her gaze flickered down to Dahyun’s sweatpants.

Oh. Right. That.

Dahyun tried to make her shrug seem confident and nonchalant, but honestly it was probably more of a nervous wobble. Her breath hitched as Sana hesitantly fiddled with the string on Dahyun’s pants.

“We…” Dahyun started. “We don’t-”

“I want this.” Sana just said, her gaze firm despite her red cheeks. And really, Dahyun couldn’t argue with that gaze.

It took a good bit of shuffling and overcoming a good deal of shyness as well, but in the end both Dahyun’s sweatpants and Sana’s shorts were on the floor. And if nothing else, Dahyun’s leg wasn’t asleep anymore, just subtly tingling. But when Sana settled above her, she made sure not to squash it,
wriggling a knee between Dahyun’s instead.

Maybe they should’ve moved to the bed. The couch really wasn’t meant for this. But honestly, even if she could’ve moved, there was a part of her that saw the irony of this and found it fitting. This had after all been the place she had fallen for Sana. Where she had texted Chaeyoung in blind panic and asked how to deal with tall beautiful japanese girls sleeping on you.

A chuckle escaped Dahyun’s lips as another thought occurred to her. Sana was still just looking down at her.

“You ok?” Sana asked.


“Of what?”

“Of me spending an hour yelling at Chaeyoung and another month grumbling at her for having sex on my couch.”

Sana looked utterly confused. And really, Dahyun couldn’t even explain why it was so funny. Maybe it wasn’t. Maybe she was just a lot more nervous now than she had realized, suddenly faced with the reality of what they were doing. As that thought struck her, she closed her eyes and grabbed Sana by the neck. Pulled her close. Felt Sana’s forehead gently against hers.

“Dahyun.” Sana whispered.

“Do you still want to?” Dahyun asked, biting the inside of her cheek.

“Yes.” Sana confirmed.

“Good. That’s good… Me too. But. I… I’m not sure what to do.” The last part was barely a whisper.

“That’s okay, just follow me. I’ll go slow.” Sana said. Kissed the tip of Dahyun’s nose.

There really was no way to prepare herself, but thankfully she found that she didn’t need to. Sana was as slow as she had promised. Tracing fingertips over Dahyun’s skin with great care, lips more loving than hungry as they trailed down her chest. It was almost painfully slow, but the next moment a moan left Dahyun’s lips. Sana’s mouth had closed around her nipple and her hand was mimicking the movements on the other breast but with her hand. Somehow, despite the fact that they had been in almost exactly this position once before, it still came as a surprise to Dahyun how much of an effect it had on her.

Yet all that was nothing, nothing at all, compared to the slight shift in Sana’s body that caused her thigh to press ever so gently against Dahyun. But it was enough to make Dahyun moan loudly, the sound making Sana reappear, cool air on the wetness around the nipple she had been licking. Dahyun could barely meet her eye, despite knowing that they had been in exactly this place once before, it still came as a surprise to Dahyun how much of an effect it had on her.

“Okay?” Sana asked, repositioning herself, holding herself up by the arms on either side of Dahyun. Shook her head in annoyance when hair fell into her field of vision and landed on Dahyun’s cheek. With a breathless chuckle Dahyun reached up and fixed it, nodding.
Next moment Dahyun almost ruined the hair she had just fixed, instinctively wrapping her arms around Sana’s neck, eyes shut tight and her body surging with electricity. Sana had moved her thigh to change the pressure against Dahyun.

“Bend your legs.” Sana whispered before pressing a kiss to Dahyun’s lip. Then she winced and giggled as Dahyun had accidentally nodded into her forehead.

“Sorry!” Dahyun whined.

“It’s okay, just bend your legs. Makes it easier.” Sana repeated. Dahyun didn’t nod this time. Just swallowed and did as Sana told. Bent her legs slightly and felt how the pressure changed, and automatically moved her hips. Immediately lost herself in the sensation of it, moving against Sana’s thigh, especially when Sana moved to match the rhythm. There was no doubt that Sana could feel it now; how much Dahyun wanted her. Not that it was much of a secret, especially with the volume of the gasp Dahyun failed to keep in when Sana’s thigh found a new angle.

“Sana.” Dahyun whimpered.

“I want this.” Sana assured her.

“I know. I mean... Sana. Please.” Dahyun’s skin burned. Not just her cheeks. Every part of her felt ablaze as Sana found her eyes. For a moment Sana just frowned. Then she seemed to get it and nodded. In the back of her mind Dahyun was thankful that she didn’t have to say it out loud. The words touch me just wouldn’t leave her lips but it didn’t matter. Because Sana just kissed her. Held her lips for a moment. Then her hand trailed up Dahyun’s thigh, over her hipbone and hooked in her underwear. Next thing her thigh was gone and Dahyun felt the cold air against her. Missed the pressure immediately. But the next, Sana tugged down the panties at the other side as well, Dahyun lifting slightly to help get them off.

Somehow Dahyun had entered a world where she was free of worry, for once. In this world, there was only a shabby old couch, a blanket, and Sana, her eyes keeping Dahyun’s locked, an expression of awe in her face.

“You really are beautiful.” Sana breathed, fingers trailing up Dahyun’s thigh. Honestly by now, Dahyun had to admit that she didn’t know her own body very well at all. For here was another thing she hadn’t expected to feel as wonderful as it did. But Sana’s fingers tracing over the skin of her inner thigh was enough to make her whimper and move her hips in a desperate attempt to get back some of the friction. And Sana read her like an open book. Slowed as if just to make her want Sana more.

Desperately, Dahyun leaned up and tugged Sana down, burying her head in Sana’s neck, her senses filling with the scent of lemons and perfume as Sana’s fingers finally found her core, slipping slightly through the folds.

Sana’s quiet giggle hit her neck as Dahyun moved her hips. Dahyun whimpered.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to laugh. It’s just cute.”

“S’okay. Just... Please.” Dahyun repeated.

Sana obliged. Slipped just a fingertip into her and quickly pulled out. Then moved up, finding her clit and circling it. And that was about as much as Dahyun managed to comprehend, losing herself in Sana’s touches and her presence. Then her hand moved back down, a fingertip once more slipping into her. And once more. Dahyun’s breath stuck in her throat and she tried to steady her shivering
legs as Sana’s fingers moved back up, her moves more insisting this time, sending Dahyun into a state of possible delirium. Dahyun wasn’t sure. Didn’t care.

Then Sana’s lips were on Dahyun’s, and while the younger girl tried, she had a hard time keeping up. It became more of a case of Sana swallowing her moans. With a giggle and a final peck, Sana gave up and moved around to Dahyun’s jaw, pressing soft kisses to her skin.

“Can I?” Sana’s breath puffed against Dahyun’s ear.

“What?” Dahyun huffed. Sana’s finger moving down to her entrance was answer enough.

“Yeah.” Dahyun breathed.

“Just tell me, okay?” Sana asked quietly, a finger slipping inside, not just the pinky this time.

Dahyun nodded. Tried to get used to the feeling and swallowed. It didn’t feel bad, just weird. But the moment Sana started moving, every wonder about the sensation was out the window. Dahyun just felt on fire. It just felt good. So good. Felt safe with Sana’s breath in her ear, but intoxicating at the same time. As if the entire world around them had disappeared into a white fog.

“Is this okay?” Sana asked, breaking the fog slightly.

“Good. So… god, so good.” Dahyun huffed.

“More?”

“Please.” Dahyun nodded, barely getting the word out before losing all coherent thought, Sana’s finger working deeper. All she could do was just to move her hips, meeting Sana, desperate for whatever she could get. Somehow, she was tethered to reality only through Sana. Tethered only through her touches and Dahyun’s arms around Sana’s neck.

“More…” Dahyun moaned against Sana’s lips, another wave of warmth flushing over Dahyun’s face.

“Tell me if-”

“More.” Dahyun’s voice was clearer now, and her face redder. She tried to express all that she wanted in the way her hips moved desperately. Sana nodded, adjusted and kissed Dahyun before adding another finger. With a hiss, Dahyun let her head fall back onto the couch, dragging Sana with her, hands getting lost in Sana’s hair, scratching at her scalp. She could feel it building in her stomach with each movement, each thrust and each hot breath of air on her lips from Sana’s mouth.

“Sana-” Dahyun gasped, trying to catch Sana’s lips.

“I’ve got you.” Sana promised.

Dahyun nodded, barely noticing Sana’s chuckle as Dahyun’s forehead hit Sana’s by accident again. Just felt Sana’s lips travelling to her jaw and turned her face, her eyes shut tightly and her lip between her own teeth as Sana kissed and licked at her jaw and down her neck, fingers working fast but not hectically. Just enough to drive Dahyun slightly mad.

“Please, I’m…” Dahyun whimpered. “Don’t stop. I’m-”

“I’ve got you.” Sana said again in her ear and kissed spot just below her ear. “I’ve got you.”

With her heart beating out of her ribs, Dahyun felt her walls slowly tightening around Sana’s fingers.
It was like standing right on the edge of the world, looking down. Yet the next second a thumb moved against her clit, rubbing at it and everything in Dahyun seemed to contract at the same time. She might as well have gone blind, holding onto Sana for dear life as she tumbled, her back arching. And Sana just held her safe and moved her fingers, helping her through. Calmed the pace as Dahyun relaxed, whimpering and breathing hard.

If someone had asked her what day it was, she wouldn't have been able to tell them. But she could tell them about the freckle on Sana’s shoulder or the way Sana’s laugh bubbled from her lips following no rules, giggles tripping over each other like raindrops on a tin roof. How they shuffled awkwardly, exhausted and tired until Dahyun lay on Sana’s chest. How they of course then had to shuffle again to get the blanket out from under them. How Sana fell asleep with a lazy smile on her face that Dahyun couldn’t resist kissing, even if it woke her again. Just for a moment.

And finally, how they forgot to set the alarm and were so very late the next morning, waking naked and clammy under the pink and orange blanket on the couch.

…

“I’ll see you in a week.” Sana murmured, her cheeks flushed from rush and the questions of why they were so late.

Dahyun saw out of the corner of her eye how Nayeon and Chaeyoung were holding onto Momo, the japanese girl practically giddy to have them both around her. It really was the best match possible with those three, Dahyun thought, before returning to Sana.

“Promise you’ll have lots of fun. And take pictures!” Dahyun said with a smile. Tried not to make it too obvious that they had gotten little to no sleep.

“I will.” Sana promised, beaming at Dahyun. “I’ll call you so you can see my old room!”

“I’d like that.” Dahyun nodded. Then she leaned in. Kissed Sana hard on the lips before drawing back. “Now go, you’re late”

“Fine, fine. I’ll go.” Sana laughed and released her grasp on Dahyun’s hips. She had been holding onto her for the last five minutes.

“Oh. One thing.” Sana’s eyes glinted as she angled her face, lips close to Dahyun’s ear. “Thank you for last night, beautiful.”

Dahyun blushed. Mumbled something unintelligible, but Sana just giggled at her and called out for Momo. Reluctantly, Momo let go of her girlfriends. Said something to them at which they nodded. Then walked towards Sana, her blue suitcase trailing after. Sana looked from Momo to Dahyun, then quickly leaned in a final time.

“Bye, Dahyunnie.” Sana said quietly, kissing Dahyun’s forehead.

“Bye, Sana-chan.” Dahyun murmured.
And then Momo was there.

Hand in hand, the two japanese girls left for security, and Dahyun felt her world turn like it had when they had first entered her life. Felt her heart trail after Sana and her body tremble with exhaustion.

It'd be okay.

She would be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please feel free to leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Dahyun wanted to move. Wanted to stop staring at the security check area from where Sana had waved at her before turning the corner, her arm linked with Momo. And for what felt like hours, she just stood there. Even if it was probably only a minute or two. Then she took the deepest breath, sighing heavily before closing her eyes.

She couldn’t keep thinking about it as one week she would have to survive without Sana. That wasn’t how it was supposed to be. Not how she wanted to be. This wasn’t going to be a countdown until Sana was gone. This was going to be the week where she faced all of it. Took up the fight. Except there were so many things she had to fight, all at once. The piano, the darkness, the extra shifts while Jeongyeon and Mina were at the Yoos, the empty apartment. The thoughts. The fear of failing at all of it. Where should she even start? How could she make sure that she’d get all that done in a week that she had decided to? But there was no use in just standing around here.

“Would you mind some company?” Dahyun asked quietly. She had sensed the girls on each side of her, and knew that they were waiting for her.

“Not at all.” Nayeon’s voice was soft and her hand on Dahyun’s shoulder even more so.

“It’s just until my shift starts but I haven’t had food since… I think last night?” Dahyun sighed and shook her head. She felt dizzy. Too tired.

“We have food.” Chaeyoung assured her quietly.

“Good. That’s… good.” Dahyun nodded, finally turning away from the security check in, in the direction of the main exit.

“She’ll be home in a week.” Chaeyoung said, obviously in an attempt to comfort Dahyun.

“I know, it’s not that.” Dahyun said, finding Chaeyoung’s hand distractedly.

“Then what?” Nayeon asked.
“It’s that I’m mad at myself for being scared.” Dahyun admitted.

“You expect too much of yourself.” Chaeyoung said.

“When has that ever been news?” Dahyun asked dryly, earning a laugh from Nayeon.

“Just don’t expect yourself to be better overnight just because you made the decision to.” Chaeyoung continued, walking through the doors into the warm morning threatening to turn noon.

“I know, it takes time. It’s always time. I just wish that there was another answer than time. Just for once.”

“Yeah, I know. It sucks.” Nayeon said quietly.

“Big time.” Dahyun agreed, leaning into the older girl as she put an arm around Dahyun’s shoulder. “God, I’m sorry, I don’t mean to pour all my shit onto you, I’m just tired.”

“No, please don’t apologize,” Chaeyoung quickly said, “you’re finally being open about it instead of just burying it and fighting alone.”

With drooping eyes and a heavy heart, Dahyun nodded. Still felt pathetic and weak, but maybe not as much as usual.

They were barely out of the train station from the airport before Dahyun had fallen asleep, head on Nayeon’s shoulder, and she didn’t wake until they had to change to the subway to get into city centre. Didn’t actually properly wake until they were a few stops in, groggy and disoriented in her friends’ arms. Not until they got off at Nayeon and Chaewyoung’s stop, did Dahyun notice more than just the immediate surrounding senses.

“Was it this warm yesterday?” Dahyun asked, squinting up at the bright sun, sleep still in her voice.

“No, yesterday was okay, the day before that though...” Nayeon clicked her tongue.

“Oh, don’t remind me,” Dahyun groaned. “The AC broke at work and we were all dying, it was horrible.”

“God, that must’ve been so hard on the customers too.” Chaeyoung said as they ascended the stairs to surface level.

“Oh, it was only the one in the kitchen that set out. It was mainly the staff dying.”

“Yikes. Did you happen to catch Jeongyeon before she went back to her folks?”

“Yeah, she was really tired, I worked that shift with her, she was completely done. Good thing she’s got a little break now. I think they went back yesterday?”

Nayeon nodded, and they turned a corner, the grey building where Nayeon and Chaeyoung lived, coming into sight.

“Is it weird that I miss her already?” Chaeyoung asked, changing the subject. “Momo, I mean.”

“No, I miss her too.” Nayeon said. “It’s so weird.”

Dahyun huffed and shook her head. It wasn’t weird at all. But she wasn’t going to pass up an
opportunity to give them a hard time, it was a part of the job description, at least as Chaeyoung’s best friend.

“What?” Chaeyoung asked sharply as Dahyun sent her a smirk.

“Nothing. You’re just so whipped.” Dahyun grinned.

“Shut up, she’s wonderful.” Chaeyoung grumbled, though the grin on her face made it hard to take her seriously.

“Yeah, I know she is.” Dahyun let Chaeyoung off the hook, for now. “And I’m sure you’re good to her.”

“It’s just as much her who’s good for us.” Nayeon shrugged neutrally, but then a smile spread across her face, and with no further prompt, the older girl started telling about how much of a difference Momo had made. How she filled their home with calm cool air and how much they laughed. How much they were looking forward to every time they saw her, and how they couldn’t wait to have her back. And it provided such a good distraction from the oncoming guilt that she hadn’t said a proper goodbye to Momo and how much she missed Sana, that Dahyun didn’t even interrupt to tease. Not once. In fact, when Nayeon finished, she couldn’t help trying to pull the subject even further.

“You’re going to be gross, grosser, and grossest now then, huh?” Dahyun grinned.

“As if you have any right to be on our heels anymore.” Nayeon retorted.

“I’m not half as bad as you!” Dahyun insisted. “Even without Momo you guys are disgustingly mushy.”

“Don’t you come starting with that when I know full well you’re out for our title of mushiest couple.” Chaeyoung grunted.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure, right. Mhm.” Chaeyoung reached around Nayeon to poke Dahyun’s side “I heard you guys at the airport, it was downright embarrassing.”

“You-” Dahyun choked on her words, her cheeks warming. “How- how much did you hear?”

“Oh, not a lot.” Chaeyoung shrugged and let Nayeon go to unlock the front door. But as soon as she had gotten inside, she ran ahead and yelled back at them, a huge grin on her face. “Sana and Dahyun, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S- Yah!”

But that was all she got to since, as Dahyun had pounced at her. Grabbed her around the waist with one arm and covered her mouth with the other. But Chaeyoung just laughed and licked Dahyun’s palm to get her to let go.

“Ew! Gross!” Dahyun complained and wiped her hand on Chaeyoung’s shirt. Nayeon walked past them and up the stairs, shaking her head.

“You’re the gross ones!” Chaeyoung insisted. “All kissy and clingy like that.”

“We are not!” Dahyun whined, making Chaeyoung laugh at her childish retort.

“Are too.”

“Are not!”
“Are too.”

“I can’t believe I’m dating you.” Nayeon commented dryly when they finally reached the apartment.

“Honestly I can’t believe you’re dating me either.” Chaeyoung shrugged. At this, Nayeon just chuckled and leaned down, kissing her youngest girlfriend chastely before unlocking the door to the apartment.

“One word and you’re out on your ass.” Chaeyoung warned as Dahyun raised an eyebrow at her goofy grin.

Dahyun shrugged and smiled innocently. Then wrapped an arm around Chaeyoung and kissed her temple before walking inside with her. Tried to ignore the pressure of the black and white keys waiting for her in the other end of the room.

...

An hour of sleep, leaned on Nayeon’s shoulder, was all Dahyun managed to get before leaving for work. But it was enough for her to allow herself a bit of cautious optimism. She would be closing with Felix tonight and she was kind of looking forward to seeing his progress. He had started as a kitchen boy about six months after Dahyun had been promoted to waiter, and it was a special feeling to see him grow. Albeit he had only been a waiter since the start of May, but he was getting very good very fast, and there was a part of Dahyun who wished she could’ve been more a part of his training. She hadn’t really gotten to train Mina much, as she had experience waiting and serving, and that her schedule overlapped mostly with Jeongyeon’s.

But nevertheless, it’d be interesting to see him at the end of a closing shift, as he was known for having almost as much energy as herself - well, as her older self. Except, it didn’t turn into one of the shifts where you notice much.

It was just chaos.

The air conditioner was still broken and Taeyang was still out. Only this time chef Kang, who had become a sort of right hand woman for Joohyun, was out as well, and the petite woman finally seemed to feel the pressure.

“You okay?” Dahyun asked, downing a glass of water that Joohyun had put out for her. The chef looked on the verge of tears.

“It’s absolute shit. All of it.” She hissed, correcting the tall chef’s hat.

“Still no word from Taeyang?” Dahyun asked tentatively.

“I can’t tell you.” Joohyun cringed.

“Why not?” Dahyun asked with a frown. “It’s not like-”

“I’m not legally allowed to talk about it, Dahyun. Just be patient, okay?”
“Patient? I don’t get it… Unnie, what’s going on?”

“Dahyun. Take the dishes out.” Joohyun looked at her sternly. Then turned to instruct her kitchen. Dahyun frowned but did as told.

In the restaurant she found Felix and Soyeon, one of the waitresses Dahyun hadn’t had many shifts with but knew well enough to joke around with when time allowed. She had been hired as a substitute when Dahyun was out with her hand injury, and was lucky enough to have kept her job after Dahyun got back. Even if it was only because Yang-nim had made moves on one of the other female waiters and made her quit. Dahyun still didn’t get why she hadn’t sued, but then again, he probably would just get away with it anyways.

“Who’s got the door?” Dahyun asked across two tables at Felix, noticing that the podium was empty and two families were waiting.

“Can you take it when you’ve served those?” Felix asked, his hair slightly ruffled from running his hands through it a lot.

“Sure,” Dahyun said, then gestured at his hair, “you might wanna look in a mirror.”

“What, it doesn’t look wonderfully windswept?” Felix grinned unabashedly.

“More like you just woke up.” Dahyun snorted, seeing how his face fell in feigned offence. With a shake of the head, Dahyun turned from Felix, instead heading to the table for whom the plates she was holding, were for. Without even needing to ask, she placed the dishes in front of the right recipients, and bowed respectfully.

“I hope you enjoy the food.” Dahyun said with a smile, trying very hard not to rush over to the podium by the door, but walking in a way that didn’t let them know she was in more of a hurry than she wanted to admit. Even if the kitchen was a chaotic mess and it was still too hot in there, it was important to maintain the calm air out in the restaurant. So with a polite smile she walked up to the podium and looked at the family in front of her.

“Hello and welcome. Have you booked a table in advance?”

“Yes, name Ki, table for three.” The man said. Dahyun nodded and smiled, looking momentarily at the very obviously newborn baby in the arms of the mother, and then glanced down at a little girl holding on to her father’s leg.

“Table 9, just come right this way.” Dahyun said with a smile, leading the family along to the side section, seating them in a booth where she knew the child would sit comfortably - being just between the age where you used baby chairs and sat on regular ones. But a booth would be more comfortable. It wasn’t actually table nine that was theirs, but a quick rearrangement had allowed it.

…

“You did well tonight.” Dahyun praised as she locked the door, Felix standing with his bag over his
shoulder, masking a yawn with his free hand.

"Thank you, noona." Felix sent her a tired smile and they walked out of the alleyway to the sidewalk on the main street.

"Which direction do you live?" Dahyun asked, looking at her phone. It was late, but Dahyun really couldn’t blame Felix much. He wasn’t used to the routine yet, so it still took a while longer to close up.

"South east, in the old neighborhood across the river." Felix gestured.

"With your parents?" Dahyun asked. Even if she was tired, it was a good chance to get to know him a little better.

"No, my folks are back in Australia, I live with my friend’s family for now, but I’m moving into a dorm close to the uni in a few weeks."

"Let me know if you need a hand moving, okay?" Dahyun said. "We’ll gladly help."

"We?" Felix frowned.

"You know, Jeongyeon, Mina, and I?" Dahyun elaborated, shifting her footing. Maybe they should’ve sat down, but it was too late now, and Dahyun really had to get home. She had barely slept and if she was going to survive the next week, sleep was her first priority.

"Oh- wait, I thought only the two of them were-" Felix pulled Dahyun from her thoughts, and ran a hand through his hair, cheeks pink.

"No, not like that," Dahyun quickly corrected, "uh- no, I know them from way back when I started here, but no. No, I’m not- uh, I-I do have a girlfriend though."

"Oh. Ohh, right, the roommate?" Felix asked.

"... Yeah." Dahyun couldn’t help from smiling, clutching the phone in her hand.

"That’s so cool! Do you have a picture?" Felix asked excitedly.

"Yeah." Dahyun turned on the phone, showing the lock screen - a snap Sana had sent in the airport.

"Wow, she’s- oh, hold on, someone’s calling you." Felix pointed at the phone, and then her ringtone confirmed it.

Dahyun turned the phone to face herself and frowned. "When you talk about the sun..."

"Answer it, I’m heading home anyways. See you in a few days, noona." Felix said, already halfway across the road, waving back at her.

Dahyun looked after him until he was on the sidewalk, then answered. It turned up as a video call, and Sana was staring at her from the screen. Dahyun couldn’t help the rush.

"Dahyun!" Sana said, a hint of relief in her voice.

Then Momo popped into view.
“Hi, Dahyunnie!” Momo grinned widely at her.

Dahyun chuckled as she walked along the dark street only lit by yellow street lights.

“Wait, you’re not home yet?” Sana asked, nudging Momo slightly as she was taking up the entire screen. Momo whined her complaint but settled for resting her chin on Sana’s shoulder.

“No, I was closing with Felix so we only just finished.” Dahyun said, running a hand over her face.

“Is he slow?” Momo asked.

“No, he’s just new. But… why are you calling at three in the morning, shouldn’t you be asleep, especially after flying?” Dahyun asked.

The shift in the mood was immediate. Momo drew away from the screen and Sana’s smile faded.

“What?” Dahyun stopped in the middle of the sidewalk.

“I…” Sana looked in Momo’s direction.

“You have to tell her.” Came Momo’s voice from the side of the screen.

“I know, but…" Dahyun said with as much power as she could muster and Sana’s head snapped around to her immediately, eyes big and frightened. Dahyun spoke softer this time. “Whatever it is, tell me, please?”

“But… Okay.” Sana sighed. Shuffled. “Okay, yes. You need to know… and it has to be now.”

Dahyun frowned.

“The past month… maybe more, I’m not sure, my dad has been sparing me, but the past month, my mom hasn’t been doing well. More check-ups. A few incidents. But my dad kept assuring me that it was fine. That she was good, and I didn’t have to worry. You know I always worry anyways, but I hadn’t ever expected that they’d keep something like this from me.” Sana’s eyes wavered and she swallowed hard. It seemed that it was all she could manage, but then she spoke again, her voice a croaking whisper. “I hadn’t expected it to be this bad. I… She got admitted this afternoon, and she’s stable but I’m not sure when we can get her home.”

Dahyun just stared. Felt her feet start to carry her again, though she had been sure only a moment ago, that they were going to give in. She barely noticed the world passing by. Just stared at the screen.

Momo was rubbing over Sana’s arm and Dahyun felt her stomach tug. She wanted nothing more than to reach through the screen and hug Sana close. To make the pain go away. Because it was clear from the way her face crumbled, that she was in immense pain.

“I should’ve known,” Sana continued, “I mean, I know my dad. He plays it down because he
doesn’t want me to stop again, like I do every time it gets bad. He’s a good man, but I can’t go anywhere when there’s a risk I’m going to lose her.”

“It’s bad?” Dahyun asked.

“Yeah, it’s very bad.” Sana breathed.

“So… So, you’re staying.” Dahyun muttered.

Sana nodded.

“For now. At least until she’s home, probably after that as well, to help around the house. I’m their only child. We don’t really have anyone but each other. I mean, there’s my aunt but she’s all the way in Sapporo. So… So for now, I’m going to to stay here and help. I’m sorry, Dahyun. I should’ve told you about her more. I should’ve made it clear to you that this was a risk.”

“It’s okay, Sana, I knew she has ill health. It’s like you said, I knew what I walked into when I chose you. You don’t have to worry about me. You’re her daughter, of course you’re going to stay. It’s the right thing to do.” Dahyun didn’t know where the words came from. Maybe just from the need to soothe Sana. But it seemed that this just made it harder, Sana leaning sideways now to hide from the screen, sniffles audible and Momo’s eyes worried as she tried to tug Sana close.

“Hey, It’s okay. You’re allowed to cry.” Dahyun said quietly, her hand clutching into a hard fist to stop herself from voicing how much she wanted to hold her. It wouldn’t make anything better. She would only feel even more guilty. So Dahyun just watched as Momo gave up tugging Sana back into the frame, instead leaning over and wrapping her arms around the younger. Dahyun swore she had never loved Momo more than in that moment. And eventually pulled Sana back into view, leaning on Momo’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry.” Sana croaked, wiping her cheeks of tears. “I’m sorry, I didn’t want this to happen. I’m sorry I have to be away from you.”

“No, Sana. It’s your mom.” Dahyun assured her. “God… it’s not your fault. In any way. You couldn’t have known.”

Sana sniffled. “I should’ve. I just didn’t want to face the possibility that it might be true. I just couldn’t get myself to think that far.”

Dahyun opened her mouth. Closed it again. She should say something. Something that definitely didn’t reflect the feelings of hurt and selfish pain that she felt. It had to be something other than admitting that it hurt to have fallen in love with someone and have that someone take a part of her away. Even if it wasn’t her fault. Of course it wasn’t her fault. Dahyun had chosen to give a part of herself to Sana, a part of her heart. And this was no-one’s fault. But she couldn’t help feel the fear that maybe Sana would stay in Japan for a long time. Maybe she wouldn’t even come back. And then what? Would Dahyun move there? Leave her life and go to Japan for Sana? Could she do that?

“Dahyun? Say something? I know it’s a shit situation, and I understand if you’d rather we-”

Dahyun frowned. Was she giving Dahyun an out? But then Dahyun remembered what Sana had said one time, that she never really had friends because of her mom’s bad health - that it was only Momo. But Dahyun didn’t want an out. Even if it scared her to not have Sana and even if it was immensely hard to see Sana so sad without being able to help her at all, Dahyun didn’t want out. She wasn’t going to run. Not this time.

“We’ll make it work.” Dahyun said firmly.
“Yeah?” Sana’s face threatened to crumble once more.

“Oh of course we will.” Dahyun said firmly. “You’re here for me when I’m not well, and I’m damn well going to be here for you now. As much as I can and as much as you’ll let me.”

Dahyun walked. Pressed her lips tight together and looked at Sana on the screen. Her eyes were red but focused on Dahyun’s face, a smile of relief forming on her face.

Dahyun looked up at the building in front of her. Down at the phone.

“You two should get some sleep.”

“We probably should.” Momo yawned.

“I can stay here until you’re asleep?” Sana offered, still leaning on Momo.

“It’s okay.” Dahyun shook her head. “Sleep. I’ll call tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Sana said quietly, finally giving into the tiredness. “Dahyun?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you... For everything.”

“Of course. Anything you need.”

“Goodnight, Dahyunnie...” Sana’s voice was soft and she wiped her cheek again. The quality of the phone-call wasn’t good enough that Dahyun could see the tears, but she could hear in Sana’s voice that they were there again.

“Goodnight, Sana. You too, Momo.”

“Goodnight, Dahyun.” Momo smiled, then jolted and spoke again. “Wait, can you do me a favor? Say goodnight to them for me?”

“What?”

“I recognize the sign on the building behind you. It’s across from their place.”

“Oh. Right. Yeah, I’ll do that.”

They said goodnight again and Dahyun ended the call. Pressed another number and waited, deciding against using the buzzer to get in. Waking the entire floor in the middle of the night was not a good idea.

“Who the hell.”

“Nayeon? Can I sleep here tonight?”

…

Dahyun woke in a mess of limbs, disoriented, salt remnants on her cheeks and a sore throat. Coughing once, she tried to turn onto her back, but almost squashed Chaeyoung in the process. The
younger girl woke with a confused mumble, and tugged Dahyun closer. Dahyun let her.

“You sleep well?” Nayeon asked, her voice croaky.

“Mm.. Thank you.” Dahyun mumbled, burying her face in Nayeon’s shirt, completely unashamed.

“You can stay here until Sana gets back if you want? If it’s the sleep thing?”

Dahyun opened her eyes but stared only at Nayeon’s shirt. As fast as she had fallen asleep between the two girlfriends, as fast was she wide awake now, her heart pounding unsteadily against her ribs.

“No, that’s ok.” Dahyun mumbled, feeling that she should at least say something. “I just needed one good night.”

“You got here at three in the morning, this can’t possibly count as a good night.” Chaeyoung commented.

“It was just after work, I wasn’t in a good place. But I promise I’ll come wandering again tonight if I can’t sleep, ok? Promise. I just. I want to try. I want to get to that point where I don’t sleep with her because I can’t sleep without her. Where it’s just because I want to.”

Her friends seemingly accepted this promise. It wasn’t a lie, that she wanted to try. Wasn’t a lie either that this was exactly the reason for it. But it was the timing that was a lie. Because right now, she just couldn’t get herself to correct the terms of their offer. Couldn’t get the words out - that letting her stay until Sana was back meant letting her stay indefinitely. But what about Momo? Would she stay too?

“Chaeyoung?” Dahyun asked, the younger girl scooting to make enough space for Dahyun to turn onto her back. “Can I… I’m gonna get up. Can you give me ten minutes before you do as well?”

Chaeyoung frowned. Searched her face and nodded. Maybe it was the heaviness of Dahyun’s heart at the impending disappointment, or maybe just the worry in Chaeyoung’s face, but the need to relieve the tension made Dahyun break into a grin.

“You can probably find a way to pass the time.” She said. Knew it was a defense mechanism and that Chaeyoung had seen through her. But the younger girl let her leave anyways.

Quickly, Dahyun untangled herself from the two girls and got up, hurrying out of the room, feeling them stare after her. But the moment she had closed the door, her pace slowed. Well, slowed in the sense that it stopped. She stopped. Because it was right there, staring at her.

Breathing deeply, she took a step. And another. And with every step she took, she told herself that it was okay, that she could do this. But it was painful to realise that something as comforting and enchanting as a piano, could make her want to run away and hide somewhere that it couldn’t see her. Where it couldn’t stare at her.

Maybe she should wait. Maybe this wasn’t the right time. But she needed control over something. Anything. And this; this was a battle she had to win. Today. Even if she could never win the war. So she sat down on the cool black leather.

The sustainer pedal felt odd and cold under her bare foot, and the keys heavy as she placed both hands on them. Then removed the left. And then the right.

She counted the keys, from one end to the next, first the white, then the black, then the lot. Again
and again until something nudge her shoulder. It made Dahyun look up, and saw her oldest friend looking down at her. There was no pity in her eyes, just a curiousness so much like the one Dahyun had seen the first time they had met, and it made her move over on the bench, the sustainer pedal slipping from under her foot.

Chaeyoung sat down next to her.

It was all Dahyun needed. Not to play. But to reach forwards and press down a single key. An A. There was nothing dramatic about it, yet somehow it was everything. Because the delicacy of how much weight to add to press it down right, seemed so deeply ingrained in Dahyun’s arm, and she couldn’t help but press the B. And then the C. Played a scale. Then let her hand slip from the keys, hanging limply beside the piano bench.

“Enough.” Dahyun nodded.

“It’s a step.” Chaeyoung said.

“I’m not ready to give it up.” Dahyun admitted, staring at the keys.

“Then don’t.”

Dahyun nodded. Wanted more than anything to press a chord and let her worries flow away with the sounds of her mind materializing as music. But she couldn’t. Not today. She had won the battle. Run a scale. But she had to stop for now - before she broke.

“Okay.”

“Are you two ready for breakfast then?” Nayeon asked from the door to the kitchen.

“Please don’t tell me you cooked.” Chaeyoung looked almost afraid as she took Dahyun by the hand and walked with her into the kitchen.

“Hey, I’ve been learning! Be a good girlfriend and be supportive!” Nayeon pointed at her with a spatula, on which sat remnants of burnt egg.

“You have Momo to praise your every move now, I get to speak the truth. And your cooking still sucks.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes.


Chaeyoung laughed and so did Dahyun. Nayeon tried not to. But the conversation was cut short just as Chaeyoung opened her mouth to comment again. The door had buzzed, and Nayeon hurried out to get it.

“You expecting someone?” Dahyun frowned.

“Jihyo called right after you got up, asked to steal Nayeon away.” Chaeyoung explained.

Dahyun wasn’t exactly sure how to react. Settled for “Oh.” and followed Chaeyoung out of the kitchen as the door opened and they heard Jihyo’s voice. She sounded happy, more awake than Dahyun felt. And for a split-second Dahyun allowed herself to hope that it was good news she brought. But the second Jihyo’s eyes caught Dahyun’s, her expression changed. First into a frown, then to shame. They stared at each other, and Dahyun felt Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s eyes on the two of them, but Dahyun couldn’t stop. What had gone wrong? There was definitely something. Something that wasn’t there that night they had spoken on Jeongyeon’s kitchen floor.
“Jihyo.” Dahyun tried.

But Jihyo just snapped her eyes away, grabbed Nayeon’s hand, ignoring the fact that she was still in pyjamas and overheard all of the older girl’s loud protests. Just dragged her out of the door and closed it afterwards.

The shame in Jihyo’s eyes mirrored in Dahyun’s heart. Because for all that Jihyo had done for her the past months, Dahyun had taken a side. Tzuyu’s side. And it wasn’t that she wanted to, but as much as it was Tzuyu’s own fault for letting herself string along, Jihyo needed to stop whatever it was she was doing, no matter the reason. But Dahyun hadn’t offered her support. She had just told her what to do. And from the look in Jihyo’s eyes, it was clear that she hadn’t. But then, what in the world had she done to make her look at Dahyun like that?

As if she was afraid of Dahyun.

...

Tzuyu got up. Frowned and walked the length of her dorm room. Another knock. It wasn’t as much a wonder of who - she knew who, just by the knock - but a matter of why. She had been so distant the past two days so why was she suddenly here now?

“C-can I stay here a little?” Jihyo asked as soon as Tzuyu opened.

“... Of course.” Tzuyu opened the door wider, letting the girl walk past her, into Tzuyu’s room. “Jihyo, what’s wrong?”

“I just need not to think.” Jihyo rubbed a hand over her face, plopping down on Tzuyu’s bed.

“Okay.” Tzuyu hesitated slightly, but then closed the door. She didn’t join Jihyo on the bed. Just looked at her. How she slumped and buried her face in her hands.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Jihyo whispered.

“Jihyo, it’s okay.” Tzuyu said. Wanted nothing more than to wrap the older girl in her arms and make it better. But she stayed by the door. Knew that Jihyo would return her embraces. Would cave. Would even let Tzuyu kiss her, if she tried. By now, Tzuyu knew all of Jihyo’s stages of vulnerability. Knew that right now, Tzuyu was the one who had to hold back.

“I keep hurting you.” Jihyo croaked. “You know, I tried to tell Nayeon today - dragged her ass out in pyjamas and everything, but I couldn’t. I just couldn’t.”

“Tell her?”

“Everything,” Jihyo’s voice shivered.

God, how hard it was to not close the distance between them.

“I’m here. If... if you want to talk. Or- anything. I’m here, Jihyo.” Tzuyu couldn’t help herself. Even
if she couldn’t hold the girl and make it better, she could at least remind her she was still here. That she was still waiting. Even if it was hopeless.

“Tzuyu.” Jihyo finally looked up, pain in her face.

“I know. But I’m still here. We agreed, friends.”

“But you don’t want to be friends.” Jihyo’s voice broke at the last word.

“I want whatever you’ll let me have, you know that.” Tzuyu shifted her weight, fingers digging into her arms to keep from walking over to her.

“... Why are you even so good to me? Why do you stay?” Jihyo’s eyes glazed over.

“Because through all this, you’re still the one who made me feel like I had a home in this country. And I never want to lose that. I stay for me. For selfish reasons. Because I don’t want to be homeless.” Tzuyu muttered the last part.

“You’ll never lose me.” Jihyo whispered. “Even if I can’t be the home you want, you’ll never lose me.”

“I know.” Tzuyu said. Felt her throat close up and her muscles jolt with the urge of moving. She let them. But instead of walking over to Jihyo, she turned and opened the fridge. Looked into it to spare Jihyo of the sight of her face crumbling.

“Tzuyu?”

“Did you have dinner? I was about to make some when you knocked.” Tzuyu lied.

“Oh, no, I didn’t have anything since… well, yesterday” Jihyo said mutely.

Tzuyu nodded at the fridge and opened the vegetable drawer. Drew out tomatoes, garlic and basil. Then she turned to look at Jihyo finally. “Pasta?”

“... sounds good.” Jihyo nodded. Sniffled and got up. “I’ll help.”

For a moment Tzuyu considered telling Jihyo to just sit down - simply because the lack of distance might make Tzuyu do something she wasn’t supposed to. But she didn’t. Didn’t tell her to sit down, but also didn’t do anything. She just asked Jihyo to start mincing garlic while Tzuyu chopped tomatoes.

“Thank you.” Jihyo said, filling the kettle with water - it boiled faster in that than on the hotpot.

“For what?”

“Letting me breathe here.” Jihyo shrugged.

“Of course.” Tzuyu said. Wanted to hold her. Didn’t. Instead she looked down at the tomato she was holding her knife over. Snorted and chuckled to herself.

“What?”

“Hand me a chopstick?” Tzuyu asked, biting down on her lip. It might not work. Might just make Jihyo question her sanity. But if there was even the slightest chance that it’d get the girl to smile, then if was worth everything.
“Here.” Jihyo took a pair of chopsticks from the topmost drawer, but Tzuyu only took one. Jihyo stood comically with the other in her hand and a quizzical expression on her face.

“I have a chopstick.” Tzuyu started, raising said chopstick. Knew that the syllables didn’t match, but Jihyo seemed to recognize the melody nonetheless.

“... dork.” The corners of Jihyo’s lips tugged as she whispered.

“I have a tomato.” Tzuyu continued, holding up the tomato. “Uh, tomato-chopstick!”

Jihyo snorted. And then laughed. And her laughter crackled like the fire burning from almost-dry wood, completely past rules and boundaries. Still Tzuyu kept singing. Danced ridiculously to it, using every silly move Chaeyoung and Dahyun had ever taught her. And Jihyo kept laughing.

It was enough.

It would be enough.

Someday.

...

Dahyun sighed. Stepped into the shower and held out a hand to make sure that the water was really warm. Then she stepped under it, feeling it soak her hair and face. With a sigh she ran her hands through the black hair and sighed. Tonight was the night. The night she would have to actually face it for the first time in two months. Sleeping alone.

It was late and she knew that she would have to blow-dry her hair afterwards, but she hadn’t been able to get off the couch since the afternoon, almost apathetically zoned out. And now she was here, running shampoo through her hair, fearing the darkness and the solitude. She just wanted Sana. Wanted her arms and her scent and her safety. Her bubbling laughter and morning breath and burnt toast and insecurity.

The shampoo ran down Dahyun’s forehead and almost got into her eye, but she wiped it away with the back of her hand. Sighed and turned the water back on, closing her eyes. She could almost feel her - Sana. Could almost feel her arms around her. Would she be able to sleep without Sana? But it wasn’t just Sana. She had slept fine yesterday in Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s arms. Slept well with Momo. With Jihyo. Couldn’t deny that she preferred Sana, but with a frown she realized, that it was just sleeping alone she was bad at.

Maybe she should just give in and call Jihyo. But it was more than just admitting defeat that made her opt against this. It was the fear in Jihyo’s eyes. And Dahyun knew she should confront Jihyo with it, but at the same time, she had to get her own life under control a little before butting in on Jihyo’s life again. But she was going to send her a text before going to sleep. Just to make sure Jihyo knew that Dahyun wasn’t just on Tzuyu’s side. She was on Jihyo’s too, even if she hadn’t made it very clear.
Dahyun turned off the water again, and stared down at the bottles that stood in the corner of the shower. Exhaled heavily and pressed her lips together. She had only once done this, but she was really tempted. Just to feel like Sana was a little closer, especially now that Dahyun didn’t know when she’d see her again.

“It’s not that hard. Come on, she won’t mind it.” Dahyun grumbled at herself the fourth time she had closed and opened her hand without actually reaching for anything. Then she bent down and took the lemon scented conditioner. Opened the lid and held it close to her nose, inhaling the scent. Immediately her stomach backflipped and she felt like crying. It was almost like she was here. Any second now she was going to wrap her arms around Dahyun from behind and tickle the younger girl’s tummy. She would tell Dahyun what a goof she is and Dahyun would turn in her arms and tell her she loved her. Would kiss her so hard that she would steal the air from Sana’s lungs.

But she wasn’t there.

After one last inhale, Dahyun turned the bottle around and poured lemon conditioner into her hand. Then closed the bottle and put it back in the corner before working the conditioner into her hair. The warm vapor spread the scent of Sana, making the air smell like her. And Dahyun knew it was the right decision. Even if it hurt that she wasn’t here, it soothed Dahyun enough to get over the pain of missing her so she could focus on being there for Sana. Because it was what she needed - Sana. Someone to watch over her now. To prove that there was someone other than Momo who would stay by her side through it all. No matter what happened.

Dahyun didn’t put her hair up after she had dried it. Let it hang loose so she could smell her better. But just as she had put her glasses on, the contacts safe in their case on the little shelf over the sink, her phone lit up and started beeping.

“Sana?” Dahyun asked as she picked up, looking at herself in the mirror. One pair of four-eyes.

“Hi.” Sana’s voice was shaky. “She’s being discharged.”

Every muscle in Dahyun’s body seemed to give in and had to grab a hold of the sink to steady herself.

“I’m so glad to hear that.” Dahyun breathed.

“She’s going to be in bed for a long time though. And…” Sana trailed off.

“But she’s going to be ok, right?” Dahyun said. Felt her heart clench at the thought that something bad could happen to her, even if Dahyun had never met her.

“I don’t know. I think so. But Dahyun. I... I know I said I’d see once she got home but I can’t leave her. Not right now.” Sana’s voice broke. “I don’t know when I’ll come back but for now... My dad is left with everything and I just. I can’t get myself to leave her. I’m so so.”

“Don’t apologize, Sana.” Dahyun interrupted her. “She’s your mother, of course you should be with her. We talked about this yesterday too.”
“But I want to be with you.” Sana breathed. “I want to stay with her but I want to be with you too.”

“You are with me.” Dahyun insisted. Turned away from the mirror and walked out into the living room.

“I’ll come home as soon as I can. I promise.” Sana whispered.

“You don’t have to hurry for me. I’ll still be here. Besides, you left my favorite shirt behind so I’m not all alone.” Dahyun said as she turned off the lights in the living room and hallway. Then walked into Sana’s room, without actually thinking about it. For some reason it felt unnatural to sleep in her own room. Felt like it wasn’t her room anymore.

“I’m hurrying for me, Dahyunnie.” Sana said as Dahyun sat down on her bed, kicking off the fuzzy red slippers. “It’s me who’s selfish and wants to come home to you.”

Dahyun felt her heart swell and laid down on the bed, shuffling under the covers.

“Do your parents know about me?” Dahyun asked.

“Oh course.” Sana murmured shyly.

Dahyun steadied her breath and tried not to miss Sana too much as she smelled the older girl’s perfume on the pillow. “Will you tell your mom I’m glad she’s well enough to be discharged? And that she has an amazing daughter?”

Sana giggled and sniffled. “I can do that.”

“Good.” Dahyun said.

“Have you been sleeping?”

“I stayed at Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s last night, so I did. I just laid down now. I hope you don’t mind me using your bed while you’re gone.”

“Not at all.” Sana said, a smile in her voice. “Are you scared?”

Dahyun bit her lip hard and closed her eyes. “I don’t know. I’m afraid that I’ll get scared. That I’m going to overthink and get overly anxious.”

“I can stay with you until you sleep? Talk you to sleep?” Sana offered.

“I need to figure out how to sleep alone. It sucks and I hate it but I need to be able to. I could do it once, I can do it again.”

“It started after the accident didn’t it? The whole thing about sleeping alone?”

“I don’t know, but I think so? I never liked it much but it wasn’t a need to be held. More that I needed to know someone was there, in the house. When I was a kid my dad would snore so loud I could hear him if I had my door slightly ajar. And when I got older it was enough to know my brother was home or that Chaeyoung was. But I think since Nayeon and Jihyo started getting me through the nightmares I’ve felt like I couldn’t sleep without getting nightmares unless someone was there?”

“That makes sense. So you don’t want to call Jihyo or Nayeon, because you want to get back to being able to sleeping alone?”
“Exactly.”

“Even if the apartment is completely empty now?”

“Y-yeah.” Dahyun hadn’t considered that. But she was right. Dahyun was completely alone.

“Just promise that if you can’t sleep, you will tell someone. So they can catch you if you fall.” Sana’s voice was full of care, and Dahyun wanted to cry.

“I don’t want to fall.” Dahyun sighed. “I don’t want to need help all the time.”

“I know. I know you don’t.” Sana hushed. “But sometimes you fall anyways. And when you do I need to know that someone is there to catch you when I can’t.”

Dahyun pinched the bridge of her nose. Nodded and remembered that Sana couldn’t see her.

“I’ll call someone if I can’t sleep. I promise. Just give me a few nights to try.”

“Of course. And don’t forget that even if I’m telling you to call someone, I know you won’t need to. You’re so strong, you can do this. You—” Sana’s voice broke and something covered the microphone. Her hand probably. Muffled voices spoke, and then she was back. “I have to go. Take care of my Dahyunnie for me, okay?”

Dahyun chuckled and promised to do so. Then she texted Jihyo and rolled over, away from the phone.

11:03 PM Dahyun: Whatever is going on, I’m on your side too.

11:04 PM Dahyun: I love you.

...

Dahyun turned onto her back. Stared up at the ceiling and made fists around the sheets. This was absolutely ridiculous. For almost an hour she had just laid there, getting more and more afraid of her own mind. And for what? It was just nightmares she was scared of. There were no cars in here. And wasn’t afraid of the cars outside. Didn’t flinch every time she saw headlights. So why was she afraid of them now.

Light pulled Dahyun from her mind and she looked around at her phone. It was silently announcing a call. Who the hell called at midnight? Sana? Had something happened? Dahyun sat up immediately, feeling her heart in her throat. Her head spun at the rush of sitting up too fast and she blinked.

But it wasn’t Sana’s name on the display. It was Jeongyeon’s. But wasn’t she still home? They weren’t supposed to come back until tomorrow morning, right?

“Jeongyeon?” Dahyun asked groggily. Cleared her throat.
“Uh, yeah. Did I wake you?”

“Huh? No, I’m still up.” Dahyun ran a hand through her hair and shook it in front of her head to smell it. She couldn’t help but smiling..

“Things tough without Sana?”

“Nah, it’s not too bad, I just got off the phone with her now, you know how it is.”

It came without even thinking about it. More naturally than telling the truth.

“Gross. Look, is there any way I can get you to take my shift tomorrow?”

“I guess, why? Are you staying home longer?”

“Oh no. But something came up, and I really need to get rid of this shift.” Jeongyeon said pleadingly.

“Sure. I got you.” Dahyun said. It wasn’t like she had anything better to do, and she only had classes in the morning tomorrow.

“Thank you, Dahyun.” The relief was audible in Jeongyeon’s voice.

“No problem.” Dahyun said, but just as she was about to ask if they had had a good few days home, Jeongyeon hung up. Dahyun furrowed her brows and hummed, but then just put the phone down and stared around the blurred silhouettes of the dark room.

“Okay, Kim Dahyun; time to get over yourself.” Dahyun announced to herself. Then decisively got up and walked into her room. Grabbed the squirrel plush from the corner of the unused bed and walked back into the bedroom. She didn’t lie down on her own spot. Instead she moved inwards, towards the wall, and settled on Sana’s pillow, back pressed against the wall, only the sheets between. Then she curled around the squirrel, pressing it against her stomach. Took her own hand and gently laced the fingers of one hand through the spaces between the other. She could do this.

She couldn’t do this. There was no way she’d ever get enough sleep, and it was so stupid, all of it. She was just useless and pathetic. Would never be able to become a person worthy of Sana. Would always be dependent on her. And she hated it. Didn’t want to be this person. It wasn’t healthy. It was supposed to be a partnership, not one part being dependent on the other. And how was she ever going to be able to be a help to Sana now that she needed her the most? God, what if it was Dahyun going through- no. No, she couldn’t think like this. It wasn’t a solution. She just had to breathe. Deeply. And again.

And again.

Dahyun yawned. Clutched her hands closer and focused on the sound of the waves playing from her phone. She had found an app that played calming sounds after reading about calming techniques. Apparently what she had done so far had been an instinctual right choice. A scent that calmed.
Physical pressure. And now calming sounds. Something to soothe the major senses.

Just a deep breath in.
Hold it.
And then out.
Hold it.
Repeat.
Repeat.
Repeat…

The phone was loud and rude, and Dahyun jolted awake. Banged her head into the wall and cursed. Rolling over in the semi-darkness, she reached for her phone on the nightstand to stop the alarm. Then looked at the clock. She had slept until morning. Without nightmares. She wasn’t well rested, but she had done it. Had slept, with whatever means she could find herself. All alone in the apartment. The thought alone brought a smile to her face and she buried her face in the pillow, taking in Sana’s scent. Then she fumbled for her glasses and put them on, still snuggled under the covers. She wasn’t quite ready to face the morning yet, even if she would have to get up in a minute.

7:31 AM Dahyun: Good morning~

Dahyun gave it a few seconds to read, but then turned off the screen and sat up, stretching with a deep yawn. The room was warm, so it wasn’t too much of a hassle - getting up. It was always worse in the winter when the air was cold and the sheets warm.

Turning the phone on sound, Dahyun got up and walked out of the bedroom. It was cooler in the hallway but not too much. It was mostly just a lack of sleep in the air that made a difference. Then Dahyun turned into the kitchen, looking around. Opened the cabinet to her right and grabbed the instant coffee powder and a mug. With a yawn Dahyun checked her phone but there was no answer. She knew this already, because it would’ve buzzed, but Dahyun couldn’t help herself from hoping. And even if there was no answer, she could at least put on some music, and make the walls seem less naked without Sana’s laughter bouncing off them.

Bopping her head along to the song, Dahyun found bread and jam and a plate. Put the bread in the toaster and turned it on. Then the phone buzzed.

7:39 AM Sana: Morning baby

7:39 AM Sana: Did you sleep?
Dahyun chuckled awkwardly. Couldn’t help it. Butterflies flew happily in her stomach. With her lip between her teeth, she typed an answer.

7:40 AM Dahyun: I did. No nightmares.

The phone turned almost as soon as the message read marked. Sana was calling.

“You slept?” Sana asked, pride in her voice.

“I did. Took me a while, plus it’s gonna be screwed up today because I took Jeongyeon’s shift, but I did sleep. Took some ASMR and spooning the squirrel plush, but I did.”

“I’m proud of you.” Sana’s smile was audible in her voice.

“How’s everything with you? How’s your mom?” Dahyun asked as she withdrew the perfectly golden toast from the toaster, putting it on the plate.

“She made it through the night, but that’s the best I can say. Honestly I’m starting to think she shouldn’t have been discharged. They want her in for testing in a few days, and I think it would’ve been better if she had just stayed there instead of having to go through the strain of being moved. I might try to talk to my dad about it today.” Sana told.

Dahyun just listened, stirring the coffee until the instant grounds were properly dissolved. Then she took a sip and winced. It was too warm and she burned her tongue.

“You okay?” Sana asked.

“Just the coffee. Is Momo staying with you still?”

“Yeah, she’s home during the day but she’s here at night to help relieve us. None of us dare sleep, and this way we can cover my mom in three hour shifts.”

“That’s very honorable of her.” Dahyun said, spreading jam across the toast.

“It’s too much, but she insists. Another reason why I’m considering asking to have her admitted again. If we’re afraid that she’ll die overnight then she should be somewhere that we can help it if something happens immediately. The hospital is half an hour away and if the valves suddenly give way then she’s screwed.” Sana sighed, her voice tired and fragile.

“I think you should talk to him, your dad. I mean I know I’m not close to the situation, but it sounds like it would be best for her to be at the hospital.”

“Yeah. I mean it could just be me exaggerating, but I just have this feeling.” Sana said.

“Then you have to act on it. You’ll never forgive yourself if something happens and you didn’t do anything.” Dahyun took a bite of toast, holding a hand against the microphone to avoid chewing into Sana’s ear.

“Yeah, you’re right.” Sana sighed. “You’ll be closing tonight?”
“Yeah, with Mina.” Dahyun said. Took another bite.

“Say hi to her for me?” Sana asked. “I know I have her number and all, but with everything going on I’m just not ready to deal with my own insecurities around them.”

“They’d love hearing from you. Any of them.”

“I know. I mean logically I know. But for now?”

“Sure. I’ll say hi to her from you. Sana? Do I tell them about you?”

“About my mom?”

“Yeah and you staying?”

“Yeah, I mean it’s probably not group chat things but-”

“They’re your friends, they should know what’s going on.” Dahyun said.

“My friends…” Sana sounded sceptical.

“Just trust them. They’re the best people. Trust that they’re here for you.”

Sana hummed. “I’ll try my best.”

…

Dahyun took a deep breath, sending a last prayer to the sky before opening the door to the restaurant. The air conditioner better have been fixed since her last shift. But the thought of which satan to sell her soul to in order to assure that it was fixed, disappeared when a familiar back stood by the lockers.

Mina was back. She turned her head for a split-second when Dahyun closed the door, but then went back to fixing her tie. She fumbled slightly with it.

“Hey, you.” Dahyun said tentatively.

“Hi.” Mina smiled at her, her eyes not meeting Dahyun’s. Then she turned her back again and closed her locker. Checked herself in the mirror on the right hand wall by the sink and nodded to herself.

Dahyun put down her bag and opened her own locker. “So how was-”

“I’ll see you in there.” Mina said, almost as if she hadn’t heard Dahyun.

“I- uh, sure.” Dahyun said, watching as Mina walked into the kitchen.

For a moment Dahyun considered going after her, but opted against it. She probably just hadn’t heard. With a hum Dahyun shook her head and opened her bag. Changed into her waitress outfit and checked her phone for messages before turning it to silent and putting it into her bag and this into the locker.

The air conditioner thankfully worked. Thankfully. Another hellish night of Satan’s butthole would
just be more than what Dahyun could take. But even then, it was her second closing shift in three
days, and if it wasn’t for the fact that she only had two courses this summer, she might not have had
the energy to get through it properly. But the success of the night’s endeavors to sleep was giving her
some of the strength she had been missing for a long time. The strength to smile genuinely at the
customers and joke around with the kids that came in. Even strength to keep an eye on Mina without
letting her worries overpower everything.

Maybe it was just the mood in the locker room earlier, or maybe something in the way Mina clearly
had on a poker face, but Dahyun couldn’t help but feel extra protective tonight. Even if, the more
Dahyun thought about it, the more it made sense. Mina was definitely an introvert and it was
completely understandable that she was tired. Four days in the company of new people, especially
new people who you’d like to leave with a good impression, would be enough to make anyone tired.
Especially a girl like Mina who preferred home and quiet.

Dahyun shook her head and walked behind the bar. Looked at the clock. How was it only nine? It
felt like she had been here for a lot longer. If she had to guess she would’ve at least said midnight.
But then again, the last dining guests hadn’t gotten the bill yet and there weren’t too many of their
drinking guests yet.

Drinking guests… God, if she was tired, Mina. Would she get more affected by their words if any
came for her? She looked okay now, but if anyone said anything…

“Miss?” A voice called from the other side of the bar. Dahyun snapped around to the customer and
realized she must’ve been staring at Mina.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Yes, may I help you?” Dahyun’s eyes went out of focus but she blinked and looked
at the man. He was her age. Maybe a little older; twenty-five? Something in that range. God, please,
not one of those. But he was talking to Dahyun and not Mina, so maybe Dahyun was just getting too
overly cautious.

“I didn’t know it was this kind of a place you ran here.” The man said casually.

“Excuse me?” Dahyun frowned. Place?

“Full of… you know. Your kind.” He said, raising an eyebrow.

Dahyun’s heart skipped a beat and her face flushed immediately. No, it was okay. She would
manage. Just as long as Mina didn’t get involved.

“Come again?”

“Look, I know that one is a dyke, but you too?” The man leaned on the counter. Dahyun gaped,
brows furrowed as he continued. What weird ass reality was this, to have her sexuality questioned by
a customer like that? “And really. I thought she was shagging that blonde girl. The one who looks
like an idol. Or are you just all-”

“Please don’t talk to her like that.”

Dahyun closed her eyes for a second, frozen. This was exactly what wasn’t supposed to happen.
More than anything, Dahyun just wanted for this part of Mina’s life to go away. If she was already
tired the last thing she needed was these. But Mina had, nevertheless, appeared by Dahyun’s side,
nudged herself in front of Dahyun. Had grabbed two of Dahyun’s fingers and held them tightly in
her hand. Maybe just to tether themselves together? Dahyun wasn’t sure. All she knew was that she
couldn’t move. Couldn’t get a better hold of Mina to get her away from this. Couldn’t figure out what nightmare this was, because one thing was the jerk who was shitting all over her, but another thing was Mina coming to her rescue and not the other way around.

“So you are just a bunch of dykes.” The man tore Dahyun from her thoughts, his eyes on Dahyun’s fingers in Mina’s hand.

“Don’t use that word.” Mina snapped. Pushed Dahyun further back, the grip on Dahyun’s fingers tightening.

“Come on, call a shovel what it is, instead of all this shit. You’re a dyke and you won’t let me fuck it out of you, so-” The man shrugged and looked past Mina at Dahyun, “but maybe this one will.”

“Shut up.” Mina said in a tone so dangerous and low that Dahyun didn’t even recognize it.

“You can’t talk to me like that. I’m a paying customer.” He reached nonchalantly across the desk and flicked Mina’s hair before she could step back. She stumbled into Dahyun, stepped on her foot and let go of her fingers.

“Out!” Mina growled. Then yelled. “Get out!”

“Mina.” Dahyun whispered. Tried to get a hold of her hand, but it was balled up in a fist so tight it turned Mina’s knuckles white. Dahyun settled for grabbing her wrist.

“You can’t tell me to get out.” The man said, almost amused. As if he was getting off on this.

“Get out! Get out!!” Mina repeated and pushed his hand away when he reached again.

Dahyun heard the mumbles of the customers. They were attracting too much attention and Dahyun pulled at Mina’s wrist. But the look Mina sent her was so unlike her that Dahyun took a step back, letting go of her. She didn’t look angry. But something in her eyes was so terrifyingly different from what Dahyun knew. And she couldn’t decipher it. Then Dahyun’s heart dropped into her stomach as a man approached from behind.

“What is going on here?”

Yang-nim.

His face was controlled and neutral but his eyes shot lightning bolts.

“And you are?” The younger man said with his eyebrows raised.

“The owner of this establishment.”

“Oh, just the man I needed to talk to then. You should learn to control your girls. They’re not all too polite telling me to shut up and get out.”

Yang-nim’s head snapped around to the two girls, immediately finding Dahyun’s face.

“She didn’t do any of that.” Mina said quickly, stepping in front of Dahyun. “I did.”

“Yeah, your little friend was just busy undressing you with her eyes.”

“I said shut up!” Mina yelled. “You can’t-”

“Myoui!” Yang-nim said in a voice so commanding that Mina immediately stopped talking, her
chest rising and falling hard, her breathing heavy and her nostrils flaring with each exhale.

Yang-nim turned to the man, who looked utterly satisfied with himself. “I’ll keep them in line, sir. Don’t you worry about that.”

“Don’t bother.” Mina said and pulled her arm from Dahyun’s grasp. “I’m done here. I quit.”

And then she walked out. Out of the restaurant, into the kitchen. A mere two seconds later there was a loud slam, telling Dahyun that she was now in the locker room.

The entire restaurant was quiet, all eyes on the three left at the bar.

Dahyun wanted to run after her but knew that Yang-nim would never allow it. Stood frozen on the spot.

The rest of the night passed in a haze. The same words kept ringing in her head. Mina’s words. Her terrifying voice and her eyes. Her eyes. Yang-nim didn’t bring in anyone else, but took over Mina’s part himself. Just let her go. And Dahyun worried. Spilled the drinks and forgot orders. But it didn’t matter. It was just about getting through this night. If only her heart would stop racing like this every time she recalled Mina’s voice. If only she could’ve got five minutes to call Mina… or Jeongyeon or Jihyo. Anyone. Anyone who could do something when she was stuck here, knowing what had happened but not being able to help it.

…

The second Dahyun managed to throw the last customers out and locked the doors, she ran. Let the restaurant be uncleaned, the bar uncounted, and ran past Joohyun and the questions in her eyes. Cursing her frustrations out, Dahyun fumbled with her locker. Even if it in the middle of the night she had to try. Had to make sure Mina was okay. Not that it was the worst thing to quit a job, but the way it had happened was just worrying. Mina so rarely lost her temper, and never ever had she shouted at a customer. No matter how rude.

With sweaty palms, Dahyun scrolled through her contacts. Found Mina’s number and pressed to call. It immediately went to voicemail. Yet for some reason she still tried again. Even if she knew that this meant Mina had turned off her phone. At the third try, Dahyun bit her lip and made a choice. If she wouldn’t answer then maybe Jeongyeon would. Even if it meant waking her in the middle of the night.

It at least beeped. But it wasn’t picked up. Or, at first it wasn’t. But just as Dahyun was about to cry with the frustration, a tired sigh took over for the beeping.

“Hello?” Jeongyeon’s voice was groggy with sleep.

“Jeongyeon. Is Mina with you?” Dahyun asked, trying to keep the panic down.

“Dahyun?”
“Yes. Is Mina with you?”

“No.” Jeongyeon said, her voice oddly monotonous.

“Do you know where she is?” Dahyun pressed, her muscles tensing so much it made her shake.

“No.”

“She quit.” Dahyun’s voice broke and she cleared her throat. “Jeongyeon, she quit her job.”

Silence.

“That’s not my problem.”

Dahyun almost lost her mind. And for once she actually yelled. “What the hell do you mean it’s not your problem! ? For fucks sake, she’s your girlfr-”

“No she’s not.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please feel free to leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter @dajeongmi or using the hashtag #TWICEroomies
Chapter Summary

She implodes

Chapter Notes

The update is finally here, I hope you'll enjoy this journey I'm taking you all on. Please do not expect the following chapters to be as long as this one... it got a little out of hand.

Thank you for waiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Okay, so listing the stupidest things Mina had ever done, her current situation would definitely be on the list. The first place was still undoubtedly the party three days ago where she had kissed Jihyo on the sidewalk. But tonight was up there too. It was her own graduation party now - except not the kind with beer and music. The kind with wine and family and manners. Where the youngest of the doctor's two children had graduated with the highest honor and now had to talk to all the adults she was supposed to count herself amongst. Well, she didn't have any friends her own age anymore, so this crowd was better than none, right? Except she didn't feel the slightest bit like an adult. She felt more than anything like a scared child who had broken a cup and didn't dare tell anyone. Who tried to sweep the pieces under the rug and hope no-one would step on them and make the pieces crack even further.

“You look down, Mi-tan.” Kai nudged gently. Spoke in their own language.

“Sorry, I'm just so tired.” Mina sighed.

“I wish Jihyo could've made it, she always makes you cheer up so much.” Kai said.

“Nii..” Mina just said, a pleading look in her eyes.

“I know, I know. You fought, but it can’t be that bad that she couldn’t come to your graduation party.” Kai said.

Mina cringed. “You don’t get it.”

Kai looked like he was going to argue the case for a while, but then he just shook his head and offered Mina his glass of wine. She took it gratefully. Drank greedily even if she hated the taste and herself for letting the alcohol take away her pain. Kai watched her skeptically.

“You sure you're okay?”

“Just... not tonight, Nii. I just have to get through tonight.” Mina insisted.
Kai nodded. Let her be.

Which, really he probably shouldn’t have. But he couldn’t have known. Had no way of knowing that his perfect younger sister would soon have downed two more glasses of wine, broken into his dad’s liquor storage and drank from his whiskey. That she would then stumble out of her house, away from her own party. That she would get on the nearest bus downtown and sit with mascara running down her cheeks and hands making fists around the skirt of her pretty red dress.

But even if he had known, he might not have been able to stop her.

And so, Mina felt the rumble of the bus and the nausea spread in her body. Felt the dizziness and exhaustion threaten to make her fall asleep right there in the bus. Honestly, she wasn’t even sure where she was going. She just kept reliving this afternoon when she had bumped into Jihyo and Nayeon on the street. There had been heartbreak in Jihyo’s eyes and her hand had reached for Mina’s. Her mouth had whispered an ‘I miss you’. But Nayeon had stepped between them and pushed Jihyo back.

“Walk away, Mina.” Nayeon had said, darkness in her eyes.

“Nayeon-unnie. I just want to- I just want to talk.” Mina had pleaded.

“No.”

“Please, I just want to make things-”

“Right, I know. You always do. Little miss perfect. Well, sucks for you, you can’t fix this. You can’t make it right.”

“Nayeon.” Jihyo’s voice had been fragile and croaky.

“No, Jihyo.” Nayeon had hissed, and then looked back at Mina. “Do us a favor and just leave. And stay away.”

And Mina had.

Little miss perfect. Perfect. Always perfect. Perfect grades, perfect face, perfect skin, perfectly fine.

The bus stopped, and Mina got off. Not that she actually had a clue where she was, but just to avoid throwing up inside the bus. If she was going to, she’d much rather do it in a bush somewhere. But there were no bushes here. Just bright lights, grey concrete and the rush of life around her. She had somehow ended up downtown. Eighteen and drunk, with her red dress flowing around her and the mascara wiped onto her wrists, leaving her face mostly unstained.

As soon as she had gotten here, Mina wanted to go home. Wanted to crawl into her father’s arms and have him sing her to sleep. To have her mom massage her sore feet and put ointment on the blisters. But the bus was gone and she had no clue where she was.

To her right, cars drove past her, and on her left, light poured from the still open marts and sketchier shops. She could just wait. For the next bus to come pick her up. But she had to go in the other direction, right? To get home? Which meant if she was to get home she had to find a crosswalk and a bus number. Which one went home from here? There were three that drove close to her neighborhood, but right now she wasn’t sure which. But the first step was crossing the road.
With a sniffle, Mina turned around, walking in the direction of the green lights further down the streets. She could feel the people looking after her. Such a pretty girl all alone in the city. God, she was really so stupid.

“Got left by your boyfriend, pretty girl?” Someone asked as she passed.

Mina didn’t answer. Just tried to pretend she didn’t hear. Show no fear.

She was used to this. The comments. The boys who wanted her attention. But she wanted none of them. But god, what did she want then? She hadn’t ever really fallen for anyone, and even if she had liked kissing Jihyo it didn’t mean - well, she had liked the girls on TV when she was younger. And the pretty miss in primary school. But she had never been in love. Had never desired anyone. There was something like that, right? Not desiring - but then again. There was the whole obsession around Song Hyekyo when she had first moved to Korea. She had watched movies and dramas to learn the language, and had been more than just a little obsessed with the actress. But maybe… maybe she just hadn’t found the right guy yet? Or the right girl. No. No, she was into guys, she had to be. Except she had no desire to be with guys. But she had never been in love with a girl either. God, why was this all so confusing?

Mina stopped. Tried to locate the crosswalk but noticed only the shop to her left. It was small and dimly lit, but a sign caught her attention nonetheless. Insignificant.

Little miss perfect huh?

The irony wasn’t lost on her, as Mina walked into the shop. When she asked them to label her.

…

This was a nightmare right? Some sick dream. She must’ve left reality in the airport with Sana. Clearly, Dahyun had entered that state of exhaustion where her mind started fucking with her.

There was just no way.

None of this could be real.

Jeongyeon had hung up on her. Had just hung up with no further explanation.

No she’s not .

What the hell? Had they broken up? For real? When? At Jeongyeon’s family’s? It had to be recently - they… God, Jeongyeon had asked Dahyun to take the shift. Dahyun, who wasn’t supposed to work this much and who had fought to have them give her the shifts they needed to get out of to go home together. She had called Dahyun because she knew Dahyun would take it. Because she hadn’t wanted to work with Mina. Why hadn’t Dahyun noticed? Had they even gone to the Yoo’s?

Dahyun cursed under her breath and pressed the number on the phone again. Straight to voicemail. Fuck . What the hell was even going on anymore? If it wasn’t enough that Sana’s mom was so ill that Sana felt afraid to leave her and with Jihyo avoiding her, but this too? It was just about more than Dahyun could take. Dahyun looked down at her phone. Felt angry tears well up in her eyes,
and the chemicals surging through her every fiber. The urge to throw the phone across the room almost overpowered her, but it wouldn’t do anyone any good.

If this really was real life - and somehow there was a sick chance that it might be, then Dahyun couldn’t just melt down. She couldn’t just stand here and wait for someone to pick her up. There was no-one left. They had all fallen. Somehow they had all fallen…

Sometimes you fall anyways. And when you do I need to know that someone is there to catch you when I can’t.

Who was catching Mina?

Dahyun pressed Jeongyeon’s number again - just to try something; anything. She even called Jihyo, but she didn’t pick up either. Not that Dahyun had expected her to. Not with how she had looked at Dahyun. God, was something really wrong with her too? Other than the whole Tzuyu business?

What was even going on anymore?

And why wasn’t anyone talking?!

Dahyun kicked the locker, giving cause for a much needed string of curses as pain shot through her foot. Someone had to do something. Anything. About Sana, about her mom, about Jihyo and Tzuyu, about Jeongyeon, about-. God, someone had to do something about Mina. But there was no-one to do anything. Except Dahyun. But what was she supposed to do? Just barge in there like she had with Nayeon? Was that the way? And how would she even get to Mina’s place? It was so far away. If she took the subway it’d be four by the time she was there.

“Dahyun.” Said a gentle but strong voice behind her.

Dahyun turned, completely disoriented. The green lockers swam before her eyes, contrasted against white walls.

“Joohyun-unnie.” Dahyun croaked.

“Are you okay?”

Dahyun shook her head, her breath catching and tears spilling treacherously down her cheeks. She wasn’t sure why, by now; if it was desperation or confusion. Dahyun shifted her weight. Dried her cheek and picked at her cuticles distractedly.

“I don’t- I have to. Mina.” Dahyun sniffled and cleared her throat, looking up at Joohyun. “I need to find her.”

“She’s probably just home.” Joohyun said calmyly.

“I need to know. There’s- there’s more to it than her quitting. It’s not my place to- unnie, I have to know that she’s safe. I can’t reach her and I’m scared; she’s never done something like this before.” Dahyun whispered the last words, her voice breaking. Then Joohyun’s hand was in hers, the warmth of it like a welcome fireplace. Dry and safe. But there wasn’t time for dry and safe.

“I have a bike?” Joohyun suggested. “I mean, I know it’s raining but- I have a bike, if you want to borrow it. Or I can go check on her?”

“No, I’ll go. She’s- I know what’s going on. Somewhat. Thank you though.”
“You can borrow my bike, I’ll just have Seulgi pick me up.” Joohyun said with a smile.


“Yeah, we-” Joohyun shrugged.

“... oh. Ohh.” Dahyun felt her cheeks warm. “I always thought maybe you and Taeyang-”

Joohyun’s laughter filled the kitchen. “Tae-nim? God no, he’s pretty much my best friend but no. He’s going to be my best man though.”

“Hold on, you’re getting married?”

“March next year.” Joohyun nodded.

Dahyun felt completely woozy. What the hell was even going on anymore?

“Dahyun?” Joohyun’s smile fell and her hand squeezed Dahyun’s. “Mina.”

Mina. Mina’s eyes. The darkness in them. Jeongyeon’s eyes. The red in them after she had gotten back inside that night before they left. Had they been over then too? But then why hadn’t Jeongyeon said anything? Why hadn’t she confided in Dahyun?

“Dahyun!” Joohyun’s voice was more stern now, and Dahyun looked up at her again.

“Right, right. Okay…. Bike. I-I could borrow your bike?.” Dahyun swallowed. She hadn’t been on a bike since November, but right now it was the fastest way to Mina. A lot faster than the subway. And even if her beating heart was making her ribs hurt at the thought; even if her hands were clammy and a sheen of sweat covered her forehead. This was the solution she had been trying to come up with.

“Of course. Come on.” Joohyun nodded and tugged at Dahyun’s hand.

Dahyun didn’t change. Just grabbed her bag and walked out of the restaurant. She waited as Joohyun locked up, standing under the eaves, sheltered from the rain. For a moment she let herself listen to the rain, tried to find a chord in the plinking against the trash-containers, but was interrupted by the feeling of her phone beeping loudly. She frowned as she grabbed it and stared at the caller ID before picking up.

“Dahyun? Are you okay? Are you-” Jihyo was tripping over her own words in haste.

“Hey, hey, shh, I’m fine.” Dahyun interrupted her.

“But you were calling a-and it’s the middle of the night and- and Sana is-”

“Jihyo. I’m fine, it’s not me.” Dahyun assured the poor girl. She sounded completely out of it.

“... then who?”

Dahyun took a deep breath and bit her lip.

“Have you talked to either Mina or Jeongyeon lately?”

“I. Dahyun what’s going on?” Jihyo’s voice revealed worry.
“I’m not sure. Just… Have you?”

Jihyo sighed. “I saw Mina about a week ago.”

“Nothing since? Either of them?” Dahyun pressed.

“No.”

Dahyun swallowed. She didn’t want to expose Mina, or Jeongyeon. It wasn’t her place. But she needed information. Anything to try and figure out what in the world had gone wrong. “Did Mina seem at all… upset, to you, when you saw her?”

A long pause followed.

“Jihyo?”

“What happened?” Jihyo’s voice trembled. She sounded utterly terrified.

“I don’t know yet.” Dahyun lied. “Can you meet me at Mina’s? I know it’s the dead of night- but.”

“She doesn’t want to see me.” Jihyo croaked.

Dahyun felt Joohyun’s eyes on her. Heard the rain intensify. Heard the blood rush in her ears.

“Jihyo, please. This isn’t about whatever you three have going on, this is serious.”

“I’m not sure my thing is much different from your thing, if I’m honest. But all I know is that, if you go over there and I’m there, you won’t get her to open up.”

“Jihyo.”

“Please. Just take care of her. I’m begging you. Do this for me.”

Dahyun nodded. “Okay. Okay, I’ll go. Just promise me you’ll try to fix whatever you two have going on.”

Jihyo hung up.

Dahyun sniffled. Looked at the way the rain hit the only bike left in the bike-rack by the entrance. If things were so bad that Jihyo couldn’t help, then how could Dahyun even make a difference? How could she help? But she had to try. Even if it would just be an attempt at a temporary fix. A stopgap in a nightmare that wasn’t hers. If she could just at least prevent further damage. Because despite not knowing exactly what was going on, losing your girlfriend and quitting your job in a matter of what couldn’t be more than a week, was more than Dahyun would be able to bear herself. And even if Mina was stronger than Dahyun - which she undoubtedly was - this wasn’t something to go through alone.

“Dahyun?” Joohyun looked at her.


“I’m just doing my part.” Joohyun shrugged, tugging her raincoat tighter around herself. Then looked at Dahyun with a frown. “You don’t have a raincoat?”

“I used an umbrella.” Dahyun admitted.
“You want to borrow my raincoat too? I can just lock myself back inside while I wait for Seul.” Joohyun offered, already unbuttoning the black raincoat.

“I-. Uh.” Dahyun bit her lip, remembering the expression in Mina’s eyes. “It’s okay, I’ll get wet. I just… I need to go.”

Joohyun didn’t argue. Just nodded and handed Dahyun the key and helmet.

Pulling the hair tie from her hair, Dahyun walked into the pouring rain, putting the helmet on, clipping it under her chin. Then she unlocked the bike and pocketed the key. Placed her bag in the front basket.

There was no getting around it. She had to go. Even if it was dark and raining and she was already soaked.

“This too shall pass.” She whispered into the darkness, breathing deep before hoisting herself onto the bike, pressing down on the pedals and turning around the corner, onto the street.

The handles and seat were wet, but she didn’t care. Dahyun just stepped on the pedal and felt the wheels against the wet asphalt, and her heart catch in her throat. With courage fighting the urge to get the hell off this thing, she switched gears. Rode as fast as she could into the night.

Tried to outrace the fear that beat in her heart.

She knew the way to Mina’s apartment by car, but wasn’t used to it by bike, and she kept slowing down to make sure she didn’t end up somewhere weird at four in the morning in the pouring rain. What a feat that would be, if she got lost. No, there was no time to consider that outcome.

Dahyun’s breath hitched as she noticed a red light ahead. She slowed the bike and stopped. Counted the seconds and stared at the light until it turned green. Then she switched gears and was off once more.

Dahyun’s entire body was drenched when she finally reached Mina’s apartment building. It had taken the majority of half an hour to get there.

Putting Joohyun’s bike against the wall, Dahyun locked it, attaching the helmet to the lock so it couldn’t just be clicked off. The rain soaked her hair as she took the bag from the basket. She might as well have stepped under the showerhead fully clothed. And suddenly, she was reminded of the last time she had forced her support on a friend in need. That time she actually had ended up fully clothed in her shower. She couldn’t help but chuckle, despite the gravity of the situation. Maybe she was just overly tired.

Reaching the door, Dahyun wiped a hand over her face to get the worst water away, and looked at the board. 37F. Myoui. Dahyun pressed the buzzer and waited. Moved another step inwards when wind made the rain hit her back. Even if it was summer, she couldn’t help but get cold from the soaked clothes.
Dahyun counted the seconds. Pressed the buzzer again. Still nothing. She cursed under her breath and tried to get the water out of her hair by squeezing down the length of it with a hand. Then she sniffled and pressed the buzzer again. Grabbed the door handle, knowing it wouldn’t budge. When this didn’t work, Dahyun gave hell to it. Tried every single buzzer in the building.

“Do you have any idea what time it is?” Asked a groggy female voice after a good minute of possibly making herself a justified murder victim by way of every resident in Mina’s building.

“I know.” Dahyun said desperately. “I know, please just let me in. I need to get inside, my friend, she’s- I need to see her, she’s not well.”

A pause.

“Who are you?” The lady asked.

“My name is Dahyun. Kim Dahyun. I need to get to Myoui Mina in apartment 37F.”

“Myoui… sounds Japanese.”

“She is.”

“Is it that girl with the mole?” The woman sounded more awake now.

“Yes. Yes, that’s Mina. Please, please let me in.” Dahyun was almost sobbing by now, trying to get control of her breath.

Another pause.

“And she’s not well?”

“Not at all, ma’am.” Dahyun croaked. “I know it’s completely unreasonably for me to ask this of you, but I need to make sure she’s okay. She’s my friend and- please, just let me in.”

The door buzzed.

Dahyun let out a sob. “Thank you so much. Thank you th-”

“Yeah, yeah, get inside. It’s the middle of the night.”

“Y-yes ma’am. Thank you!” Dahyun felt the tears fall just from relief, and exhaustion. She had been so wound up from the bike ride and only now was her body letting her feel it. With a last thank you, Dahyun pushed at the door and hurried inside. Took the stairs two steps at a time, acid in her thighs and her lungs threatening to collapse.

There were lights under the door, and Dahyun felt her body threaten to collapse with relief, and she gasped for air. She was home. For a moment, Dahyun considered hammering the door down until Mina had no choice, like she had done with Nayeon. Instead she just knocked quietly.

“Mina.” She spoke into the wooden door, a plea in her voice. “Mina, please let me in.”
No answer. Dahyun knocked again. Could almost feel her right on the other side.

“Mina, please. Let me help.”

No answer. Dahyun sighed. Knew exactly what would make her open the door and resided to it. If nothing else, then to at least get inside. And it wasn’t really a lie. It was just a mean trick to use on her, just because Dahyun knew that Mina was nothing if not willing to put everyone else ahead of herself, even if it wasn’t the best thing for her.

“Come on, just let me in. I’m drenched and freezing.”

The lock clicked.

And the door opened.

…

The bus came to a halt once more, and Mina winced. Felt the pain on her rib as she walked out of the bus, her eyes tired and her body aching. How long she had been gone, she honestly didn’t have a clue. But the lights were off in the house as Mina walked up to it. God, she had really screwed up. She had never done anything like this ever before.

“Mina!” A voice called in a low hiss from somewhere above her head, and Mina’s heart stopped. But when she looked up, it wasn’t her parents she saw looking down at her. It was Kai, leaned out of his bedroom window.

“Are they mad?” Mina asked instinctively.

“You bailed on your own party, of course they’re mad. But they’re asleep now, just sneak in the back, I left it open for you. But quietly!” Kai instructed, pointing around the house to the back entrance.

Mina nodded and did as told.

Hurried inside, locking the door after her and hurrying upstairs. She was mostly sober by now, and so was getting increasingly aware of exactly what she had done. And without really knowing why, she didn’t go into her own room when she got up. Instead she chose the door to her right, gently knocking before sneaking inside.

“Hey…” Mina whispered carefully, seeing Kai sitting in his bed with the nightlight on. He was in pajamas but didn’t seem the least bit asleep. Nor did he answer Mina. Just made room for her to sit on the bed.

“I’m sorry.”

“I told them you went to Jihyo’s.” Kai said calmly, his entire expression unreadable.

“I didn’t.” Mina said, fiddling with the hem of her red dress.

“I know, I found the whiskey without the cap on.” Kai noted, his tone dry now.
“I’m sorry.”

Kai nodded. Then he shook his head. “Mina, what the hell are you doing?”

“What?” Mina cringed, and winced. The rib hurt again, as if she had been burned.

“You showed up in the dead of night three nights ago, smelling like a frat party, completely torn up about something you won’t tell me, and you pass out on my bed. And now this? Disappearing from your own party, drinking dad’s best whiskey? Are you in- why are you looking like that?” Kai’s voice changed, worry taking over for the lecturing.

“Like what?” Mina clenched harder around the hem of her dress to avoid putting a hand over the rib.

“Like you’re in pain… Mina, are you hurt? Did someone hurt you?” Kai sat up more, reaching for her hand, but she drew away immediately. Too fast.

“Shit, ow. Sorry. No, it’s nothing. I wasn’t hurt.” Mina insisted. Why had she chosen to get it right on bone - it was so stupid. Why had she even gotten it in the first place?

“What? You’re clearly in pain. What happened? Please just talk to me, I’m worried.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Mina. If you can’t tell me what it is that’s been going on lately, I can’t promise to keep covering for you.”

“You-” Mina felt her heart skip a beat. “Nii, please…”

“I won’t tell them about three nights ago. And I won’t tell them this either. But the next time, I won’t cover. Because three times is a pattern.” Kai said sternly.

Mina nodded. And then, without having any control of her own words, she started talking. As if she had waited for someone to knock on her door and ask to be let in. Even if she mostly spoke to the sheets, not able to meet her brother’s eyes.

“I kissed Jihyo. Well, she kissed me and then I kissed her. And I thought I liked her, but I don’t. But she loves me, and now everything is shit. They hate me. Jeongyeon and Nayeon. Want nothing to do with me. I screwed up so bad, and today when I was getting ingredients for the dumplings, I bumped into Nayeon and Jihyo. And it just… god, it was hell. I just wanted to get away. And I guess when I got the alcohol tonight it just took away a little of the pain, so I had more. But I still wanted to run. I just wanted to get away from everything. So I did. I ended up downtown, somehow. I’m seriously not sure how. And- and I did something. I went into this shop, and I have no clue why, honestly, but I just couldn’t stop myself. Managed to fool the guy into thinking I was sober, somehow. And older. Not that they should care, it’s illegal anyway. But it’s done and there’s no taking it back. I mean tattoos are permanent, so I’ll just have to deal.” Mina shrugged, as if it was nothing.

A long silence followed her words.

“... I’m… a little lost on reaction here.” Kai admitted quietly. “The tattoo we can deal with, I have two, I know what to do. I’ll help you. But Jihyo. Mi, are you gay?”

“I don’t know.” Mina admitted, her heart racing at the word. It didn’t sound like she had imagined it from his mouth. It sounded less… bad.
“But you thought you liked Jihyo?”

“I… yeah. Well, she’s my best friend and she’s in love with me and I wanted to… wanted to reciprocate. And I mean the kiss was good, I didn’t mind but I just didn’t feel anything? Romantic? Not that I know how that feels anyway.” Mina sighed, running a hand through her hair, sniffling. Then Kai leaned forwards, his hand on her cheek, wiping away a tear. Mina hiccupped.

“Maybe you didn’t feel romantic for her because you’re not into girls.” Kai suggested.

Mina shook her head. “I thought that might be it too, but I haven’t been into a guy ever, not even the actors. But the girls…”

“Kyehyo.” Kai said, amusement in his voice.

Mina felt her cheeks burn and she wiped her own cheeks this time.

“Well, you have good taste at least. Except for the Jihyo thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean it’s a shame you can’t like her back, she’s pretty darn amazing, that one.” Kai shrugged.

Mina looked up, and found her brother’s eyes. Looked into the brown that was so like her own, like their mother’s. And then she cried. Let the tears spill freely down her cheeks and bit down on her lip to keep from sobbing loudly.

Honestly she wasn’t really sure why she was even crying. Maybe just relief. But whatever it was, it healed something in her. Gave her hope. That even if she would have to face a tomorrow with furious parents and no friends, no Jihyo, and the pain of this tattoo on her rib, she still had a brother by her side. Someone in her corner.

“I don’t want to do ballet.” Mina admitted through tears.

“You what?” Kai frowned. “Look, Mina, this isn’t the time to consider that, you still-”

“I’ve known it for a while. I don’t want to dance for the rest of my life. It’s not fun anymore.” Mina said, sniffling.

“Then what do you want to do? You already applied for the scholarship.” Kai looked at her in complete bewilderment.

“No, I didn’t.” Mina whispered. “I never applied. I had plans to travel around Asia with Jihyo after exams and I knew that if I told mom she wouldn’t let me.”

“So what? You two aren’t still planning the trip are you? And what about college?”

“We’re not travelling. No. I’ll find something to do and take my entrance exams this winter.”

“But if it’s not going to be ballet, then what?”

“I’ve been thinking about Asian culture and history. For a teaching degree.” Mina said shyly, feeling her heart slowly steady. She might as well get it all out now.

“So my perfect little sister-”

Mina winced at the word and this time couldn’t stop herself from touching her rib. Bad idea. Very
“Is that where you got it?” Kai asked, nodding at her rib.

“Yeah…” Mina admitted.


“... Perfect.”

Kai snorted. “Of course you did.”

“Stop it. It was a stupid decision, and I regret it already.” Mina whined.

“No, it’s a part of your journey. I mean, it’s a little cliché but that’s okay. Just stand by it.” Kai said, then looked at her with an evaluating gaze and nodded. “Go to bed, Mi-tan. I’ll figure out something to tell mom and dad. Right now you need to get changed and get some sleep. It’s four in the morning and you smell like whiskey.”

Mina nodded and got up.

“Thank you, Nii.”

…

“I… uh.” Dahyun shifted her weight on the doorstep. She hadn’t been wrong; she really was completely drenched. Head to toe. Even her trainers squelched as she made to take a step and she looked down at them.

Mina wasn’t sure what to do. Didn’t know why she had opened in the first place. Most of all she just wanted to run away, but the door was blocked and she was honestly stumped. When the door first had buzzed she had been sure that it was Jihyo. That Dahyun had called Jihyo and that she was now coming to keep her promise - to end things. But Dahyun standing there, out of breath and unsure, shifted something in Mina. There was something about the younger girl that made Mina step aside and open the door further. Dahyun looked down at the shoes again.

“I don’t-”

“Just take them off out here I’ll put them in the bathroom.” Mina said monotonously. Was surprised at her own calm. It was as if she was back where she had been for the past days - keeping herself together when she had to. Mostly.

“O-okay.” Dahyun nodded and sniffled. Then she took a hold on the jamb of the door and worked off shoes and socks. Hesitated when she picked them up, but Mina just held out her hands.

“Mina.”

The sound of her name made her heart skip a beat. Made her breath hitch. And she reached forwards, taking the shoes in a shift motion and turned on her feet before Dahyun could get further. She heard it again halfway across the room. The sound of her name. But she didn’t react. Something
was falling inside her, and she couldn’t let Dahyun see.

The careful puzzle of broken pieces to create the illusion of sense.

For a moment, Mina considered locking herself in the bathroom. But as soon as the thought struck her, she shook it from her mind. It wasn’t a permanent solution. When she ran, it had to be for good. And until then, she just had to play the part. So instead, Mina opened the cabinet and took two of her biggest towels and looked back at the evidence of what she had just let into a life she was planning to leave behind. The shoes stood neatly side by side in the shower, socks hanging over the shower curtain rod.

With a sigh, she walked out of the bathroom and into the main room. It was both living and bedroom, but at the moment it looked mostly like storage - all her stuff in boxes. Her brother would come in the morning and pick it all up, help her take it back to her parents’ place. Until she found something else. A new life somewhere far away from this life she had lived since she had come to Korea. Maybe she should just go home. All the way home.

“Mina?”

Mina looked up at the sound of her name. Found the dark eyes worried on her and looked down at Dahyun’s feet. Water had pooled around her feet, dripping from her clothes in a slow motion. Almost hypnotic.

“I didn’t want you to be alone.” Dahyun whispered. As if she knew that the smallest wind would make Mina fall over.

“I appreciate that.” Mina said quietly, handing Dahyun one of the towels. Dahyun sniffled and dried her face in the towel, then looked down at her clothes.

“I had to know you were safe.” Dahyun continued, trying somehow to dry herself over her clothes.

Why wasn’t she wearing a raincoat? Even if it was warm, a t-shirt was still not enough when it was raining that hard. How had she even gotten here so fast? Wasn’t it only an hour since her shift ended? It was. Maybe she had left earlier? Taken the subway probably. It would’ve taken her an hour and a half to walk.

“Mina?”

“I’m sorry I worried you.” Mina said almost instinctively.

Dahyun looked for a second like she was going to talk, then for a second like she had decided not to. Then the words came, turning Mina’s body on fire, threatening to break her in less than a second.

“I talked to Jeongyeon.”

Mina couldn’t do it. Turned from Dahyun and bit down on her lip so hard it drew blood. She could taste the iron on her tongue immediately. Could feel herself about to break, her muscles shaking with the effort of keeping her standing. The name rang in her ears and Mina could see her face as vividly as if she was there. The confusion in her eyes.

Mina jolted. Felt the pieces of her clatter to the ground as a hand touched her shoulder.

“What happened?” Dahyun asked.
Mina shook her head. Shook all over. Fell apart under a veil of final effort.

“Please, just let me help, whatever it is.”

Mina could hardly get the words out, a fist closing around her throat so hard she might faint from lack of air any second.

“You can’t.”

It was barely a whisper.

“Let me try. Please. Or… at least let me stay with you tonight. You shouldn’t be alone.”

Mina closed her eyes. Weighed her options. She couldn’t just throw Dahyun out. It was so late and it wouldn’t be safe for her. And even then, she would probably just stay outside the door the rest of the night. The kind of thing Dahyun would do for Mina. God, why did it have to be Dahyun? She always went to greater lengths than anyone else did, for Mina. Stood up for Mina as if it was her instinct. Every time.

“You can stay the night.” Mina sighed finally, facing Dahyun again.

“Thank you. Let’s just-” Dahyun took a step into the apartment.

“I’ll find you something to sleep in.” Mina interrupted. Even if she couldn’t throw Dahyun out, there was no way she would give the girl a chance to talk Mina out of her plan.

“Okay.” Dahyun said quietly, closing the door gently.

Mina walked away. Crouched by the bed and pulled out the drawer underneath where she kept most of her clothes. It was meant for stuffing sheets in to turn the bed into a couch, but she never folded it back in, and instead saved the space of having a closet.

A sound told Mina that Dahyun was stepping out of the wet clothes. Not that it was a big deal, they had seen each other in underwear at the start and end of every shift they had worked together. But there was something final about it, even so. About letting Dahyun into her clothes. Into her bed.

“I… I need dry underwear too if you have. The seat was wet and-”

“Seat?” Mina looked up, temporarily distracted.

Dahyun stood with the towel tight around her, and the clothes in a pile beside her.

“Oh, yeah. The bike seat. I-I biked here.”

Mina stood up immediately. Couldn’t breathe. Felt the tears spill from her eyes before she could even think about stopping them.

“Whoa, Mina. It’s okay, I’m okay!” Dahyun assured, the sounds of her wet feet on the wooden floor as she walked the length of the room to reach Mina.

Mina nodded. Kept crying silently, drops falling from under her chin down onto the clothes she clutched.

“U-under… underwear. In the-” Mina gasped, trying to somehow explain that the underwear was in a basket in the bathroom cabinet on the shelf over the towels.
“It’s okay. You’re okay.” Dahyun said. Her hands clutched harder around the towel as if she wanted to take a hold of Mina. Any part of her. And there was a tiny voice inside of Mina that asked her to. But she didn’t let it grow. Instead she pushed the clothes at Dahyun until she took them and then pointed at the bathroom, stammering once more but not getting more words out than ‘underwear’.

Dahyun nodded. Seemed to understand Mina’s useless instructions.

“I’ll be right back. You’re okay. Mina. Look at me.”

Mina closed her eyes.

“Look at me.” Dahyun insisted.

Mina whimpered.

“Trust me.” Dahyun whispered.

Mina opened her eyes. Felt hot tears fall anew as Dahyun stood up on her toes, hands tightly around the towel and clothes, and pressed her cool forehead against Mina’s.

“You’re ok.”

It was an invasion of space. Of privacy and choice. But Mina didn’t mind. And that, more than anything else, scared her. That the voice calling for help grew inside her at the gesture.

“Wait here.” Dahyun said calmly.

And Mina did. Sunk helplessly onto the edge of the bed and laid back on it, hands on her stomach, trying to control herself. To build back up all the pieces that had fallen apart at Dahyun’s words, at her gesture. She had biked. For Mina. Had done the thing that scared her more than anything, for Mina. To get to Mina. To make sure she was safe.

And there was a second where Mina imagined letting Dahyun drag her back. But the next she saw Jihyo’s eyes. God, when she found out. Surely Jeongyeon must’ve told her by now, right? No. No she wouldn’t. She would spare Mina. Of course she would. Even now, she would spare Mina of Jihyo’s wrath. Probably hadn’t told a soul.

Jeongyeon.

No. No she couldn’t let Dahyun drag her back. She had broken too much, and some day, Mina didn’t know when, she would undoubtedly break Dahyun too.

The door sounded but Mina just kept her eyes closed.

“Thank you.” Dahyun said somewhere to Mina’s left.

Mina didn’t react.

Then weight was added to the mattress, gently so. Mina felt her sit down. Felt her lie down. Felt warmth emit from her and knew her arm had to be inches from her own.

“Can we just sleep?” Mina whispered as soon as Dahyun’s intake of breath revealed that she was about to talk. “... please .”

“Okay.” Dahyun breathed.
Neither moved. They should. But neither did. Just lay on top of the covers, feet hanging out, and eyes closed.

But Mina didn’t sleep. Dahyun had fallen asleep within ten minutes, and Mina guessed that she had been a lot more exhausted than she had expressed. It was the perfect opportunity to run. But Mina didn’t. Instead she turned onto her side. Watched the girl sleep, as if transfixed by her presence. There was a peace about her that seemed almost addictive, as she lay with her mouth open and cheeks flushed, her damp hair forming a wet patch on the sheets. Somehow, all the things that caused Mina to break apart in endless waves, got a little less painful when Dahyun was there.

…

One day Mina might find the answer as to why she had agreed to this, but right now she honestly didn’t get it. It had just been something Chaeyoung had suggested, and there was something about the way Nayeon and Jeongyeon had looked at her that had made her say yes.

Sure, I’ll have a housewarming party when I get settled. Sure. Brilliant idea, Myoui Mina. It had been so easy living in the same dorm as Jihyo. They were never really at Mina’s place, as Jihyo was the natural center of things. But now? Now she had to be the host. And considering the whirlwind of the past two weeks and especially with trying to spare the others from Jihyo and Mina’s drama - she just didn’t feel like it. Especially after yesterday and all the shit going on in her head. But it didn’t change the fact that they were here. Tzuyu and Dahyun had thankfully arrived first - the two of them taking the subway while the others took Jihyo’s car. But now Jihyo, Jeongyeon, Nayeon, and Chaeyoung were here too, and Mina was wishing more than anything that she had never said yes.

Honesty, Mina had been sure the past months that she had actually been able to succeed in putting her past behind her. But then Sooeyoung happened and now here she was - handing out soda cans and announcing that the pizzas should be here in a few minutes.

“Does anyone need anything else?” Mina asked, hesitating at the edge of the bed.

“Nope. We’re good, I think.” Nayeon said.

Mina nodded. Then sat down on the empty space in the little circle they had formed on the bed. Since the room was too small to all sit on the floor and the table only having four chairs, they had settled on sitting on the bed, even if it was only just big enough to fit it.

The sound of Jeongyeon opening her soda made Mina flinch slightly.

“God, I needed this.” Jeongyeon sighed, lowering the can after having taken a big gulp of soda.

“Long day?” Tzuyu asked.

“Yeah, we’re doing news writing and reporting this semester and it’s horrible.” Jeongyeon groaned.

“How so?” Nayeon asked.
“Well, you just get aware of how much corruption and greed controls everything. That it’s the rich and powerful and the rest of us are just pawns.” Jeongyeon said with a yawn.

No-one really spoke for a good twenty seconds after that, and Jeongyeon looked slightly embarrassed at the moodkill comment. Not that she had any reason to, Mina thought. It was true. But the tension was high today, and made the timing miss. For a while, Mina had wondered if it was just her that was being awkward about all this. If she had completely overreacted by removing herself from Jihyo like that. But if Jihyo was to have any chance of getting over Mina, they had to not be together all the time like they had been the past year.

“... Anyways.” Nayeon said, turning the seal pup plush in her arms. Then she turned to Mina. “I don’t think I’ve actually seen your stuff before, now that I think about it. You have a lot of plushies. You know, your age considering I mean.”

“Y-yeah, I guess I do.” Mina looked down at the sheets, shifting the still closed soda in her hands. They had fish on them. Why couldn’t she had changed to something a little more adult? Why hadn’t she hidden the plushies with her clothes? It was just that she always had them on the pillow next to her. Made the bed seem less empty. Not that there had ever been anyone who was meant to lie there. But someday maybe there could be.

Maybe she could grow to love someone.

“I love this one.” Dahyun’s voice pulled Mina from her thoughts and she looked up. Dahyun was sitting with the shark head pillow, making a face to match its open mouth.

Mina giggled. Couldn’t help it, with how ridiculous Dahyun looked.

“God, you had that one before you even got to Korea, didn’t you?” Jihyo asked, reaching for it. It was a little used, a little faded compared to the original color.

“Yes, I got it when I was thirteen I think.”

“How’d you get it?” Dahyun asked.

Mina frowned. It wasn’t a natural continuation, but she looked genuinely interested.

“Well, I-I broke a molar from a skateboarding accident and had to get a silver tooth, so my brother got me that - both to make up for the fact that it was his fault I lost the tooth and to tell me that there are animals that just grow out new teeth all the time, as if that wasn’t a comically depressing fact when you’re thirteen and don’t like the idea of a silver tooth.” Mina chuckled a bit at the thought.

“You have a silver tooth?” Jeongyeon asked curiously. “I didn’t know that.”

“Well, it’s a molar so you luckily don’t notice it much.” Mina shrugged.

“I didn’t know sharks grew new teeth.” Dahyun said in a puzzled tone.

“Yeah, I didn’t either but he loves sea creatures, real and mythical, so I know a lot because of him.”

“Wait, so you’re not into them yourself? Then what is the meaning of all the fish stuff we’ve been giving you all this time?” Jeongyeon looked honestly confused. Which, really was fair, considering that Mina’s apartment looked mostly like a mix of an ikea catalogue and an aquarium gift store.

“No, I love all of it.” Mina assured her quickly. “It was just something my brother got me into. But I do like them. And I love sharks.”
“Oh good, cause I already had an idea for your Christmas present.” Tzuyu said with a shy smile.

“You don’t-” Mina started but was cut off by the buzzer.

**Pizzas.**

How it ended up being only Mina and Dahyun at the end of the night, came as a result of ten minutes of logistics. Since Tzuyu and Dahyun had taken the train from Dahyun’s place, there hadn’t been a problem, but the trip from Mina’s place to Tzuyu’s campus was complicated if she were to use public transport, and in the end Jihyo had offered to take her in the car - even offered to stow Dahyun in the trunk (though she chucklingly refused this). They had all offered to stay and wait until Dahyun’s train would leave, but Dahyun had refused and told them to go. That she didn’t mind being alone with Mina and that she would help with the dishes.

And that had been the end of it. The other five had said goodnight and disappeared in the now quite stuffed car.

“Thank you.” Mina said, almost as soon as they were alone. Had wanted to say it all night but it would be too obvious.

“No biggie.” Dahyun shrugged. “I don’t mind helping.”

Mina bit her lip. It hadn’t been the dishes Mina had meant. But she didn’t know how to explain how much it meant to her that Dahyun had stepped in when Mina felt trapped. Not just when Nayeon had commented on the plushies. But all through the night. Every time. Had stepped in an taken the place as the natural center of attention - a spot Mina really preferred not to have.

The phone buzzed again and Mina jumped. She didn’t take it from the kitchen table though.

“You’re a popular girl.” Dahyun winked at her and Mina bit her lip.

“I should’ve turned off the sound. Or just turned it off.”

“Nah, it’s fine, Jeongyeon was getting a lot of texts too.” Dahyun shrugged.

“Still…” Mina pressed her lips tight together and then spoke before having properly thought it through. “Dahyun?”

“Mm?” Dahyun didn’t turn around.

Mina wanted to talk about this, but on the other hand, wouldn’t it be better to keep it outside the group? But Dahyun didn’t know about Mina and Jihyo, so she was kind of neutral ground here, right? And really, since last night, Mina could really use someone to talk to.

“You’ve never had a- I mean you’ve never dated, right?”

“Nope.” Dahyun said. “I’ve never had a girlfriend.”

“Oh. Okay. Uh…” Mina cleared her throat, ready to abandon the subject.

“Why?” Dahyun asked, still focused on the used mugs.
Mina cringed. “I may have one?”

There was about three seconds where Dahyun didn’t move. But then she went back to cleaning the stitch mug Jeongyeon had used.

“The texts were from h- them?”

“Her, yeah. Sooyoung. I mean, no, we’re not dating. We went out once but I didn’t really like it. And I told her that but she kissed me goodnight anyways. And I liked that.”

Dahyun nodded but didn’t comment. Almost as if she had sensed that Mina had needed to talk, and gave her the space to go down whichever path she wanted.

“We agreed not to date. But we are… well. As of yesterday- we.”

Mina cleared her throat. Why was this so awkward to talk about. Well, sure, with Dahyun’s cheeks pinking like they were now it was kind of awkward but she needed to say it still.

“Is it… is it okay if I talk about this?” Mina asked just to make sure.

“Of course!” Dahyun said immediately, though her voice was a little higher pitched than usual.

Mina cleared her throat and grabbed a towel. Dahyun handed her a mug.

“I don’t really think of myself as aromantic or asexual - not anymore. But I never really crushed on anyone. It has just always been wanting to be friends - like with you. But I like kissing Sooyoung. And I like having sex with her. But I still don’t want to date her. Like I don’t get that connection with her, like I really want to know more about her. She’s just… nice? And I don’t get why I can’t want to be friends with someone and want to kiss them. Because that’s what dating is, right? Wanting to know them and being around them but also the sexual parts.”

Mina spoke as she cleaned, putting the mugs away one by one until finally they all stood side by side in the overhead cabinet over the stove.

“Well, I guess that’s the gist of it.” Dahyun turned from the sink, walking back over to the bed instead. “Being attracted to all three parts.”

“Parts?” Mina frowned, following Dahyun until they both sat on the edge of the bed.

“Head, heart, and body.” Dahyun shrugged, letting herself fall back onto the bed, stretching like she didn’t have a care in the world.

“You know the heart isn’t actually the organ of love right? It’s-“ Mina clamped up at the grin Dahyun sent her. Of course she knew.

“I mean the logical and the illogical - I guess you’d say the hormonal? Part of the brain. And then the body.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Mina sighed, laying back on the bed next to Dahyun.

“But you’ve never had anyone where you really wanted to know everything about them?” Dahyun turned her head on the pillow.

“Of course I have. You and Jihyo and the others.” Mina said. “I love getting to know you all better, every day.”
“But you don’t want to kiss me. Or Jihyo?” Dahyun inquired innocently.

Mina tried not to wince. “No. I want to kiss Sooyoung though. But I don’t even know if she has siblings, and it doesn’t bother me? I just like the physical parts. But I also don’t want it to just be that?”

“So you do want to know her better.” Dahyun concluded, wrongly.

“No, I want to find someone who I really want to be friends with and also really want to do all the physical stuff with.” Mina turned onto her side, looking at Dahyun. “You know - someone who makes me blush and laugh. Someone I will want to flirt with and who makes me think about her all the time.”

“You want to fall in love.” Dahyun nodded.

“Yeah.” Mina said and closed her eyes. “Honestly, I think I might end it. With Sooyoung I mean. It’s just not what I want, you know?”

Dahyun nodded. “But you’re not a bad person if you don’t end it, as long as you both agree on the not-dating thing.”

“So it wouldn’t be wrong to keep seeing her?” Mina asked.

“Nope, as long as you’re both consenting.”

“Okay. I’ll… I’ll think about it.” Mina sighed. “I just want to settle down here and at the restaurant - I don’t need any more complications. But I guess as long as it’s not a relationship and it’s not anything with feelings, then it’s okay.”

Dahyun nodded. “Just get the rules down - are you allowed to see other people, etc.”

“Who would I even see?”

“Who knows, maybe you’ll fall for me some day. Or Tzuyu. Or Jeongyeon. Or Jihyo?”

“You’re just listing all our single friends.” Mina noted dryly.

“Well, if you fall for a friend then you’ll have solved the problem of not connecting the three parts.”

“Mm, that’s true. But I just can’t imagine falling for any of you.” Mina scrunched her nose. Really. She had tried. Hard.

“That’s fair. I wouldn’t fall for me either, you’d have to listen to my Mask impression on a weekly basis. 0/10, do not recommend.” Dahyun said conversationally.

“Well, at least you have perspective.” Mina giggled, then felt her smile fade and looked at the younger girl. “Dahyun?”

“Yeah?”

“Would you… I mean- you can just stay over if you don’t-”

“I can stay.” Dahyun said. Turned onto her side as well. “If the seal doesn’t get offended about me stealing his spot.”

“I think he’ll manage.” Mina smiled. “Thank you, Dahyun.”
Mina’s thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of a phone somewhere in the other end of the room. Looking around, Mina noticed Dahyun’s bag by the door. She looked at the clock. Who called at four thirty in the morning? For a moment she considered getting the phone just to stop the ringing - but what if it was something important? Maybe she should wake Dahyun.

The ringing stopped and Mina looked around at Dahyun again. She looked completely at peace, despite lying awkwardly with her feet dangling off the edge and her head turned to the side, towards Mina. She might get a neck-ache or back-ache tomorrow, and momentarily Mina wondered why they hadn’t moved under the covers. But Dahyun had fallen asleep so fast, and Mina was just stuck here. What she wouldn’t give to let the world go and just sleep. But she couldn’t. The only thing she could think of, was how much she had broken in her path.

She had broken the heart of her best friend, broken the heart of the girl she loved so much and quit her job to top it off. But not only that - she had terminated the lease on her apartment before all this, with the intent on moving in with Jeongyeon. And now she would be heading back to her parents. Would move back in to her old room and have to explain why. God, she would actually have to come out. Well, maybe she could just tell them she had a fight with the girls she was supposed to live with, which wasn’t a lie. Honestly, if they took it bad and didn’t let her come back because of her being gay, maybe she should just keep it to herself until she found something else. Or maybe she could stay with Kai and his girlfriend. That was an option, right?

Dahyun mumbled in her sleep and Mina looked around at her. Then the phone rang again. This time Mina got up with a frown. Dahyun moved in her sleep, turning onto her side and curling into a ball on top of the fish-patterned sheets. Her hands balled around the fabric, like a child, and Mina smiled despite everything else. There was just such a peace about it. Except for the phone.

Right, the phone.

Mina turned from Dahyun and tip-toed across the floor and opened Dahyun’s bag. Found the phone and looked to see who was calling. Sana. Mina frowned and, without really knowing why, picked up.

“Dahyun, I’m sorry, did I-…” Sana’s voice said, slightly pitched but obviously relieved.

“Sana, it’s not Dahyun. It’s Mina.” Mina whispered as she headed for the bathroom, trying not to wake Dahyun.

“Mitang?”

“Dahyun is with me, she’s sleeping. Sorry for picking up, but she’s fast asleep and I thought it might be important.”

“No, it’s fine it’s- I just…” Sana sighed and swallowed.

“Are you okay?” Mina asked quietly despite herself, locking the door to the bathroom and sitting down on the floor against the door, wrapping an arm around her knees.

“My... Uh, I don’t know if Dahyun told people, but my mom is ill. She’s been back home for a little but we just took her to the hospital now, and I guess I just needed her. Dahyun.”

“I can wake her?” Mina said, already on her way up.
“No. No, if she’s sleeping then it’s okay.” Sana insisted.

Mina nodded at the phone and sat back down. “I’m so sorry to hear about your mom.”

“It’s okay. Well, it’s not but at least she’s admitted now. I just couldn’t take any more - we’ve been watching over every second but none of us dare to sleep in case anything happens so. And Dahyun convinced me to ask that she get admitted again. Dad wasn’t much for it, but Momo and I talked some sense into him in the end.”

Mina didn’t interrupt Sana. It seemed like she really needed to talk to someone, and as horrible as it was - what Sana was going through - Mina felt a little bit of her pain leave at the thought that she was providing the older girl with some comfort.

“I’m glad you’re with her. Dahyun, I mean. I’ve been afraid for her, she’s so stubborn and never really lets people help when she should. She can’t carry it all on her own, especially when she’s trying her best to be there for me as well.”

Mina hugged her legs tighter and mumbled instinctively. Didn’t know what she was trying to say.

“Did I wake you?”

“No. I was up.” Mina admitted.

“You shouldn’t be.” Sana said in a worried voice.

“No, I shouldn’t…” Mina sighed.

“Go sleep, Mitang.”

“You keep calling me that.” Mina smiled despite herself. Leaned her head back against the door and held a hand to her throat, trying to relieve the lump that settled there.

“It suits you.” Sana said gently “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Thank you, Sana.”

“I’m here if you want to talk about it.”

“I’m fine.” Mina breathed.

“Mh, right, you say that but you’re not. But until you’re ready to talk, can you do me a favor?”

Mina felt her throat close up even more. Tried to say something but failed. Sana seemed to understand anyways.

“Dahyun... She sleeps best if you hug her. She doesn’t want to admit that either, but she’s terrible at sleeping alone.”

Mina frowned. “You want me… to hug her?”

“Yes. She always sleeps better like that.”

Mina bit her lip. Why in the world would Sana ask her that? It was so out of the blue. “I-I don’t-”

“Please.” Sana’s voice was sweet but insisting.
“... Okay.”

“Thank you, Mitang. Sleep well.”

“You too, Sana.”

Sana hung up, and Mina sighed. For a moment she just looked up at the ceiling of the bathroom. Then she nodded to herself and got up. Turned off the lights in the bathroom and walked out.

Quietly she put Dahyun’s phone in the charger by her bed and then looked at Dahyun, trying to figure out how best to get the girls underneath the covers.

It took a bit of work but eventually she managed to tug the covers out under Dahyun and heave her up far enough that her head ended on the pillow. With a small plea that all the bustling wouldn’t wake the poor girl, Mina put the covers over Dahyun and reluctantly crawled under them facing Dahyun. Honestly, it was a miracle that she didn’t wake.

As Mina joined Dahyun under the covers however, Sana’s plea took up every thought in her head. She really didn’t want to. Not because she didn’t like hugs. Or Dahyun. But because she knew whose body she missed in her arms and feared that she would break from the heartache - the memory of what she had thrown away. But even so, Mina carefully wrapped an arm around the younger girl.

The reaction was immediate.

Dahyun hummed happily and seemed to melt into Mina, burying her head in Mina’s neck.

Mina had been right. It hurt. And she missed Jeongyeon. So much.

Tears threatened to fall from Mina’s tired eyes as she stroked Dahyun’s hair distractedly. With a whimper she closed her eyes and felt Dahyun’s hands grasp at her shirt. Made her feel wanted. Made her snuggle closer and hug Dahyun tighter, despite the voice in her head telling her that she was supposed to run. But the other voice grew. The voice that told her to be selfish and take everything back. The voice that begged her to wrap her arms around Jeongyeon and tell her she loved her. That she would always love her, even now. The voice who would beg for a do-over.

But she couldn’t tell her that. Couldn’t ask for another chance. That had been the whole reason Mina had left in the first place. Because Jihyo had been right. Jeongyeon deserved better than what Mina had to offer. Of course it would’ve been better if Mina had just stayed away in the first place. But she hadn’t. She had approached Jeongyeon. Had flirted and danced and eventually kissed her. Had dragged her home and asked to be loved. Had dragged her home and asked to be loved. And Jeongyeon had done so. Had made them everything and had become everything Mina ever dreamed about. The girl Mina wanted to know everything about. The girl that made her feel giddy at the thought of the blush on her cheeks caused by Mina’s words. The girl who loved her with such care. Who made her feel so whole.

And in that moment, the need to feel something - anything - that wasn’t pain, made her give hell to the voice that told her to run. Despite all her promises, all of her intentions, Mina let herself be selfish and tether herself to her sleeping friend. Let herself feel Dahyun’s concern and relished in the feeling of being important to someone. It didn’t matter whether she deserved it or not - not right now. Right now she just needed comfort. And she couldn’t stop her heart from feeling a little lighter with Dahyun’s calm breath on her neck. In that moment Mina let herself be there for Dahyun. Even if that was the thing she feared more than anything.

Because hearts were much easier to break when you held them in your hand.
Jeongyeon looked up at the sound of her name, a slight pout on her face.

“You’re not supposed to see the cake before we serve it.”

Mina giggled and pushed herself off the door jamb, taking a few steps into Dahyun’s kitchen.

“I know, but you were taking so long.”

“I want to make it pretty, but I don’t know how to fit twenty two lights into this and still make it look good.” Jeongyeon whined, gesturing at the cake.

“I think it looks good like this.”

“But that’s because I accidentally counted wrong and there’s only twenty one lights here. So if I put one in then the symmetry will be broken but if I move them there’ll be marks.” Jeongyeon sighed, narrowing her eyes at the cake as if it had personally offended her.

Mina had to hold a hand over her mouth to keep from laughing loudly at her. Not that it would be very loud, sure, but enough that Jeongyeon might misunderstand. Think it was because of the mistake and not because of how cute she looked.

“Okay, here.” Mina said, taking the last candle, offering it to Jeongyeon. “You hold it and I’ll wish on you.”

Jeongyeon looked at it for a second, then mumbled something, her cheeks tingeing. Mina just grinned and then stuck the candle firmly into the side of the cake.

“What’d you do that for?!?”

“Now it doesn’t break the pattern on top.” Mina shrugged.

“But it looks completely misplaced!” Jeongyeon whined, looking to see if she could remove it again without ruining the smooth frosting. But the next she complained as Mina stepped between her and the cake.

“Leave it.” Mina insisted.

“But.” Jeongyeon tried, but Mina just shook her head.

“Leave it.”

“... Fine. But I’m not letting them blame me.” Jeongyeon huffed.

“I don’t expect you to.” Mina assured her, leaning a little closer, almost instinctively. It had been almost seven weeks, and honestly Mina couldn’t get enough. Everything about Jeongyeon was addicting and wonderful. Jeongyeon’s eyes shifted between Mina’s and she smiled. Then looked in the direction of the doorway.

Mina on the other hand took the opportunity to admire Jeongyeon’s face in profile. How had she not noticed just how beautiful she was, considering how long they had known each other? Sure, she had
always thought she was pretty, but she hadn’t been breathtaking like she was now. Like she had been since the night they had danced.

“You’re staring at me.” Jeongyeon said very quietly, a smile spreading on her face, eyes still on the doorway.

“Yeah.” Mina said. “Waiting.”

“For what?”

“To see if you’re going to give me the birthday kiss you’re contemplating if you can risk, or just a peck before we go back out.” Mina hummed, hooking a finger in the belt loop of Jeongyeon’s jeans.

“Smartass.” Jeongyeon shook her head, then turned her head back around.

She settled for a peck, but Mina still loved it.

“You know we could just tell them. And then you could kiss me properly.” Mina shrugged.

“Mm, yeah. Maybe you’re right. We gotta do it eventually anyways. So might as well be tonight.” Jeongyeon hummed and stole another peck.

“I’d like that.” Mina smiled.

“Now get out of the kitchen so I can light the candles and surprise you.” Jeongyeon prodded Mina’s side, but got pulled lightly along when Mina moved instinctively, the younger girl’s finger still stuck in the belt loop.

They did all blame Jeongyeon for the misplaced candle, but she didn’t tell them it was Mina’s doing.

“You made a wish?” Jihyo asked as Mina opened her eyes again, the many little flames calmly burning.

Mina nodded and blew. Got all but the one on the side in her first try. Quickly blew out the last one and hoped no-one noticed. Then Tzuyu’s finger dipped into the frosting and before Mina knew what was going on, the frosting was on the tip of her nose. Then on her cheek, courtesy of Chaeyoung. Then on her forehead from Dahyun.

Mina just smiled. Couldn’t help it. Giggled as the rest dug in, smearing frosting all over her face and her jaw too. Dahyun even got a little bit on her neck, at which Mina couldn’t help whining.

“It’s all for good luck.” Dahyun insisted, as Mina tried to get it off, despite not being able to see it. But when she felt there was no more, she tasted the frosting on her finger and hummed happily.

“Does anyone have a knife to cut the cake?” Nayeon asked.

“Kitchen.” Dahyun said. “You know where it is, right?”

“I don’t cook.” Nayeon scrunched her nose.

“You could learn?” Chaeyoung suggested but quickly took mercy on the oldest. “Top right drawer, babe.”

“Thanks.”
“Mina, here.” Jihyo said, catching Mina’s attention. She stood leaned backwards with her phone up, and Mina just sent her a shy smile as Jihyo counted down to the picture.

“I think I’m going to hang this on my wall.” Jihyo said with a chuckle. “Want me to print one for you too?”

“Yes please.” Mina nodded.

“Okay, beware, I’m not used to using one of these.” Nayeon announced with a hint of nervousness in her voice, returning from the kitchen with what was hopefully the largest knife Dahyun owned.

“Oh my god, give me that before you hurt yourself.” Jihyo said, quickly dropping her phone onto the couch and reaching for the knife.

Jihyo cut cake for everyone, and Mina handed out the pieces on napkins until everyone had one. Discreetly Mina tried to wipe off some of the frosting from her face, but Jihyo immediately insisted she let it sit, or it wouldn’t be good luck. Mina narrowed her eyes at her but let her win. Even if they both knew it was just that Mina wanted more pictures of the mess.

For a few minutes, no-one really spoke except for praising Jihyo on her choice of cake, but then Chaeyoung finished hers and pressed her lips together.

“What?” Dahyun asked.

“I was just thinking maybe we should turn this into a party instead of just birthday cake.”

“I thought birthday cake was part of a party, but sure, if you need the booze.” Jeongyeon said as is she was taking offense on behalf of the cake - which she hadn’t made, by the way. It was Jihyo who had brought it from work; Jeongyeon had just been the one to put the candles in.

“Jeong, she wants to play music, not get drunk.” Nayeon interfered, covering her mouth with her hand to hide the fact that she was talking with her mouth full of chocolate cake.

“Oh, sure!” Mina said, then remembered it wasn’t her apartment, and turned to Dahyun. “If it’s okay with you?”

“Of course…”

“Got it.” Chaeyoung beamed, then reached for her phone and shuffled through it until she found music she was satisfied with. “This too loud?”

“Nope, you can turn it up a little.” Dahyun said, taking another bite of cake. “Oh, I love this one.” Jihyo said happily, finishing her piece of cake.

“I remember.” Mina chuckled. It had been Jihyo’s get-ready song in the mornings. At least whenever Mina had slept over. Maybe it had just been to make Mina laugh, but, the image of Jihyo, sixteen and with her hair slick and black, dancing around the teenage bedroom with a hairbrush, still made Mina smile.

“Come on, you gotta do it with me.” Jihyo said, and Mina noticed a moment too late that Jihyo had gotten up, an arm outstretched to Mina.

“But I-” Mina started to protest, but someone had already taken her napkin with the half eaten cake.
There was something right on the edge of wonderful about dancing with Jihyo with a party hat on Mina’s head and buttercream frosting on her face. About the song that took them back to sixteen and the cheers from the other five girls. The way the room spun when Jihyo turned them and how their hands felt clasped tight together.

And then Mina’s stomach turned. Jihyo had stopped dancing for a second and looked at Mina with an intensity she hadn’t seen in three years. Please no, Mina begged silently. Don’t do this. It had been so right until now; a perfect rekindling of the best friendship Mina had ever had.

But Jihyo did lean in. As if she was going to kiss Mina. And Mina jerked back instinctively, heart in her throat.

The magic was broken but the song still played.

Mina’s breathing was still shallow half an hour later, as she stood with her face cleaned of frosting and her eyes turned at the city-lit night sky.

The clouds were in the way of the stars.

It didn’t seem like anyone had noticed the incident; even Jihyo hadn’t made a big deal about it. But Mina couldn’t help the lump in her throat.

“You’re taking an awful long time taking down the trash.” Jeongyeon’s voice was soft, and her arms even more so as they snuck around Mina’s waist.

“Sorry.”

“What happened?” Jeongyeon asked, nosing Mina’s hair. Mina felt her inhale and then the smile tugging at her own lips.

“I don’t know. But I don’t think we should tell them tonight. It could’ve just been me overreacting, I mean she might’ve just gone for a cheek kiss. But I swear it looked like Jihyo was going to kiss me for a split-second. And I freaked.” Mina sighed.

“I think it was just a birthday kiss, Minari.” Jeongyeon held on tighter, her front pressing against Mina’s back. “And if it was, then it’s a good thing, because that means she’s ready for that, right?”

“Yeah, but I swear it seemed like more.”

“That’s fair.” Jeongyeon hummed. “So not tonight?”

“I’m sorry.” Mina closed her eyes. “I wish I could just be braver about this, but I’m so scared of losing her. And I feel so bad about this, sneaking around, but even more so because I enjoy it. If that makes sense?”

“No, it does. It’s fun to sneak around. And that doesn’t mean you’re out to hurt anyone, it’s just… new.”
“Seven weeks, Jeongyeon.” Mina turned in the older girl’s arms, looking up at her. “And two days”

“You’re counting?” Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow.

“Maybe.” Mina shrugged, then looked Jeongyeon right in the eyes. “I’m just... I’m so in love with you. I don’t even get it, but I’m so in love.”

Jeongyeon gave an awkward chuckle and broke eye contact, letting her head fall onto Mina’s shoulder.

“I’m serious.” Mina said.

“I know.” Jeongyeon said, happiness emitting from her voice so genuinely. “It’s just so weird. You were just the little weird kid Jihyo dragged everywhere. The one who would mix up the words for good and cold and follow us around like a lost little animal.”

“Jihyo called me a lost penguin because I waddle.” Mina pressed her lips together.

“Mm, that’s about right.” Jeongyeon smiled, then angled her face and kissed Mina’s shoulder.

“And now?” Mina asked shyly. Knew that Jeongyeon wasn’t one for big speeches.

“Now you’re... Everything.”

Mina felt her heart soar like it had the first time, and tugged Jeongyeon impossibly closer

“Don’t worry about telling them. We’ll sneak around a little more and I’ll keep an eye out for Jihyo - see if I can figure out what’s going on. Okay?” Jeongyeon asked into Mina’s shirt

“Thank you.” Mina sighed. “I just don’t-”

“She’s your best friend. I get it.” Jeongyeon pressed another kiss to Mina’s shoulder, then moved and kissed the crook of Mina’s neck. Mina had to stop herself from squirming at the tickling sensation. If she did then Jeongyeon might stop.

Instead she just hummed and closed her eyes

“Say something?” Jeongyeon asked, her kisses moving slowly up Mina’s neck. Then to Mina’s complete surprise, the older girl licked at her neck.

“Jeong!” Mina giggled, pushing Jeongyeon back.

“You still had some frosting left.” Jeongyeon looked completely unashamed, licking her lips.

“No I didn’t. I was very particular about getting all of it.” Mina rubbed the mark where Jeongyeon had licked. Mainly to distract from the desire to ask Jeongyeon to do it again.

“Mm, no you didn’t.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“Yes I did.” Mina insisted.

“No because your neck doesn’t usually taste like buttercream frosting.” Jeongyeon looked annoyingly smug. Mina huffed and shook her head. For a moment she considered claiming her proper birthday kiss now, but there was a risk that someone would come looking for them soon.

And really, they had the rest of their lives to exchange kisses, birthday ones and regular ones.
If Mina’s wish came true.

... 

Mina’s lips felt dry, and she licked them automatically. Then swallowed. She had dreamt. Which meant she had slept. But it hadn’t been a dream, as much as it was a memory faded into a dream. But maybe if she just kept her eyes closed she could get back to it. To her wish coming true. To a world where she had never screwed everything up. Where she could still tell Jeongyeon how much she loved her. How, even now in all her misery, Jeongyeon was the one thing that made it hardest to run away, even if it was for her sake. That more than anyone else in this life, Jeongyeon was the girl that made Mina want to be selfish.

Mina didn’t realize she was crying until a warm thumb rubbed over her cheek.

“Mina...” Dahyun’s voice was soft.

Mina opened her eyes. Found Dahyun close, the nightlight on and an expression of pain on the younger girl’s face.

“Are you okay?”

Mina’s question was more of a reflex than anything else, but it made Dahyun smile nonetheless.

“Hungry and headache, but I’m good. I should be the one asking you that question.” Dahyun said, reaching a little more, to cup Mina’s cheek fully. Mina covered the hand. Felt loved. And somehow, that hurt more than anything. Because she couldn’t let Dahyun love her. She had let Jihyo love her. Had let Jeongyeon love her. And she had broken them both. Intently. For her own greed. Really, there wasn’t far from where she was now to the monsters that used to hide under her bed.

“I didn’t mean to worry you.” Mina whispered before drawing away. From the hand, from the love. From Dahyun. Quietly she shuffled out from under the blue and green covers, getting to her feet.

“Mina.”

“Dahyun, there’s nothing you can do.” Mina said, looking at her phone. Less than an hour until Kai would be there to help get her stuff.

Her stuff.

Mina looked up and around at her room. Everything was packed. The boxes labeled and stacked neatly around the furniture. Only a single mug hadn’t been packed away - the one with the whale tail she had used last night after work and would have to wash before packing it with the rest. Before packing up her belongings and leaving her life behind. She had to. It was too late to turn back.

“What are you planning, Mina?” Dahyun asked quietly.

Mina’s breath caught in her throat, and she looked around at Dahyun, the younger girl looking around Mina’s room like she herself had done just now. She couldn’t get herself to say it. But then her eyes fell on Mina’s face, studying her features so deeply that Mina felt like Dahyun was trying to
find her soul under a mask. Then they grew slowly wider, and her brows knotted.

“You’re running away.”

It wasn’t a plea not to. Not a question. Just a neutral statement.

Mina felt like she was breaking in extreme slow motion as she nodded. Like the initial impact of porcelain against a cold stone floor acting as a catalyst, destructive energy spreading as cracks along the shape until it finally broke apart in a thousand pieces scattered.

It had all just been one mistake.

A single slip-up that had catalyzed every single bad decision ever since. But she hadn’t been able to stop it. And now she didn’t know how to put it all back together.

But there was something in Dahyun’s words - the fact that someone had said them out loud for once, that made Mina realize the exact consequence of them.

That she would never be able to see them again. Any of them. That she would have to start over and somehow learn to trust that she wouldn’t screw up the next life. But how could she trust that more than trusting that she wasn’t going to keep hurting her loved ones in this one?

If she could just go back. Do over. Take it all back.

For the longest time, she just stared at Dahyun. It felt like everything inside her had gone dark. No more tears. No more pain. Just numbness at the realization. That there was no-one pulling her back this time; no-one to choose for her. That Dahyun wasn’t there to choose for her, but merely to listen. To make sure she wasn’t alone.

To love her unconditionally.

And maybe that made all the difference.

Mina’s voice was barely a whisper, but in it she carried her weight of her actions like Atlas held the heavens. Came to a halt and faced the morning with everything that might come of it.

“I don’t want to run anymore.”

…

“Come on, just once! We’re graduating, that calls for celebration!” Jihyo grinned widely at Mina as she dragged her along the road. The younger girl tried to fix her dress.
“I just don’t really like parties like these.”

“I promised I would bring you. Everyone is so excited and I’m not gonna let you watch Jurassic World for the fiftieth time this month.” Jihyo rolled her eyes.

“But it’s good!” Mina protested.

“So are people. You know, socializing?” Jihyo took a swig of the beer she had brought along from her home. Picked at the label until it came off. Stuffed it in her pocket. CASS fresh.

Mina scrunched her nose. “You’re just saying that because you know how to do that.”

“People love you. You’re so cute and charming and you don’t even know it.” Jihyo cooed.

Mina chuckled. Felt the warmth from Jihyo’s body as the older girl linked their arms.

“But maybe try not to waddle as much.” Jihyo whispered and offered Mina the bottle.

Mina took it to hide her blush as she tried to correct her walk to a normal one. The beer was sour, but she drank a good mouthful without cringing too much. Forgot about correcting her walk, and tried again. It felt weird. Jihyo laughed at her attempts as she took the bottle, emptying it without any difficulty.

The party was as awkward as Mina had feared. She hardly recognize anyone, nor did anyone recognize her. So she simply let Jihyo drag her around and let her stick one drink after the next into Mina’s hand, chuckling as Mina’s cheeks got more and more flushed from the alcohol.

Mina forgot all about waddling feet and personal space but stuck to Jihyo like glue. Noticed Nayeon and Jeongyeon sitting in a couch in the living room talking avidly. Nayeon was laughing loudly, slapping Jeongyeon’s arm repeatedly until Jeongyeon yelled at her. Then Jeongyeon said something that made Nayeon turn bright red and even more violent. Jeongyeon moved across the couch in protest and Nayeon threw herself at her. Mina smiled at them but they didn’t see her. They rarely did. Instead, Mina tightened her grip on Jihyo’s shoulder and felt as the older girl’s body shook with laughter.

“Come.” Jihyo whispered and walked with Mina hanging behind, up the stairs to the bathroom. “I gotta pee.”

Mina stumbled slightly as she followed Jihyo upstairs, the music getting quieter as they queued outside the bathroom. Thankfully only one other girl was in line. Jihyo shifted her footing and turned her head to look at Mina.

“You ok?” She asked with a grin.

“Hm? Yeah, good.” Mina grinned lazily at her. Wasn’t at all used to drinking. She had thought that she wasn’t very affected, but the stairs had proven that it wasn’t the case. Maybe it was just easier not to notice when Jihyo was there to hold onto.

The door to the bathroom unlocked and two giggling girls came out with smeared lipstick, the girl in front of them walking inside and locking the door. Mina felt a blush creep up her neck and saw Jihyo bite her lip. Felt her hand on Mina’s.

“Do you think they-”
“Yup.” Jihyo mumbled.

“Oh.” Mina said. Felt a knot in her stomach.

In truth, Mina always feared she wouldn’t feel like that ever. Or worse. That no-one would feel like that about her. But then she heard Jihyo hum a melody as they waited, and forgot about the fears for a while. Heard the toilet flush and the faucet turning on and off. Then the girl emerged and made room for them. Jihyo hurried inside, Mina swaying slightly as she let go and walked after Jihyo. Locked the door as Jihyo sat down on the toilet. Mina settled for leaning against the sink. Felt awkward as always. Tried to figure out how to break the silence.

“I’m sorry I keep clinging to you.” Mina murmured, fiddling with the hem of her dress.

“Don’t. I like it.” Jihyo grinned at her and reached for the toilet paper.

Mina smiled and let her eyelids flutter shut, the room spinning. She held onto the sink and shifted her weight. Heard the toilet flush once more and then Jihyo shuffling beside her, nudging her slightly as she washed her hands.

“How drunk are you?” Jihyo asked, a little further away.

“Mh-no.” Mina muttered.

Jihyo laughed under her breath. Was close again.

“Are you drunk, Mina?”

“No…” Mina hummed.

“Come here.” Jihyo took her hands and wrapped them around her neck. Mina followed willingly. Bumped into Jihyo and opened her eyes. Jihyo had stopped. Mina tried to focus on her eyes.

“How drunk are you?”

“Not really.” Mina tried to convince them both “Just. Tipsy. I’m not really used to al-”

But she couldn’t finish the sentence, because Jihyo’s lips were pressing against hers. Blood rushed in Mina’s ears as Jihyo leaned into her, hands on her waist. Mina’s mind had stopped working. She didn’t return the kiss. Just drew back. Looked at Jihyo whose expression fell.

“Jihyo. I…” Mina started as Jihyo’s eyes glazed over.

She tried to grab Jihyo’s hand as the older girl snaked out of Mina’s arms and hurried towards the door, unlocking it. Managed to grab Jihyo’s wrist on the third try, but Jihyo shook it off. Quickly walked out and ran down the stairs. Mina yelled after her but she didn’t stop. And with all the coordination she definitely didn’t have in this state, Mina stumbled down the stairs after Jihyo. Didn’t notice Jeongyeon looking after them.

The front door was open and Mina tried her best not to fall over her own feet as she ran into the darkness, looking around for Jihyo. Found her on the curb in front of the house next to the one they had just exited.

“Jihyo.” Mina tried.

“Go away, Mina.” Jihyo said harshly. Wiped her face and wrapped her arms around her knees.
“No.” Mina said and sat down next to Jihyo. Pulled at her arm when Jihyo made to get up. Without knowing why, Mina reached around and cupped Jihyo’s cheek. Wiped her tears.

“I’m sorry.” Jihyo said in a small voice, eyes flickering between Mina’s. “I shouldn’t have kissed you.”

“It’s ok.” Mina assured her.

“I’m so stupid.” Jihyo croaked.

“No, you’re not.” Mina insisted and wrapped her free arm around Jihyo’s shoulders.

Fresh tears fell from Jihyo’s eyes. “I just… I like you so much. And you never saw. Never once. So I thought. Maybe. Maybe if I kissed you, you’d see. I’m… I’m so in love with you, Mina.”

Was this what it felt like, to be loved? Mina wasn’t sure. Had never been loved before. But the kiss hadn’t been uncomfortable as such. And after all, Jihyo liked Mina. Loved Mina. So maybe Mina loved Jihyo too.

It was perhaps nothing more and nothing less than the curiosity to find this out, that made Mina lean in and kiss Jihyo. She felt Jihyo sigh against her lips and clumsily wrap her arms around Mina’s shoulders. It wasn’t uncomfortable, kissing. It was quite nice, actually. It was like a rhythm, following the movement of Jihyo’s lips. She even liked the way Jihyo grasped at her shirt. Made her feel wanted. Curiously she angled her face, deepening the kiss.

The ground was cold but Jihyo was so warm. She responded to Mina’s every move. Yet with every brush of lips - every taste of Jihyo and beer - Mina couldn’t help but wonder if she shouldn’t be feeling more.

Then again, maybe this was just what kissing was.

But if that was the case, medias played it up quite a lot, and she needed to have a serious talk with fanfiction authors about what the deal was, with describing it as something magical.

She felt her lips fail to keep up as she zoned out and then Jihyo’s breathy giggle against her lips. It tingled. But then Jihyo’s hand was in her hair, tugging Mina closer again. Asking for more. And when Mina obliged, Jihyo sighed happily and her lips trembled. As if she was about to cry. Not really knowing why, Mina caught Jihyo’s lip between her own. It was dry but soft, and Mina tasted it carefully. Jihyo’s breath hitched and she seemed to melt into Mina. Did Jihyo feel more? Did she feel all of that magical wonder that Mina thought she herself would feel?

It was this thought that made Mina draw back, fear spreading through her veins like fire guided by kerosine. And the enamored smile on Jihyo’s face only confirmed it.

Mina felt sick. What had she done? This… this-

“I love you.” Jihyo whispered.

Tears stung in Mina’s eyes, trickling treacherously down her cheeks. She couldn’t say it back. Not the way Jihyo wanted her to. And she couldn’t face the pain she was about to cause by admitting that. So instead - and to this day it was still at the top of the list of Mina’s mistakes - she just freed herself. Jihyo’s face fell painfully, as Mina got to her feet. But it was too late. Something had irrevocably broken between them the moment Mina had kissed her.
And Mina ran.

She only just managed to hear Jihyo’s sobs before the sound of the party was swallowed by the darkness of the night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a kudos or a comment or come talk to me about it on twitter @dajeongmi or using #TWICEroomies.
She explodes

Thank you so much for being patient while I finished my exams. I hope it was worth it!!

Thank you for waiting?

“I don’t want to run anymore.”

“Then don’t.” Dahyun said, sitting up in the bed. “You can stay here, with me. With us.”

Mina looked at her. Waited for Dahyun to reach out and pull her in. But she didn’t. She just waited for Mina to make the choice to sit back down on the bed.

“It’s not that simple, Dahyun.” Mina said, giving into her selfishness and sitting down on the bed, on top of the covers. They were warm.

“You could explain it then?” Dahyun suggested, moving to sit on top of the covers as well, cross legged and facing Mina. Their knees almost touched.

“I just don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t want to run away, I don’t want to lose you guys, but I can’t see any way that I can stay. Because I fucked up so bad and I hurt people so much, and-”

Mina’s voice caught.

Dahyun tilted her head a bit, waiting for Mina to talk.

“I… It’s complicated. I just realized a lot of things… We fought. Jihyo and I. The night I got this.” Mina opened her palm, showing a pink wound by her thumb. It was almost healed, but still with a thin crust on it.

“What, like you fought fought?!” Dahyun sat up further, pulling Mina’s hand closer to inspect the cut.

“No, I cut my hand on a broken cup.” Mina let the younger girl run a finger over the wound. It tingled. “Ironic, huh?”

“Yeah... What happened? With you and Jihyo.”
“I don’t want to get into what she said. I think she was just scared and she just took it out on me. Not that it makes the words any less true.” Mina looked down at their hands. Then reached and grabbed one of the pillows to have it in her lap. Just so she could keep holding Dahyun’s hand without her arms getting tired. It felt nice. To hold onto Dahyun.

To stay.

“Did she tell you why?” Dahyun asked.

Mina pressed her lips together. “I don’t know if I can tell you.”

“They both know I know, if it’s- you know, Jihyo and...” Dahyun said. Grabbed the other pillow to mirror Mina. Opened her other hand to Mina. Just an offer.

Mina took it.

“Well, back then, when we- when I kissed her. It broke her trust. Completely. And I think she never really allowed herself time to get over me properly. Romantically, yes, but she never got over the betrayal. Which- I mean I don’t blame her. What I did was absolutely horrible. And I can explain it as much as I want with being young and drunk and worried about my own sexuality. But I can never excuse it. I’ll have to live with it always. And fact of the matter was that I screwed up, and she paid the price for it.”

Dahyun nodded. As if she knew Mina wasn’t done talking yet.

“I think the problem for her was that she never took time away from me. Jeongyeon and Nayeon kept pushing her to let me go, and even moreso, I tried to run. You know, leave them all behind? I knew they’d be better off without me, and that I had lost my right to be their friend with what I did. But she wouldn’t have it. And I think she was so afraid of losing me as a friend that she just never allowed herself to properly get over me. That’s why it took so long.”

“She’s not in love with you anymore.” Dahyun said.

“I know. She’s in love with Tzuyu. And I’m so happy for her, because Tzuyu loves her back. But she’s still so scared of Tzuyu breaking her like I did - that she’s going to have to go through another two and a half years like she just had.” Mina felt her throat close up. “I just h-hurt her. Over and over. And she was right - all I do in the end is just break people. I break people. And I wanted to make sure I wouldn’t be that person anymore.”

“Jeongyeon?” Dahyun asked, as if something was dawning on her.

Mina nodded. Felt a sob build in her throat. “I should’ve just stayed away from her. I tried to, I really did. There was a party and an almost and after that I really tried not to like her. It was so complicated. Even after new years I knew somehow. And now it’s all messed up because after the fight with Jihyo I just couldn’t see a single possible outcome where I didn’t screw her over.”

“Wait, hold on. New years?” Dahyun looked lost.

Mina felt her cheeks puff even if she was still crying. She couldn’t help the smile at the thought.

“Oh, wait... You guys kissed.” Dahyun’s mouth fell slightly open. “It was supposed to be Jeongyeon and Jihyo but they- so Tzuyu and Jihyo. And you and Jeongyeon.”

“The way she kissed me.” Mina said, her voice like a sigh of love. Then she giggled. “God, she couldn’t help herself.”
“But you didn’t kiss for long.” Dahyun frowned.

“No, but friends just give a peck. She… she really kissed me. She wanted me.”

“Oh.” Dahyun’s cheeks reddened visibly. Mina bit her lip. Her heart had felt lighter for a moment, at the thought of Jeongyeon’s flustered demeanor afterwards, but now she only saw the confusion and hurt in Jeongyeon’s eyes. The pain.

“Mina…” Dahyun’s voice was soft, and Mina realized she was crying again.

“I’m sorry.” Mina mumbled, reaching up to wipe her cheeks. It didn’t help much.

“You know you’re allowed to screw up, right?” Dahyun asked.

Mina looked at her, mouth falling slightly open.

“You’re allowed.” Dahyun repeated. “You don’t have to be perfect.”

Mina closed her eyes. She knew logically that there was a truth to Dahyun’s words. That you couldn’t expect perfection from people - because perfection and humanity are polar opposites. Yet somehow, she still clung to her upbringing. As if the search for perfection was so deeply rooted in her, that she couldn’t see past it. Ever since she could remember, it had been demanded of her. And if she did misstep, she had been made to repeat. Do over. Try again. Until she got it right. Everything in life. Not just the ballet, or her grades. Everything.

*Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.*

But then came Jihyo. Jihyo, who followed no straight path with her loud friends and her arms so tight around Mina’s waist it made her giggle. She hadn’t needed to repeat anything to get it right with Jihyo and eventually had felt the same with the two older girls as well. She had just been herself. Had felt free.

Until that night.

She had almost quit on all of them that time too. Had accepted that Jeongyeon and Nayeon would always take Jihyo’s side. But Jihyo kept taking hers. Kept pulling her back. And Mina wanted to repeat. To go back and not kiss Jihyo, or to try harder to fall for the girl who was so good to her. Mostly the latter. But there was no repeat in real life. Just choices. And consequences. And she had made so many stupid choices, and now faced the consequences of each and every one at the same time.

No Jihyo.

No Jeongyeon.

No job.

But Dahyun.

Dahyun’s smile, her hand, her chuckle, her love. An unlikely friendship that now stood with no walls and no secrets.

“I’m afraid… Because of what happened with Jihyo. How much I hurt her.” Mina whispered, finally breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

“You screwed up. You apologized, and she forgave you. It wasn’t like you went into the kiss
thinking _let me break her soul_.” Dahyun raised an eyebrow. “Did you?”

“Of course not.” Mina said promptly. “I thought… I really thought I might love her.”

“See? You weren’t malignant in your actions. You just screwed up. It happens. What defines you is how you act when you screw up. If you face up to it or not.”

“I just want to take it all back. I want to go back to that night and not kiss her.” Mina whispered, not sure who she meant. Both, probably.

“Mina…” Dahyun said quietly, her thumb stroking over Mina’s skin. “If you keep living your life thinking about what you wanted to change, you’ll never see the future clear enough to make the choices that will get you where you want to be.”

Mina stared at the younger girl opposite her. She had never considered that angle. In fact, hadn’t she spent most of her life just looking back? Lest for the past few months, her entire life had been about missed opportunities and choices made for her instead of by her.

“That’s Chaeyoung, by the way.” Dahyun said, interrupting Mina’s thoughts “It’s her words. Not mine. She told them to me the day I told her they couldn’t fix my hand. The… The day I gave her my piano.”

Mina squeezed her hand. “Do you live by those rules?”

“I try. I’m not very good, but I try.” Dahyun admitted.

“I’m just so afraid.” Mina muttered. “I’m afraid of the pain I might cause. I’m afraid that if someone loves me, I’m gonna break their heart. Like I broke Jihyo’s. And Jeongyeon’s.”

“If someone loves you?” Dahyun raised her eyebrows. “Mina, you have eight girls who love you. And I’m sorry to say, that you’re not gonna get rid of us.”

“I already did though. I pushed-. I pushed her away. I broke her. Told her it was over. Left. I didn’t even explain. She’s… everything to me. All I wanted was for her to be happy, and getting to make her happy was such a rush. But I couldn’t live with the idea that I’ll break her. But… I already did. I proved Jihyo right and I broke Jeongyeon. And now.. I’m here, somehow thinking I deserve to try again, and it’s so messed up.”

“So you left Jeongyeon so you wouldn’t eventually break her.” Dahyun sighed.

Mina pressed her lips together. Nodded.

“That is the single most ridiculous and stupid thing I’ve ever heard.” Dahyun said dryly.

Mina stared at her, completely taken aback.

Dahyun’s eyes softened. “So you’re telling me that because you might risk breaking Jeongyeon’s heart at some point, you’d rather break it now with no reason at all, very obviously breaking yourself in the process too. Just in case?”

“I-” Mina tried, but failed to come up with an argument.

“Mina, that’s like calling the cops on yourself and confessing to a murder just in case you someday might accidentally run down a deer.” Dahyun said, her voice louder.

Mina frowned. “That didn’t make any sense.”
“Exactly! It doesn’t make any sense. You love her.”

Once more Mina had to blink away tears. A familiar knot settled in her stomach and another closed her throat. Then she nodded.

“More than anything else.”

“Then tell her that!” Dahyun insisted.

“I can’t.”

“Why not? Mina, you have to tell her what’s going on.”

“No. I can’t just ask to undo. I forfeited my right to—” Mina couldn’t finish the sentence. Just the thought about maybe getting her back, broke and healed her at the same time.

Mina had been romantically attached to three people in her life. Jihyo. Sooyoung. Jeongyeon. Jihyo had loved her, and Sooyoung had desired her. Both made her feel wanted.

But Jeongyeon.

It had been the first time Mina had actually looked at someone and felt the desire to be near them. Where merely thinking about getting to be near Jeongyeon, had made her stomach jolt with excitement. There were so many little things Mina loved about her. Her silly puckered lips when she was bored. Her slightly lopsided grin. The way she made Mina’s body fill with so much happiness she had to kick her legs just to get some of it out. Her jokes and sappy comments all mixed up in a big mess. The way she yelled when Momo tickled her. How she argued with Nayeon with love in her words, and how she complained about Mina’s morning breath against the younger girl’s lips before kissing her deeper. The way she always seemed to gravitate towards Mina no matter where they were. As if she just wanted to be near Mina, no matter what. How she admitted her insecurities to Mina in the dark of the night, whispering into Mina’s neck.

Tears fell anew, dripping from under Mina’s chin, onto the blue pillow. Then Dahyun tangled their fingers and when she looked at Mina it was with an expression so gentle that Mina might as well have been made of glass. “I wish I knew how to make it better. To fix it all.”

Mina clutched their hands tight, sniffling. “I don’t need you to fix it. I’m the one who made this mess. And I’ll learn to live with it, even without— even… But I’m just— I’m glad you’re here, Dahyun. You’re the first who actually got through to me. You made me want to stop running, just by being here. And what you said… It made me think in a different way than I’ve done since I can ever remember. You already made it better.”

“Gotta remember to thank Chaengie then.” Dahyun chuckled, her voice cracking slightly.

“No, it wasn’t that.” Mina said. “It was that thing you said about the deer.”


“Yeah. Don’t confess to a crime you haven’t even thought about committing, right?”

“…Yeah.”

“I wanted to love her. Jihyo. I wanted to feel for her what she felt for me. I just… I never could. And
then I fell for Jeongyeon even though it was the last thing I wanted.”

Dahyun released one of Mina’s hands to tuck a strand of hair behind Mina’s ear. “You can’t control who you fall for. And you can’t live without taking risks. You just have to trust yourself and act on that.”

“I just wish I had found all this out weeks ago… years ago.”

“But you know now.”

Mina closed her eyes. Sniffled. “Do you believe in redemption, Dahyun?”

(Of course.”

“So you think I can come back from this?”

“I think so. I mean, you probably won’t get the job at the restaurant back-”

“I don’t want to.” Mina said immediately. “But.. if I choose to stay. Then I’ll have to face them. Jeongyeon and Jihyo.”

“Jihyo is unconditional in her love. You always, have her, you know that.” Dahyun said softly.

Mina tried to hold back the sob in her throat, but failed. Felt Dahyun’s fingers clasp tighter around her hand.

“I don’t think she’ll be so forgiving this time.”

(Of course she will.” Dahyun insisted firmly.

Mina shook her head frantically. When you break her, we’re over.

Jeongyeon stood in the door, hand on the door handle, a dumbstruck expression on her face as her eyes travelled from Mina’s face to the bag over her arm before snapping back up to Mina’s.

“Mina? What-”

“It’s not gonna work.” Mina said, keeping her face neutral and her eyes on Jeongyeon’s. Watched as her mouth fell slightly open and her brows knotted.

“I don’t-”

“We’re not gonna work.” Mina said firmly. Felt like every bone in her body was breaking all at once. It was a wonder that she managed to keep the expression. As if the searing pain in her hand kept everything else at bay.

“But-”

“Don’t follow me, and don’t try to contact me.”

Jeongyeon made to close the door, but Mina walked forwards, grabbing the handle to keep it open. Jeongyeon was close. Close enough to see the way her eyes glazed over. How her chest rose sharply as if gasping for breath. Like Mina was stealing it in this act.
“Mina, please.” Jeongyeon’s voice was barely audible.

“Don’t.” Mina said, realizing in that second that it would be the last time she would see Jeongyeon. It threatened to tear Mina apart at the seams. Threatened to make her heart stop and her body collapse. Then she acted. Couldn’t have stopped herself if the fate of the world depended on it. She leaned up just for a second and pressed her lips to Jeongyeon’s. Felt her shiver and drew away. Put a hand over Jeongyeon’s heart. It was hammering under her shirt.

“Don’t do this.” She croaked helplessly, frozen in a world Mina was breaking apart. “Please. Don’t do this.”

“I’m sorry.” Mina whispered, withdrawing her hand. Then she walked around Jeongyeon and out the door, heading down the hallway. Didn’t hear steps or shout. Just the door closing and two hearts breaking.

She made it to her car. Didn’t leave the car-park for hours.

Mina let go of Dahyun’s hands at the memory. Held them over her mouth and felt her body shake with renewed tears.

Dahyun didn’t try to stop her or hug her. Just let her get everything out as she needed to.

Eventually Mina lowered her hand to her chest, feeling her own hammering heartbeat. “I don’t know what to do.”

“That’s okay. Let’s just take it one step at a time. Baby steps.”

“But where do I even start? I have so much to face and I don’t know what to…” Mina trailed off.

“Let’s just make sure you aren’t running, firstly.” Dahyun said.

Mina sniffled and nodded. “Okay.”

“You were planning on moving home?”

Mina nodded again. “Yeah. Kai is- oh god, he’s going to be here in… twenty minutes.”

“To move everything home to your parents?”

“Well, I quit the apartment when I thought I was moving in with Jeongyeon and Momo, and someone else has signed the lease to take over after I leave, so I don’t really have a choice, right?” Mina shrugged. It was far away, but Mina would just have to make it work.

“... Maybe not.” Dahyun said, looking like she was trying to figure out a very hard piece of math.

“What do you mean?”

“Well- okay, well, for now, you can stay with me. Boxes and all. I have a room. We might have to store some of the furniture at your parents’ place, but you can stay in my room. I’m not using it anyways and Sana isn’t- well… she’s staying in Japan for now.” Dahyun sounded pained at the last sentence, but kept a neutral expression.
“What? Live with you?”

“Yeah. It’s not like I’m ever using my room anyway, and you can stay in it for now until we find a permanent solution.”

Mina felt herself nod before she had even finished figuring out if it’d be a good idea. As if there was a yearning to take this step that was stronger than the need to be in control.

…

It took quite a bit more effort than Momo had calculated to enter a closed door with two full cups of tea, and eventually she had to settle for knocking her foot against it until Sana opened.

“Shut up, I’m being nice to you.” Momo grumbled when Sana gave a soft chuckle at the sight of her.

“I know. Thank you, Momoring.” Sana smiled, taking one of the cups. She had her phone in the other hand, and Momo gestured at it.

“About to call her?”

“Nah, I texted her. She’s got a lot on her plate right now.” Sana said as they sat down on the floor of Sana’s old childhood bedroom.

“I thought you said you didn’t get a hold of her last night?” Momo asked.

Sana took a sip of tea and nodded. “I didn’t. But I got a hold of Mina.”

“You called her?”

“No, she picked up the phone the second time I called Dahyun. Dahyun was sleeping at her place, so I talked to Mina a bit instead. Seems she has a lot to deal with, but she wouldn’t tell me what. So I just told her to go hug Dahyun and go to sleep.”

“Well, at least Dahyun is sleeping, and I bet Mina gives better cuddles than my Bearring. I meant to give it to her before we left but I forgot.” Momo huffed. She had gotten severely distracted the last night before they left, and forgotten everything about the bear. Had spent the last days before leaving, at Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s.

Sana nodded and yawned. Then she ran a hand over her face, rubbing at her cheeks and eyes. When she turned her head to Momo, her eyes were closed and she looked like she was going to pass out any second.

Guilt tugged at Momo’s stomach at the sight. She was supposed to go back soon, and leave Sana. But how could she, when Sana was feeling like this.

“Sana?” Momo said hesitantly.

“Mm?” Sana hummed.

“… I’m cancelling my flight.”

“Momoring…” Sana opened her eyes, her face falling immediately as she looked at the older girl.
“Sana-chan…” Momo teased, nudged her slightly, not enough for her to spill her tea, but enough to make her giggle, even if only for a second before she went back to her serious demeanor.

“You can’t stay. You have to go back.”


“Not this time Momo. What about the audition?”

“I’ll find another dance crew to join. The world won’t stop just because I wait for you.” Momo smiled, then caught Sana’s eyes. “Unless you can look me in the eye and tell me you don’t want me here.”

“You know I can’t do that. I always want you by my side.” Sana smiled and shook her head. “But you can’t stay forever, Momo. There are more people who need you now. Not just me. You can’t choose just me anymore.”

Momo stared at her tea. Took a sip and let her heart wander back across the sea for a moment.

“I know.”

“Three weeks.” Sana said. “That’s all. Then you go back and you go to that audition and you go be there for those two girls you call yours, ok?”

Momo stared into her tea for the longest time before speaking...

“... I don’t want to do anything without you.”

“I know. But they need you.” Sana said quietly.

“You don’t need me?” Momo looked up, genuinely afraid.

“I need you to be happy. I need you to be my happy Momoring.”

Momo sighed. Put her tea down on the floor by the bed. Then she reached and took Sana’s away too, ignoring her confused muttering. With a determined look on her face, Momo sat back up, turning in the bed to face Sana. Grabbed both her hands.

“I can’t leave you here.” Momo said.

“You have to-”

“No, you have to listen to me, Sana.” Momo insisted, cutting her off. “Three weeks. But only if you promise you’ll come back too. No, I’m not done. I don’t mean you come back in three weeks, but that you do your best to come back to Korea as soon as you can. Promise me. Promise me you won’t grow roots here.”

“These are my roots, Momo.” Sana muttered.

“I mean don’t grow new roots here.” Momo said, even though she knew Sana was perfectly aware of what Momo meant. She was just buying time.

“What if I want to?” Sana asked, defiance in her voice.

“Do you? Do you really want to stay here?” Momo looked around the pink bedroom with all the gathered paraphernalia, memories of a time when it was just the two of them and a field of clovers.
Sana couldn’t meet her eyes.

“You miss her.” Momo said. Tucked a strand of hair behind Sana’s ear.

Sana’s lips quivering as if she was trying not to smile. Then she nodded.

“I’ve never felt like this before. I feel so guilty and ashamed.” Sana finally looked up. “Momo, I feel jealous.”

“Jealous?” Momo frowned. “Of who?”

“You.” Sana breathed. “Because you get to go home.”

“Then come with me. Your dad already told you not to stay for their sake.”

“Momoring…” Sana sighed.

“Sana-chan.” Momo sang and felt pride surge through her veins at the small smile that spread on Sana’s lips and made her eyes glisten.

They didn’t discuss it further. It was time to stop. Instead Momo just reached down for both the cups. As she handed Sana hers, she shuffled closer and wrapped an arm around Sana.

“When do you leave?” Momo asked as Sana leaned on her.

“Twenty minutes.” Sana sighed.

It felt weird. Knowing that in a few weeks, Momo would have to leave Sana in the airport. They had walked their entire lives at the same pace. Momo stopping when Sana stumbled. Sana running wherever Momo ran. Always Motang and Satang joined by the hip, untouchable to the world in each other’s company. Never one without the other. From the day they met.

But they weren’t kids anymore. And Momo didn’t fear losing her anymore, like she had when they were younger. Knew that she never would, and that even if she went back, Sana would always be there for her. It was the only thing Momo knew for sure.

That there was love in the world so strong it could never fade.

…

9:53 am Jihyo: Hey~

9:55 am Tzuyu: Hi, you heading to work?

9:55 am Jihyo: Yup, shift starts in a few.

9:55 am Jihyo: It’s definitely better now that exams are over.
9:55 am Tzuyu: So you stopped closing late?
9:56 am Jihyo: Yeah we’re gonna keep that as an exam period offer.
9:56 am Jihyo: Not enough customers at night now to keep a profit.
9:57 am Tzuyu: Well that’s my luck then I hope?
9:57 am Jihyo: That’s bold.
9:57 am Jihyo: I should be done around 7:30?
9:58 am Jihyo: Do you want to watch that movie we talked about? Enchanted?
9:58 am Tzuyu: I was thinking we could talk actually?
9:58 am Tzuyu: I think it’d be good for you.
9:58 am Jihyo: I can’t.
9:59 am Jihyo: I thought you understood that?
9:59 am Jihyo: That you were okay with us not talking about it.
9:59 am Tzuyu: Don’t make this my issue.
9:59 am Tzuyu: You came to me and talked about it.
9:59 am Tzuyu: Don’t blame me for worrying.
10:00 am Jihyo: Sorry.
10:00 am Jihyo: I didn’t mean to seem harsh..
10:00 am Jihyo: I gotta go
10:00 am Jihyo: Another time.
10:00 am Jihyo: I’m sorry.
10:02 am Tzuyu: Yeah me too..

…

“Dahyunie?”

Dahyun sighed happily, hugging her knees, shuffling slightly on the bed. She hadn’t really realized until that moment how much she had missed Sana’s voice. Especially when she said her name.

“It is you! You slept long then. I’m glad.” Sana sounded so happy that Dahyun felt she could cry just from the way her voice tugged at Dahyun’s heart, drawing it closer. She must’ve recognized Dahyun from just her sigh.
“I’ve been awake for a while I think, but I honestly have no idea what time it is.” Dahyun muttered. “How are you? How’s your mom?”

“I’m ok, Mom is still… We’re back at the hospital.” Sana said, her voice suddenly serious. “She’s stable, but I’m glad she’s back here where they can watch her if something happens. In this state, stable doesn’t mean safe. Something could happen really fast. It’s a relief that they agreed to admit her again.”

She sounded tired. Her night had probably been a lot longer than Dahyun’s.

“Are you there with her?” Dahyun asked.

“Mh, in the cafeteria with dad. He says hi, by the way.”

“... Hi back?” Dahyun frowned as Sana said something in Japanese with her name in it. Heard a voice and a chuckle. It was deeper but just as airy as Sana’s.

“What’s he saying?”

“He says he’s glad that you make me smile.” Sana said shyly.

Dahyun felt her heart swell with pride and hid her grin, resting her forehead against her knees. Hugged them a little tighter. She was glad Mina wasn’t here, listening for the sound of the shower. There had after-all been a reason she had called. Then the faucet turned on, letting Dahyun know that Mina was under the shower and wouldn’t be able to hear her. With a deep breath Dahyun gathered all the butterflies in her stomach and gave instructions for them to sit tight. There was something more important than the joy Sana brought.

“Sana, I slept at Mina’s last night.”

“Yeah, I know.” Sana said.

“Wait. What?” Dahyun lost her focus.

“I called you around four in the morning and you didn’t pick up, but Mina did and I talked to her for a bit.” Sana said. “There’s something up with her, isn’t there?”

“Yeah. Kinda.” Dahyun took a deep breath. “I need to know if it’s okay that I keep using your room as mine.”

“I assumed you already had been.” Sana chuckled. “But sure. Why?”

“Well, Mina was going to move home, but I offered that she could stay in my room for the time being, but-” Dahyun’s cheeks burned and she tried to avoid tripping over her words as she continued. It didn’t really go all that well. “But- But it doesn’t change the fact- and- well. If she wants. Just until she finds her footing- it doesn’t have to be permanent if you don’t feel- If, you know-”

“Dahyun.” Sana said, cutting her off. “What exactly are you trying to say?”

“Sana, she’s going to be homeless in a week,” Dahyun sighed. “And I- I never use my room anyway and I know it’s way to soon and way too much and with your mom and we’re totally not ready and I realize-”

“She’s getting kicked out? Why?”
“It’s a long story, but she ended the contract on the apartment and it runs out next week.” There was no choice but to tell Sana what was going on, if she was to justify what she was asking of Sana. “She was supposed to move in with Jeongyeon and Momo, as you know. But… well. They- they broke up.”

“Oh.” Sana breathed. “So… you want to-”

“I don’t have a lot of stuff, I promise I won’t even take up half the closet-”

“Yes.”

“-but she has nowhere else and-” Dahyun stopped. “Yes?”

“Yes.” Sana said. “You can move into my room, permanently. I mean, I still don’t know when I’ll be coming back but it honestly won’t be that different, right? You’ve been sleeping there for months anyway.”

“I have.” Dahyun said, heart in her throat. “I like it better.”

“Funny, I didn’t notice that at all.” Sana teased. Dahyun chuckled shyly. “Oh, Dahyun, I gotta go, my mom is back from her scan.”

“Sure. Talk later?”

“Definitely.” There was sunshine in Sana’s voice.

“Good luck with your mom!”

“Thank you, Dahyunnie.” Sana said.

Dahyun hung up, a grin spreading on her lips as she looked down at the phone. Two in the afternoon. And almost as if her stomach could read the clock, it growled in protest. In the same instant the water turned off in the bathroom and a text appeared on her phone. Dahyun opened it to see a picture of Sana and a man who was undoubtedly Sana’s dad. Same nose, same kind eyes behind spectacles. Really, the only noticeable difference was that Sana’s glasses were round and that she didn’t sport a mustache and goatee.

It took only a minute for Mina to emerge from the bathroom, clad in grey sweatpants and a simple black t-shirt. Her hair was a damp and messy, but she somehow made it all look good. No wonder Jeongyeon had fallen for her.

“What?” Mina asked.

“You know people probably tell you this all the time, but you’re so pretty it’s downright unfair.” Dahyun said.


“Oh don’t worry, I’m not interested.” Dahyun assured her. “But about the roommates thing.”

Mina immediately looked worried. She crossed her arms and dug her fingers into her skin.

“No, it’s good. Well, it could be, if you want?”
Mina’s expression changed again, brows furrowed in confusion. “I don’t-”

“Well, if you want, you can have the room permanently? My room.”

“Wait, really?” Mina asked.

“Yeah. I talked to Sana just now and we discussed it. Well, I stammered and blabbered and she got
the jist of what I was asking, and said it’d be fine for her and I to share my room. When she gets
back I mean.”

“So she is coming back?”

“Of course, I mean not right now, her mom is sick and…” Dahyun trailed off. Felt something tug in
her stomach again. There was that doubt. The uncertainty. Sure, they could plan all they wanted and
move stuff around but fact of the matter was that right now, it could be months or even years before
Sana came back. Momo had mentioned that Sana’s mom had been ill for long periods before, but
how long Dahyun didn’t know. And she couldn’t exactly ask without sounding impatient.

All she could do was hope.

“Dahyun?”

“Sorry. Sorry, I got lost in thought. But, yeah if you want, we can just move all your stuff over to my
place permanently.”

“I don’t know…”

“Oh, come on, Mina. You said it yourself, that you were moving in with Jeongyeon and Momo
because you wanted to be closer to us all. And I’m not the worst roommate in the world.”

“It’s not that. It’s just… a very big step.” Mina said, biting down on her lip.

“Well, then take the smallest one first.” Dahyun shrugged. “You rescheduled with Kai, right - so
he’d come tonight?”

“Yeah.”

“Then maybe cancel it tonight? You still have a week until you have to be out, right?” Dahyun
suggested.

“And do what? Just sleep over at your place?”

“Yeah, just to try it. Make it a temporary situation for now.”

“With the goal of moving in to your old room?” Mina asked, sitting down on the bed. She ran a hand
through her hair.

Dahyun nodded. “If you want?”

“Okay…” Mina said. Then she took a deep breath and closed her eyes. A nervous smile played on
her lips. “Okay, I think then I’d like to move in. Permanently.”

“You sure?” Dahyun asked.

“No. But I’m gonna try. Baby steps, right?” Mina gave a nervous chuckle.
“More like big girl shoes.” Dahyun acknowledged.

Mina took her hand. Ran her thumb over Dahyun’s scar.

…

Chaeyoung looked at her phone. Sighed and turned it face down on the table. Then she leaned her head sideways against the side of the fridge. An empty bowl stood in the sink and the taste of Oreo O’s was still on her tongue.

“You grumping?” Nayeon’s voice sounded from the entrance to the kitchen.

Chaeyoung didn’t open her eyes but nodded, feeling the pout on her lips. She didn’t resist it. There was no use in denying that she missed Momo, and especially now that she was going to be in Japan longer than expected. But it was so silly, right? To miss someone so much when she had barely gotten to be a real part of their daily life yet.

But she was. She was already a part of Chaeyoung, as Nayeon was.

The sound of steps across the kitchen floor was followed by a hand gently on Chaeyoung’s thigh. Chaeyoung hummed and blindly found Nayeon’s arm, tugging her closer.

“I have something for you.” Nayeon hummed quietly. Her voice was close, and Chaeyoung angled her face expectedly.

“Not that.” Nayeon chuckled.

Chaeyoung huffed.

“Okay, that too.” Nayeon gave in, almost too fast. But Chaeyoung didn’t care. She just happily hummed as Nayeon kissed her. But next thing something was placed in Chaeyoung’s lap, and it definitely wasn’t a hand.

“I know you aren’t done with the old one,” Nayeon mumbled, her lips brushing against Chaeyoung’s occasionally. “But I think you should use this one.”

Chaeyoung frowned and opened her eyes, looking down as best she could. A turquoise floral pattern notebook with a gold spiral back lay in her lap.

“Any special occasion?” Chaeyoung asked, a smile spreading on her lips.

“Read the message.” Nayeon kissed the corner of Chaeyoung’s lips. Then she drew back enough for Chaeyoung to properly push herself off the side of the fridge. With a slight flutter of her heart, Chaeyoung opened the notebook to the last page.

Thank you for the adventure that is our life, and for recording your mind in these books. Please think of love when you write in this.
Chaeyoung read the words over and over. Traced over the last two and then closed the notebook. Held it to her heart and tugged at Nayeon’s arm.

“I love you so much, you know.” Chaeyoung whispered, not trusting her voice.

“I know, baby.” Nayeon said, pressing a kiss to Chaeyoung’s forehead. “How are you coping without Momo?”

“Not well, honestly?” Chaeyoung said.

“We could call? Or you could?” Nayeon suggested.

Chaeyoung shrugged. “It’s okay, we don’t have to.”

“Why not?” Nayeon clicked her tongue impatiently.

“What if she’s busy?” Chaeyoung bit down on her lip.

“Then she won’t answer or she’ll call back later.” Nayeon shrugged, pulling out her phone.

“I don’t know how to do this, okay? It was different when she was just here all the time.” Chaeyoung sighed, once more leaning against the side of the fridge.

“I know, baby. That’s why you need to talk to her. You gotta talk to us, not just your notebooks.”

“Hey, I love my notebooks.” Chaeyoung clutched the new one close to her heart. “They don’t judge me.”

“And you think we do?” Nayeon frowned.

“No, of course not, I don’t mean it like that. I just mean that I don’t have to filter anything and I never have to be afraid that they’ll get tired of listening to me.”

“You could literally talk to me about the frequency of storks on church roofs in France and I would swoon. I love your weird mind, and everything in it. It’s what I fell for.”

“Okay, first of all, strange compliment but I’ll take it. But more importantly, what the hell is up with that stork story?”

“I was watching a documentary.” Nayeon shrugged.

“Of course you were, but how do you manage to retain that sort of information when you have asked me 14 times in the past month how long the eggs have to boil to be soft-boiled?” Chaeyoung turned a bit more, a grin playing on her face.

“I only retain vital information.” Nayeon noted, leaning up, obviously trying to get a kiss.

“You’re gonna starve to death if you’re ever alone, that’s why you need two girlfriends.” Chaeyoung
chuckled, shuffling to obey Nayeon’s silent request. The older girl smiled into the kiss.

“Are you gonna call her then?” Nayeon asked when Chaeyoung drew back.

“Fine.” Chaeyoung rolled her eyes and took Nayeon’s phone.

As soon as she took it however, she felt the nerves build in her skin. She couldn’t help it. It made her heart beat faster. Made her press the wrong app and accidentally turn the screen off. But then Nayeon’s arms were around her waist, pulling her closer, and her soft hum sounded in Chaeyoung’s ears. Chaeyoung unlocked the phone again and found Momo’s number.

“No, do a video call.” Nayeon muttered into her shoulder.

“But-”

“You wanna see her face right?” Nayeon asked.

“... I do” Chaeyoung smiled and felt her cheeks warm. It was still new and overwhelming. Letting herself feel so much, being so unconditionally in love with Nayeon and also getting to feel her feelings for Momo build, seeing the feelings that were slowly budding between them all. But it was also this that scared her. They were so different - the feelings she felt towards them. And adding the feeling when she saw them together, it was all just a confusing mix of champagne bubbles and shooting stars. Bird wings beating in her heart and daisies before her eyes.

And then there was Momo’s grin on her screen, lighting up her world, waving exaggeratedly at them. She moved and it immediately became clear to Chaeyoung that she was outside. Squinting slightly at the sun, Momo tried to find a good angle.

And this was where Chaeyoung was supposed to say something. Anything. You know, like hi, baby or hi, momo. Just a hi would do at this point.

“Where are you?” Chaeyoung eventually got out.

“A park.” Momo beamed. Then she looking down at her feet, apparently searching for something. “I used to go here as a kid.”

“Oh, that’s cool, are we disturbing you?” Chaeyoung asked.

Nayeon nudged her, but Chaeyoung ignored it.

“Not at all, I’m just-” Momo trailed off, the camera moving shakily, focusing more on her neck than her face. Albeit a very pretty neck but not really the point of the call.

“Momo?” Nayeon asked, poking distractedly at Chaeyoung’s side. Chaeyoung knew that it was an attempt to keep her nerves down, and loved her for it, even if it tickled. Maybe because it tickled.

“Huh? Right, I’m trying to- there!” Green in a mix of grey and white took over the screen as the image shifted fast before Momo’s face came back into view, a massive smile on her face.

“What?” Chaeyoung grinned, letting herself enchant by the silly girl on her phone.

“Hana was right, they really are here!” Momo looked like she had just unlocked the secrets to the entire world.

“What is it?” Chaeyoung asked, trying to see on the screen.
“A four leaf clover!” Momo grinned and showed them, holding it between her fingers.

“Honestly, what is it with you and four leaf clovers?” Nayeon asked with a chuckle.

Momo bit her lip. “It’s for Sana. Hana - my sister - she used to take us here when we were kids. When Sana couldn’t be in her own head; when everything in her life was about cardiograms and wires and hospital visits.” Momo looked away for a moment, then back at them. “I didn’t know this until an hour ago, but apparently four leaf clovers are a genetic thing, so if there’s one there’s bound to be more, and they’ll grow in the same patch year after year. But Hana knew already when we were kids, and she took us here and told us to find some so Sana’s mom would have good luck. So when we found them we really did feel lucky because we didn’t know that they would always be here. So I’m gonna bring one to the hospital now. So Sana can feel lucky.”

“That… is just about the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard.” Nayeon muttered, her hands gripping tightly at Chaeyoung’s waist, as if she needed to steady herself.

Chaeyoung just stared at Momo. Wondered if everyone got to experience this; feeling so much for someone, loving how much someone loved; having a heart that desperately wanted to be loved by someone like Momo. By Momo.

“I’m gonna hug you so hard when you come home.” She whispered eventually.

Momo’s shy chuckle rang in her ears long after the call ended.

...

7:24 pm Jihyo: Hey?
7:27 pm Tzuyu: Hi
7:27 pm Jihyo: I’m sorry.
7:27 pm Tzuyu: Thank you
7:28 pm Tzuyu: I’m sorry too. I did say I would let you just rest with me. That I wouldn’t try to make you talk when you’re not ready.
7:28 pm Tzuyu: I just worry.
7:29 pm Jihyo: I know, and I love that you do. Even if I’m not ready to talk about it.
7:29 pm Tzuyu: It’s just who I am, I guess.
7:30 pm Tzuyu: Do you still want to watch enchanted?
7:30 pm Jihyo: Very much.
7:30 pm Jihyo: Can I come over now?
7:31 pm Tzuyu: Please.
7:31 pm Tzuyu: Have you had dinner?

7:31 pm Jihyo: Not yet. Order for both of us if you haven’t eaten either?

7:32 pm Tzuyu: I actually made homemade kimbap again if you want?

7:32 pm Jihyo: How are you so perfect? Cooking for me and everything..

7:34 pm Tzuyu: Please don’t flirt.

7:34 pm Jihyo: Sorry

7:35 pm Jihyo: Sorry, I didn’t think.

7:36 pm Tzuyu: I know, I just really want to not be in love with you anymore.

7:37 pm Jihyo: I’m sorry.

7:39 pm Tzuyu: I’ll make some rice for us now, then.

7:40 pm Jihyo: Okay

7:40 pm Jihyo: Be there soon.

…

Dahyun dried her hands and drew out her phone. She had felt it buzz in her back pocket earlier, but hadn’t reacted.

8:16 pm Chaeyoung: Where u at?

Dahyun frowned and typed as she walked out of the bathroom.

8:21 pm Dahyun: Mina’s place, why?

Dahyun waited a few seconds but as it wasn’t read immediately, she turned the screen off and settled back on the bed.

“Feel better?” Mina asked quietly, a huge pillow in her lap and a half eaten bowl of cereal balancing on it, holding the bowl still with a hand on the edge of it.

“Yeah. Sorry.” Dahyun mumbled and considered finding herself a bowl of cereal too.

“It’s okay, you’re valid.” Mina shrugged and lifted the bowl to eat, revealing the orca pattern on the sides.
Dahyun just nodded and pressed her lips together. Then looked at the phone again as it buzzed.

8:23 pm Chaeyoung: Cool, just went over to your place and you weren’t there.
8:24 pm Dahyun: No, I thought I’d get a good night’s sleep so I went home with Mina after work.

The lie was intentional this time. It wasn’t her place to tell people what was going on. Not now at least.

8:25 pm Chaeyoung: Oh so you’re still there?
8:25 pm Dahyun: Yeah, she taught me how to play tekken.
8:25 pm Chaeyoung: Bet you sucked.
8:26 pm Dahyun: Bet I’m gonna block you.
8:26 pm Chaeyoung: Right. Sure. Let’s see about that.

Dahyun put down the phone and shook her head. Found Mina’s eyes on her.

“Chaeyoung.” She pointed at the phone, grabbing it just to have something to fiddle with.

Mina nodded. Then took a breath.

“Are you sure about the offer? The room, I mean.” Mina asked, putting the empty bowl on the nightstand.

“Of course. This was nothing.” Dahyun shrugged.

“If you get anxiety at the thought of moving into her room, then maybe it’s not time yet. Even if you don’t use your room.” Mina said, opening her palms on the pillow. The scar in her palm caught Dahyun’s attention.

“I’m not scared of that. I’m scared that I pushed her. That she’s not ready.” Dahyun muttered, playing with the phone in her hands.

“That’s understandable.” Mina nodded, putting one hand in the other. “Just… You know you don’t have to, right? Give up your room. I can find somewhere to stay if I need to, once Sana comes home.”

“Do you think it’s too soon?” Dahyun muttered, putting the phone down. “Me and Sana?”

“There’s definitely a risk involved.” Mina said quietly. “But honestly, dating a roomie, especially when it’s just you two, is risky all on its own, and if you break up it’d be unlikely that you’d keep living in the apartment together anyway, right? So if you want to, then I don’t see a problem.”

Dahyun grabbed a pillow and put it in her lap. Picked at the edges, and glanced down at her phone.
“I read somewhere online about the average time to wait until you take steps. How many dates before you kiss, how long of a time to be a couple before you have sex, before you say I love you, moving in together- Everything.”

“Screw all that.” Mina said firmly, making Dahyun look up with a frown. “Those guides are for people who aren’t confident in their feelings.”

“And you think I am?” Dahyun chuckled. “I’m hopeless, I have no clue how to do this.”

“I read those articles too. But honestly, the minute-” Mina trailed off. Looked down at her hands and picked at her cuticles. Dahyun reached over and covered her hands.

“You’re ok.” Dahyun whispered.

Mina gave a single hopeless chuckle.

The phone buzzed again and Dahyun glanced down at it.

8:36 pm Sana-chan: Hi

Dahyun bit her lip.

“Do you want cereal?” Mina asked, making Dahyun look up. “I’m gonna get another bowl.”

“I... sure. Yeah, I’d like that.”

Dahyun never really figured out if Mina left to let Dahyun talk to Sana, or because she couldn’t talk about Jeongyeon. Maybe a mix. But she gave Dahyun’s hands a squeeze before she moved the pillow in her lap, grabbed the orca bowl and walked out into the kitchen.

8:37 pm Dahyun: Hi, everything ok?
8:38 pm Sana-chan: Yeah, just wanted to check in
8:38 pm Dahyun: I’m glad
8:38 pm Dahyun: You still ok with my invasion?
8:39 pm Sana-chan: Yep
8:39 pm Dahyun: Good, then we’ll start moving some of her stuff tomorrow
8:39 pm Dahyun: I have work but we’ll share my key until I can make a copy.
8:40 pm Sana-chan: Sounds like a plan
8:41 pm Dahyun: How’s your mom?
8:41 pm Sana-chan: No change...
Dahyun stumbled for a second, trying to figure out what to write, but Sana texted again before she had finished trying to word her feelings.

8:42 pm Sana-chan: But I have luck on my side. So she'll be fine.
8:42 pm Dahyun: That's good! I'll send you my luck too!
8:42 pm Sana-chan: No, you need it!
8:42 pm Dahyun: I got all I wanted from mine already, she can have the rest.
8:43 pm Sana-chan: Oh?
8:43 pm Dahyun: You!
8:44 pm Sana-chan: How are you so smooth when you're cheesy?!
8:44 pm Dahyun: Beats me. But if it works, it works, right?
8:45 pm Sana-chan: It works.
8:46 pm Sana-chan: I miss you.

Dahyun’s grin faded and she stared at the name on the screen. Pressed the home button just to look at the picture of Sana she had as her home screen. Then went back into chat.

8:47 pm Dahyun: I miss you too.

Dahyun watched as the message was read. Chuckled at the happy puppy gif Sana sent and returned it with a heart. Then looked around for Mina, realizing that she hadn’t come back. And that there were sounds coming from the kitchen. Sounds that made bricks settle heavily in Dahyun’s stomach.

8:48 pm Dahyun: brb

She found Mina in the kitchen staring into the depths of a coffee cup, shoulders shaking and lips trembling.

Dahyun could do nothing but hold her.

…
Giselle popped up from a sewer. Jihyo wished she could disappear down it instead. Get away from this world to one where the lines were simpler, cleaner, where the colors were brighter and where the feeling of awkwardness wasn’t threatening to get the best of her. Because Tzuyu was right there. Right there on the bed beside her, her long legs crossed, palms open, resting in her lap. If Jihyo just reached.

Robert yelled for Giselle to come down from the castle, and Jihyo stole a glance at Tzuyu.

There had been something different about her today. Like she was still mad that Jihyo wouldn’t talk. But she had agreed afterall, so it wasn’t really Jihyo’s problem, right? She would just have to get over it.


“I like this song.” Jihyo hummed.

“Yeah.” Tzuyu said, her voice small. It made Jihyo steal another glance. Tzuyu’s lips were pressed tightly together and she swallowed. She was definitely uncomfortable. Jihyo tried shifting again, to eliminate some of the distance, and for a moment they lay with their shoulders touching. But then Tzuyu took a breath. Held it. Exhaled. And moved. Not a lot, but enough that they weren’t touching anymore.

“You okay?” Jihyo asked, eyes on the screen.

“Youp.” Tzuyu said. It was obvious that she was trying to relax, but her shoulders hunched slightly. It was quite unlike Tzuyu, whose posture was always perfect.

Jihyo looked at her again, the younger girl’s eyes glued to the computer screen as Robert complained about the fate of his curtains. Then she moved. Moved further away from Tzuyu, towards the wall. Tzuyu visibly relaxed more.

Oh.

It wasn’t that Tzuyu was mad at Jihyo. This was breaking her heart. Being so close to Jihyo. And she was just trying to protect herself. Distancing herself from Jihyo. Jihyo who wanted nothing more than to be the cause of Tzuyu’s happiness, but was so terrified of Tzuyu being the cause of Jihyo’s misery. But right now, it was the other way around. Tzuyu was the thing that made everything bearable for Jihyo, but for Tzuyu, Jihyo was misery. Pain. Heartbreak.

And for the first time Jihyo fully understood exactly what she was doing.

It was like coming to the edge of a cliff and looking down. Deciding whether to jump with the promise that she would learn to fly in the seconds it took for her to let go, or to turn back and run away, never to see the sky again.

Jihyo felt electricity surge through her skin and the stones settle in her stomach. She loved the sky. Wanted to warm it and make the wind rush through her body.

She didn’t want to run anymore.
With a single movement, Jihyo leaned forwards and closed the laptop.

“What are you-” Tzuyu started, but Jihyo just held up a hand to hush her, heart in her throat. Then she took the laptop and put next to them in the bed. Then she turned, sitting up in the bed, looking down at Tzuyu.

“Jihyo-” Tzuyu tried again, making to get up, but Jihyo put a hand to her shoulder, pushing her gently back to lean against the wall like before.

Jihyo opened her mouth to speak, but couldn’t get a word out. Couldn’t breathe. Just had to act. But how could she? How was she supposed to jump when her muscles wouldn’t listen? But then Jihyo saw the confusion spreading in Tzuyu’s sad eyes, and she moved without even realizing. As if she wind had swept her off her feet. She leaned forwards. But before she could get anywhere, Tzuyu’s hands were on her shoulders holding her back.

“What are you doing?” Tzuyu asked, fear in her voice.

Jihyo felt her eyes water, and her throat allowing exactly two words. “... Being brave.”

Tzuyu frowned. Then her eyes went wide and her cheeks reddened visibly. “Oh.”

Jihyo leaned closer, finding that Tzuyu’s arms bent to allow it, her voice small. “I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t.” Tzuyu breathed, eyes darting between Jihyo’s.

Jihyo swallowed hard. Felt the tip of her own nose brush against Tzuyu’s. And with the wind rushing in her ears, Jihyo pressed her lips to Tzuyu’s. It wasn’t a choice anymore, to jump. She was already flying. Felt how Tzuyu’s lips shiver against her own and moved. How Tzuyu’s hands travelled behind Jihyo’s neck and pulled her closer. It was overwhelming and intoxicating, and Jihyo adjusted to deepen the kiss, halfway chuckling and halfway crying against Tzuyu’s lips. Maybe more than halfway crying. But why? She wasn’t afraid. She wasn’t thinking of anything except how to keep being so close to Tzuyu.

Yet she drew back with tears running down her cheeks. Took Tzuyu’s hand from behind her neck and pressed her trembling lips against the palm.

“I-I did a bad thing.” Jihyo whispered.

The tug was immediate, Tzuyu trying to draw her hand back, eyes full of fear.

“No-” Jihyo hurriedly said, clutching Tzuyu’s hand. “No, not this.”

Tzuyu’s eyes glazed over, and Jihyo leaned back down, forehead pressed against Tzuyu’s.

“Tzuyu. This was good. This isn’t the bad thing! I think this… this was the best thing I’ve ever done.”

Tzuyu gave a wet laugh, and Jihyo kissed her again. Felt a sigh against her lips and chuckled.

“I love you so much, Chou-tzu.”

Tzuyu didn’t answer. Just broke the kiss and angled her face to kiss the tip of Jihyo’s nose. Completely out of context.

“What was that?”
“Your freckle. It’s cute. I… I always wanted to kiss it.” Tzuyu said quietly, cheeks red.

Jihyo shook her head with a smile and closed her eyes. Then nodded to herself and took a deep breath.

“I should’ve given you an explanation when you kissed me back then. I owed you that. But I didn’t know how to tell you that I was afraid you would break my heart.” Jihyo opened her eyes and met Tzuyu’s. “I’m sorry.”

Maybe it was the way the corners of Tzuyu’s eyes crinkled when she smiled, or maybe it was the shyness in her expression, but Jihyo knew that she was forgiven. And it was a start. But it was by far the smallest of the mistakes Jihyo sought forgiveness for.

“I lost my temper.” Jihyo felt Tzuyu’s hand shift in Jihyo’s, clutching it tightly, the other once more around Jihyo’s neck. “I was bitter and scared and I took it out on Mina for a mistake she made years ago. A mistake I let her make. A mistake I could’ve stopped her from making if I hadn’t been such a fool.”

Tzuyu remained silent. Merely held onto Jihyo. And it made Jihyo feel safer than anything she could’ve hoped for.

“How much do you know of my story with Mina?” Jihyo asked cautiously.

“Bits and pieces. Enough to know what you’re talking about.” Tzuyu muttered.

Jihyo nodded and let out a shivering breath.

Then she spoke. And once she had started talking, it all burst from her like a waterfall in the early spring, the ice breaking off all at once, coming to life and pouring off the cliff, violent and unstoppable. She told everything. Bared her soul to Tzuyu. And the younger girl just wiped away every tear and held her eyes when they threatened to waver. Held her heart together and prevented it from bursting with regret and shame.

“Let me help.” Tzuyu whispered when Jihyo finally ran out of words.

Jihyo shook her head. “I already know what to do. I know what I have to do, but having to do it is just… so hard. But I think- I think I can do it now. Knowing I won’t lose you. But I need to sort this whole thing first, before I can do this properly. So maybe… God, this is so unfair, but maybe if you can wait for me? Just a bit longer.”

“But you’ll be with me afterwards?” Tzuyu interrupted her. “You promise?”

“I promise. And I’ll hurry. I want to hurry so I can do this right, with you. But I just-”

“I know.” Tzuyu smiled. “Not like this.”

Jihyo looked at the younger girl, letting herself feel everything she had tried not to. Love, fear, hope, and a new feeling that spread like embers through her. Courage.

“I know, you know, that we aren’t together yet.” Tzuyu said, her voice shy, and her fingers playing with Jihyo’s. “But can I just- you know just one last…”

Jihyo smiled. She couldn’t help it. Because Tzuyu was sitting there, asking for one last kiss before
Jihyo went to war. And Jihyo couldn’t deny her that, even if she wanted to.

“I promise this won’t be the last.” Jihyo said, twining her pinky around Tzuyu’s before leaning in.

They lay side by side in the bed, watching the last half of the movie. Not like lovers, though not like friends either. But the finger that Jihyo wrapped around Tzuyu’s was a promise. A promise not only to Tzuyu, but to Jihyo as well. A promise that she would fight for Tzuyu.

That she was worth the risk.

…”

“I won’t lie, having four buff guys help move makes the process a lot easier than having to do it just the two of us.” Dahyun said with a chuckle as she folded up the empty take-out boxes and put them all in a big bag.

“Oh definitely, especially with practically re-furnishing your- my room in the process.” Mina flopped down on the old yellow couch.

Kai and his old college buddies had just left after being treated to pizza and kimbap as a thank you for helping Dahyun and Mina move. It was almost two in the afternoon, and Dahyun couldn’t stop looking at the clock. She would have to leave for her shift soon.

Hesitating slightly, Dahyun sat down beside Mina, looking at her.

“So…”

“I don’t know.” Mina said. “I don’t know what to do, Dahyun.”

“She hasn’t tried to contact you at all?” Dahyun asked.

“No.” Mina breathed.

“Is there anything you want me to tell her?”

Mina shook her head. “Not like- you can tell her what you want but I don’t have a message.”

“That’s fair.” Dahyun said. “But Mina?”

“Oh?” Mina sounded scared. Probably was.

“It’s okay that you’re not ready yet, but you have to promise me you’ll try to find the courage to talk to her. She deserves to know the full story.”

“I know.” Mina said, then pulled her legs up and hugged them. “I feel like the worst person for not being ready.”

“You stopped running. That’s the first step. You need time. All I’m saying is that we need to make sure she’s okay too. It worries me that she hasn’t tried contacting you.”
“Really? It doesn’t surprise me at all.” Mina said, sniffling.

“Why?”

“That’s how she is.”

“Unresponsive?” Dahyun frowned. It didn’t sound like Jeongyeon.

“No.” Mina shook her head, wiping her cheek. “She’s too accepting. She accepts that people treat her like shit.”

“You didn’t—”

“I did. Dahyun. I did. I left her without explaining. I didn’t handle it in any kind of mature way. And there was this part of me that kept wanting her to run after me and ask me to explain, that would hold me to my promise.”

“But she didn’t—”

“No.” Mina whispered. “She let me walk away.”

“Oh.” Dahyun pressed her lips together.

“She lets people use her and break her over and over because she’s too damn kind for her own good. She never stands up for herself. Everyone else she’ll go to hell and high water for. But not herself.” Mina shivered and hugged her knees tighter.

“So maybe that’s why it’s you who has to change.” Dahyun suggested. “If you want this to work.”

“No, we’re not getting back together. That’s not what I’m saying, Dahyun.”

“I know, but it’s what I’m saying.” Dahyun insisted. “You love each other.”

“I don’t have any right to love her.” Mina whispered.

“Love doesn’t give two shits about rights.” Dahyun said dryly.

Mina sniffled and buried her face in her knees. “Just make sure she has someone, okay? It’d be typical of her to… to just keep it inside and not tell anyone.”

“Okay. Okay, I’ll do that.” Dahyun promised, giving Mina’s arm a squeeze. Then she looked at the clock again.

“We still have twenty minutes until I leave. Do you want to check if the playstation got set up right?” Mina shook her head against her knees, and then looked up, wiping her eyes again. “But maybe we could unpack a little?”

“We can put your cups and plates and stuff into the overhead cupboards?” Dahyun suggested. “It’ll feel more homey tonight to use your own stuff.”

Mina sniffled and nodded. “I’d like that.”

“Try not to beat yourself up too badly. Okay?” Dahyun asked.

Mina nodded and made to get up. But in the same instance, Mina’s phone buzzed, and she jolted,
eyes wild and cheeks flushing.

She read the message over and over before showing Dahyun.

2:19 pm Jihyo: Can we talk?

Something moved inside Dahyun and made her feel a little lighter, as she looked at the message.

Maybe there was hope after all.

…

Or maybe none at all.

Jeongyeon was in the worst mood Dahyun had ever seen, and she was sure she had seen the worst when Nayeon had first convinced her to bleach her hair and it had gotten so damaged at the ends they’d had to cut it short.

It seemed that the minute the cat had gotten out about Mina, Jeongyeon had stopped pretending everything was fine. She wasn’t rude to any of the customers, even smiled at the rude customers whom she had many times promised a horrible death. But the minute she got into the kitchen, she looked as if every single spoon had tried to murder her.

“Jeongyeon-ssi. Calm down.” Joohyun insisted when she grabbed a plate with so much force she almost lost hold of it.

“Leave me alone.” Jeongyeon bit at her, turning away from her.

“Jeongyeon!” Dahyun blocked her path.

“Fuck off, Dahyun.” She glowered and walked around Dahyun.

Dahyun grunted and rolled her eyes. Got the exact same response the next three times she tried to talk to her. So in the end she settled for keeping an eye on the older girl for the rest of the night. Watched how the smile faded faster and faster, how she yawned when she thought no-one was looking and how her voice never reached the same range it normally did.

At half past eleven, Dahyun tried one last time. With the excuse of getting ice from behind the bar,
Dahyun nudged Jeongyeon ever so lightly.

“Hey…”

“Dahyun, I swear to god, if you touch me again-” Jeongyeon grumbled under her breath and looked at Dahyun with empty eyes and gritted teeth.

“Just-”

“No.” Jeongyeon’s voice rumbled like thunder and Dahyun drew back. Nodded and let her be.

For now.

The entire rest of the night, Dahyun was torn between three solutions. All three of which would end with Dahyun risking her face colliding with Jeongyeon’s fist. The first was to handle everything herself, and insist on talking to Jeongyeon - run after her home if must. Chase her down like she had Mina. Except Dahyun still had Mina at home, broken and alone. The second was to corner Jeongyeon here and insist that she talk to someone. It was obvious from Dahyun’s conversations with Chaeyoung, that Jeongyeon hadn’t told Nayeon anything, or Chaeyoung would’ve asked how Mina was. There was the chance that she had told Jiho, but then again, considering everything, it was an unlikely perspective. This would however possibly also result in Dahyun chasing Jeongyeon down.

The last option, as far as Dahyun could see, was to tell on Jeongyeon to Nayeon. Possibly through the means of Chaeyoung. But this idea was both grossly amoral and by far the biggest risk for Dahyun’s own relation to Jeongyeon. She would never forgive Dahyun for a stunt like this, and Dahyun wouldn’t deserve forgiveness. Honestly, a stunt like that would probably justify Dahyun ending up a ditch somewhere with an ‘eat me’ sign for the hyenas.

She ended up doing it herself in the end. With her mind screaming that she couldn’t carry more hearts, she opened the door to the locker room, finding Jeongyeon busy trying to get the necktie over her head. She had apparently done the knot wrong in the first place and now it was stuck. She cursed loudly and kicked the locker.

“She’s safe.” Dahyun said cautiously, facing Mount Doom with all the risks of getting her ass kicked.

“Like I care.” Jeongyeon huffed, pulling at the knot.

“Of course you care.” Dahyun said as calmly as she could. “You love her.”

“She left me.” Jeongyeon spat. Pulled at the tie, teeth bared and eyes shut tight.

“Stop. Let me do that.” Dahyun insisted, swatting her hands away and trying to work on the knot.

Jeongyeon turned away. Slammed her locker shut in an apparent attempt to get some of the energy out of her body.
“Hey! Let me help!” Dahyun said loudly. Grabbed her shoulders forcefully and tried to catch her eyes.

“Just stay away from me.” Jeongyeon growled. “Dahyun!”

“No.” Dahyun insisted, grabbing the knot of the tie again and pulled at the right part.

Jeongyeon protested but Dahyun swatted her hand away again and kept working until it was off, the knot undone, then fixed Jeongyeon’s collar. Held a hand to Jeongyeon’s shoulder for a second before looking up at her.

Her eyes seemed hidden behind a veil and her face was threatening to crumble.

“Let me go.” Jeongyeon croaked.

Dahyun did. Took a step back, heart in her throat and breath catching. There was something about Jeongyeon’s voice being so small and fragile, that somehow made it ten times more terrifying than Mina yelling.

In the next second Jeongyeon took a shaky inhale and grabbed her bag. And before Dahyun managed to gather her thoughts enough to form a sentence, she had turned and walked towards the door.

“Text me when you’re home.” Dahyun said. Let her go.

Jeongyeon didn’t answer. Just slammed the door after her. Left Dahyun alone in the locker room.

With the image of Jeongyeon playing like a horror movie on her retina, Dahyun changed from her work uniform, the last one left at the restaurant. Then she took a round to make sure every door was locked and every stove turned off, just in case. With a yawn, Dahyun locked the back entrance and tried the handle to check. Then took out her phone and texted Sana.

2:14 am Dahyun: On my way home, hope you’re getting some sleep <3

She watched the screen for a good minute as she walked, seeing whether Sana would answer immediately, though hoping she wouldn’t as this meant she was probably asleep for once. When there was no immediate answer, Dahyun unmuted the phone and pocketed it. Looked up at the sky, and tried to imagine the stars she would be able to see if there weren’t any clouds. It felt a little better knowing she wouldn’t go home to an empty apartment, even if she was facing an empty bed. But at least, it still smelled like lemons. So did her hair. She had used Sana’s conditioner again.

Maybe by now, Dahyun had accepted the reality, that she would never sleep well alone. And maybe she could live with that. Maybe she’d get better in time, but for now she’d just have to try her best. Keep doing the things she had tried the first night. And then maybe one day it would only be a matter of not wanting to sleep without Sana, instead of not being able to. Maybe it already was.

But no matter what, Dahyun was definitely going to fight and be strong until Sana came back.

If… If she came back.
What if her mother wouldn’t get better any time soon? What if it took months? Years? Could they survive that? Could Dahyun survive feeling this much and Sana being that far away? When she missed her so much after just a week… What if she wasn’t cut out for this long distance thing. But maybe if she didn’t come back, Dahyun could take a semester there? They had a university in Osaka, right? And maybe she couldn’t get the classes she could here, but then she could at least be with Sana.

God, what was she even thinking? Uprooting her life like that. But she would. If it meant seeing Sana. Holding her? Dahyun stopped in her tracks. Frowned and almost felt Sana’s arms around her waist. And for a moment she felt left behind. Felt like Sana had taken something from her. Taken it with her without telling her. Dahyun shook her head and sighed. Tried not to think about it. Tried not to feel the way her throat closed up. Tried not to hear the words in her head. Tried not to love.

The moment Dahyun pressed the buzzer for Mina to let her in, Dahyun heard her phone beep and grabbed it.

2:26 am Jeongyeon: Home.

Dahyun bit her lip so hard it drew blood.

2:27 am Dahyun: Home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please feel free to leave a kudos or a comment here or on twitter using #TWICEroomies or by contacting me on @dajeongmi
Dahyun cursed. Picked herself off from the floor and looked back at the laundry bag currently containing all her clean clothes. Then she scrunched her nose and nodded. If falling over it was what it took to get a grip and do something about it, then so be it.

With a deep breath, Dahyun reached for her phone on the bed and pressed the most recent call, listening for it to be picked up.

“Hello?”

“Sana, hi. You busy?” Dahyun asked, a grin tugging at the corners of her lips at the sound of Sana’s voice. It was an automatic reaction.

“No, I’m just watching a movie.” Sana said neutrally.

“You’re home?” Dahyun frowned.

“No, my mom’s room at the hospital. She’s getting an angioplasty and I hate those tests, she’s always in so much pain. So I’m passing the time” Sana explained. She sounded tired.

“Do you mind passing time by helping me out, then?” Dahyun asked cautiously.

“No at all. The guy in the movie is such a jerk, I honestly don’t know how people fall for that type.” Sana clicked her tongue. “You know that type that’s all cold and tough and it’s the girl’s job to soften him and see the vulnerability in him and be patient until he opens up to her. As if it’s her job to fix him.”

“Yeah, I don’t get it either.” Dahyun gave a dry chuckle.

“Oh wow, no, he’s really a douche. I’m turning it off. What did you want my help with?”

Dahyun took a breath. “Well, I want to move some of your clothes around to make room for mine, but I don’t know your closet or your preferences so I thought it’d be best if you helped.”

“Can you change to video?” Sana asked.
“Sure, hold on.” Dahyun said, doing as told and feeling her heart jolt when Sana’s face appeared. The walls were light blue around her and the edge of an empty hospital bed was visible on her left. Her roots were long, hair tied in a ponytail, and her glasses had slid slightly down her nose. But she was looking at Dahyun as if she was the most important thing in the world. Looked at Dahyun in a way that made the younger girl forget what she was doing. Made her forget that there was a world beyond the inches of the screen, sucked into Sana’s eyes, frozen in this bizarre reality that had become theirs. This reality where they had spent 24/7 stuck together for months, and now Dahyun could only see her thought a few inches of surface, let alone feel her presence.

“You’re… I really miss you.” Dahyun breathed, then pressed her lips together for a little, gaining the courage to say what she wanted. “You look really pretty.”

Sana’s smile was soft. Warm. It only made Dahyun’s heart beat stronger and she felt the muscles in her arm tense as if her body had stopped her from reaching out before she noticed she was even reaching.

They were nearing ten days apart but it might as well have been forever.

“I miss you too, Dahyunnie. So much… Ugh, but there’s nothing we can change about that. However we can change that closet.”

Dahyun nodded. She was right. They couldn’t change the distance. And as long as Sana was smiling like she was now, then it wasn’t so bad. That was the most important thing after all. Sana’s smile. Her giggles. Her way of saying Dahyun’s name. Lemons. Arms. Lips. No. Dahyun shook her head to get the longing to go away.

“You okay?” Sana asked carefully.

“Yeah. Yes. Okay, so all my clothes are over here.” Dahyun turned and pointed, angling the camera at the laundry bags. “But I really don’t have a lot, you know my style, it’s very plain.”

“That’s because you look amazing in an old sweater even if it has stain that won’t come off the sleeve.”

“Hey, you made that stain.” Dahyun complained.

“I know. That wasn’t the point.”

“Oh. Then what was?”

“I was calling you hot, Dahyun.” Sana rolled her eyes, a small smile playing on her lips.

Dahyun chuckled nervously, feeling a familiar warmth in her cheeks. Even at 500 miles distance she could make Dahyun react to only a few well-chosen words.

Clearing her throat, Dahyun turned the camera on the phone and faced Sana’s closet. Dahyun watched as she propped the glasses up on her nose, squinting slightly as she looked.

“Do you have anything that needs a hanger?”

“Nope, I don’t really--” Dahyun shook her head, then corrected herself. “Wait, yes. Two things. My formalwear from my recitals are mostly at my parents’ place, but I have one suit and one dress here.”

“Hold up. You have a suit?” Sana asked curiously, her eyes sparkling mischievously.
“I do. It depends on my mood, what I feel like wearing when I had to dress for recitals and stuff.”

“I need to see that suit on you. And off. Or a combination.” Sana sounded downright shameless, leaning forth in her seat a little.

Dahyun bit her lip, glad the camera wasn’t on her. “So anyway, I can fit the- those two things-”

“The suit.” Sana said it in a way that, if Dahyun hadn’t read the undertones, would’ve mostly reminded her of the way a kid said ‘the christmas present’. Once again, Dahyun had to clear her throat, pressing her lips tight together. Sana’s eyes just shone.

“I can fit the- uh, suit... and the dress into the closet without moving any of your stuff. It’s more the drawers I’m worried about.” Dahyun looked at the laundry bags and frowned.

“If you pile some of the stacks we might manage, and otherwise we’ll find a solution. I mean I prefer your clothes to mine anyway so I’ll just give some of it to goodwill.”

“Right, okay. I’m just gonna place the phone somewhere... uh.” Dahyun looked around.

“I’ll be here. Watching.” Sana said with an unmistakable intention in her voice.

In the end Dahyun placed the phone on the table, angled it and turned the camera back to front view. She waved slightly as she returned into view and Sana beamed at her, face close to the screen. And for a moment Dahyun forgot what she was doing. White noise. It only made Sana’s smile turn to giggles. Really, if Dahyun could spend the rest of her life hearing that giggle, knowing she caused it, then she wouldn’t need any more.

“You can see the closet, right?” Dahyun asked finally, grabbing one of the laundry bags and pulled one of the sliding doors to the side. It was one of those ikea closets with drawers inside the closet, a peculiarity that had spoken to Chaeyoung when she had bought it. As her old room had built in closets, she had had to get a proper one when she moved into the apartment.

“My view is just fine.” Sana chimed shamelessly.

“You are very flirty today.” Dahyun muttered with a grin, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Well, I get to stare at you for the first time in a while.” Sana shrugged. “And besides. I know you well enough to know that if I’m not flirting with you already, you’re gonna die on me when you realize that this rearrangement of clothes means that you’re gonna have to move my underwear around.”

Dahyun stopped dead.

Sana had spoken in such a matter-of-factly tone, but as Dahyun slowly turned, processing the sentence, Sana’s face took up the entire screen and a smirk was plastered on her face. It took a few seconds too long for Dahyun to turn away and hide her burning cheeks and the delay spurred a loud laugh from Sana.

“So shirts first?!” Dahyun asked.

Sana giggled and hummed. Leaned back in the hospital chair as Dahyun opened the top drawer. Very, very quickly shut it again. She hadn’t seen anything other than lace but it was enough to find out the content.
“It’s not funny!” Dahyun whined at Sana when she cackled unashamed.

“It is.” Sana said through laughter, but then stopped, tilting her head. “Come here, Dahyun.”

Dahyun grumbled but did as told, walking back over to the desk with flaming cheeks, squatting to level with the phone.

“Dahyun. It’s okay that you think it’s awkward.” Sana said genuinely. “And it’s okay that I think it’s cute that you’re awkward about it. It’s just how things work. And afterall, you have only seen a very limited selection of what’s in that drawer.”

“It’s lingerie, it’s… I’m not used to seeing stuff like this and actually imagining what it would look on someone that isn’t myself. But I’m pretty sure that’s what I’ll do if I go into that drawer.”

“So? I’m your girlfriend, Dahyunnie. You’re allowed to imagine me in underwear.” Sana said, then tilted her head a bit. “You haven’t ever… you know, imagined that?”

“I… Well- I mean.” Dahyun stammered. “Yes. But not specifics. You know, this way I’ll know what all your underwear looks like at once.”

“Okay, then I have an idea for you.” Sana said leaning closer to the screen. Her eyes were dark and full of ideas. But only for a second, then she leaned back. “You know what. We’ll just wait with that one. There’ll probably be room for your underwear in the bottom drawer without much budging, I only have socks in that one.”

Dahyun didn’t answer immediately. A moment ago Sana had been almost lewdly flirty, and now her voice was just conversational. And Dahyun wondered what had changed. But Sana’s face revealed nothing, and Dahyun didn’t ask. Instead she just nodded and let herself look at Sana for a little. Then got back up.

“Shirts are in the second drawer.” Sana said as Dahyun reached the closet again.

“Thank you.” Dahyun sent a thankful smile back before opening the second drawer.

It was surprisingly an easier job than expected. Sana’s shirts were mostly thin cotton or chiffon, and they stacked well to make room for Dahyun’s shirts. The jeans and pants was more of an issue, as both Dahyun and Sana owned a lot, and eventually the bottom drawer had to be converted from sock drawer to socks- skirts- and underwear-drawer. But with a lot of budging, a few curses and a little more budging, Dahyun managed to make room for it all. At least all that wasn’t in Japan with Sana or in the laundry basket in the bathroom.

Finally, after almost half an hour, Dahyun settled on the desk chair, stretching from the work. Sana was still there, just watching Dahyun. Had come up with ideas and solutions and encouraged Dahyun every now and then. Had cooed when Dahyun had brought in the dress and suit, although not demanding that Dahyun put on the suit as the younger girl had feared. Merely asked if it was pinstriped - to which Dahyun nodded.

But now the suit and the dress were stowed away in their closet with the rest, and Sana kept looking towards the door.

“Is she coming back from her test soon?” Dahyun asked the third time Sana looked back over her shoulder.

“I hope so. It takes a while but she should be done soon.” Sana said. “You okay?”
“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?” Dahyun asked.

“You just looked like you deflated a bit now.” Sana shrugged.

“No, I’m good. I mean. I just really miss you. It feels like this, like this is something we should’ve done together.” Dahyun flopped down on the chair by the desk, pulling up her knees.

“But we did do it together.” Sana said softly.

“You know what I mean.” Dahyun sighed.

“Yes, I know.” Sana said, then took a deep breath. “I really miss you too. I miss being able to touch you when we talk, to see you properly. Not through a screen. I miss holding your hand. I miss holding you when we sleep. The other day I was out watching the stars with Momo and I saw a shooting star, and I felt so guilty afterwards.”

“What?” Dahyun frowned.

“Because I didn’t wish for my mom’s health. I didn’t think about that at all. In the moment I saw it all I wished was to just go back to Korea just for a day, and hold you all day. Just stay in bed and make out and cuddle.”

Dahyun’s throat closed up but tried to speak nonetheless. It came out in a croaky voice that threatened to break. “I’d love that.”

Sana smiled in an almost defeated manner. “How have you been sleeping?”

Dahyun put her head on her arms and shrugged. “So-so. Better now that Mina is around. She’s quiet as a mouse, but knowing she’s there, it helps.”

“Will you tell me when you don’t sleep well?”

Dahyun bit her lip, then nodded. “I’ll try. I’m really doing okay most of the time, surprisingly. It’s much more… you know. Everything else. It’s all just fucked up.” Dahyun sighed, burying her face in her arms.

“Mina?” Sana asked.

“Not just her. Jeongyeon as well, and Jihyo.” Dahyun looked up slightly to avoid muffling her voice too much. “Well, and Tzuyu if you add her in as well. They’re all just… it’s such a mess. I’m doing my best to handle everything and be there for Mina. I want to push her to talk to Jeongyeon and I want to push Jeongyeon to talk to Mina. But Mina just cries and Jeongyeon shouts. I try to be there for them both, and for you, and I wanted to be there for Jihyo too, but I’m just so tired. I can’t hold more misery in my heart than I already am.”

“Dahyun… You have to remember to make time to be there for yourself too.” Sana said, concern in her voice.

“I am. I really am. Like I’ve gotten a habit of taking long showers and I’m having Mina teach me to play tekken.” Dahyun said. “I just want all this to be over. If I could just get them to talk. I mean it’s been what? Two weeks? But I guess maybe now things will get easier. Or a shitload worse.”

“What do you mean?” Sana asked.

“Well, Jihyo texted the other day and asked to talk. And Mina said she would, but then said that she
had to talk to her parents first. She’s at lunch with them now actually.”

“Oh…”

“I think maybe she’s coming out to them? So I’m worried about her. If her parents don’t take it well then it might just set her back further. I’m just not sure it was the right order to deal with things in. I mean her main support system were Jihyo and Jeongyeon. I just think it might be easier for her with them around. If we just fixed that first-”

“You can’t be sure any of it will get fixed, though.”

“I know. But I have to believe that it can. I have to believe that there’s a way to fix this because even if she doesn’t see it, it’s so obvious that it’s just a big misunderstanding that could be solved if they just talked. I mean they love each other so much. All three of them.”

“It’s just not always enough... But I hope they find out too. I’d hate to see them fall apart.”

“Yeah… Lot of love wasted.” Dahyun said, shifting in her seat.

They didn’t talk more. Just stared at each other through the screen for another five minutes until Sana’s dad entered the room and spoke to Sana. She answered him in Japanese, and Dahyun noticed that her upper lip curled a little when she addressed her father, her voice a little lighter. Then Sana’s dad walked closer, bending down to get his face in frame. His similarity to Sana was even more striking live than in the picture. He waved and said hi. Dahyun tried saying hi back, but got caught on her tongue. Japanese had never been easy for her. He just chuckled and then put his hand on Sana’s shoulder. Said something in a hushed voice, and Sana nodded, the same curl of her lip back. Looked almost like a child. Then she looked back at Dahyun, the childlike innocence still in her eyes.

“I have to go now.”

“That’s okay, I have to study anyways.”

“Don’t overdo it.” Sana reminded.

“Yeah, I won’t. Bye Sana.”

“Bye…” There was something in Sana’s voice. A hesitance. But then it was gone and so was she.

For a moment Dahyun just sat there. Waited for the reality to manifest, away from the screen. Reality without Sana. And it felt like being exposed to the truth behind a magic trick. Finding out that it doesn’t exist. Magic. And it hurt more than she could’ve expected. A sudden and irrevocable plummet.

…

Mina stared down at her bowl, poking at the poached egg with her chopsticks. She knew everything about this situation so well. Had sat at this table so many times. Had practiced this speech so often.
Yet she hadn’t ever combined the two. And it was this that scared her to the point where it felt like her insides were twisting around themselves.

“So are you settling in alright?” Mina’s mom asked cautiously. “I mean-”

“Yeah. And I’m sorry you went through all the trouble of me intending to move back here and then not.”

“Oh, I think it’s good that you stayed in the city with your friends.” Mina’s dad said. “Though I still don’t really understand why you ended up moving.”

“It’s a long story.” Mina said. Chickened out.

Then something nudged her foot, and she looked up. Found Kai’s eyes on her and a question in his eyes. Mina took a deep breath and pressed her lips together. Nodded to herself. Kai nudged her again. Sent her a smile. They both knew what she was trying to do, and he was there for her. Then Kai shifted in his seat, whereby eliminating a little bit of the distance between the two siblings. As if letting her know she wasn’t alone. That he was there for her. That there was someone in her corner.

“Mom?” Mina wasn’t sure she had actually said it, but then her mom looked up, a kind expression in her eyes.

“Yes, dear?”

“… I have to tell you something.” Mina poked at the poached egg until it bled into the soup.

Her mom sat up a little, opening her expression. She was listening.

Mina hesitated. Wanted to run and never tell them. What if they didn’t understand? What if they weren’t good about it? What if they threw her out?

“Mina?” Mina’s dad asked.

“Okay.” Mina said, mostly to herself. “Well, you see. It’s- it’s complicated.”

“Complicated?” Mina’s mom frowned.

Mina tried to figure out how best to explain it. Because it wasn’t just a matter of *hey, I’m gay*. And in the end Mina closed her eyes, trying to get the words out. She knew that she had to say *her* name but still felt her throat close up the first time she tried. She felt herself tear up. Please, this wasn’t how it was supposed to go.

“Are you okay, darling?” Mina’s dad asked, making Mina open her eyes.

Mina sighed. “Do you remember Jeongyeon?”

“Oh… Yeah, the one with the- the teeth, right?” Mina’s mom gestured at her own teeth.

“No, that’s Nayeon. Jeongyeon is… the other one. Tall one?” Mina tried, without saying the words she wanted to use.

“Oh yes, I remember her. Pretty girl. What about her?” Mina’s mom seemed genuinely confused.

“Uh. Well, you see. The thing is-. She…” Mina felt her heart rate pick up and she picked at the
poached egg again.

“Is she in trouble? Is she pregnant?” Mina’s dad asked. The doctor in him, Mina thought.

“No!” Mina hurriedly said. “No, she’s not pregnant.”

“Then what?” Mina’s dad asked, but before Mina could take a breath, Mina’s mom spoke instead.

“Are you dating her?”

Mina’s heart stopped. For at least a few seconds. How the hell had her mom deduced it from this? Did she know more than she had let on?

“I… was. Not anymore, but I was.”

“Oh.” Mina’s dad said. Cleared his throat.

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of, darling. You’re young still. If you had gone to school in Japan we would’ve encouraged you to go through this back in high school too. It’s completely normal for girls to have these feelings. Sometimes friendships between girls just get so strong that it feels like having a girlfriend, and there’s nothing wrong with that. It doesn’t mean anything for your adult life.” Mina’s mom explained patiently.

Mina stared. Kind of felt like throwing up. It wasn’t like she was oblivious to the culture back in Japan just because she hadn’t gone to high school there. She knew all about it. Had even wished sometimes that she could’ve gone to school there so she would’ve had the opportunity to test her feelings without risking anything. At least until later. But she couldn’t just keep putting it off or wishing for a different reality. Because she was here, in the middle of it all. And her mom was looking at her with excruciating understanding in her eyes.

“Mom, it’s not like that. It wasn’t a phase. It’s… it’s just who I am.”

“Mina dear, it doesn’t work like that.” Mina’s mom tried.

Mina felt agony bubble in her stomach, and she looked pleadingly at her mom. “But it does work like that for me. I love her. Jeongyeon. I love her like how you love dad. I love her in a way that sends butterflies through my veins and makes my heart feel lighter. It feels right with her. It does work exactly like that. She’s more right for me than any guy.”

Mina’s mom looked to Mina’s dad and then back at Mina.

“So you’re saying that you’re…” Mina’s mom trailed off, as if she couldn’t get herself to say it.

“… Gay. Yes.” Mina nodded. The word still tasted weird in her mouth, and it was just as scary to say as she had feared. And as opposed to her hopes, it didn’t feel any different afterwards. It didn’t feel any better to say it out loud. Because her parents were staring at her as if she was a stranger.

“Did someone hurt you?” Mina’s mom asked, as if this was the most reasonable conclusion for why something was wrong with her daughter.


“But didn’t you say you weren’t… dating her anymore?” Mina’s dad asked, the words sounding unfamiliar to him.

“Yeah. Well, that’s the reason I had to tell you.” Mina explained, feeling Kai’s hand on her shoulder.
“The reason I was moving home is… well, her. I ended the lease to move in with Jeongyeon and her roommate Momo, but then… well, stuff went down and we’re not together anymore. But instead of moving back here, I moved in with my colleague from the restaurant, Dahyun.”

Mina opened her mouth to continue. To note that she wasn’t exactly working at said restaurant anymore. But she didn’t. Now wasn’t the time for that.

“Well, good.” Mina’s mom said, as if she had reached a conclusion. “Then there’s still time to get over this Jeongyeon girl and find a husband.”

“Mom.” Kai said, finally breaking into the conversation. “Stop. This is how it is and you just have to get used to it. It doesn’t change who Mina is. Trust me.”

“You knew?” Mina’s dad asked.

“I-” Kai seemed caught.

“I told him the night I disappeared from my graduation party.” Mina explained. “I was dealing with some stuff concerning that, at the time. That’s why I disappeared.”

“Because of Jeongyeon?” Mina’s mom asked with a frown.

Mina bit her lip. “No… Jihyo.”

“So you did date Jihyo, I always suspected she might be your.. High school phase. But then again, she wasn’t a senpai so I wasn’t sure.” Mina’s mom explained.

So that’s how she guessed about Jeongyeon. Well, technically Jeongyeon did fit the classic description of a senpai. Taller and gorgeous in an almost careless manner, as if she didn’t really notice it much. An air of unattainability around her. And older. An upperclassman. But it wasn’t that.

“No, I never dated Jihyo. I… Well- It’s a long story.”

“So.” Mina’s dad cleared his throat. “Are all your friends- … you know. Like you.”

“It’s called being gay, dad.” Kai said, maybe a little harder than necessary.

“Kai.” Mina hushed him, then looked around to her dad. “Yes. Well, not all… gay. But all into girls. I think it’s a thing? That people find ones who are similar? Gravitate towards one another.”

“So the gaydar is real?” Kai asked, looking impressed.

Mina giggled and nodded. She couldn’t help it. There was something so freeing about Kai that made it all better, even if her parents were obviously having a hard time with it. Something about his excited honesty that made it feel like things were going to be okay. It just felt like maybe it could all be okay.

“But then… Are you sure?” Mina’s mom asked, concern in her voice, pulling Mina back to reality.

“I mean I can never be sure as such, it’s a fluid thing for many people, but I’ve never really fancied a guy? So I’m as sure as I can be in a world where nothing is certain.” Mina said, feeling considerably more calm now than she had at the start of the conversation.

“And this Dahyun girl, are you two-”

“No.” Mina shook her head. “Dahyun and I are just friends. She found out that I was planning on
moving back here, and suggested I take the spare room in her apartment.”

“Oh, that’s very kind of her.”

“Yeah, Dahyun is really quite an extraordinary person. I’m very grateful for her.” Mina nodded. Ran a hand over the almost healed wound in her palm and took a bite of the poached egg.

It still tasted like home.

...

Dahyun had never been one to meddle, as such. Had always minded her own business, even if this had for the majority of her childhood been due to the fact that no one ever talked to her. But something had changed since the accident. She wasn’t entirely sure why, but maybe it was just seeing how the others had taken care of her. How they had meddled when she needed it and had caught her when she fell. Or maybe it was just easier to deal with other people’s shit, than all of her own. Probably a mix, though Dahyun wanted to believe the first more than the second. Wanted to be that person who went out of her way to help.

And maybe that was why, despite what happened the last time, Dahyun determinately took a hold of Jeongyeon’s wrist the moment they had finished their shift. Before Jeongyeon got a chance to walk out on Dahyun again. And to Dahyun’s surprise, Jeongyeon didn’t pull away. Just followed as Dahyun dragged her around the restaurant and sat her down on the bench. Their bench. And for a moment Dahyun wondered why the older girl let her. But maybe Jeongyeon just didn’t have the energy to resist. She looked impossibly worse than two nights ago. Looked like she hadn’t slept since, the bags under her eyes heavy and purple and her eyelids drooping. Her dry lips told Dahyun that she probably hadn’t had much to eat or drink either.

Reaching into her bag, Dahyun grabbed a bottle of water, offering it to Jeongyeon. The older girl took it and drank greedily.

“Have you told Nayeon?” Dahyun asked, holding onto Jeongyeon’s arm, just in case. But she didn’t try to run. Just shook her head and gave Dahyun back the bottle.

“She’s living with- with me. Mina.” Dahyun felt Jeongyeon’s body jolt at the name.

“Okay.” Jeongyeon closed her eyes and sighed.

“Why didn’t you ask her?” Dahyun looked up at the sky. Briefly wondered if Sana did too.

“Ask her what?” Jeongyeon asked monotonously.

“Why didn’t you ask her why she left you?”

“Why would I?”

“You don’t want to know why? Everything was going so well, it was completely out of the blue, and you’re not the least bit curious what happened?”

“I’m not curious about anything.” Jeongyeon opened her eyes again, staring up at the starlit sky. “None of it matters anyway. We’re over. I’m over it. She can do whatever the hell she likes.”

Dahyun rolled her eyes. “Right. Sure.”
“You know, if you’re gonna offer me support you might wanna try not being so snarky about it.” Jeongyeon snapped, pulling her arm away and getting up.

“I just don’t believe that you’re over her. At least, if you are then she clearly loves you more than you loved her.” Dahyun knew she was pushing it to the edge again. But from what she knew with how Nayeon handled her, soft words had never been the way to go.

“And what the hell do you even know about that? She left me, remember?”

“Yeah, but you clearly don’t love her anymore whereas she is a sobbing mess half the time and the other half she’s just dead. And you did nothing to stop her.”

She could see it in Jeongyeon’s eyes immediately. That she had gone too far. But the words had come before she could stop them.

“If she doesn’t want to be with me then why the hell would I stop her?”

“Maybe because you love her, and still, you just let her leave. You know how she is - you know her and still you just let her run away.”

It really was a shitty move to use the information Mina had accidentally given to hit where it hurt. But it was the only thing Dahyun could think of. The only way Dahyun could see to make Jeongyeon realize she was worth an explanation.

“You can really be a bitch sometimes, you know that?” Jeongyeon hissed.

“Yeah, well, which one of us has to go home and comfort Mina? Definitely not the one it ought to be.”

“Then stop meddling.” Jeongyeon said coolly. “No-one is forcing you.”

“I’m all she has. There isn’t a choice here.”

“There are nine of us, are you really the only one?” Jeongyeon narrowed her eyes, crossing her arms.

“Well, you’re out. Sana is stuck in Japan indefinitely. Nayeon is out - telling her isn’t my business-”

“None of this is any of your goddamn business.” Jeongyeon interrupted her harshly.

“Nayeon is out.” Dahyun repeated, counting on her fingers. “Chaeyoung for being Nayeon’s girlfriend. Momo isn’t coming home for another week and she’s also out because of Nayeon. Jihyo-well... and Tzuyu is out by extension.” Dahyun held up her fingers. “That leaves me and Mina.”

Jeongyeon turned her head away. “Fine. Then just stay out of my life, okay? Mina can have you.”

“This isn’t about picking sides, you oaf.” Dahyun got to her feet, grabbing Jeongyeon’s wrist again, but this time she pulled away, a painful jolt searing through Dahyun’s thumb at the force. “This is about helping my friends. Both of my friends.”

“We’re not friends.”

“Fine. Then talk to your friends. Talk to Nayeon. Tell her, or I will have to eventually.”

“You won’t tell her shit.”

“So, what? You think I’m never gonna talk to Chaeyoung again? That she might not be a little bit
confused when she finds out Mina lives in my old room? When she finds out that you two aren’t living together. And what are you going to do when Momo comes home? Do you expect her to keep quiet about it too? You can’t just sneak around like you did when you got together. You have to fucking stand up, Yoo Jeongyeon.”

Jeongyeon stared at Dahyun, and the hatred that burned in the older girl’s eyes was almost enough to make Dahyun back down. But she just stared back defiantly, daring Jeongyeon to do something. Anything. Jeongyeon clenched her jaw and scowled.

“Whatever. Tell her then. What the hell do I care? Not as if I have anything left to lose anyway.”

Then Jeongyeon turned on her heel and walked away. Dahyun let her, scoffing at the stars before heading in the opposite direction.

…

It was perhaps the hardest thing Jihyo had ever done. But the memory of Tzuyu’s soft voice and her finger wrapped around Jihyo’s was a constant reminder. It was something worth fighting for.

Mina was already sitting on the bench by the water, Dahyun by her side hiding Mina slightly from Jihyo’s view. It was only the sharp profile and crossed legs that gave her away behind Dahyun’s sharp nose and thick hair tied in a tall bun as usual. Immediately, Jihyo wanted to run. Wanted to flee from her own conscience yelling at her. But this was the only way to shut it up. To get everything out in the open, however much it might hurt.

With Tzuyu walking quietly by her side, Jihyo closed the last distance between herself and the bench. Their bench. Mina and Jihyo’s.

“Hey…” Jihyo said cautiously.

Mina didn’t speak, and the angle still hid most of her. But Dahyun didn’t speak either, just gestured for Jihyo to sit own. Tzuyu, on the other hand, stepped back a little, keeping her distance. Jihyo caught her eyes and nodded. She had needed Tzuyu by her side to do this, but now she had to leave. Had to give the space for Jihyo to fight for herself and for them.

“Dahyun?” Jihyo tried, looking at her, frowning slightly at the unusual solemnity engraved in her features.

Dahyun gave a little nod and turned from Jihyo to Mina. Looked at her without saying anything.

“It’s okay.” Mina said quietly, her voice lyst of the usual melodic calm, like the sound of wind chimes.

Jihyo wanted to say something, but the way Dahyun’s eyes flickered when turned to look back at Jihyo made it clear that she knew. Possibly everything. Definitely more than what Jihyo had told her that night in January.

Squeezing Mina’s hand once, Dahyun rose from her seat, And it was as if she was taking a wall with her. A wall that had been between the two high school friends for god knows how long. It was as if
they were revealed to each other for the first time since their graduation.

She was almost unrecognizable, Mina. Lifeless and pale, hugging her arms, hair falling flat down onto her shoulders.

“Tzuyu.” Dahyun muttered almost inaudibly and reached for Tzuyu’s hand.

Jihyo resisted the urge to yell her insecurities as Dahyun walked away with Tzuyu, taking away her rock, taking away her heart, baring her to Mina. Even if it was necessary. Because right now, the distance between the two old friends was too far as they faced each other, barely five feet apart. And the look in Mina’s eyes was dark and lifeless, yet there was also something else. The smallest hint of emotion. Fear.

Jihyo took a deep breath.

Didn’t speak.

Then Mina opened her mouth.

Didn’t speak.

It was everything Jihyo could do not to break the eye-contact. Not to waver and run. But when she looked at Mina’s face, it wasn’t the memory of her lips moving against Jihyo’s that surfaced. It was the way she froze when Jihyo had first kissed her in the bathroom.

Jihyo gripped the bench, grounding herself. “I should have stopped you.”

There was no turning back now. She had said the words that had been simmering in the back of her head for a long time. Maybe for years. Words she hadn’t been able to face.

Mina’s eyes flickered and a frown formed on her face.

“I let you kiss me.” Jihyo elaborated quietly. “I knew the second I kissed you in that bathroom, that you could never return my feelings. But I was desperate and foolish and I let you kiss me. I knew the entire time when we were kissing on that curb that you didn’t feel the same, but I just… I just wanted to believe. I let you kiss me because I wanted to believe you felt more, and I thought if I just told you enough that maybe you would love me too, because it felt so right to kiss you. So I guess what I’m trying to say, is that just as much as it was your mistake for kissing me, it was mine for letting you. It was just a big mistake. I’m not saying you didn’t screw up, I’m saying I did too. For different reasons, or maybe just both because we were desperate. But Mina,” Jihyo reached for Mina’s hand, but changed her mind and fiddled with the hem of her own shorts instead, “everything that happened afterwards wasn’t your fault. It was mine. You owned up to your mistake. Faced it every day. But I let you believe it was your burden to bear. I’ve been blaming you. I let our friends blame you, let you blame yourself. For something I should have stopped.”

Mina didn’t answer. Just stared over the river, though her lip quivered and she looked like she was about to cry.

“I was so mad at myself for being scared.” Jihyo continued. “For thinking Tzuyu would break my heart when I knew deep down that you never meant to cause any harm. And I never helped you get past it. It was just easier to blame you than to accept.” Jihyo sighed and finally took Mina’s hand. “I never wish we hadn’t been friends. I’ll always cherish what we had, even if we don’t anymore. It’s a part of my life. You’re a part of my life.”

“Thank you…” Mina whispered.
“Mina, I should have told you the minute you got up from that curb, or at least the next day. I should’ve told you what I probably already knew back then. That there’s no blame to be held.”

Jihyo realized the second she spoke the last sentence that she hadn’t needed to say anything but those last six words. It was the only thing Mina had needed to hear. And it was only then Jihyo realized that Mina hadn’t wanted Jihyo to take the blame. She just wanted it gone.

The muscles in Mina’s face relaxed visibly and her eyes darted between Jihyo’s as if she was reading into Jihyo’s soul.

“‘It’s no-one’s fault?’” Mina whispered, her face threatening to crumble.

“It was a mistake.” Jihyo nodded. “We’re allowed to make mistakes.”

And for a moment Jihyo was so sure. So sure that they would be okay now. That she was forgiven and could breathe properly. With no bitterness or shame simmering under the surface. But then Mina spoke, and if Jihyo hadn’t spent years perfecting the art of hearing Mina no matter how quiet she was, she might not have heard.

“But even so. Jihyo, we’re over.”

Jihyo’s face fell, and her heart settled in her throat. “No. No, Mina, we can come back from this. We’re stronger than this.”

“No, Jihyo. I… I screwed up.”

“You… you screwed up? No, Mina, we just agreed; it’s no-one’s fault. It was just a mistake. I know I’m late, I know I should have told you years ago, but I’m here now. I’m here now, and you didn’t screw up anything, we’re still us, we’re-” Jihyo’s voice broke.

“No, Jihyo… I left her.” Mina muttered.

It was as if someone had cut the cord between the part of Jihyo’s brain that received information and the one that processed it. She just stared at Mina, the younger girl shivering visibly in the wind. Then it all made sense; how she could look so lost and lifeless, how Dahyun had stepped in and mediated everything. It wasn’t just that she had felt like Mina’s bodyguard. She was Mina’s bodyguard. Probably had been ever since the night she had called Jihyo and asked Jihyo to help.

“That night, when we fought. I just couldn’t risk you being right. I couldn’t risk that I would break her like I broke you.” Mina said, her voice trembling. “I couldn’t bear to be the cause of her pain. I left her to spare her, but I screwed up. Because it broke her anyway. And now I don’t have her. And I don’t have you. And… I just want to go back. I want to undo everything. I… I miss you.”

“Mina.” Jihyo muttered and moved over on the bench to reach the quivering girl fully, wrapping both arms around the younger girl.

Love is found in many places. In a smile. In a kind gesture to a stranger. In empathy. Devotion. Encouragement. But despite all of this, there is one thing love never is. It’s never flawless. It’s only ever so complicated and filled with intention and confliction and best efforts. But it’s what we do with the flaws that makes or breaks a bond. When a hand reaches out and owns up to the hurt. When it lives in the arms around a body and healing words from a friend’s lips.

“We’re never over, Mina.”
They sat for almost half an hour, wrapped in each other’s arms, slowly healing what had broken between them. It wasn’t perfect. But it was good. They didn’t speak much, but Mina told about quitting her job and moving in with Dahyun and Sana. Had promised to consider the offer, when Jihyo had asked her to come back to the coffee shop.

“They’re back.” Mina noted quietly.

Jihyo opened her eyes with a hum and saw Tzuyu out of the corner of her eye, arm linked with Dahyun, walking slowly by the river, talking quietly. Smiling.

“Go to her.” Mina whispered.

“What?”

“You said you wanted to get your affairs in order before anything happened with Tzuyu.”

“We’re okay?”

“I… if you’re sure you can forgive me for the- the…” Mina’s face immediately fell, and Jihyo pressed her lips to Mina’s cheek.

“Of course.”

Mina nodded, sniffling slightly. “Go get her.”

Jihyo clung to Mina tighter, but Mina just giggled under her breath and pushed Jihyo away. Trying to suppress a nervous whine, Jihyo got to her feet. Looked at Tzuyu, taking one deep breath after the next in a desperate attempt to calm her racing heart. But it was no good.

The second Tzuyu noticed her, Jihyo’s knees threatened to give in. She was coming closer, her head tilted slightly and brows knotted. Jihyo just stared. Then Dahyun withdrew her arm from Tzuyu and walked the other way. Jihyo could’ve sworn that she was smiling. But next moment there was nothing but the back of her head and the bun bouncing slightly on her head as she walked.

And Tzuyu.

She was right there. Waiting for Jihyo. Just like she had patiently waited for her for so long. But all it took was twenty steps, and she would never have to wait again. And Jihyo would get to do the thing she wanted more than anything. Would get to be the cause of Tzuyu’s happiness. Would no longer be the cause of anyone’s misery. Not Mina’s. Not Tzuyu’s. Would just get to make people happy like she wanted to. Make Tzuyu happy.

The first steps were wobbly and short, but she didn’t look back. Didn’t stray. Walked nervously until she came to a halt in front of Tzuyu. Looked up at the younger girl and searched her eyes. God, was she always this tall? And beautiful? Did her eyes always shine like that? Maybe. Maybe Jihyo just hadn’t let herself see it.

“Everything alright between you two?” Tzuyu asked, her voice cautious, trying to hide the obvious question.

“Yeah.” Jihyo muttered. “Finally. I mean she’s not okay, it’s not all okay. But she and I. We’re okay now.”
Tzuyu nodded. Jihyo stared.

“Tzuyu…”

“Yeah?”

“Be with me?” Jihyo asked.

Tzuyu didn’t answer immediately, her expression unreadable. Then she lifted her hand between them and held out her pinky. “Like this?”

Jihyo laughed. Couldn’t help herself. Felt the tears pressing, but blinked them away.

“Like this.” She said as she grabbed Tzuyu’s pinky with her own and saw how Tzuyu closed the distance between them, one hand cupping Jihyo’s face, only their hands between them. Felt Tzuyu’s lips on her own. And honestly, Jihyo really did her best to return it. She really did. But she couldn’t stop laughing. Couldn’t stop crying either. It was probably a mix. Too fast, Tzuyu drew back, a comical expression on her face. At least she didn’t seem to mind. Just wiped Jihyo’s tears and shook her head.

“You’re so ridiculous.”

“I’m sorry…” Jihyo giggled and tangled their fingers, just to at least keep Tzuyu close.

“It’s okay, I’ll wait.” Tzuyu muttered.

Jihyo breathed hard, the laughter subsiding at Tzuyu’s words.

“You’re done waiting, Tzuyu. I’m already yours.”

Tzuyu smiled so wide that her ears moved, and Jihyo couldn’t resist. She never had been able to resist the younger girl. Lifting slightly off her heels, free hand on Tzuyu’s shoulder, Jihyo reached her. Tried to put every feeling she had for Tzuyu, into the kiss. Would’ve preferred not to move for at least a year. Not with Tzuyu’s hand in her hair and her lips moving perfectly against Jihyo’s. And even when Tzuyu tried to draw back, Jihyo merely followed her, mumbling in the air between them.

“I love you. I love you, I love you, I-”

Tzuyu kissed her long and hard. Didn’t move her lips this time. Just kept her from talking, guiding Jihyo back down to stand on her heels. Then she drew back again.

“Dahyun…” Tzuyu explained, nodding at the space behind Jihyo.

Jihyo turned, her face warm.

Dahyun stood with crossed arms, Mina still on the bench in the distance. A slightly sheepish expression manifested on Dahyun’s face as Jihyo found her eyes.

“Not to… you know, interrupt or break the happiness or anything.”

Jihyo felt Tzuyu’s hand find her hip from behind. Then felt it move down to settle in the front pocket of Jihyo’s jeans. God, that was distracting as hell. Wonderfully so.

“Jeongyeon.” Dahyun said. The word made Jihyo return to reality at once, cool wind blowing through her.
Jihyo didn’t know what to say. Just looked down. God, the mess. But then Tzuyu’s nose was in her hair and it made it better.

“You haven’t talked to her, have you?”

“I-I tried. Yesterday. But she blocked me. And I went to her apartment and she just refused to open. I don’t really know what to do honestly, this was always Nayeon’s- she always-”

“Have you talked to Nayeon then?”

“Not since… not- no, not really.”

“Maybe you should.” Dahyun said, fingers digging harder into her arms. “I keep trying to talk to Jeongyeon but I just can’t anymore. I can’t keep trying to fix everything, not when Sana- not- I have to be there for me too. I have to be there for me.”

She shivered. As if she too was about to break. But when Jihyo held out her arms, she didn’t hesitate. Just crept into Jihyo’s arms, Tzuyu drawing back quietly.

Dahyun told them about Sana’s mom and the fear that something was going to happen to her; that Dahyun herself was going to relapse without Sana there, with having to hold everyone else together. And Jihyo kissed her hair and sang quietly for her. Saw out of the corner of her eye how Tzuyu walked over to the bench and sat with Mina.

Love is many things. Takes many forms. But one thing was sure; Jihyo loved.

...

Rain fell heavily onto the curb just out of reach of Dahyun’s feet. She ate the cold noodles in the dark. Looked at the clouds, cursed them for not letting her share the night sky with Sana.

11:45 pm Dahyun: It’s raining again.

Dahyun switched from the chat to her camera roll. Changed her lockscreen to a new picture of Sana, a snap that she had sent earlier. Looked at the chat. Then the screen changed and Dahyun pressed the green button, smiling slightly as Sana’s face appeared, her cheeks puffed and eyes narrowed. Though her adorable attempt at judging Dahyun soon turned into a frown as she looked around Dahyun.

“Where are you? I can barely see you.”

“On the steps in front of the building.”

“You’re up late again.” Sana raised an eyebrow.

“I know.” Dahyun sighed and ran a hand through her hair, digging her fingers into the bun on top of
her head. “I’m just thinking.”

“About?”

“Philosophical stuff mostly. Things that usually belong in Chaeyoung’s mind, not mine.”

Sana tilted her head. “Like what?”

Dahyun sighed. Then yelped as a hard blow of wind made the rain splash onto her feet. Shuffling quickly, she pressed herself further into the door, into a corner, staring as the rain increased, her heart racing slightly from the sensation. Another hard blow, and Dahyun cursed.

“Why is the weather so shitty?” Dahyun complained, then looked down at her feet. “Okay, ew, my socks are really wet. Sorry, I’m just gonna head inside, hang on.”

Dahyun got up, eying the night in disgruntlement. Trying her best not to leave too many wet footprints on the way, she tiptoed up the stairs, hurrying as best she could, until finally locked herself into the apartment.

“You good?” Sana asked, a chuckle in her voice.

“All good. No wait, my socks are still wet, hang on.” Dahyun groaned, pocketing her phone and bending down to pull off her socks. Shuddering slightly, she looked around the dimly lit apartment, her eyes catching a hint of pink from the blanket splayed across most of the couch, but she didn’t sit. Instead she grabbed the blanket and dragged it with her to the bedroom.

“Dahyun?” Came Sana’s voice from Dahyun’s back pocket as Dahyun closed the door.

“I- wha-” Dahyun grabbed for the phone, cheeks burning as she faced Sana through the screen. “Sorry.”

“Hey.” Sana smiled as Dahyun awkwardly wrapped the blanket around her like a cocoon, sitting down in the bed. “So, your philosophical mind? Can I hear about it?”

Dahyun frowned. Tasted the words as she opened and closed her mouth. Sana didn’t rush her, but waited patiently.

“I just wish it wasn’t so hard. That there wasn’t this constant thing stopping people from talking to each other. It’s like the mind is preset to self-sabotage.” Dahyun wrapped the blanket tighter around her, leaning against the wall.

Sana took a few breaths before speaking, her face thoughtful. “Well, in order to talk about it, you have to face it, right?”

“I guess?”

“Well, most times facing the thing that scares you can be even worse than just knowing it’s there. It’s like when you’re a kid and you make your parents check for monsters. Because you know they’re there but you can’t face them yourself.”

Dahyun nodded. Opened her mouth and closed it. Tugged at a corner of the blanket.

“I just wish they would talk to each other. All of them. Apparently none of them are really talking. Jihyo, Jeongyeon and Nayeon. They’re just… settling for silence instead of facing each other. Though I do have to credit Jihyo for trying. But not just them; Jeongyeon and Mina too. I just wish I
had the energy to do more. To make them work this out somehow, you know, give Jeongyeon an explanation. She deserves that much. And honestly, I’m sick of her taking it out on me. I know she doesn’t mean it, that she’s just stubborn and hurt, but words hurt no matter the reason behind them.”

“I get that.” Sana nodded. “You know the reason, but you still fear that her words come from a place of truth.”

“Now who’s the philosophical one?” Dahyun grinned.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think.” Sana shifted the phone to the other hand and shook her left, as if it had fallen asleep.

“How are things?”

“No change from yesterday.” Sana sighed. “But hopefully that means she’s stable enough that we can take her home soon without worrying.”

“That’s good. Are you at the hospital still?” Dahyun asked, Sana being too close to see her surroundings.

“No, dad told me to go home.”

“He’s smart, getting you to rest.”

“He just didn’t want to see me being all moeey.”

“Moeey? That doesn’t sound like you.” Dahyun frowned.

“I just… I want to go home, but I can’t get myself to.”

For a moment Dahyun frowned, but then had to bite the insides of her cheeks hard to control the emotions surging through her veins. There was a girl, 500 miles away, who saw this bed, this room, this apartment as her home. A girl whose absence had filled Dahyun with more longing than she thought she could feel for a person. Before Sana, she had only ever felt this kind of longing for ivory keys. But giving her heart to Sana had been unexpectedly just as easy as giving it to the music.

“Dahyunnie?”

A smile unclenched Dahyun’s jaw.

“Sorry… Zoned out.”

“Seems like every conversation ends here, doesn’t it? With both of us saying these things. That we miss each other. I’m always sad at the end of a call, because I want more. I want to go home and I want to touch you and hold you and kiss you. God, I’d give anything to kiss you.” Sana sighed, moving the phone further from her face.

Dahyun’s stomach tugged at Sana’s words. At the thought of kissing Sana. And there was a second where Dahyun almost asked her. Almost told her to come home. But she couldn’t, and there was no way Dahyun was going to ask it of her.

“Then let’s just try not to let it end sad tonight.” Dahyun suggested. “We can just talk about whatever while I get ready for bed, okay? Like we usually do at night.”

“I don’t know if I know how to do that anymore.” Sana averted her gaze, and Dahyun understood what Sana’s father had meant when he called her moeey. She was so different. As if all the bubbles
had disappeared, like a soda left open too long.

“Come on. I’ll tell you about Mina’s awesome collection of fish plates?” Dahyun suggested.

“She has fish plates?” Sana asked, her voice a little uplifted, as if it had distracted her.

“They’re a lot prettier than our ikea ones.” Dahyun said, hurrying to pick up the conversation to keep
Sana distracted. “I packed away most of ours to make room for hers. There’s different fish on each
plate. She has a Dory plate, and it’s one of those kiddy plates that’s made of plastic, but it’s just so
cute? But she has real porcelain ones too. Sharks and tropical fish and dolphins”

“Dolphins aren’t fish.” Sana noted, a hint of her old self in the way her nose scrunched.

“They’re not?” Dahyun frowned.

“No, they’re mammals.”

“Oh. How did I not- I mean I knew they had babies but I thought it was just like with fish?”

“No, they’re mammals, like whales and orcas.”

“Don’t ever tell Mina that I didn’t know this. I’m supposed to be smart.”

“You are smart, babe. But you can’t know everything there is to know in the world.”

Dahyun chuckled and unwrapped herself from the blanket.

“How do you know it?”

“There’s an aquarium in Okinawa, we went there on holiday once, our family and Momo’s.”

“Okinawa?” Dahyun headed into the bathroom, listening to Sana tell about her vacation.

For almost a full four minutes, Dahyun forgot that Sana wasn’t really there, listening to the older girl
talking as she brushed her hair and took out her contacts, cleaning them before putting them in the
case. But when she put on her glasses and looked into the mirror, there was no-one to grin at. No-
one to nudge playfully. Of course, Sana was right there on the screen, but it wasn’t the same. And
she had stopped talking as well.

“I should get to bed too.” Sana muttered. “I’ll call tomorrow, ok?”

“No, please don’t hang up.” Dahyun said hurriedly. “Sana… Stay with me?”

Sana bit her lip. Then nodded.

It took a few too many funny faces to make Sana smile, but when Dahyun finally managed it was
followed by the sound of bubbling laughter that made Dahyun’s heart swell. Still sounded like
champagne.

“Say hello to our ceiling, I know it’s been a while.” Dahyun chuckled as she put the phone onto the
bed and grabbed Sana’s shirt from the chair by the desk.

“Hi ceiling. I miss you. Am I laying in my bed? I miss that too.” Sana said, obviously trying her best.

Quickly, Dahyun changed into Sana’s shirt and her own pyjama pants. Then flopped onto the bed,
shuffling under the covers and reached for the phone. A soft smile played on Sana’s lips as Dahyun
looked at her, showing her the shirt.

“You’re really something, Kim Dahyun.”

“What? What am I?” Dahyun grinned, rolling onto her side and grabbing the squirrel plush and pressing it against her stomach, just to feel close to something.

“You’re just cute. Really cute. And dorky.” Sana shook her head and smiled. “Now go to sleep.”

Dahyun nodded and took off her glasses, watching through tired eyes and blurry vision as Sana got ready for bed. And when she propped her glasses on and stared at Dahyun, it was with sparkles in her eyes.

“Goodnight, Sana-chan.” Dahyun muttered.

“Goodnight, Dahyun…” Sana answered.

It was the last thing Dahyun heard before sleep dragged her away.

…

The airport was crowded and loud, the sounds of suitcases and loudspeaker announcement mixing with conversation. It took away Momo’s focus, and she closed her eyes as the loudspeakers called for the final boarding call to flight 201 to Singapore.

“Momo?” Sana’s voice was on her left, and then her hand was on Momo’s arm.

“Sorry, it’s just a lot of noise. Lot of people.” Momo sighed.

“I know, but you’ll be home soon enough.” Sana said calmingly, rubbing Momo’s arm.

Momo looked around the airport with a frown. So many lives. So much to live for. And yet here she was, about to leave the one person behind whom she had lived for her entire life.

Momo sighed. “I don’t care about going home.”

“Sure you do, you have the audition and you have girls to kiss, Momo, you have to be excited to get back.” Sana said as if it was a truism that Momo just hadn’t gotten yet.

Someone walked by in heels and they clicked distractingly against the floor.

“Sana, you don’t get it.” Momo said. She was so tired. Tired of trying to get through to Sana. But there was also a part of her that couldn’t stop trying. Because Sana still didn’t get it, and for all Momo’s words and however tired she was, that girl was still the biggest part of Momo’s life.

“Of course I get it,” Sana said, “you don’t want to leave me because we’ve never been-”

“You’re wrong. I don’t mind being apart from you. I know we’re going to be fine even if we’re apart, I found that out when we stopped living together. I mind that you’re not happy. I mind that you keep telling me to be happy Momo, but you’re the one who’s miserable. You’re the one who
keeps staring at your phone hoping she texts, and you’re the one who’s so guilty about not feeling like you can leave, that you can barely sleep. You beat yourself up over and over again instead of actually doing something.”

“You’re not being fair, Momo.” Sana mumbled. She was obviously hurt by Momo’s words. “You know I can’t just.”

“But you can. You can. Your dad keeps telling you to go, so why are you still here? You’re miserable here.”

“What if she dies?!” Sana asked loudly, her voice pitched.

Momo bit down on her lip hard. How was she supposed to answer that? It wasn’t like Momo was just cold. She feared for Sana’s mom’s life as well. God, she had been worried for her ever since Sana fessed up and told her about her all those years ago.

“What if she dies, Momo, and I’m over there and I can’t be there to say goodbye. I can’t bear the thought.”

“They’ll tell you if things go south again.” Momo tried, grabbing the handle of the suitcase so hard it almost made the suitcase lose balance.

“They didn’t this time.” Sana sounded close to tears. “They didn’t tell me and she was so bad off when I got here and I just can’t trust them to keep me in the loop anymore. And she just got home from over a week in the hospital. She had so many tests done and they were even talking about another operation. What if they decide to do it and she dies on the table and I’m not there.”

“But she’s home now, Sana.” Momo said, reaching for Sana’s hand. “She’s home because she’s stable. I know she wasn’t last time, but she’s stable now. And they didn’t go for the surgery because it wasn’t necessary. She’s doing so much better than she was when we first got here. But you’re not. You’re wasting away here and you’re miserable and it hurts to see. You’re not my happy Satang anymore. You keep telling me to be happy, but what about you? You’re not happy and the past few days it’s only gotten worse, and I want to stay here to make it easier - so you at least have someone when you sleep. But you won’t let me stay. And what am I supposed to do then? Just let you be completely? You know that’s not how we work. I don’t ever let you just draw back.”

Sana whimpered. Took a step closer to Momo and held her hand tighter. “Momo, please…”

“No, Sana. Just go home. Come home with me, I’ll buy you a fucking ticket if that’s the problem or you can have mine. I don’t care. I just need you to go home and be happy. Your home isn’t here anymore. It’s in Korea.”

“I can’t just go home because of a girl, Momo. That’s the-”

“Why not!? Isn’t she worth it? Don’t you love-”

“Don’t! Don’t you dare finish that sentence.” Sana pulled her hand back, glaring at Momo.

“Fine! Then don’t go back for her. Go back for me. Or for our friends. For Jeongyeon and Nayeon. Jihyo, Mina, Chaeyoung, and Tzuyu. But mostly, just please, go home for yourself. To become that person you’ve been so proud of lately. That girl who works so hard and gets amazing grades and amazing praise from her peers. That girl whose friends adore her and whose best friend thinks she’s so annoyingly cute when she’s all happy and bubbly. That girl who loves her friends so much she literally hesitated to kiss one at the risk of losing all.”
“Momo.” Sana’s eyes glazed over. “I can’t.”

Momo looked at her. Closed her eyes and sighed, sound returning to her. Then she looked her best friend in the eyes one last time.


“Momo…”

Momo took a hold of the suitcase. “No, I can’t keep telling you when you won’t listen to me. I always stop for you. I’m always here for you, waiting. Why can’t you for once just believe that I’m right? That I know you?”

Sana didn’t speak. Just opened her mouth and shut it again.

“I can’t yell anymore.” Momo whispered, frustrated tears welling up in her eyes. “I don’t have any more words to say. I don’t know what more to do.”

And with that, Momo turned away from her best friend for the first time in her life. Took the suitcase and dragged it after her. She had done what she could. For now. There was no choice but to leave, or the plane would part with neither of them on it. And even if Sana refused to live, Momo had to. For once, Momo chose to live. Even if it hurt with every step she took, increasing the distance between her and her best friend. She had to.

Sometimes, you just have to live, despite everything.

Momo was almost by the check-in line when she heard it. When she heard her calling from across the airport, and the running steps on the tiled floors.

“Momo! Momo, wait!”

…

Mina sat down gently, placing the tea cup on the coffee table and leaning back in the couch. Tucking her feet up under, she reached for the tea and blew at it.

“How are your parents doing with the whole gay thing?” Dahyun asked.

“They’re… dealing.” Mina shrugged, sipping from her tea.

Dahyun adjusted on the couch and stretched. “Is your mom still sending you wedding pictures?”

“No, thank god. I mentioned as a joke that my future wife would look good in the dress she sent a picture of and she freaked. I think we’re back to denying the entire thing, but at least they didn’t disown me. Well, my dad is actually pretty cool with it actually, but it was never him I feared.”

“You seem more comfortable with it too? Making a comment like that? Badass.” Dahyun complimented.
“Or just me possibly ensuring that my mom won’t ever let me move back home.” Mina smiled slightly. There had been more life in her the past few days since she and Jihyo had made up. But still, no-one had heard from Jeongyeon. And she hadn’t shown up for her last shift either. Dahyun had almost called Nayeon. But then again, Jeongyeon was an adult and had the right to deal with the entire thing in her own pace, as Jihyo had argued. Apparently the same kind of thing had happened the first time Jiyeon had cheated on her. And the second. But she always came back. It was just impossibly hard to stand by and wait.

“Well, there’s no question on whether or not you’re moving back there.” Dahyun said. “I’m already too used to having you as a roomie.”

“Good. Because a used car dealership agreed to buy the car.”

“That’s awesome. Are you getting the price you wanted?”

“A little less, but it’s okay. I just need the money for now, so I can pay out the rent until I find a new job.”

“You could-”

“No, I can’t. Not yet. I’m not done considering that offer.” Mina said sternly. Dahyun huffed and nudged Mina’s thigh with her toe. Just to see her smile into her tea.

“I was thinking,” Dahyun said changing the subject as she looked at the empty space in the corner where the piano had been, now only home to an extra TV table housing Mina’s games and some of Dahyun’s music books. “Maybe we should do something to properly make this apartment both of ours. I mean, and Sana’s of course.”

“Yeah? Like what?” Mina asked, pawing the thin plaid shirt.

“You know that wall Jihyo has, with all the memories? Well, I was thinking we could do something similar maybe? Put our favorite books and stuff on top of the TV table and then put up pictures and ticket stubs and stuff, like she does? Mix all our stuff together?” Dahyun suggested.

“That’s actually a really good idea.” Mina hummed.

“Okay! If you get stuff from your room, I’ll get some from mine!” Dahyun got up from the couch.

Mina chuckled. “What now?”

“Why not?! It’s not like we’re doing anything and Tzuyu won’t be here for another two hours.”


“What?” Dahyun asked, stopping in her tracks, already halfway towards her room.

“What about Sana? Didn’t you want her stuff here too? I mean we all live together.”

“Oh… Right.” Dahyun said, an uncomfortable sensation spreading in her stomach. “Yeah, I can’t very well choose something for her, and I think it was harder for her than she showed when she couldn’t help with the clothes.”

A silence settled in the room and they both looked at the empty wall.

“You know, maybe we can still get a little stuff and leave room for hers?” Mina suggested halfheartedly.
“Yeah, definitely, let’s do that.” Dahyun agreed, trying to bring back up the enthusiasm. It was annoying how fast the mood had plummeted, and how hard it was to get back up. But they still both went into their rooms, coming back out with a few things.

“That’s all?” Dahyun asked, looking at the three things Mina had in her hands. A picture of herself and Jihyo from when they were in 1st year of high school, a ticket from a CNBLUE concert and a plane ticket to Korea.

“I don’t really usually keep stuff like this honestly, and the rest reminds me of… well. This is it for now. It’s okay, I’ll fill in more stuff later.” Mina said determinately. “Do you have white tack to put it up with?”

“No, I forgot.” Dahyun said, arms full of stuff.

“It’s okay, I’ll get it.” Mina quickly said, disappearing into her room.

Dahyun waited, Mina returning a good twenty seconds later with white tack.

They put up the stuff as best they could, but it still looked weird. There were too many spaces. The TV table looked fine, now with a few of Mina’s favorite books stacked as well as some paraphernalia of Dahyun’s. A fossilized sea urchin and a seashell. A purple key from a cheap little keyboard. An eagle feather in a glass jar. But the wall was so sparsely decorated. Only Mina’s three things and some of Dahyun’s to fill an entire wall. Dahyun initially hadn’t brought any pictures. Instead she had taken a coffee house receipt, and a movie ticket stub as well as a few of her favorite sticky notes from Chaeyoung. But after looking at it for a good few minutes she had gone and found some of her old photos as well.

“Well, there’s room for Sana now?” Mina tried.

“God, I hope she has something to fill out this mess.” Dahyun sighed. “Sorry, it looks stupid.”

“It doesn’t look stupid. It looks like lives that have a lot of living left to do.” Mina said.

“Mine feels more like a life I’m scared to live.” Dahyun admitted.

Mina hummed and leaned against the couch. “Mine too. I just can’t get myself to put up any of the things that remind me of Jeongyeon. And she’s kind of been there for all the time I’ve been in Korea, so almost everything does.”

“I’m sorry.” Dahyun said quietly, then cleared her throat. “Where- uh, where do you think you are with that?”

“Jeongyeon?” Mina asked.

Dahyun nodded.

Mina took a deep breath and fiddled with her shirt. “I think I’m ready? I think… Maybe not this exact second but I think I’m ready to face her. I think all this stuff with Jihyo has slowly made me realize that I really owe her an explanation. I can’t let her live thinking she did something wrong. I can’t let her take the blame like I know she is. I don’t… it’s still- you know. We’re not-. But I owe her that much. An explanation.”

Dahyun nodded. Felt oddly proud at how far Mina had come, knowing she was supplying the
support Mina needed to get there. Wondered briefly if she could ever be as brave as Mina and ask for help too.

“Do you know what you’re going to say to her?”

“No clue.” Mina admitted. Crossed her arms and hunched a bit. As if she was only truly realizing what she had to do next. “I think I’m going to go over there.”

“Yeah?”

“I think she’s going to let me in, even if she won’t let Jihyo or you in. I’m pretty sure she will.”

“I think so too.” Dahyun said. Reached and tugged at Mina’s arm. “I’m proud of you, Myou.”

Mina gave a single chuckle, letting Dahyun pull her into a hug. They stood like that for a little, just with their arms around each other. Supported each other without really knowing what they needed from the other. And maybe it didn’t matter. Because it made a difference still. And when Mina pulled back, she looked determined.

“Okay, I’ll be right back and then I’ll go.” Mina said.

Dahyun nodded and watched as she walked around Dahyun, into the bathroom. Dahyun looked at the wall. A life waiting to be lived, huh? Maybe she was right. Dahyun sighed and turned to head into the kitchen for a cup of tea. But right in the moment she did, there was a careful knock on the front door. Dahyun frowned but walked over to the front door anyways, her mind on Mina as she opened.

“Hi…”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment or come talk to me on twitter using #TWICEroomies or contact me @dajeongmi
Night Sky part 1: If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night

Chapter Summary

She Tries

~ Earlier that day ~

“Momo! Momo, wait!”

Sana’s voice sounded in the busy airport, and Momo turned just in time to see a mess of blonde hair before being engulfed in her best friend’s arms.

“Sana…” Momo mumbled, the sound of sobs in her ear and Sana’s shoulders shaking, the younger girl clinging to Momo as if it was the only thing that kept her breathing.

“I-I can’t let you leave when you’re mad at me.” Sana cried. “I can’t b-bear to have you be mad at me. I’m sorry. I’m s-sorry, I’m-”

“Shh,” Momo hushed, stroking Sana’s hair. “Shh, you’re okay. We’re okay.”

“I want to be braver. I want to go home. I just-”

“I know. You can’t. I know, we’re okay.” Momo sighed. Held onto her best friend and felt how she slowly calmed down.

“I’m g-going to miss you s-so much.” Sana cried, her face buried in Momo’s neck.

“I’m going to miss you too.” Momo mumbled.

“This is… It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” Sana admitted, drawing back slightly.

“What is?” Momo frowned, reaching up to fix Sana’s hair.

“Sending you home. Asking you to be someone else’s.” Sana sniffled.

“Cheese.” Momo rolled her eyes and wiped Sana’s cheeks.

“Shut up, I love you.” Sana huffed, then took a deep breath and found Momo’s eyes. “Don’t think too badly of my cowardice.”

Momo shook her head and wrapped Sana up in another tight hug. “I never think badly of you. And you’re not a coward.”

“You were so mad.” Sana whispered in a shivering voice.

“That doesn’t mean I think badly of you. It just means I hate seeing you so lonely and scared, and I
hate knowing that I can’t make it better. Knowing that once I leave it’s going to be worse.”

“Mm.” Sana muttered.

“I’m sorry I yelled.” Momo whispered. “We’re okay, I promise. I just got… scared of leaving you.”

“I’m scared of you leaving me too.” Sana drew back. “But you’re right. We’re okay.”

“Always.”

Sana nodded and sniffled again. Then looked behind Momo and back at her. “You have a plane to catch.”

“I know.” Momo leaned on one leg, nudging Sana’s shin with this tip of her shoe. “You can do this. Whatever it is you want to do, you can do this.”

“You have too much faith in me.” Sana sighed, a tired smile on her lips.

“I don’t think I do.” Momo shrugged.

Sana averted her eyes. Looked down at her shoes. “She’s not just a girl, you know.”

“I know, Sana. I know.” Momo smiled. Then she grabbed the handle of the suitcase once more, giving a determined nod in Sana’s direction. “Now, as the french say; adieu.”

“As the rest of the world says: bye, you big dork.” Sana shifted her weight and Momo chuckled. Then she turned on her heel and joined the queue for passport control and security check.

“Give her a kiss from me!” Sana called. “And tell her- tell her I miss her!”

Momo almost yelled do it yourself back at her, but decided not to. There was no reason to step in it. Instead she just held up a thumb and then waved. Momo didn’t look back.

Sana’s wet laugh filled the airport entrance hall and made Momo’s heart feel lighter.

…

Momo stared at the blue walkway of the airplane, her ears still hurting from the increase in pressure in the cabin as they descended. But there was no more way to go. They were officially on Korean ground, and the seatbelt signs were off.

It still felt wrong - leaving Sana in the airport. Felt wrong to the snapchat of her being back home. It helped a little that the picture was of a newly pressed four leaf clover in Sana’s open palm, but still. Only a little. But there was nothing Momo could do. It was just about getting back to Nayeon and Chaeyoung, and to the audition. Not that there was really much motivation to audition without knowing she would spend the next year with Sana. Honestly she would much rather wait and take the last year only when knowing that Sana would be there with her. But she had promised, and that had to be motivation enough.
“Miss?”

Momo turned at the sound and blinked. She was still standing in the walkway between the plane seats, an older lady, maybe 35, looking at her.

“Do you mind?” The woman asked impatiently.

“Oh right, sorry.” Momo mumbled, pinching the bridge of her nose and walking out, the trolley trailing after her. The right wheel clattered a bit, and Momo made a mental note to look at it when she got home. Maybe it was just use getting to it finally. She never brought more luggage than just carry-on, having a closet full of clothes both in Korea and her home in Japan. Not that she had actually been home much in the past three weeks. Honestly, she had just spent most of the time with Sana. Luckily her own parents and Hana had been good about it and joined up with Momo on occasion outside the hospital or at Sana’s place. But next time, Momo promised herself, she would be home for herself more than she had been this time.

Home.

What an odd concept. To have a place be a designated piece of heart when really, for Momo, it was people. People were her home. Smells and sights and feelings. Home was her father’s protective arms and her mom’s hand on her shoulder. The sound of a parents expressing their pride in their daughter’s achievement. Home was her sister pulling her hair and tickling her until she couldn’t breathe. Sana hugging her so tight it felt like she would never let go again.

But somehow home was also Nayeon’s hand in her hair combing through it and Chaeyoung’s wet laugh after their first kiss. Dahyun’s flustered whine and Mina’s back. Jeongyeon’s howls of indignation and her little notes on the fridge for Momo. Tzuyu’s shy smile and Jihyo’s glinting eyes whenever Momo said something, making her feel important and smart.

So even if she had just left home, barely been home, she was also coming home. And as she exited the plane, this thought stuck by her. Made her walk faster to find the arms of the two girls she knew were waiting for her in the other end of the airport.

At first glance, Momo didn’t see them. She had been looking for red hair, because Nayeon usually stood out more in a crowd with her hair than Chaeyoung did. But then a familiar voice called her name, and she turned to face the sound. Still saw no red hair, but next moment saw full lips and dark eyes. Chaeyoung. Her Chaeyoung. And Nayeon next to her. And it became blatantly obvious why Momo had been unable to find Nayeon by her hair. It wasn’t red anymore. Nayeon was standing there with a shy grin, black hair framing her face and one of Momo’s dance academy hoodies on.

Momo didn’t comment on the last fact. Just walked right into their arms and felt them around her. Felt Chaeyoung’s lips subtly brush her neck and Nayeon’s in her hair.

Home.
“You dyed your hair?” Momo asked curiously, drawing back, trolley still in her hand.

“Yeah.” Nayeon said a hint of insecurity in her voice. “I mean I know it’s just black but-”

“You look beautiful.” Momo interrupted her shyly. Chaeyoung chuckled and Nayeon mumbled something unintelligible.

“I’ve been trying to tell her that but she won’t listen.” Chaeyoung said with a headshake.

“Well, I just don’t know if it suits me, I was getting used to the red.” Nayeon scrunched her nose, trying to correct her own hair.

“You didn’t like the red at first either, babe.” Chaeyoung counter-argued, twining her fingers with the eldest’. Then she found Momo’s eyes. “How was it? How’s Sana?”

“She’s… Uh, it’s complicated. But she’s trying. Her mom got back home just now so they’re a bit on edge, because that means she’s stable but they’re still scared. It could be a really long recovery. If she ever really recovers.” Momo sighed.

“I’m sorry.” Chaeyoung said, reaching and taking Momo’s hand. It helped a bit.

“Enough about me though, how are things back here?” Momo asked, desperate to think of something that wasn’t Sana’s tear-stained face.

“Good I think, I haven’t really been in the loop. I spent an extra day at my brother’s than planned but otherwise it’s been really quiet. Almost too quiet, but I guess that’s summer for you.” Chaeyoung said, letting go of Nayeon’s hand as they started walking towards the exit that lead to the subway.

“Actually…” Nayeon said quietly, “I’m not so sure it’s the summer.”

“What do you mean?” Momo asked. Nayeon looked down, crossing her arms.

They stepped onto the downwards escalators.

“I mean that I think something is up.” Nayeon sighed, a tired expression on her face. “Well, I know something is up and I think I know what. But I haven’t been able to do anything until now. I didn’t know how to tackle it without Chaeyoung and you being there to help, because they fucking refuse to talk about it and Jeongyeon downright just doesn’t talk.”

“Wait, what?” Momo asked. What about Jeongyeon?

“I think Jeongyeon and Jihyo had a fight. Big one.” Nayeon said as they got off the escalators again. “I mean I don’t know exactly how big but my guess is Jihyo boiled over and took it out on Jeongyeon.”

“Why would she do that?” Momo asked, reaching for Nayeon’s hand as well so she could hold both of them now that they weren’t on the narrow escalators. It felt right.

“I don’t really know,” Nayeon furrowed her brows, “but I know Jihyo did something. She told me that much, that she fucked up. And I know that Jeongyeon has been cutting contact with everyone. I tried to get a hold of her but she’s just shut down. I swear one time I almost used my key to lock myself into her apartment, but as long as it’s nothing medical I can’t overstep that boundary.”

“But what about Mina?” Chaeyoung interjected. “Surely she-”

“Mina.” Momo said, stopping halfway onto the platform. The others stopped too, turning to look at
her.

“What?”

“I think you’re right, something’s up.” Momo just said. Tried to piece everything together. She hadn’t had much contact with Jeongyeon and none with Mina since going home but there was that thing Sana had said. That it seemed like Mina wasn’t okay. That Dahyun had been staying with her. Something about—fuck.

“I think Mina is living with Dahyun.” Momo thought out loud.

Nayeon gaped and Chaeyoung downright looked like someone had hit her over the head with a baseball bat.

“I’m not sure but I think so. But she was supposed to move in with us, which means—”

“Which means whatever this was, cost Mina and Jeongyeon their relationship.” Nayeon finished the sentence.

…”

The train rustled loudly, getting closer to the city as Momo and Nayeon took turns explaining the bits and pieces they knew and Chaeyoung pieced it together. It had been natural for Momo to sit in the middle of them. Natural for them to sit close enough to be engulfed in the apparency of her presence.

“So we agree that this has something to do with Jihyo being scared of loving Tzuuy, and with her taking that fear out on Jeongyeon?” Chaeyoung asked in the wake of the silence when the other two had stopped explaining.

“Yes.” Momo nodded. Ran her fingers delicately over Chaeyoung’s palm.

Nayeon saw the nervous smile that spread on Chaeyoung’s lips. Then she shook her head fast as if she was trying to wake herself up from a daze.

“But why Jeongyeon?” The youngest asked.

“Because Jeongyeon gets to have the exact happiness that Jihyo dreamt of for years.” Nayeon explained, this being the conclusion she had reached a few days ago but been afraid to act on. Because what if it was true? “And somewhere in her head, the old dream and the new are still connected.”

“So she’s mad at Jeongyeon for loving Mina?” Chaeyoung frowned.

“No, she’s mad at Jeongyeon for being loved by Mina.” Nayeon corrected. “Which makes no sense logically, I know, but it’s the only explanation I can come up with.”

“But then why not be mad at Mina?” Momo asked, twining her fingers with Chaeyoung’s. “I mean if you turn it around, doesn’t it make more sense for Jihyo to be mad at Mina for loving Jeongyeon when she couldn’t love Jihyo?”

“Well, it would, except for some reason, Jihyo is never mad at Mina.” Nayeon rubbed a hand over her face, trying to make sense of it all. “She’s never been mad at Mina, ever. But Jeongyeon and
Jihyo have it out from time to time. They’re both quite brash at times."

“But then,” Momo asked, picking at the edge of Nayeon’s shorts. “What do we do?”

“I think we need to talk to them. I mean now that you’re home, Jeongyeon has to actually surround herself with people.” Nayeon said, feeling a tingling sensation where Momo’s fingers touched her skin. It was more than just a little good to have her back. As if she hadn’t really felt whole the past three weeks without her. Not that it wasn’t good with Chaeyoung, it was just a lot better with both of them. And she had been so happy to find that everything had just been natural when Momo came back, especially considering how Chaeyoung had let some worries hang in the air that it might be awkward. But Nayeon had been the one to keep the faith that it wouldn’t be any different. Because Momo would still be the same. And she was.

“Do we talk to Jeongyeon first then?” Chaeyoung asked, shifting in her seat to lean on Momo more.

“I don’t know.” Nayeon sighed, leaning on Momo more too. Even if just for a little, she longed for the comfort. “I think I need to get Jihyo to somehow tell me what the fuck she did, because I need to get both sides of this story before I can make sense of it. And Jihyo already said it was her fault, so I think I need her side first. Not that I yet know how, considering she’s chickened out several times.”

“Then we head straight there and get her to tell, right?” Momo asked.

“Mm, well, I’m not sure.” Nayeon huffed. “I’m scared Jeongyeon is running for the hills now that you’re coming home. I mean there’s barely a chance of this, but Seongyeon lives in another part of town, down in the arts district, and if things are really shit Jeongyeon probably there.”

“So we head to Seongyeon’s.” Chaeyoung said. “But then what about Jihyo?”

Nayeon let go of Momo and bent forwards burying her head in her hands. This was really just a mess. And she did want Jihyo’s side first, but Jeongyeon… she couldn’t just choose who to help first. But it was time to fix both. Everything. If there was even an inkling of a chance, now was the time. She just couldn’t do it all herself. But of course, she wasn’t by herself. She had Momo and Chaeyoung right there.

For a while, she sat there, staring into her hands, trying to come up with anything that might work. And finally, she took a deep breath and nodded to herself.

“Okay.” Nayeon sat back up. “Okay, I have a plan.”

Momo and Chaeyoung both turned in their seats, ready to listen.

“I’m going to go to Jihyo’s, on my own. She responds best one on one, I think it’ll overwhelm her if we all go. But I need you two to look for Jeongyeon. If she’s at the apartment just keep her there, and maybe try to talk to her if she’ll listen. Though don’t expect her to. And then I’ll join once I know Jihyo’s side. I can get her to talk, I know I can. Well… I have to trust that I can, or there’s no point in any of this. It’s all just such a mess.” Nayeon sighed.

“We got your back.” Chaeyoung said firmly. “You go get Jihyo and we’ll hunt down Jeongyeon and put her in a chokehold or something.”

“Thank you… I just had no clue what to do until now. I promised her I would never use my key to intrude on her when she didn’t want to talk, but Momo has the right to enter the apartment, considering it’s hers.” Nayeon bit her lip. “I was over there yesterday with my fucking key in the lock and I swear I could feel out friendship cracking right there. I just couldn’t do it. I couldn’t break that barrier.”
“But you wanted to?” Momo asked.

“They’re my best friends and they’re not talking to me, or to each other, of course I wanted to. I want to yell at them and hug them and tell them whatever the fuck they got themselves into, it’s going to be okay.”

Nayeon felt how her throat closed up. She had just kept it at a safe distance until now. But there was no getting around it anymore. She had to act. Now was the time to get the truth. To solve this mess. It couldn’t go on for a minute longer.

...

The streets were colder somehow, without Momo and Chaeyoung by her side. And Nayeon dug her hands into her pockets. It had been only an hour since they had picked Momo up from the airport and she had already put another burden on her shoulders. But it was important. And she would get Momo back tonight, hopefully.

But for now, Jihyo was her target.

With determined steps, Nayeon reached the door, just in time to slip into the building behind a lady unlocking it.

“Thank you.” Nayeon sent the confused lady a smile and hurried up the stairs. Took the steps two at a time and heaved by the time she reached Jihyo’s door, knocking insistently. Damn lungs. No matter what she did, she never seemed to be able to get in better shape. It didn’t matter right now however. All that mattered was whether or not Jihyo would open.

Steps from inside the apartment warned Nayeon, and then the door opened.

“... Tzuyu?” Nayeon frowned as the young girl showed in the door. It took all of three seconds for Nayeon to take in the sight of Tzuyu with her hair in a mess and one of Jihyo’s long shirts over bare legs, teacup in her hand and bare feet.

Tzuyu didn’t answer. Just stared at Nayeon, her cheeks growing more and more pink.

“I’m... I should’ve used the buzzer, I’m-”

Tzuyu’s hand reached down, pulling the shirt farther down her thighs, and she turned her head into the apartment. “Jihyo?”

“Wha-?!?” Jihyo’s slightly muffled voice came from inside.

Nayeon frowned. Somehow simply the sound of Jihyo’s voice was enough for Nayeon to realize. This wasn’t a problem that could be solved by Nayeon mediating and listening to both sides. This was a problem only solvable by all three of them talking. Because this wasn’t just about Mina. That might be the root, but the past months’ miscommunication and deliberate omission of information between the three of them was definitely the reason it had come to this. And listening to Jihyo’s side wouldn’t solve anything. It wasn’t Nayeon who needed to hear it. It was Jeongyeon.

“Put on some clothes, you’re coming with me!” Nayeon called into the apartment.
“Nayeon?” Jihyo called, finally showing up in the door wearing a pyjamas and with pink fuzzy slippers on her feet.

“We’re solving this right now, get some clothes on.” Nayeon said, not giving a moment’s notice to the fact that it was very clear what had gone on in this apartment. Even if the fact that it obviously had, confused Nayeon further. Wasn’t it supposed to have been Jihyo not letting herself love Tzuyu that had caused all this? Or- wait, no it had to be, right? Where the hell had she been disconnected from this entire thing?

Jihyo still looked slightly out of the loop. “Nayeon. What are you-”

“Jeongyeon. You and me and Jeongyeon, that’s what I’m talking about. So unless you want to take the subway in your jammies, change your clothes right now.” Nayeon crossed her arms.

“Bongs...” Jihyo tried, her expression changing to that of fear.

“Jihyo, go with her.” Tzuyu said in a low voice, her fingers subtly trailing down Jihyo’s side. “It’s time.”

Jihyo sighed and nodded. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

“Jihyo? I’m not out to make you a villain. I just want to get to the bottom of all this, because Jeongyeon, she-” Nayeon’s voice broke. “I just need her to be okay.”

“... You’re right.” Jihyo sighed and closed her eyes. “Give me a minute and I’ll be ready.”

Then Jihyo turned on her heel, walking away, back into the apartment.

“So,” Tzuyu cleared her throat, obviously awkward about the situation.

“Tzuyu. It’s okay.” Nayeon said, sending the younger girl a smile. Reached forwards and gave her arm a squeeze. “I’m happy she’s finally given in.”

A quiet but relieved chuckle slipped past Tzuyu’s lips and she looked down at her bare feet.

“How’d you convince her in the end, if you don’t mind me asking?” Nayeon asked.

Tzuyu shrugged, her cheeks growing more and more red, though her stature revealed that she also relaxed a little more. “I don’t really know, to be honest. I’m just... happy.”

“I’m glad.” Nayeon said, just as Jihyo showed up in jeans and a t-shirt, looking like she was about to hyperventilate.

“Okay. Let’s do this.” Jihyo said, her words a lot more confident than the way she said them. Then she turned to Tzuyu. “Sorry to bail on you like this, you’re welcome to stay though, if you want?”

“I’ll be here when you get back.” Tzuyu promised, her eyes on Jihyo with such a tenderness that Nayeon felt the need to look away.

“I love you, Chou-tzu.”

“And I love the chicken we already ordered.” Tzuyu said.

Nayeon snorted without meaning to. This kid, she was really the best of them all. Always knew what to say somehow, to break the tension. It was so obvious, that it had been exactly what Jihyo had needed too, as she visibly relaxed, eyes crinkling at the edges as she smiled up at the older girl.
“Are we leaving or what, Hyo?”

“Right.” Jihyo said, sending Nayeon an awkward look. Then she turned back to Tzuyu for a second and leaned up, pressing the quickest little giggly peck to Tzuyu’s lips.

“Now?” Nayeon asked as soon as Jihyo seemed to have gotten a self-respectable amount of control over her giddy gayness.

Jihyo nodded and walked out past Tzuyu, sending her a last look before the youngest closed the door.

“So is this the part where you fret me for all my sins?” Jihyo asked as they walked down the hallway together.

“No, Jihyo.” Nayeon wrapped an arm around Jihyo’s shoulders. “This is the part where you come with me and we figure this shit out without blaming anyone.”

…

Really, Jeongyeon should move. She should move and get out before Momo got home. But she just didn’t have the energy. The parts that normally connected thought and action seemed to have completely malfunctioned the past few days, and she had just been a shell. Had gotten up and gotten clothed and drank her morning coffee. Gone back and laid on the bed, staring into the ceiling, music blasting on random shuffle for hours on end. Not that she had anything better to do. And the ceiling was the only thing that didn’t have a sign that Mina wasn’t there anymore. Everywhere else, she was missing. Was missing in the sheets that lay in a pile in the bathroom. In the dressers with the empty spaces where her clothes used to be. The place she kept toothbrush and other toiletries. Under the TV where her switch stood. The mugs missing from the kitchen cupboard. She had been everywhere. And she had taken it all with her when she left. But the worst was that she had taken herself away from Jeongyeon.

She had taken Jeongyeon’s everything.

Not that she cared. Jeongyeon. There was nothing left to care about. She had been mad at first. At herself, at Mina. Mostly at herself. At Jiyeon. Had almost called Jiyeon several times just to shout at her for what she had put Jeongyeon through. But now? Now there was nothing left but apathy.

The key turned in the lock, but Jeongyeon barely heard it. Just rolled onto her back on the bed. The sheets smelled like detergent, and it was impossibly worse than when they had smelled like her. Like them.

“Jeongyeon?” Momo’s voice called through the apartment, forcing through her headphones. But she just turned up the music and listened to the scientist’s story. Closed her eyes and waited for Momo to find her. Because she was bound to. And Jeongyeon didn’t have the power to resist. Didn’t have the will.
Light on her right side showed under the closed eyelids, and Jeongyeon knew that she would feel a touch any moment now. Yet she still jolted when it happened. When a hand stroked over her cheek.

Then her headphones were removed, the music blasting from them, revealed to the world. The bass disappeared and then the bed dipped. The phone was removed from Jeongyeon’s hand and the music stopped. And still, she just lay there. Didn’t dare open her eyes, as it meant that she would have to face Momo and all the shame she felt. All the regret. The embarrassment that she was just lying here feeling sorry for herself. But it wasn’t Momo’s voice that spoke. It was a softer one, deeper and more soulful. As if an old spirit hid in a child’s body.

“Unnie…”

Jeongyeon opened her eyes. Found Chaeyoung’s head hovering over her own, and felt her face grimace involuntarily. As if she was trying to stop herself from crying and laughing at the same time. As if her mind just couldn’t figure out how to react. All she knew was that Chaeyoung’s eyes locked Jeongyeon’s mercilessly, and that it was too much.

Jeongyeon closed her eyes again. Felt how her heart beat faster and stronger. It was too much. She wasn’t ready.

Couldn’t face herself.

“Hey, shh…” Chaeyoung mumbled, cupping Jeongyeon’s face with both hands.

“I’m-” Jeongyeon tried, her throat dry and hoarse from not having talked since her last shift. “I’m okay.”

“No you’re not.” Momo’s voice said somewhere to her left. “And that’s okay.”

“I’m fine.” Jeongyeon insisted.

“Unnie, please.” Chaeyoung’s voice pleaded. “This isn’t you being okay. You’re not okay”

“Yes I am. I’m fine.” Jeongyeon said. Why didn’t they get it? Why were they even here.

“Then you won’t mind telling me what happened then?” Momo asked, her voice annoyingly confident.

“It’s none of your business.” Jeongyeon cringed, feeling Chaeyoung’s thumbs rub over her cheeks. Too much. And finally, Jeongyeon gained a bit of energy. Just enough to close her hands around Chaeyoung’s and remove them.

It was too much.

It was all just too much.

“Unnie, we’re here to help.” Chaeyoung insisted. The bed shifted where she sat, and her hand settled over Jeongyeon’s heart.

Immediately, sparks flew through Jeongyeon’s veins. A cool night. Merlot. Hot breath. And the feeling of skin as she slapped Chaeyoung’s arm to get it away. The dizziness as she stood up too fast and the blurred outlines of the room as she tried to locate the door. The headrush. A cold doorknob. Momo’s voice calling her name. Lights in the hallway and then arms closing around her waist, trapping her arms in the process. Already then, Jeongyeon knew it was pointless to resist. Momo was a lot stronger than her, and they both knew it. Especially in Jeongyeon’s famished state. It just wasn’t
possible. But she still tried, even if it was no good. Even if it did nothing at all.

“I’m sorry.” Momo croaked, her arms tightening around Jeongyeon. “I can’t let you go.”

“Momo.” Jeongyeon said, starting to feel the familiar anger bubble under her skin.

Couldn’t they just leave her alone? There was nothing to do, and there was no reason to try. Over was over. And really, it was just Jeongyeon who had been stupid to not see it from the start. That they were headed for destruction from the time they had started talking on the curb outside the party.

“How long?” Momo asked calmly.

“None of your business.” Jeongyeon said monotonously, her eyes closed and the fatigue threatening to get the best of her. She didn’t try to fight Momo’s arms in the hopes that she would let go if it seemed like Jeongyeon cooperated.

“Oh course it is.” Chaeyoung said tentatively somewhere in front of Jeongyeon.

“No it’s not. It’s- M-… hers. And mine.” Jeongyeon’s skin burned and she hated that she couldn’t even say her name. Was she really that pathetic that she couldn’t live without her? That she was this shell without her?

“Then we wait.” Momo said conclusively.

“For what?” Jeongyeon asked, not caring about the answer.

“Nayeon.” Chaeyoung said.

Jeongyeon opened her eyes, glaring at the youngest. “You wouldn’t.”

“Why do you think we’re even here?” Chaeyoung asked, a defiant expression on her face. “She’s gonna come once she’s talked to Jihyo.”

“She- get out.” Jeongyeon said, her voice as low and threatening as she could make it. Of course this was Nayeon’s doing.

“No.” Chaeyoung crossed her arms. “I’m staying right here until you talk or until Nayeon gets here. It’s your choice.”

“This is my apartment.” Jeongyeon snarled. “If I say you get out, then you fucking get out, Chaeyoung. What part of that don’t you get?!”

It was all too much.

“It’s mine too.” Momo said dryly. “And that’s my girlfriend you’re biting at, if you’d be so kind to stop that.”

With a growl Jeongyeon made an attempt to force her way out of Momo’s arms, but it was no good.

“Momo, I swear to god if you don’t let me go right now-”


Jeongyeon felt like crying. Felt trapped and dizzy. Mostly just felt like giving up. “You’re such a bitch...”
“I know.” Momo said, her voice as if she was soothing a child.

Still she didn’t let go. Just hugged Jeongyeon tighter, Chaeyoung still standing there in front of them, small and mighty with a defiant expression on her face.

“So what? We’re really just going to stand here until Nayeon gets here?” Jeongyeon asked.

“No, I’d prefer if we move to the couch as I’m still sore from travelling but essentially yes. I am going to just hold on to you the entire time.” Momo nudged her hip against Jeongyeon’s in an obvious attempt at making her walk.

Jeongyeon didn’t move. Hated every single thing about this situation. What was she even supposed to say? What would she tell Nayeon when she got there? Why were they all so obsessed with talking to her? It wasn’t like Jeongyeon hadn’t done this before. The first two times Jiyeon had broken up with her, it had been like this as well. It had been these weeks of anger and apathy playing some sick game of ping pong in her head. But slowly, somewhere along the way, she had just gotten used to it. That this was just the way of the world. She had just been stupid to believe that Mina was different.

“Jeongyeon?” Chaeyoung’s voice brought Jeongyeon back.

As if through a veil, Jeongyeon looked at the younger girl. Felt Momo pushing again and moved her feet without noticing it much. The waves of anger had faded again, replaced by the apathy. The inner battle in her mind always seemed to trigger this state. The fear that Mina might’ve really not loved her, was just too much. So instead she just shut down. Let Momo sit them down in the couch and felt the girl settle around her, one body curled around another. Almost like a hug. Almost safe.

…

The buzz of the door made Jeongyeon jump and Momo’s arms tighten around her. They had been sitting on the couch for almost an hour according to the clock on the wall over the TV.

“I’ll get it.” Chaeyoung said softly, getting up from the floor. She had been sitting in front of Jeongyeon, holding her hands passively.

They hadn’t tried to get her to talk. And Jeongyeon hadn’t pushed them away. But now she looked after Chaeyoung, the uncomfortable feeling of empty hands slowly waking her. And slowly she realized who it was at the door.

“Hey, shh, you’re okay.” Momo said immediately, her entire body curling tighter around Jeongyeon’s. Had she sensed the quickened heartbeat and hitched breath already.

“Don’t let them in.” Jeongyeon said quietly, her voice hoarse again. When did she last have a meal? Have water?

Chaeyoung buzzed them in anyways.

What wouldn’t she say when she saw Jeongyeon like this? Nayeon? How disappointed wouldn’t she be that Jeongyeon was this weak? That she had this little fight in her.

Fight…
The feeling of being trapped resurfaced with a single sharp inhale, waking Jeongyeon’s senses again. Made her fight the restraints of Momo’s arms, using arms and legs to get distance between them. Felt like she was trying to breathe underwater, instinct taking over in an attempt to get free.

“Ow!” Momo complained, and Jeongyeon noted that she had accidentally elbowed Momo.

But it was enough. Enough to get away from Momo’s arms and up from the couch.

Chaeyoung didn’t try to stop her. Just stepped aside as Jeongyeon headed straight for the door.

The door. The door that Nayeon was on her way towards.

Jeongyeon stopped dead with a hand on the doorknob. Looked at the door, her entire body shaking. Any second now, Momo would trap her again. Surely she would. Would imprison her and Chaeyoung would open the door, forcing Jeongyeon to face Nayeon. To face herself.

“I can’t.” Jeongyeon whispered to herself.

The answer came as a knock. Quiet and controlled.

Nayeon.

Jeongyeon took a deep breath. Wanted to tell her no. Not because she wasn’t longing for her voice and her arms. But because she knew what would happen the moment they faced each other. The moment Jeongyeon admitted that the bracelet lay on black cotton, hidden from sight, instead of sitting on her wrist like it ought to.

Another knock.

“Jeongyeon?”

“Jihyo?” Jeongyeon said it involuntarily, her heart in her throat.

“Will you open?”

This time it was Nayeon’s voice.

Jeongyeon shook her head. Shook. Felt the hurt and the shame bubble inside her, threatening to surface.

“No.”

“Jeongyeon, please.” Jihyo said, a plea in her voice. “Please just open.”

“Why? So you can all get a good look at the wreck?” Jeongyeon couldn’t help the anger. Couldn’t face herself. The situation.

“Sure, we brought our camera to make sure we eternalize this moment of our best friend hurting.” Nayeon’s voice was dripping with sarcasm. “Who the hell do you think we are?”

Jeongyeon looked at her wrist.

“Nayeon.”

“No, we’re talking.”
“That’s not up to you.” Jeongyeon snapped. “You don’t get to come here and have your little girlfriends choke-hold me until you get here and just think you can do whatever the hell you want. This isn’t any of your fucking business.”

“You’re my best friend and you’re miserable, do you expect me to just watch?!” Nayeon’s voice broke.

“That’s exactly what I expect, because I’m telling you to.” Jeongyeon felt how her voice rose and her blood boiled involuntarily. “And if you don’t get the hell out of here right now we’re no longer-”

“Bracelets.” Jihyo’s voice trembled under the insistence as she cut through them. “I call bracelets.”

Jeongyeon stared at the door for a moment. Then narrowed her eyes, her voice expressing some of the disbelief she felt that Jihyo had actually just said that. “You can’t call bracelets, Jihyo. We’re not kids."

“Could’ve fooled me.” Nayeon said dryly.

“Nayeon, stop.” Jihyo’s voice was quiet, as if turned away from the door. Then it was back. “Bracelets, Jeongyeon. I’m calling bracelets.”

The sun was high on the sky, and Nayeon led the three of them towards a quiet part of the market. The place was absolutely packed, and they weren’t really supposed to be here without supervision. But Nayeon was tall for her age so no-one asked, and Jihyo’s mom was right around the corner in the café anyway. They had just wanted to go look at the stuff.

“Are we going back now?” Jihyo asked, looking up at the two older girls. She was still holding Nayeon’s hand.

“In a moment. But I want to show you what I bought first.” Jeongyeon said, holding out a paper bag.

“Is it candy?” Jihyo asked excitedly, her eyes sparkling.

“Nope.” Jeongyeon grinned, revealing the content to Jihyo, the three bracelets held in her palm.

“Oh…” Jihyo looked at them in awe. “They’re pretty!”

“They’re friendship bracelets.” Jeongyeon explained. “If we ever fight-"

“We won’t.” Jihyo looked up at Jeongyeon with big eyes.

“I know Ji, but if we do. We call bracelets.” Jeongyeon said, crouching in front of the little girl, taking her hand gently. Watched as Nayeon tied the little bracelet around Jihyo’s thin wrist and tightened the strings. “And then we have to stop fighting and talk about it, okay? That way we’ll be friends forever."

“You promise?” Jihyo asked with a pout, looking skeptically at the bracelet.

“Promise.” Jeongyeon held out her pinky for Jihyo.
Then Nayeon crouched too, her own pink held out too. Jeongyeon sent her a grin and Nayeon stuck out her tongue at her before they both turned their attention back to the youngest. Barely eight. But she was theirs.

The younger girl giggled shyly and wound her own pinkies around Nayeon and Jeongyeon’s “Promise.”

…

They hadn’t used it until now. Had never actually been far enough out to use the promise.

Jeongyeon sighed. Leaned her head back and looked at the ceiling. Closed her eyes and turned the lock and doorknob.

Let them in

No-one said anything, and Jeongyeon didn’t look at them. Just held her wrist and backed away. Even if Jihyo had called bracelets, Jeongyeon still needed some safe distance from them all. There were just too many people. It was still too much.

“Jeongyeon?” Jihyo’s voice was small. Like a child’s. And it made Jeongyeon open her eyes. Made her look into big sad eyes.

“Please don’t pity me, Ji…” Jeongyeon sighed.

“I’m not.” Jihyo croaked.

Somewhere behind them, Nayeon closed the door.

“I’m fine.” Jeongyeon rubbed a hand over her face, just to do something. The anger had already settled again. It was both confusing and frustrating that she couldn’t just stick to one mood. Because most of all she just wanted to scream out all of her pain. But she couldn’t. Couldn’t get it past the little fires. Couldn’t let it burn. Maybe that was a good thing though. The aftermath might be more than Jeongyeon could handle. Screaming your pain makes it real. Makes you face it.

“I’m sorry.” Jihyo’s voice was small. Matched the steps she took towards Jeongyeon.

Jeongyeon crossed her arms tight in front of her. There was that pity again. The pity that made Jeongyeon feel pathetic and helpless. Not that she wasn’t. She just hated admitting it. Hated that Jihyo forced her to confront her with it.

“I never meant to cause all this pain.” Jihyo said.

Jeongyeon felt her mouth fall slightly open and her brows furrowed in confusion as she looked at the tiny girl in front of her. Saw only thin wrists and big eyes and sadness. Barely eight. Afraid of their friendship breaking some day.

“I don’t.” Jeongyeon cleared her throat as Jihyo aged in front of her eyes to the grown woman she was now. “What do you mean your fault?”

“I mean that this, you and Mina-”
Jeongyeon jumped slightly at the name, cringing.


“No? Jihyo, no, it’s not. I know it’s—”

“You don’t know.” Jihyo mirrored Jeongyeon’s position, hugging her arms. “It’s my fault.”

“How can it be your fault that she left me?” Jeongyeon asked hopelessly, her shoulders hunching even more.

“Wait.” Nayeon said, interrupting them both. “Mina left you?”

Jeongyeon looked around at her, swallowing hard. “I- yeah…”

“I thought you left her?” Nayeon looked thoroughly bewildered.

“No, she—” Jeongyeon felt the words catch in her throat, and then her lips tingling. As if she was right back there in the door, frozen as Mina kissed her. As Mina left her.

“But why?” Nayeon asked, looking from Jeongyeon to Jihyo and back again.

“… I don’t know.” Jeongyeon admitted quietly, feeling like she was folding in on herself, getting absorbed by some black hole in her stomach.


Jeongyeon closed her eyes. They must’ve talked then. But wouldn’t it be better to just accept it instead of finding reason in it? Wouldn’t it be better to just move on?

“You talked to her?” Nayeon asked when Jeongyeon didn’t reply.

“I caused it.” Jihyo whispered. “That’s what I’m saying, it’s my fault. I caused all this. I- I fucked up.”

There was a whimper, followed by steps, and Jeongyeon opened her eyes. Nayeon stood with her arms around Jihyo’s shoulders, and there were tears in the younger girl’s eyes.

“I’m so sorry, Jeongyeon. I never meant- I never-”

Jeongyeon just looked at her, waiting for her to come to. At least enough so that she could explain. Not that Jeongyeon really wanted to know. It didn’t matter. But it seemed important to Jihyo to tell it.

“I was bitter.” Jihyo started shakily, her chest rising and falling heavily. She was definitely trying not to cry, the girl always having been prone to tears. “I was bitter because Mina had gotten to move on from that night, but I was still stuck there. I was bitter because I hadn’t forgiven myself for letting her take the blame, and bitter that I was so scared that it caused me to hurt the girl I actually am in love with.”

Jeongyeon blinked. Jihyo was in love? No. It didn’t matter. None of it mattered. But then what about- no, it didn’t matter.

“I asked her to meet up with me after work one night.” Jihyo continued, her voice still small. “I had this plan, that if I could just look her in the eye and forgive her and tell her that it was all okay, then maybe I could forgive myself as well. And then maybe I could trust Tzuyu.”
“But-” Nayeon interrupted.

“I’m getting there.” Jihyo said, shutting her up.

Jeongyeon felt something despite herself. A tiny spark of joy for the girl who had slept next to Jeongyeon after new years. Who had told a secret in confidence and gotten one in return.

“I really just wanted to talk, but she was so scared. I could feel it immediately, and I just- something broke in me. Something snapped. And I took it out on her.”

“Ohh…” Nayeon exhaled.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked despite the fact that she couldn’t care less about the answer. It’d just been a reflex.

“I thought Jihyo and you had had a fight. Because you kept avoiding each other and shutting me out. I didn’t know- wow, I really got this backwards.”

Jeongyeon just looked down at her shoes. She didn’t need to have it pointed out to her how shittily she had behaved towards them both.

“Jeongyeon.” Jihyo’s voice sounded once more like that of a child.

Jeongyeon didn’t react. Didn’t want to hear it. But Jihyo still spoke.

“She left you because of me. Because of what I told her. Because I told her- I… I told her that- I told her a lot of shit. So much. I kept blaming her for my own shit and told her I wish we had never been friends and- and that I was waiting for her to break you. That I didn’t trust her around you. She left you because of what I told her. Because she couldn’t bear the thought of hurting you.”

Jihyo’s voice died but her words stayed in the air like smoke, floating in the space between them, refusing to die out.

Jeongyeon’s stomach churned. Made it very obvious that she had gone two days without a meal. The acid burned up her throat, and she hugged herself harder. Couldn’t process the words properly. What did that even mean? That she- no, it couldn’t- but then if it was; then she still loved… loved her. Right? If she- if she didn’t leave her because she wasn’t- if. But Jiyeon had done the same. Had left her out of nowhere time and time again, and explained that it was just because she didn’t feel like it anymore. That she had found someone else. Someone better. And then Mina had left her just like Jiyeon had. But not- not for the same reasons?

No, it had to be.

It had to be because the alternative was… was that Jeongyeon had assumed the worst of Mina and never asked to be proven wrong. It meant that Jeongyeon hadn’t once stopped to consider that maybe there was something else going on. And for a moment, the skin under Jeongyeon’s thumb wasn’t that of her arm. But that of the soft skin over a ribcage, tracing over black characters. Perfect.

“So…” Jeongyeon swallowed, her throat dry. Everything hurt inside her.

“I’m sorry, Jeongyeon.” Jihyo’s voice broke, and Jeongyeon knew, without looking, that she had
succumbed to tears.

“But why did it get so bad?” Nayeon asked calmly.

Jeongyeon stepped back. Couldn’t handle it. Didn’t want to hear it. Didn’t want to admit that she knew why. She found the wall with her palm before sliding down it. Really, her knees wouldn’t have carried her for another moment. Yet she didn’t look up. She knew that the others were looking at her. All of them.

“I don’t know.” Jihyo croaked. “I think- It was really fine for a long time. I was. But then Sooyoung happened.”

“Sooyoung?” Momo asked. She had been sitting quietly until now.

“A girl who asked Mina out at the coffee house back in September” Jeongyeon said monotonously. “They dated for a few weeks.”

“Oh. Wait, they dated? I didn’t know that.”

“She wasn’t very vocal about it because of how Jihyo reacted.” Jeongyeon said. Didn’t even know why she said it. She just couldn’t help it.

“I wasn’t over her then.” Jihyo started. “Not fully. I mean I was okay, and I loved her mostly as a friend, but I still had this hope that maybe someday she could… that we would- but no. The way she blushed when Sooyoung asked her out, it made me realize that it was time, and after that I really did work so hard on it. And even if I hate that she took such drastic measures I can’t deny that the distance helped. We needed the space, but I hadn’t allowed myself to. But I think as soon as I got that distance I realized that I had just been holding on to something I didn’t really want anymore. I just had to let go, and I was finally ready to. Or, I thought I was.”

Jeongyeon looked down. She knew what was coming now.

“But then Tzuyu happened.”

Jeongyeon looked up. Okay, so maybe she didn’t know.

“We kissed on new years, and it was just a cute peck and nothing more but still, it woke this hope in me. And I just started falling for her. But it was like, the more I fell for her, the more scared I got. It wasn’t this magical solution where you fall in love and magically everything is better. I was still carrying Mina around with me, for some reason. And I couldn’t figure it out for the life of me. I just knew that I hated my own fear so much. Just as much as I hated how much I loved Tzuyu. I didn’t know how to stay away or stop it, but I also didn’t know how to get over my fear of being hurt. Because it felt exactly like it had with Mina, falling for all her dumb jokes-“

“Mina jokes?” Nayeon asked at the exact same time as Jeongyeon asked the same about Tzuyu.

“Yeah. They both joke, a lot. And they both have weird humor.” Jihyo said. “But Tzuyu… and there was this point where I thought I was scared because she was just a rebound or whate-“

“Please tell me she’s not a rebound.” Nayeon sounded suddenly scared.

“No. In no way. She’s…” Jihyo trailed off, a sudden burst of butterflies on her tongue. “But anyway. Yeah, I just was so afraid, and I took it out on Mina instead of admitting that the thing I’ve actually been afraid of, is admitting that I knew full well she never loved me. And I let her kiss me, and then I let her take the blame so I could mend my broken heart. Because I never stopped to think that hearts
don’t just break from romantic love. Her heart broke that day too.”

“What do you mean?” Chaeyoung asked, having moved to the couch and now sitting in Momo’s arms. Safe.

“I mean that by kissing her, I forced a change in our friendship, and I asked for something she couldn’t give me. That she wanted to, but couldn’t. And as shitty as it was to kiss me like that, I knew. I just wanted to stay in the dream a little longer…”

Jihyo’s story finally came to a close, and Jeongyeon leaned her head back against the wall.

“But why does that make **this** us, your fault? I mean sure, you said some bad stuff and put thoughts into her head but she’s the one who acted on them. She made the choice.”

“Jeongyeon. I-I told her… I told her when you break her, we’re over. I took away the choice in her head. I took away her choice to make you happy.”

“But she chose to believe it, Jihyo. She could’ve talked to me about it. She could’ve have told me all of this. But she chose to leave me without an explanation.” Jeongyeon sighed.

It was so hard to admit. So hard to forgive Jihyo when she was right there, offering herself as a scapegoat. But they had to be better. They had to learn.

Jeongyeon opened her mouth, about to say this, but Jihyo shook her head.

“You need to wait to forgive me, Jeongyeon.” Jihyo muttered. “I haven’t told you the last reason it all went to hell.”

Jeongyeon looked at her finally. She was still shivering in Nayeon’s arms, but Jeongyeon couldn’t muster the energy to get up and comfort her. Even if Jeongyeon wanted to.

“You don’t have to say any more, Jihyo.”

It was all Jeongyeon could do to relieve the girl a little.

“I do. I have to admit that the last straw… was you.”

Jeongyeon frowned. Then closed her eyes in realization. Of course.

“It hurt.”

“I know, I never meant- I swear I did everything I felt I could to not fall for-“

“Not that.” Jihyo interrupted, her voice trembling. “It hurt that you didn’t tell me. It hurt that you felt like you had to hide and sacrifice your love because of me. Even hearing you say you tried not to, for my sake, if hurts. And I know it’s justified considering my record with her-“

“No.” Jeongyeon said, looking directly at the girl, strength slowly returning to her body, though she didn’t know how or why. “No, it’s not justified.”

Jihyo looked lost.

“This wasn’t you being so bad about Mina that we didn’t feel like we could tell you. This was us being cowards. Well, at first it was just this excitement in sneaking around and living on that high
that meant we could just ignore the consequences. And it was so liberating because I had spent months worrying about the fact that I was just falling for her more and more. But then, slowly, it turned from excitement to cowardice. And we kept trying to find time to tell you, but I always chickened out. I just didn’t know how to tell you that- Jihyo, I’m... I... I’m so sorry.”

A silence fell in the living room, but Jeongyeon wasn’t done. She just couldn’t find the words for this next part. Instead she just looked down at the bare wrist, her pulse slowly elevating with each second she realized. And then the tears came. With no warning and no mercy they trickled down her cheeks, her body reacting to it immediately, curling in on itself until she was hugging her knees.

She just didn’t understand. Didn’t get why this last part was so hard to admit. But when a tentative hand found her knee, and it turned out to be Nayeon’s, Jeongyeon understood at once. This was the reason it was so hard. Because she was about to get forgiveness for something she didn’t deserve. That she was about to ask of Nayeon what she would willingly give, but shouldn’t.

“I should’ve told you.” Jeongyeon croaked. “I should’ve let you decide for yourself how you wanted to act on the information instead of lying to you. I should’ve asked you for help in telling Jihyo and I should’ve leaned on you like you asked me to. Like you asked time and time again.”

Nayeon hummed and nodded. “You should have, and you know that. So why didn’t you? I mean I know you’re scared but you were scared when we were thirteen too and you told me about your crush on Chungha. What made this so different?”

Jeongyeon cringed and wiped her cheeks free of tears. Looked up at Jihyo who was standing where Nayeon had left her. Jeongyeon couldn’t help the plea in her eyes. She needed Jihyo close for this. Close enough that she wouldn’t risk losing her.

Jihyo returned her gaze. Nodded and closed her eyes for a second. Then she walked the last steps, settling next to Nayeon, in front of Jeongyeon. Only when she was close enough did Jeongyeon dare speak, albeit without meeting Nayeon’s inquiring eyes.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

Nayeon frowned. She didn’t seem to think it was obvious. And it was fair. She had always told everything to Nayeon. Their entire relationship was built on love and mocking and sharing secrets - on the utmost trust that they would always be there for each other.

She seemed to find the truth only when Jeongyeon stopped avoiding her gaze.

“Yoo Jeongyeon...” Nayeon sighed. “You’re such an idiot.”

“Well, what would you have done? How would you have handled it?”

“I... Fair enough on the Jihyo department. But why the hell didn’t you come to me? What’d you think I was going to do?”

“I was afraid that you would make me tell her.”

“Well, obviously I would’ve, she deserved to know this.” Nayeon clicked her tongue and stared at Jeongyeon. Jeongyeon stared back.

“Know what?” Momo asked from the couch. “About you and Mina?”

Jeongyeon shook her head and looked beggingly at Nayeon. She didn’t have the energy to explain.
Nayeon nodded. Grabbed a hold of Jeongyeon’s wrist where the bracelet should’ve been.

“Jeongyeon and I... We always thought Mina and Jihyo were meant to be. You know, the once in a lifetime love where things all work out in the end. Of course there was a while after they kissed where it seemed like we were wrong. But they kept together still and Jihyo was so into her it was almost embarrassing. So for the past year or so we’ve been waiting for something to happen because they just got closer and closer. And we hoped they might finally be working things out. And honestly, we hadn’t seen the Sooyoung thing as the end for them. We had just seen it as a bump on the road.”

Once more, the room turned quiet, and Jeongyeon knew that they were all taking in this info. Especially Jihyo. But it was only part of the story, and Nayeon hadn’t finished it. She had just broken the ice enough that Jeongyeon could continue.

“There was a night, a party, and I wanted to take that opportunity to talk to her about Jihyo, to see if there was any truth to our suspicions that she might have feelings for Jihyo despite Sooyoung. But it just didn’t- I didn’t end up talking about that with her. We just… clicked. And it was so easy to get lost in the alcohol and her words and her laugh. Way too easy. And before I knew it we were flirting and dancing and she was following me home. And something could’ve happened that night. Something did. I fell for her. I fell for the love of Jihyo’s life.” Jeongyeon buried her head in her knees, ashamed of herself for the choices she was about to admit. “At new years... we-”

“Oh my god, you kissed.” Chaeyoung said from the couch, making Jeongyeon look up again. Her mouth was agape and her general expression was as if a light had just turned on in her. “You and Mina. Jihyo and Tzuyu. Damn, wonder what would’ve happened if you and Jihyo hadn’t been such chickens about a little smooch.”

“Well, Mina probably wouldn’t have caught on to my feelings as fast as she did.” Jeongyeon sighed.

“What do you mean?” Jihyo asked.

Jeongyeon cringed. “I mean that I was maybe more than just a little eager when we kissed.”

“You-” Nayeon’s voice caught in her throat and she cleared it. “But we were in the same room as you.”

“I know, why do you think I was so eager for all of us to kiss Dahyun? I never want to kiss anyone. But I wanted to kiss her. And I know that she knew that night. She told me that she knew that night, but that the next weeks I just didn’t notice her flirting with me. And I guess she was right, I mean I was just so scared that- so when it actually happened I just let myself. I didn’t know how to stop it, and I didn’t want to. I wanted everything.”

“So you went for her, and you were ashamed of that? Because she’s the love of my life?” Jihyo asked, the last part said most like a quotation than a statement.

“... Kind of.” Jeongyeon sighed.

“Kind of?” Jihyo asked.

“It’s... It’s nothing. Look, it doesn’t matter.” Jeongyeon made to retreat her hands, but neither of her friends let her. “We’re over and that’s-”

“No secrets, Yoo Jeongyeon.” Nayeon interrupted quietly. “You have to tell her.”
Jeongyeon felt her face screw up. Knew Nayeon was right. And with the deepest breath of her life, she spoke.

“I didn’t know what to do, and I hid from you, because I didn’t know how to tell you - either of you - that I thought-. That even before that night where we got together, she was somehow everything to me. That- that she made me want everything with her. That… she might not just be the love of Jihyo’s life. That I’m pretty sure she’s mine too.”

Jeongyeon felt something lift inside her at these words. Felt something finally come to a close. As if she had taken the choice of freedom.

For a second.

“But you didn’t stop her from walking away.” Nayeon said, mercy in the tone of merciless words.

Jeongyeon closed her eyes again. Shook her head. “No… I didn’t.”

“Why not?” Jihyo asked, her voice trembling.

“I didn’t know how.” Jeongyeon admitted. “I just froze. It was like this nightmare and she was Jiyeon and I was worthless and-”

Jeongyeon couldn’t say more. Couldn’t admit how she had seen the dark brown of Jiyeon’s eyes in Mina’s black. How she had felt a gust of wind that smelled like unfamiliar perfume and sleep. How she felt exactly as worthless and small as she had before the night of the party. Before she had wanted to be more than what Jiyeon had made her. It was just shock. She knew somewhere that Mina hadn’t just left her because she was done playing around. Knew that Mina had loved her. Somewhere. But that place - where she knew these things - was like a movie, or a memory, or just some alternate universe. A world of soft giggles and late nights talking and and burnt tongues from hot cocoa.

“God, she really screwed you up, didn’t she?” Nayeon sighed, sitting back on her butt instead of crouching. The action pulled Jeongyeon’s arm forth a bit.

“I just- it was like something clicked in my brain? I closed the door and walked into the bedroom. Then I pulled off the sheets and put them on the bathroom floor. As if- almost on reflex. And by the time I came to, she was long gone and I didn’t know how- I just couldn’t figure out what to do. So I just curled in on myself. And for weeks it’s just been these two polar reactions and I didn’t know how to control any of them. Anger on one hand, and complete apathy on the other.”

“Sounds like you.” Nayeon said dryly.

“I know, thank you.” Jeongyeon scowled.

“No, I mean it sounds like you to deflect instead of feeling the heartbreak.”

“I don’t-” Jeongyeon’s voice caught in her throat. She wanted to object, tell them that she was okay, that it was just the usual and she would get back on track. Still. She usually didn’t take this long to bounce back. And she certainly didn’t usually cry. But she was now. Silently cried in pain of the way her chest felt like it was splitting in two, and how her skin ached. How her hairs stood on end and made everything itch, and how her brain sent her back to a reality she couldn’t have anymore. To one where Mina’s hands fiddled with the hairs at her nape and her words made Jeongyeon’s world make sense.

Someone shushed her. And then someone wrapped an arm around her shoulder. Tucked her against
her chest and held her close. Momo, judging by the citrusy perfume and strength of her arms. And this time, her arms weren’t a cage, but a comfort. Calmed Jeongyeon faster than she wanted to admit, and with a shivering sigh, she felt the control return.

“You’re okay.” Momo whispered.

“I’m not.” Jeongyeon croaked. “I’m not okay. I don’t know what to do.”

“You get her back.”

Chaeyoung’s voice was close, somewhere on Jeongyeon’s right. But the words didn’t make sense.

“What?”

“You get her back. Win her back or whatever. Just don’t let her go.”

Jeongyeon felt Momo’s arms loosen enough to let her turn her head. “But I… I already let her go.”

“That doesn’t mean you can’t get her back though. Or try at least.”

“But if she doesn’t- If she really doesn’t want to be with me, or can’t then…”

“Then it’s the exact same situation you’re in now, only you’ll know for sure. It can’t get worse than this, right?” Chaeyoung shrugged. “You’re on rock bottom. Worst case scenario she’ll say no, most likely you’ll at least get an explanation and maybe she’ll even want to get back together.”

The thought of getting Mina back, of holding her close, kissing her skin and feeling her giggle… it was too much.

Jeongyeon looked away, down at her wrist, Jihyo’s fingers still gently closed around it.

“Don’t-”

“Oh, come on, let us help.”

“But how?” Jeongyeon asked hopelessly. “I can’t just turn up on her doorstep and beg her to take me back.”

“But why not?” Chaeyoung frowned.

“What would I say?” Jeongyeon looked around again, her cheeks and neck wet with tears, but her hands occupied. And she didn’t want to draw back. Didn’t want them to ever let go; any of them. Not that she’d ever tell them. But Chaeyoung seemed to read her mind, because she scooted closer and reached up, running her palms across Jeongyeon’s cheeks and down her neck. Dried them in her shorts and reached up again to get the rest.

“Just… ask her for an explanation.” Chaeyoung suggested feebly. She didn’t seem to have any actually useful ideas.

Still, despite the hopelessness and the exhaustion, Jeongyeon couldn’t help her stomach doing a flip at the thought of standing face to face with Mina. What would she say? She would probably have to restrain herself from not wrapping Mina up in her arms. They weren’t there anymore. Even if it was all Jeongyeon wanted. To hide in her soft black hair and smell her shampoo. To smell sleep on their sheets and Mina’s strong coffee in the morning. But why was Jeongyeon even considering this? It was ridiculous. Even if she wanted to, she couldn’t just show up and ask Mina to- what? Take her back? Try again? Do it over?
“It’s too late, Chaeyoung.” Jeongyeon sighed, feeling her body deflate. There had been hope in it after all. But before she managed to slump into Momo’s arms again, the latter had released her and gotten to her feet. And honestly, the speed at which she did it with, meant that if Nayeon and Jihyo hadn’t had their hands around her wrist, Jeongyeon would’ve slid sideways and slipped. But with them keeping her steady, she stayed upright.

“Where is it? Your drawer?” Momo asked, looking down at Jeongyeon as Jihyo snuck around to sit where Momo had. Jeongyeon twined their fingers and felt a shivering sigh from the younger girl.


“You hid it somewhere, right?” Momo asked.

Jeongyeon furrowed her brows. Tried to figure out what the hell Momo was- oh.

“No.” Jeongyeon said, clenching Jihyo and Nayeon’s hands hard. She heard Jihyo wince, but didn’t have enough presence to ease the grip.

“Oh, come on. Why not?” Momo crossed her arms, an unusual defiance on her face.

“Because it’s none of your business where it is.”

“You made a promise. Plus you know I’ll find it.” Momo shrugged.

“What are you-”

“It’s gone.” Jeongyeon tried, interrupting Nayeon’s confused question.

“Like hell it is, you’d never throw it away, you’re way too sentimental.” Momo argued.

“Sentimental about what?”

“The thing that’s going to get Jeongyeon and Mina back together.” Momo said confidently.

“How the fuck is a shirt gonna fix everything? It’s a damn shirt, it makes no difference.” Jeongyeon said, tightening her grip on Nayeon and Jihyo’s hands.

“Fuck’s sake, Yoo, I might need that hand.” Nayeon complained.

Jihyo just winced.

Jeongyeon loosened her holds. Then stared up at Momo. Knew that she had won already, because fact of the matter was that Momo was right; she had kept it. And if Momo looked hard enough, she would find it. It was just a matter of how much Jeongyeon would have to clean up after hurricane Momo searching through her room.

“... bottom drawer, under the sweaters.”

Momo nodded and turned on her heel, walking through the hallway. Jeongyeon sighed at the sound of a drawer being pulled open.

“What shirt?” Jihyo asked.
Jeongyeon shook her head. Couldn’t explain. She just kept seeing standing in it that first morning. Kept feeling the fabric under her fingers as she held Mina close. Hated that Momo even knew about the shirt. But there was nothing to do now.

Confident footsteps alerted them that Momo was coming back. And sure enough, a second later, she turned the corner to the living room and dropped the shirt into Jeongyeon’s lap. Then dropped something else on top of it.

“Thought you might have missed that too,” Momo said.

Jeongyeon looked down at the shiny beads, like pieces of the night sky contained as orbs, as promises.

One. Nayeon.

Two. Jeongyeon.

Three. Jihyo.

A piece of worn string already replaced twice, to tie them together.

“You know you were wrong, right?” Jihyo asks quietly.

“About what?” Jeongyeon asks, afraid and hopeful about the answer at the same time.

“She isn’t the love of my life. She’s yours.”
Night Sky part 2: I'll bet they'd live a lot differently

Chapter Summary

She loves

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much all, for waiting for me over and over. I hope you'll enjoy this chapter and be patient with the next. I will do my best, but there are also some problems currently that will undoubtedly cause delays. I promise to finish this ride with you though, just wait for me please. I love each and every one of you. Every time you comment or leave a curiouscat, I read them and rejoice that I bring something to people. And I hope I can continue being worthy of this praise you give. From the bottom of my heart. Thank you.

“Mina?”

Dahyun’s voice sounded through the apartment, reaching Mina. She had been standing in front of the mirror for a good few minutes, looking herself in the eyes.

She had to do this, and she had to do it in the right way, so they could both move on with their lives without it breaking everything. It was never easy, dating within a friend group, especially one as tight knit as this, but breaking up was harder. Especially seeing as the whole attempt at taking herself out of the equation hadn’t worked. But if she explained and was proper about it, maybe they could find a way to still be around each other. Honestly, it was the worst cliche in the world, but she just wanted them to still be friends despite everything. Even if they could only be politely so. Even if it would never be the same again.

“Mina!”

Dahyun’s voice sounded again, louder this time. Mina shook her head and closed her eyes. She had gotten lost in thought. With a final sigh, Mina washed her hands and dried them in the pink towel. One of Sana’s, Mina deduced from the color. Sana. That was really all that was left of her right now, wasn’t it? Her stuff?

There was a second where Mina felt the emptiness that had taken the place of the bubbly girl. How mustn’t that feel for Dahyun?

As Mina exited the bathroom she made a mental note to talk to Dahyun more about Sana, if she could. It would definitely be good for the younger girl to have someone to share it with. It must be so hard for Dahyun, even more than she was letting on. With Sana’s mom being sick and-

Mina stopped dead. Felt for a moment as if she had been physically strained, unable to breathe or move or feel.
“... Hi.” Jeongyeon’s voice was shivery but soft, and she blinked a few times, as if adjusting to the sight of Mina.

She looked tired. Pale. Stood in the door, technically outside the apartment still. Her glasses had slid slightly down her nose and her hair was damp and the top of it was in a bun. Must’ve showered recently. Did she use the same shampoo that she found a month ago, with the sandalwood?

Mina opened her mouth, to say something, to ask why she was here, to- anything. But nothing came out. Nothing happened.

“I-” Jeongyeon started, but then stopped herself and looked down at the doorstep. “Can I come in?”

Mina couldn’t get herself to look away from her. Didn’t react. Just stared at her. All the preparation she had done the past few days trying to get ready for this was out the window. Would she have reacted like this if she had been the one to go to Jeongyeon too? Maybe. Her stomach would most certainly be tugging like it was now, and her skin would be aching for her touch like it was. But she just stood.

“Please? Just-” Jeongyeon’s voice broke and she cleared her throat. “Please just let me in? Mina?”

“Yes.” Mina’s voice came almost as a gasp, a response solely to the sound of her own name on Jeongyeon’s lips.

Jeongyeon nodded, visibly relieved, and she took a careful step into the apartment. Used her left shoe to get off the right shoe, and then the right foot to get off the left shoe.

She didn’t put them neatly. Didn’t close the door. Didn’t move. Just stood, barely inside the apartment, looking at Mina. Was she waiting for Mina to come closer? Probably. But Mina couldn’t move. Could still hardly breathe. Definitely didn’t trust herself if she moved closer. Maybe it would be too hard after all, being friends. Maybe even just staying in the same friend group. Because nothing in Mina seemed to be working around Jeongyeon.

Jeongyeon waited. Then seemed to realize that Mina wasn’t going to move. Nodded.

“I’m... I... I don’t really know... And you’re not obligated to explain or- you know.” Jeongyeon looked completely lost, yet took another few steps into the apartment. “I’ll respect you, it’s not that. I just wish you’d-. But if this is what you want then...”

Mina swallowed. Watched out of the corner of her eye how Dahyun closed the door behind Jeongyeon and tiptoed past them, towards the hallway. But her main focus was on Jeongyeon, the older girl digging into the bag she had over her shoulder. A door closed somewhere behind them. Probably the door to Dahyun’s room. But Mina’s eyes were only on Jeongyeon, a frown on her face as Jeongyeon seemed to have found whatever it was, retrieving it from the bag.

And once more, it felt like she had been physically strained. Turned to stone, possibly. As if someone was physically constraining her lungs, and she felt like she might actually break this time.

Any second now, she would surely break into a thousand pieces.

“I don’t... I can’t wear it anymore. And you love it.” Jeongyeon muttered, holding out the shirt for Mina.

Even if she couldn’t make anything out past black cloth, there was no doubt in her mind what it was.
“If we ever break up, that shirt is gonna be the cause of a custody fight.”

“Then we never break up. I will stay with you just to keep this shirt.”

What was she expecting? It wasn’t like Mina could wear it either. It would hurt too much. Honestly she wasn’t sure she could even handle looking at it for another second.

To think something like this could cause such physical pain.

“I don’t know what to do here, Mina.” Jeongyeon whispered desperately, holding out the shirt.

The sound of her name made Mina jolt. God, there was nothing she had missed more than that sound. Except it wasn’t in the usually playful tone. It was broken.

Right.

Mina had broken her. She was the cause of all this. She was the reason they were standing like this. And maybe, if it really did cause Jeongyeon pain to have the shirt, then Mina should take it. Let it be her burden to bear, keeping that memory. That was the right thing to do, right? Do whatever she could to make it easier on Jeongyeon? Make amends where she could.

With her heart beating out of her chest, Mina tried to move. Found that her thigh and hip worked out of sync, pushing her foot forward instead of lifting it. Cringing at the unexpected pain, her entire body tensed up, but she took another step still. Managed to lift her foot a little this time.

Nine little steps was all it took for Mina to get close enough. Close enough to reach out and ghost her fingers over the fabric of the shirt. It felt like home. Like safety. And she swore she could almost feel Jeongyeon’s skin under it.

Jeongyeon didn’t move. She just waited for Mina to close her fingers around the fabric and take away the pain she had caused. And when Mina finally did, when she finally held the shirt, she did so with a gentleness and a fear as if it was something incredibly fragile. Something that was threatening to die if she held it too tight.

And maybe it was.

“Look at me?” Jeongyeon asked gently, making Mina’s eyes snap up to meet the older girl’s, without even thinking about it. It was just second nature. “Will you tell me why?”

Mina frowned.

“Why… why you left.”

“Oh.”

“Y-you don’t have... you know with the Jihyo- sorry.”

Mina had flinched. Clenched the shirt momentarily and clutched it against her heart, automatically
stepping back. It didn’t make sense. They had already solved that, she and Jihyo. So why was she reacting like this? But how did Jeongyeon know? Had they talked? They must’ve. Okay. It was okay. She knew and it was okay. She was still here. Still asked Mina to explain, just like she wanted.

With a calming inhale, Mina loosened the grip of her shirt and looked down at it. Made sure it hadn’t broken.

“I know some of it, so you don’t have to- you know. But I just want to understand what went wrong.”

Mina stared for a long time. Then she nodded, lowering her hand with the shirt and running her thumb over the fabric as she normally did with the skin of Dahyun’s thumb. It felt like she was soothing it. Healing the pain of clenching it too hard.

“I was afraid of breaking you.” Mina admitted finally.

Jeongyeon nodded but didn’t speak. And Mina knew she was afraid. Afraid that Mina would clamp up. But she didn’t. The younger girl kept talking, except this time, all the calm had disappeared, her voice trembling.

“I thought it was all my fault. All the things she-” Mina bit down on her lip.

“I know.” Jeongyeon said, merely confirming that it was okay for Mina to keep going.

“I never meant to do this much damage. I just- I wanted to protect you.”

“From you?” Jeongyeon asked. “Because you would break me?”

Mina nodded. A long silence followed this. Then Jeongyeon narrowed her eyes, a look of consideration on her face.

“And if I don’t want protection?” Jeongyeon asked finally, the words like strangers in Mina’s ears. “If I just want the promise of that shirt?”

Mina didn’t react. The words didn’t seem to process into an actual sentence.

Jeongyeon took a deep breath, and continued. “If everything I want is for you to take it all back and love me?”

Mina’s head was spinning. It made no sense. None of it. Jeongyeon was there, offering her everything. Offering her to love Jeongyeon, to take it back.

But still.

“I can’t.” Mina heard herself say. “I love you but I can’t. It doesn’t work like that.”

Jeongyeon nodded quietly. Frowned and then nodded again, seemingly having reached a conclusion. Then she took a step towards Mina.

She was close now. Close enough that Mina naturally angled her face upwards slightly to keep her eyes. Close enough that they could break each other in a single movement. Except they were already broken. Mina had made sure of that.
“Mina,” Jeongyeon said, her voice as gentle as a the lightest touch of skin against skin. “You say it doesn’t work like that, but please. Tell me. If you got a chance to repeat, one repeat - a do-over… would you still have left me?”

Something moved inside Mina. A hope. And in a flash she saw a reality where she had never left. Where she had sought solace in Jeongyeon’s arms and asked for help to be a better person. A reality that wasn’t. But the one she wanted more than anything. The one where she wasn’t holding the shirt, but wearing it, sitting in Jeongyeon’s lap, with the older girl’s comforting arms holding her safe.

Mina felt how her eyes glazed over, and she shook her head ever so lightly.

Jeongyeon took a breath so deep and fast, that the weight of the world might’ve been lifted from her lungs all at once. She was blinking rapidly and opened her mouth slightly, looking like she was going to say something. But the words caught audibly in her throat, over and over, with every breath.

The moment seemed to drag on forever, and Mina’s heart was racing so fast it was making her skin hot like she had run a mile.

And then Jeongyeon closed her eyes, her voice quietly filling the entire room.

“Then do it over.”

Mina stared at the way Jeongyeon tried not to let her face crumble. How she opened her eyes and looked at Mina with a plea that made it almost impossible not to give in.

“Please, Minari. Do it over.” Jeongyeon’s voice rose in volume and desperation. “Do it over.”

“Do it over.” Mina tasted the words on her tongue. “As in... as in don’t leave you?”

Jeongyeon nodded. Opened her mouth but couldn’t seem to get a word out.

Mina didn’t speak either. There was a virtual war going on inside Mina. If she took the chance at a do-over, what would mean she would’ve never left Jeongyeon. And she wanted that to be reality. More than anything. Because knowing the pain she had caused, feeling her own heart so broken, it was too much. She hadn’t even known she was capable of loving another person this way. But she did. Loved Jeongyeon with everything she had. And she had broken them. Had chosen to end it.

Mina felt her own heart break all over again as she shook her head, refusing the out Jeongyeon offered her. “No… I can’t take it back.”

Jeongyeon’s face fell immediately and she pressed her lips hard together, closing her eyes. The despair took hold in every cell of her body like it had the first time Mina had broken her. But that wasn’t this. She just… she couldn’t take the out.

“Jeongyeon.” Mina said quietly.

Jeongyeon jolted and opened her eyes. She looked absolutely lost, her eyes flickering between Mina’s.

“Listen to me.” Mina continued, trying her best to figure out how to say this. Tentatively, she reached out, holding her fingertips less than an inch from Jeongyeon’s palm, a question in her eyes as she looked back up at Jeongyeon. The hardest question to ask, and impossibly harder to answer.

Jeongyeon swallowed once. Nodded.
And Mina felt skin under her fingertips. Felt every cell in her body ache to get closer, but restrained herself. Instead she gently guided Jeongyeon’s hand forwards sliding her fingers over the back of the hand until it turned palm up.

“I don’t get to take back what I did. I can’t change the fact that I chose to break you, and not tell you why.” Mina said, eyes on their hands as she traced over Jeongyeon’s palm. The older girl’s fingers spread apart naturally. Almost like they had just been waiting for Mina to fill the space.

Mina drew back. Looked back up at Jeongyeon’s face, searching her eyes for a courage she couldn’t find within herself. This wasn’t the plan. It wasn’t what she had wanted for them. But it was like everything had changed the moment she had seen Jeongyeon in the door. Just like that night. It hadn’t been a choice not to kiss her. She had just known. And she knew now too. Even if it was impossible not to feel selfish for it.

“You know why I did it now, even if it doesn’t justify anything. And you’re asking me to risk breaking your heart again.”

“Yes.” Jeongyeon breathed.

“You get that I can’t take it back, right? Done is done. I broke us, I… I broke you. And there’s nothing I’m more sorry about, than that. I wish I had acted differently, but I can’t change it. All I can do is go from here. No more do overs. This is the consequence.” Mina pressed her lips together. Jeongyeon had finally lost the battle against holding back the tears, and they trickled silently down her cheeks.

“Jeongyeon, this is my consequence. I have to live with what I did, and face it. And there’s so much history with us, so if we’re doing this, then-”

Mina heard how Jeongyeon’s breath caught and saw her eyes flicker between Mina’s. And just as Mina was about to explain how she needed to be even more selfish. How she needed to ask of Jeongyeon to not let her go without talking about it ever again. But her mind had gone blank. Jeongyeon was staring at her so intensely, locking her in place.

“If?” Jeongyeon asked, the underlying hope in threatening to break through to the surface.

Mina could say no. Should say no. Should make sure Jeongyeon never got hurt on her accord again. But love is selfish. And love is selfless. And love is weighing the risk of being her worst pain against the chance of being her brightest happiness.

And love is love is love is love.

Mina couldn’t help it. Couldn’t help the smile that tugged at the corners of her lips as she spoke.

“If you still-”

But Mina never got further.

Jeongyeon had taken Mina’s face between her hands and kissed her so hard that Mina stumbled backwards.
Everything inside Mina was chaos. Blood rushed in her ears and her lungs were imploding. Lightning travelled across her skin and the scent of sandalwood and salt filled her nostrils. But most of all - more than anything else she felt - there was Jeongyeon. Her hands on Mina’s face and her body so close, Mina desperately tugging her closer with one hand. It was one of those moments where the world seemed to exist only for them, time and space pausing to let Mina take in all of it. To let her move the hand against her own chest down to get Jeongyeon closer. That enabled her to hold the shirt as tight as she could without causing it pain. A second in an eternity to feel the insistence of Jeongyeon’s lips held unmoving against her own.

They gaspingly shared the air between them when Jeongyeon drew back, and Mina felt herself shake. But then Jeongyeon’s lips were back on hers. For a split second. And another. And another. Then arms wrapped around Mina’s neck and Jeongyeon’s voice spoke in her ear, croaky and breathless.

“Don’t ever do this again.”

Mina nodded against Jeongyeon’s neck, but she couldn’t get a word out. She was still completely disoriented and not exactly sure what had just happened. All she knew, was that Jeongyeon was there, and that the tears on her cheeks were not of pain.

“I swear to god, Mina, you have to stay with me this time. You have to talk to me about these things. I can’t,” Jeongyeon’s voice broke. “I don’t want to do this without you. I don’t want to do anything without you.”

“I’m sorry.” Mina finally managed. “I’m so sorry. I got so scared. I let it get the better of me, but I’m… I don’t ever want to hurt you. I didn’t- I was trying-”

“I know. I know you were. Just stay with me.”

“I will.” Mina promised, feeling herself slowly come to, realizing what was happening; what she was promising. “I will…”

“Good. Cause I want you to be with me.” Jeongyeon held her tighter, the tone of her voice changing as she continued. “Plus, I really didn’t want to give up that shirt.”

Mina chuckled through tears.

“You’re such a dork, Yoo Jeongyeon.” Mina muttered. Why was it so easy to just give in to her? So easy to love her. As if she was made for that one purpose. But she had also broken her. And who was to say she wouldn’t get scared again?

“I know. Please don’t tell the others.” Jeongyeon mumbled. Then she drew back, seeing the expression on Mina’s face. She frowned.

“What’s wrong?”

Mina shook her head, but then sniffled and swallowed. She had to talk about it. “I might need some help sometimes… being reminded that it’s okay to love you. I’m scared still. You know, scared that I’ll hurt you. It’s so scary. I don’t ever want to hurt you, ever.”

“Trust me, I’m never going to let you go again. Not without talking about it.”

“I just keep thinking we shouldn’t do this because I’m just going to mess it up again, but I can’t not love you and… I know it’s selfish of me to ask you to stop me, but-” Mina looked down.
“But you’re a flight risk. I know. I always knew, and I should’ve reacted the first time. I mean I know your heart. I think I know it better than anyone else, and I shouldn’t have let you go. I just couldn’t help feeling - you know, that it was Jiyeon all over again. That maybe you just didn’t love me.”

“I love you so much. So much.”

“I know. I know now that it was completely the opposite reason you left. Just promise me something” Jeongyeon asked, tilting her head a little.


“Don’t fly away without me? Take me with you.”

Mina bit her lip. Just the way Jeongyeon looked at her felt like the world was falling into place somehow.

“Dorky and cheesy.” Mina sniffled. “What a catch you are.”

“Hey, I’m only a dork because you love it.” Jeongyeon argued playfully.

“I love you because you’re a dork.” Mina corrected, her lips trembling as she smiled. Jeongyeon wiped her own cheeks with the back of her hand, sniffling.

“Do you still want the shirt?”

“It’s okay, I can always steal it.” Mina’s lips parted and the smile felt liberating. “I have you.”

Jeongyeon chuckled. “Now who’s cheesy?”

“Still you.” Mina giggled, hiccuping as Jeongyeon’s fingers played with the hairs at her nape. It sent sparks through her.

“I’ll have to live with it then.”

Mina smiled, her breath still rapid from the entire thing. And from the surprising amount of nerves she got, as she leaned in, pressing a careful kiss to Jeongyeon’s cheek.

“I love you, you know?” Mina asked tentatively, nosing her skin.

“I know.” Jeongyeon hummed. Then she drew back, turned and caught Mina’s lips in a kiss of the kind that stole the air from Mina’s lungs.

Yeah; she knew.

…

Dahyun changed the song on her phone and looked at the clock. Almost half an hour since Jeongyeon had shown up, and Dahyun was getting hungry. She hadn’t ended up getting tea like she wanted earlier, and if she was going to study with Tzuyu in just over an hour, she would have to get something to eat. Maybe she should wait another half hour though, if they were still talking. The last thing she wanted was to disturb them. She hadn’t heard anything, but then again, with her
headphones in, they could’ve left the apartment for all she knew. But just as Dahyun decided to wait that half hour though, her stomach growled, and she sighed.

Closing the book she had been reading, Dahyun got up from Sana’s chair and walked across the room. Looked momentarily at the empty bed and thought about texting her. Not that she ever didn’t, but she just kept hesitating these days. Felt mostly like she was bothering Sana, especially with how sad she had been about Momo going home. But she would definitely text her later. Right now was about the insistent growl of her stomach though.

The door creaked slightly when Dahyun opened it, the headphones hanging from one ear. Carefully she peeked out, to see if the coast was clear. It wasn’t. Just not in a bad way. They were sitting on the couch, and a rush went through Dahyun at the sight of Jeongyeon’s hand playing with Mina’s hair.

Good.

Now if only Dahyun could sneak across unnoticed and grab a pack of choco pies. There was no way she was going to start cooking ramen or something. Just four more steps and she would-

“Dahyun?”

Dahyun froze halfway through a step, turning her face to look at Mina. Her eyes were red and her cheeks flushed but there was a smile on her face. Jeongyeon however, had drawn her hand back and was now awkwardly inspecting said hand. Dahyun didn’t comment. The few minutes they had spent waiting for Mina were awkward enough. There was no reason to step in it.

“Sorry,” Dahyun said. “I had to get something to eat. Just pretend I’m not here.”

“It’s your apartment too, Dahyun. You don’t have to tip-toe. We’re all talked out anyways.”

“Oh?” Dahyun asked, hoping it meant what it looked like.

Mina’s shy gummy smile told everything, and Dahyun grinned back at her. Then her eyes fell on Jeongyeon again, the past nights’ words visible in the plea in her eyes. And Dahyun nodded. They were okay.

“I’m uh, heading that way.”

Mina nodded. “When is Tzuyu coming?”

“As an hour or so, I think.” Dahyun said. Then she gave them a little wave and walked into the kitchen. With a little smile, Dahyun drew out her phone, about to text Sana. But instead she just turned the music back on and switched the song. Listened to the distinctive beat of one of her favorite Taeyeon songs and bobbed her head along to the tune. Then she grabbed the kettle, opening it and putting it under the tap, filling it with water while the song played.

As the water slowly heated, Dahyun dug into the cupboard for a cup of ramen and took a pair of chopsticks from the top drawer.

And now the wait.

Biting her lip, Dahyun grabbed the phone from her pocket, allowing herself a moment to get lost in the soft smile in the picture on her lockscreen. How was it even possible to miss someone this much? It seemed like every part of her was longing to see her. Her eardrums seemed to protest at the silence of her absence, and her body longed to be close to her. Not necessarily touching her, but just close
enough to sense her presence. And she couldn’t help but trace her fingertips over the picture on the phone. It was cold. Distant. Just a screen. So instead she unlocked it, determinately swiping through the menu. Found the chat and typed out fast. But she didn’t send it immediately. She couldn’t help but hesitate. Maybe she should call instead? Yet next second, her gaze had moved from the phone to the sleeve of her shirt. That damn stain.

5:14 pm Dahyun: Guess who showed up!

It felt right. To text her. And now she just had to wait. Wait for Sana. Wait for the water to boil. But at least she could prepare the tea in the meantime. Maybe the other two wanted some as well? She should ask. Mina’s old cup of tea had surely gone cold on the coffee table.

Dahyun briefly checked if the message had been read, and then poked her head out of the kitchen.

“Do you want tea?” Dahyun asked.

Mina looked around the back of the couch, and then at Jeongyeon. Jeongyeon’s hand was once more playing with Mina’s hair, but this time she didn’t draw away.

“Sure, if you’re making anyways.” Jeongyeon said. She didn’t look directly at Dahyun, and Dahyun guessed she was still awkward despite Dahyun’s forgiveness. They might have to work on that.

“I am.” Dahyun said. Hesitated and then shook her head. That could wait.

Instead, Dahyun walked back over to the kettle, the water slowly heating. Reminding herself that she needed to check for more shampoo tonight, Dahyun turned over her phone to see if Sana had answered. But there was nothing. So Dahyun just changed the song and opened the ramen. Found cups and tea bags. Lemon.

She had almost finished the cup ramen by the time Sana answered.

5:39 pm Sana-chan: Momo?

Dahyun frowned. Oh, right, she must home now. An additional mental note was made to also go see her, although probably not until she was done with her audition.

5:40 pm Dahyun: No, Jeongyeon!

5:40 pm Dahyun: She came over about an hour ago, and I think they talked everything out.

5:41 pm Dahyun: Pretty sure they’re back together
Dahyun turned the phone on sound and put it down, instead lifting the ramen cup to her mouth to get the last drops of the soup and the little chive bits at the bottom.

The phone buzzed before she was done, and she patted the bottom of the cup to get the last out. Then put it down and picked the phone up again.

5:42 pm Sana-chan: That’s good to hear
5:42 pm Dahyun: Yeah, they seem good.
5:43 pm Dahyun: You busy?

Putting the phone down again, walking up to pour herself another cup of tea, emptying the kettle in the process. She had expected the phone to buzz fast, but it didn’t. In fact Sana didn’t answer until Dahyun was back in her room, head in the book she had been reading before.

6:01 am Sana-chan: Just waiting for the home nurse.
6:02 am Dahyun: You ok? How’s your mom?
6:03 am Sana-chan: No change

Dahyun bit the insides of her cheeks. Something was wrong. It definitely was. But Tzuyu was also coming over soon, and the day had already been weird enough. It would definitely be better just to talk it out immediately.

6:04 pm Dahyun: Can I call?

Dahyun looked at the phone. Waited for the message to go on read. It didn’t. But Dahyun still stared at the screen. Felt her heart slowly sink further into her stomach with every minute that passed.

By the time Sana answered, Dahyun had gone back to her book, waiting for something to happen. She hadn’t even been reading; had just been waiting. For Sana. For Tzuyu.

For anything.

6:23 pm Sana: Not a good time. Talk later?
6:24 pm Dahyun: Sure

And it was silence from there. And suddenly the bedroom was cold and lacked the usual comfort it
provided. The memories it held felt like mockery and she had barely read a single page in the past half hour. She tried texting Chaeyoung instead, just to get some company until Tzuyu got there. But there had been no answer there either. Not that Dahyun blamed her. If it had been Dahyun just getting-. But she couldn’t finish that thought. She just felt jealous. She couldn’t help it. She envied Chaeyoung that she had gotten Momo home while Dahyun was stuck here alone, hating that she wasn’t a bigger person. That she couldn’t help feeling left behind when Chaeyoung didn’t answer her. When Sana didn’t. Even when Tzuyu didn’t show up on time, she couldn’t help feeling left behind a little.

…

Nayeon stretched. Let her arm rest on the back of the couch and heard Momo’s shy chuckle before realizing just what she had done.

“Oh, you like smooth moves like that, huh?” Nayeon teased, reaching purposefully for Momo’s shoulder this time.

Momo didn’t answer. Just smiled shyly and let Nayeon tug her close. And then Chaeyoung was on her other side, crawling sleepily closer until she rested against Nayeon’s side.

“You okay?”

“Just sleepy, the food was so good but I ate too much.” Chaeyoung yawned, adjusting to bury her head in the crook of Nayeon’s neck.

Nayeon hummed and let her hand rest on the youngest’s waist. But just as she was about to coo at her girls being so sleepy and cute, she heard the buzz of a phone coming from Momo’s back pocket.

Momo pressed her lips together. Ignored it and reached for one of the packets of snacks on the coffee table instead. She had bought quite a lot from Japan to bring back for them.

“You can answer her, you know?” Chaeyoung said as Momo quietly opened the green packet.

“I don’t want to be rude.” Momo bit her lip.

“You’re not. Chaeyoung talked to Dahyun during dinner too, remember? And besides, Sana’s probably really lonely, and she’s your best friend. And honestly we’re all worried. You should answer her.” Nayeon assured her. Watched as Chaeyoung held out a hand for the packet.

“Okay… yeah, I will” Momo muttered thankfully, handing over the snacks and grabbing her phone instead.

“What do these say anyways?” Chaeyoung asked, pointing to the characters on the snack packet.

Momo looked up from the phone, the frown on her face softening a bit.


Chaeyoung turned the pack and looked at the characters, trying to make sense of them. “So that squiggle there is *no*?”
“Yeah, it’s hiragana.”

“Hiragana? That’s one of the written languages, right?”

“Yeah, we have three.” Momo said distractedly, typing on her phone. Then she turned off the screen and put the phone on Nayeon’s thigh. Just to have it close, Nayeon guessed. “This one is a phonetic written language, you know syllabic script? For native words. But that one over there is kanji.”

Momo pointed to the last character. Three vertical lines connected at the bottom by a horizontal one.

“Wait, I thought kanji was more like chinese letters, super complicated?”

“Kanji is Chinese lettering. But they’re not all complicated, some are simple like this one. But you’re right, logographic letters are sometimes super hard. Even Japanese people don’t know all kanji, it’s just so many.”

“Logographic?” Nayeon asked, having stumbled over the word.

“Yeah, okay, so your written language and this one,” Momo pointed to the first part, “are syllabic. They represent a syllable. But kanji is logographic, meaning that every symbol represents a word, like a picture. So instead of writing sun with syllables how you’d say it, you draw the symbol for sun.”

“Oh,” Chaeyoung said, finally having opened the pack, “that’s so interesting.”

Momo chuckled shyly, but just as she adjusted to lean on Nayeon more, the phone buzzed, and Momo took it. Sighed as she read the text.

Nayeon wanted to ask. Wanted to make sure Sana was okay, that they hadn’t stolen something from her and left her in the darkness. Honestly, that was the only thing she had been hesitant about in terms of getting Momo home. The two were so tight, and it felt wrong to have Sana all the way over there by herself when the rest of them were here.

“Here.” Chaeyoung said quietly, handing Nayeon one of the mushrooms. It seemed that she had sensed Nayeon’s hesitance. Nayeon took a bite while Momo finished texting. It was a weird mix of a crispy cookie and dark chocolate, but it was honestly really good?

“She’s sad.” Momo said unprompted, reaching for a chocolate mushroom. Chaeyoung handed her one. “She doesn’t want to bother anyone but I can tell that she’s sad. She was showing me pictures of the walk she was on with her dad earlier, but there wasn’t a single silly selca. And that’s usually a sign that she’s been crying because then her cheeks puff and she doesn’t take selcas.”

“You really know her…” Nayeon said in awe. Ate the rest of the chocolate mushroom.

“I do. I just hope she reaches out to Dahyun even if she can’t reach out to me.” Momo sighed.

“Why can’t she ask you for help?” Chaeyoung asked, confusion in her voice.

“She just sent me back here, she’s afraid I’ll feel guilty for leaving her.” Momo explained. “It’s okay, I’ll give her a few days, but honestly, I just hope she figures it out soon.”

“Figures out what?”

“That her home is here, with me and Dahyun and all of you.” Momo pressed her lips together and put the phone in her back pocket.
“I hope so too.” Chaeyoung said.

Momo hummed, leaning against Nayeon once more. Nuzzled into her and sighed. Nayeon couldn’t help but fall for the girl even more just from that. Fell for her more and more every day. Every minute they spent together.

“Momo?” Nayeon asked.

“Hm?” Momo drew back a little to look up at the oldest.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” Momo asked, obviously confused.

“Saying yes when we asked you out.” Nayeon bit her lip. “Coming home to us now?”

“Oh…” Momo gave an awkward chuckle at the sudden confession. Her cheeks reddened visibly and she looked over at Chaeyoung.

“Is it still okay to kiss you when I want?”

“Of course.” Chaeyoung said. “Both of us, any of us, neither. Whatever you want.”

“Good, because I do want… you know, to kiss.” Momo mumbled shyly.

Chaeyoung chuckled. “Good, because we’ve missed that part of having you around.”

“Yeah?” Momo looked up at Nayeon again.

Nayeon nodded. Cupped Momo’s cheek and leaned in, feeling Momo’s giggly breath on her lips. But she didn’t kiss Momo. Just held her and waited for the girl to close the distance. She had missed so much what it felt like to be kissed by Momo, and couldn’t help it. Couldn’t help how much she loved it when Momo pushed herself up by a hand on Nayeon’s thigh, kissing her full on the lips.

To think that there was a time where she had been a panicked mess at the thought of how Momo would feel under Nayeon’s touch; how it would be to have her close like this. Where she hadn’t allowed herself to love this girl.

Their Momo.

…

Dahyun turned onto her back. Then onto her side. Heard a bump. Sat up. And for a split-second Dahyun was so sure that it was Sana rummaging in the kitchen. That she was out there and had stumbled and bumped into the kitchen counter. Until she remembered. It couldn’t be Sana. But someone was rummaging in the kitchen, definitely not Mina, but someone. Jeongyeon? Probably.

Dahyun put on her glasses and checked her phone. 2:32 am. Why would she be up that late? Nevermind. She would have to talk to Jeongyeon eventually of course, but honestly, this time of the night was suboptimal. For a moment Dahyun tried merely turning onto her side, but her bladder had other plans, and by the time she got out from the bathroom, she was so awake that she might as well go check.
Just as she had expected, it was Jeongyeon who had woken her. She was sitting in the kitchen in a hoodie and checkered boxers. Had Mina’s shark mug between her hands. The entire kitchen smelled like raspberry tea.

“Can’t sleep?” Dahyun asked, leaning against the jamb.

Jeongyeon looked up, her glasses halfway down her nose and her hair tousled. She shook her head. “You?”

“You woke me.” Dahyun shrugged and pushed herself off the jamb. Walked over and checked the kettle. It was still warm enough.

“Sorry. I couldn’t work that thing.” Jeongyeon gestured at the kettle.

Dahyun grabbed a cup and a tea bag from the box. “You and Sana could make a great match. Her problem is the toaster. I honestly don’t know why my kitchen supplies don’t work for other people.”

“In my case, it’s probably karma.” Jeongyeon sighed as Dahyun sat down opposite her, lifting and lowering the tea bag in the hot water.

“For what?”

“Being a bitch.” Jeongyeon stared into the mug.

“I thought that was me.” Dahyun raised an eyebrow and took a sip.

“I’m sorry.” Jeongyeon cringed.

“You’re forgiven.” Dahyun kicked her leg under the table playfully. A smile threatened to break across Jeongyeon’s face, but it didn’t. But for now it was enough to know that it might.

“You can’t just forgive me like that, I was horrible. I took all my shit out on you just because I was afraid of facing it.”

“If I want to forgive you I will.” Dahyun shrugged, sipping from her tea. “Don’t you tell me what to do and not to do, Yoo Jeongyeon. You were hurt and angry, yeah, and you took it out on someone who didn’t deserve it instead of dealing. But you owned up in the end.”

Dahyun took another gulp of the tea. She still preferred lemon, but as they were out as of this afternoon and Dahyun hadn’t had the chance to buy more, this would have to do. Jeongyeon mumbled something and drank from her tea as well.

“Although, say that I had a condition for my forgiveness, would you take it?”

“Not if it involves me doing one of your stupid ass dances. Then I’d rather not.”

Dahyun raised an eyebrow but Jeongyeon just stared back. Stood firm on this.

Dahyun shrugged. “It’s not that.”

“Then fine.” Jeongyeon softened visibly. “What is it?”

“I need advice.” Dahyun clenched around the eeyore mug.

“Yeah, of course.” Jeongyeon sat up straighter.
“Sana is in Japan.”

“Yes?” Jeongyeon took another sip of tea.

“Indefinitely.”

Jeongyeon put the shark mug down, brows knotted. “Wait, why?”

“Her mom is sick. She’s been hospitalized for the majority of the time Sana has been there so far. Just got home yesterday. I mean I get it, she’s a really good person for staying and I wouldn’t have it any other way but—” Dahyun trailed off.

“But?”

“It was so easy when she was here. And this- this distance, not knowing when I’ll see her again. It’s so hard, especially on her, I think. And I think she might be trying to make it easier in case we don’t make it. Or maybe she’s already decided we aren’t going to. I don’t know. It’s really very hot and cold right now. She’s been really distant today, and you know that miserable excuse of a memory wall out in the living room?”

Jeongyeon nodded, a small smile playing on her lips.

“It was kind of an attempt to make it more likely that she’d get home and fill all those holes.”

“And you don’t know how to ask her in case she actually is trying to spare you?” Jeongyeon concluded. “But you don’t want to be spared?”

“I want to be with her, even if it’s really hard. But it seems like she’s drawing away, especially today. I’m just not good with relationships, Jeongyeon. I haven’t ever been in one until two months ago.” Dahyun sighed.

“Well, how long you’ve been in a relationship doesn’t say anything about how good you are at being in one. Look at how well I’ve been handling things.” Jeongyeon said.

“I just don’t know what to do here? Do I just keep trying to cheer her on or do I accept that she’s pulling back?”

“In my experience… If you want to be with her, let her know, and if you feel like she’s pulling back then at least get a reason from her. If she needs space, give it to her, and if she’s afraid, let her know that you’re there for her. And if, and I very highly doubt this but if she at some point doesn’t want what you have, then that’s fair. You can’t change that. But if she does, then you hang onto her with all that you have. Honestly, though, I think you might be overthinking this. I mean Momo went home today, right? So she’s probably just really sad about that, considering how they’ve never really been apart. At least from what Momo has told me. And just in general, long distance is hard as hell, it takes a lot of work and finding that balance is… it’s messy.”

“You’ve tried it?”

“No, thankfully I haven’t. But Nayeon has. In our senior year, her girlfriend moved away three months into their relationship. They made it a few months after that, but they weren’t really mature about it, any of them. Nayeon was clingy and Jungwha got really jealous of me - you know, of Nayeon and I. Even though there wasn’t anything there. I guess technically it wasn’t the distance that broke them, but it was hard nonetheless. Really hard.”

Dahyun nodded and emptied the tea cup. Jeongyeon emptied hers too.
“Want another cup?” Jeongyeon asked. Dahyun nodded.

“I just miss her so much, it’s crazy. I can’t imagine my life without her. She just barged in here and changed everything, and I hate that I can’t live without her now.”

“You can if you have to. Live without her I mean.” Jeongyeon noted as she poured more water into the kettle and turned it on, successfully this time. Found new teabags and threw the used ones out.

“But I don’t want to.” Dahyun pressed her lips together tight.

“That’s different.” Jeongyeon sat back down, eyeing the kettle.

“I guess.”

“Dahyun, this may sound hypocritical coming from the idiot who showed up begging for her love to take her back, but you can always live without them. It might be shit but you can. You learn to survive.”

“Says you.”

“I know, shut up.” Jeongyeon rolled her eyes.

“I still can’t believe you actually did that, showed up like that. What the heck happened?”

“Nayeon happened.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“Of course. Damn, I should’ve called her when I threatened to.”

“No you shouldn’t. You did the right thing, even if I didn’t.” Jeongyeon reached across the table, opening her palm.

Dahyun gave a nervous chuckle but took her hand nonetheless. It felt weird. They didn’t normally do these things. Still, there was something healing about it.

“I’m sorry, Dahyun.”

“You’re okay.”

Jeongyeon snorted. “That’s my line.”

“I know. You’re okay.”

“I am.” Jeongyeon said. Released Dahyun’s hand and got up to get the kettle, now boiling happily.

They took another twenty minutes to drink the second cup.

...

“Goodnight, Dahyun. Try to sleep some more, okay?” Jeongyeon said, a hand on the door to Mina’s bedroom.
“I always try.” Dahyun sent her a tired grin, reaching for the black hair-tie lazily wrapped around the hair. It fell at a weird angle and Dahyun shook her head to correct it.

“Here.” Jeongyeon said, reaching up to correct it. And without really realizing it, she let her hand rest on the top of Dahyun’s head a little longer. But only a little.

Dahyun didn’t seem to take notice. She just adjusted her glasses and gave Jeongyeon a little wave before walking into her room. Jeongyeon watched for a second as the door closed. There was no need for texts tonight. They were home - both of them.

With a stretch of the neck, Jeongyeon opened the door to Mina’s bedroom, sneaking in as quietly as she could. The room was tiny and the bed took up most of the far end now that Mina was living here. When it had been Dahyun’s room, there had just been a single bed and it had fit a desk too. But the part of Jeongyeon that got very warm at night in the summers was secretly happy that Mina hadn’t opted for that bed even though she had technically been single when she moved in.

Doing her best to navigate in the darkness, Jeongyeon felt around for the edge of the bed. Found it and crawled onto it, hoping she had aimed far enough to the right to take her side. She hadn’t. Her hand collided with a thigh and Mina jolted.

“Sorry.” Jeongyeon winced. She had really tried not to wake her.

“It’s okay, I wasn’t sleeping.” Mina said quietly.

“Why not?” Jeongyeon asked, finally managing to find the head of the bed, settling under the covers.

“I woke and you weren’t there and I don’t know. I started thinking.” Mina sighed. Then she turned over to face Jeongyeon, curling the sheets slightly in the process.

“About what?” Jeongyeon asked, shifting slightly, feeling her way in the darkness until she found Mina’s waist.

“Us.” Mina said. “I was thinking about us. Me.”

“Bad thoughts?” Jeongyeon asked, tugging slightly at Mina.

“Yeah.” Mina exhaled, scooting closer until Jeongyeon could wrap her arms around her. “I’m sorry.”

“I know.”

“I’m so sorry…” Mina’s breath grew shallower.

“Shh, it’s okay, you don’t have to apologize.” Jeongyeon tried, but Mina didn’t seem to hear.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m- I’m sorry.” Mina’s voice rose in pitch and Jeongyeon felt how she started to shake. How long had she been lying here, alone with her thoughts? Why hadn’t she gotten up? Maybe she had thought that they deserved time, the two of them without her. But Jeongyeon wouldn’t have minded. Not at all. And Mina was still apologizing.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” Mina gasped. Sounded like a child who had been desperately cornered and now just wanted to make everything better immediately. “S-sorry. I’m-”

“Shh, it’s okay, I forgave you. We’re okay.” Jeongyeon hushed, tugging Mina close. Felt the tears against her neck and pressed her lips together. It hurt that she was hurting. Hurt that she beat herself up like this. Jeongyeon knew that Mina blamed herself much more than Jeongyeon did. But it was
never malicious intent. It was just a screw-up, on more than one person’s behalf. A situation that got out of control, and even Jeongyeon couldn’t see herself free of blame. She had been one of the contributors to Jihyo breaking like that.

“I shouldn’t even be allowed to be happy like this, I- I’m so sorry.”

“Hey. Hey, listen to me.” Jeongyeon drew back enough to look down at her in the darkness, though it was so close that Jeongyeon could barely make out her silhouette. But it was enough that Jeongyeon could reach around, placing her palm over Mina’s ribs.

Mina inhaled shakily, leaning back a little to let Jeongyeon a better angle. And there was a part of Jeongyeon that swore she could feel the characters marked in black under the shirt.

“You’re not perfect, Mina. Remember? You’re allowed to screw up, it doesn’t mean you don’t get to be happy for the rest of your life. You made amends, and you’re a good person, Mina. You’re a good person! To me, you’re the best person, and I know you won’t listen to that but trust me; I’ve met plenty of shitty people to know that you’re not one of them. We’re better together than apart, Minari. It’s supposed to be like this. You and me. It’s right, this way. It’s how I want to live.”

“... Sorry.” Mina sniffled.

“Mina, if you don’t stop apologizing right now, I will tickle you.” Jeongyeon clicked her tongue.

“I came out to my parents.”

Okay, that was not the response Jeongyeon had expected from that.

“You… you did?”

Mina hummed as confirmation, creeping closer. “Last week. Except now I think I should’ve waited.”

“Why?” Jeongyeon asked with a frown, moving her hand down from Mina’s ribs to her hip. Played with the hem of Mina’s t-shirt. Jeongyeon’s t-shirt.

“Because now I have to explain how we broke up and then got back together and my mom is going to use it as a reason not to like you. Not that she isn’t a nice person, but this whole… gay thing, is a bit of a pill for her.” Mina explained quietly.

Jeongyeon nodded and adjusted the covers before moving her arm back under it. Felt the bare skin of Mina’s hipbone under her fingertips. It wasn’t meant as enticing. It was just habit, to have her close like that.

“I don’t know how to tell them.” Mina sighed, reaching up to wipe her cheeks. Then she dried the hand in the piece of sheet between them and cupped Jeongyeon’s face.

“Do you want to practice it?” Jeongyeon offered.

“I… was thinking maybe- I mean if you want?”


“I think if I’m going to get past all this guilt and get on with my life, starting by properly introducing you as my girlfriend is a good step.” Mina sighed. “If you still- I mean we haven’t exactly talked about-”

“I’m yours. Every part of me.” Jeongyeon said firmly. “And I’m actually really proud that you want
me there.”

“Why?”

“Well, just minutes ago you were apologizing and saying you didn’t deserve me. And there’s nothing I want more than to be everything you deserve.”

“God, I forgot how mushy you are when no-one else is around.” Mina hiccuped.

Jeongyeon tutted and turned her head to kiss the edge of Mina’s palm.

“It’s late. And if I’m going to be introduced as miss Myoui Mina’s girlfriend, I’d rather be so without dark circles under my eyes. So go to sleep please.”

“Okay.” Mina said, calm finally in her voice, though it was still a little hoarse. Then she sighed heavily and turned to face away from Jeongyeon, pulling at the older girl’s arm as if she was covering herself with a blanket.

“I’m-”

“I will tickle.” Jeongyeon reminded her.

“I wasn’t going to apologize.” Mina said quietly. “I was going to say I’m glad you’re here.”

Jeongyeon hummed. “Me too, and I’m glad Nayeon doesn’t give a shit about my personal space.”

“Yeah, remind me to send her flowers.” Mina mumbled.

“Please don’t, I will never hear the end of it.” Jeongyeon begged.

“Mm, you’re right perhaps.” Mina chuckled, obviously falling asleep.

Jeongyeon merely hummed and buried her nose in the soft black hair.

…”

Had she considered the current scenario a month ago, three months ago, six months ago, Jihyo might have been braver. Might’ve kissed Tzuyu sooner. Might’ve stepped up and not screwed up. But really, there was no point in worrying about that now. What’s done was done, and there wasn’t anything she could do about it.

The basement was empty except for the two of them, Tzuyu sitting on the folding table while Jihyo stared into the depths of the washing machine. Watched as Tzuyu’s clothes spun around in there.

“You’re brooding again.” Tzuyu said calmly.

Jihyo sighed. Watched as a sweater was pushed against the glass. Then she mumbled something and turned to face Tzuyu fully. The younger girl waved her closer, hopping down from the table to lean against it instead.

Jihyo couldn’t not go to her. Couldn’t help but trust the younger girl with all that she was. It seemed, that as soon as she had taken the final step, as soon as she had chosen to love Tzuyu, there hadn’t
been a single speck of doubt in her mind that this was where she wanted her path to lead from here. Anywhere into the unknown, as long as it was with her.

Jihyo closed the distance between them and wrapped her arms around Tzuyu’s neck. Looked up at her, feeling Tzuyu’s arms around her waist.

“I’m worried that you might think I’m just settling for you.” Jihyo said truthfully. It was easier than she had expected to say it. But it had always been easier than expected with Tzuyu, talking about the hard things.

“Are you settling?” Tzuyu asked neutrally.

Jihyo smiled. The apparentness of her was so intriguing and refreshing. A fresh breeze on a stuffy summer day.

“In no way.” Jihyo said firmly, wrapping her arms tighter around Tzuyu’s neck, lifting slightly off her heels to get closer. She could feel Tzuyu’s breath on her lip. “You’re not a rebound, and I’m not settling. You’re… you’re what I’ve been fighting for.”

Tzuyu smiled. “Good, then I have nothing to worry about. Not that I ever did. I know your history with Mina, and it’s okay. You’re not the first person on the planet to have a first love that doesn’t work out.”

“How come you know so much?” Jihyo asked, in awe of the younger girl. “You know when people talk about being wise beyond their years, it’s you they’re talking about.”

“I don’t know that much, actually.” Tzuyu smiled and placed a chaste kiss on Jihyo’s lips. “I just know that I love you.” Another kiss. “And I trust you.”

“I love you too, Chou-Tzu.” Jihyo said with as much calm in her voice as she could muster, even if she couldn’t prevent her voice from breaking slightly from the joy that tugged at her stomach.

“I’m glad. That’s the only thing I ever feared.”

“What? That I don’t love you?” Jihyo drew back a bit to examine Tzuyu’s face.

“No. That you wouldn’t let yourself love anyone again.” Tzuyu said, pouting until Jihyo leaned back in. Let Tzuyu kiss freckle on the tip of Jihyo’s nose, causing a laugh to bubble all the way from Jihyo’s stomach, up through her throat before it fell over the other girl’s lips. Tzuyu just smiled and stroked a hair from Jihyo’s forehead.

“Is it weird that this might be my favorite thing in the world?” Tzuyu asked with a scrunch of the nose.

“What? My nose freckle?” Jihyo looked at her.

“Well, that too, but I mean, just hanging around doing the trivial stuff with you. Laundry isn’t that bad when I can pass the time with you, when I can talk with you while we fold clothes. I don’t know why I would spend my entire life searching for the big adventures, when there’s you, right here.” Her hands folded behind Jihyo’s back, and Jihyo’s cheeks hurt from smiling.

“You’re too good for me.” Jihyo whispered happily.
“I’m exactly right for you, I think. If I may be so bold.”

“Not at all. I think you’re right. You’re just right.” Jihyo bit her lip, and then drew back, lowering her arms until they rested calmly on Tzuyu’s shoulders. “Did you talk to Dahyun other than studies yesterday?”

“A bit. She wasn’t focusing well for the first half hour, kept checking her phone. She said something about Sana being sad tonight, but she didn’t elaborate.”

“It must be so hard.” Jihyo sighed, adjusting to lean her head against Tzuyu’s chest.

“For Dahyun?” Tzuyu asked, calmly stroking her thumb over the small of Jihyo’s back.

“For both of them, but yeah, for Dahyun too. I just really want to be there for Dahyun, but I don’t want to cling or seem like she doesn’t have a choice.” Jihyo sighed. Honestly she had been thinking about it ever since Jeongyeon had left the apartment yesterday.

“You could tell her that?” Tzuyu asked. “That you want to help, if she will let you?”

Jihyo nodded. “Maybe I should. Yeah, I think I will.”

Tzuyu smiled. And Jihyo nosed the crook of her neck.

It was almost there, their happy end. They had found each other somehow, and even Dahyun was doing so much better now than she had since the accident. But Sana... Sana had come into their lives like a storm of soap bubbles and sunshine and expanded the limits of what it meant to laugh and love. And now that she wasn’t, it all seemed so empty even if everything else was fine. She was missing somehow, despite having only been there for a few months. Her absence just made it all a little less okay. But maybe that was just how it felt, being a family.

…

Dahyun stared at her phone. Tried not to check her messages. Sighed and turned it face down.

Wrapping the blanket tighter around herself, she listened to the rain outside the window and tried to read. Just because it was summer courses, it didn’t mean there was any excuse for doing the bare minimum work. And besides, it was a necessary distraction from the silence from Sana’s side for the days. It wasn’t like she expected Sana to be online all the time, but it was still discouraging that they hadn’t managed to get a proper conversation going for three days. Ever since Momo had gone home.

11:11 am Dahyun: Some of the others are coming over tomorrow, if you want, we can facetime while they’re here so you can see them? They miss you a lot.

11:14 am Sana-chan: It’s okay I have to go with my mom to the hospital tomorrow for a check-up

11:14 am Sana-chan: Sorry

11:15 am Dahyun: No it’s okay, I just wanted to offer. I hope you get good news tomorrow.

11:15 am Dahyun: We can call now? I miss you too, not just the others. I miss you a lot actually.
Dahyun closed the chat with a sigh. There was still so long until nighttime and Sana hadn’t specified. Honestly, the messages they had exchanged in the past few days had done nothing to calm the fear that Sana was pulling back. Somehow it seemed like she had plummeted completely after Momo left.

“Dahyun?” Mina’s voice pulled her from her mind.

Dahyun placed a finger on the part she had reached in the book. Then she looked up, seeing Mina standing in the door, arms crossed as she leaned on the jamb.

“Hey, what’s up?” Dahyun turned in the chair and waited as Mina settled on the edge of the bed. She looked down at her folded hands for a moment and then nodded to herself. Looked up.

“When is the deadline for changing your major?”

“I still have a few weeks.” Dahyun pressed her lips together, a knot in her stomach at the sudden confrontation with the matter. What was this all of a sudden?

Mina nodded again and swallowed before looking up at Dahyun. Her eyes threatened to waver. Was she nervous? “You know what my father does for a living, right?”

“He’s a doctor, right?” Dahyun frowned.

“He’s… not exactly just a doctor. He’s also the chairman of the board of directors at the university hospital.” Mina said carefully.

“The…” Dahyun choked slightly on the world, mouth falling slightly ajar. “So he’s… he basically owns the place?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh.” Dahyun breathed. She knew Mina was well off, but this was a bit more than just being the doctor’s daughter. If her dad was really the chairman then, “Why do you live in a hole like this apartment then? Why did you live so far out before?”

“I don’t take his offers to pay. Never have. I want to make my own money, and he respects that.” Mina said. “He helped me find the apartment I had before, but that was my decision to move that far away. That’s the first time I’ve ever asked him a favor.”

“Oh… Well. I’m still not sure I follow?”

Mina looked down at her hands again. “I asked him advice a few days ago when I was there. Asked him for another favor.”

Dahyun didn’t comment, but waited for Mina to elaborate. Wasn’t a hundred percent sure where Mina was going but Dahyun’s mind was spiralling already. Doctors. Favors. What exactly had Mina done?

“There’s a program at the hospital for treatment of peripheral nerve damage. I asked him when we
visited my parents a few days ago, and he said he would look into it, from what I could describe. And he got back to me just now. He told me, that in your case, with the right physiotherapy combined with stimulation from lasers or TENS, you stand a good chance of being regaining up to ninety five percent painless function in your hand again.”

Dahyun looked down at the scar, rubbing her thumb distractedly over it. It hurt.

“That’s very kind of him to have looked at my case.” Dahyun said quietly. “But there’s no way I can afford that. I’m still on an interest freeze just to pay off the surgery and therapy bills. I looked into it after the first surgery, with TENS and that, but it’s so expensive, and there’s no way-”

“You don’t have to think about the money.” Mina said. “I told him how much you’ve done for me since we’ve been friends, and what happened to you. Then, when he asked what the exact issue was, and I showed him that video on youtube of you playing Greig. He was so impressed. And his family comes from a family of music, he knows talent when he sees it. He agreed that it would be an honorable way to use some of my funds.”

“Wait, you-” Dahyun’s voice caught.

“Even though I wouldn’t allow him to pay for my living, he still set the money aside.” Mina explained.

“Mina,” Dahyun could barely get a word out. It was too much. “I can’t take the offer.”

“You can.” Mina reached over and grabbed her hand, turning the scar up for both of them to see, naked, uncovered, untouched. Dahyun could cry. “You’re can to take this offer and stay in your major and follow your dream. I chose to change mine instead of chasing it fearlessly. I’m begging you, Dahyun. Choose your dream. Chase it with every opportunity this might give you.”

Dahyun searched Mina’s eyes, her heart pounding hard against her ribs and her stomach threatening to reveal the contents of her dinner.

“Mina-”

“Take the offer, Dahyun.” Mina pleaded. “I want you to be able to play piano, and I’m fortunate enough to enable it.”

“But I can’t ever repay you.” Dahyun croaked.

“You paid up front when you forced your way through my walls and took me in. And it’s not just the past weeks, you’ve been so special to me and I doubt you ever even noticed how much I love and appreciate you. I want to help you.” Mina soothed the scar with her thumb. “Please let me?”

Dahyun closed her eyes, her breath shallow and shaky. The idea that she could one day stretch out her fingers and touch both C’s at once without feeling that jolt of pain was threatening to make her entire world turn upside down. But Mina was right there holding her through it all. Held her as the hope and fear spread through her body and soul.

Dahyun felt the tears that spilled over and ran down her cheeks, gathering under her chin and falling into her lap. And then she nodded.

“Okay.”
Dahyun stared out of the window. Darkness had long fallen, yet she could find no calm. It was late. And Sana hadn’t called. Hadn’t contacted her. But Dahyun had been a mess for hours and she knew that she couldn’t sleep until she had gotten to tell this to Sana.

“Okay, Kim Dahyun. Get it together.” Dahyun said to herself, pushing herself away from the window and grabbing her phone.

11:53 pm Dahyun: Are you still up? I need to tell you something really important.

She stared for a moment at the last conversation, or rather the complete lack of proper conversation.

Then the screen changed, and automatically Dahyun pressed the green button, barely registering that it said *Sana-chan*. Or that it was video. So when Sana’s face showed up on the screen, Dahyun’s stomach did a backflip. Sana’s eyes searched Dahyun’s face through the screen, concern evident on her face. Her roots were so long now, her hair hanging down either side of her face.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m-” Dahyun’s voice caught in her throat.

“Wait, your face is all puffy,” Sana continued, moving closer to the screen.

“Oh.” Dahyun felt her cheek and chuckled. “Well, I’ve been crying, that’s probably why.”

“Crying? Dahyun, what’s going on?” Sana asked loudly, and Dahyun turned down the volume, pressing her lips tightly together.

“Shh, just a moment, Jeongyeon and Mina are asleep. Let me just go outside then I’ll explain all of it.” Dahyun whispered.

Sana nodded, her eyes still searching Dahyun’s face worriedly.

Okay, just… Dahyun, you’re worrying me.”

“It’s not bad, I promise. It’s really good, actually.” Dahyun hurriedly said as worry spread across Sana’s face. Then she grabbed the keys from the desk and hurried out of the room and out of the apartment, with no worry that she was in pyjamas and bunny slippers.

As fast as she could with a bunny on each foot, Dahyun hurried down stairs and out of the door, pausing on the stairs. Yet as soon as she had sat down on the steps, Sana spoke, a hint of a whine in her voice.

“It’s so dark, I can barely see you.”

“Oh, just a second then.” Dahyun got back up, looking around for an alternative solution. In the end, she settled for a lamppost nearby, walking over to stand under it “Better?”

“Yeah.” Sana smiled softly. Dahyun’s stomach jolted, and she smiled back widely. She had missed that smile more than she had imagined. Was her mood getting better? Maybe it hadn’t been so bad, really. Maybe it had just been something Dahyun had imagined.

“So, my big news.” Dahyun smiled and leaned against the lamp post.
“Oh?” Sana shuffled, on what seemed to be her bed. Dahyun took a moment to look around Sana, noticing a lot of pink and a lot of posters. Her childhood bedroom? “Dahyun?”

“Right, yes!” Dahyun grinned, but felt her throat close up as she tried to speak again. She cleared her throat, but it was still shaking when she spoke. “Well, the thing is. You know my hand, right?”

“I’ve met it.” Sana said, teasing in her voice.

Dahyun chuckled hoarsely. How was it possible to have missed someone this much? It was as if her world was getting infinitely better just from having Sana there. “Well… I’m gonna get my hand fixed. I-. I still don’t really understand; I’m still trying to wrap my head around it. But I’m gonna get it fixed, at least almost all the way, or I mean… they’ll try to fix it. And I won’t even have to pay.”

“Wh- How-… You’re getting it fixed?” Sana looked completely lost.

Dahyun considered just saying it was Mina’s doing, but in the end she ended up explaining all about Mina’s family and how it was supposed to work, with the consultations and treatment plans. How she would go there soon so they could examine the nerve. And Sana’s eyes shone more and more with every minute. It made the whole thing more real somehow; to tell it to Sana.

When Dahyun was done, her cheeks were hurting from smiling and she had been crying for a good five minutes, her heart racing happily in her chest at the thought of how the ivory keys would feel under her fingertips.

“That’s so amazing… I’m so happy for you. Who knew Mina was loaded though?”

“I knew she had money. She’s offered to help before, but I just never really think about it because all she ever wears of clothes is that old plaid shirt, and she waddles more than struts. But I mean when she wants, she can be so elegant. At least until she starts doing her wriggly giggles.”

Sana chuckled.

“You seem to be in a good mood as well.” Dahyun commented, glancing up at the stars for a moment.

“I… I just missed you so much?” Sana whispered. “I didn’t want to bother you because I didn’t want to bring down the mood, because honestly… I’ve just been so sad since Momo left, even if my mom is doing really well. I just forgot in all this, that one of the reasons I’m so happy around you, is because you make me happy. And- and I’m sorry.”

“Oh…” Dahyun pressed her lips together and sat down on the curb against the lamppost. “Sana, it’s okay to be sad and lonely, you don’t have to be happy around me.”

Sana looked away for a moment, then shrugged lightly, her smile fading. “I just don’t want to be sad. You make me happy and I want to make you happy, but I also just miss you like crazy. I want to go home…”

“You’re doing what’s necessary right now, and I’m proud of you.” Dahyun tried, fearing that the mood might be going away. But next second Sana’s lips spread in the warmest, softest smile - like the sun warming on a spring day. Exactly how Sana had always been to Dahyun.

“So I know it’s late, but,” Sana said shyly, biting her lip, “do you want to see my room? I know I promised you I’d show you weeks ago, but that was before and-”
“I’d love to see your room.” Dahyun smiled, her cheeks hurting still from before. How she had missed this. “I can kind of see the posters behind you but they’re a bit blurry, but… Wait. Sana, is that Babymetal?”

Dahyun squinted at the screen, looking past Sana.

Sana gave a quiet chuckle and nodded. “Momo and I went to a show, just for fun, and we got that poster and got it signed and everything.”

“Now that’s a side of you I had never expected.” Dahyun said, trying not to laugh too hard at the image of Momo and Sana at a Babymetal concert.

“It was fun to try! I think I have an album somewhere too.”

Dahyun watched as Sana turned the camera, allowing Dahyun a brief view of a room so stuffed it was surprised that Sana herself could fit in there. Then the camera landed on a shelf full of love novels and albums and Sana’s hand appeared, pulling out the Babymetal album. Dahyun snorted and Sana giggled.

“We really hadn’t planned on going but one of Hana’s crazy friends got us tickets and it was right before we were to leave for Korea so we wanted to do something together, all of us. It was so much fun, honestly. I had a major crush on that one,” Sana told enthusiastically, pointing at one of the girls on the cover of the album, “I swear she was flirting with me from the stage.”

“Oh, definitely. You stand out in any crowd.” Dahyun grinned, Someone walked by, but other than a frown at Dahyun’s bunny slippers, he didn’t comment. Just walked along the road.

“Smooth.” Sana praised Dahyun’s flirting. Then she went back to showing more albums, matching them to the posters stuck to every free surface on her walls. Mostly korean groups but also a few japanese ones and a few american singers too.

As more and more of Sana’s room was revealed to Dahyun, it occurred to her why Sana had been so fascinated with how organized Jihyo had been about her paraphernalia. It was the complete opposite of Sana’s room. There was nothing organized about any part of it. There were shelves full of stuff and posters on every inch of space. Clutter no matter where Dahyun looked, and to top it off, an abundance of plushies on the bed so big it could be matched only by Momo’s collection. Sana casually pointed out a light blue alpaca and a purple unicorn as her favorites.

As the ‘tour’ progressed, Sana’s shelves also revealed an abundance of mangas, DVDs and perfume as well little figurines and souvenirs from the trips she had taken, Sana telling about at least half of them.

The sheer amount of stuff in her room made Dahyun sure that Sana was the type who had never saved up for anything, but spent her money the moment she got it. It was probably just a side effect of how much she loved. It seemed she was the kind who couldn’t help but collect something that brought her joy. Not that Dahyun didn’t love things. But her love was concentrated on very few subjects, whereas Sana was generous and widespread and saw the charm in everything.

Sana ended up spending most of an hour telling about all the things, and Dahyun listened in constant awe. Wished Sana would keep talking forever. She had just missed that voice so much. Missed how Sana could make Dahyun interested in every little story just because of how happy she was when telling about it. Missed how her heart did a little jump whenever Sana giggled.
When she was done telling about the stuff on her walls and shelves, Sana even showed Dahyun her high school uniform, a glint in her eyes and a chuckle under her breath when Dahyun muttered something about how cute the sailor style was.

After this, Sana finally settled back on the bed, looking around to see if there was anything she had missed, then looked at Dahyun and smiled shyly. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Am I not allowed to look at my girlfriend like she’s the most adorable thing on the planet or what?” Dahyun feigned annoyance but it broke as Sana broke into a fit of laughter.

“You’re the biggest nerd on the planet.” She said and shook her head.

“I guess you have a type then.” Dahyun shrugged and yawned.

Sana’s expression changed. “Wait, what time is it?”

“I don’t know, honestly.” Dahyun said.

Sana reached and pressed the screen of the phone. Her brows furrowed.

“Oh. Dahyunnie, you should sleep.”

“No way.” Dahyun protested with a pout. “No way, I want to stay here.”

“You’re such a baby. And you look ridiculous with that pout.” Sana chuckled.

“I think ‘cute’ is the word you’re looking for, actually.” Dahyun insisted.

“I think ‘ridiculous’ is fitting.” Sana said happily and stuck her tongue out.

Dahyun laughed, and looked up at the stars, glinting down at her. Remembered a shirt. And when she looked at Sana again, there were stars in her eyes.

“I love you.” Dahyun said, unable to hold it back any longer.

But Sana didn’t react. Just stared, wide-eyed and fearful, her mouth slightly ajar. When she finally spoke, it was with fear in her voice.

“You what?”

Dahyun considered denying it. Considered laughing it off. But she just swallowed hard and looked directly at Sana. “... I-I love you.”

”Oh.. oh, I’m-” Sana’s throat caught audibly and she looked away.

Dahyun couldn’t speak. She hadn’t expected Sana to say it back - that wasn’t why she had said it. She had said it because in that moment she had nothing to hold her back.

She had felt it before, that soaring in her chest that made her want to say it; the night before Sana left, when she left Dahyun in the airport; when she had offered to wait to combine the last drawer. But she hadn’t known what it was until about a week ago. But it seemed like everything had gotten worse since Dahyun had moved into Sana’s room. For the past two hours, however, it had all been so easy, and Dahyun’s fears had retreated with every laugh. Now they hit her like waves of confusion and hurt, as Sana bit her lip.

And then she cried. Broke down right in front of Dahyun’s eyes, with shoulders shaking and her hair
falling in front of her eyes. Sobbing in a way that broke Dahyun’s heart.

“I’m sorry, I’m- I don’t mean to be so sad and cry so much, I’m so sorry. I miss you so much and I’m so sorry. I think- I think I need to figure all this out.”

“Figure all of what out? Sana, I don’t understand.”

“I can’t keep feeling like this, Dahyun. It h-hurts. Hurts so much.”

Dahyun’s heart felt like lead in her stomach. Maybe she shouldn’t have said it. She should’ve waited until Sana was home. Because this was so hard to watch. Hard to be so helpless when she was this sad.

“I’m sorry. I… I have to go.” Sana still shook, her face wet with tears when she looked back up.

Dahyun wanted nothing more than to get on the next plane to Japan and hold her close. Screw classes, screw responsibilities, Dahyun just had to hold her; take this pain away somehow. But she couldn’t and all she could do was apologize.

“Please, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have-“

“You did nothing wrong.. please, Dahyun, I have to go. I’m sorry.”

Sana hung up.

Dahyun stared at the phone. Was honestly not sure what had just happened. But something had. Something that made her heart hurt and made tears fall down her cheeks without Dahyun even really realizing it. But there was nothing to do now, right? And she couldn’t just sit here. Where was she? Oh. Right. She was outside. And she was alone. And she was so desperately in love that it threatened to break her right there and then.

Except she didn’t. Instead she just… zoned out.

As in a trance, Dahyun let her hand fall to her side, got up from the sidewalk where she had been sitting, leaned against the street-light, and headed inside.

Of all the things she had imagined when she had pictured herself telling Sana exactly how she felt, this wasn’t one of them. Not at all. But there was no point in trying to call her back. And she couldn’t bear to think about it. She couldn’t think about the possibility that she wasn’t going to get to love Sana.

The image of Jihyo appeared in Dahyun’s mind, threatening to take away any remaining feeling, leaving Dahyun completely numb to her surroundings. In her mind, Dahyun saw Jihyo’s bright smile as Mina wrapped her arms around Jeongyeon in the water and kissed her to stop her from chasing Sana.

Sana.
And the starlit night filled with memories, hitting Dahyun like a wall, laughter, stolen touches, warm arms and complete trust. The feeling of being the best part of someone’s day.

Dahyun closed her eyes for a moment. Felt her brain turn to static noise. Except this wasn’t exciting and dizzying. It was just blinding. And the next thing she knew she was in the bed, pressed against the wall, curled around a pillow, not really sure how she had even ended up there. All she knew was love and pain and the tears that trickled over the bridge of her nose and down her cheek, landing on the clean sheets by her ear.

Dahyun fell asleep with the phone clutched in her hand, her dreams haunted and disturbed by all the thoughts.
Once You Love

Chapter Summary

She Pleads

Chapter Notes

Hi! I'm back at it finally! I know things have been a little slow on my part, but I'll do better from here on out. We're nearing the end, and I hope you'll stick with me the last few chapters.

Thank you for waiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dahyun…”

Dahyun groaned and buried her face in the pillow. She felt warm and almost ill, her head aching and her nose stuffy.

“Dahyun, you have to wake up.” Mina said softly somewhere above her. Then a hand touched Dahyun’s shoulder, shaking it lightly.

Dahyun sighed heavily and turned her head to face Mina, looking at her through heavy eyelids.

“What?”

“Your phone. It keeps calling.” Mina said cautiously.

“What?” Dahyun turned fully onto her side and rubbed her eyes.

“Pick up your phone, please. It’s been ringing all night, I honestly don’t get how you haven’t heard it.”

Dahyun frowned. Her phone?

With an indistinct muttering, Dahyun fumbled to grab her phone, squinting at the screen.

Sana-chan: Missed Call 10:14
Sana-chan: Missed Call 09:49
Sana-chan: Missed Call 09:20

Dahyun scrolled. The list went on for 15 calls, the first one missed at five past three in the morning.
Dahyun sat up so fast she almost collided with Mina, who in turn quickly moved backwards. The room spun and Dahyun covered her eyes with a hand, heart pounding in her chest. The events of last night slowly came back to her, a blur of emotions and conversation pieces trying to take up the main focus all at once. Moving her hand down her face, Dahyun grabbed her glasses, propping them on clumsily. Almost avoided poking herself in the eye, but only almost. Then, with an eye painfully watering she looked around at Mina, a frown on the older girl’s face.

“I… I don’t know what to do.” Dahyun admitted, her mind still buzzing.

“Call her.” Mina looked confused. “Something must be up, right?”

Dahyun tried to focus, but it was hard. “Call her…”

“Yes. Please. Jeongyeon turned the phone on silence after the fifth call. She tried to get you to pick up but you were completely out of it. Do you remember anything at all?”

“No…” Dahyun admitted.

“You just kept trying to swat her away, telling her to shut up and let you sleep. Jeongyeon was really worried that it was something with Sana’s mom and almost picked up, but you wouldn’t let her. And eventually she gave up. But please, I’m begging you. Call Sana. Whatever it is that’s going on between you two.”

“What makes you think something is up?” Dahyun muttered.

“If there was any unexpectedness about it, you would’ve woken and taken the call. But you know why she’s been calling, it’s the only logical reason why you wouldn’t let Jeongyeon pick up. Why your mind hasn’t immediately gone to her mom. Plus you were gone for two hours in the dead of night, then spent half an hour crying and whining in your sleep and then all the calls?” Mina explained, a logic in her arguments that was completely impenetrable. You could really never hide anything from Mina. But she wasn’t done, it seemed, a concerned expression on her face as she crouched in front of the bed. “Dahyun, did you guys break up or something?”

“No, we- I… I-” Dahyun pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to focus. “I don’t think so? No. No, we didn’t, I… she-”

“Call her.” Mina said once more before getting back up. “Please.”

“I… yeah, I will. I will.” Dahyun promised.

“Good.” Mina said, a weight in her voice that Dahyun wasn’t quite used to. Then she walked out of the room, closing the door after her.

The semi-darkness immediately enveloped Dahyun, and with it came an uncomfortable tug of her stomach. What if it had been something about Sana’s mom? What if something was really wrong and Sana needed her? Why hadn’t Dahyun acted when Jeongyeon had woken her? How far away had she been that she couldn’t even remember it? God, it was all a mess. But there was no beating around the bush. She had to call Sana. Because even if it wasn’t about her mom, Sana had obviously not slept at all, in the attempt to get a hold of Dahyun, at least judging from the timing of the calls. With her heart heavy in her chest, Dahyun looked down at her phone again, scrolled down over the calls, and took a deep breath. Then she pressed her thumb to one of the call notifications and put the phone to her ear.

One beep.
“Dahyun?”

Sana’s voice was croaky and breathless.

“Hi.” Dahyun didn’t know what else to say.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Dahyunnie, I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have-” A sob cut her off.

“It’s okay, Sana.” Dahyun tried, a knot in her stomach at the sound of Sana’s crying.

“It’s not. It’s not ok, I shouldn’t have run like that, I-I... I didn’t mean to-” Sana’s voice muffled.

“Breathe, Sana. Please breathe.” Dahyun tried. “One deep breath, can you do that for me, please?”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m-”

“Sana, can you switch to video?” Dahyun cut her off, shifting to lean against the wall, grabbing Sana’s pillow and hugging it tight, just to hold onto something. The urge to hold Sana tight and comfort her was threatening to take away her focus. Then she held the phone out in front of her and switched hers to video.

“I don’t-”

“Please, Sana. Just switch to video.” Dahyun pleaded.

There was a moment of silence and then Sana’s screen turned from black to image and took up the entirety of Dahyun’s phone. But it wasn’t Sana’s face on the screen, but rather her impressive collection of plushies. She was hiding, but her sobs revealed that she was somewhere to the left of the screen.

“Sana. You’re ok. I’m not mad. I promise, you’re ok.”

The camera shook as the phone was moved, and Dahyun’s stomach jolted at the sight of Sana’s tear-stained cheeks and swollen shivering lips.

“You’re ok. Just look at me, follow my breathing. You’re ok.” Dahyun said.

Sana whimpered and nodded, new tears falling from her eyes, that she tried to wipe, the camera shaking.

“You’re okay.”

Every time Dahyun breathed out she just repeated the same words, and reminded herself to thank Mina for having taught them to her. It somehow always helped, even if it was all a lie. Because there was no way Sana was okay. Still, ever so slowly, slowly Sana stopped shaking, even though tears still trickled down her cheeks. But it helped. And even if they were separated by the screen and an ocean, they breathed together, Sana’s whimpers turning into tired sighs.

“I didn’t mean to freak out.” Sana finally said, breaking their rhythm “I-I just didn’t know what to do.” Sana sniffled and slumped against her mountain of plushies, pulling out the light blue alpaca and hugging it tight. Dahyun hugged her pillow tighter. Hoped against hope that Sana would feel it somehow. And maybe it was just something Dahyun imagined, but for a moment she was so sure that Sana could feel it. Or maybe the soft sigh was just a reaction to hours of panicking finally starting to ebb out.

“You know I don’t expect anything from you, right?” Dahyun tilted her head slightly, holding
Sana’s gaze.

“I… That’s not the problem, Dahyunnie.” Sana sighed.

“Can you tell me what is, then?” Dahyun frowned. Honestly, she still didn’t quite understand what was going on for Sana to be so completely devastated.

Sana looked down, puffing her cheeks and then took a deep breath. Her voice was unusually cautious when she spoke. “It’s complicated… Well, actually it’s not. I got… mad. At my mom - for being sick. The moment you said that... the moment you said that you loved me I got so mad at her for being sick, and I just didn’t know what to do because it’s not her fault, and I felt horrible for feeling like that. And then, the second I realized what I had just thought, there was this sadness weighing down on me so hard, as if something was physically pressing on my heart. I just couldn’t take it. I didn’t know how to handle that kind of anger. I’m not an angry person, Dahyun, you have to know that. And I love my mom so much. But I was- I am angry with her. For being sick. … Who does that? Who gets mad at someone for being sick?”

Dahyun felt her mouth fall slightly ajar. It was probably the furthest thing from what she had expected.

“I just want to go back home and I feel so guilty that I don’t want to be here at all. There’s no joy left in this house and for as long as I’ve known it’s been me who’s been the center of joy in the family. But there’s nothing left and my dad keeps saying it’s because I don’t belong here anymore - not in their hearts I mean, but physically this isn’t where I’m supposed to be. I’m supposed to be home. Yet… I can’t get myself to leave it all to my dad. I don’t know how to leave. What if-” Sana buried her head in the plush.

“I’ll wait for you, okay? Sana, I don’t mind waiting.”

“But I do…” Sana whispered, looking back up, and Dahyun felt her stomach drop. “It’s so hard, Dahyun. I’m so sad all the time. And it just got worse and worse after Momo left, because I have nothing to distract myself. My dad is running around trying to get everything settled with bills and treatment plans and keeping the house and I just try to help him and keep my mom company, but I’m just so… I don’t have a life here anymore. I don’t have any friends or family other than my parents and I’m so bitter and angry that I’m too big of a coward to leave them even if she’s technically just as stable as she was three months ago. It’s such shit and I don’t know how to make my brain see it. And I just get.. So sad…”

“Sana…” Dahyun muttered, feeling the lump in her throat at the growing desperation in Sana’s voice. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know it was this bad.”

“I try not to let it show too much.” Sana admitted “I like being the happy part of people’s lives. I love being a happy part of your life. Making you smile and laugh and- god, I miss you. And I think a big part of it is because, you’re what makes me happier too. You and Momo; talking to you. And I just… I miss my life. I miss you. I miss you so much.”

Dahyun felt the tears threaten, but she didn’t let them. One of them had to keep it together right now. Honestly, while she knew it was bad, she hadn’t imagined that Sana felt this bad. That she was having a much harder time dealing with the distance than Dahyun was. But of course she was. Because it wasn’t just Dahyun she was away from here. It was her school, her bed, her home, her Momo, her life. The life she had chosen for herself. The friends who had chosen her. And Dahyun too. She missed Dahyun. And Dahyun could do nothing but sit here. Couldn’t soothe her or hold her or be of any use.
“You don’t have friends in Japan?”

Dahyun regretted asking the second the words had left her. How was that useful in any way?

Sana shook her head, a small whimper on her lips. “None that I can count on. I was popular in school; there were a lot of people who considered themselves my friend, but as soon as the hard parts came it was only Momo who stuck through. It was only her. I think maybe I was too… I don’t know, I didn’t really tell anyone? So maybe that’s why no-one stuck. Because I just disappeared. But then again, they never asked, and they never- only Momo.”

“Well, not this time, okay?” Dahyun tried. “We’re all here for you.”

“I… I haven’t actually talked to any of the others since Mina and I talked…” Sana admitted. “I mean, I don’t expect them to and I haven’t contacted them myself and I think they just want to give me space and not pressure me, but-.”

“Do you want me to ask them to call you?”

“No no,” Sana’s voice skipped a register and she quickly waved at the screen, “It’s okay, I don’t mind. Like I said, I don’t expect them to and it’s really okay, I’m good. I’m-”

“Sana, it’s okay to miss them. They miss you.”

“They do?”

“They text me sometimes and ask me how you are, and they always ask when they’re here. I really think they just don’t know they’re allowed to call you. They haven’t got much clue about what’s going on.”

“Oh…”

“Can I tell them? That it’s okay to call you?”

“I… I don’t really know. Not right now. But like, that’s not even the worst thing, honestly?” Sana averted her eyes from the screen. Bit her lip.

Dahyun frowned. “What is then?”

“Contact. I miss the contact.” Sana whispered. “That’s what made me plummet when Momo went home. I don’t know how much she told you, but ever since we were kids she’s held onto me a lot. And when we first met I didn’t like it much because I was always scared of hugging my mom when she was weak. I thought hugging her too hard might break her. But Momo hugged me. Held me safe at night and held my hand in school and when we walked the streets. And she made me love it. And now it’s like I can’t live without hugs. I miss you the most because - and nothing against Momo here - there’s no one’s body and warmth I’ve ever missed more than yours. Every time I think that I can’t hug you and make you smile and laugh awkwardly; when I can’t kiss you and feel your hands on my waist… It hurts. And I don’t know how, but it’s like you just turned my life around and I don’t ever want to be me without you again. I just want to be me as yours. And you’re not here. And I’m not there… I just- I guess I work best if I’m holding onto someone at all times?”

It was obvious from the smile in the end, that she was trying to turn the conversation into something lighter. And Dahyun couldn’t resist the urge to pick up that note. The possibility of seeing a proper smile on Sana’s face was just too tempting.

“Oh, you don’t say?” Dahyun teased.
Sana chuckled wetly and shrugged. But the smile that stayed on her face for a moment was genuine. Until it fell. And until a new shower of rain took over for the momentary burst of sunshine.

“Dahyunnie… I… I’m so afraid.”

“For your mom?” Dahyun asked.

Sana shook her head. “For us.”

“Why?” Dahyun didn’t get it. Until she got it. And the moment she got it, what Sana was afraid of, it made Dahyun’s heart drop into her stomach. “You’re… you’re afraid that we won’t make it?”

Sana nodded and bit her lip, chin shaking once again. A sob slipped past her lips and she looked away. Hid her face in the light blue alpaca plush, shoulders shaking in a manner that told Dahyun that Sana was trying to control it.

“Hey. Look at me,” Dahyun said firmly, setting all her own feelings aside. “Look at me. You’re okay. We’re okay.”

Sana looked back at her, eyes big and fearful. “I always thought I was stronger than this. But I don’t think I am. I really… am not sure I’m strong enough for this.”

Dahyun hesitated. For the longest moment. Because the question that had settled on her tongue was probably needed but definitely not one she wanted in the room. And not one she wanted to expose Sana to either. But she had to. If it would be better for Sana this way then- but no. Dahyun didn’t want to. Except that was the thing, right? It was the right thing to offer it, if it was what Sana needed, right? If it would make it easier for her...

Dahyun sighed. Took the deepest breath of her life and looked at the screen. “... Would you rather we stop? … you know, this? Us?”

“No.” Sana shook her head fast. Dahyun sighed in relief. “No, please. N-not yet.”

The lump was back in Dahyun’s throat. So there was a definitive risk that she would be saying goodbye to Sana. But if there hasn’t then why had she offered? Maybe she just hadn’t expected the actual idea that it might come. The thought that she wouldn’t get to keep Sana; that she wouldn’t get to hold her tight and smell lemons and flowers on her neck, not be able to feel her body shake with bubbly giggles when Dahyun kissed her neck… Dahyun felt the tears drip from her chin before she realized she was crying.

“Sorry.” Dahyun wiped the tears angrily with the back of her hand. Sana shook her head as if to tell her not to apologize.

“We’re not done fighting. I’m not- I’m not done fighting for you. For us. For me.” Sana said quietly, her voice shivering horribly. “But I… I can’t promise anything.”

Dahyun nodded and dried her cheeks even though it was pointless. New tears just kept falling.

“That’s okay. But you want to keep fighting?”

“I really do.” Sana nodded. “I… I really do.”

Then we try.” Dahyun nodded. Sniffled and wiped her cheeks again.

Sana bit her lip and held the phone closer to her. Her eyelids drooped slightly
“... Have you seen Momo since she got back?”

“No, but I texted her a little. She’s been busy because of the audition, but she’s coming over tomorrow with Chaeyoung - for movie night.”

“That’s good...” Sana said, her voice still shivery but calmer now.

“Did I tell you she saved the day as soon as she got back?” Dahyun asked carefully.

Sana looked lost and she rubbed her eyes with her palm. “No? How?”

“She and Chaeyoung and Nayeon, and I guess Jihyo too. They solved things with Jeongyeon. Kicked her ass back to Mina.”

“I bet she needed it.” Sana smiled softly.

“She did.” Dahyun nodded. Felt her heart a bit lighter at Sana’s smile. “And it turned out good. She hasn’t left Mina’s side since. I think we better make space for her on the lease. I give it three months tops until she lives here permanently.”

“Momo says she’s always at Nayeon and Chaeyoung’s as well, I bet two months before they both give up and give in.” Sana’s words slurred slightly and she nuzzled into the plushie pile. Dahyun couldn’t help but wonder how Sana could be so adorable.

“Sana?” Dahyun asked.

“Hm?” Sana stretched like a cat.

“Did you sleep at all last night?”

Sana seemed to freeze mid-peace. Then she pressed her lips together hard and shook her head, brows knotted and eyes glazing over.

Dahyun nodded. “Can you sleep now?”

Sana swallowed and sniffled. “I... I guess? We don’t have plans. But I don’t want to leave you.”

“I’ll stay here while you sleep as long as I can... If you want.” Dahyun offered.

Sana seemed to consider it for a while, opening and closing her mouth several times before finally nodding. Then she closed her eyes and sighed, all the energy disappearing in that single exhale.

“I’d like that.”

“Then put the phone down, so you can still see me, and I’ll just stay here, ok?” Dahyun said.

“Mm.” Sana said, though she didn’t do anything. She just kept holding the phone in her hand.

“Sana, put down the phone.” Dahyun said softly.

“Mm-yeah, right.” Sana still didn’t do anything. She must be completely exhausted to just crash like this, Dahyun thought. But of course, if she had been panicking all night, the slightest relief would naturally cause her to deflate.

“Sana-chan.” Dahyun sang.
A soft smile spread on Sana’s lips and she yawned loudly before shuffling. With what seemed like a world of hassle, she got under the covers and positioned the phone against something, probably one of the many plushies. Then her expression changed again, the slightest twitch of an eyebrow warning Dahyun.

“Hey, no, we’re okay.” Dahyun hushed her before she even got started.

“I really miss you…” Sana whispered. “I want to sleep with you.”

“You are,” Dahyun said. “I’m right here.”

“S’not the same.” Sana muttered, closing her eyes with slightly knotted brows.

“I know… But I’m here. So sleep, please.”

Sana nodded, but then opened her eyes. “Dahyunnie?”

“What?” Dahyun chuckled.

Sana bit her lip. “… Will you... say it?”

Dahyun felt her stomach somersault, suspecting what Sana was talking about. “What?”

Sana shrugged and her words slurred from exhaustion as she spoke, though it was clear that she really tried to be present. “I want you to be able to say it, if you want to. Without being afraid. I won’t freak out. I promise.”

Affection rushed over Dahyun, her heart soaring despite everything that had happened. And despite the possibility that they might not make it, despite all the fear and uncertainty, this was one thing she wasn’t doubting in the least. Not anymore.

“I love you.”

The smile that spread across Sana’s face was peaceful and she closed her eyes with a hum, curling around the light blue alpaca. The smile stayed on her face until her chest calmly rose and fell, finally asleep.

…

The beads of a bracelet bumped against the beads of an identical bracelet as Nayeon adjusted so Jeongyeon could rest her head on the older girl’s shoulder. Nayeon looked down at their tangled hands, then over the river. On her other side, Jihyo sighed and then yawned.

“Up late?” Nayeon asked.

“Mm, yeah, kind of. Lost track of time watching Kim Bokjoo, and we ended up bingeing the entire thing. By the time we were done, it was three in the morning.” Jihyo explained.

“Damn, but it was as good as I said, right?” Nayeon wrapped an arm around Jihyo’s shoulder and felt her relax.

“For once. Yes, the straight drama you suggested was really good.”
“Told you.” Nayeon grinned. “And Tzuyu liked it too?”

“I think so, she fell asleep halfway through the last episode though, so we’re watching that again tomorrow night.”

“Cute.” Nayeon said. Though she couldn’t exactly see Jihyo’s face she was quite sure she knew exactly what dorky smile was plastered on the youngest girl’s face.

“So now it’s just you Jeong.” Nayeon nudged the blonde girl and poked her forehead.

“Mh.” Jeongyeon muttered distractedly.

Nayeon frowned.

“What’s wrong?”

“I… It’s nothing It’s just-…” Jeongyeon shook her head and sat up, looking over the river with a frown on her face.

“You’re mulling.” Jihyo noted casually.

“I am.” Jeongyeon sighed heavily, burying her head in her hands in a tired manner. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize for that.” Jihyo chuckled, leaning into Nayeon more.

“No, I’m sorry because I should’ve come to you guys first.” Jeongyeon looked around at the two others, a pained expression on her face.

“There’s nothing we can change about that now.” Nayeon said, reaching up to bury her fingers in Jeongyeon’s hair. How it remained that soft, Nayeon didn’t understand. She had been blonde for almost a year now.

“I know, but I should’ve trusted you, and come to you after I realized I had fallen for Mina. You deserved better from me.”

“Well, you have an entire life to pay back.” Nayeon ran a thumb over the skin behind Jeongyeon’s ear and watched as the blonde girl closed her eyes. “And I suggest you start by cooking us dinner three times a week.”

“Forget it.” Jeongyeon grinned, seemingly pacified by Nayeon stroking through her hair. Honestly it was a miracle that Jeongyeon had even let her do so for this long, but Nayeon didn’t bother to ask about it.

“Once a week then.” Nayeon negotiated.

“… Once every other week and we’ll mix it with movie nights.” Jeongyeon sat back up straight, Nayeon’s hand finally falling from her hair. “I want to get back to having those anyways, especially once Sana gets back.”

“Oh, that’s actually a really good idea.” Jihyo sat up more too.

“It’s a deal then. We’ll make a group chat with Sana and Momo too and see when they have time next semester.” Jeongyeon seemed decided.

Nayeon nodded and nudged Jeongyeon’s leg just because she didn’t know how else to respond.
“… Jeongyeon?” Jihyo sat up completely now, looking past Nayeon at Jeongyeon.

“Yeah?”

“You keep saying, *when she comes back*, is there any news? I thought it was indefinite for now?” Jihyo looked hopeful.

“No, it still is but we’re trying to make it a habit to say *when* around Dahyun. Those two are having a hard enough time just surviving right now, they don’t need that constant reminder. They need the hope.” Jeongyeon explained.

“So she’s still really ill?”

“I actually don’t know.” Jeongyeon admitted. “They’re… it’s complicated, I don’t think it’s my place to talk about. But you should ask Dahyun. She’s trying her best, but she needs someone. I think she just doesn’t want to bother Mina and I because of everything. And especially with Mina helping her with her hand, it’s all too much for Dahyun if she puts everything on Mina.”

“Hand?” Nayeon frowned. What hand?

“Oh, right, you don’t know.” Jeongyeon’s lips split in a wide grin. “We visited her parents recently, and she spoke to her dad about taking money out of her fund to get Dahyun’s hand fixed.”

Jihyo’s mouth fell open, and Nayeon felt her own do the same.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope. He didn’t get it at first but she showed him Dahyun’s videos and—” Jeongyeon’s voice broke and she looked over the river, a wide beam lighting up her face. “It’s all looking up.”

“Except it looks like it’s about to rain.” Nayeon said, kicking Jeongyeon’s leg lightly.

Jeongyeon huffed and tried to kick back despite the angle.

Neither mentioned Sana again. They didn’t need to say it out loud to know. It was all looking up. Except for her. And it was threatening to let the rain fall on the group once again.

But just as the clouds opened for a light drizzle, and the three friends got to their feet, Jihyo’s phone sounded in her pocket and she dug it out.

For a moment the other two just looked at her, but then she turned the phone around to let the others see.

11:11 AM Mina-ssi: Hi Ji~ If the offer is still there, I’d like to ask for an interview to get my job back at the Black Bean ^^

Nayeon felt Jeongyeon’s hand on her arm, and a warmth spreading through the bubble that enveloped the three of them. It was a bubble usually meant for two. But these days it seemed to have gotten more than just a few more residents. Stretched across neighborhoods and overseas. A bubble meant for soulmates - that suddenly housed nine.
It just didn’t stop the rain from pouring down on them before they had even gotten halfway to Jihyo’s place. But it didn’t matter. The rain provided the perfect excuse for hot cocoa and watching the last episode of Kim Bokjoo with Tzuyu.

Rain, really, is mostly about perspective.

Though sometimes, Nayeon admitted quietly, with Jihyo fast asleep in her arms, you still wish it away.

…

Sana’s chest rises softly under the covers, and her mouth is slightly open, a softness in her features as peace holds her safe in her sleep. She seems so far out by now that even an earthquake might not wake her. It’s only the dried salt on her flushed cheeks and her still wet eyelashes that reveal a different truth than the tranquil she exudes.

It’s the complete contrast to the reality on the other side of the screen. Dahyun looks fine. Looks very much like she’s just keeping Sana safe. But the slightly rapid breath and the way she keeps licking her lips reveal a different truth. One where her head is spinning with fear and sacrifice and love, making her dizzy and making her chest hurt under the soft cotton shirt.

It felt mostly like two entities were fighting inside her head. Like the angel and the devil on her shoulder, except they were love and… love. Because both arguments came from the simple realization that she loved Sana. That she just wanted the girl to feel better however it might be best. But which was best? They had agreed to fight. They had agreed that they wanted each other and this, despite it being indefinitely stuck in this situation. Despite Sana obviously being absolutely miserable. Not that she hadn’t been miserable from the time she got back to Japan, but this was worse somehow. When it was her mother’s illness, it was something Dahyun couldn’t change, but could better by being there. But now? This was something she could change. Something she was bettering by being there but at the same time worsening it.

Dahyun sighed. Felt the shiver in her breath and shook her head. There was no good sitting here, getting more and more caught in her head about it. So with a hard swallow, she reached forth and turned the mic off on the call. Sana still slept on the screen, but now she wouldn’t be able to hear Dahyun.

“Mina?” Dahyun called, her voice shaky. The rest of her body was shaking too, she noticed. When had it gotten this bad?

For a few moments nothing happened, and Dahyun was just about to open her mouth to call again. But then the sound of footsteps, and the door opening.

Mina stood with a slight frown on her face, eyes worriedly travelling over Dahyun’s face.

“You ok?”

“I need Chaeyoung.” Dahyun croaked. “I need- can I borrow your phone? Sana is- she’s sleeping on mine and… I really need Chaeyoung.”
Mina nodded immediately. Took a few steps into the dimly lit room and withdrew her phone from the back pocket of her shorts.

“It might need charging soon. I forgot to plug it in last night.” Mina said, unlocking it and handing it over to Dahyun.

“Thank you.” Dahyun gulped. “I’m sorry, I’m just- I need…”

“You need your best friend.” Mina said, a soft smile on her face. “I get it.”

“Thank you.” Dahyun repeated.

“Call her. Lean on her.” Mina walked with her slight waddle through the room and opened the blinds, letting the daylight in, even if the sky was grey and the streets wet. Then she opened the window slightly, just to let fresh air into the stuffy room. And even if it wasn’t what Dahyn had asked for, it was somehow exactly what she had needed. For someone to let the world in.

Dahyun nodded and then reached out a hand as Mina walked back past her bed.

Mina stopped and took it. Gave a single huffed chuckle as Dahyun ran her thumb over the scar in Mina’s palm, pink but healed.

Dahyun didn’t speak. Didn’t know how to put words to the feelings in her heart. So instead, she simply tried to emphasize all the feelings she didn’t know how else to get out, in the simple returned gesture she had gotten so used to from Mina.

“I know.” Mina muttered. Gave Dahyun’s hand a squeeze and tickled lightly over her wrist to get her to let go.

Then she walked away, closing the door gently. Let Dahyun sit in the daylight and slight breeze and dial Chaeyoung.

“Mina! I’m glad you called; listen-”

“Chaeyoung?” Dahyun felt her eyes glaze over, and she looked down at Sana’s sleeping face on her screen.

“Dahyun? What are-”

“It’s a long story.” Dahyun cleared her throat “Are you free?”

“Oh. Uh, yeah. I’m just chilling. I don’t have work for another two hours. What’s up?”

“A-are you alone?”

“I… can make myself alone, hold on.” Chaeyoung said.

A fair bit of shuffling and the sound of bare feet on linolium told Dahyun that Chaeyoung was walking somewhere - probably her room.

“Sorry Momo was napping on me. But I’m alone now, fire away.”

Dahyun sighed and pressed her lips together. How was she even supposed to start this?

“... I’m considering maybe it would be better for Sana if we weren’t together.”
The gravity of the words settled, and a long pause followed. Dahyun felt the silence press against her eardrums and threaten to overpower her.

In the other end of the phone, Chaeyoung’s breathing kept changing as if taking breaths to speak and then choosing not to. Until finally she seemed to find something useful.

“... Why?”

Dahyun looked over at her phone, propped on the nightstand.

“I think maybe I’m adding an unnecessary pressure to her entire situation. We talked last night and for a while it was so good, but when I told her I loved her-

“Go Dahyun.”

“Not go Dahyun. She got really sad. She cried and apologized for doing so and talked about how much it hurt to be over there all alone, and hung up and... it was a mess but we’re okay now. It was just a really bad night for her and she’s asleep now - that’s actually why I’m calling from Mina’s phone, I still have facetime running on my phone because she didn’t want to leave me.” Dahyun explained, feeling a little lighter as she looked down at the phone. Sana had turned onto her back, the alpaca plushie in her arms and profile sharp. Had Dahyun ever told her how pretty she was? She wasn’t sure. It was definitely not something she said enough.

“That’s so adorable, oh my god. But then why are you considering breaking up?” Chaeyoung sounded utterly confused, and honestly, Dahyun couldn’t blame her. From this, it didn’t make any sense.

“She told me how hard it was for her, how guilty she felt and how much she hated herself for not being able to go back.” Dahyun shuffled to sit up in the bed, leaning against the wall and wrapping an arm around her knees before continuing. “Because technically her mom is as stable as she was when she left the last time, but I think the scare this time - and especially her parents not telling her honestly what’s been going on - it’s done something to her. She’s so scared of leaving her mom, and I think me waiting for her like I am might just add additional pressure.”

A silence followed this, and Dahyun caught herself looking at the way Sana’s eyes fluttered under closed eyelids. How was everything about her so warm and soft and sweet? Maybe it was just the floral sheets or the soft blue fur of the plushie, but she looked more like a kid than ever, and Dahyun couldn’t help but want to protect that sense of peace that surrounded her now.

“But maybe you’re what she needs in order to hang on. Like a goal to work towards, so she can get back to the life she wants? I don’t know. But like, when you had your hand broken, what did you work towards?”

Dahyun looked down at her hand and then at Sana. Swallowed. “... Nothing. I never had a goal, a reason to move on. Because the doctors had taken my dream away from me.”

“Thought so. Now hear me out for a second. If you break up with her without letting her have a say, if you do this just to try and do what’s best for her, you risk taking away her dream. She’s an adult, and you have to agree what the best situation is.”

Dahyun frowned. How had she not considered this? “We agreed to try. We didn’t want to make any indefinite promises but she wants to fight.”

“Then why are you considering breaking it off? Let her fight. Please. As long as you can hear it, let her fight. And it might not work out, but that’s a risk you’re going to have to judge now. Are you
willing to run the risk or do you want to stop now? For yourself?”

“I don’t want to stop. I can deal with this. It hurts so bad to see her so sad, but I’m so in love with her and even if I can’t make her mom better or make her anxiety go away, I just want to be something good in her life. And I want her to be something good in mine. Which… even though she’s sad, just looking at her sleep like this, it makes me all warm and happy inside. Just being with her makes me happy. And she was laughing so much last night, I can’t remember my cheeks hurting that much from smiling, in a long time.” Dahyun heard the sunshine in her voice grow, and closed her eyes, reliving last night. That same feeling of being utterly in love settled in her stomach with a confidence she hadn’t expected.

“Then be something good for each other as best you can.” Chaeyoung finally said.

Dahyun opened her eyes and looked again at Sana. The salt trails were clearer at this angle than when she had faced the camera. “I want to. But it’s so hard to feel like I am? When she’s so sad. Sometimes it’s- it just feels like I’m not doing any good.”

Dahyun bit her lip. How was it possible to be this conflicted?

“And that’s the risk you’re running in any relationship.” Chaeyoung said softly. “That there’s a day where you aren’t good for them anymore. But if that day comes, it has to come from her. The day she’s not good for you, it has to come from you. You just have to keep communicating about this. Even if it hurts. And… Dahyun I know it doesn’t seem like it now, but- but there was a life before Sana, and there’s gonna be a life after her as well, if that’s how things turn out. It might not be the same, but it’ll be a good life too. It might even be a better life. You can’t know. You just have to believe in her. And in yourself. In the two of you.”

Dahyun swallowed. Closed her eyes and sighed. A better life… Without Sana? It was hard to imagine. Impossible. Sitting in her bed, in her shirt, watching her, the scent of lemon from her hair and the summer breeze filling the room, how was Dahyun supposed to live a life without Sana?

“Dahyun?”

“I don’t want to have to be without her.” Dahyun muttered. “I can if I have to, I know that. But I don’t want to.”

“Then let her fight.”

Dahyun nodded. “Okay. Thank you, Chaengie.”

“I’m always here, Maestro. You just have to reach out.”

“I know.” Dahyun smiled. Exhaled deeply and looked up into the ceiling.

I don’t want to.

…

The situation was almost odd enough for Nayeon to find it comical.
Ever since Momo had entered their lives, she had been nothing but a leaf in the wind, never too worried, always fitting in wherever she landed. But now she was anything but calm. Her face was screwed up and her hand was clutched around the phone as she paced around the room, skin pale and cheeks flushed. Honestly, she looked mostly like she was about to be sick.

“They’re gonna call.” Chaeyoung said calmly, closing her notebook and reaching out a hand for their girlfriend. Momo stopped. Looked at the hand and then at Chaeyoung, her chest rising and falling rapidly, as if suddenly scared to take it.

Then she continued her pacing.

“Momo…” Nayeon said softly, pushing herself off the door jamb between the kitchen and the living room. Ever so slowly she walked towards the peach blonde girl.

“I’m okay. I’m okay, I just really need them to call.” Momo assured them with close to zero confidence in her voice. “Please, can they just call me already?”

“They will.” Chaeyoung insisted, hand still reached out to Momo. It didn’t seem to bother Chaeyoung the slightest that Momo didn’t take it. They all knew what was at stake here for Momo.

The day after she had gotten home from Japan, Momo had gone to the audition of a dance crew made up of seniors from her major and graduated students - an audition she had been invited to take already last year as the only sophomore ever. But she had refused out of insecurities. But this year she had gone. Had danced in front of the best dancers to come out of her school. Momo had told Nayeon that she hadn’t been able to get Sana out of her head. That she honestly had no clue how it went because she couldn’t remember much. And even though Nayeon was sure that she had done as well as always, it was hard to convince the girl when she was this distraught and nervous.

Momo stopped pacing and Nayeon walked up to her, though without touching her. “You’re going to get in. You said it yourself, you were invited onto this crew a year ago. They know you, they notice you. I bet they’ve been keeping an eye out for you this entire last year considering that they asked you again after you turned down the offer.”

“But-”

“Nayeon is right. You were specifically asked to audition, your seniors singled you out, and you know your body well enough to know when you’ve done good. And even if you didn’t, they know your usual quality, there’s no way they’ll take away your spot just for a mistake. If you even made one, which I highly doubt.” Chaeyoung interrupted her.

Momo whined and looked up at the ceiling. “They were supposed to call by noon.”

“Hey, come here.” Chaeyoung said, waving her hand a little.

“Sorry.” Momo mumbled. Then she reached for Chaeyoung’s hand, shivering when Chaeyoung’s hand closed around hers. And this was Nayeon’s cue to close the distance as well, gently wrapping her arms around Momo’s neck and feeling the Japanese girl’s free arm around her waist.

“Don’t apologize. They’re gonna call. They’re fools if they don’t recognize your talent. You’re the best dancer in your year and you know it.” Nayeon muttered, pressing her lips to Momo’s cheek. Pride surged through Nayeon as a smile tugged at Momo’s lips.

Chaeyoung got to her feet and wrapped herself around Momo from the other side. “I haven’t seen what the others came up with but honestly, the piece you showed us was so good, I can’t believe for a second that they wouldn’t want you.”
“I really want to join this team…” Momo looked down at her feet, the smile widening. “They look so awesome on stage. I watched them even before applying for the scholarship. It’s partly why I applied. To be on that team.”

“You will be.” Chaeyoung insisted.

Momo huffed and sighed, closing her eyes tight and leaning the side of her head against Chaeyoung’s. She seemed to calm considerately in the arms of her girlfriends, and Nayeon nuzzled at her exposed neck.

“I’ve never seen you this nervous.” Nayeon said, trying to keep the conversation going, lest keeping Momo from getting stuck in her own head.

“I just really think this is what I want to do.” Momo shrugged the best she could, sandwiched between the other two. “Getting to dance professionally and teach it as well, it’d just make all those years worth it.”

“Those years are worth it whether you get in or not.” Chaeyoung tightened her grip around Momo’s waist, flush against her side. “It’s not about the result.”

“Mm, I know. Doesn’t change the fact that I want it though, the result.” Momo said, a faint smile on her lips as she opened her eyes again.

“You’ll get it.” Nayeon insisted.

Momo nodded. Hummed. And then looked down at her feet, her voice almost fragile when she spoke again. “What if I get it though?”

“What do you mean?” Nayeon frowned. The mood had changed immediately.

“I mean… What if I get the job, then I’ll be stuck here and-”

“You don’t want to be here?” Chaeyoung asked.

“No, I do.” Momo said quickly, looking around to Chaeyoung. Nayeon couldn’t see her face, but she could feel how her heart had raced immediately. “I do, it’s just-”

“Sana.” Nayeon said softly.

Momo nodded. Looked down at her feet again.

“The more strings you connect your life to here, in Korea, without also connecting them to Sana, the harder it will be if she doesn’t come back.”

Momo closed her eyes. “I want her back.”

“She’ll come back though, won’t she? Once her mom is better?” Nayeon asked.

“I’m not sure.” Momo whispered. “I’m not sure she will, I-”

“But what about Dahyun?” Nayeon asked instinctively. She still couldn’t forget the sound of a small but decisive fist on her door before a girl had broken through Nayeon’s walls, forcing through every one of Nayeon’s defenses, leaving the older girl naked and fragile in Dahyun’s arms.

Chaeyoung cleared her throat and pressed her lips together, releasing her hold on Momo. Nayeon naturally did so too.
“What’s going on?” Nayeon asked.

“It’s-” Momo started but then clamped up.

“You both… wait, did they break up? What’s going on?” Nayeon immediately feared the worst. Momo knew something and Chaeyoung had talked to Dahyun yesterday. But if neither were sure what to say, then it must be bad.

“No.” Chaeyoung finally said, shaking her head. “She’s considering it.”

“Wait, Dahyun is? Why?” Nayeon felt completely lost.

“Same reason Sana is, I suspect?” Momo shrugged. Crossed her arms and hunched her shoulders, hugging herself.

“What is, exactly?” Nayeon pressed.

“It’s too hard on Sana.” Chaeyoung mumbled, then looked over at Momo. “She’s…”

Momo nodded and took over. “She doesn’t really let anyone know, and I’m assuming none of you have talked to her-”

“We wanted to give her space in case… you know, in case she needed it?” Nayeon’s defense quickly died out. She should’ve texted Sana and asked anyway. Just so she knew they were still there for her. That’s what friends do, right?

“She needs to know that she has someone in her corner. Especially now that I’m not there. She… She’s not good at distance.”

“I didn’t know it was this bad.” Nayeon breathed. Why hadn’t anyone told her? Not that it was any of her business but- but Jeongyeon had said something about it, right? That it was bad, but she couldn’t talk about it without Dahyun’s consent to do so. And what had Nayeon then done to figure it out? To figure out how to help? Exactly nothing.

“Nayeon. It’s not your fault.” Momo’s hand on Nayeon’s arm brought the eldest back with a start.

“I-”

“Sana, she… she doesn’t really let anyone know. But if you’re around, you’ll learn to read her. And right now she’s scared and lonely.” Momo ran a hand through her hair. “I just hope she finds out in time.”

“What?” Nayeon looked at Momo, searching her eyes.

“… That Dahyun is worth it.”

Nayeon smiled despite her worry, but just as she was about to reply, a loud beep sounded from Momo’s hand, making all of them jump. Momo fumbled and almost dropped the phone in an attempt to answer the incoming call. As the phone slipped from her hand, she cursed but caught it midair.

“Hello?” Momo said when she finally managed to answer the call.

“Yes? Yes, I’m Momo.” Her voice shook as she spoke but her face was unreadable as she listened. “Yes, I understand… Yes, thank you. Okay. I… Thank you. Thank you. Yes, Saturday. Bye.”

Nayeon watched, conflicting feelings of worry and hope in her heart, as Momo’s lips split in a shy
“You got it?” Chaeyoung asked.

“I did.” Momo whispered.

There was a second. That second right after the fuse has burnt up to the rocket, before launch. The anticipation. Waiting for the room and Momo to explode in joy and relief. But it never came. Instead, she looked from Chaeyoung to Nayeon and then - without a single word - turned on her heel, phone in her hand, and walked straight out of the front door on bare feet, shutting the door after her.

Nayeon stared after her, left with Chaeyoung in the middle of the living room, without a clue what to do, or how to react. Her body seemed to be feeling everything at once and her heart still raced from the urge to burst with excitement that Momo had gotten the spot on the dance team.

Momo didn’t return for almost half an hour.

…

“How is it that you invite me to join this and end up making me the waitress?” Jeongyeon complained, coming back from the kitchen with chopsticks and snacks.

“Because you love us.” Momo pointed out, reaching to relieve Jeongyeon of the snacks.

“I somehow regret not taking Felix’s shift tonight.” Jeongyeon grumbled.

“Oh, stop it.” Chaeyoung chuckled, making room for Jeongyeon between herself and Momo, the latter of whom had Dahyun sitting in her lap.

Jeongyeon huffed and settled in the couch, putting her feet onto the table and handing out the chopsticks. Meanwhile, Chaeyoung was busy scrolling through Netflix to find the movie, starting it before grabbing the box of dumplings from the coffee table, opening it. Then she ripped off the lid and opened the container with dipping sauce.

“Did you get the kimchi honey one?” Momo asked looking past Dahyun into the box.

“Yep.” Chaeyoung showed Momo the lid, a bit of the dipping sauce stuck on it. Then she placed the box in Jeongyeon’s lap and took a dumpling, dipping it before eating it.

“When did I become a table?” Jeongyeon asked.

“About the same time you became a waitress.” Dahyun argued, pointing at Jeongyeon with the chopsticks, a dumpling caught between them.

Jeongyeon huffed but merely took one of the dumplings. On the TV in front of them, the movie was starting, and Momo hummed along to the tune.

Dahyun smiled. She hadn’t realized just how much she had missed Momo until she was there. The older girl had practically tackled Dahyun to the ground as soon as she had gotten through the door, hugging her so tight that Dahyun could barely breathe. Had told her how much she had missed
Dahyun and then had kissed her cheek with the words “From Sana.”

Dahyun’s heart still happily skipped a beat at the thought. It wasn’t the same as having Sana back - far from it - but the power of Hirai Momo could not be denied. Though right now, with Sana having been distant ever since finding out Momo was there, it was hard not to wish Momo back in Japan where she could look after Sana. Or maybe… no, that was an insane idea. One doesn’t just go to Japan. Or Mordor. But in this case, Japan.

“You watching?” Momo muttered.

Dahyun looked around at the older girl, and realized she had been sitting with a dumpling between her chopsticks, staring over at the wall.

“No, I- …” Dahyun didn’t really know what she was trying to say, and in the end settled for just eating her dumpling.

“You know, no one will judge you for texting while we watch the movie.” Chaeyoung noted.

“Unless it’s texting memes to Felix, then I will judge.” Jeongyeon added.

“It’s okay, she’s… it’s okay.” Dahyun said, taking another dumpling. There weren’t a lot for each girl when there were four splitting a box, but it was good anyways.

“I swear, I’m this close-“

“Momo, it’s fine. She’s just sad because she misses you.” Dahyun tried.

“That’s not an excuse to be distant with you though.” Momo tutted.

“I know. I’ll call her later and talk to her. Once the movie is over.” Dahyun adjusted in Momo’s lap. “Maybe you could join?”

“Oh, maybe I should..” Momo sounded hesitant but Dahyun just looked at her until she agreed. Then Dahyun put the chopsticks down and reached for a bar of Milka chocolate. Leaned back against Momo, wrapping the older girl’s arms around her waist.

“Missed me that much, Dahyunnie?” Momo hummed happily, patting Dahyun’s stomach.

“Yes.” Dahyun didn’t try to hide or downplay it. Merely opened her chocolate bar and broke off a piece. Fed it to Momo. “I missed you a lot.”

“Gross.” Jeongyeon said, though Dahyun couldn’t help but notice the little smile.

Momo didn’t seem to have taken notice of Jeongyeon’s comment though. She merely nuzzled into Dahyun’s neck and ran her thumbs over the fabric of Dahyun’s t-shirt right under her ribs. Dahyun took a piece of chocolate for herself and let it melt in her mouth while the TV-screen told a story of a girl trying to grow up and stay a kid at the same time. And Dahyun watched, safe in her friends’ company and Momo’s arms, how the girl struggled. It felt oddly freeing. Felt freeing to immerse herself in someone else’s fictional trouble instead of dealing with her own. Instead of constantly trying to come up with solutions and what-ifs, when all that was needed, really, was time.

Momo was fast asleep by the time the movie ended, her fingers twined with Dahyun’s and the chocolate wrapping on the coffee table next to an empty bag of chips and an equally empty box of
“Should we try and wake her?” Dahyun asked quietly.

“I’d let her sleep a little longer if you’re not going anywhere, she’s been awake a lot the past few nights.” Chaeyoung looked at the sleeping girl with adoration.

“Nightmares?” Dahyun asked.

“No, she doesn’t really have those, but she can’t sleep sometimes and then she goes into the living room and dances. Impossibly it calms her, I think?” Chaeyoung pondered.

“It wouldn’t surprise me if it did. When I played piano, that always calmed me even if I was playing as fast as I could. Because it stopped all the thoughts in my head and I got to just focus on what I was good at. Dancing is her liberty as Piano was mine. Music can be an amazing escape because it demands your heart to focus solely on that. It’s like when you write songs, you focus on that and listen to the music you make.”

“… Listen with your heart.” Chaeyoung said.

“What?” Jeongyeon asked.

“It’s… Momo said that one of the first times we talked, because I told her I didn’t know how to dance.” Chaeyoung shook her head as if in a daze, and then looked at the sleeping girl. “Guess she knew what she was talking about.”

“Guess she was.” Jeongyeon noted, just as the lock clicked and the door opened, revealing Mina.

The sound made Momo inhale sharply and her arms tighten around Dahyun. But instead of waking she just mumbled something and pulled Dahyun closer. And Dahyun didn’t resist. Swore she would never again resist or whine at Momo’s cuddles.

“You done watching the movie?” Mina asked in a gentle voice as she put her shoes by the others.

“Yeah, we just finished.” Chaeyoung said, stretching and yawning deeply.

Mina gave a small chuckle and walked across the room, settling behind the couch.

“How was dinner?” Jeongyeon asked, looking up at her and stretching an hand up to guide Mina down by the arm until she was leaning down over Jeongyeon’s face. Dahyun sent Chaeyoung a look and a roll of the eye, and Chaeyoung chuckled.

“Good, Kai has a new roommate and he’s pretty fun. I think Seungyeon knows his girlfriend maybe?”

“Oh?” Jeongyeon asked.

“Park Hwan.. Hwanhee? She’s had some minor roles and I think she mentioned one that Seungyeon was in too?”

“Oh yeah, I think she’s one of the unnies Seung talks about.” Jeongyeon nodded, tugging not very discreetly at Mina’s arm.

Dahyun snorted. It was obvious she was asking for a kiss, and the slightly amused expression on Mina’s face made it obvious she knew very well.
“I think this is your cue to wake Momo,” Chaeyoung said, barely able to hold back her laughter. “I don’t think I can watch Jeongyeon be this whipped.”

Jeongyeon turned her face to glare, but Chaeyoung just crossed her arms and looked at Jeongyeon as if daring the older girl to prove her wrong.

But before the two got to fight further, Momo gave a whine and moved under Dahyun before yawning. She had woken.

“Mitang?” Momo’s voice was full of sleep, and it made Mina giggle.

“Hey, sleepyhead.”

Momo smiled lazily and Jeongyeon tugged at Mina’s arm again.

“Jeongyeon-chan…” Mina tutted quietly.

“Yes?” Jeongyeon asked innocently.

“You’re being a dork.” Mina noted before kissing her exposed forehead chastely.

Dahyun felt the need to find something less cringy to look at or at least call them out, but just as Dahyun was about to nudge at Jeongyeon’s leg to tease her, Dahyun’s phone buzzed in her pocket, and she untangled her hands from Momo’s to pull it out.

9:54 PM Sana-chan: Can you call me when you’re done? I miss you.

Dahyun smiled at the message and typed back a reply.

9:54 PM Dahyun: Sure, Momo and the others are here too if you want to say hi?

“Sana?” Momo’s voice was low, and her hand rested on Dahyun’s hip.

Dahyun nodded distractedly. “She wants me to call.”

“That’s good.” Momo said encouragingly. And Dahyun could tell just from the tone, that Momo knew how much was actually going on between Sana and Dahyun. What they had discussed. And somehow it made Dahyun feel safer. Because that meant that Sana was confiding in Momo instead of pulling away from her.

9:56 PM Sana-chan: Maybe just you and me tonight? Maybe tell me about the movie you watched?

Dahyun bit her lip. For a moment she considered pushing, insisting that the others were worried and wanted to see her, but decided against it. Just the fact that she had asked for Dahyun was a step, and
Dahyun wasn’t going to risk pushing her away.

“Uh, not to be rude, but is it okay if I go talk to Sana?” Dahyun asked.

“Of course. I mean you can just talk here if you want?” Chaeyoung suggested. “It’s not like you have to go away to talk?”

“Not tonight. I already asked, I don’t think she’s doing well tonight.” Dahyun said. Felt Momo’s hand on her arm, giving it an encouraging squeeze. She had made the right decision - at least according to Momo.

“Okay. Well, give her our best.” Jeongyeon said.

“Thank you. I will.” Dahyun promised. Then she let Momo kiss her cheek and got up, bidding them goodnight before walking away from the party. Saw out of the corner of her eye how Mina finally settled in the couch, taking Chaeyoung’s spot as the youngest had immediately claimed Dahyun’s spot in Momo’s lap.

Dahyun closed the door to her room before dialing.

…

“I seriously don’t get how you’ve worked here this long and you still can’t tie a proper Windsor knot.” Dahyun shook her head and walked over to a struggling Jeongyeon. She had accidentally pulled up her tie at the end of the last shift instead of just loosening the knot, and now couldn’t get it tied again.

“It’s not like I haven’t tried learning, but it’s just not my style.” Jeongyeon cringed, letting her arms fall by her sides to let Dahyun tie the knot for her.

“This okay?” Dahyun asked as she pushed the knot up towards Jeongyeon’s neck, trying not to get it too tight

“Yeah, that’s good, thank you.”

“You should get Mina to teach you, she can do a trinity knot.” Dahyun said, pulling her hair into a ponytail and adjusting the baby hairs by her side before straightening her skirt.

“But she’s Mina, you can’t expect her not to be excellent.”

“Whipped.” Dahyun snorted, checking her phone before putting it on silent and closing the locker.

No messages.

“No, that’s actually a completely objective observation.” Jeongyeon argued, closing her own locker as well and adjusting her bangs.

“True.” Dahyun shrugged. But just as she was about to argue that it didn’t make it any less mushy, a sound caught her attention. Laughter. All-mighty, booming laughter from the kitchen.
Dahyun felt her heart race as she found sparks in Jeongyeon’s eyes and a smile spreading on the older girl’s face.

They knew that laugh.

“Is that...?” Dahyun asked.

Jeongyeon nodded carefully. “I think so.”

And then they moved. Hurried out of the changing room and into the kitchen, stopping dead only a few steps in, both taking in the sight.

Joohyun was standing in the kitchen, leaning over the line, an expression of the purest joy on her face. But she wasn’t looking at Jeongyeon and Dahyun. Because leaned against the side of the big dishwasher stood Taeyang. He wasn’t in his chefs uniform, but it was, undoubtedly Taeyang. Dahyun didn’t know what to say. Didn’t know what to do. After this long it was almost surreal to see him standing there. And then in a suit. But the way his eyes shone and his face split in a wide grin when he saw them made something move in Dahyun. The urge to somehow cry and laugh and hug him all at once. But she did none of those. Instead she just stared.

It was Jeongyeon who spoke, disbelief and breathlessness in her voice.

“Where the hell have you been?”

Taeyang gave a chuckle and then crossed his arms, a suddenly stern expression in his eyes.

“That’s no way to address your boss, Yoo.”

“My... What?” Jeongyeon asked, her voice and expression mirroring Dahyun’s confusion.

“Your boss.” Joohyun repeated. “That’s where he’s been all this time. Trying to get Yang-nim out of the place.”

“I- What?” Jeongyeon looked completely lost.

Dahyun just stared.

“I got the bastard fired.” Taeyang shrugged. “The way he was treating everyone and how he harassed and pressured my team - I couldn’t take it anymore. So I went to the big boss.”

“... Big boss? You mean there’s someone higher than Yang-nim?” Dahyun said, her mind finally catching up somewhat.

“You know, the owner.” Joohyun tried.

“I thought that was Yang-nim?” Jeongyeon asked.

“No, he was the head manager, but the owner has four restaurants, this being one of them.” Taeyang said.

“So you went to the owner and complained?”

“Yeah, she’s very reasonable and listened well to what I had to say, especially mentioning the incidents with Mina and some with Yang-ssi going after Joohyun. Of course Yang tried to sue me for going over his head and then tried to sue her for firing him, but neither worked because he didn’t have any relevant claims.” Taeyang looked more amused than anything.
“Oh, that’s brilliant.” Jeongyeon gave a breathy laugh, but then frowned. “But what the hell are you saying about being the boss?

“Oh, well, I do love cooking but I’ve basically been running the place before I went directly against him, so I knew a lot and when he got thrown, big boss Lee asked if I wanted the spot. So I’m the manager now and this lil’ thing,” Taeyang nodded over at Joohyun, who didn’t look the slightest like she appreciated being called lil’ thing, “Sorry, this big scary monster, is officially your new head chef. And her spot as sous chef will be filled by Seulgi.”

Taeyang uncrossed his arms and pushed himself from the dishwasher and looked back at Joohyun, sending her a grin.

“I can’t believe…” Jeongyeon trailed off.

“Believe, Yoo. But maybe believe while you go man the restaurant?” Taeyang tilted his head slightly.

“Shit, right. Sorry.” Jeongyeon looked flustered.

“Nah, we’re good. I’ll be in my office if you need me.” Taeyang said, giving a little wave before walking down the hall towards Yang-nim’s office, the sign now reading Taeyang. But before reaching it, he stopped and turned his head back at them.

“Dahyun? Can you stop by the office after your shift? I need a word.”

“1- uh, sure!” Dahyun flustered. A word?

“Thanks.” Taeyang said. Walked into the office. Left the door open and sat down at the desk.

Boss, huh?

...

Something hit Dahyun’s thigh, and she yelped, automatically jumping sideways. Stumbling slightly, she turned to see Jeongyeon with a dishcloth in her hand and a smirk on her face.

“Don’t make me kick you out of the apartment.” Dahyun warned, but Jeongyeon just shrugged and twisted the dish cloth again, ready to strike.

“No the fuck you don’t, Yoo Jeongyeon.” Dahyun moved out of Jeongyeon’s range, chuckling as Jeongyeon raised an eyebrow but let the dish cloth fall instead.

“Did you want something or are you just being a pain?” Dahyun asked when Jeongyeon didn’t make to speak or explain her actions.

“It’s eleven,” Jeongyeon shrugged, “you’re done for the night.”

“Oh.” Dahyun looked up at the clock over the bar. And she looked for just a second too long, because next second something touched her side. She yelped, but next second Jeongyeon’s arm was around her shoulders.
“Why so soft all of a sudden?” Dahyun asked with an awkward chuckle. It was really unlike Jeongyeon to be like this, especially in the restaurant.

“I have some repaying to do.” Jeongyeon shrugged and rubbed Dahyun’s shoulder before letting go.

“Oh.”

Jeongyeon pressed her lips together and shrugged. Their ill words hung in the air between them for a second, but then Jeongyeon twisted the dishcloth again, and Dahyun took a step back.

“Don’t you dare.” Dahyun said, slightly disoriented by Jeongyeon’s gestures.

“I will if you don’t get out of here.” Jeongyeon threatened.

“Fine, I’m going, just don’t do that.” Dahyun pointed to the dishcloth, as if it had personally offended her.

Jeongyeon laughed and let go of the dishcloth, placing it on the counter of the bar. “Don’t forget to stop by Taeyang-nim.”

“Nim… that’s so odd to say.”

“I know, right?” Jeongyeon grinned.

“Yeah. Thank you for reminding me.” Dahyun said.

“I got you.” Jeongyeon saluted her. Dahyun sent one back, and disappeared out into the kitchen.

The door to the office was still open, but Taeyang was sitting down now, a headset in his ear, working on the computer. The minute Dahyun knocked however, he looked up and smiled widely, leaning back in his chair. Dahyun shifted her weight but Taeyang gestured for the chair in front of the desk.

“Please, sit.”

Dahyun nodded and did so, knees knocking together and squirming slightly. It was really not the context she was used to with Taeyang. He had always just been the caring and goofy older brother. But now he was their boss.

“Things are going to be running a bit differently here from now on.” Taeyang twirled a pen between his fingers and looked at Dahyun. Then he shook his head, an amused smile playing around his lips. “Sorry, that was the most cliché way of phrasing it. I’m not used to being in charge like this. It’s different than just ordering my kitchen staff around.”

“You’re good, a lot better than Yang-nim already.” Dahyun assured him.

“Thank you. The thing is, we’re not getting Mina back. I called her tonight and she’s rejected my offer to come back. So there’s a spot open for a new waiter, but I’m also changing the system a bit. Jeongyeon and you are the senior waitresses, and I’m down to six waiters in total. And just like I have a head chef in Joohyunie, I need a head waiter. Someone who can step up and take on the training of our new waiters. I’m hiring two new people to take over for Mina and to relieve some of the pressure on Felix and a few of the other younglings. I won’t have people overworking themselves.”
“That’s very kind of you.” Dahyun said, not entirely sure where this was going.

“But in order to keep this system, like I said, it requires someone to be in charge of the waiters. And I want you to be that person. The head waitress.”

Dahyun felt her mouth fall open in a comical ‘o’, searching Taeyang’s face.

“Really?”

“You’re the best at organizing, you’ve stuck by this all the way and Joohyun tells me how you’ve come back from it all, and how much of a fighter you’ve proven yourself to be. It comes with a raise and you’ll get hours for organizing shifts and overseeing training of the new staff.”

Dahyun swallowed. This was an amazing opportunity, and the getting to organize and train new staff were in fact some of Dahyun’s favorite parts of work. And maybe if she took it, she could properly save up to visit Sana, even if just for a while. It was honestly tempting. But then there was the prospect of the next six months, with a full semester and hospital visits and dealing with her anxiety of playing, with Chaeyoung. Everything the past months had just been so overwhelming and weird and wonderful and scary. And more than anything, Dahyun needed to keep breathing like she had learned recently.

For the longest time, she weighed everything, Taeyang sitting patiently, waiting for an answer. And when she spoke, it was with careful wording and knotted brows.

“I can’t take that offer.” She said. “It’s more responsibility than I can take on myself at the moment. I’m getting my hand fixed and I’m working hard to be able to play professionally. And besides, Jeongyeon is older, more stable and works more full shifts. She’s the one you should offer this to. Plus she’s entering her senior year, she needs the experience on her resume sooner than I will.”

Taeyang nodded, and leaned further back in the chair and clicked the pen, narrowing his eyes.

“And there’s no way I can get you to reconsider?”

“Unfortunately, at this time, no. I need to get my life in order before taking on any more. And Jeongyeon… she’s the right person for this job, she’ll be an amazing head waitress.”

“I know she will, and she was actually the one I was going to ask in case this happened.” Taeyang nodded and put the pen down. “But I’m really not having a lot of luck with my plans. First Mina and now you.”

Dahyun leaned back in the chair. “Trust me, I wish I could’ve taken on the offer. And a few months ago I might’ve. But I’ve learned a lot about myself lately. And I know now that I can’t go through every open door at once, or I’ll lose myself.”

“Philosophical coming from such a weirdo.” Taeyang chuckled.

Dahyun shrugged. “Maybe I’m not much of a weirdo anymore. Maybe I’ve outgrown my weirdness.”

“Right, sure. I heard your Rocket Raccoon impression a few hours ago.”

“Well, there ain’t no thing like me, except me.” Dahyun said in her best accent, earning a booming laugh from Taeyang.
“But if you want,” Dahyun continued as soon as Taeyang had stopped laughing. “I’ll still help train the kiddos.”

“That’d be good.” Taeyang smiled, then sighed. “Better get cracking on hiring new people then.”

“You better.” Dahyun agreed.

“And you should get home and sleep young lady.”

“Psh… young lady… I’m 21 years old, just so you know.” Dahyun clicked her tongue and rolled her eyes. But Taeyang just shook his head with a smile and sent her on her way.

…

The weather was warmer than what was comfortable even with the heavy rain-filled clouds overhead, but the plastic cup was cool and wet with condensation and Dahyun relished in the feeling. August was almost here, and with August came the end of their summer subjects and three weeks worth off from school before the fall semester started.

“I’m really, really looking forward to not having gen ed classes next semester.” Tzuyu sighed as they sat down on the bench in the shade under the canopy outside Jihyo’s coffee shop.

“I wish.” Dahyun shook her head. “I have to take most of mine this next semester while they fix my hand.”

“So you signed up then?”

“Yeah, I talked to the administration at the faculty and they accepted that I just push some subjects around and it’ll be fine. I’ll start back up with music subjects after Christmas hopefully. But if I’m not ready by next summer then I’m pretty much screwed, and I’ll have to just do a general studies bachelor, which I don’t want at all.”

Tzuyu nodded and tucked her hair behind her ear. “You’ll make it. You’re training with Chaeyoung, right?”

“If by training you mean sitting in front of the piano trying not to have a panic attack, then yes, I’m training.”

“It’s a start.” Tzuyu insisted.

“That’s what Chaeyoung said.” Dahyun sighed.

“I know, we talked about it the other night at the movies, that you’re making progress and taking little steps.” Tzuyu said and drank from her coffee.

Dahyun looked at her own coffee and smiled at it. The sound of Sana’s singing sounded in her ears as silence fell between herself and Tzuyu. Sana had been in an unusually good mood this morning, singing old songs while cleaning out some stuff in her closet, showing them to Dahyun every now and then, while Dahyun ate her breakfast.

“Good day?” Tzuyu asked.
“Very.” Dahyun muttered happily. Remembered how Sana had put on her old high school uniform and twirled around for Dahyun just to make the younger girl blush, whereafter she had thoroughly teased Dahyun for her red cheeks. But really, what was Dahyun supposed to do? Not have a thing for uniforms? Not a chance.

“Any news on when you’ll have her home?”

“Nope.” Dahyun bit her lip, and then met Tzuyu’s eyes, remembering how Sana’s mood had dropped at the end of the conversation this morning. How she had obviously struggled not to get sad and how Dahyun had tried to tell her it was okay that she got sad. She hadn’t listened well, and had smiled when Dahyun said goodbye, but there hadn’t been a spark in her eyes.

“Tzuyu, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.” Tzuyu took a sip of her frappe.

“...Would it be completely stupid of me to take from my savings to go visit her, Sana, once classes end? I know I can’t exactly afford it but I—... I just miss her and I think it might brighten her mood to not be over there all alone, even if it’s just for a week or two. But then again, she just might get more sad when I have to leave again?"

“I don’t think it’s a stupid idea. If she’s up for you visiting then go for it.” Tzuyu shrugged. “Just go for what you want. Even if you aren’t sure of the outcome, as long as you have good intentions, things usually work out.”

“That’s true.” Dahyun nodded. “I just wish I knew how she’d react if I asked her.”

“You can’t know. You just have to trust your instincts.”

“How about I trust your instincts? They’re better than mine.” Dahyun grabbed her spoon and dug up a good bit of whipped cream, relishing in the taste of it and of the chocolate sprinkles on top of it.

“Dahyun. Just go for it. I mean, it worked the first time, when you asked her to kiss you.”

Dahyun sighed. Tzuyu was right about that one. It just didn’t change the fact that the idea, at least in Dahyun’s head, was absolutely ridiculous, and had it been anyone else, she wouldn’t even have said it out loud. But with Tzuyu, she could always be honest, even if it felt stupid. It just didn’t seem that stupid if going to Japan could make Sana happier; if it could mean maybe weeks of Sana’s arms around Dahyun. Then wasn’t it worth it? Except, there was still the chance that Sana didn’t want her to visit.

Tzuyu didn’t try to get her mind off it, but merely scooted closer and let Dahyun lean against her. Wrapped an arm around Dahyun’s shoulders and took another sip of her frappe.

Dahyun sighed and adjusted against the tall girl, closing her eyes. “Should I ask her?”

“Of course. I think showing up unexpected might be a bit too much 90s rom com.” Tzuyu said, bumping her knees against Dahyun’s, amusement in her voice.

“No, I mean—”

“I know what you mean.” Tzuyu interrupted her with a breathy chuckle and leaned her head on Dahyun’s. “Yes, I think you should ask her.”

“Mm, maybe I will.” Dahyun sighed. “I’ll consider it at least.”
“Consider what?”

Dahyun opened her eyes and lifted her head from Tzuyu’s shoulder. Jihyo stood in front of them, apron around her waist and a hand on her hip. Her eyes glinted and the smile around her lips widened as she shared a look with Tzuyu.

“Oh, she’s just being princess charming, that’s all.”

“Yeah?”

“Considering possibly maybe doing something that might be charming and might be stupid as heck.” Dahyun corrected.

“It’s romantic, I say go for it.” Tzuyu shrugged.

Dahyun looked around at Tzuyu, eyebrows raised. “Since when did you become one for romance?”

“I’m not, but you are.” Tzuyu said.

“No, it’s gross.” Dahyun scrunched her nose.

“You two are both such bad liars.” Jihyo clicked her tongue, making the younger girls look around at her. “Dahyun, whatever you’re planning, do it, she’s gonna love it, that girl is so lost in you. I’m honestly still confused about how you managed to make any girl so heart-eyed at your jokes, but she is. And Tzuyu, don’t you dare tell me you’re not one for romance. I refuse to date a hypocrite.”

Tzuyu laughed and nodded. “Fine, a little romance isn’t too bad then.”

“Good.” Jihyo grinned and leaned down, giving Tzuyu a quick kiss on the forehead before getting back to work. Dahyun cringed at the silly smile plastered on Tzuyu’s face, but quickly lost herself in the fantasy of travelling to Japan to see Sana. To dance around her room with her and see if Sana actually knew how to make toast in her own home or if it was a general thing that toasters hated her.

Yeah… Japan didn’t sound bad at all.

…

The apartment was empty and it was stuffy from the heat outside. Dahyun was huddled in the couch, the TV running like background noise to a world she was looking at from the outside. Her only focus was the phone, waiting for Sana to answer. Just as she shifted to wake her buzzing leg, Sana picked up, and her face appeared on the screen, eyes big and tired.

“Hi.”

Dahyun could hear it in her voice, that her day hadn’t gotten better since she wrote in the morning that the doctor had been by to check on her mom. A week had officially passed since Sana had admitted her hardship with their situation, and every day had been unpredictable to say the least. It was obvious that Sana was doing her best, but with every day that passed, Dahyun’s courage faltered a little bit more and the idea to ask if she could visit, was no more than a silly girl’s hope by now. But classes ended tomorrow, and Dahyun was officially overdue on asking. She should’ve done it last
week. Should’ve done it every day since then, so she could leave the day after tomorrow if she had wanted. It’s just that *should* is a lot easier than actually doing it. Especially considering the outcome of the last big gesture Dahyun made.

With every second that passed, Dahyun felt the pressure to speak. But her mind wouldn’t keep still and her throat kept drying up. Sana didn’t speak either. Just laid down on her leaning on her arm, brows knotted slightly. And Dahyun felt helpless, her stomach tugging uncomfortably as Sana reached and touched the screen.

It took more time than Dahyun wanted to admit to realize, that Sana was trying to feel her through the screen. For her to return the gesture, running the tip of her finger softly over the screen at where Sana’s cheek was displayed.

“The deadline for signing up for classes is next week.” Sana whispered.

Dahyun nodded. “Do you think you’ll make it back by september?”

Sana shrugged. No. It meant no. And Dahyun couldn’t help how her face fell. The skin around Sana’s lips went white as she pressed them tightly together. This was the time to say something. Anything. But she didn’t get a word out and Sana hid her face in her arm.

“Sana…” Dahyun tried. But it was no good. Her shoulders shook in that way that told Dahyun that Sana was trying to stop herself from crying, trying to suppress it. And it was worse than knowing that she was crying.

“I’m sorry.” Sana croaked and sniffled, her face still hidden from view, the length of Sana’s black roots revealing how long she had put herself aside.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Dahyun assured her, “you’re allowed to be sad. It’s a shitty situation.”

“I want to go home.” Sana sobbed into the floral duvet.

“You will eventually.” Dahyun insisted. Sana nodded and sniffled once more. “Sooner or later you’re going to come back and when you do we’re all going to the beach. We already agreed. And it doesn’t matter if it’s weeks or months or years, we’re going to the beach together. The nine of us.”

Sana nodded into her arm again, audibly swallowing a sob. “But I don’t want it to be years. I don’t even want it to be days.”

“If it were up to me you’d already be here.” Dahyun said quietly and gathered all of her courage. “Or I’d be there.”

“I just want to be in my own bed.” Sana’s voice broke. “I want to dance with Momo and watch movies with Chaeyoung and talk to Mina about home in a way that makes me not despise it.”

“... And me?” Dahyun couldn’t stop herself.

“You know, right? You know I miss you so much, right?” Sana raised her head and looked at Dahyun with red eyes and wet cheeks. “It’s not a single thing I miss with you; it’s everything.
Dahyun nodded, feeling her heart a little lighter and a little heavier at the same time.

“I swear when you get back, I’m gonna wrap you and me up in this blanket and I’m gonna fall asleep on you on the couch.” Dahyun said firmly. “Revenge for the first night, where you cost me an entire night’s sleep.”

“I left when I woke.” Sana argued with just a hint of sunshine in her voice. She dried her cheeks.

“And you think I actually managed to sleep well after that? You got me crushing so hard just from that night.” Dahyun raised an eyebrow. The tiniest of smiles pulled at the corners of Sana’s lips and she leaned on her arm again, repositioning the phone.

“Well, I didn’t know. It took you weeks and weeks to confess.” Sana said playfully.

“I know. But I’m pretty sure I was yours from the first time you laughed.” Dahyun said, but felt the pain as soon as she had stopped talking. It hurt to think about. Hurt to see how Sana’s eyes wavered. And the awkward silence that fell between them hurt more than all of that combined.

It took minutes for one of them to break it.

“Mina texted me today.” Sana said quietly.

“Oh?” Dahyun frowned, a sting of regret in her heart, that she hadn’t been brave enough to be the one to do so. To ask to be Sana’s. But she picked up the conversation nonetheless. “What about?”

“Just wanted to know how things were, and we talked for a little. She has a very soul-baring spirit. You trust her fast.” Sana smiled.

Dahyun nodded and let out a breathy chuckle. That much was definitely true.

“Is she settling in alright?”

“Seems like it, haven’t heard her complain. We managed to fit all of her cute mugs and plates in the cupboard, and she’s taken over some of Chaeyoung’s old chores; grocery shopping and cleaning the bathroom. I definitely don’t miss either.”

“As long as they remember to get you the right kind of tea.” Sana tried feebly.

“I think I’m pretty easy to figure out on that part. I’m biased.”

Sana smiled, but then it faded. Dahyun however was determined not to let the sadness build between them. She puffed her cheeks and chuckled when Sana poked at the screen again, pretending to deflate at her touch.

“Oh, by the way.” Dahyun smiled, remembering Momo’s news at their latest movie night. “Did Momo tell you she got the spot on the dance crew?”

Sana frowned. And then, with no warning Sana’s eyes filled with tears once more and she nodded. Dahyun’s heart dropped faster than the mood.

“She called me right after she got the news. And she begged me to come back. I got really mad, because I felt like it was unfair of her to pressure me, even if she was right in all the things she said. I
ended up hanging up on her.” Sana’s voice shook as she spoke. “I haven’t talked to her since.”

A helpless sob caught in Sana’s throat and she hid her face once more.

“Sana…” Dahyun couldn’t help the way it sounded. Couldn’t help the sigh. And it wasn’t meant as disappointment but it was obvious that Sana took it like that.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I don’t know what to do.”

“Talk to her.” Dahyun begged. “She’s your best friend. Just talk to her.”

“I just feel like such a coward.”

“You’re not. I promise you’re not.” Dahyun tried. Hesitated and then took a deep breath. “Sana?”

“Mh?” Sana whimpered. Seemed completely out of it.

“Would it make- I mean- … I have three weeks off from school starting tomorrow.”

“What?” Sana looked up, confusion in her big sad eyes.

“I have time off, and now that Taeyang is in charge I might be able to switch it around so I can take a week or two off work? Go see you?”

“I…” Sana looked both confused and caught.

“You don’t have to say yes, or even decide right now. But I was talking to Tzuyu about it and I thought maybe-. Maybe if you can’t come here, then I could go there?”

“Dahyun. It’s not- I wouldn’t want you to bo-”

“It’s not a bother. I promise. I want to see you, Sana. I want to hug you and kiss you and make it better somehow, and if I can do that by coming to see you, then why not?”

Sana bit her lip so hard it made her wince. And Dahyun couldn’t help but regret the decision to ask.

“I already had to send Momo home, I don’t know how I could bear to send you home at the end if you come visit. It’ll be too hard. It’s… It’s too hard. And-”

“And?” Dahyun wasn’t sure she wanted to hear the next part, but there wasn’t a choice but to ask her to say it.

“... And I’m not sure I can do this anymore.” Sana whispered.

Dahyun felt her stomach turn to lead. Felt the lump settle in her throat and her limbs go numb.

“What?”

“I can’t keep doing this to you, I don’t like who I am when I make things so hard on you, but it hurts that I’m here when my friends aren’t, but if I can’t go to you then-”

“Then you should let us come to you.” Dahyun cut her off sharply. She knew what Sana had been trying to say. That maybe she should settle for finding friends where she was and leave Korea behind. Leave Dahyun, Momo - all of them - behind.

“I can’t, Dahyun. You deserve better than this, than this mess I am right now, it’s- you should be happier than I can make you.” Sana said through tears.
“That’s not for you to decide, Sana. You don’t get to decide if I love you or not. If it’s you then it’s okay, I won’t let you pull back for my sake. I don’t want to lose you, Sana.”

“But I’m not the same girl. I’m-”

“You’re you.” Dahyun croaked. “You’re you, no matter how you’re feeling. When you’re happy and bouncing around the apartment on bare feet singing, you’re you. When you yell at the toaster you’re you. When you’re crying because you love so much it’s tearing you in half, you’re you. And I’m yours for all of it. Even on your worst day, I’m yours.”

“I’m not worth it.”

“I think you are. And you can’t take that away from me. You don’t get to take you away from me. Not like this.”

Dahyun’s breath caught at the final words, and she felt her heart hammering under her ribs. Saw how Sana’s eyes wavered. How she once again hid her face in her arm, shoulders shaking.

Dahyun wondered how many times in the past month she had seen this. Sana crying. Sana devastated. And it occurred to Dahyun, that despite what she said about wanting to spare Dahyun, there was a part of Sana that considered the out for herself. That maybe, instead of Sana sparing Dahyun, it should be the other way around. Because this, this really was Sana tearing herself in half.

Briefly, Dahyun’s mind travelled to Mina, remembering all of their talks. But this wasn’t like confessing to a murder you didn’t think about committing. This was actual pain, not just fear. And it could be prevented. Maybe not immediately. Maybe it would just tear Dahyun apart for a while. Maybe. But if there was a chance that Sana could find a way to not feel like this, then, maybe there was a point.

“Dahyun?”

Dahyun looked up at the sound, a frailty like no other in Sana’s voice.

“Can we maybe- maybe just- can you stay tonight? Just tonight, I don’t think- I know it’s selfish but… Just tonight. Please.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading <3
Sana

Chapter Summary

She lives

Chapter Notes

I know this is a long one guys, but I hope you'll stick to the end. Y'all really wanted Sana... so here she is.
Thank you for waiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Quiet settled over the town, and the clouds parted slowly to reveal a brilliant sunset, yellow and red melting together in a vision so stunning it almost took Dahyun’s breath away. And with a hammering heart she watched the city from the window of her bedroom, the warm night air hitting her face as she leaned on the sill. For a moment, she swore she could hear the subtle sound of piano from somewhere far away, but the next moment a car passed by and a bird chirped from its home at the top of the next building.

Dahyun reached around, pulling the hair tie out of her hair, rustling through it lazily as August progressed before Dahyun’s eyes. As she inhaled deeply, the faint smell of the rain filled her and gave her peace.

Swallows crossed the skies in search of food, and orange faded into pink and purple, the sound of the street putting sound to color. Somewhere on the next street a child cried, and a dog barked. The bird on the next building chirped happily once more. It didn’t know better.

Dahyun sighed. As she followed the swallows in the sky, her gaze fell on the straight white crystals from a plane, and she wondered briefly where might be going. But it didn’t matter. Dahyun wasn’t going anywhere. She was going to stay here in this room and wait for the stars to turn on, hoping that they would shine bright enough for her to see despite the lights from the street lights around her, gaining strength as the sun set.

As Dahyun took in the view, the last beams of sunlight disappeared behind the buildings, the sun slowly on its way to shine for someone else.

There was magic in the air on this night, Dahyun found. The sounds faded slowly with the sunlight, the blue of the night sky taking over for purple. And miraculously, one by one, the moon and the stars turned on, replacing the sun, lighting up Dahyun’s world. By now, the only remnant of the sun was the warm kiss on her cheek. But it was okay. For Dahyun reached for the moon, catching its light. Let it rest in her hand for a moment before holding the hand to her chest, filling her heart with its might. And though tears threatened to fall, the smile around her lips kept them at bay.
When Dahyun finally turned from the night sky and huddled under the covers, the moon shone in her chest and blinked with every beat of her heart, and the sun warmed her cheeks. No matter what happened from now on, Dahyun had finally accepted it. Had accepted the uncertainty of life, and that the book was coming to a close. And maybe she would have to relearn for the next battle. But for now, she was okay. Come what may.

For now, the twenty one year old girl merely turned onto her side, and drifted off to sleep.

…

Wind swept over a sea of green, and Sana crouched, studying a patch of clovers. Ran her hand over the surface to spot for any irregularities. Any rarity. Any luck. But there was none.

“Damn it.” Sana mumbled, even though she wasn’t supposed to swear. But it was hard not to, when things looked so bleak. Closing her eyes, the young girl got up and looked around for another patch. Felt a headache build behind her eyes as she squinted to see better. Maybe she should get her eyes checked? No, that wasn’t a concern for now. Right now, it was about her mom. But maybe before she started junior high, even if being a four eyes in junior high wasn’t something she particularly fancied.

No. Not right now.

Sana shook her head and looked around once more. The next patch was five feet to her right. But here she found no luck either. And with every patch she searched, the hope faded and her stomach got heavier and heavier with fear. What if they didn’t find one? What if they couldn’t make her better? Somehow the two had become connected in her head. Find luck. Heal mom. Be happy.

Sana squatted and looked at another patch. But here too were only stems with three leaves, not four. A sigh slipped past Sana despite her intention to keep hope alive. Maybe she should just go home. Well, go to the hospital. What if her mom was getting worse while she was here? What if it was Sana who kept her mom alive? Then shouldn’t she be there? They always say that parents live for their kids. And Sana always felt that her mom had. That she had always lived just to make Sana smile and laugh and be her pillar. Until a month ago. Until her heart gave in, and she learned that her mother had in fact never been properly well. And now she was here, in a stupid park by the hospital, looking for something, anything, that might make a difference. Not that anything probably would. What difference does an extra leaf do anyway?

“A girl’s voice carried by the wind through the park just as a breeze caught Sana’s black hair. Sana turned her head. Looked around and felt a jolt of hope as she found Momo right by the edge of the park, the wind trying eagerly to catch the short pigtails as she waved Sana over.

“Sana-chan!”

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“Sana-chan come here!” Momo called again “I found them!”
Sana bit her lip and hesitated for a moment. But only a moment. And next thing, she was running across the park to get to Momo, coming to a halt as the older girl squatted and pointed down into the grass.

“Here!” Momo said excitedly.

And she was right. Between the stones and the bushes and the light green spring grass was a patch of clovers. Not that the rest of the park didn’t have them; but this patch was different. For here lay the magic they had been searching for, right before them. One, two, ten, fifty four-leaf-clovers spread across the patch, waiting for someone to discover them.

“Now she’ll get better.” Momo whispered, barely able to contain the bubbles in her voice.

Sana nodded eagerly, settling on a rather large stone and running her hand through the patch, just to feel the softness against her hand.

“Pick one.” Momo settled in the grass. “The prettiest one. We’ll give it to your mom.”

“But will the magic work if we pick them? Isn’t it like flowers, that they’re prettiest in the wild where they can get water and sun? Won’t it wither?”

“We’ll press it. I bet Hana-chan has a book.” Momo suggested “We’ll press it so it never withers.”

Sana nodded. Felt her stomach jolt as she closed her fingers around the stem of the biggest one she could find. But she couldn’t get herself to pull it from its home.

“What?”

“What if this doesn’t help?” Sana whispered “What if her new heart still won’t beat?”

“It will, Sana-chan. It will beat. She’s not done being your mom yet, and you’re her luck.” Momo reached and put a hand on Sana’s arm. Sana nodded and put her hand over Momo’s. It helped just to have her close. Then she reached once more and this time picked the four-leaf-clover. Held it between her fingers by the ground from which she had taken it and watched as Momo too picked one.

“Who is yours for?” Sana wondered.

“You.” Momo simply said.

Sana felt the eyes glaze over before she could stop it, and felt Momo’s arms around her before she had even registered that the tears had fallen. Always one step ahead, Momo was. But she always waited for Sana. Always helped her.

“You’re squashing me.” Sana huffed.

“Shut up.” Momo mumbled into Sana’s hair.

“Okay.” Sana breathed.

For a moment neither spoke. Just held each other and each their four-leaf-clover. But then Momo spoke, her voice low and nervous.

“Satang?”

Sana frowned a bit at the new nickname, but didn’t comment. “What’s up?”
“If I like girls the same way you like boys, will you still be my friend?” Momo whispered.

Sana smiled. Pressed a kiss to Momo’s cheek, almost by her ear, and heard her breathy chuckle. Then she drew back slightly, though not enough to look Momo in the eyes.

“... If I like girls the same way I like boys, will you still be my friend?”

Momo nodded wordlessly. Hugged the younger girl tighter again.

“Motang-” Sana said, her breath hitched. “Still squashing me.”

Momo didn’t let go. And Sana didn’t either. Just held the four-leaf clover and held Momo close. She had always felt lucky to have found Momo, and today was just another proof. That Sana had all the luck she needed, in the arms that held her tight.

They pressed both clovers in Hana’s manga book. Gave one to Sana’s mom, and put the other in a frame in Sana’s room.

…

Daylight slowly forced through the heavy clouds, lighting the city in monochrome, and a zipper tab was dragged across the length of a bag, closing it shut.

…

“I’ll try, okay? I can’t- I can’t promise anything.” Sana held a hand to her chest just to ground herself.

“Just make sure you do this for yourself if you do.”

“The same with you, Momo. Don’t stay for me.” Sana fiddled with the soft fur of the baby blue alpaca in her lap.

“Promise.” Momo said steadfast in the other end of the line. “You can do this, Satang.”

“Mh…” Sana mumbled. Picked at the alpaca’s ear.

“Say it.”

“Kinky.”

“Sana. I’m serious. Tell me, instead of just saying mh .” Momo’s voice was unusually serious.

“Fine. I can do this.”

“Yes, you can.” Momo sounded beyond pleased with herself and Sana felt the urge to tell her to shut up. But she didn’t. Instead she just said goodbye and turned off the call. Stared down at the blue
plushie and then around her room. It was completely stuffed, and somehow it seemed smaller than usual. As if it was getting ready for her not to fit in there anymore. And somehow, it made it easier for Sana to get up from the floral sheets and walk out. To head into the kitchen where her mom sat with her hands around a cup, warming her hands. They were always cold; even in summer.

“Mom?”

“Sana-chan.” Her mom’s face lit up, and she gestured for Sana to sit down opposite her.

With a feeble smile, Sana did so. Looked down at the table and then at her mom’s hands. But she couldn’t look her in the eye. It felt shameful, what she was about to ask.

“Let me into that beautiful mind of yours, my darling?” Her mom said, her voice melodious and soothing.

“Momo…” Sana felt the lump in her throat. “It’s about Momo.”

“Oh.” Her mom breathed. But there was something in the way she did, that made Sana’s eyes snap up.

“Mom, I-” Sana felt like crying. Maybe she couldn’t do it after all.

“It’s okay. I know.”

“You… you know?” Sana frowned. Had she heard Sana and Momo talk about it?

“It doesn’t change anything for me who you love.” Sana’s mom held the mug a little tighter. Sana felt completely lost. What was she on about…? Oh.

“No!” Sana’s lips split in a grin and she laughed. “Oh no, mom. No, I’m not dating Momo.”

Sana’s mom moved back a little, surprise in her eyes. “You’re not?”

“No! In no way. I- uh….” Sana’s heart hammered. This was as good a time as any, right? Her mom had just said it would be okay, right? “I… I do like… you know, girls. And boys! And- and anyone, I mean-. I have had a- I’ve-”

“You’ve dated a girl?” Her mom helped, a slightly amused smile on her pale lips.

Sana nodded and swallowed. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“You weren’t ready.” Her mom said calmly, taking the cup of tea to her lips and taking a sip. “It’s okay.”

Sana nodded. Mostly to herself. It was okay - even if this had kind of come as a surprise conversation to Sana. It was good to have gotten it out.

“Good.” Sana said, trying to steady her breathing. “Okay. Good. But that’s… that wasn’t actually what I needed to talk to you about.”

“Then what, my darling?”

Sana looked back down. How was this somehow harder now than it had been five minutes ago? Okay, her pulse was definitely higher - she could hear it rushing in her ears. But honestly, there wasn’t a doubt in Sana’s mind that she would be supportive. So why was Sana so scared?
“Momo, she- well, there’s this- … She’s trying out for a scholarship, you know, for dancing.”

“To college? Oh, Sana, that’s wonderful news. Where to?” Sana’s mom asked, her smile genuine and warm, but her eyes searching Sana’s.

“… Seoul.”

“Oh.” Sana’s mom said, as if she had suddenly understood. “So that’s the crunch. She’s leaving you.”

Sana pressed her lips together. Nodded and then shook her head. Reached and put her warm hands outside her mom’s cold ones around the teacup.

“I want to go with her.”

Sana’s mom’s hands tightened around the teacup, but she didn’t waver. “To Korea?”

Sana nodded. “I probably won’t get a scholarship, I’m not nearly as good as Momo. But I’d like to try.”

“You want to study in Korea?”

Again, Sana nodded.

“What if it wasn’t dance - if it wasn’t Momo. Would you still want to study in Korea?”

Sana felt a lump settle in her throat. She should lie here. She should say she would go no matter what; that it was Korea that made her want to go, and not Momo, not dance. But she couldn’t lie. If she was to go, they had to know why, and it had to be reason enough.

Sana shook her head.

“Okay.” Sana’s mom said decisively. “Then you need to try.”

That answer came as a complete surprise. Wasn’t it situations like these where parents were supposed to remind their daughters to think about their future and not go hurling after some friend just to stay together? To choose academics over the creative?

“You think so?” Sana asked breathlessly.

“Yes. Because if you want it so much that you’re willing to move to Korea on your own, you and Momo, then it must be something you’re incredibly passionate about.” Her mom said.

The lump in Sana’s throat grew and she finally looked up at her mom.

“I don’t want to leave you.” Sana whispered.

“Oh, child. Oh, my dear girl. You’ll never leave me. You’re always here.” Sana’s mom said, turning her hands under Sana’s to take them instead. “You’ll always be here. Because this is your home. Your first home. And now you’re ready to find your next.”

Sana nodded. Felt how her mom’s hands felt a little warmer now - from Sana and the teacup. Mostly Sana. Not that she was competing with a teacup or anything. She just liked to imagine that she could heal her mom somehow.
Okay, maybe also competing with the teacup. A little.

...

The curtains hung neatly on each side of the window, and the vase had been emptied earlier that day. But now it was final. The room was empty of life and the lights turned off.

Only memories kept the furniture company now.

...

“Last call for flight EG4529 to Manila, boarding at gate B14. Repeating, last call for flight EG4529 to Manila.”

Sana’s eyes traced over the words on her cellphone, sniffing slightly and blinking away the tears. Then she turned off the phone and pocketed it, running a hand through the newly blonde hair. With a deep breath, she nodded to herself. There was no point in missing her parents now. She had her whole life ahead of her, and they had already said their goodbyes. Not that they hadn’t offered to come to the airport, but Sana preferred it like this. To take this last step alone. Somehow, it felt like, if she just said goodbye at home, it would be like going to school and coming home in the afternoon.

Just with months between departure and homecoming.

Sana shook her head. No. She was okay. It was okay. She was going to Korea with Momo and they were going to dance. They were going to thrive. It was all set and paid. They even had an apartment waiting for them with a few other Japanese girls who were already in Korea to study. Everything was ready. Except - it seemed - Momo.

Momo had been on edge for weeks, ever since coming out to her mom. It had taken so much courage to do, but she had been just as accepting as Sana’s mom had been, albeit without assuming that Sana was her girlfriend. In fact, when Momo had asked if she thought they were, she had merely laughed and shaken her head. Said she knew best friends when she saw them.

But with Momo’s dad it was different. She had always been closer to him, and so the risk of losing him, or even a part of him, was much scarier. But she had promised herself that she would do it before leaving for Korea.

And now the deadline was up, and Sana could see her best friend cower under the pressure she had put on herself.

“Momo…” Sana said tentatively. “We have to go.”

It wasn’t that Sana wanted to interrupt them, but they were late. Really, actually late. And the queue to security was just building.
Momo nodded, and Sana took a respectful step back to let her say goodbye to her dad. Watched as Momo took a deep breath and held out her fist. As her dad bumped it with a kind smile.

“You come back to me soon, kiddo.” Momo’s dad said, holding their fists together.

“I’ll be back for Christmas, I promise.” Momo said decisively.

“Good. And be careful.” Momo’s dad said, worry in his eyes.

“Always.” Momo nodded.

“And promise me you won’t go finding some Korean boy over there, so you never come home to us.” Momo’s dad joked.

Momo cringed visibly, but he didn’t seem to notice. He just waited as Momo opened her mouth and then closed it again.

Then she withdrew her hand.

“Bye, dad.”

“Bye, kiddo.” Momo’s dad said quietly.

Sana grabbed the handle of her carry-on, and checked the tickets again, giving her best friend a few more seconds of time, in case she needed it.

“Sana?” Momo’s dad’s voice was deep and reassuring as he spoke her name, but it still startled her. She hadn’t expected it. And looking up from her passport, she felt her heart leap. His arm was outstretched with a fist reached towards her just like it always was with Momo.

“Take care of each other.” Momo’s dad said.

Sana nodded. Stared at the fist and felt her throat close up.

He didn’t hurry her. It wasn’t something they had ever done, a gesture normally only for his daughters. And with the utmost care, Sana raised her own arm, clutching her hand and pressing her fist against his. It was weird but good.

“You’re a good kid, Sana. I’m glad Momo has you - she’s lucky.” Momo’s dad said, as if their connected fists allowed this conversation.

Sana sniffled and nodded. She wanted to tell him that she, Sana, was the lucky one. She just couldn’t get the words out.

It didn’t seem to matter. He understood.

“You better hurry.” Momo’s dad said, retreating his fist at the same time Sana did.

“Oh, right. Yes.” Sana shook her head, as if recovering from a haze. Looked around a Momo. “I guess this is it then.”

Momo nodded, her cheeks flushed and a small smile playing on her lips. She still seemed out of it, and Sana swore she could see the doubt bubble in Momo’s veins.

“Come on.” Sana said softly, taking her hand. It was no good to let it drag out. She would just get more and more upset with herself. It’d be better if they just got somewhere safe without her dad so
Sana could calm her enough to see that it wasn’t the end of the world, having missed the deadline she had set for herself. After all, coming out was supposed to be something you did when you felt safe to do so. Ideally. And right now Momo wasn’t feeling safe.

“Okay.” Momo nodded.

With a last goodbye, the girls turned from Momo’s dad, hand in hand and their carry-on’s on either side, dragging the suitcases along.

“You’re okay.” Sana mumbled as they walked towards security. Momo nodded.

They both knew she wasn’t entirely okay.

Sana just hadn’t realized how much it bubbled in Momo until they had gotten to the other side of security. Because Momo’s dad was still standing, visible from the walkway from security towards the tax-free area, and the sight of him made Momo stop. He hadn’t noticed them, still looking into the crowd of people going through security. Waited to see them off to the very end.

“It’s okay.” Sana reminded her.

But Momo just shook her head. Then she yelled.

“Dad?! Hey dad!”

Momo’s dad turned his head, eyes scanning for the source until he found first Sana and then Momo. He smiled. And to Sana’s surprise, so did Momo.

But this surprise was nothing to the surprise of the words she shouted, loud enough for everyone in a five mile radius to hear.

“I can promise I won’t find a Korean boy. Because I don’t even like boys. I like girls!”

Sana stared at her best friend. What in the actual… But Momo didn’t seem fazed. The nerves that had before bubbled now shone as a strong glow through her, chest rising and falling heavily as if she was running a pulse of 150. It was only the tightened grip on Sana’s hand that made Sana aware of the fear in her best friend. It was still there. Just hidden under a rush of adrenaline.

For the longest moment, Momo just stared out at her dad. Then a shiver ran through Momo so violently that Sana felt it. It seemed that the adrenaline was making way for fear. And somehow it pushed some button in Sana’s body, and she looked out at Momo’s dad. Wanted to shout at him for not reacting.

But she had been wrong. Because Momo’s dad had reacted. Stood with his arm stretched in Momo’s direction, a fist held out.

The shiver hadn’t been fear. It was relief.

And Sana watched with sunshine in her veins as Momo held out her own fist, a grin spreading on her face. Then she lowered her hand and looked at Sana.

“I’m ready.”

“Good.” Sana muttered happily. “Me too.”
For a moment, Sana just looked at Momo. Then winked at her and looked at Momo’s dad.

“Me too! I like girls too!”

Momo’s dad chuckled and Momo giggled. Sana could only hear the latter, but knew it was practically the same, albeit with a few registers difference.

With a final glance back at Momo’s dad, they walked away together, Momo clinging to her side happily. Walked into the new world, no matter what it might be.

It was okay. As long as they had each other, they would be okay.

Motang and Satang, joined by the hip.

...

Arms wrapped tight around her back, and loving words sounded in her ears. Words of comfort and reassurance that made her heart a little more hopeful. Then lips pressed against her forehead and tears threatened to fall onto flushed cheeks.

It would be alright.

This was right.

...

“What do you mean, she’s going home?” Sana asked, her voice breaking.

It couldn’t be.

January had only just made way for February and the freezing cold was threatening to break through the comfort of their apartment. Sana shuffled to lay on her side in her bed, staring up at Momo in pure disbelief, waiting for someone to say ‘April fools!’ or ‘hah! Gotcha!’. But no-one did. Momo was just sitting there on the other side of the bed, hugging her knees, a pout on her lips.

All she did was shrug.

For a moment Sana just felt like crying. But the next, a fire surged through her and she sat up. This was wrong.

“Where is she?” Sana demanded, staring Momo down, the best she could through the shock of it all.

“Well. Getting her stuff from the school.” Momo said monotonously.

“What do you mean, getting her stuff? Why- Momo, did you just let her go? If something is up, then we have to help her. We can’t just let her quit like this!”
“Sana, don’t.” Momo muttered, unaffected by Sana’s glower. She rested her cheek on her knees, her eyes sad but firm as they looked at Sana. “Just leave her be. It’s been coming for a while, there’s nothing we can do. And besides… I think it’s better for her if she goes home.”

“Momo, you can’t be serious.” Sana said breathlessly.

Momo offered her hand to Sana, but the younger girl just stared at it with narrowed eyes until Momo let it fall. Hugged her knees tighter instead.

“Sana. She’s not well.” Momo said quietly.

“Of course, she’s… Momo, what the hell is going on?”

Momo pressed her lips tight together, the skin around them turning white. It was almost like she was trying to judge how much she could let on, and honestly, it pissed Sana off. She wanted the whole truth. Why shouldn’t she? They were all friends - all roommates. This decision would affect them all so much, not to mention that apparently something was wrong with her friend without anyone letting her know. “She’s been mentioning some things… It’s been going on for a few months.”

“And you two didn’t think to involve me in it? For christ’s sake, Momo, there are three people in this apartment. You can’t just keep this sort of stuff from me.”

“It’s not that we wanted to keep you in the dark, she didn’t want me to worry you… not just after you got back.”

Sana gaped. Wanted to yell. At Momo. At Tsukiko. After all the shit she had been through for the past months she just couldn’t take any more. As if it wasn’t enough that Somi had moved out in October, making the money tighter than she actually wanted to admit, she had also spent her entire Christmas break in Japan trying to come up with solutions after her aunt moved to Sapporo, leaving her dad with everything. And now this? It was just too much.

The urge to explode, however, faded at the look in Momo’s eyes. It somehow deflated all of Sana’s anger. Always did. Sana hated her for it. Loved her endlessly for it. It didn’t happen often, that Sana got mad. In fact, it only really happened when she felt out of control.

Leaning her head back, Sana stared up at the ceiling, feeling Momo silently grounding her. It really was no good. She could never be mad at her. And besides, it hadn’t been done in malice. Maybe Sana had just complained too much, been too upset about her family. Momo did say it had been an attempt to spare Sana. Damn it. Maybe if she had just noticed? Had opened her eyes and seen the signs instead of being so caught up in everything. Still, hadn’t the last few weeks been okay? She had gotten things sorted with her dad and… but no, she hadn’t taken much note of the other two, if she was to be honest.

“I’m sorry you felt like you had to shield me from this.” Sana said finally, huddling closer until her arm pressed against Momo’s. Found her hand and held it tight.

“It was out of love, you know that, right? She just couldn’t bear to burden you with more, and really, I hadn’t seen this as the outcome.” Momo admitted.

Sana sighed, leaning into Momo’s side. “I know. I just wish-”

“I know.” Momo tightened her grip on Sana’s hand and uncurled her body to let Sana slide down to rest her head in Momo’s lap. Then she unpause the movie on her laptop. They had been watching it before Momo had dropped the bomb, and now, the older girl was just humming as Ponyo tasted the honey in her tea. As if their world wasn’t about to change. But in Momo’s arms, Sana didn’t
waver. Whatever happened, they’d be okay. Right? They’d still be Motang and Satang. Together.

...

The sound of the door closing was always the worst. Still there after all these years. But she took the step anyways. Closed the door. And the sound of her heels on the sidewalk joined the singing of the birds on the telephone wires.

...

Sana looked at the paper in disgust. Read the advertisement over and over again. This had to be a joke, right?

Roommate wanted, no pets allowed. No gender preference. Shared kitchen, bathroom and living room, but separate rooms. Room size approx 200 square ft. Access to washing machines in the laundromat across the road.

Current resident: Kim Dahyun, 20, music and composition major and works part time as waitress.

For further details please contact me at kimdubudab@live.yahoo.com

1. description of current resident courtesy of now former resident: She’s a total goof, you’d get a great laugh. Just ask her for her Monty Python impression. Feed her chocolate and she’ll be loyally yours. Important: she can cook an egg well and masters a hot water kettle for your Ramyun needs.

“Never in a million years.”

“Stop being so dramatic, Sana.” Momo rolled her eyes and adjusted in the kitchen chair. “It doesn’t have to be permanent. But we’re getting kicked out in a month and we need somewhere to stay.”

“Then why don’t you take the apartment?” Sana thrust the advertisement back at Momo, crumpling it up in the process.

“I’m looking for anything and everything. Trust me. But I can’t just take this for myself, and leave you on the streets. Besides, I’ll just crash at your place until I find something.” Momo shrugged and downed the last of her soup. Sana glared, her heart beating fast in her chest at the thought of being separate from Momo. This wasn’t how their lives were supposed to go. This wasn’t what their story was supposed to be. They were supposed to be together always. Just the thought of Momo moving somewhere far away was enough to make Sana clench her jaw.

“I’m not taking it.” Sana said stubbornly.

“Why not?” Momo asked just as stubbornly.
Sana huffed and deflated. Stared at a point to the left of Momo.

“... Because I don’t want to do this without you.”

“As if I’d ever let you leave me behind.” Momo raised an eyebrow at Sana. “You’re stuck with me.”

“Then let’s find something together! We can’t just give up just yet.” Sana pleaded.

Momo seemed to consider it for a moment, then pursed her lips. “Three days, but then you better take this, okay? It’s close to the university and it’s a good place. And she seems like a great roommate.”

“I already have a great roommate! I couldn’t ever get a better roommate!” Sana whined, no pride left. But Momo just chuckled and reached over to poke her puffed cheek.

“Hey, who knows? Maybe she’s a total babe.” Momo shrugged.

“You’re a total babe too, I don’t need anything else.”

“We went over this five years ago. It’s you and me, yes. But I’m not screwing you.” Momo said dryly, grabbing the half-eaten pack of jellies from the kitchen table. Offered to Sana before taking one herself.

“We’re going to find something.” Sana insisted, chewing confidently on the jelly. “And it’s gonna be for both of us.”

…

“Please mind the gap between the train and the platform.”

The sound of the announcer sounded as if from far away - from a dream? No. This was reality. Definitely reality. Because around her, people shuffled, and someone bumped into her.

But she just kept going until she was inside the train. The doors closed behind her.

…

Having a plan was probably the most sensible way to handle things when you’re three weeks away from being kicked out of your apartment in a country where you’re studying as a foreigner.

No, it definitely was.

Unfortunately, this meant that Sana officially had to take action. Meant that she officially had to deal with the high plausibility that she and Momo would no longer be roommates.
The buzzer sounded loudly from the door, and Sana pushed it open. The door was heavy but it was one of the old buildings in the district that, although working with a buzzer, had key-locks instead of code-locks. Sana sighed.

Definitely a bad sign.

No, she couldn’t start off like this. Had to keep a positive attitude.

The apartment number was 27, right? Which meant up the stairs, as far as Sana could deduce. She looked to her left and saw the number 12 on the door. Yes, upstairs then.

As she walked up the old staircase, Sana took note of the state of the hallway. A little used. The bannister a little wobbly. The paint a little dirty. But it was a decent neighborhood and maybe the state of the place was just because it was mostly students who lived there, meaning that the people living here were willing to accept a lot of little flaws. It could, after all, just be the outside needing a little touching up. Maybe the apartment was fine? It probably was. It was probably just Sana trying to make the place unacceptable in her own head so she wouldn’t have to move in. This was definitely a battle she had had to take many times in the past week. But if it was anything close to liveable, she would have to take it. And it was okay, because it’d only be temporary - until she and Momo found something together.

Sana reached the second floor.

“Okay, so if that’s 23. Then 27 must be…” Sana muttered to herself, looking around. The numbers rose down the hallway, and she walked, eventually passing 25 before reaching number 27.

It looked okay. Looked decent. Could be worse.

Could also be better. Could be with Momo. Or with room for Momo.

“Okay.” Sana said quietly. “Keep an open mind. Maybe she’s nice. Maybe it’s all okay.”

Sana took a deep breath.

Knocked

Once.

Twice.

Waited.

The sound of a lock was the first she heard, and then the careful opening of a door. A glimpse of a bright apartment painted with light yellow walls was the only thing Sana got to see before the view was taken up by a person.

A girl.

She looked around Sana’s age, and had black hair, arranged in a messy bun at the top of her head, with baby hairs sticking out here and there. She wore glasses. Had distinctive warm eyes and a
slightly upturned nose. Pale skin. And she was short. Not alarmingly so, but shorter than Sana, definitely. Or maybe she just looked particularly petite in a huge black sweater hanging down to the middle of her thighs, purple and yellow tracksuit pants sticking out underneath. The legs of the pants made folds at her ankles, definitely too long for her legs. And pink socks.

“Hi.” The girl said, her voice soft and a little confused.

Sana looked up. Realized she had just, actually looked the girl up and down, and felt her stomach tug with embarrassment. The giggle came without Sana intending it to. Just bubbled from her, out of her own control. She had never really been good at handling feeling caught like this, and somehow her body reacted through laughter.

But even so. She should really say something.

“Sana! I mean- hi! I’m Sana!” Sana said enthusiastically. Maybe too enthusiastically.

“Oh, okay yes, I’m Dahyun. Kim. Which- you knew you read the advertisement, anyways.” The girl, Dahyun, said. Stepped aside and opened the door fully to let Sana inside.

Sana beamed at her, even though her stomach tugged at her own behavior. Why did she always do this when she was embarrassed? Why was she even embarrassed? She wasn’t even checking Dahyun out. She had just looked at the attire, slightly comical with how she seemed to drown in the clothes. But what if Dahyun had taken it as that? No. That wasn’t important now. What was important now, was that she was supposed to go inside and- oh, right, shoes.

Dahyun took a step into the apartment, kicking her feet a little to avoid getting her feet caught in the too-long tracksuit pants. Sana bit her lip. Maybe that was a little cute. No. No, this was not the time or the place.

Dahyun didn’t seem to notice much. Just smiled at Sana’s giggle. It made it a little less embarrassing.

She wasn’t really a clutz, Sana. She just got nervous sometimes when she was embarrassed or sometimes she’d be a little airheaded. And it was always when she was supposed to give good impressions that she did stuff like this. Like in school when they had presentations, she always tripped over her own feet on the way to the board, and when she had to meet her ex-boyfriend’s friends she had spilled tea down her front. But for some reason, her body had always just reacted by making her giggle, and then most people didn’t seem to mind much.

Dahyun seemed to be one of these people.

“So…” Dahyun said.

Sana turned. Had completely lost herself in thought. Again. Two minutes and it was already a mess, well done Minatozaki.

“I’m guessing you want to see the apartment?” Dahyun asked carefully.

“Yeah! I mean I’m guessing this is the shared living room?” Sana asked as if it wasn’t obvious from the presence of the slightly worn yellow couch and the coffee table in front of it. But it did seem a little empty out here. Maybe the old roommate used to have stuff here before she moved?

“Yes, and down that hall is the rest of the apartment.” Dahyun pointed to the hallway. Sana nodded and folded her hands behind her back. Took a few more steps into the apartment until the hallway became fully visible.

And then collided with the couch.

The giggle slipped before Sana could stop it. Damn it. Okay. No, it was okay. She just had to get this apartment. There really wasn’t a choice anymore, with the pressure. And at least Dahyun seemed like a lowkey and practical person, very down to earth. And her smile was nice too. You could always tell a lot about a person from their smile, Sana knew. And Dahyun smiled with her entire face. Genuine.

“Can I see the rooms?” Sana aske, trying to distract from her little run-in with the couch.

“Of course!” Dahyun said, walking around the yellow couch to lead Sana into the hallway.

“So that’s the kitchen, it’s small but everything works and if- I mean, I don’t know if you want the room, but if you do, we’ll figure out with food however you want. I used to share everything with my old roomie, but we don’t have to.” Dahyun said, as Sana peeked into the kitchen. It was quite small, but not that bad, honestly. It was bigger than the one they had right now.

“I don’t mind sharing.” Sana said hurriedly, realizing she hadn’t answered Dahyun yet.

“Oh, good.” Dahyun seemed relieved. Then she lead Sana a few steps further down the hallway.

“So, okay, and the bedrooms… oh, wait, the bathroom is here.”

Dahyun opened a door to a small but well utilized bathroom. Pretty standard.

“That in there is my room, it’s the smaller one. You can look if you want?”

“I- uh, sure.” Sana said, not sure why Dahyun offered. Maybe to prove that Sana would be getting the bigger room?

Dahyun opened the door to her own room. It really was tiny. Only fit a desk, a closet and a twin bed. A twin bed currently housing a small, obviously used squirrel plush. Sana smiled despite herself but pretended not to have seen. Even if Sana had a plushie collection to rival Momo’s, she knew that some people their age weren’t good at admitting the comfort a stuffed animal could bring.

“And my room is there?” Sana asked as Dahyun closed the door to her own room.

“Yes! It’s bigger, but it’s completely empty right now except for the closet. I think I forgot to write it in the advert but Chaeng left her closet here. I can get it removed if you don’t want to take it over.” Dahyun explained, opening the door to what would become Sana’s room, if everything worked out as it should.

This room was bigger, just like Dahyun had promised. Big enough to fit Sana’s big bed and the desk too.

Curiously, Sana stepped into the room, walking across it to reach the closet. Carefully the opened it,
studying the shape of it. The quality was good and the white color made it blend well – not taking too much attention. It would probably serve her better than her old dresser.

“If it’s okay, I’ll keep the closet.”

“Brilliant! Wait-” Dahyun paused, “that means you want the room, right?”

“Uh…” Sana bit her lip. This was the moment. But there was no getting around it. Nothing to be conflicted about, even if there was a part of her that still tried. “Yes. Yes, it does.”

“Oh, great. I- Oh, I’ll just need to know a few things about you just before I can accept you as my roommate though.” Dahyun looked slightly awkward. Tapped a pink-socked toe against the floor of the empty room. “You know, just a little about who you are?”

“Sure! Of course. Uh, as I explained in the email, I major in performance dance with my friend Momo. We’re both from Japan, the Osaka area. Uh… well, I’m an only child but I don’t think I’m difficult to live with? And I like food!” Sana paused, but Dahyun just waited patiently. “What else… I love watching horror movies even though they scare me and I cry at thunder. And I laugh a lot. Momo says I’m like a bouncing ball? Oh, I’m affectionate. I’ve been told to inform of this. I hug people a lot and I- but I won’t if you mind.”

Dahyun’s chuckle sounded like she had tried to hold it in, and Sana couldn’t help but smile.

“Bouncing ball sounds good. And I don’t think I will mind the hugs.”

“Good!” Sana’s stomach felt a little lighter than it had the past week. At least she wouldn’t have to restrain herself there.

Dahyun looked a little uneasy, but Sana just smiled at her. It made Dahyun chuckle again.

“Oh uh, do you have anything you want to know about me?”

“Hmm.” Sana pursed her lips. Then she shook her head. “I should just feed you chocolate, right?”

“What? Oh, right, the advertisement.” Dahyun mumbled, her pale skin pinking on her cheeks and ears.

“Okay, well, then I guess… I guess it’s yours? The apart- the room, I mean.”

“You don’t have other applicants?” Sana scrunched her nose.

“I had two others yesterday, but-” Dahyun shrugged. “I like you better?”

Sana looked at the girl for a second, trying to figure out what exactly was going on inside of her body. Found that it was genuine happiness. Somehow, despite the fact that she would be leaving Momo, she was actually happy to be offered this place. Even if it would hopefully only be temporary until she and Momo found something together. That wasn’t an issue for Dahyun to be troubled with though.

“If you still want to, I mean?” Dahyun’s voice had changed in the seconds Sana had spent lost in her mind, and Sana focused on her features again.

“I. Yes, I do. Definitely” Sana said, sunshine spreading through her body, making her fingertips tingle and a smile light up on her face. And Dahyun smiled back.

“I guess we’re roommates then!” Sana said conclusively.
Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad afterall?

The train came to a halt, and cool air from the underground station poured through the doors. People around her hurried out, and she felt her feet carry her, as if her heart and body had made an agreement outside the restraints of her mind.

Sana inhaled sharply, turning in the covers. Stretched and groaned, her head groggy and her back aching. There was a taste of wine and pizza in her mouth and she realized that she must’ve gone to bed without even brushing her teeth. Damn it. Had she just walked into her room and passed out? The events of the night buzzed in her head, and she felt sleep in the corners of her eyes. Felt her lenses sticking to the insides of her lids.

The last thing she remembered before falling asleep on the couch last night was that she had been watching a movie. Had been leaning against Dahyun. They had shared pizza and wine - hence the breath - and Dahyun hadn’t seemed to mind Sana sitting close despite it being their first night living together. Honestly, she hadn’t even considered until now, that maybe Dahyun hadn’t felt it was okay. It was just such an integral part of who she was, and neither of her old roommates had minded it. But maybe… No, but she said she hadn’t minded, right? Hadn’t she said it was okay?

“Ugh, Sana, get a grip.” Sana whispered to herself, slowly opening her eyes and blinking her lenses into focus. She felt her fingertips tingle. Dahyun’s cheek had been so warm and her heart had raced under Sana’s hand. It was the phone light that had woken Sana initially last night, but the sound of a rapid heartbeat had caught her attention, and she had laid quietly on Dahyun’s chest, listening to it. And really, she shouldn’t have moved her hand down, but she hadn’t been able to help her curiosity. Especially when it was rewarded with such increase in the younger girl’s heart rate.

Sana swore she could still hear it.

It was so stupid. Why had she flirted like that? What would she have done if Dahyun had picked up the cues? Had flirted back? No, it wasn’t important. She had stayed, and Sana was safe.

But… what would she have done? If Dahyun had followed her? It was clear that Sana had done something to her. The burning cheeks proved that much. She had just wanted to check. Had merely wanted to see if they actually were as warm as they looked. And they were.

Sana sighed.

Would she have kissed her? Would she… probably. But it was better for everything that they hadn’t. Honestly, there wasn’t a single reason to believe that Dahyun’s reaction had been caused by anything other than the reality of being slept on by an almost stranger. Physiology. So it was definitely better that Dahyun hadn’t acted. Having a one-night-stand with your new roommate was
definitely cause for making the situation harder. Especially as it was getting increasingly doubtful that she and Momo would find anything together until at least summer break when the seniors graduated.

Okay. It was okay. Nothing had happened, and they didn’t have to talk about it. It had just been one night.

Sana groaned. Her bladder was making her increasingly aware of its presence and the wire of her bra was pushing into her armpit. Why the hell hadn’t she taken that off? She must’ve completely lost it last night. Without a second thought, she unhooked the bra and pulled the straps out through the sleeves of her shirt, eventually removing it from underneath her stomach, discarding it with distaste. Who invented metal wires in bras anyway?

With a last grunt of annoyance, Sana freed herself from the covers and walked out of the bedroom, trying to remember which door was the bathroom. Luckily picked the right one, and locked the door.

The tiles were cold against her bare feet and the toilet seat too, uncomfortable when she was still warm from sleep. What time had it even been last night? Had it been late when she had fallen asleep on Dahyun? She had looked at her phone around nine to see if she had gotten an answer from Momo about letting her stay here for a while, but otherwise there hadn’t been any...

Sana frowned. Looked across the room at the hamper. It was closed, but on top of it lay a hoodie. Grey. But it wasn’t the color that had caught Sana’s attention. It was the motif on it. A very familiar motif, actually. She just didn’t understand what a picture of the Kobe skyline was doing on a sweater in Dahyun’s bathroom.

Nevermind that.

Sana rolled her eyes at her own distracted mind and reached for the toilet paper.

No, but really, why did Dahyun have a Kobe shirt?

Sana got up, pulling her jeans back up. God, why had she slept in jeans? Did she have exactly zero brain cells? Possibly.

Sana flushed and turned to wash her hands. The faucet stuck and she turned it on too much, almost spilling water over her own shirt. Almost. God, she had to get over all this clumsiness. It wasn’t good. She knew it was nerves but still. She had to get over it. She might end up breaking something of Dahyun’s if she wasn’t careful. Dahyun’s... Dahyun’s shirt.

Sana pressed her lips together.

No, bad idea.

Okay, but just to see if it was actually from Japan, or if it was a complete coincidence. If nothing else, it’d give them a topic to talk about. Sana had after all spent a good majority of her days in town looking up at the Kobe Port Tower pictured center on the skyline.

With her lip tucked between her teeth, Sana grabbed the neatly folded shirt and opened the neck of it. A Japanese tag. Maybe she had gone there for vacation once? It was unusually soft. Not the standard brand for generic tourist hoodies but not one Sana recognized either. But it was definitely Japanese.

It felt warm. And it made absolutely no sense that it would, because it had been lying here for a while, Sana guessed. Unless Dahyun had worn it while sleeping and then taken it off minutes before
Sana went in here?

Would it smell like her?

Sana frowned. She had noticed it last night, laying on her chest. It hadn’t been a particular scent as such. Not like a perfume. More like how the entire kitchen smells like freshly baked bread or how the living room smells of flowers when you let air in during the spring. Around Dahyun everything smelled... safe. Home-y.

And the shirt did too.

She hadn’t noticed that she had held it to her face until she was standing with her nose buried in the shirt’s front, eyes closed and inhaling deeply. But it took away all her nerves immediately. Filled her body with an unbelievable calm and safety. Somehow it felt almost like hugging Momo. Or like laying with Dahyun last night.

Sana took another inhale.

Then lowered the shirt. She was smelling her new roommate’s sweater. Actually.. Smelling it. That was one of those things people found weird right? But it wasn’t like she had any bad intention with it. It was just calming. As if she hadn’t even realized how stressed out she had been until now.

It wasn’t even a choice. At least not one that Sana was aware of or had any control of. She turned the hoodie in her hands and stuck her arms through it. Pulled it over her head and tugged it down. Studied herself in the mirror and traced her fingers across the drawing of the Kobe Port Tower. It felt exactly right somehow. Made it all easier. Like magic. As if somehow this shirt, this scent, and this warmth, took away the doubts she still carried. Made her believe that, whatever this was she was getting into, with Dahyun and Momo and soon Dahyun’s friends too, would become something good.

She had forgotten to take off the hoodie before exiting the bathroom, and Dahyun had caught her. And there had been a split-second where Sana had feared that she would yell. But she didn’t seem to mind at all.

The only thing she had minded was the fact that Sana had burnt the toast.

Dahyun had been her home from that morning.

...

The hall was noisy and warm. Too warm. Made her feel queasy and nervous and tighten the grip on her bag as she tried to figure out where to go. Blinking to get the board properly into focus, she studied the information displayed on it. Found what she was searching for and tried to locate the number on one of the many signs around the hall.
Sweat trickled down Sana’s forehead and chest as she repeated the move over and over again. But she couldn’t get it right. Every time her arm moved forwards, she automatically moved her foot the wrong way.

Eventually she tripped and stumbled forwards a few steps.

Momo looked over at her. “Want help?”

Sana shook her head. It was no use. Not right now. She wasn’t focused. Why couldn’t she focus? What was even wrong with her?

Sighing deeply, Sana walked to the back of the room. Dried her neck and head with the towel and took a gulp of water.

“You did fine yesterday.” Momo said calmly, joining her.

“I know.” Sana mumbled and sat down, stretching forwards, reaching around her toes, feeling her back stretch. It hurt, but in a way that gave her a sense of accomplishment.

“You’ve been distracted all day.” Momo noted. “Why?”

“I don’t know.” Sana bit down on her lip, hiding her face against her thighs. She felt Momo’s hands on her back, pushing her forwards more.

Sana winced slightly.

“You can talk to me, you know.” Momo sounded hurt.

“I know. I just... I don’t know what to talk about.” Sana sighed. Momo removed the pressure and Sana got back up, stretching her torso from side to side, looking up at Momo.

“Wanna try again?” Momo offered.

“Yeah. Let’s do that” Sana agreed and let Momo help her to her feet.

Standing side by side, they went through the choreography once again. Sana felt how the music filled her with a sense of purpose and tried to trust her body, trust the eyes looking back at her from the mirror. It went well until it didn’t. Until Sana stumbled. She had been trying to correct her wrong footing.

“Shit.” Sana hissed. It was unlike her to curse. She normally just laughed it off. But for some reason she couldn’t. Not today.

Momo stopped the music.

“Are you su-”

“Again.” Sana gritted her teeth, got back in position. Stared herself down in the mirror. Momo obeyed her. Restarted the song. Danced along with her.

Sana’s arms ached as she moved them and her back complained when she dipped and her feet hurt with every step. She had been going at it for hours, the same song over and over again. And the
same smile confusing her - the same soft chuckle in her ear.

Sana stumbled again.

And again.

“Maybe we should stop for today.” Momo said, her breathing shallow. Grabbed her phone again.

The comment was enough to make Sana stop, just for a moment. She had intended on staring Momo down. To growl and ask her to start again. But she was seeing spots now, and her head was spinning. She couldn’t focus on Momo’s face. Felt like barfing. Instinctively she bent and let her arms break her fall just as her knees gave way.

“Whoa, Sana.” Momo said and squatted to support her.

“I’m fine.” Sana tried.

“No, you’re not.” Momo said, dragging the limp Sana to the wall. And Sana let Momo lay her on her back, legs up against the wall. She stared at the ceiling until it stopped spinning. Momo sat down beside her. Took her hand.

“I think I like her, Momo.” Sana whispered.

“Who?” Momo asked.

“Her... Dahyunnie.”

A smile spread on Sana’s face at the sound of her name, and she felt the butterfly soar in her stomach.

“And to think just weeks ago you were yelling at me just for suggesting you take the room.” Momo clicked her tongue and squeezed her hand. Sana giggled and closed her eyes.

“I didn’t know until... now.” Sana breathed. “I mean, maybe I knew but I didn’t know .”

“I knew.” Momo said dryly.

“You did?”

“I’m your best friend, of course I knew.” Momo ran her fingers through Sana’s damp hair. Still held Sana’s hand with the other.

“How long?” Sana asked. Was almost afraid to hear the answer.

“Since you texted me saying you had worn her sweater and gotten mascara on it...” Momo shrugged.

“How come?” Sana opened her eyes.

“Well, first of all you had lived there for a day when you started wearing her clothes and second of all you were so worried she would be mad that you got a stain on her shirt and you kept rambling about how you didn’t mean to even put it on but that it just smelled like her. Honestly, it was yucky.” Momo grimaced.

“Oh... But I don’t think it was actually feelings right off the bat, honestly. I think it was just an attempt to make the best of a shitty situation, and I think because she was so calm, I leaned on her in
order to feel more at home. I had to be without my home in a country that wasn’t my own, I had to
do everything I could.”

“You sap…” Momo swatted Sana’s hair but Sana just huffed.

“Shut. Unless you have something smart to say.” Sana bit her lip.

“I mean I was wondering at first because it could’ve been just you being weird, but then almost
immediately you took every opportunity to be close to her.” Momo said as if it was nothing. “Even
more than usual. So I knew you were either overcompensating or falling fast. Turns out it was
both.”

“I don’t even know what it is about her. I just get this feeling, you know, right here.” Sana held their
clasped hands to her chest. She was sure that Momo could feel her racing heart. “Just being around
her. She’s so cute and pretty and it’s so adorable all the time. She’s addictively easy to tease but then
also, she’s so calming to be around. Like when she did her homework, I just sat there, held her
hand. And I couldn’t think of a single thing I’d rather do than be right there. And she didn’t mind me
at all.”

“You’re being extremely gross, you are aware of that, right?” Momo scrunched her nose.

“I know. But Momo.” Sana looked up at her best friend. “She’s so sweet. And at night… and she
smells wonderful.”

“Ew.” Momo laughed.

“I kissed her.” Sana grinned.

“You… what?!” Momo looked absolutely flabbergasted.

“It was accidental, and it wasn’t a real kiss. I think. But that night when I picked her up from work?
I was gonna kiss her cheek, just to calm her down or- I don’t know. It just felt right to kiss her cheek
in the moment. But she turned around and I accidentally kissed her here instead.” Sana stretched
her arm and touched the corner of Momo’s lips with a fingertip. A deeper blush threatened to break
through on Sana’s already warm cheeks, her entire body exhausted and sweaty from dancing.

“What did she do?” Momo asked neutrally, removing the hair tie from Sana’s hair. The blonde
locks fell down Momo’s thigh.

“I think-” Sana bit down on her lip, sunshine in her voice as she continued. “I think she might have
kissed me back?”

“What do you mean, you think?”

“Well, I kind of panicked and drew back but I think- but it might’ve been my imagination. I just think
I felt her lips move. I couldn’t sleep for like an hour afterwards, but she was completely passed out.
She looked so cute hugging your Bearing. I couldn’t help myself, you know? I just touched her arm
once, just to feel her.”

“I think I’m getting cavities.” Momo said. “You’re paying my dentist bill for this one, Satang.”

“Just listen, will you?” Sana complained and poked Momo’s cheek. “I touched her arm and out of
nowhere she grabbed my hand. I think she was asleep, but she reached back and grabbed my hand.
She wouldn’t let go. So I just gave hell to it.” Sana said shyly, trying not to giggle too much at the
memory. “I kind of just let her pull me around her - it felt like I was her blanket or something. And
we fit so well, Momo. I don’t think I’ve ever slept as well as I did that night with her. And she smells so good.”

“You said that already.” Momo said dryly.

Sana looked up at Momo, her cheeks hurting.

“You’re a goof, you know that?” Momo untangled her hand from Sana’s hair to poke her nose. “What I don’t get though, is with all this… why don’t you just kiss her?”

“I’m scared. It’ll be so complicated.” Sana whispered. “It’s already complicated enough as it is. If she turns me down then it’ll just be awkward and you just found a place and it’s with one of her friends so what if it’ll be so awkward that we both have to find somewhere else and I don’t want that because I really like them all. Not just Dahyun - well, not all of them that way, but I-you know what I mean. I was starting to maybe hope I could finally fit in somewhere?”

“You do know she’s into you, right?” Momo raised her eyebrows.

Sana’s legs slid off the wall and she turned around, her eyes wide. Her heart raced immediately and a lump settled in her throat.

“She is?”

“Look, I know your eyes are bad, but you’re hopefully not that blind.” Momo rolled her eyes.

“Just ask her, she’s so smitten I can’t believe how you haven’t noticed.”

Sana bit her lip, trying to get control of her heart. It wasn’t really going all that well. “I don’t know-”

“Okay, if you’re chicken about it then let’s do it this way. We’re going to Chaeyoung’s birthday tomorrow, right? You’ll have a good time Then when you go home together, you ask her out. If it works, it works and if not you can just say you were drunk and be over with it. And this is not me saying get drunk and make out, I’m saying you have to stay sober, or at least not drunk.” Momo shrugged. “But I’m ninety nine percent sure she has the biggest crush on you, so I really wouldn’t worry.”

Sana grinned, giving hell to her warm cheeks. Let her thoughts wander to a reality where she hadn’t panicked but had moved around to actually kiss Dahyun. Properly kiss her. And it made the butterfly multiply to thousands in her chest, spreading to every part of her body.

“You really are into her…” Momo chuckled.

“I really, really am, Motang.”

“Then please, save all of your kissing fantasies until tomorrow and let’s get this move right. Then we can talk about smooth talking the lil’ thing.”

“Gotcha.” Sana pressed her lips together, but it was no use. The giggles wouldn’t stop and she had a goofy grin plastered on her face, as they went over the move again and again. But it didn’t matter. Because she got it right.

As they gathered their stuff by the wall of the practice room, Sana promised Momo that she would
do something about Dahyun tomorrow.

“Sooner rather than later. If it’s unrequited, it’s better to get it out of the way, right?” Momo argued and Sana agreed.

…

“Passport, please.” The man at the security check-in asked. She handed it over.

“Boarding pass, please.” The man said, in the same monotonous voice. He nodded as she showed him. Then she packed away both, trying to remember if she had everything. But she did. She had made sure that everything was as it was supposed to be. As she wanted it to be.

…

Sana looked at her phone. Seven. She hadn’t slept last night at all, and she was still cold from spending the night on the couch, covered only by a blanket coupled with the early morning train ride here. But judging from how lucid Tzuyu had been last night and not knowing her usual sleep schedule, there had a fair chance that she might wake and see Sana on the couch.

Honestly, talking about why she was there, was the last thing Sana needed. So at half past six she had snuck into the kitchen and left a note for them about her whereabouts.

Then she had left.

And now she was here, outside Jeongyeon and Momo’s apartment building, trying to figure out if she should press the buzzer or call Momo asking to be let in. But Momo always had her phone on silent, and there was no way her appearance wouldn’t cause a ruckus anyway.

Sana pressed the little blue button. Pressed her lips together and waited.

The silence was enough for the sadness to overwhelm her. The reality that Dahyun really.. That she didn’t feel anything more than friendship. She had said it quite clearly, right? I mean it doesn’t get more clear than saying ‘you can kiss me if you want’. Right? That wasn’t ambiguous, right?

Sana sighed just as the speaker system plopped and buzzed in the way that meant someone had picked up the door phone in the apartment.

“Yes?” Jeongyeon’s more than just mildly annoyed voice sounded on the other end.

“Jeongyeon?” Sana said, unsure of how close to the phone she was supposed to stand for Jeongyeon to hear her. “It’s Sana- I- can you let me in?”

“... Sana? Wait, we- ... you know what, sure.”
The lock on the door clicked, and Sana thanked Jeongyeon before pushing open the door. It was heavy. Or maybe Sana was just tired. She wasn’t sure. But the weight of her body as she dragged herself upstairs made her lean towards the lack of sleep rather than gravity exerting an extraordinary effort today.

“You can kiss me if you want.”

The door was open when Sana reached it and she snuck inside, closing it after her. Jeongyeon was nowhere to be seen. But Mina… Mina was very much there. And Sana felt automatically how her eyes travelled over the girl’s body. Her hair was a right mess and the green boxers only just peeked out under a big black t-shirt. A hickey sported just on the edge of the boxers Sana had to pull her eyes away to avoid point-blank staring at it. And for a moment, Sana completely forgot about last night.

Mina looked caught and embarrassed, her skin pale but her cheeks and neck flushed.

Sana shook her head. It was none of her business. “Hi… Sorry, Jeongyeon let me in, I- I didn’t know you’d be here.”

“It’s okay. I didn’t- I just heard the buzzer.” Mina said, trying - obviously with as much discretion as possible - to tuck the boxers down a little.

“Oh.” Sana said.

It wasn’t like she wanted to do the math. It was none of her business why Mina was there… but if she wasn’t aware that Sana was coming and if Jeongyeon had apparently disappeared back into her room, that meant Mina must’ve come from Momo’s room. Meaning that the hair… and the hickey. Well, it was Momo’s speciality, and it wasn’t like Sana hadn’t noticed that the two seemed close. Quite a lot closer than could’ve been expected, now that Sana thought about it.

The sound of a toilet flushing sounded, and it startled both Sana and Mina.

“Do you want tea?” Mina asked, her voice pitched and her hands in fists around the hem of her shirt.

“Y-yeah. Or coffee? I haven’t really slept.” Sana admitted. Followed Mina into the kitchen. Couldn’t keep from noticing a very much out of place hair at the back of Mina’s head, and automatically reached to fix it. Not that it did much other than make Mina jump.

“Sorry, there was a hair.” Sana muttered.

“Oh, right. Look, Sana, I-”

“It’s okay, I’m not here to judge.” Sana assured the girl, settling against the kitchen counter as Mina opened the cupboard to grab the glass of instant coffee.

“Okay. Just know that…” Mina put the glass on the counter and reached for the kettle behind Sana. “It’s not what it looks like, okay?”

“It looks like you have sex-hair.” Sana noted dryly, making room for Mina.
“Okay, well… but it’s not just, you know—no, nevermind.” Mina shook her head and opened the kettle under the faucet, pouring water into it before putting it on the electric stand and turning it on.

“It’s fine, Mitang, it’s not like I’m elaborating on why I’m here at 7 in the morning,” Sana said.

Mina smiled and nodded. “Thank you.”

“Of course. You’re happy, that’s what matters to me.”

Mina’s smile widened and it showed her gums. She opened her mouth to say something but was interrupted by the opening of a door and the sound of bare feet in the hallway. Next moment Jeongyeon turned up in the door, squinting and with her arms crossed.

“You making coffee?” She croaked at Mina. Didn’t seem the least bit surprised to find her here.

“Yeah.”

Jeongyeon nodded and ran a hand through her blonde hair. “What time is it?”

“Seven.” Mina just said.

Jeongyeon winced and groaned. “I might just go back to bed. Is Momo still sleeping?”

“Probably.” Mina said. “I’ll check in a second.”

Jeongyeon nodded. “How much coffee?”

“ Enough for you as well.” Mina said, stretching her arms over her head and yawning.

Sana drew out her phone and looked down at it. Nothing. Not that she should have expected anything at this hour and definitely not that Dahyun… nevermind. Sana looked up at Mina.

“I can check on Momo if you want?”

“Sure? I mean it’s her you’re here for, right?” Mina shrugged. Then she put a hand on the kettle, feeling how warm it was.

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“Sure? I mean it’s her you’re here for, right?” Mina shrugged. Then she put a hand on the kettle, feeling how warm it was.

“Yes.” Sana nodded. But just as she got up, the sound of a door reached them and once more, bare feet tapped on the floor.

Momo looked barely conscious, her eyelids drooping heavily and her bangs flat against her forehead.

“Thought I heard,” Momo yawned deeply, covering her mouth, “M’re… sorry…”

“Rough night?” Jeongyeon asked with a raised brow.

“I’m never drinking again. Or playing Mario Kart with Mina.”

Mina giggled as if she was proud, and Sana figured she must’ve beat Momo’s ass at it last night. Maybe that was the cause of the hickey.

Momo huffed and reached between Mina and the fridge to feel the kettle.

“Sorry I didn’t make water for you, I thought you’d be out for hours still.”

“I probably would’ve, but my brain has a Sana-radar. I heard her.” Momo looked at Sana as if this
was her fault. Sana just stared back. Waited for her best friend to explain. But she didn’t. Just moved a hair on the top of Mina’s head and smirked at her.

“Shut.” Mina grumbled.

“Didn’t say anything.” Momo insisted. “Can you boil more water?”

“Sure.” Mina nodded, stopping the kettle and lifting it under the faucet again, filling it more.

Momo thanked her, and then looked at Sana, a sudden expression of confusion on her face.

“Sana… Why are you here? Weren’t you supposed to- oh.”

Sana looked down at her hands. “Didn’t work. It is what it is.”

“Oh, Sana, I’m sorry.” Momo sighed, walking over to Sana to wrap her up in a tight hug.

It wasn’t until Momo’s arms were around her that Sana realized how much she had needed that. How much she had needed the safety of her best friend. With a shudder she leaned into her best friend’s touch, and closed her eyes, burying her nose in Momo’s shirt. It smelled like sleep and Momo and home.

“I’ll be okay. I wasn’t too hopeful anyways.” Sana muttered.

“Sure you weren’t.” Momo hummed, hugging Sana tighter.

Neither elaborated. Mostly - at least on Sana’s behalf - because doing so might cause questions from Mina and Jeongyeon, possibly leading to a divulsion on Sana’s rather big crush on their friend and coworker. They didn’t need more awkwardness. Catching Mina was enough for one day.

Mina.

Sana opened her eyes and looked up at Momo with a frown.

“What?”

“When were you going to tell me?” Sana asked, drawing back a little.

“Tell you what?” Momo seemed lost.

Sana tutted and broke the hug, gesturing at Mina, the youngest of the four now busy pouring boiling water into four mugs. Four rather curious mugs. Was that Daisy Duck’s face on one of them? Sana shook her head.

“What about her?” Momo frowned.

Mina stopped pouring. Stood with her back turned to them, clearly listening.

“Momo.” Sana sighed. “How long have you two been seeing each other?”

Momo snorted. “Excuse me?”

“I’m not stupid. It’s seven in the morning, she’s here in boxers, with bed hair and a damn hickey on her thigh.”

To Sana’s left, something fell to the floor with a clatter, startling the room. All three looked around
at the noise. Jeongyeon stood pale and frozen, a butterfly fridge magnet by her feet.
“Wh-” Sana looked from Jeongyeon to Momo and back again.
Mina giggled.
The sound seemed to bring Jeongyeon back to life. Mostly in that her skin pinked considerably, and
she gave a very awkward laugh before bending down to pick up the fridge magnet. Then she looked
at Mina. Shrugged and nudged her head in Sana’s direction.
Oh.
“ Oh!”
Momo groaned. Jeongyeon looked very much like she would like to disappear, and apparently the
only way she saw of doing this was wrapping her arms around Mina and hiding her face in the
black hair.
“So…” Sana cleared her throat.
“Yeah. But- Sana, please don’t tell anyone?” Mina said, a small smile on her lips. “No-one else
knows yet. Only Momo. We’d appreciate if-”
“Oh, no, totally. I get it. I know nothing.” Sana said, holding Mina’s eyes while fumbling for
Momo’s arms. She couldn’t help the slight tug of jealousy at seeing the two so close, when she had
just lost her own chance
“Thank you.” Mina said gratefully.
Sana nodded and then turned at Momo. Looked up at her with a slight pout and relished as strong
arms wrapped around her once more. She had been gone too long already, Momo. And Sana was
still cold. Somehow, with no warning, every distraction had disappeared with the realization the
Mina thing wasn’t a subject she could prioritize over her own pain. And now there was nothing left
to do but face reality.

It hurt more than she had expected it to, when she lay in bed with Momo an hour later and told the
events of last night.

“Good to know.”

It was time to get over her. Time to figure out how the heck to get a weird, wonderful, admirable,
odd little goof to stop being the thing that made Sana’s heart soar.
It’d be better this way, anyways. What had she even been thinking, letting herself fall like this for her
roommate? What kind of idiot did that? But then again - no-one else had a roommate like Dahyun.
She was all Sana’s. But not Sana’s at all.

…


For someone who really never minded crowds much, she was finding right now, that she could really use some quiet. But this was definitely not the place to get that. Maybe if she had remembered to pack headphones in the carry-on it’d be different. But now she was stuck listening to the chattering conversations and busy steps around her.

\[...

There was something eternally tempting about Dahyun’s birthday. It was a free pass. An opportunity. An excuse for Sana to indulge in the feelings she was trying to get over. Just one single moment. But she had to time it right. The easy thing would be doing it before Dahyun woke. It would be painless, with no-one to answer to.

Except, it’d be wrong. She couldn’t just kiss the girl without her consent. So if she wanted to, she had to ask.

God, she wanted to.

There probably wasn’t anything in the world she wanted more right now. But it wasn’t just the thought of getting to kiss Dahyun that was enchanting. It was the nervous laughter that tumbled past Dahyun’s lips and the way she blushed. It was hearing her chuckle as Sana wrapped her arms around the younger girl’s waist, and even how she thought she could hear Dahyun’s breath hitch when she angled the kiss just right.

It had been so long now. So long since Sana had dared do anything other than what Dahyun asked of her. So instead she just held her when she slept and joked around with her and bumped her hip in the bathroom at night.

It was all she could.

Yeah, yeah, stupid. Sana knew. Knew that she was supposed to get over the girl instead of this. It had been a month after all. But she just didn’t know how. How do you get over someone so wonderful? No matter what she did, she couldn’t help but give in to Dahyun. Couldn’t help the way her heart burst when Dahyun every once in a while wrapped her up in a hug or held her hand. And despite knowing that she should be doing her best to get over these feelings, this urge to hold Dahyun closer than was normal for friends - to do much more than friends did, with Dahyun - she couldn’t stop. She had tried. So maybe she should just give up trying. Give up and give in and lean down and kiss the girl awake.

But she didn’t.

It wouldn’t be right.

Instead she merely nuzzled her nose into Dahyun’s hair and whispered against her skin.

“I wish… I wish you wanted me. I know it’s not my birthday, I’m not the one who gets to wish. But I wish I was yours.”

Dahyun breathed deeply, and Sana felt herself fall further. The exact opposite of what she was supposed to be doing. But today was about Dahyun. And she was going to do exactly what Dahyun
Dahyun, who turned slightly and tugged at Sana’s arms, pushing herself into Sana’s front. Sana bit her lip. Any moment now she would give in.

No.

No, it was definitely time to get up.

“Sorry…” Sana whispered even if Dahyun couldn’t hear her. Then she untangled herself - albeit with some difficulty - and crawled over the sleeping birthday girl, hurrying out of the room. It was too much. She was going to end up crying at this point.

Without realizing how, Sana ended up in the bathroom, leaned against the door. Come on. It couldn’t be that bad, right? Sure, Sana was the type to feel a lot and feel fast, but to think that just Dahyun’s closeness was enough to break her. It was going to have to end soon. She was reaching her limit. Reaching… Sana’s thoughts made way for an observation, as her eyes fell on the hoodie on top of the hamper. The Kobe sweater. Sana laughed despite herself. The irony. It was almost like it was mocking her. Daring her.

And Sana didn’t have any control left.

After all. After all the feelings she tried to battle. The smell of home still filled her mind and covered her skin as she tugged the hoodie over her head, and calm settled in her heart as she hugged herself tight.

The queue shortened, and she moved forwards gratefully, clutching the top of her bag, just to ground herself to something.

“Hello, how may I help you?” The young barista at the desk asked, an apron around her waist and her hair in a bun on the top of her head.

“Lemon tea please, medium.”

“Anything else?”

Courage? No, she couldn’t ask that from a coffee shop. So she just shook her head and fumbled with the zipper on her bag. It took a little work but she managed to retrieve her wallet before her cheeks tinged too much with embarrassment. But the barista just smiled and waited as she paid.

“What name should I call?”
Sana’s bladder complained. And Sana huffed. Why couldn’t she just stay here in her heaven without being reminded of silly things like human needs? No? But Dahyun was fast asleep, and in Sana’s arms and there was nothing Sana had ever seen that came closer to stopping time for her. It was the most wonderfully calm sight to behold. But wondrous sight or not, the problem of how to postpone human needs to convenience, was probably not an issue to tackle at half past seven in the morning on a regular Tuesday.

Still. Sana couldn’t help but take a few more seconds to stare at the beautiful girl in her arms. Her beautiful girl. Hers. Hers. Sana giggled at the bubbles in her stomach and nuzzled her nose against Dahyun’s cheek. Then pressed her lips to the soft skin and felt how Dahyun smiled in her sleep. It was downright addictive. The high of having Dahyun. The blissful light of her presence that relieved all worry. Making a last attempt at winning the battle against her bladder, Sana pressed another kiss to Dahyun’s skin. Her cheek. Then her temple, her forehead, the corner of her mouth. Dahyun’s soft hum vibrated against Sana’s lips. But just as Sana got the idea of waking the girl with kisses like she had dreamt of so many times, her bladder called attention to itself again. Stubbornly, painfully so.

Okay, fine.

With a huff, Sana untangled herself and crawled gently across the sleeping girl, grabbing her phone out of habit as she walked out, hastily closing the door after her.

As if it was trying to punish her for dedicating all of her time to fooling around with her roommate, Sana’s body went into protest again, almost the second she had flushed the toilet. But this time it was her stomach. It grumbled so loud, Sana was sure it was going to wake Dahyun from two doors space. So Sana was really not going to get to wake up Dahyun with kisses today then? Well, she could, but she also knew that she would lose herself in Dahyun’s arms the moment the girl woke, and… would that really be so bad? Sana smiled at herself as she exited the bathroom. Hers… No, focus. Food. Definitely food first and Dahyun afterwards.

With determined steps, Sana walked into the kitchen, leaving the door to her room closed. Scanned the room and saw the bag of bread left on the counter from yesterday morning. Was she really going to try? Maybe. Maybe today would be the day she actually conquered the toaster.

With a flame of confidence in her chest, Sana put the phone on the kitchen counter, crouched and pulled her nemesis from the cupboard. Plugged it in and stared it down.

“You and I. The war ends today.” She told it sternly. Then she grabbed two pieces of bread from the bag, put them in, and turned on the toaster.

For a moment she considered just staring down the depths of it, but then the bread would already be lukewarm by the time she had gotten it buttered. So instead, she settled for listening for the toaster while grabbing butter and jam from the fridge. Then she found glasses and juice and poured water in the kettle for tea.

The toast wasn’t done yet.
But it didn’t smell burnt either, which was definitely a good sign.

With pursed lips and attentive ears, Sana leaned against the kitchen counter and grabbed her phone, checking it for messages. There were none. Not that she had expected it. But she checked her conversation with each of her parents on turn, just to be completely sure they hadn’t written. They had been unusually vague recently, and it was starting to worry Sana a little. But Momo said it was just paranoia from being happy finally, because Sana always waited for things to go bad again, and she was probably right.

Sana switched apps and read through the past few days worth of conversation with Momo. There was a suspiciously small proportion concerning Dahyun, a subject that otherwise took more than half of their chat these days.

As with any other concern, Momo had been there at every conflicting thought, calming her down. But now that something had actually finally happened. Now that she could actually just go and kiss Dahyun so hard it would take both their breaths away, Sana had clamped up. And Momo was starting to suspect that something was up. Asking if Sana gave Dahyun a birthday kiss. Asking if Dahyun was sleeping better. Asking if she wanted help dealing with Dahyun at the movie night tonight. But Sana had just brushed it off. And she wasn’t even sure why. But Dahyun disappearing right after their first kiss might have had something to do with it. The confusion and hurt of that whole ordeal had definitely been the reason Sana hadn’t told Momo immediately. Back then she had wanted to wait to judge if this was sun or rain.

But it was definitely sun.

With Dahyun, everything seemed brighter somehow, and it was impossibly stronger than anything Sana had ever felt. Maybe just because they spent so much of their time together. Or maybe it was the other way around. That her feelings made her want to spend every possible moment in Dahyun’s light. Maybe it was some middle ground of those.

Sana’s fingers hovered over the keyboard on the phone, biting her lip. But she didn’t write. Blamed the smell of burnt toast that pulled her from her thoughts.

“How in the-” Sana hissed under her breath, putting the phone back on the kitchen counter and turning off the toaster. It was no good. The layer of burnt black bread was already there, and Sana stared them down. Why did they always have to burn? It couldn’t be that hard. She could cook. Some things. One thing. But this was just bread. Maybe she should just have ramyun instead. Or have cereal.

Or remember to breathe.

The latter was possibly out of the question, because Sana felt mostly like bursting. Arms had wrapped around her waist and a cold nose nuzzled in her hair, and Dahyun’s voice had sleep in it when she spoke softly against Sana’s skin.

“Someday I’m gonna teach you how to use it properly.”

Sana giggled in Dahyun’s arms, putting the burnt toast on the counter. Then she leaned back into the younger girl, resting her head on Dahyun’s shoulder. Tangled their hands over Sana’s shirt.

“Did I wake you?” Sana asked.

“Ten minutes ago when you started kissing me.” Dahyun said dryly, causing giggles to bubble past Sana’s lips. “I fell back asleep for a little but then smelled the bread.”
“Sorry, I just couldn’t help myself. Your cheek is very soft and kissable.” Sana defended herself.


“Yeah?” Sana asked.

“Definitely.” Dahyun said. Pressed her lips to Sana’s cheek in a way that sent the older girl flying.

How was it even possible to feel this much?

“You want help with the toaster?” Dahyun asked against Sana’s cheek.

“Yes, in a moment.” Sana hummed, turning her head, in an attempt to kiss Dahyun properly. The angle however meant that she instead ended up bumping her nose against Dahyun’s upper lip. It didn’t stop her from trying again though, until they managed. Then maybe dragged the kiss out a little. Maybe. And maybe she was rewarded by Dahyun valiantly defending Sana from the toaster, the result being two pieces of beautiful, crispy, golden pieces of bread, butter melting as soon as it was spread across the surface, the scent of toast mixing with that of lemon tea.

…

The lemon tea got cold before she got to finish it, but she drank every last drop anyways. By now she was used to cold coffee, and cold tea, and honestly neither bothered her much. There were much bigger things to think about now than cold tea. Things that made it hard to focus, and threatened to awake confliction despite the decision already being made.

But what if it wouldn’t be okay?

Even despite all of this, what if she still wouldn’t be ok?

…

There’s a thing about best friends - about soulmates. A very important thing. They somehow always open the door if you knock. If you ask. They’re always there when it matters. Or at least Sana’s soulmate was like that. Because there was no hesitation when Momo opened the door, quickly moving aside as Sana stumbled inside, completely beside herself.

“Thank you...” Sana said breathlessly, gathering her hair in a ponytail before bending down to take off her shoes.

“Did you run here?” Momo asked quizzically.

“I...” Sana took a deep breath. “No... Kinda? Okay, yes.”

Sana pressed her lips together. Got back up and met Momo’s raised eyebrow.
“Getting cold feet about the travel?”

Sana shook her head. Nodded. And shook her head again. Sighed and felt her pulse slowly settling.

“It’s complicated.” She huffed. Momo shrugged and gestured for them to head into the kitchen.

“Where’s...” Sana trailed off halfway, looking around.

“Jeongyeon is at work, Mina is in their room.” Momo led them into the kitchen.

Right. Work. With Dahyun. Sana’s mind travelled immediately but Momo bumped her hip before hopping onto the kitchen counter, opening the fridge at an awkward angle, blindly grasping until she found a box. Sana watched, only judging her a little bit, as she tried to close the fridge again, with much less success.

Eventually Momo sent Sana the pout the younger girl had been waiting for. With a smirk, Sana effortlessly pushed the door shut, and Momo grumbled under her breath as she opened the box.

“So. The fire. Where is it?”

Sana leaned against the wall and crossed her arms, trying to keep a somewhat straight face as she spoke “I guess the correct answer here would be... Dahyun’s pants.”

Momo frowned. “I don’t- is she lying to you?”

“What? Oh, pants on fire. No, she’s not lying. That was bad phrasing, sorry.”

“Then what? I don’t follow..” Momo opened the drawer beneath where she was sitting, now cross-legged with the box of leftovers in her lap. She drew out a pair of chopsticks, offering Sana a pair as well.

“No thanks, I’m not hungry.” Sana declined. A lie. Sort of.

Momo shrugged and dug in. Sana chose to wait until Momo was done with a bite, to speak. There really was only one way to say this and Momo would surely choke on the rice if Sana told it mid-bite.

“I almost had sex with Dahyun this morning.”

Momo dropped her chopsticks. Sana picked them up and handed them back to Momo.

“Come again?” Momo said, washing the chopsticks before sticking them into the rice without eating from the box.

“We, uh- Yeah. But only almost. Well, I guess I kinda- no, but. God, why is sex so complicated? Okay, no, we didn’t do it. But almost.” Sana let her mind run through her mouth.

“How much almost is almost?” Momo asked, grabbing the chopsticks again, taking a careful bite of rice.

“I, uh. Well, I had my hand down her pants?” Sana tried to stop the smile that tugged at her lips. Unsuccessfully.

“Oh, so sex.” Momo looked impressed. Took a bigger bite.

“No, I chickened out.” Sana sighed. And this time Momo did choke on her rice. And it took a full
minute to get her to stop coughing.

“You,” Momo croaked, her eyes watering, “You, Minatozaki Sana, chickened out of sex?”

Sana scowled. “It’s not like I’m proud of it, I just- I don’t know what happened?”

Momo examined the box of rice. For a very, very long time.

“Did she notice it?” Momo finally asked.

“Why, I don’t know, Momo. If Nayeon and Chaeyoung got you riled up to a moaning mess and then left you hanging, don’t you think you’d notice?” Sana snapped.

Momo’s cheeks turned bright pink, and she settled for putting the lid back on the rice. “Fair enough.”

“Sorry, I just… I don’t understand what happened.”

Momo opened the fridge and put the box back. Sana gently kicked it shut.

“What exactly did happen?”

“As if I’m gonna tell you the details of my sex life.”

“Never stopped you before.” Momo shrugged.

“Well, not this time.” Sana dug her fingers into her arms.

“Look, do you want my help or not?” Momo let a leg fall down the kitchen counter. Sana estimated that at the right angle Sana would be in kicking distance of that leg. But Momo just kept talking, leg dangling like a threat. “Stop being so stubborn and tell me.”

“Well, we were just... I don’t know how it happened actually, but we ended up almost- I mean, I almost… you know?”

“Did her.” Momo said dryly.

“Shut. It’s not like that, it’s more… I don’t know, she’s really innocent and adorable. It’s like she feels everything a lot but doesn’t know how to let herself? But she’s such a good kisser you have no idea, and the sounds-. Momo, she’s so beautiful. I think most people wouldn’t consider the possibility, because she dresses like an old man, but she has such a good body, it’s almost unfair. I’d be jealous if it wasn’t for the fact that I got to-”

“Yes, thanks, that’s quite enough.” Momo held up her chopsticks.

“You told me to tell you!” Sana whined.

“I meant tell me what happened to make you freeze, not gush about how hot she is.” Momo cringed.

“Oh, right.” Sana bit her lip. “Well, we were... you know, but the minute I actually touched her, I just.. I got overwhelmed. I think?”

Momo seemed to consider, the hue on her cheeks a little less scarlet “Scared?”

“What would I be scared of?” Sana frowned.
“Sana, you know exactly what you’re scared of. And so do I.” Momo’s leg stretched and a toe poked Sana’s thigh.

Sana pressed her lips together. Remembered the past few weeks worth of conversations with her parents. The alarming silences. Brushing off her concerns as if they were nothing. And it felt like something was pressing against her trachea.

“But in the moment I didn’t think about it at all, I just… froze. I didn’t know why I couldn’t commit. I just felt scared.”

“Even if you didn’t know if at the time, don’t you think it makes sense?”

“... yeah.” Sana nodded. “I just don’t know what to do. I want to. And when I’m with her I really want to. And she- she wanted to.”

“Then just try not to let it stop you. Don’t let it stop you from loving her. The fear. Because, it’s just that. Fear. This thing with your folks I mean - it’s nothing more. You know how they are, they’re just looking out for you. They don’t want you to worry unnecessarily. And I know that there is no way you’re going to let fear win, because you’re the strongest person I know. It might take a while, and I think it’s good that you get to see them and confirm that it’s okay. You know? It’s just a battle against your mind for now, but you’ll win eventually. You just have to fight for what you want from life.” Momo said, and it would’ve almost been philosophical if she hadn’t ended a last sentence. “And hey, if winning means getting laid, isn’t that the best motivation?”

“Ass.” Sana chuckled and uncrossed her arms. Tried to catch Momo’s foot but wasn’t fast enough.

Maybe Momo was right. Maybe she should just try not to fear the love she felt.

…

Was it possible that places like airports existed in some relative dimension? That time just passed slower here? It certainly seemed like it. There was honestly only so many things to do in here, and she was just getting increasingly nervous. It was so hard to keep her mind from wandering to the worst case scenario. So hard to stop herself from running back where she came from.

…

Sana couldn’t breathe.

It felt like everything was suddenly real and she had been sleepwalking. As if she wasn’t here at all, somehow disconnected from her soul. It felt like she hadn’t actually been here, in Japan, for the past month. Not until now. Now she was here, suddenly too present, gravity too strong as she stared at the phone laying on the sheets, turned off and reminding her only of what she had just done. But it wasn’t guilt that was overpowering her. It was anger. An anger so confusing and frightening that it might have meant her final breath.

Sana’s hands clenched tight around the sheets and she buried her face in the pile of plushies, letting
the fabric swallow her anguish, her unexplainable wrath towards a life she had never asked for.

Why did she have to be sick? Couldn’t she just be well? Why did she have to be Sana’s mom? Why couldn’t Sana have gotten a normal life with a normal mom with a heart that was hers? And this heart, this other woman’s heart beating in her mom’s chest... it wasn’t even doing a proper job. It didn’t even work. It didn’t even fucking work properly, and this other woman died but Sana’s mom got her heart and it couldn’t even do the fucking job of keeping Sana’s mom safe. Sana had prayed to that heart over and over, laid all her soul into the hope that this heart would keep her mom safe when her own had given in. She had trusted it. Had trusted her mom. But they hadn’t kept their promise. She had almost died... again. And again. And again. And even now, where she was safe, how was Sana supposed to go home when they didn’t keep their promise the first time? How was she supposed to trust that the heart would keep beating?

Violent shivers ran through Sana, and she curled up as if in a full body cramp, trying somehow to control the reaction. Anger was one thing... She knew about it from therapy and from her dad, that anger was normal. But she had never expected it to be aimed at her mom. Had never expected to be this mad at her mom, for the simple reason that she was sick. That she could be mad at her mom for threatening to die on Sana. How could she be mad at that? It wasn’t like her mom had done it on purpose.

It wasn’t like any of it was on purpose.

I love you

Sana whimpered and fresh hot tears slid over her nose and down the side of her face, falling onto the pillow and on the edge of her ear.

Why hadn’t she acted differently? Why had she just hung up like that, when really... when really what she should’ve done was say it back? When really she should’ve made sure Dahyun knew that it wasn’t wrong. That Sana did love her, but- but that she just couldn’t. That she would only make everything worse for both of them. But how would Dahyun understand that? How could anyone understand when Sana didn’t even understand it herself?

It didn’t make any sense.

How could she handle the responsibility of being loved when she couldn’t even make sure the people she loved were safe? How could she continue leading this life where she couldn’t keep everyone safe? As if she was drowning and she had to choose between her mom and her life. Herself. So how could she be selfish and choose herself, choose the love she wanted to have, to give, when really... She was just being selfish. It was all so selfish. All so wrong.

As she lay with dead eyes, curled into the corner of her bed, Sana realized that this was - and would be to every day after - the thing she was most ashamed of. The desire to choose herself over her mom. But even so, the shame and the self-deprecation and the fear... it didn’t better anything. Didn’t change anything. All she could do was to somehow try to... what? Sana didn’t even know. She didn’t know anything really.
Only love - in all its forms.

Fifth time was the charm. Apparently. At least, that was the amount of times she had looked up at the board before the gate number finally appeared. Before there was finally a boarding time visible.

This was it.

She was almost there.

Prison cells were supposed to be grey, right? Grey and old and dusty, with bars and a worn mattress. Nothing else. So how come Sana’s was pink and colorful, with the summer sun beaming through the open windows and the bed splayed with flowers and soft teddies.

“Sana?” Sana’s dad stood in the door, arms crossed and his hair neatly combed. “You want breakfast?”

Sana shook her head. Licked her dry lips and cleared her throat. “I’ll be out a little later.”

“Sana… can we talk?” Sana’s dad asked, leaning on the jamb with a frown on his face.

“Dad, it’s fine. I just only woke up. I think if I eat right now I’ll just get nauseous.”

“I think if you eat now you’ll have actually eaten in the past day.” Sana’s dad said dryly.

“I’m fine, I’ve just been feeling under the weather.” Sana insisted.

“I think you’ve been feeling under the weather since you got here.”

Sana didn’t answer. Just stared at her dad. What part was she supposed to disagree with? But what was she supposed to do?

Sana’s dad seemed to read her mind though. Closed his eyes and pushed himself off the jamb. Then he sent her a single sad look and walked away.

“Say it.” Sana whispered. “Please.”

But it was too late. He couldn’t hear. And she couldn’t raise her voice. So instead she shuffled out from under the covers, and closed the door. Sank to the floor and grabbed her phone. Pressed the second call on the list to redial.
Then she waited. Bit her lip. The seconds before the call was answered were too long. Threatened to take away her courage.

“Sana?”

“Tell me to go home...” Sana croaked.

“What?” Momo sounded groggy and confused, her voice full of sleep.

Sana’s breath shook as she inhaled. “Please. Tell me to go home.”

“Home-” Momo’s voice caught, and then there was a fair amount of shuffling. “Sana, hold on.”

Sana’s response was nothing but a whimper. She curled into the corner of the bed she’d gotten so used to. Hugged her knees tight with one arm and felt her empty stomach protest.

“No, go back to sleep, it’s okay.” Momo’s voice sounded quietly, meant for someone on the other end. Nayeon’s sleepy groan told the answer of who. Then a door sounded.


“I... I need you to tell me to go home.” Sana’s stomach tugged uncomfortably and her eyes already glazed over. “I need to come home.”

“What happened?” Momo asked again.

“Nothing happened, I mean- I just...” Sana felt her chin tremble and her brows furrow as she tried to get her thoughts under control. “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t be here, I can’t feel this much. I can’t be this sad... I want to go home.”

A silence settled between them on the phone, and Sana’s skin burned with shame at her words.

“If you want to go home, then please... do it. Go home.” Momo said.

“I can’t.” Sana’s voice trembled horribly. She didn’t miss Momo’s sigh. “I can’t get myself to- to... Momo, can I tell you a secret?”

“I didn’t think you had any left, but okay.” There was a humor in Momo’s voice despite the gravity of the situation, and it somehow made everything a little better.

“I know she’s safe, Mom. Logically, I know she’s safe. But... but somehow ever since I came home from the store with my dad and found her; you know. My mom?”

“I know.” Momo said.

They hadn’t known each other long when Sana had revealed how they had found out about her mom’s heart. That Sana and her dad had gone to the store to get ice cream and had come home to find Sana’s mom lifeless in the kitchen.

Sana bit her lip and took a deep breath. “Ever since then it’s somehow been connected in my head. That if I’m here, closeby, then I can keep her alive. I couldn’t stand the thought of leaving her, just going to school was hard for a while. But then she got better and better, and so did I. I stopped fearing it to some degree, and by the time I moved to Korea it was almost gone. I still got antsy sometimes but overall, I think that leaving for Korea was the best thing I could’ve ever done for myself. I needed to see that she was safe without me around. Except now-”
Sana stopped, the lump in her throat hurting so much she had to physically hold a hand to her neck to relieve some of the pain.

“It’s back?” Momo asked.

“It’s back.” Sana breathed. Just saying it hurt, but she had to keep going. Had to finally tell. “But she’s safe. There’s no greater risk of her- of her dying… than there was three months ago or a year ago. I’m just so scared, because those thoughts, they’ve been so hard to fight. But it’s like they don’t have the same power as they did. It’s just as strong but it’s different. It’s like it’s an enemy more than fear; like this road block someone put in front of me and I don’t know how to get it away. So I need you- I need you to tell me to go home. I need someone to move that road block and tell me it’s okay to come home.”

“Sana, It won’t- I’m not…” Momo seemed to trail off.

“What?”

“No, just keep telling me about this? About this connection in your mind; between you being there and your mom being alive. How did it get better?” Momo sounded almost professional.

Sana frowned. “I.. uh, well, you. You made it better. The more I felt safe with you the less I felt like I had to watch over my mom all the time. It somehow helped to know that if I got scared, I had you to talk sense into me.”

“Wait, is that why you started sleeping over? To practice being away when she was doing well?” Momo sounded astonished.

Sana nodded despite Momo not being able to see it. “It was a part of it. I needed to get out of the house because the more time I spent there the more scared I got. But when I slept with you I didn’t worry about her too much. Just don’t think I was using you for that purpose, I really love you and you’re my best friend. And I think a big part of the reason I love you so much is because I just got to be me around you; you know, happy, weirdly excited, bouncing ball, Sana.” A small smile crept over Sana’s lips.

“You really think you know a girl after twelve years. And then bam, she turns out to be this softie who just really loves you.” Momo’s voice almost cracked with giggles.

“Shut up.” Sana huffed, readying herself for more teasing.

But Momo didn’t tease.

“Sana?”

“Yeah?”

“I always say you’re the strongest person I know, but I think you just dethroned yourself.” There was absolutely nothing but genuity in Momo’s voice as she spoke, and Sana’s face lit up and she had to bit her lip to keep from smiling too wide. But the second was over almost as soon as it had come, and her face fell, the thoughts overwhelming her.

“… I can’t do it, Momo.”

“Can’t do what?” Momo asked.

“I don’t think I can come back. I want to and I want someone to tell me to, but even then, I don’t
think I can. I think I… I’m considering-”

“Don’t you dare leave her. Don’t you dare leave us. Any of us. Not like this, Sana, I swear. It can’t be because of this.”

“Do you think I want to?” Sana asked with a sob. Her throat closed up again and she swallowed in an attempt to get it away. “I want to go home because it’s- it’s my home. But I don’t think I can. I’m not strong enough.”

“You are.”

“I don’t think so, Momo. I mean… I love you and I love Dahyun. I love all of them, Mina and Jeongyeon and Jihyo. Nayeon and Chaeyoung and Tzuyu too. I love everyone so much, so much I don’t even get it. And if that isn’t enough then-”


“I don’t know how much longer I can keep fighting, Momo..”

“That’s because you’re not meant to fight. You’re meant to come home.”

“I know. Trust me, I know. I just can’t…”

“Then why did you call me?!?” Momo snapped. “Why did you tell me to say ‘come home’ if you won’t listen?!”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Momo, I don’t- I’m sorry.”

Momo sighed. “No, it’s okay, I get it. It’s an impossible situation.”

“I wish it was.” Sana whispered. “But that’s the worst thing, it’s not. It’s not any different from when I left after Christmas or when I left Japan the first time.”

“But it is. They broke your trust in them, and now you don’t have that to fight with when you get scared. They took away the trust you had, that they would tell you if something was up.”

“Then I guess I’m just screwed.” Sana said dryly. If she had nothing to fight with, then what was she going to do? Flail her arms around and ask for mercy? Seemed quite a lot like what she was already doing.

“No. You just trust them anyways. The mistake they made, was out of love. You’re their daughter - their only kid. They just wanted to protect their child just like you want to protect your mom. But now they know, and there’s no way they will do something like that again. They see how it breaks you.”

“It’s just not that simple…”

“I know it’s not. I know.” Momo’s voice was soothing and kind, no hint of the previous impatience left.

Sana closed her eyes. Didn’t talk more. And Momo didn’t ask her to. Just sat in the silence and misery, like a soul passing through the prison cell for a moment.
Sana wished it was enough.

Knew that it wasn’t.

…

The scurry of the crowd alerted her, as if waking her from a slumber. She’d been so caught in her own head all day. But then again, with what was to come, it was really hard not to get a little lost in memories.

The queue gathered around the gate, and she got up from her seat, stomach complaining at the lack of food. The lemon tea hadn’t been enough to settle her, but at the same time her entire body was hurting from nerves. She would eat when she landed. Right now, the next step was to board.

…

The strongest person Momo knew, huh? Sana felt like a shadow of that person who Momo looked up to. Had lost to the fear time and time again over the past month. And especially the past days, had been like her own personal hell. But she was still here. She had felt it for the first time last night. The end. Had pleaded for it not to be tonight, even if she was the one who had initially confessed her doubts about the relationship. She just hadn’t been able to bear it when faced with the actuality. Wanted more than anything to tell Dahyun that she loved her, that she was going to come home soon. But she couldn’t. It wouldn’t be fair to tie them tighter together. But what was the alternative? Not having Dahyun in her life? No, that wouldn’t be possible. Not just because the thought was unbearable, but just as much because Momo was now with Chaeyoung who was Dahyun’s best friend. So they’d have to meet from time to time. The thought alone hurt more than she could bare. The idea that she would have to see Dahyun and not be in her arms? Not get to talk to her and listen to her voice?

A knock on the door interrupted her trail of thoughts. Sana looked up and mumbled her response. But it wasn’t her father’s head that showed in the door. It was her mother’s. Supported by a cane, short of breath already.

“Mom.” Sana jumped from the bed, trying to get to her mom, to help her. But her mom just held out her palm. Sana froze. Watched as her mom walked the few steps and sat down on the bed, resting the cane against the nightstand. Then she patted lightly on the floral bedsheets, asking Sana to sit.

“Mom…” Sana’s voice broke as she sat.

Sana’s mom smiled, putting her hand on Sana’s for a moment, squeezing it lightly. She was so cold.

“I’m so proud of you, Sana.”

Sana frowned. “I don’t-“

“I’m so proud to call you my daughter.” Sana’s mom continued. “But Sana. This you - this isn’t my daughter.”
Sana watched as her mom reached out and took one of the plushies from the corner of Sana’s bed. The oldest. The first. A simple white teddy-bear with a yellow ribbon around its neck. The one Sana’s hands had held onto so tight before she could even express her thoughts, before she could walk or crawl or sit. With a smile around her lips, Sana’s mom pressed the teddy bear into Sana’s hands.

“We have to let each other go.”

“But-“

“Listen to me, Sana.” Her mom’s voice was strict but loving, her eyes firm but soft.

Sana nodded, trying to rid her face of the involuntary pout.

“You don’t know this, because you don’t have kids. But a mother’s sorrow is to always worry, to always miss, to always think about her child.”

Sana’s mom spoke slowly, and while she did, she reached up to stroke over Sana’s cheek with a thumb, wiping it free of dried tears. Sana wondered briefly if there was any point in it. There seemed to be such a plentiful supply of tears these days. Then she moved her hand to cup Sana’s cheek instead. And Sana closed her eyes for a moment, letting the feeling of her mom’s touch run through her.

“Sana, look at me.”

Sana did as told.

“A mother’s sorrow is to always worry, but a mother’s pride is to get to see her child thrive. To see her child strong and happy, dancing in the wind and fighting for herself. I have no pride in my ability as a mother right now. Because you’re keeping yourself here, for me, and I failed to tell you... I failed to tell you that I need you to go home, more than I need you to be with me.”

“I can’t leave you.” Sana’s voice was nothing but a whimper. “What if something happens to you and it’s my fault, because I wasn’t here.”

“Sana. My beloved Sana.” Sana’s mom sighed, stroking over Sana’s hair. “If something happens suddenly, then there’s nothing you could’ve done anyway, and it wouldn’t make a difference if you were an ocean away or just a room. But if something does happen slowly, and I get very ill, then it’s something we will find a solution to. But that’s something we can solve when the time comes.”

“You didn’t- you didn’t tell me.” Sana could barely manage the words, but the feeling of distrust spreading through her was too much.

“I know. I should’ve. Your dad wanted to, but I kept telling him no. But I will listen to your wish in the future. I will be honest about my health from here on, and I promise I will let you know when I need you. Because there will come a day when I need you with me. But that won’t be for you to keep me alive, my child. It’ll be to send me off to whatever comes next.”

Sana failed to swallow the sob, and felt her shoulders shake at the thought. It hurt too much to think about.

“Sana. It will happen someday. We don’t know when, but with my condition it might come sooner than you might hope. That’s just reality. But that doesn’t mean you should halt everything, because you being here won’t keep me alive. Nothing except this heart will. And the prayers we send to it. Life is full of death to remind us to live. To make the most out of the time we have. To live the best
life we can. If I had been terminal, that would be different. But I might die tomorrow or I might die when I’m ninety seven years old. I don’t know. All I know is that this life here, our life. It’s not yours anymore. You have a different life.”

Sana bit her lip to keep from crying too hard.

“... You want me to g-go back?”

“I want you to be happy. And this isn’t my happy daughter. My Sana hasn’t been here at all. So when you come back here for Christmas, you better bring her.”

“Happy Sana?” Sana asked, sniffling.

“Her too.”

Sana frowned. Then clutched the teddy bear a little tighter. Oh.

“You need your friends. You need your dance and your life. You need sisters and lovers and laughter, and you can’t get that here. You could try, but it’s not what your heart wants. Your heart has already decided its companions. And they’ve chosen you.”

Sana nodded quietly. “I think I chose Momo the day I met her... and the same with Dahyun.”

“It’s not just them, though. It’s all of them.”

“All of them? All of who?”

“I got a call this morning, Sana. Momo and a friend of yours, Mina?”

“Mitang.” Sana breathed, a curious feeling spreading through her.

“They begged me to send you home... They told me how much you mean to all of them, and Mina told me how they’ve all had a really hard time because even if they haven’t known you long, they’ve all been so worried but wanted to give you space. She said she wanted to be in on the call because she was worried maybe you thought they didn’t care about you? The others I mean. But they do. They all love you. She gave me their names too, Mina, and sent a picture of you all from the beach? You look so happy in that photo.”

“I was.” Sana whispered, her head rushing at the memory of that picture. It had been an amazing day, even if Sana had struggled with her feelings for Dahyun. The memory of midnight brought a smile to her face.

“See? This is the Sana I’m proud of. My happy girl.”

“I miss them.” Sana whispered.

“I know. And they miss you. But Momo... She told me something else.”

“What?” Sana asked, fearing that she might’ve been informed of Sana’s plausible plans to end things with Dahyun.

“She told me why you’re staying.”

Oh.

Sana swallowed, a shiver went through her.
“I already knew. I know you have this idea in your head that you need to keep me from dying. You’ve always had that ever since you were a little girl. But I think I may have forgotten it a bit the past months in trying to keep you safe. And that’s my flaw. I forgot that you weren’t my little Sana anymore. You’ll always be my child, but you’re not little. And you deserve to know what’s going on with me, so you can feel happy without worrying about me too much.”

Sana bit her lip. “I don’t want you to die.”

“I don’t plan to. Trust me. If I do, it will be because there’s nothing else I could’ve done. But more importantly, if I do, there’s nothing more you could’ve done. There will be no blame on you when the day comes. And for now, I’m well. And you need to listen to what I have to say to you. Because you need to hear this from me.”

Sana looked at the cool hand on her own. Then into her mother’s eyes, so strikingly like her own. Could barely breathe.

“Go home, Sana.” Sana’s mom’s voice was gentle in its gravity. “Make me proud. Give me something to fight for. Give my heart a happiness in seeing you thrive instead of worry at being your confines. We don’t decide when life stops. But we can damn well decide when it starts.”

Sana chuckled through tears as her mom cupped her cheek and then kissed it gently.

“Decide to live, Sana.”

...

The seats were blue and the slim hallway lit with dimmed lights, marking arrows to the emergency exit. With a kind smile, the elderly women in the aisle seat got up to make room for her to take the window seat as she returned from the bathroom. Everything was blue up here, and the sun never hidden in clouds.

Here it just shone freely.

She never minded flying much, but this time was different. Every fiber in her being was jolting with tension and excitement. Was is the right decision? Could she forgive herself if something happened? But then again… could she forgive herself if she didn’t do this? Could she forgive if she didn’t try? If she didn’t listen to herself? No. No, she couldn’t. This was a chance she had to take; for herself. She had to try. Had to trust her racing heart and jolting stomach instead of her treacherous thoughts.

“You look like you have a lot on your mind.” The old lady noted kindly, pulling her from her thoughts.

“Yeah, I do.” She admitted. “I’m a bit nervous, I guess.”

“Oh, are you going on vacation too, dear?”

“No,” Sana said, her voice almost breaking as sunshine poured from her voice, “I’m going home.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for reading <3
Thank you so much for patiently waiting for me and this chapter. I know it's been a while, but I'm so glad to show you this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was unreal. The entire situation was absolutely ridiculous, and Dahyun wanted to scream. Just this one time, they had borrowed Jeongyeon’s sister’s car, and then what? A traffic jam. On a regular humid and cloudy Wednesday. Who the hell had even invented traffic jams anyways? They were the devil’s work. Definitely. Because Sana’s plane was landing in less than ten minutes and they were still at least twenty minutes from the airport. And then there was parking and finding the right terminal and-

“If your head tries to hold one more thought, it’s gonna explode.” Jeongyeon noted dryly, switching from second gear back to first as the traffic stopped dead again.

Dahyun clenched her hands into fists. “I just. I don’t-“

“You miss her.” Momo said from the back seat.

Dahyun slumped back in the seat and nodded. Gnawed on her lip just to ground herself. Then felt a hand on her shoulder and turned her head. Momo had leaned forwards in her seat, and rested her cheek on the back of Dahyun’s seat.

“You’re okay.” Momo’s voice was soothing in Dahyun’s ears.

“I am, I’m just- I don’t understand what happened.” Dahyun croaked.

“I know. She’ll explain, just give her time.” Momo reached her hand up to stroke over Dahyun’s cheek and then pinched ever so lightly at the skin.

Dahyun couldn’t help but smile, and it seemed to encourage Momo. The older girl shifted to change her angle, and then pressed a kiss to Dahyun’s cheek, mumbling against the skin. It healed something in Dahyun.

“It’s okay now.”

Dahyun swallowed. It was. She wasn’t sure how, but it was. It had to be, right?

…

Dahyun had expected the tears before she even picked up the call, but still felt her heart drop at the sight of Sana’s red eyes, the older girl lying on the floral duvet in her bedroom.

“Dahyunnie.” Sana’s voice trembled so bad she could barely speak. But it wasn’t full of sadness. It was something else. Something Dahyun couldn’t quite place. Unfamiliar… no, but something she
hadn’t seen in a while.

“Sana, what’s…” Dahyun trailed off as Sana’s face softened, an almost serene smile on her lips. But tears still fell anew, lumping her eyelashes and wetting her red cheeks.

“I have-“ Sana sniffled and dried her cheeks. “I have a favor to ask you.”

“I- What?” Dahyun couldn’t decipher the situation for the life of her. Couldn’t find anything in the world that might explain Sana’s current mood.

Sana took a shuddering breath and closed her eyes. “C-can you come pick me up, at the airport? Tonight?”

Dahyun stared at the phone. Tried to make sense of Sana’s words. And for the first time in her life she actually had to physically pinch herself, just in case this was her mind fucking her over. Because with the past weeks, it just might be a hallucination. Or a really mean dream. Dahyun winced and looked at Sana. Sana… Sana who seemed to be bursting with giggles.

“I don’t-” Dahyun started, heart beating hard against her ribs. “Is she… is she better? Your mom?”

Sana shook her head, nodded, and shook her head again.

“It gets a little better every day. But no, she’s not well as in, healthy.”

But then what? What had changed?

“But… you’re,” Dahyun hardly dared believe it, fingers digging into her arm, just to ground herself, “you’re coming back?”

Sana nodded. And Dahyun’s stomach backflipped.

“But. I just-” Dahyun croaked, “for how long?”

Sana looked down at the floral covers. Then up at Dahyun, lips pressed tight together. Then she spoke, her voice so small and fragile that it was almost unrecognizable. Dahyun hadn’t heard that voice since the night of her birthday. “I was thinking maybe… indefinitely?”

Once again Dahyun felt the urge to pinch herself. But this time she didn’t. Just let her heart race happily, knocking against her ribs as if too big to fit. Felt the smile widen on her face and the tears glazing over her eyes. She cleared her throat and blinked rapidly.

“My plane lands at 6:15 PM. It was the earliest I c-could… could get. If you… If-“

“I’ll be there.” Dahyun said firmly. Felt like every cell in her body was trying to break its confines.

Sana hiccuped and wiped her cheeks once more. Then buried her face in the sheets and mumbled into them. Dahyun barely made out the words.

“I miss you.”

...

“I swear to God, I’m gonna murder someone if I don’t get there before she gets through customs.”
Dahyun hissed, walking so fast across the parking lot, neither Momo nor Jeongyeon could really keep up, despite both of them having considerably longer legs than Dahyun.

“You’ll make it. It’s not that much later.” Jeongyeon assured her, slightly out of breath.

“Dahyun, just calm down,” Momo said insistingly. “customs takes a long time and getting luggage too. Hell, just getting off the plane sometimes can—”

“It’s twenty to seven, she landed almost half an hour ago.” Dahyun could cry. How big was this shitty ass car park anyways? It couldn’t take that long to get to the terminal.

“You’ll make it.” Jeongyeon repeated.

Dahyun huffed, her lungs hurting from hurrying this much. Definitely not in shape. “Maybe I’ll just murder you for promising I’d make it.”

Jeongyeon seemed completely unfazed. “I will accept this from you, only because you’re a fool in love.”

“You called me a bitch and said we weren’t friends.” Dahyun said dryly. It wasn’t that she wanted to take it out on Jeongyeon, but she was way too stressed and nothing Jeongyeon said helped in the slightest.

Momo looked slightly confused but didn’t comment.

“You forgave me for that.” Jeongyeon shrugged.

“Yeah, well, now I un-forgive you” Dahyun grumbled.

Jeongyeon rolled her eyes, but then grabbed Dahyun’s hand.

“We’re late!” Dahyun whined.

“You’re a mess. You can’t go meet her like that.” Jeongyeon insisted. And to Dahyun’s complete surprise, Jeongyeon wrapped both her arms around Dahyun’s body in the middle of the car park, hugging her so hard that Dahyun could barely breathe. The shock of this action was enough to make Dahyun forget everything else. And instead of listening to her racing heart, Dahyun returned the hug, holding onto Jeongyeon as tight as she could. Then a hand was on her hair, stroking it. Momo.

“I’m so nervous.” She mumbled into Jeongyeon’s shirt. “I don’t even know why I’m so nervous, but it’s all just so confusing. We almost broke and now she’s here in- she’s- she’s right in there, and I need to see her but I’m so nervous. What if we’re not the same?”

“You won’t be. But you’re not supposed to stay the same people all your life. You’ll grow together, and this will be different from before. But it will still be good.” Momo said, moving a little closer, her arm resting on Dahyun’s back as she kept stroking Dahyun’s hair. It was overwhelming and calming all at once.

“I’m just so scared…”

“It’s okay.” Jeongyeon said, stroking Dahyun’s back. “I know. But you’re okay. Both of you. And you need to go find her now, okay? Maybe think of a good joke to break the ice.”

Dahyun drew back, looking up at the older girl. Momo moved back a little too. Then Dahyun looked from one to the other. “Thank you.”
“You’re welcome.” Jeongyeon shrugged, muttering something under her breath that sounded an awful lot like silly fool. Dahyun huffed. But then Momo’s arm was around her waist, and Jeongyeon’s around her shoulders. And somehow, sandwiched between her friends, she managed to reach the terminal somewhat calmer. Or maybe just numb. Dahyun wasn’t really sure. She couldn’t feel her legs, and instead blindly trusted them and her friends to carry her forwards.

Towards Sana.

…

Cool air hit Dahyun’s face as soon as she had gotten through the door to the arrivals section of terminal four. The room was massive, a glass roof letting the last daylight fall onto the white tiles, the only shops in this part of the airport offering car rentals and exchanging currency. Loudspeakers announced the arrival of a flight from Frankfurt. The sound of suitcases and carts moving over the tiles mixed with the sound of carefree smalltalk and people greeting loved ones. Dahyun’s pulse rushed in her ears and her heart pounded against her ribs. The protective arms of Jeongyeon and Momo were no longer around her, the two older girls instead keeping a respectful distance, Momo slumped against Jeongyeon’s front and Jeongyeon feigning annoyance at this as she held around the Japanese girl’s waist.

Dahyun walked forth alone, scouting through the crowd for familiar eyes. With so many people that had to mean that they had gotten through customs, right? Or it could just mean that more planes were arriving at the same time. Who knew? No, wait, that man on the phone to her left was speaking Japanese. Right? Yes, that was definitely probably possibly Japanese.

Dahyun sighed and scanned the room again. A family of four walked past her and Dahyun turned to look in a different direction. But there was no blonde hair in sight, no bubbling laughter forcing past the other noises.

Dahyun checked her phone to see if Sana had texted, but there was no messages from her. Just a message from Chaeyoung wishing Dahyun good luck. Pocketing the phone, Dahyun looked around to try and find the arrivals board to see if they had even landed. But why wouldn’t they have landed? Unless something had happened. It might. What if something-

A light tap on the shoulder pulled Dahyun from her thoughts and she spun with her heart in her throat.

It was unreal. Absolutely unreal. To have her standing there in front of Dahyun’s eyes. With her blonde hair in a low ponytail, the long roots black and her eyes big and cautious. But she was real. And Dahyun acted on pure instinct, the need to hold her close taking over every rational thought as she flung her arms around Sana’s neck, hugging her so tight that the older girl had to take a step back to counter the force. But then arms wrapped tight around Dahyun’s back and a shivering breath hit her neck. Nothing else mattered. Nothing but the scent of home on Sana’s skin and the way Sana’s fingers dug into her sides.

Dahyun didn’t know how long they stood there. Didn’t care. All she cared about was the fact that she could hold on to Sana forever if she wanted. And God, she wanted to.

“I’ve missed you.” Dahyun muttered. “I’ve missed you so much.”
“I’ve missed you too, Dahyunnie.” Sana’s voice shook, and the slight crack in it made Dahyun’s heart ache. “I’m so sorry.”

“No, shh.” Dahyun held tighter around Sana’s neck.

“Dahyun, I didn’t- I should’ve-”

“Don’t apologize.” Dahyun said quietly. “You have nothing to apologize for.”

“But I am sorry.” Sana insisted, burying her face in Dahyun’s neck. “I should’ve come back sooner, I should’ve told you- I should’ve been b-braver.”

“You are brave.” Dahyun insisted.

“I just wish it hadn’t taken me this long.” Sana mumbled, her lips brushing over the skin of Dahyun’s neck as she spoke.

“But you’re here now.” Dahyun said. Drew back just enough to press her forehead against Sana, still with her arms around Sana’s neck as best as possible. She really didn’t want more space than necessary.

“Dahyun…” Sana started, her voice barely a whisper. “I-”

“I know.” Dahyun hushed. “You’re okay. We’re okay.”

Sana exhaled shakily. Closed her eyes and nodded. And suddenly there was nothing easier than for Dahyun to simply angle her face and catch Sana’s lip between her own. To feel Sana’s shivering breath and the hands on her waist tug Dahyun closer.

If someone told Dahyun that nothing else was real, she would’ve believed it. The airport had gone from around them, and with it the noise. There was nothing but Sana. Her lips. Her hands on Dahyun’s waist. Her enamored sigh as she broke the kiss, and her giggle when Dahyun stole a final peck.

“I love you.”

Sana’s words hit Dahyun’s lips in short puffs of air, and turned Dahyun’s mind to white noise immediately. Channel Sana. In the best way. The way that made her heart flutter and her fingertips tingle. Dahyun felt the grin on her face and saw how Sana’s eyes searched Dahyun’s.

“I’m so desperately,” Sana whispered, leaning back only to leave space enough that she could kiss Dahyun’s forehead, “giddily,” Sana kissed the tip of Dahyun’s nose, “immensely in love with you, Kim Dahyun.”

Dahyun’s heart soared and she felt her cheeks warm as Sana held her eyes. It was all so overwhelming, and honestly a part of her had still not realized that Sana was actually here in her arms, let alone saying what she was. Logically, she was here. But the part of her brain that was supposed to figure out and deal with the consequence of this fact, had absolutely set out.

“You okay?” Sana asked, a small frown on her face.

“I- yeah. I just… you’re here.”

“I came home.” Sana nodded, her lips quivering slightly as she gripped Dahyun tighter. “I’m home now.”
Dahyun didn’t know what to say. Didn’t know what to do. So she just kissed Sana for all that she was worth. Felt Sana’s smile against her lips and the laughter bubbling like champagne as Dahyun pulled her closer. It was a weird and wonderful feeling. To be loved. Not that she hadn’t been loved before. But never like this. Never so irresistibly, effortlessly, and with no restraints. It had been the easiest thing Dahyun had done since she was six years old, to love Sana. And it was the only thought left in her head as Sana’s lips responded to Dahyun’s feelings.

“I love you too, you know that, right?” Dahyun asked breathlessly when she finally pulled back, the sound of a child crying and suitcase wheels on tiles breaking through the white noise. Right… they were still in the airport.

“I know.” Sana smiled softly, letting Dahyun go to stroke a hair from her face before holding out her hand between them. Dahyun grinned and took it, threading her fingers through the spaces between Sana’s.

“We still fit.” She breathed, awe in her voice.

“Of course we do.” Dahyun chuckled. “Hands generally don’t change size much after you grow up.”

Sana’s laughter poured from her lips and bounced impossibly against every surface of the arrivals section, filling Dahyun’s heart with butterflies as the older girl’s grip tightened around her hand.

“Are we grown up though?” Sana asked, words slurring slightly under her giggles.

“No, you’re both silly teenagers.” Jeongyeon said, her voice dry. Momo was no longer in her arms, but instead stood with a dumb smirk very much matching Jeongyeon’s. Oh, right… they had seen it all. And to imagine that Jeongyeon, Tzuyu, and Dahyun were once partners in cringe.

“Hey.” Sana’s voice was shy and her cheeks red, her eyes on Momo. Then she softly held out her free arm, her hand in a fist. Momo grinned and shook her head. Bumped her own fist against Sana’s and then pulled the girl into a hug, causing Sana’s hand to slip from Dahyun. But it didn’t matter.

“We still hug.” Momo reprimanded.

“I know, Motang” Sana chuckled. “I know.”

“I’m glad you came home.”

“Yeah... thank you for- well, for everything. I didn’t exactly make it easy on you.” Sana drew back. Momo rolled her eyes. “That’s the understatement of the century.”

Sana giggled. Then let go of her best friend and looked past her at Jeongyeon, the oldest of the four still standing a few steps behind. Jeongyeon cleared her throat and tapped the tip of her sneaker into the ground. Buried her hands in the pockets of her jeans as best she could in women’s jeans.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” Sana smiled softly. Then looked around, a frown forming on her face.

“They all wanted to be here.” Jeongyeon said as if she had read Sana’s mind. “They just didn’t want to overwhelm you.”

“But you’re here?” Sana asked, biting her lip.
“I’m driving. Plus I- well…”

“You missed me?” Sana asked in the smallest voice.

Jeongyeon shrugged. “I mean it’s kind of hard not to notice that you’re missing, so-”

Sana beamed. “I missed you too, Jeongyeonnie.”

“What’s with the- hey!” Jeongyeon spluttered as Sana had launched herself at the older girl, giggling and wiggling them from side to side. Jeongyeon merely patted her back and laughed awkwardly, allowing Sana to hug her way longer than any of them - Mina not included - had ever been allowed. Though it did seem that she drew the line when Sana turned her head and kissed Jeongyeon’s cheek.

“Ew, Sana , no, st-stop!” Jeongyeon tried to push Sana away, or herself away from Sana. But not until she prodded Sana’s sides to make her squeal and squirm, did Sana let go. Not that this stopped her from making a second attempt. It was just that Jeongyeon seemed prepared this time, holding her arms outstretched to prevent Sana from getting closer. “Dahyun! Get your gi- no, Sana!”

Sana had finally gotten through Jeongyeon’s defenses, going for the cheek again. Dahyun chuckled, but took mercy on Jeongyeon anyway. But only because she needed the ride home. Obviously not because of the way her heart soared as Sana melted under her touch. As she let herself pull off the red-faced spluttering Jeongyeon, and the feeling of home as she leaned into Dahyun’s arms. They fit like puzzle pieces, Sana’s body relaxing, shaking only slightly with the last remnants of laughter, as Jeongyeon wiped her cheek.

“You ready to go home?” Dahyun asked as Sana started playing with Dahyun’s hands, tracing across the lines of Dahyun’s palm.

Sana twined their hands. “I am home.”

“Cheese.” Dahyun muttered, her heart racing.


“I don’t think that’s right.” Dahyun snorted. Then whined as Sana untangled from Dahyun’s arms and poked her side.

“It’s right if I say it’s right.” Sana insisted, tickling for another few seconds at Dahyun’s side while holding her close with the other hand. Then she bit her lip and looked into Dahyun’s eyes, the sudden tenderness so overwhelming that Dahyun almost forgot how to breathe. “But yes, I am definitely ready to go home.”

…”

“I’ll have to still help my dad with some stuff, but it can be done over the phone.” Sana nodded.

Jeongyeon had asked from the driver’s seat, mostly practicalities concerning Sana’s mother’s condition. They had been driving for a good ten minutes, and Dahyun had mostly just settled for silence, head on Sana’s shoulder and her hand in Sana’s. Momo had taken the passenger seat, though she couldn’t keep from looking back at them. At least until Dahyun tried to stick her shoe up Momo’s nose when she smirked and wiggled her eyebrows at Dahyun.
“That’s good, I’m glad you’re not compromising anything by coming back to us.” Jeongyeon said with a nod. She signalled left and switched lanes.

“No, it was never really… well, it was at first, but the past weeks it’s mostly been my own fault.” Sana sounded shy again, and her hand grasped Dahyun’s harder as Dahyun lifted her head from Sana’s shoulder to listen.

“Then I’m glad you overcame that.” Jeongyeon said decisively. Dahyun frowned. It didn’t sound like a very Jeongyeon thing to say; at least until she heard the slight shiver in Sana’s breath. And Dahyun realized that Jeongyeon was trying to distract her. Bring out her playfulness, giving her lead after lead to play on.

“Yeah…” Sana said quietly. “I’ve been used to her illness ever since I was a kid, and somehow leaving just- Momo?”

Momo turned her head at them for the first time since the shoe incident.

“Mh?”

“Why Mina?” Sana asked.

Dahyun felt lost. What about Mina?

“Huh?” Momo asked. Looked just as lost as Dahyun felt.

“Mom said it was you and Mina.”

“Oh!” Momo turned more in her seat, her eyes wide with realization. “Well, I wasn’t sure it would be overstepping, I mean it was a bit much. But the day before yesterday, I had gone with Nayeon to see Jeongyeon because of- what was that even about?”

“Nayeon’s bracelet finally broke, so she wanted to talk about getting new ones.” Jeongyeon said, lifting her hand from the steering wheel to show the faithful bracelet, three sparkling blue orbs held together by thin black string. Then she shrugged. “Apparently marketplace bracelets are not expected to last more than 12 years. We’re getting real ones this time - more discreet.”

Momo let out a soft oh and then nodded. “That explains why she asks who of you has the fattest wrist, I was so confused.”

“You said her, right?” Jeongyeon snorted.

“I said I had no clue, what do I know about the fatness of your wrist, Yoo Jeongyeon?” Momo rolled her eyes.

“Maybe you’re attentive to wrists, I don’t know.” Jeongyeon chuckled. “You pay attention to all sorts of weird things - like Nayeon.”

“Hey, watch it. Just because- no, you know what, forget it. Anyways, Mina.” Momo turned back to Sana. “We had tea and I had been considering it for a few hours, and honestly, of all the people I know - Mina is the smartest and most morally upstanding person.”

“Gee, thanks.” Jeongyeon interjected dryly.

“You’re twenty three years old, and last week you put red food coloring in my shampoo.” Momo said dryly before turning back to Sana. “But yeah, I asked her for advice on whether I should and
how I should do it, and she helped me a lot with what I should say, and when I should call. But then
the next morning when we had agreed I should call, she texted me and asked if she could help,
because there were some things she wanted to say on behalf of the others. I think she felt guilty for
not keeping in touch better, and for not communicating properly with you about how you wanted to
talk.”

“We all got a little squeamish and didn’t really know how to handle it.” Jeongyeon interjected again.
“We missed you but we also didn’t really know you well enough to just hit you up and ask for your
confidence. So I think we all resolved - wrongly - to the idea that you had Momo and Dahyun.”

“Oh.” Sana bit her lip. “Well, it’s okay, you didn’t do anything wrong.”

“We didn’t do anything right either.” Jeongyeon insisted. “We just did nothing.”

“I never expected you to,” Sana said assuringly.

Jeongyeon nodded. Pressed her lips tightly together, but smiled slightly when Sana put a hand on her
shoulder for a moment before turning back to momo.

“You said... Mina wanted to talk to mom?”

“Yeah, and she told your mom how much you mean to her and to all of them - you know, stressing
the point that you have a life here. More than just Dahyun and I. Honestly I think it made way more
of a difference than she realized. I think it really showed your mom why it was so important for you
to go home.” Momo smiled softly.

“I’ll have to thank her then.” Sana mumbled. Then looked at Dahyun and tugged at her hand.
Dahyun nodded and leaned back on Sana’s shoulder. The moment was over - and honestly, Dahyun
still didn’t have a clue what was really going on. But even so, it didn’t seem like Sana was
completely unwilling to talk about it. Maybe she was just waiting until they were alone. Dahyun
hoped so. As much as she was overjoyed to have Sana back - the need to know what happened was
only growing with each stroke of Sana’s thumb over Dahyun’s.

“You’ll get your chance to thank her soon, we’re almost home.” Jeongyeon said.

“Home, huh?” Dahyun couldn’t resist it. “Do we need to find the lease and add a fourth name
already?”

“Whoa, hey.” Jeongyeon said hurriedly, her cheeks visibly reddening. “We don’t move at nearly the
same pace as your foolish asses.”

“Yeah, so that apartment you never use is what, a safety blanket?” Dahyun asked, refusing to let it
go. Grinned as Momo chuckled.

“No. In fact, we’re going over there as soon as we’ve dropped off you two. I’m just gonna head up
with you and then take Mina with me, so we’ll be out of your hair.”

Why? It’s Mina’s apartment too, you’re allowed to be here.” Dahyun frowned.

“We just figured you might want the time and space to talk? I mean it’s been a long time, and we’ll
be back tomorrow - well, Mina will, I have a shift.”

“Oh, yeah, boss Yoo.” Dahyun grinned.

“If you call me that I will have you fired.” Jeongyeon growled, then looked in the rear view mirror,
her expression changing. “Sana, if you’d rather we stay, we will. I mean one call and we’ll all be here. It’s really not that we don’t want to- I mean we just want to give you two some space, but-”

“No, it’s good.” Sana said, her voice small once more. Dahyun looked around at her. Something had changed.

“You okay?” Dahyun asked quietly, lifting their hands into her lap to cover Sana’s hand with her own.

Sana nodded, a small smile on her lips. “I just think- I think it’s true, that it might overwhelm me a bit right now. I think maybe I need to rest a little? I can feel I’m- that I’m worried already - the closer we get to home, I mean.”

Dahyun held her hand “You’re allowed to worry. We’ll figure it out. And if you’d rather just be tonight, that’s okay. I’m just- we’re all just happy that you’re back.”

Sana nodded, then looked at Jeongyeon. “We’ll figure out how to meet, all of us? Soon.”

“Of course.” Jeongyeon sent her a smile, utilizing a red light to turn her face to grin. “And if nothing else, Jihyo still insists that we go to the beach again before the summer ends.”

“I’d like that.” Sana hummed, running her thumb over Dahyun’s skin. “I’d really like that.”

“Listen, I know you have a lot of stuff, Sana, but did you bring your entire room back?” Momo grunted, finally reaching the top step of the stairs. She looked very much like she was regretting her decision to carry Sana’s suitcase.

“No... but if you’re gonna complain, I could’ve just taken it myself.” Sana huffed, reaching for the suitcase, but Momo moved it out of reach.

“No way am I going to carry it all the way from the car and all the way up here just for you to take credit on the finish line.” Momo grumbled, walking past Sana with the suitcase.

Sana giggled and bit her lip before following, Jeongyeon and Dahyun last, the older girl with her arm around Dahyun’s shoulders.

“I have two new girls tomorrow. One has some diner experience and is gonna train to take over the lunch shifts, but the other one is all green, she’s going to be a kitchen worker for now.” Jeongyeon said as they walked down the hall towards the apartment. “The green kid is gonna be on your shift on Friday as well so can you help if she has any questions?”

“Sure.” Dahyun nodded. “But Felix is on that shift with me so he’ll probably help too, he was a kitchen boy more recently than me so he probably remembers.”

“Yeah but Felix is a puppy and this girl is a bit shy so she might get scared if Felix is too... Felix.” Jeongyeon stopped, reaching the apartment.

“Oh, then sure.” Dahyun said. Wondered for a moment why they weren’t moving and then saw Sana standing with her hand held out, as if she wasn’t sure if she should knock or turn the handle.
The insecurity was so evident in her eyes, and Dahyun wondered just how much was going on in Sana’s head in order for her to have this many jumps in her mood. But no-one did anything. Dahyun knew that this wasn’t the time for her to reassure Sana. This was the time for Sana to reassure herself. And she did. Took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Then turned the handle and opened the door to their apartment.

Pride surged through Dahyun as she followed Sana and Momo into the apartment, even if it was a bit crowded to fit four girls and a suitcase into the little indented square. But Momo just kicked off her shoes and lifted the suitcase into the living room with no hesitation, and Jeongyeon hurried as well. Only Dahyun waited for Sana.

“You ok?” Dahyun asked quietly, as the older girl nudged her canvas shoes to make them stand right, taking a while with this.

“... It smells like home.” Sana mumbled.

Dahyun hummed. “It is home.”

Sana nodded. Looked around at Dahyun and opened her mouth. But then closed it again, and her eyes with it. Shook her head and huffed.

“It’s okay.” Dahyun assured her.

“It’s not.” Sana mumbled. “But I’m hoping it will be.”

Dahyun nodded. Didn’t understand anything, but didn’t ask. Sana clearly wasn’t ready to talk.

“Hey, you ready to go?” Jeongyeon’s voice came from across the room, and Dahyun looked over. Mina was standing a ways away, almost at the hallway to the rooms, hands behind her back and her hair in a ponytail. She had been waiting for them.

“I have everything, yeah. It’s on the bed.” Mina said, softly reaching to stroke over Jeongyeon’s wrist, silently asking Jeongyeon to get it.

Jeongyeon nodded and walked past her. Then Mina turned to face Sana and Dahyun, still at the door. Her eyes darted only briefly to Dahyun’s before settling on Sana, the oldest seemingly frozen on the spot. The hesitance in her eyes almost mirrored the one she had expressed in the airport before Dahyun had hugged her. And Dahyun remembered the conversation in the car. Momo had called… Sana’s mom? And Mina too. Mina had helped get Sana home somehow? Dahyun didn’t exactly know how. But it was obvious that Sana was nervous.

But then, with a tilt of her head and a small smile on her lips, Mina said something in Japanese that made Sana jolt slightly, a smile playing at the corners of her lips. Dahyun swore she could see the bubbles threatening to burst from Sana’s heart as she walked across the room, engulfing Mina in a hug so incredibly heartwarming, and when she spoke it made Mina giggle and beam.

Mina’s voice sparkled as she answered Sana. It was just that effect Sana had on people, Dahyun thought. She was so full of sunlight, Sana, yet she never kept it to herself. Instead she seemed to make everyone else around her glow just as strong. It showed in Mina’s cheeks, puffed by a wide smile, and in her arms so tight around Sana. And Dahyun realized that the apparency of Sana hadn’t just affected Dahyun. They had really all missed her so much. She hadn’t just turned around Dahyun’s life. She had turned around the others’ too. The thing was, however, that it wasn’t just the sunshine that existed between them. There was something more about the way they hugged each other - Mina and Sana. They weren’t hugging like newly reunited friends, but rather… rather like
newly reunited sisters.

The sound of a door closing brought Dahyun back, Jeongyeon turned up around the corner, carrying Mina’s floral duffel bag.

“Mi- oh, sorry.”

Sana drew back, and shook her head at Jeongyeon. “It’s okay. I said what I needed to.”

“But I didn’t.” Mina said, looking steadfast at Sana.

“Huh?” Sana blinked.

“That night, you made me hug Dahyun to sleep - you did that for me too, right?”

Sana frowned for a second, but then nodded. “You sounded like you needed it.”

“I did.” Mina nodded, pressing her lips together for a moment. “And it helped a lot. So thank you for that.”

“You’re welcome.” Sana beamed.

Mina opened her mouth. Closed it and then opened it again. “I’m glad you’re home, roomie.”

Sana giggled. “Roomies… It sounds so odd. But you’re right. I guess we’ll be seeing more of each other, then?”

“Lots. I’m not moving out any time soon.” Mina shrugged.

“Good.” Sana said firmly.

Momo cleared her throat. Had sat on the suitcase for the entire time, just quietly observing. Jeongyeon looked around at her, and Momo nodded in the direction of the door.

“Oh, right. Mina?”

“Yeah, I’m good now.” Mina said. But then, to everyone’s complete surprise she leaned in and pecked Sana’s cheek. And the giggles that bubbled from Sana’s lips felt like magic, making the entire room brighter.

The remnants of Sana’s giggles still reverberated off the walls by the time their three friends had walked past Dahyun, Jeongyeon with Momo around her neck and Mina’s fingers twined with her own. As the door slowly closed after them, Dahyun vaguely heard Momo ask to be carried, with the argument that she was tired from carrying Sana’s suitcase, and then a grumbled unintelligible answer. But as soon as the lock clicked there was nothing but silence. And Dahyun was still standing by the door. They were alone. Home. And Dahyun didn’t know what to do. They might as well be meeting for the first time.

Dahyun looked down at her feet. She had worn pink socks that day. Had only realized the oddity in that when Chaeyoung had pointed it out later at night.

“You okay?”
Dahyun looked up. Sana looked curious and worried at the same time, and Dahyun wriggled her toes. “Chaeyoung said you were a good match because you didn’t comment on the fact that I wore pink socks.”

“Excuse me?”

“The day we met, I wore pink socks. And that night Chaeyoung said- well, I think that was her way of saying she approved of you?”

“Oh,” Sana bit her lip, her eyes glinting as she smiled. “I’m glad.”

Dahyun nodded. Waited for the awkward silence to settle like it threatened to. But Sana seemed to have felt it too, and she did not wait. Instead she held out a hand to Dahyun.

“You’re too far away.” Sana said quietly, her voice sweet and calming.

“Sorry.” Dahyun cringed slightly, though she walked across the room nonetheless. Felt Sana’s presence as soon as she got close enough, and crept into her arms instead of holding her hand. Wrapped her arms around Sana’s waist and nuzzled into her neck. Why she was still awkward after their talk in the airport, Dahyun wasn’t sure. But Sana’s arms felt like a warm breeze and her lips in Dahyun’s hair made the room spin.

“You hungry?” Dahyun asked quietly.

“A little? But I think maybe I want to unpack first?”

Dahyun nodded against her neck. Hugged Sana tighter just to hear her chuckle.

“I’ve missed you so much.” Dahyun muttered. “I wanted you back every single day. I wanted to tell you to come home to me, every single day. I just wanted to hold you and make everything hurt less. But I couldn’t be the one to ask that of you.”

“Why not?” Sana asked.

“I think I was afraid that you might say yes.” Dahyun whispered. “I think I was afraid you might come back before even being ready to. For me. And I got so scared that maybe the best thing for you would be… not me. That it would be better for you to be without me. Easier.”

“Oh.” Sana breathed. Stroked up Dahyun’s arm, over her shoulder and up her neck to cup the younger girl’s cheek. Guided Dahyun back enough to press her forehead against Dahyun’s. “I’m glad you didn’t ask me home, because I probably would’ve gone if you asked me to. But I’m glad you’re with me still. Because you are good for me. I was so sure I wouldn’t have a home here without Momo, but…”

Sana trailed off and drew back, brows furrowed.

“What?” Dahyun asked, covering Sana’s hand with her own.

“Just a moment.” Sana said absentmindedly. She let go of Dahyun, freeing herself gently. And without another word, she walked determinately into their bedroom, leaving the door open. Dahyun followed. Settled against the jamb of the door, watching as Sana opened their closet, immediately grabbing the sleeve of a hoodie. Dahyun’s hoodie. The grey one Dahyun had gotten from Mina. The one Sana had a tendency to steal. For a moment she merely held on to the sleeve, but then she turned to look at Dahyun.
“Can I borrow this?”

“You’re asking?” Dahyun snorted.

Sana blushed. Bit her lip and gave a little shrug. “Can I?”

“Of course.” Dahyun nodded at her.

Sana beamed. Turned once more to the closet and lifted the hanger off the rack. How she freed the hoodie of the hanger, casting the latter aside on the bed. And despite the fact that it was both warm and humid, Sana drew the hoodie over her head. Pulled the blonde hair out and tugged the front of the hoodie to her nose, inhaling deeply.

“Sana?” Dahyun couldn’t help but comment.

“Smells like you.” Sana mumbled peacefully. Looked over shyly and then closed her eyes, taking another deep breath.

Dahyun’s cheeks immediately felt warm. Had she always done that? Smelled Dahyun on the hoodie like that?

“Dahyun?” Sana’s voice was slightly muffled by the shirt still covering her mouth and nose.

“Yeah?”

“I know I owe you an explanation. I know it’s- I know. It’s all so… It’s like I don’t know how to word it yet or where to start, because reality hasn’t really kicked in yet. I don’t really know how to form my words yet. So… please wait for me?”

Maybe it was the way Sana’s chin quivered slightly, or maybe just the plea in her voice. But Dahyun’s throat felt suddenly dry.

“I- of course. Sana, I don’t expect you to… I don’t want to pry.”

“This is a relationship, Dahyunnie. A serious one, at least on my part.

“My part too.” Dahyun quickly said.

Sana smiled. “You deserve to know.”

“I want to, I just-” Dahyun shrugged, pressing her lips together. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t want to overstep.” Sana nodded. “But this isn’t overstepping.”

“You want me to ask?” Dahyun asked. It honestly sounded like that was what she was trying.

“This isn’t about what I want, this is about what you want.” Sana said calmly.

“You. I want you.” Dahyun’s answer came automatically. And the way Sana lit up, made Dahyun feel like she had somehow broken the code to perform magic. To bring out such joy in another person and make someone smile like Sana was, right now. What luck must’ve struck, for Dahyun to be granted the privilege of being that person, who makes Sana’s world better.

Dahyun looked down at her feet. Then at Sana again. “Do you need help unpacking?”

“Very much. I’m not really sure I remember how you arranged our closet.”
“... Our closet.” Dahyun breathed as Sana walked past her out to get the luggage. “Wow, I can’t believe I’m an actual U-haul lesbian.”

“A what?” Sana asked, walking back with her stuff.

“Bad joke, sorry. But honestly, how did we even get here? You’ve only been here… what, 5 months? And I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I think we got here because you asked me to kiss you.” Sana said, stopping in the door with her suitcase in one hand and the carry-on in the other, and a smirk on her face.

“Yeah? If I ask again, will you kiss me again?” Dahyun asked, not bothering to cringe at her own corny line. Sana seemed to love it.

“Mm… you could try.” Sana hummed, tilting her head.

Dahyun chuckled, finally succumbing to the slight embarrassment of their words, but she distracted herself by grabbing the edges of the front pocket of the grey hoodie, tugging Sana closer. But Sana didn’t oblige. Just raised her eyebrows. Tease.

Dahyun rolled her eyes. “Please, can I have a kiss?”

Sana beamed. Leaned in and pecked Dahyun’s lips before drawing back.

“Wh- … that’s not a real kiss.”

“No? Then what is?” Sana asked innocently.

“I-” Dahyun felt her throat dry up. But then she huffed and tugged at the hoodie again, giving Sana only a second to set the suitcase down before catching her lips in what was most definitely a proper kiss.

“See, but this isn’t very helpful.” Sana giggled, drawing back too soon.

“You’re complaining? I thought that was great help and a great kiss.”

“Oh, it was a great kiss, but I’m still standing here with no luggage unpacked.” Sana tutted.

Dahyun scrunched her nose but let go of the hoodie. “Fine. Should I get the hamper?”

“Yeah, I left so fast, half my clothes are dirty.” Sana nodded, picking up the suitcase again, walking over to the bed and lifting both that and the carry-on onto it.

Dahyun nodded, allowing herself to look for a second as Sana ran a hand through her hair before putting it in a ponytail. It really had to be illegal to look that good, right?

Apparently not.

“Dahyunnie.” Sana said, obviously humored. She wasn’t looking at Dahyun, but merely unzipped the suitcase, opening it.

Dahyun mumbled something she wasn’t even sure what was, and then turned out of the room, getting the hamper from the bathroom.
10:14 pm Dahyun: HELP!
10:15 pm Dahyun: H E L P!!
10:15 pm Dahyun: Oh god, please be up.
10:15 pm Dahyun: Heeeelpp!!!
10:17 pm Chaeyoung: The fuck?
10:17 pm Chaeyoung: What’s wrong?
10:17 pm Chaeyoung: Aren’t you with Sana?
10:17 pm Chaeyoung: Did something happen?
10:19 pm Chaeyoung: Dahyun?
10:20 pm Chaeyoung: Dahyun, I swear to god.
10:20 pm Chaeyoung: If you’re dead, I’m gonna kill you.
10:21 pm Dahyun: GOTCHA!
10:21 pm Chaeyoung: The-
10:21 pm Chaeyoung: What the fuck?
10:21 pm Chaeyoung: I’m so confused
10:21 pm Dahyun: I’m fine
10:22 pm Dahyun: Just messing with you.
10:22 pm Chaeyoung: Oh fuck you!
10:22 pm Chaeyoung: You scared the living shit out of me
10:22 pm Chaeyoung: I need better friends
10:22 pm Dahyun: What are you talking about?
10:22 pm Dahyun: I’m the greatest good you’re ever gonna get!
10:23 pm Chaeyoung: Don’t even kid yourself.
10:23 pm Chaeyoung: My greatest goods are here sleeping on me rn.

Dahyun snickered and looked down at Sana, her mouth slightly ajar, resting her head on Dahyun’s chest, hand over the younger girl’s heart. Her eyes flickered under closed lids and Dahyun stroked a hair out of her eye. Her lips twitched as she slept.

They had spent the majority of the past two hours unpacking. Then Dahyun had ordered take-out while Sana showered, and it seemed to freshen her up a bit. But almost as soon as they had finished dinner, she had leaned on Dahyun, falling asleep almost immediately. Dahyun had tried to adjust
them so she could sleep more comfortably, resulting now in Sana laying almost the same way she had the first night. The only exception was that Dahyun wasn’t actually panicking this time. In fact, she probably hadn’t felt this at ease since June.

It seemed in this moment, that nothing mattered except for the fact that Sana was here.

10:25 pm Dahyun: Funny, so is mine.
10:25 pm Chaeyoung: Wait.
10:25 pm Chaeyoung: Oh
10:25 pm Chaeyoung: Now I get it.
10:25 pm Chaeyoung: Yeah, I really do need better friends.
10:26 pm Dahyun: Sorry to say it, but I think we’re stuck with each other.

Dahyun let out a breathy laugh and scratched Sana’s scalp, just to hear her hum in her sleep and feel her shuffle against Dahyun’s body. Even on this lousy couch, Dahyun wouldn’t mind if they never moved.

Her back might, but at least her heart wouldn’t.

10:26 pm Chaeyoung: … I’ll tolerate you.
10:27 pm Dahyun: Aw you loooove me!
10:27 pm Dahyun: That’s so gay
10:27 pm Chaeyoung: Speaking of gay
10:27 pm Chaeyoung: Are you naked or are you just as useless as usual?
10:27 pm Dahyun: She just got back, do you expect me to just jump her?
10:28 pm Chaeyoung: That’s what we did when Momo got back. Or, as soon as we were done kicking Jeongyeon’s ass
10:28 pm Dahyun: TMI, friendship cancelled.
10:28 pm Chaeyoung: I’m just saying
10:29 pm Dahyun: Anyways!
10:29 pm Dahyun: There was something I wanted to talk to you about that does not involve… that.
10:29 pm Chaeyoung: Okay shoot.
10:29 pm Dahyun: Can we move movie nights to your place permanently?
10:30 pm Chaeyoung: Uh sure, why?
10:30 pm Dahyun: I’d like to turn them into piano practice and movie nights.

Dahyun bit her lip and threaded her hand through Sana’s hair, revealing her shoulder. Traced the skin with her fingertips and smiled at the older girl’s sigh. From her breathing, it seemed she might be
surfacing, but she still gave no other indication of being awake. Just lay on Dahyun’s chest.

10:31 pm Chaeyoung: It would be my honor, maestro.

10:31 pm Dahyun: Thank you, young padawan.

10:31 pm Chaeyoung: Always.

10:31 pm Dahyun: Also, Sana is up for going to the beach again, if we can find a day that fits all?

10:32 pm Chaeyoung: Oh right

10:32 pm Chaeyoung: Ji and I talked about that actually, that if she has time saturday?

10:32 pm Dahyun: This saturday?

10:32 pm Chaeyoung: Yeah, Jeongyeon says neither of you have work then.

10:32 pm Dahyun: That’ll probably work, I’ll ask her and get back to you.

10:33 pm Chaeyoung: Woop, Momo’s awake and trying to smooch

10:33 pm Chaeyoung: Ttyl

10:33 pm Dahyun: Sure, abandon your best friend to make out. Classy.

10:33 pm Chaeyoung: How about you stop complaining and try doing the same instead.

10:34 pm Dahyun: B Y E.

With a chuckle, Dahyun put the phone on the coffee table and looked down at Sana. Found her eyes open, staring lazily up at Dahyun.

“You talking to Chaeyoung?” Sana asked sleepily, shuffling to rest her head in the crook of Dahyun’s neck, breath hitting Dahyun’s skin.

Dahyun nodded. “Yeah, just giving her shit. But she wants to know if you want to go to the beach with all of us on saturday?”

“Huh? Oh sure, I don’t have plans.” Sana seemed not entirely awake. Stifled a yawn. “What time is it?”

“Half past ten.” Dahyun said quietly, running a hand up and down Sana’s back, watching a tired smile spread on the older girl’s face.

“S’late.”

“Yeah, I know. But I was having a moment about this, so I couldn’t get myself to wake you.” Dahyun admitted.

“Yeah, and your heart is still beating like crazy.” Sana said with amusement in her voice, tapping the fingers of the hand she was resting over Dahyun’s heart. As there was really no getting around that fact.

“Your fault now, as much as it was that night.” Dahyun hummed unashamed.

“I know.” Sana grinned lazily.
“You knew then?” Dahyun blushed.

“No. Not that you liked me as me. But I knew that you felt something. Attraction of some sorts.”

“What was I supposed to do? There was a gorgeous stranger sleeping on me.”

Sana giggled sleepily and pressed a kiss to Dahyun’s skin. “We should move.”

“We should.” Dahyun agreed, still rubbing Sana’s back distractedly.

“And we need a bigger couch. Especially now that we have Mina.” Sana yawned. Hunching her shoulders, she let out a soft groan and adjusted. Then winced and shuffled.

“What?”

“My knee pressed against a spring.” Sana complained. “Please, we need a new couch. I’m going to withhold cuddle nights until we do.”

“You wouldn’t.” Dahyun gasped theatrically.

“I would. But we should be able to get a decent one, right? I mean with Mina paying a third of the rent and everything, there should be a little air in the budget.”

“Not much I’m afraid. We’re given baseline fewer shifts, because of how Taeyang is moving all the schedules around, and I can’t take a ton of extra shifts until I know my hand is okay to play. But we could just wait this one out and insist Jeongyeon take hers with her when she moves in here?”

Sana raised her head to look at Dahyun from a better angle. “Now that is both an affordable and sensible solution. If she ever moves in, that is.”

“I give them six months, tops.” Dahyun said dryly. “I mean they had originally planned to move in together, and Jeongyeon already practically lives here.”

“Well, then let’s bet on that. It’s a way better couch than ours anyway, and probably better than anything we would be able to find in our price range.” Sana said.

Dahyun nodded. Let out a tired breath and then closed her eyes. “It’s okay for now though.”

“Yes?”

“As long as we don’t fall asleep here again, my back complained for three whole days last time.” Dahyun mumbled. Felt the languor despite her words.

“Well, then we won’t sleep here.” Sana said determinately.

Dahyun yawned and nodded. “Good. Good…”

“Dahyunnie.” Sana hummed.

“Mh?” Dahyun opened her eyes slowly.

“Should we move before you fall asleep or are you planning to have me carry you to bed?”

Dahyun chuckled. “Sorry. I’m awake.”

“No, you’re passing out.”
“Right, right.” Dahyun huffed. Stretched the best she could under Sana. “Just let me text Chaeng first.”

“Okay.” Sana nodded, watching as Dahyun found her phone and texted Chaeyoung.

10:41 pm Dahyun: Sana is game for saturday. Same beach as my birthday?

Dahyun didn’t wait for a reply, instead pocketing her phone and looking at Sana, the girl still very much lying on her. “You are aware that if we’re moving, you have to move first, right?”

Sana hummed. Looked like she considered staying put. Then shifted and got up. Masked a yawn and adjusted her shirt. And Dahyun couldn’t help but stare. Not that she wasn’t allowed to. In fact, she absolutely was. Yet, after all this, she still wasn’t quite sure it was real. Any of it. But Sana just chuckled and traced her fingers across Dahyun’s cheek.

Dahyun leaned into the touch.

“C’mon, you goof.” Sana said quietly.

Dahyun nodded into Sana’s hand and reached up to take it, letting Sana pull her up. She stumbled slightly, her legs sore from being laid on, but Sana’s grip was firm and steadied her. They didn’t get very far though. Because just as Sana had started pulling Dahyun towards the hall, she turned her head, and stopped.

“What?” Dahyun asked, blinking to wake more.

Sana didn’t answer. Just let go of Dahyun’s hand and walked - not towards their room, but towards the memory wall Mina and Dahyun had made.

“Oh, it’s- I know it’s not that pretty yet, but we made space for…” Dahyun trailed off. Sana didn’t seem to have heard her. Her eyes were caught completely by a single picture, standing with her nose only inches from it, a hand raised as if she was about to touch it.

“Mina got that one from Jihyo.” Dahyun explained. “She got it printed and we hung it up. It’s the only one we have with all of us. She said we should take more pictures when you got home. They matter. They-”

Sana nodded silently, cutting off Dahyun’s words.

Dahyun didn’t dare move. Just watched as Sana traced the edge of the photo with the tip of her finger.

“I know where to start.” Sana said. Smiled peacefully and closed her eyes. Then reached blindly back with both arms, and Dahyun understood immediately. Let Sana find her wrists and pull her close. Felt how Sana shivered as Dahyun hugged her from behind.

“I really love ice cream. I always really loved it. One day, I had begged my mom for ice cream, because it was so warm, and I really craved it. In the end she said if I helped her with laundry, dad would take me to the store to get ice cream in return. She said she was tired that day, and that she needed my help. We did laundry together, and she taught me how to fold towels prettily, and called me good for helping. I remember she had a cough that day… had had a cough for a while. I thought
she was coming down with the flu. When we were done, my mom went to make tea, and my dad
took me down to the local store as promised. We took a long time to pick out which flavors we
wanted, because I kept insisting mom liked banana flavor more than strawberry. I was a kid and I
didn’t accept that dad knew her better than I did. We ended up getting banana flavor for her and
matcha for me. He said he wanted strawberry for himself but—” Sana’s voice cracked, and her back
hunched. Dahyun held her tighter. “I think he knew she really loved strawberry a-and that way she
could taste from him still. He does those things. F-for her.”

Dahyun didn’t know what to say. Just held Sana and heard the way she swallowed her sobs. Felt
how her hands clenched Dahyun’s and how her body shook.

“For years I thought, if I just went back and had gotten strawberry for her, we wouldn’t have- she
would’ve been well. But she was already sick before we went. She had said it. That she was t-tired
and needed my help. She was already sick but I… I blamed myself. We found her on the kitchen
floor when we got home. She was so… pale. Cold and clammy and… and her breath. She was
heaving through the mask. S-she couldn’t breathe, and when we took off the mask to help her
breathe, her lips… they were blue. My dad called an ambulance, and… the doctors told us it was a
block in her heart from something called Romano-Ward syndrome. It-it causes the heart to beat
irregularly and uncontrolled, and- and other things too. Can cause heart failure. My grandma died
from it when she was around fifty, but I never knew that was why, until mom was brought into the
hospital. They treated her, and tested me. It’s heritable, and there was a fifty percent chance I had it
too.”

Dahyun buried her face in the back of the hoodie. Didn’t want Sana to know that she was crying too.
It was hard enough just to hear Sana’s voice shake as she talked.

“I don’t. I don’t have it. But they feared it because I’m anemic, and I pretty much always have been.
But they treated the block, gave her medicine and she stopped working. She taught me at home for
about a year before I went back to school. But it wasn’t enough, and she got first one surgery on one
of her ventricles and then when I was twelve, they told me- told me it was acute heart failure. It
seemed no matter what we did the damn heart just wouldn’t- it wouldn’t- It couldn’t keep her alive.”

Sana’s breath was shallow by now, and she let out a whimper. But she kept looking at the picture.
Sniffled and took a deep steadying breath. And Dahyun listened quietly as she continued, aware that
Sana could probably feel the wet patch on her shoulder where Dahyun’s tears had stained the shirt.

“I was with Momo while she got her new heart. We found four leaf clovers and prayed to the new
heart to keep mom alive. But she never fully recovered. There’s always complications, and she… it’s
a long story. Kidney disease and stuff like that. But I was always so scared of leaving her after that
day we found her on the floor. I was so scared that she would die if I wasn’t there. The meds they-
they lowered the risk, but she could still have one of her arrhythmias and she could die. I was so
scared of leaving her alone. I still am. Even now.”

Sana trailed off once more, this time for longer than she had before. But she wasn’t crying anymore.
Not on the outside anyway. Instead, credence and peace seemed to settle slowly in Sana, starting
from her heart, making its way through her body to the top of her head and the tips of her fingers.
Dahyun felt it. Felt how it made Dahyun calm as well, their fingers still twined though the hold was
mitigated. Faithful rather than fearful.

Dahyun shifted to look over Sana’s shoulder. Saw Sana’s eyes out of the corners of her own. Still
she was looking at the picture, eyes slowly moving over each and every one of the faces grinning at
the camera.

Then she spoke again. Spoke of cold hands around warm teacups, dialysis appointments, and
reciprocal resurrances between herself and her parents. Spoke of best friends and late nights and tight hugs and the fear of loss. Of the smell of freshly baked bread and burnt toast and lemon tea. And Dahyun listened as Sana’s story took her from Japan to Korea and to Dahyun, the younger girl’s heart swelling in her chest from the descriptions of herself coming from Sana’s lips.

“I fell for you so fast I didn’t even know what was happening until I was giggling on the floor of our practice room, telling Momo that I accidentally kissed you.”

Dahyun hid her face against Sana’s back once more, though this time to hide the dumb smile on her face. Felt how Sana’s hands held hers a little tighter.

“I was so sure you didn’t like me, because- you know I had basically asked you to kiss me and you didn’t.”

“Sorry. I’m not called a useless lesbian for nothing.” Dahyun muttered, speaking for the first time since they got up from the couch. Sana chuckled.

“... It took all the strength I had in me, not to kiss you on your birthday…” Sana said quietly.

“And it took all of mine to ask you why you hadn’t.” Dahyun said quietly.

“I’m glad you did. I’m glad you asked.”

Dahyun nodded, standing on her tiptoes to press an unsteady kiss to Sana’s neck, making her giggle and wrap Dahyun’s arms tighter around herself.

“I’m really glad about all of it. That you brought me along to Jeongyeon’s place. It wouldn’t have been weird of you not to. You could’ve just said hey, I’m out with friends tonight, but you asked me along.”

“Jeongyeon suggested it actually.” Dahyun hummed, settling back down on flat feet. “I just never really considered it might be weird to invite you.”

“It wasn’t.” Sana quickly said. “It was amazing. I had so much fun, and I think I fell in love with all of you a little bit that night.”

Dahyun nodded. She could’ve easily made a joke of that last notice; turn the mood lighter. But it wasn’t necessary. The room was already full of golden sunshine. And Dahyun understood it - the thing about being a little bit in love with their friends. Dahyun was too, on some level. Not the romantic kind. But in love with the feeling of their friendship. In love with the confidentiality and trust that resided between the nine of them. With every string that intertwined them.

“Mina sent that picture to my mom.”

Dahyun looked up again. Was this what they had talked about in the car; Momo and Sana? They had talked about Mina and Sana’s mom, right? Dahyun opened her mouth to ask, but then closed it again, not sure what exactly to ask. Thankfully Sana seemed to sense the confusion, because she quickly elaborated.

“A few days ago I called Momo. I begged her to tell me to go home. I needed someone to tell me to go home. I knew she had told me many times, and I knew it wouldn’t change anything, but I begged her anyway. But instead of telling me once more, she suddenly started asking me a lot of stuff, and I didn’t realize then, but she was getting to the root of my fears, and I didn’t even know I was telling them to her. But she and Mina called my mom this morning. I don’t know how early, but early. My mom came in around nine? Honestly, it’s all a blur. I still don’t know exactly how it’s still the same
day. If you told me it’d been a week, I would’ve believed you. But yeah, they called mom. Mina told her about my life here. Told her that I belong here, in Korea, with all of you. She showed mom that picture.” Sana nodded at the picture. “Sent it on her phone to my mom, and told her that they all miss me. I think it was odd for her to suddenly have someone ask for me, that wasn’t Momo. She’s used to me dating people, but not having friends like Mina and the others. No-one that… no-one that fights for me. I’m not used to people fighting to keep me around.”

Sana closed her eyes for a moment, as shaky smile on her lips.

“I’m starting to think she really might be an angel, Mina.” Dahyun mused, her heart swelling for the third occupant of the apartment.

“Oh, definitely.” Sana hummed. “But it wasn’t just Mina. Momo explained everything I had told her - that I’m afraid if I’m not there she will die. That I’m somehow what keeps her alive.”

“Do you still fear that now?”

“I fear that she’ll die without me there. But not that she’ll die because I’m not there. I mean sometimes I do fear that, but most of the time I try not to. And when I do, I try to tell myself what she told me - that you can’t control when life stops. But you can decide when life starts. That really helps, more than anything I’ve ever been told before.”

Dahyun nodded. “I’m glad.”

“We made a deal.” Sana’s voice was calm by now and her posture more relaxed “She’s going to keep me in the loop, and I’m going to make her proud, by living the best I can, here. And she said to bring you next time I went home - if you want?”

Dahyun smiled and hummed. “I think I’d like that very much.”

“Good. I want to show you… everything. Not that there’s much, but I’m definitely gonna take you to the Kobe Port Tower.”

“The what?” Dahyun asked.

“The red tower on this shirt.” Sana raised her shoulders a few times to gesture at the shirt.

“Oh, I didn’t know it was called that. Mina brought it back for me the last time she went there with her parents. I always just really liked it because it’s so soft.” Dahyun explained.

“It’s there too.” Sana noted, letting go of Dahyun’s hand to point at a picture of Mina and her brother under a blooming cherry tree. She was right, it was right there in the background. Maybe from the same trip? “You know I really adore this idea of a memory wall. It reminds me of Jihyo’s.”

“That was the idea, actually. It just didn’t turn out well because we were trying to leave space for your stuff and she was being all depressed about Jeongyeon.”

“We should finish it.” Sana said determinately.

“Uh-huh?” Dahyun looked at the empty spaces between the memories.

“Definitely. She’s coming home tomorrow, right?” Sana asked.

“Yeah, I don’t remember exactly when, but some time tomorrow before three.” Dahyun nodded against Sana’s shoulder.
“We’ll make it tomorrow then. And maybe… could we ask Jihyo over too?” Sana suggested. “She really knows how to make these things pretty.”

“I don’t know if she’s working, actually. But if she’s not, we should. I can text her?” Dahyun asked, already making to let go of Sana’s other hand. But Sana clutched it tight.

“Can I?”

“… Of course.” Dahyun untangled their hands, holding her own hand around Sana’s waist while the older girl got her phone from the front pocket of the hoodie. With a small smile she watched as Sana typed, the number so far unused.

12:29 am Sana: Hi, are you working tomorrow? If not, do you want to come over? Mina and Dahyun made a memory wall and I remembered yours and thought maybe you could help finish it?

12:30 am Sana: love, Sana

12:30 am Sana: I miss you~

“That’s not too much right? I can say that?” Sana asked.

“You definitely can. She’ll be so happy.” Dahyun tightened her arms around Sana’s waist for a moment.

Sana hummed and turned the screen of her phone off, pocketing it before finding Dahyun’s hands again.

“Sana?” Dahyun muttered. Wasn’t sure now was the time but knew that she had to say this.

“Mh?” Sana twined their fingers lazily.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” Sana asked, turning her head a little, her eyes finding Dahyun’s out of the corner of her eyes.

“For telling me? Not just about what happened today, but- you know, everything. It was really good to finally- I mean not that you owe me-”

“Dahyun, I did owe you. At least some of it. But that wasn’t why I told you. I told you because you’re an important part of my life, and I want you to know my life. And this is a big part of it. And I realized when I was in Japan all the things I never told you. That I should’ve told you. But I got so lost in my feelings that I forgot an important part of it. That as much as it’s a romantic relationship, it’s also a friendship. And I love you as both my friend and my girlfriend.”

Dahyun chuckled and bit her lip.

“What?” Sana asked.

“Just you saying- you know-”

“I love you~”
Dahyun felt another laugh bubble through her throat. “Yeah. It’s so weird. Not bad weird, but it makes it really hard to keep it together.”

“Well, take it as payback then. You know how much my dad teased me because I looked ridiculously lovestruck whenever we talked?” Sana chuckled, gently letting go of Dahyun’s hands to turn in her arms. Looked down at the younger girl with flushed cheeks and red eyes, but a soft smile on her lips and sparkles in her eyes.

“I can imagine.” Dahyun twined her own fingers behind Sana’s back. “If he’s anything like you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Sana huffed, wrapping her arms around Dahyun’s neck.

“That you’re completely unable to stop yourself from picking up any subject that might prolong someone’s smile. And teasing you probably made you smile more.” Dahyun noted. “You do things like that, make people smile more. It’s like… how do I explain this. When there’s daylight - it’s the sun, right? Even if it’s not visible, there’ll still be daylight, and it’s still decent. But when the sun is visible, it’s so much stronger. You’re like that. You make everything around you brighter and warmer.”

Sana looked absolutely taken aback, blinking rapidly, mouth falling slightly agape. She swallowed once. Then closed her eyes and buried her face in Dahyun’s neck. Tightened her arms around Dahyun’s neck and exhaled deeply.

They stood there for the longest time. Just held on to each other, eyes closed and hearts somehow conversing silently.

“I’m so tired.” Sana muttered eventually, her voice muffled against her own arm. “I don’t even get how I’m still awake.”

“It’s late.” Dahyun nodded. Let go of her own hands and rested them on Sana’s hips instead, air finally allowed between them.

“Yeah. I wish I could make today last forever, but I think a part of me also just needs for there to be a tomorrow, you know?” Sana shrugged. Moved a hand up to remove the hair tie from Dahyun’s hair, the black hair falling from the bun in what didn’t feel like a very charming manner. But Sana just combed through Dahyun’s hair as Dahyun spoke.

“You need to experience that it’s alright for time to pass.” Dahyun said.

“Yeah.”

“Then let’s go.” Dahyun tilted her head in the direction of their bedroom.

Sana’s eyes glinted immediately, and Dahyun chuckled. This was exactly the type of temptation that was damn near impossible for Sana to pass up.

“Trying to get me into bed, Kim Dahyun?”

Dahyun chuckled nervously.

“Well, are you?” Sana clearly couldn’t help herself.

“Yes, Sana.” Dahyun shook her head, cheeks warm despite the irony of her voice. “Obviously that’s exactly what I’m trying to on the first night you’re back.”
“Hm, guess I didn’t leave a lasting impression then.” Sana pursed her lips.

Dahyun narrowed her eyes. “You know very well, you did.”

“Mm, I just wanted to hear you say it.” Sana giggled, but quickly yawned, masking it with a hand. “But you’re right, maybe not tonight.”

“Then let’s go sleep.” Dahyun let go of Sana’s hips, and Sana brushed through Dahyun’s hair a final time.

“Okay.” Sana nodded. Turned back to the photo on the wall one last time and nodded to herself. “I’m okay.”

Dahyun smiled. Waited for Sana to finish looking and then led them into the bathroom.

“Do you think we can remember the routine?” Sana asked, brushing her hair back with her fingers to avoid it getting in the way.

“If not, we’ll make a new one.” Dahyun said, doing the same.

Sana nodded and smiled at Dahyun through the mirror. Then turned on the faucet and ducked to wash her face. Dahyun noticed a hair that kept falling into the water, and moved it behind Sana’s ear. Then looked at herself in the mirror. Her cheeks were salt-stained and she had a hint of double-eyelids, probably from being tired. Then her eyes fell on the glasses next to her own on the little shelf under the bathroom mirror. It seemed right somehow. The entire area around the sink had looked so empty without Sana’s stuff, but especially the shelf. Now, however, the little shelf seemed almost like it was showing off just how good it was at fulfilling its purpose of being the keeper of Sana’s things. Dahyun loved it for that. For showing off its occupancy so proudly, reminding Dahyun that of the gift she had just gotten.

The sound of the faucet turned Dahyun back to reality, and she watched as Sana grabbed her lens case.

“You’re trailing behind, goof.” Sana looked at her through the mirror. Bumped her hip. Giggled when Dahyun smiled shyly and ducked down to wash her face too.

The water cooled her skin and she cupped her hands, letting the water pool. Then she raised her hands and washed the long day from her skin. Pressure. Nervousness. Salt. All of it gone into the drain with the water, and she repeated the motion over and over as if in a trance, addicted to the softness of the water and the way it felt on her lips, like a prayer on her tongue as she took a few sips from her hands. Then she turned off the faucet and raised her head, finding Sana with a towel in her hands.

“Thanks.” Dahyun said, drying her face. Then looked up, eyes wide.

Sana giggled. She had taken her lenses out, but instead of wearing her own glasses, she wore Dahyun’s. She looked absolutely ridiculous, the thick glasses making her eyes look huge. It was really bad enough that Dahyun looked like something out of a cartoon in them, but she was used to that. She wasn’t at all used to this look, and it was really hard not to succumb to the urge to topple over with laughter. Especially when Sana went cross-eyed from the strain.

“I really forgot how blind you are.” Sana noted, taking off the glasses and blinking to adjust her eyes before putting her own glasses on instead.

Dahyun huffed and grabbed the saline solution. “I can see some things.”
“Like what?”

“Hm…” Dahyun pursed her lips, taking out one lens, rinsing it in the palm of her hand.

“So nothing. Can you even see my face if I’m next to you?”

“I can. I just can’t like… it’s a little blurry.” Dahyun put the lens in the case and filled the little chamber with saline solution. Then did the same with the other.

“How close do I have to get for you to see me?” Sana asked, moving her head close to Dahyun as the younger screwed on the lids to the lens case.

“Closer than that.” Dahyun squinted, leaning a hand on the sink and facing Sana.

“How about now?” Sana asked.

“Nope.” Dahyun lied.

“Say when, then.” Sana said, inching slowly closer.

Dahyun bit the inside of her cheek. Watched as Sana’s face slowly got closer and closer to her own.

“Oh, come on, you can’t even see me like this?”

“No…” Dahyun lied, wondering if she could get away with this without laughing. She could already feel the impulse to.

“Liar.” Sana narrowed her eyes, her nose now touching Dahyun’s.

“True.” Dahyun said. Closed the distance between them, kissing Sana. It just didn’t work very well, because Sana almost immediately faltered, succumbing to a fit of giggles.

“Oh, come on, that was a good one.” Dahyun grumbled.

“You really are the biggest dork on the planet.” Sana shook her head. “Prime quality cheese.”

“Only the finest.” Dahyun noted.

“I agree. A very effective cheese. Knee-wobbling cheese. Froma-”

“Please, not with the french again.” Dahyun snorted.

“Oh? I never heard you complain about anything french before.” Sana teased.

“Now who’s being cheesy?” Dahyun raised an eyebrow. “Frenching? Really?”

“Sure, if you insist.” Sana chimed, kissing Dahyun before she could retort. And really, what was Dahyun going to say? No? No. But she did draw back when Sana made a very effective attempt at turning it European.

“Sana.” Dahyun drew back with a chuckle. Grabbed her glasses. “Weren’t we going to sleep?”

“But you’re tasty.” Sana whined, very unabashedly sneaking her hands under Dahyun’s shirt to rest on the skin of her hips.

“I thought you were tired.” Dahyun’s cheeks felt hot.
Sana huffed and sighed. Retreated her hands from Dahyun’s hips. “Annoyingly responsible cheese.”

“One of us has to be, you’re clearly not of sound judgment.” Dahyun insisted, grabbing Sana’s hair brush and handing it to her.

“Hmprf.” Sana pouted but then turned back to the mirror, pulling the hair tie from her hair. But just as Dahyun was sure that she had won, something tapped Dahyun’s butt. Then the something - Sana’s hand - dug into Dahyun’s back pocket. And Dahyun looked around at Sana, finding a satisfied smirk on her face, staring very focused at herself in the mirror, brushing through her long blonde hair.

Dahyun bumped her hip. Sana’s smile grew, and she found Dahyun’s eyes in the mirror.

“Four-eyes.” Sana said.

“Makes two of us.”

It had been no problem remembering their little routines. In fact, there had been no problems with any parts of Sana coming home. Somehow, like the shelf in the bathroom, it seemed that everything had waited for her to come home and fill the empty space. Even the walls seemed happier somehow. Or maybe it was just Dahyun. Maybe it was just the way Sana looked at her as they lay side by side in bed, turned to each other. Or the way Dahyun’s stomach did somersaults when Sana moved closer, moving Dahyun’s hair out of the way. When she kissed Dahyun so gently it might have been a dream already.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this.” Dahyun said quietly, finding Sana’s waist under the covers.

“Used to what?”

“Kissing you? If I had known how much I would love kissing you, I might have done it sooner.” Dahyun praised the semi-darkness for hiding her warm cheeks at the admittance.

“Oh, really?” Sana asked sceptically.

“... I mean probably not. But I really didn’t realize how much I missed it until now.” Dahyun said. She really must be tired if she was saying sappy stuff like this. Or maybe she was just tired of keeping it in.

“I missed it every day. The first thing I thought about when I woke, was your lips. Your laugh. You know that nervous chuckle when I catch you off guard? Your eyes.”

Dahyun felt very much like hiding her face now, the aforementioned nervous chuckle escaping her.

“That laugh!” Sana exclaimed happily. “That’s the one.”

Dahyun laughed. Couldn’t help it. Even when she was about to fall asleep, energy and light seemed to burst from Sana like fireflies, and Dahyun found herself shuffling closer, settling in the crook of Sana’s neck. Closed her eyes and took in the scent.

“Why does that shampoo just smell so much better in your hair than mine?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been using yours, because I missed the smell.” Dahyun admitted, angling her face to bury her
nose in the blonde hair. She could almost feel her heart rate slowing just from that.

“Oh, that explains why it was almost empty.” Sana said quietly. Stroked up Dahyun’s arm and down her back, tugging her closer. Yawned and shuffled under the covers.

“Yeah, sorry.” Dahyun muttered. Snuck a hand under Sana’s shirt, feeling the soft skin on her waist. Sana squirmed slightly, seemingly adjusting to the slightly cooler skin of Dahyun’s hand but then she kissed Dahyun’s hair.

“Goodnight, Dahyunnie.”

“Goodnight, Sana-chan.”

…

Dahyun woke to the smell of burnt toast

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading, I hope you enjoyed the fluff. This one was so warm to write, and I really enjoyed diving back into the things that really gave this story its aura. And remember; It's not over until it's over.
We've finally come to journey's end. It's been an amazing year. Thank you so much for filling my world with sunshine. For making my days warmer, safer, and for travelling with me so far. I could say so much about this but I just want to quote one of my favorite songs.

"Now I'm old and feeling gray
I don't know what's left to say about this life I'm willing to leave
I lived it full and I lived it well
There's many tales I've lived to tell
I'm ready now, I'm ready now
I'm ready now to fly from the highest wing

I had a dream"

Thank you, roomies - for being my dream.
I dreamed you well.
I lived you well.
Allonsy.

Dahyun woke to the smell of burnt toast. Grunted, one nostril pressed against the pillow and the other stuffy from sleep. With a huff, she rolled onto her back, the duvet crumbling under her, leaving her side exposed. She shuddered. Even if the room was warm, the air was still cool against her hot skin. Blinking a few times, she saw the blurry blob of what was probably the ceiling lamp. At least if she was judging by what normally hung there.

A yawn escaped Dahyun, and for a moment she considered sleeping another hour. If she could just roll onto her side and- wait, why was it smelling like burnt… bu-

Sana.

Dahyun’s heart skipped several beats, and she sat up so fast the room swam before her eyes, and she almost fell right back down on the bed. A firm grip on the edge of the bed kept her steady, and she blinked rapidly to get her head to stop spinning. Fumbling slightly, she grabbed the glasses from the nightstand and propped them on, almost poking herself in the eye with the tip of the temple. Not that she cared much when she knew exactly what - or rather who - she would find in the kitchen.

As predicted, Sana stood right where Dahyun had imagined, in front of the countertop, busy having a mumbling discussion with the toaster. Judging from her words, she was trying to figure out why it kept burning the bread. The slightly crumpled oversize t-shirt covered her shorts, her glasses had slipped down her nose again, and her hair was unkempt. Yet Dahyun had never found her more beautiful than right now, with her bare feet on the kitchen floor and her fingertips tapping lightly on the counter as she turned on the toaster.

Dahyun could’ve stared at her forever. Could’ve merely stood there, and that would’ve been enough. But Sana seemed to sense eyes on her, because her eyes darted suddenly sideways towards Dahyun.
She blushed. Turned to face Dahyun and sent her an apologetic smile.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get this right.”

“It’s okay. I don’t mind” Dahyun shrugged, walking over to Sana, finding space in the older girl’s arms that was somehow, miraculously, always Dahyun’s. Even if it meant Dahyun being wedged between the counter and her girlfriend.

“I’m really a decent cook.” Sana insisted, holding Dahyun tight. “I make a mean miso soup, just so you know.”

“Then make that for me tomorrow?”

“Mmh, okay. I guess I’ll let the toast dream die.” Sana huffed, drawing her head back to look down at Dahyun. “I just always assumed you had toast for breakfast because it was always out on the counter.”

Dahyun bit the inside of her cheek. How was Sana even real? With that cute scrunch of her nose and her cheeks puffing out.

“Well I do have toast, usually, but I think miso soup sounds nice too, for that. Not that I expect you to cook for me.”

Sana pouted. “I’m always up first, it makes no sense just to wait for you to come make your own breakfast.”

“Then wake me, and we can make breakfast together? I don’t mind being woken, if it’s you.”

“I shall wake you in the future then.” Sana said in an official voice, though it still bubbled as she spoke. “You’ll make toast and I will make miso soup. Or maybe I’ll surprise you sometimes and serve you breakfast in bed. I saw once in a movie that the guy brought his girlfriend breakfast in bed, with toast and orange juice and a flower in a vase. I could do that too. Actually, that was my plan, today.”

“You were going to make breakfast in bed?”

“Yeah. I thought maybe- you know. Stay in bed this morning and cuddle and eat toast that I made. Except this thing won’t let me.” Sana stared over Dahyun’s shoulder at the toaster with obvious distaste.

Dahyun chuckled, but didn’t answer. Instead, she leaned up, pecking Sana’s lips once. Just to take her mind off things. This, however caused Sana to nearly falter from giggles, but she quickly pressed her lips tight together, narrowing her eyes in an obvious attempt to look serious. It just didn’t stop her from shaking slightly with the giggles she was trying to keep inside. Then, a thought seemed to enter her mind, and she stood up a little straighter.

“I did get up early for another reason, though.” Sana said when Dahyun didn’t kiss her again.

“Yeah?” Dahyun checked the toast, hearing a familiar crackle of a crumb being fried. Pushed the button to force it to stop toasting and let go of Sana.

“Well, first, Jihyo answered - she’s coming in an hour and a half by the way. But I also talked with my mom for a while.” Sana nodded, taking the cue to open the fridge, finding jam and butter. “She’s doing well. She says the picture I sent made her really happy.”
“What picture did you send?” Dahyun asked curiously, grabbing two of Mina’s fish pattern plates and placing the toast on either one. Then put two new pieces in the toaster and sat down.

“Just a selca of me in the kitchen - showing that I’m home. You want tea?” Sana asked, placing butter and jam on the table along with a pitcher of water.

Dahyun nodded. “Yes please.”

“Lemon?” Sana reached up and took two cups down from the cupboard - white ones.

Dahyun nodded again. “Thank you.”

“I promised to send her one of you as well.” Sana noted, finding teabags and then filling the kettle with tap water. “Well, of us. She wants a picture, but I think maybe we should wait until I get these roots done in case she decides to frame it or something.”

Sana scratched her head before running a hand through the unkempt hair. Then she turned on the kettle, leaning against the counter, beside the two white Ikea cups.

“Good idea. And until I’m not wearing these.” Dahyun moved the glasses up her nose. Sana chuckled, reaching with a foot to nudge Dahyun’s shin. “You look cute in glasses.”

“Then let’s make a deal.” Dahyun suggested. “You send a picture with you in that hair and me in these glasses, and we’ll see when we go there for Christmas?”

“Sounds good. Wait-” Sana stared. “Go… go where?”

“Japan? I’m coming, aren’t I? We agreed before you left that I’d come for Christmas, I mean if you still want…” Dahyun trailed off, Sana swallowing visibly and blinking. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I-... I’ve missed you so much.” Sana croaked. Shook her head. Then took the single long stride to reach Dahyun, cupping her face with both hands, kissing her so hard it took Dahyun’s breath away. Her lips moved desperately, taking up every coherent thought from Dahyun’s brain, the younger girl simply fumbling to hold onto Sana’s arms. She felt dizzy and enchanted, caught in the kiss. The kitchen had somehow disappeared, only she and Sana left. Sana’s lips. Her taste. Her tongue. And even with cool air between them, both breathless, Sana still held onto Dahyun’s face as if she was afraid she might never get to hold it again.

“I love you. And I love that you want to come with me, and you should, and I don’t even know why I’m surprised anymore that of course you want to come…” Sana muttered, her breath puffing on Dahyun’s lips.

“Why wouldn’t I want to?” Dahyun asked quietly, stroking her thumbs over the skin of Sana’s arms.

“I don’t know, but I thought maybe- but of course you do. Because you’re you, and- and I love you.” Sana sounded in absolute disbelief, and Dahyun couldn’t help but chuckle, just to relieve some of the tension.

“I love you too.”

“I know. And I’m so damn lucky that I know.” Sana nodded before diving in again, the kiss slower but deeper this time. And Dahyun felt her adjust, moving closer before settling on Dahyun’s lap, a leg on either side of Dahyun’s. With white noise clouding her thoughts, the only focus on following Sana’s lips, Dahyun moved her hands to grasp Sana’s waist. Held her close. Needed her as close as possible after all her words and all the distance. Wanted to make up for every single hug she hadn’t
been able to give. Yet Sana’s mind seemed to go in a slightly different direction. One that made Dahyun feel almost drunk.

With Sana’s teeth softly digging into her lip and her hand moving back from cupping Dahyun’s face to tangle in her hair, it was absolutely getting impossible to focus on anything else. There wasn’t a single doubt that Sana wanted more. Needed more. So Dahyun just gave in. Moved her hands under Sana’s shirt and up her back, with no regards whatsoever to when and where. All that mattered was Sana’s fingers scratching over her scalp and her back arching under Dahyun’s touch. The way she fumbled through the kiss when the shirt crawled up with Dahyun’s arms. Her shivery breath and her warm skin under Dahyun’s hands.

The distinct sound of a toaster brought them back with a jolt, and they pulled apart. Dahyun’s hands naturally slipped down, and the shirt fell back down to cover Sana’s stomach. Sana looked at her, face red and chest heaving. And then she giggled. Let her head fall onto Dahyun’s shoulder and chuckled.

“You good?” Dahyun asked with a snort, still slightly out of breath and warm all over.

“Yeah, I’m just- would it be very wrong of me to ask you to keep going?” Sana asked, her voice turning increasingly shy.

“Keep going?” Dahyun asked, not entirely sure Sana meant what Dahyun thought she did. Well she did on some level, but the urgency with which they had gotten here, made her hesitate nonetheless.

“Yeah.” Sana nodded against Dahyun’s shoulder. Moved a hand down Dahyun’s arm and finally leaned back to look at Dahyun, cheeks flushed and lips pressed together. “Keep going. Please.”

Dahyun had definitely interpreted correctly. Yet just as Dahyun nodded, moving her hand under Sana’s shirt once more, another sound broke through the fog in Dahyun’s mind.

The turn of a lock.

Sana cursed under her breath, and Dahyun flushed bright red. Then, in a single swift movement, Sana got up from her seat on Dahyun’s lap, moving the shirt down and walking over to the toaster.

Dahyun heard the door open and close. Exhaled deeply and took a big gulp of water to attempt to cool down. Really, she still wasn’t sure how they had gotten there so fast, or how it had started. But right now she really wished Mina had just waited an hour longer.

But Mina was here, and she peeked into the kitchen curiously, her black hair in a high ponytail and a pink tinge in her cheeks from the sun outside. She said something in Japanese, to which Sana replied. It was the same thing Mina had said yesterday that Sana was saying now.

“What does that mean?” Dahyun asked before Mina could greet her too. Maybe mostly to distract herself from the rush of blood in her ears and the warmth still travelling through her.

“What? Oh, Okaeri ?” Sana asked. Her cheeks were really quite red.

“Yeah.” Dahyun said, trying not to look too obvious. “You said it yesterday too, didn’t you?”

Mina nodded, adjusting the floral duffel bag over her shoulder. She didn’t seem to have noticed, or at least had the decency to conceal her reaction if she actually had read the room. “ Tadaima means I’m home, and Okaeri means welcome home.”

“Oh.” Dahyun just said. Didn’t know how to continue.
“I noticed she and Jeongyeon did it a lot in the time after Chaengie’s birthday when I was over there a lot, so I started doing it with her too.” Sana explained, silently offering Mina a cup of tea.

Mina nodded. Grabbed one of her mugs from the overhead cupboard - the baby shark one Dahyun had given her for her birthday.

“Wait, so that’s where you were? Back then, I mean.” Dahyun asked as Sana poured the now-hot water into the three tea-cups while Mina scraped the black off the toast.

“Yeah.” Sana nodded. “I just needed to get away from you for a while - no, not like that! It was just so hard not to fall for you, and every second I spent close to you I- I just wanted… but I just wasn’t very good at keeping away in the end. It’s a trend for me, it seems.”

Dahyun’s cheeks burned as Sana raised an eyebrow, a smirk on her face.

“I wondered where you went all those times. I mean I knew you went over there the first day but after that - I didn’t really know for sure, even if it was my best- ... Wait, does that mean you guys knew she liked me?”

Dahyun had turned to Mina for the last question.

Mina shrugged. “We weren’t sure, but we knew you liked her and the fact that she showed up that morning, and how Momo consoled her, it seemed like something might’ve gone on between you two? Honestly, I thought you already did something that night and were awkward about it.”

“Mmh.” Dahyun tucked her feet up onto the chair, wrapping her arms around them. “Well, something would’ve happened if I hadn’t been so dumb.”

“Hey, I’m glad it didn’t happen that night, despite everything. I’m glad we were sober and safe.” Sana assured her, placing the two white cups on the kitchen table before sitting down. Mina stirred the tea a bit, tea-bag still in it.

“How long until your shift?” Sana asked.

“We’re on at two, why?” Mina said, looking at the clock on her phone’s lock screen. “Oh, and sorry I’m barging in so early, Jeong had to go help her sister and I’m not exactly back in Seungyeon Unnie’s good graces yet.”

“That’s okay. I was just wondering, because Jihyo is coming over to help with the memory wall, and I thought maybe you wanted to help finish it?” Sana asked hopefully, taking a careful sip of her tea. Nodded at it and took a bigger mouthful.

“Of course. I’d love to. I think I have a few things that need to go on there anyway. I just didn’t put them up last time because - well.”

“We’ll make it a lot prettier this time.” Dahyun assured her. “As long as we leave space to live more than we already have. Right?”

Mina smiled. “You’re really the biggest dork.”

“Thank you, I take great pride in that.” Dahyun sipped from her tea. Lemon.
“This is such a mess, you’re aware of that, right?” Jihyo’s eyes wandered over the wall.

“Why do you think we called you in? You’re the queen of aesthetic messes.” Dahyun said, her arm around Jihyo’s waist.

“My life in a nutshell. Thank you for that.” Jihyo rolled her eyes, scratching the top of Dahyun’s head. Then she turned her head to talk to all of them. “But yeah, you have to take this down and then we’ll lay it out on the coffee table with the rest - before putting it up.”

Sana nodded, looking at the coffee table. It had three piles. One for Mina, one for Sana, and one for Dahyun. Sana’s was the biggest, but nothing else could be expected, as she had brought stuff from her room in Japan to display here. And Dahyun definitely remembered how Sana’s room looked in Japan.

Dahyun squeezed Jihyo’s side. Watched as Sana and Mina started taking the original items down, putting them neatly on the coffee table in a fourth and fifth pile - one by Dahyun’s and one by Sana’s.

“Okay, now let’s start with pictures. Do you want each a section or just mix it together?” Jihyo asked.

The three inhabitants of the apartment looked at each other in turn, all shrugging.

“Mix it?” Mina suggested. Sana and Dahyun both nodded.

“Great, then take the pictures from each pile and we’ll make them be the skeleton of the wall and spread them out.” Jihyo said. Scratched over Dahyun’s scalp one final time before letting her go so they could both help Sana and Mina put up the pictures.

Mina and Dahyun mostly worked by putting white tack on the back, while Sana and Jihyo put the pictures up. They had way more of a flair for that stuff, it turned out. Maybe the instinctual thing, that neither of Mina and Dahyun really had. They both had a tendency to overthink things like that. To search for systems and lines and end up diverting from the original idea.

“Any more?” Sana asked, looking over the table after a total of twenty five or so pictures had been spread across the wall.

“Uhh.” Mina looked over the piles. Then shook her head. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Okay. Any other square or similar things - tickets or wrappers?” Jihyo asked.

“I have a concert ticket, and my plane ticket from when I first moved here.” Mina said, holding up two tickets, then leaned down and grabbed the last piece of paper in her pile. “Oh, and this.”

“What is it?”

“My scorecard stating how many times I won over Jeongyeon in Mario Kart the first day we spent in my apartment after we got together.” Mina giggled. “I keep it just so I can remind her that I don’t always win.”

“That says, 15 to 2.” Jihyo snorted.

“Two is more than none,” Mina shrugged.
... Fair.” Jihyo looked thoroughly amused. “Sana?”

“I have concert tickets and some receipts, and I have the original ticket when I came here the first time too. And-” Sana held up her ticket. But then, without a word, she put it down and walked over to the door.

“Sana?” Dahyun called.

“Hold on.” Sana waved them off. But they all looked. Watched as she dug into the wallet from the bowl by the door, and pulled out a different ticket.

“This one too.” Sana said, holding it out for Jihyo. “It’s from yesterday. One from leaving home, and one for coming home.”

Jihyo took the ticket, and Dahyun took Sana. Took her hand and tugged her close, arms sneaking around Sana’s waist and head on her shoulder. Sana chuckled.

“I’ll place them close then.” Jihyo nodded. Handed them to Mina who put white tack on the items that hadn’t been up before.

“Dahyun?” Jihyo asked.

“Mh?” Dahyun asked, Sana playing with her hands distractingly.

“Do you have anything of this kind?”

“Oh, yeah. I- uh, I have this.” Dahyun let go of Sana, grabbing two of Chaeyoung’s post-its and a coffee house receipt from the Black Bean. Two Frappuccinos with cookies and cream. It was old now.

Jihyo smiled at it.

“Anything else?”

Dahyun shook her head, but then Sana pointed to the post-its.

“What are those?”

“Back in high school, Chaeyoung would bring me food during recess, cookies or something her grandma made, as a thank you for teaching her piano. She always put those post-its on them.”

“That’s so cute.” Sana cooed, looking closer at the one that had a strawberry drawn on it.

“She’s sentimental like that.” Dahyun hummed. Checked the white tack on the back and suggested a place for it. Jihyo nodded.

“And now for the rest.” Jihyo said, looking at the few items left. Luckily most of it had been easy to put up. “There’s stuff that’s hard to put up, and for that we can either put string around it and attach with a pin or we can put it on the shelf.”

Sana nodded, crouching to lay out the rest.

Neither Mina or Dahyun had added extra things there, but Sana had. In a little pile of hers lay a keychain of a metal four leaf clover, a yellow rose petal, a label from what she explained was her favorite perfume, a few of the nicknacks from the shelf in her room in Japan. Mostly souvenirs from Okinawa and Sapporo.
“Oh, I recognize these, they were like 300 yen at the gift store, right?” Mina took a tiny plastic seal between her fingers, placing it on the shelf. “In the Okinawa aquarium, I mean.”

“Yes! I got it when I was five I think.” Sana beamed. “I refused to leave the store without it, so I traded with my dad, so I got it instead of the ice cream he had promised me. And that’s a lot, me giving up an ice cream.”

“I bet.” Mina chuckled in her quiet voice. “I really wanted one too, but I thought I was too old.”

“How old were you?” Sana asked curiously.

“... Four.” Mina scratched her temple, cheeks pinking.

“Why am I not surprised at all?” Jihyo asked dryly from her seat on the edge of the almost empty coffee table. “Before we met, you barely had anything childish except for that shark pillow of yours.”

“And now look at me.” Mina grinned, putting Dahyun’s eagle feather and her own books back on the shelf, almost the same place they had been before they took everything down.


“You did.” Mina agreed softly, settling on the coffee table next to Jihyo. Jihyo smiled and leaned her head on Mina’s shoulder. Took her hand.

“I like that we have that exact same label for such different reasons.” Jihyo said quietly. Dahyun knew she was referring to the Cass fresh label. Mina’s wasn’t as pretty as Jihyo’s. Torn more.

“Yours from the night I did what I shouldn’t have, and mine from the night I didn’t do what I should’ve.” Mina chuckled.

“I think you did exactly what you should’ve, with Jeongyeon. From what she told me, anyway.” Jihyo noted.

“She told you?” Mina asked curiously.

“I made her.” Jihyo shrugged, sounding thoroughly amused at the memory. “She owed me, and honestly, there’s nothing more fun than seeing her fluster and stammer like she does when she talks about you.”

Mina looked down at their clasped hands. “I should’ve told you everything from the start. I just thought I could get out of the crush at first, but after New Years I definitely should’ve told you.”

“Stop it, Mina. We’re not having this conversation again. We’re past that.” Jihyo said decidedly.

Mina nodded. Still looked a little sheepish, but the next moment she was squealing, trying to get away from Jihyo’s tickling. Dahyun smiled at her friends, thoroughly ignoring Mina’s pleas for a helping hand. Instead, she turned to Sana, helping her put a pin in the wall for the four leaf clover keychain. Then she took a step back and looked at the wall.

“We kind of need something right here.” Dahyun noted, a noticeable vacancy on the wall.

Sana frowned and tilted her head. “Yeah, we do.”

“Mina, do you have another thing you want up?” Dahyun turned to look at Mina. She was still caught in Jihyo’s grip, though the older girl had stopped tickling.
Mina shook her head. “No, not that I can think of.”

Jihyo studied the wall for a little. Frowned and then spoke. “... I have something.”

“You want to put something on our wall?” Sana asked.

“If it’s okay with you guys?” Jihyo asked, loosening her grasp on Mina.

“Sure.” Dahyun shrugged, receiving nods from the others as well.

They all watched as Jihyo got up, taking a pin from the little box Sana held. Watched as Jihyo put the pin up, touching the wall for a second as if asking it to take care of her soul well. Then she undid the clasp of her old bracelet, clasped it again and put it on the pin. The three blue beads sat against the wall calmly.

“Wait, are you sure?” Mina asked breathlessly.

Jihyo nodded. Looked at the wall a little longer and then looked over her shoulder with a soft smile. “It’s a loaner though.”

“Of course, but you- you don’t want it on your own wall?”

Jihyo shook her head and showed her wrist. Until now hidden by the old, bigger bracelet, sat a thin silver one with three tiny silver beads. “I have mine with me.”

“I can’t believe you’re actually changing it.” Mina said. “I haven’t ever seen you not wear it.”

“It felt like the right time.” Jihyo shrugged. There was an air of peace around her. And she nodded to herself, eyes on the old one, now on their wall “Yeah. It feels right, like this.”

…

You can’t win the world all at once. You can’t win the world all at once. You can’t- You can goddamn try to at least win something.

Dahyun sighed. Most of all she just wanted to slam her hands onto the keys, her muscles trembling with frustration. She had barely played. It wasn’t fair. She had gone from playing pieces composed by the greatest masters of their time, and now here she was, struggling halfway through the simplest piece she could manage to find. Not because she didn’t know the keys. But because her muscles wouldn’t move like she wanted them to. Kept fighting her. And for what? She was fine! The doctors at Mina’s dad’s hospital had given her a good prognosis and a treatment plan. So why couldn’t she just play? Why was it so hard? She was good, right? She had a good life, all in all. So why was this still so hard? So irrationally, devastatingly hard?

“If you kill the piano, you’re buying me a new one.” Chaeyoung warned dryly.

Dahyun sighed and nodded, turning her head to face her best friend, part of the frustration left behind at the sight of her. Chaeyoung raised an eyebrow.

“You really don’t give yourself enough credit.”
Dahyun scrunched her nose. “It’s pathetic.”

“No, see, that’s where you’re wrong.” Chaeyoung turned on the piano bench. “It’s brave.”

“What do you mean? I’m sitting here, barely playing, wishing that I had just lost the function all together in the first place so I wouldn’t have to go through this, and you call me brave?”

Chaeyoung shrugged, her voice unusually small as she spoke. “I think you’re brave.”

“Why?” Dahyun frowned, genuinely confused.

“You got your heart broken when you had to give it up. You said your goodbyes and you accepted it. You took the heartbreak and lived through it.”

“More like repressed it.” Dahyun pressed her lips together. Didn’t feel at all worthy of Chaeyoung’s unwavering eyes.

“No matter what, you’re still here,” Chaeyoung grabbed Dahyun’s hand, “and you’re risking that heartbreak all over again, because you can’t stay away from the music. And I think that’s damn brave.”

Dahyun stared at her for a long time. “... I guess it’s a step.”

“We’ll take more in time. Remember, it’s piano practice and movie night.” Chaeyoung closed the lid over the keys.

Dahyun nodded. Felt the liberation of no longer being able to see the keys - though she strangely missed them too. Missed the predictability of them.

“Can I come over monday too? To practice more?”

“Sure. You can come over as often as you want.” Chaeyoung said firmly. “We can play after the movie too? Or play now and just hold the food?”

“No, it’s okay. A break would be good.” Dahyun swallowed and pulled the hair tie from her bun, letting the black hair fall down her back and over her shoulders. Then ran a hand through it to make it look decent.

“We’ll take a break then. Food smells ready anyways.” Chaeyoung said. Ran a hand over Dahyun’s black hair, correcting a few loose strands. “… I’m proud of you, kiddo.”

“I’m older than you.” Dahyun huffed impatiently. Turned to look for her target for the rest of the night. It had been way too long. And she was sitting so patiently in the couch, waiting for Dahyun.

“Maybe in years, but- hey!”

Chaeyoung yelped as Dahyun launched herself at Momo, claiming her for cuddles before the youngest could even think about it.

“Hey, no fair, she’s my girlfriend!” Chaeyoung huffed as she flopped down on the couch next to Momo, Dahyun curled into a ball in her lap.

Momo chuckled shyly as Chaeyoung tugged at her arm.

Dahyun pushed her thigh with a foot. “Get in line, she’s my cuddle buddy. Right?”
Dahyun had turned to pout at Momo, scratching at her scalp for a little extra good will.

Momo beamed. “Mh… If I get a kiss, you are.”

Dahyun snorted. Did as Momo asked anyway, kissing her cheek softly. Momo’s grin was beyond giddy.

“I’m Dahyun’s for the night.” Momo declared officially, moving Dahyun to sit a little better. Wrapped both arms around Dahyun’s waist.

“I’m leaving you.” Chaeyoung declared dryly. “Both of you. I’m cancelling movie night and I’m leaving you.”

“Oh? Well, good luck with that.” Dahyun said, playing with Momo’s fingers.

Chaeyoung mumbled something, but settled for getting the dumplings and chopsticks, as well as black bean noodles and more snacks than they could probably eat their way through tonight. Even if Momo seemed more than just a little motivated to try.

Chaeyoung lay asleep in Dahyun’s arms by the time the movie was done, the petite girl curled against the other two as best she could with Dahyun still situated in Momo’s lap.

“Do I wake her?” Dahyun asked carefully.

Momo shook her head. “Nayeon should be home in ten minutes, she’ll carry her into bed.”

“Okay. We’ll wait then” Dahyun nodded, softly tapping chords over the black locks of Chaeyoung’s hair. She held it at an imagined A-minor and took a exhaled softly.

“... Momo?”

“Mh?” Momo stroked over her hair. Probably wasn’t aware of how much it calmed Dahyun. Or maybe she was. But Dahyun was just grateful either way.

“If I fail at this - at playing again,” Dahyun cleared her throat uncomfortably. “If the treatments don’t work… am I still good enough?”

Momo’s hand didn’t stop stroking over Dahyun’s hair for a single second. Didn’t waver the smallest bit.

“Yes.” Momo said quietly. “You’re already more than good enough, now.”

Dahyun took a deep breath. “I have no clue what I want to do if I can’t do this.”

“You don’t have to know. You try your best to have faith and then make a decision when you have to, and when you’re ready to.”

“How will I know if I’m ever ready to?” Dahyun asked, leaning into Momo’s soft touch.

“You already took a chance by trying. You can take another if it comes to that.” Momo reminded her.

Dahyun closed her eyes. Twisted her fingers and tapped them gently against the top of Chaeyoung’s head in a familiar pattern. Watched as her best friend’s eyes moved under closed
eyelids, her mouth slightly open and her breath steady and calm.

“I want to play with her again someday.” Dahyun muttered.

Momo didn’t answer. She didn’t have to. They both knew that. They both knew that was the choice Dahyun had already taken - the one she was working towards. However long it might take.

...

The sound of Ryujin’s shriek sounded through the kitchen, and she cringed.

“It’s okay, I got you.” Dahyun assured her quickly, grabbing two of the dishes she was balancing.

“I’m just not good at these heavy plates yet.” Ryujin sighed. She had almost dropped all four plates, and probably would’ve, if Dahyun hadn’t been swift.

“I get it, don’t worry. Let’s just get the food out to the table, and I’ll show you later how to balance when they’re really heavy. But you may want to do some pushups the next few weeks, to get some strength in your arms if you feel the dishes are too heavy.” Dahyun suggested, the younger girl following Dahyun out of the kitchen, towards her table. As soon as they were out, however, Dahyun made sure that Ryujin walked first. She was still new, but this would be good for her to learn. And so, Dahyun watched as Ryujin called the dishes and handed out first her own and then the ones Dahyun was holding.

“If there’s anything else, I’m Shin Ryujin, just call on me or one of my colleagues and I will be right with you.” Ryujin sent the family of four a professional but kind smile - just right.

“Good job.” Dahyun praised quietly as they turned back, Dahyun stopping at the bar to deal with drinks for a few new tables.

“Go check the line, take a bit of water and then come do a round in your section.” Dahyun instructed, running a finger down one of the order lists, getting started on it. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed how Ryujin disappeared into the kitchen.

“Isn’t it me who gets to boss around the kiddos?” Jeongyeon asked, appearing suddenly on the other side of the bar, leaning on it with a smug grin.

Dahyun rolled her eyes and worked on cutting lemon slices for the soft drinks.

“Are you or not?”

“I am. Why would I go home when she is at your place?” Jeongyeon asked shamelessly.

“And you say you’re not planning on moving in.” Dahyun tutted, opening the beers and putting
glasses on the tray.

“I thought we wouldn’t talk about you-know-what.” Jeongyeon sulked.

“I thought you wouldn’t be so grossly whipped for anyone, ever.” Dahyun shrugged, walking around the bar with the now full tray. “Guess we both got it wrong.”

“I’m moving her home to me.” Jeongyeon threatened.

“You wouldn’t dare.” Dahyun warned. There was a split-second where she actually feared it, and it wasn’t nice. She really loved having Mina around so much, it was impossible to imagine her gone.

“No… I wouldn’t.” Jeongyeon agreed, walking away towards the door. Dahyun on the other hand, gave drinks to the table and sent a look to Ryujin who looked slightly lost. Then she told her customers to enjoy the drinks and walked over.

“You done?” Dahyun asked

“I- uh, I think so?” Ryujin didn’t sound sure.

“Do a checklist in your head.” Dahyun guided Ryujin behind the bar. “If there’s anyone waiting for any of the following, do it in that order: pay, get food, order. If they want to order additional items or ask about the food, they will call you, and otherwise just keep an eye on how long they’ve waited for the kitchen.”

Ryujin nodded, squinting slightly as if she was trying to keep track of it all. “Okay, okay. Pay, food, order, and then do whatever else there is. I can do this.”

“Of course you can. Just don’t expect to learn it all in one day.” Dahyun shrugged, finding glasses and ice. “Baby steps.”

“Thank you, unnie.” Ryujin said running a hand through her hair, gathering it in a ponytail.

Dahyun beamed. Gestured for Ryujin to hand her two beers and find the opener.

“These?” Ryujin showed Dahyun a brand, and Dahyun nodded.

“Miss?” Dahyun looked up. A man, approximately thirty, stood leaning against the bar, almost in the same manner Jeongyeon had been just before.

“Hi, how may I help you?” Dahyun asked, not sure if she had seen the man before or not. They all looked the same, and they all made her worry.

“Three sojus and her number.” The man said casually, confirming Dahyun’s suspicions. His eyes were on Ryujin. Dahyun softly gestured for Ryujin to step back, without the man noticing. Just because it was Taeyang in charge now, didn’t mean that incidents didn’t happen. It just meant that they now had a binder of specific customers to watch out for, and that they were in the works of getting the restaurant reclassified due to its part use as a bar.

“Three sojus coming up.” Dahyun said as if she hadn’t heard the last part. Grabbed the bottle and three shot glasses, pouring one after the other. “Tab or cash?”

“Uh, cash.” The man said, eyes still on Ryujin. Then he shook his head and dug into his wallet, handing over the money distractedly. He looked once more at Ryujin, the young girl now busying herself cleaning glasses. Then he opened his mouth, but Dahyun got in the way, placing the three
“Are they always like this?” Ryujin asked cautiously.

“Not all. But some.” Dahyun hesitated. But the look in Ryujin’s eyes made Dahyun continue. “The girl whose job you got, she quit because of them. I know it’s not the thing you’re supposed to say to a new employee, but you need to be aware. You’re very pretty, and very young, and they will try to flirt with you. Not all, but some of the entitled ones. They can be really persistent. But we have a different boss now than we had back then, and he’s handling it differently.”

Ryujin pressed her lips together. Nodded and stood up straight. “I can handle it.”

Dahyun sent her a smile. “Just call for help if you can’t, okay? It’s okay not to be okay, and we’re here. Jeongyeon and I, and all the other waiters. We all know what it’s like.”

“They hit on you two as well?”

“Not Jeongyeon as much, she always looks really intimidating, plus rumors have spread around her. She deals with other kinds of comments than you will.”

“Oh?” Ryujin asked curiously.

Dahyun shook her head. It wasn’t her place to divulge on Mina’s accidental outing of the two of them, and the consequence of certain crowds of guests calling Jeongyeon names. They were all on the first page in Taeyang’s book.

“Just be patient and professional, and they’ll eventually get the idea. Hopefully.” Dahyun rubbed a hand over her cheek and forehead, checking the clock. Almost time to go home.

“Thank you.” Ryujin said. “For telling me the truth. It means a lot.”

“Of course.” Dahyun grinned, scanning Ryujin’s section before nudging her. “Now, go through the list in your head.”

Ryujin looked confused for a split-second. Then jolted and nodded, looking around her section too. With a last smile at Dahyun, she hurried over to a table waiting to pay.

Dahyun looked after her. Then at Jeongyeon standing by the podium at the door. The older girl seemed to sense it, because she glanced over her shoulder and made a face at Dahyun. Dahyun made a face back. Jeongyeon rolled her eyes and waved her off. Smiled.

There wasn’t another incident until the end of Dahyun’s shift. But even so, her nerves steadily grew as the night progressed, and when she finally stepped out of the restaurant with the bag over her shoulder, she felt like someone was running a high voltage current through her body. Because the bike was right there, waiting for her. She had brought the bike with her to work - walking it here. Of course, she was supposed to have ridden it here too, but in the end she had given up and walked. But
now it was staring at her, and there wasn’t the excuse of possibly being late. There was no excuse at all. There was only the bike helmet fastened to the lock and the scratches on the side of the frame where it had gotten hit.

“You got this.” Dahyun mumbled to herself, eyes locked on the scratches in the metal. “It’s just four minutes then you’re home.”

It felt silly, talking to herself. But maybe she was talking to the bike more than herself. Asking it to keep her safe, and get her home well. And somehow that angle worked better than anything. If she couldn’t trust herself, she could at least try and trust the bike. Even if her hand shook as she unlocked it and clicked on her helmet.

Sending a long prayer to the sky to keep her dry, Dahyun swung a leg over the bike and put her foot on the pedal. Took a deep breath and clutched the breaks. No. No she could do this. She could. She had done this only a few weeks ago, and it had been fine. She had biked ever since she was five and her brother had taught her how. It was all just about starting. About taking that step. No big deal. Yes… big deal. But it was okay that it was. To Dahyun, this was a big deal. So with her heart hammering against her ribs, she finally let go of the breaks and stepped up properly, biking across the quiet street, and took a left, towards her home.

The ride home seemed way too long, and when Dahyun finally parked the bike in front of the building and locked it, she was sweating despite the fact that it had only taken her a few minutes. But when you’re constantly trying to fight your fear, a few minutes seems like a lot more. But she did it. Had walked the bike to work but ridden it home. Even though her muscles hurt from the strain and her heart raced in her chest. It was okay. Like she had said to Ryujin - baby steps. It was always baby steps. Always pushing slowly to get past the fear - the hardship.

With a hand on her heart and the new bike helmet in her other hand, she walked up the stairs to her apartment, moving the hand from her heart to unlock the door.

The living room was quiet and dark, but light coming from the kitchen revealed that there was probably someone still up. Whether Mina or Sana, Dahyun didn’t know - but from experience it was probably the latter.

Dahyun kicked off her shoes nudging them to stand neatly. Then she hung the helmet on the jacket rack and put the keys in the bowl. Stretched and walked through the living room, peeking into the kitchen.

“Hey.” Dahyun said cautiously, seeing Sana with her feet up on the chair, a cup of tea in front of her.

“Hi.” Sana’s voice was small as she looked up, and her smile cautious. “Good shift?”

“No. It was okay that it was. To Dahyun, this was a big deal. So with her heart hammering against her ribs, she finally let go of the breaks and stepped up properly, biking across the quiet street, and took a left, towards her home.

“New girl is promising, and Jeongyeon is back to normal.” Dahyun nodded, walking around to stand behind Sana’s chair, wrapping her arms around the older girl’s shoulders. “You okay?”

Sana shook her head, reaching to hold on to Dahyun’s arms. “I’m scared. I don’t really… have a reason to be. But I’m scared, and I have been all night. I’m just fighting the urge to get on the first plane back to her.”

Dahyun nodded. “Did anything set it off?”
“Not that I know of.” Sana sighed. “I think maybe it’s just because I haven’t talked to her today.”

“Have you considered calling?”

“I wanted to, but I didn’t because I was supposed to be strong.” Sana’s voice shook. “But the stronger I tried to be, the more I wanted to talk to her, but then it got too late, and she’s sleeping by now.”

Dahyun crouched slightly to hug her tighter. Felt how Sana hummed and seemed to relax a little in Dahyun’s arms. Saw how she lowered her legs and felt her tug at Dahyun’s arms. Dahyun nodded and moved around to sit on Sana’s lap, still holding her tight.

“I don’t know how to balance it.” Sana admitted, burying her face in Dahyun’s neck, arms tight around Dahyun’s waist.

“No-one expects you to.” Dahyun hushed. “It’s all trial-and-error.”

“This was an error, then.” Sana whispered. “I should’ve called her.”

“Call her tomorrow morning then, before you go to the hairdresser.” Dahyun suggested.

Sana nodded. “I will. But I’m still so worried right now.”

“Would your dad be up at this hour?” Dahyun asked.

“I don’t know.” Sana’s voice was but a whimper. “Some days he is and some he isn’t.”

“Maybe try texting him? See if he responds.”

Sana sniffled. Nodded and took a deep breath. “Yeah... yeah, I can do that.”

“Where’s your phone?” Dahyun asked, looking around for it.

“Under your butt.” Sana chuckled quietly.

“Oh, sorry.” Dahyun quickly made to get up, but Sana’s arms held her in place.

“I can get it without losing my cuddle buddy.” Sana insisted when Dahyun made another attempt, letting go of Dahyun with one arm to retrieve her phone from the front pocket of her sweatpants. “See?”

Dahyun nodded and held Sana tighter as she texted. “Yes, you are indeed very talented.”

Dahyun noticed that she had a picture of Dahyun sleeping as her background, and Dahyun wondered when she had taken that picture.

“Mhm.” Sana hummed, turning off the phone and sighing as she once more held tightly around Dahyun’s waist.

“Do you want to wait up for him to answer or get ready for bed?” Dahyun asked.

“I’m not done with my tea, but once I am, we can.” Sana said. “I need sleep, whether my brain thinks so or not. I’m so exhausted.”

“You saying you didn’t get sleep last night?” Dahyun asked, unable to keep the humor out of her voice. They both knew the truth. That they had gotten so lost in each other that the clock had read
four in the morning when they finally fell asleep.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying miss. But I’m not saying I mind.” Sana hummed and reached for the teacup, Dahyun naturally adjusting to allow her to take a sip. But just as Sana was about to make a take another mouthful of tea, her phone buzzed and she jolted, setting down the cup and picking up the phone. Dahyun felt how all Sana’s nerves were back just with the buzz of the phone. Heard her suddenly rapid breath.

There was a moment of silence where Sana read. Then she typed hastily and shut off her phone.

“She’s good.” Sana exhaled deeply. “She slept a lot today but she had a little more dinner than usual.”

Dahyun stroked over Sana’s hair. “That’s good.”

Sana nodded. Leaned into Dahyun and took several deep breaths. “She’s okay. I’m okay. I’m okay.”

“You’re okay.” Dahyun muttered. Kept stroking over Sana’s hair. Felt how Sana’s hold on Dahyun got tighter for a little before she started relaxing.

When Sana finally asked if they could sleep, the tea had gone cold and the hour had passed midnight. They had barely moved. Just sat there, healing in the presence of each other. Working through it at whatever pace it demanded. All of it. Any of it. Just giving it time.

…

“No, that’s wrong. Look, you gotta-” Jeongyeon reached across Dahyun, pressing the left joystick down. “See, like this, or the horse is gonna see you and run away.”

Dahyun nodded and swatted Jeongyeon’s hand away, the result being that Link popped back up from the grass, scaring the three horses in front of them.

“I don’t get this anyways, shouldn’t we be getting on with the actual story of the game?” Dahyun asked, pressing down the left joystick herself now, trying once more to get close to the pretty horse she had gotten her eye on earlier. Brown and white with beautiful spots. Carefully she got closer to it, until finally the screen asked her if she wanted to mount the horse.

“Come on, side quests is the main purpose of Zelda games and you know it. Okay, now, press A.” Jeongyeon instructed.

“I can read the screen.” Dahyun nudged Jeongyeon, pressing A.

The horse immediately tried to throw her off, but the screen told her to soothe it, so Dahyun just pressed L over and over and over in an attempt to stay on. But something was wrong. Because she got thrown off anyways, and her stamina was way down.

“What the… What am I doing wrong?”

“I’m not sure, I just remember- wait, hold on, do you have more food?” Jeongyeon turned, pressing the controller to check Link’s bag for food. “You need to get more stamina while trying to soothe the
“Who the hell eats while trying to stay on a horse that’s playing rodeo with you?” Dahyun asked exasperatedly. This game made no sense at all.

“Just do it.” Jeongyeon clicked her tongue, then turned back and called into the kitchen. “Mina? Am I not right that if you’re trying to catch a horse, you need to eat while on the horse?”

Dahyun turned her head to look as well, seeing Mina appear from the kitchen less than five seconds later.

“Yeah, and lots of it if you want a good horse.” Mina walked towards them.

“The horses are different?” Dahyun asked as Mina inspected the screen.

“Oh, yeah, full color are better then spotted horses but they all have different traits and strengths, but honestly the easiest is just to get Zelda’s horse because he’s stably good and fast, and that way you don’t have to do a lot of trial and error on horses to find one as fast as him.” Mina explained. “But anyway, which one did you want?”

Dahyun’s ears burned as she muttered. “That one, with the spots.”

Mina almost looked like she was about to scold Dahyun for making such a poor choice, but the next moment she crouched on the couch behind Dahyun and leaned an arm over the back of the couch to instruct.

“Okay,” Mina smiled, “if you want that one, then let’s get it for you.”

“Wait. How does Zelda’s horse look?” Dahyun asked carefully. She really wasn’t good at these games, but it was more fun than she had expected and they were still waiting for Sana and Jihyo to get back from the hairdresser.

“It’s white, really pretty. But it’s a side quest, you have to go talk to Toffa first if you want it.” Mina explained.

“Okay, then let’s do that.” Dahyun said decisively, not having a single clue who Toffa was. “Wait, but can I catch more than one horse?”

“You want the spotted one because it’s pretty?” Mina asked softly.

Dahyun nodded. Mina chuckled. Got to her feet and walked around the back of the couch to settle on the armrest next to Jeongyeon. They really needed a couch that actually comfortable could seat three. Or more. Not that Jeongyeon seemed to mind the way Mina had to lean halfway across her to help.

“Okay,” Mina said decisively, wrapping her arm around Jeongyeon’s shoulders, “crouch down and let’s get you that horse.”

Dahyun grinned at Mina’s determination, but did as she instructed, crouching through the grass until she found the horse she had marked as her target. And this time she got it. Tamed it with the help of Mina, and with absolutely no help from Jeongyeon (the oldest thought it much more fun to see if Dahyun could catch the horse while being poked in the side).

“Okay, now let’s go to the outskirts stables and find Toffa. We can register this horse there too.” Mina instructed, adjusting for the fifth time in three minutes.
“You can sit here if you want?” Jeongyeon suggested, making to get up. But Mina shook her head.

“I’m okay.” Mina insisted.

“You’re squirming.” Jeongyeon noted, reaching up naturally to adjust Mina’s hair.

Dahyun looked at the screen. Tried to get a hang of riding the horse. It wasn’t exactly going where Dahyun wanted it to, and she had to constantly make up for its change in direction. But she could still hear Mina and Jeongyeon’s muttered conversation.

“Let’s just switch, you’re better at this anyway.” Jeongyeon tried again.

Mina didn’t answer. But next moment Jeongyeon chuckled and Dahyun saw out of the corner of her eye how Mina had moved sideways into Jeongyeon’s lap, sitting with her feet in the space between Dahyun and Jeongyeon, an arm around the oldest.

“Okay so which way to that Toffee guy?” Dahyun asked.

“Toffa. Uh, you have to head north west towards the hopper pond and then straight north from there.” Mina instructed.

They were halfway through one of the Dueling Peaks side quests, when the lock finally sounded.

“They really took their time with that, huh?” Jeongyeon asked as Dahyun paused the game.

“I’m barely in the door and you’re already complaining?” Jihyo asked, clicking her tongue and bending down to take her shoes off as if nothing was different. But something was. Something that made both Dahyun, Mina, and Jeongyeon gape at her. Made them barely notice Sana stepping inside after her.

“What?” Jihyo asked, getting back up.

“You- y- uh.. hair!” Jeongyeon managed, pointing at her.

“Oh. Yeah.” Jihyo’s eyes shone and a shy grin spread on her lips as she ran a hand through her hair. Her significantly shorter hair. Where it had before reached her chest, it now barely touched her shoulders. “They had an empty timeslot, and I thought maybe it was time for a change.”

“She looks amazing, right?” Sana asked, wrapping her arms around Jihyo’s shoulders. “A total babe.”

“Oh definitely. Tzuyu is gonna floor it.” Jeongyeon snorted.

Dahyun chuckled as Jihyo blushed, obviously not expecting this reaction. And maybe it was exactly this that made Dahyun want to take it further. Just to widen Jihyo’s smile.

“Jihyo, I know I’m saying this with my girlfriend hanging around your neck but please, please date me.”

Jihyo blushed profusely and Sana laughed, moving Jihyo’s hair behind her ear, only to reveal that the shell of Jihyo’s ear was also very red, matching her cheeks.

“I-I… uhh, you know…” Jihyo looked absolutely flustered. “And… Tzuyu.”
“Wow, you broke her.” Jeongyeon said acknowledgingly.

“I just asked her to date me.” Dahyun shrugged, knowing full well what she had done.

“I can’t blame you, Dahyunnie.” Sana chuckled, still with her arms around Jihyo “She’s a catch. I mean she always has been, but the second she told me she was considering, I knew it’d be amazing.”

“You were right. And hey, you’re no longer competing for the prize of longest roots.” Jeongyeon noted with a grin.

Sana huffed at her. “You know, someday you’ll have to learn how to give a compliment.”

“I do.” Jeongyeon insisted.

“Let’s hear it then.” Sana leaned her head on Jihyo’s shoulder.

“I just said Jihyo looks amazing.”

“No I said that.” Sana interjected.


Sana giggled and hid her face in Jihyo’s hair.

“I mean, you’re weird but you’re pretty.” Jeongyeon added with a shrug. Chuckled when Mina clicked her tongue.

“You were so close.” Jihyo said dryly.

“She is capable, I promise you.” Mina said, raising an eyebrow at her girlfriend. “I think.”

“You- but I compliment you all the time.” Jeongyeon pouted.

Mina giggled and let her off the hook. “I know you do.”

“You’re mean.” Jeongyeon grumbled when the rest laughed at her. “The lot of you.”

“Oh come on, let us enjoy the opportunity to give you all the shit you deserve.” Jihyo grinned, letting Sana move the two of them in front of the couch, wriggling between the couch and coffee table. Dahyun tried to somehow make room for them, but before she could do anything, Sana had sat down in Dahyun’s lap, pulling Jihyo down in her own lap.

“Oh my god you’re so heavy.” Dahyun groaned at the weight of both Sana and Jihyo cutting the blood supply to her legs.

“Shush.” Sana tutted.

“If my legs fall off from this I expect to be carried everywhere.” Dahyun said dramatically, holding on to Sana’s hips nonetheless. Sana just giggled.

“I… We should get going actually.” Mina said, looking at the clock and then at Jihyo. “Minho is gonna be grumpy if we’re late.”

“You’re right.” Jihyo nodded, freeing herself from Sana’s arms and getting to her feet. Dahyun immediately sighed, her legs already buzzing from the weight. Then she winced at the prickly sensation almost immediately following the return of proper blood supply.
“You ok?” Sana whispered, worry in her voice at Dahyun’s expression. She made an attempt at moving, getting up as well, but Dahyun didn’t let her.

“I’m fine, my legs just have pins and needles.” Dahyun nodded.

“I can move?” Sana offered.

“No, it’s fine. I want you here.” Dahyun insisted.

Sana chuckled and hummed, leaning into Dahyun. Didn’t move.

Her hair smelled like lavender today - they had probably it washed at the hairdresser’s. Honestly it was almost odd to see Sana without the long dark roots. She had the exact same completely blonde hair now that she had when they had first met. And she looked impossibly even prettier.

“... Sana?” Dahyun bit her lip, remembering the earlier conversation. “You know, just for the record, you do look very beautiful”

Sana immediately laughed and squirmed as if Dahyun had tickled her. She somehow always turned into a giddy mess any time Dahyun complimented her.

“I do?”

“Oh, very.” Dahyun continued, just to get Sana to smile even more. It worked wonders, especially when she turned to look at Dahyun, her eyes shining as if asking for more.

“See, I told you they’re gross.” Jeongyeon’s voice cut through Channel Sana, and Dahyun looked around at her. She was sitting in the couch still, though looking up at Jihyo.

“Come on, let them. It’s cute, they’re happy.”

“That’s easy for you to say, you don’t have to be around it all the time.” Jeongyeon whined.

“Neither do you, you don’t live here.” Dahyun said dryly.

“Well, you keep hogging my girlfriend, so I kind of do have to.” Jeongyeon huffed. Then turned into something mostly resembling a puddle when Mina crouched by the armrest, a hand on her arm.

“We’re still on for tonight, right?” Mina asked quietly.

“Ah definitely, I’ll be there. Eight, right?” Jeongyeon asked.

Mina nodded. “Did you bring your umbrella here?”

“No, it’s home.” Jeongyeon pursed her lips slightly.

“Okay, I’ll just share with Jihyo now then and you can take mine tonight.” Mina said.

Jeongyeon nodded. “Thank you. Now go, or you will be late.”

“Okay.” Mina smiled. Hesitated and then leaned in, kissing Jeongyeon’s lips softly.

Jeongyeon chuckled under the kiss, and Mina drew back. Gave her arm a squeeze and got up. “See you tonight.”

“Bye.” Jeongyeon said, clearing her throat, a sheepish expression on her face. “Love you.”
“Love you too.” Mina’s cheeks puffed as she smiled before turning to put her shoes on.

Jeongyeon just stared after her. Loser.

Dahyun clicked her tongue at her friend. Felt Sana’s hands fiddling with her free one, the controller limply held in the other. Her fingers naturally found the spaces between Dahyun’s. Really, it was honestly quite hard to keep clowning her lovesick friends, when she was obviously just as bad. When it had just been Nayeon and Chaeyoung, it was a lot easier. But with Sana in her lap and Jeongyeon grinning stupidly after Mina, it was almost impossible to justify the hypocrisy of Dahyun’s sky-turned eyes. But it didn’t stop the reflex.

“So, are we going to get that horse or what?” Jeongyeon asked impatiently, clearing her throat as soon as Jihyo had closed the door behind herself and Mina.

Dahyun almost made a joke at Jeongyeon’s expense at that comment. But instead she just handed Jeongyeon the controller.

“Actually, I’m going to go call mom, okay?” Sana said quietly as Jeongyeon unpaused the game.

“Sure.” Dahyun nodded and untangled their hands. “Say hi from me.”

“I will. She’s been pestering me about the picture, since I told her I was getting my roots done today.” Sana got up, a soft smile on her face.

“We’ll take one tomorrow at the beach.” Dahyun promised.

“Oh, she’ll love that!” Sana beamed. Took her phone from her pocket and walked away, into her room. Dahyun stared after her unabashedly.

“I’m gonna let your spotted pony loose if you don’t get your eyes off your girlfriend’s butt and pay attention to the game.” Jeongyeon said dryly.

Dahyun turned with a panic, reaching for the controller. “No! Give it here! I swear, Yoo Jeongyeon, no way are you going to- no, give me- Jeongyeon, give it here!”

Jeongyeon had held the controller stretched away from Dahyun, and the younger basically had to crawl onto and over Jeongyeon to finally get a hold of it. Not that it was much of a struggle when Dahyun’s hand actually closed around it. Jeongyeon never really turned it into a real fight. In fact, it seemed much more like a way to make Dahyun forget about her worries for Sana, especially made obvious when Jeongyeon had made Dahyun lean on her for the better part of two hours, as they tried to solve side quests without the help of Mina. Not that they managed it very well. But Dahyun didn’t really care about that stuff. As long as she could just get to ride around Hyrule on the slow spotted pony and have one of her best friends coming up with ridiculous background plots for every NPC they talked to.

…

“Run, Dahyun! Come on, we’re not going to make it!” Sana shrieked, running along the platform, dragging Dahyun by the wrist.
“Sana…! Slow down!” Dahyun complained, completely out of breath.

“No, come on, we’re almost there!” Sana pulled harder at Dahyun’s wrist, stretching her other arm out, blocking the doors just as they were about to close. With a yelp, Dahyun was pulled sideways and jumped into the carriage, sweat piling on her forehead and her lungs failing to expand at the speed needed to support her heart rate. Yet somehow Sana was bouncing happily beside her, completely undisturbed as the train doors closed and the engine started.

“See, I told you we’d make it!” Sana beamed, Dahyun’s hand still in hers, Sana happily shaking it up and down, completely incapable of containing her joy. Dahyun didn’t have the energy to tell her that she had said exactly the opposite thirty seconds ago.

“You alive?” Asked a voice beside her.

Dahyun couldn’t answer. Just shook her head and looked at Jeongyeon, a grin plastered on the older girl’s face. If only her rib-cage was a bit bigger then maybe they could fit all the air her lungs were trying to take in. It hurt everywhere. But then again, running after Sana for god knows how long in her complete lack of shape, was downright suicide. And Jeongyeon just had the audacity to snort at her.

“Please… tell my… family… that I love them.” Dahyun panted, letting go of Sana’s hand, bending down to lean on her knees. She felt a hand on her shoulder and knew it was Jeongyeon’s, keeping her steady as the train started moving.

“At least you made it in time.” Jeongyeon said, giving Dahyun’s shoulder a squeeze.

Dahyun nodded and got up. Sana looked sheepish and amused at the same time, and Dahyun shook her head and sent her a smile.

“Oh. Okay then.” Dahyun sighed, holding a hand to her chest. “Okay, I’m alive.”

Jeongyeon chuckled at her dramatics and pulled her along, Sana following them. The rest already sat around two four-seats on either side of the hall, and Dahyun took the seat next to Mina while Jeongyeon wedged her way past Momo to take the empty window seat in the other four-seat.

“Why are you so late anyway?” Jihyo asked, sitting next to Tzuyu, opposite Jeongyeon.

“I broke a plate…” Sana admitted as she sat down on Momo’s lap, ignoring the older girl’s complaints. Just grabbed her arms and wrapped them around herself.

“What plate?” Mina asked nervously.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t use yours, it was one of Dahyun’s white ones.” Sana said.

“Oh. Okay then.” Mina said. Then pressed her lips together. Leaned on Dahyun’s shoulder and spoke to Dahyun. “Dahyun? It’s okay that she uses mine, even if they risk breaking.”

Dahyun chuckled quietly. Reached to stroke over Mina’s hair and watched as Mina closed her eyes, shuffling closer.

“I’ll tell her that.”

“Thank you.” Mina said with a tired smile.

“You sleepy?”
“Mh, we ended up going to norae bang with Jihyo last night and it got really late.” Mina said. “And my head is always so full when I’ve been out doing something that noisy.”

“Well, you can sleep on the train then.” Dahyun suggested.

“That’s my plan.” Mina opened her eyes momentarily, sending Dahyun a smile. “If you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.” Dahyun hummed. Felt Mina’s hand in hers and the thumb that stroked over Dahyun’s scar habitually. Felt her heart swell for her friend. Even if it was formed in pain, the bond that had risen between the two, was something Dahyun would never want to be without. If you had asked Dahyun a year ago if she was close with Mina, she probably would’ve shrugged and said that she wasn’t sure. But now? She couldn’t imagine her life without the girl. Couldn’t imagine her life without any of the eight girls in the train, heading for the beach.

“You’re really heavy, anyone ever tell you that?” Momo’s complaint made its way to Dahyun’s ears.

“Shut.” Sana whined. “There’s eight seats and we’re nine people, so you’re my seat. Deal with it.”

“I hate you.” Momo groaned, wrapping her arms tighter around Sana’s waist.

“You know you love me.” Sana hummed happily. Wriggled and laughed when Momo then started complaining about getting Sana’s hair in her face.

“Did you order tickets for the show?” Jihyo’s voice sounded over the noise of the train and Momo’s complaints.

“Oh, yeah, we got them.” Jeongyeon nodded, adjusting a bit to allow Momo more space to handle Sana.

“Good, I was worried when I didn’t hear from you.” Jihyo said.

“What tickets?” Dahyun asked across the hall.

“Jihyo, Nayeon, Mina, and I are going to a concert of these two girls we used to talk to in high school.” Jeongyeon explained. “They have a duo, and they’re playing down in Itaewon-Dong in a few weeks.”

“You went to school with idols?” Sana asked curiously.

“Well, they’re not huge idols, but yes!” Jeongyeon grinned. “Not that they were in class much, because of their music, but we kept in touch with them after we graduated. Nayeon and Jihyo mostly but still, it’ll be fun to see them again.”

“That’s so cool.” Sana breathed.

“You want to come? I think there are still tickets.” Jihyo asked.

“Wait, really?” Sana asked, stars in her eyes.

“Of course. Hold on, I’ll check, and otherwise I’ll ask Jisoo if she can manage some deal.” Nayeon said, pulling out her phone immediately.

Sana looked mostly like Christmas had come early. And with a soft grin, she leaned back, settling for laying across both Momo and Jeongyeon. And Jeongyeon just let her. Played with her hair and poked her cheek.
“Oh, there’s still standing tickets!” Nayeon said excitedly. “Should I get one for you, Sana?”

“Yes please!” Sana said happily holding up a thumbs up and laughing at herself so much it made her body shake.

“Dahyun? You want to go too?” Nayeon asked.

“What date?” Dahyun asked.

“Uh, 18th.” Nayeon said.

“Then no, I have a shift.” Dahyun adjusted slightly, and Mina sighed, seemingly halfway asleep.

Nayeon nodded and returned to the phone, buying a ticket for Sana.

“How much do I owe you?” Sana asked.

“Don’t worry about it, the tickets aren’t too expensive.”

“You sure?” Sana looked up from Jeongyeon’s lap, the angle strained.

“Absolutely. If you pay for the alcohol after the show, we’ll call it even.” Nayeon insisted.

Sana beamed and nodded. “Okay.”

For a moment they all seemed focused on Sana and Nayeon, but the next moment Sana’s head was back in Jeongyeon’s lap and her legs swung gently in the hallway between the two halves of the party.

“Oh, speaking of getting things done; Dahyun?” Chaeyoung asked in the seconds of silence that followed. “Did you sign up for classes yet? Isn’t the deadline tomorrow?”

“I signed up Thursday.” Dahyun nodded. “Lots of gen ed for me, it’s gonna be hell.”

“But they still allowed you to pile the classes.” Tzuyu shrugged. “And that way you can just focus on your major after winter break.”

Dahyun nodded in agreement. “It doesn’t mean I won’t complain, though. Especially since this was supposed to be our last semester together before we drifted to different branches, and now we won’t even have this next semester together...”

Tzuyu smiled shyly, averting her gaze to Jihyo’s hand in her lap, their pinkies twined.

“Wow, you’re really getting soft.” Chaeyoung stated at Dahyun in mock surprise, then looked up at Sana. “What did you do to her?”

Sana shrugged and giggled. “She’s always been soft.”

“That’s true actually, you used to be able to squish her cheeks re-“

“Yes, thank you, Jihyo!” Dahyun stared her down, cheeks warm.

“What? I remember you with your soft cheeks in that bunny suit, I swear you were the most adorable thing on earth!” Jihyo continued unabashed, chuckling at Dahyun’s attempt to hide her face in her hair, although this proved quite impossible with Mina sleeping on half of it, her head steadily leaned against Dahyun’s shoulder.
The sound of the female announcer calling the name of the next stop, fell between the remnants of laughter, and conversations struck up anew. About Tzuyu’s new job and moving dorms and about Jeongyeon’s sister getting cast in a drama, and everything in between. And thus, one minute took the next until the announcer suddenly called their station. Called their presence to the sea.

After waking Mina and Momo, and getting their stuff from the overhead shelves, they left the train in twos and threes. Dahyun walked with Momo as the last ones, though close enough that they heard Tzuyu talk, her arm linked with Sana’s.

“How is your mom?” Tzuyu asked carefully.

Sana looked around at her, brows furrowing for a second before relaxing.

“No real change.”

“I’m sorry.” Tzuyu said genuinely.

Sana tried her best to brush it off, but Dahyun could see the mist in her eye. “Well, she did get a lot better in the time I was there so it makes sense that the progress would stagnate. It just needs time.”

Dahyun resisted the urge to take Sana’s hand, allowing her to lean on Tzuyu instead. If she was ever going to become a fully integrated member of their little group, it was important for the others to know that she trusted them. And it was important to let others be something for her, without Dahyun being there all the time. That much Dahyun had learned by now. So instead, Dahyun just held Momo’s hand a little tighter. And Momo seemed to get it. Because next thing the cool tip of her nose brushed Dahyun’s temple and a kiss placed in the same spot a second later. Dahyun smiled. Felt lucky that Momo could somehow read her mind.

“Are you going back to visit her soon?” Chaeyoung asked to their left, her head helplessly caught under Jeongyeon’s arm, dragged along at an awkward angle without really seeming to mind. Then again, she never really seemed to mind any shenanigans Jeongyeon got her into.

Sana smiled in amusement at Chaeyoung but nodded. “I’m going back for Christmas, and Dahyun is coming with me.”

“You’re coming to Japan with us?” Momo asked hopefully.

Dahyun nodded. “We talked about it this summer already, but the schedules didn’t fit. But I’ll make it fit with Taeyang this Christmas so we can go.”

“You better. I’ll cover whatever shifts are needed.” Jeongyeon said immediately.

Dahyun looked down at her feet. Grinned to herself as sand took over for pavement. With Momo’s hand on her shoulder, Dahyun stopped and leaned down to take off the sneakers and socks, digging her bare feet into the warm sand. It felt as wonderful as it had on her birthday, and the beach was just as beautiful as it had been that day.

“Wanna race?” Chaeyoung asked beside her.

Dahyun got back up with a grin. “You’re on, Padawan.”

“Here, let me take those.” Momo said, grabbing both their shoes and bags.
Chaeyoung beamed at her girlfriend and then got into position, like a real sprinter would. “You ready, Kim? Three-”

“Wait,” Momo said quickly, “phones, give those here too.”

“Oh, right.” Chaeyoung got up from her kneeling position, brushing the sand from her hands and digging her phone from the jean shorts.

“Mine is already in the bag.” Dahyun said. Looked with a raised brow at Chaeyoung as she once more got ready to run, hands on the sand and butt in the air and everything. Dahyun snorted.

“What? I’m serious.” Chaeyoung sent her a smirk. Dahyun sighed but mimicked her position anyways. Knew that the others were looking at them but didn’t care.

“Three.” Chaeyoung said.

“Two.” Dahyun answered.

“One…”

“Go!” Dahyun barked. And so they were off, Chaeyoung’s strong legs carrying her better than Dahyun’s in the difficult sand. But Dahyun somehow kept up, ignoring her lungs complaining that they were once again put to work.

Despite the strain, there was something about the warm sand under her feet that made her feel liberated. Something about Jeongyeon and Jihyo’s laughter ringing in her ears and the blood rushing to her fingers and toes, that made her feel so alive.

None of them noticed who got there first, the water splashing around their legs, coming to a halt a some fifteen feet out, water playing around their calves. But every day since then, Chaeyoung would claim it was her, and Nayeon would call her a liar.

…

The sand burned under Mina’s feet and she walked with nimble steps towards the shore, most of the others already in the water. Only Tzuyu and Nayeon had yet to go in, and Tzuyu most likely wouldn’t try. She had never been one for water, and Mina respected that about her - that she didn’t do anything just because others asked her to. She was so comfortable in her own skin somehow, and standing at the water’s edge, looking over at the youngest, Mina couldn’t help but wish that she was more like her. More sure of her own stance when faced with insecurity. But Mina wasn’t like Tzuyu. Mina was… Mina, after all. With all the flaws that came with being herself.

“You know,” Nayeon’s voice cut through Mina’s thoughts somewhere to her right, “I never really liked you.”

Mina looked around. Gave a small smile when Nayeon joined Mina, standing next to her with crossed arms.

“I know.” Mina hummed peacefully, sitting down in the warm sand. Nayeon joined her with no hesitation.
“I love you,” Nayeon sighed, “but I never really liked you. I think- well no, I know why. You scare me.”

Mina frowned. “I scare you?”

Nayeon nodded. “You’re soul baring. And I hate that. I hate that I can’t be friends with you without wanting to share my soul with you, because it’s not a very pretty soul, and I don’t know if you’d like me much if you knew how it looked.”

Mina looked over the water, at her friends fighting and playing in the waves. Put a hand between herself and Nayeon, just in case Nayeon needed something to hold on to.

“I don’t think I could not like how your soul looks, Nayeon. Because as opposed to you, I’ve never seen a part of you I don’t like.”

Nayon gave a humorless laugh. “Well, I haven’t showed you much. Yet. Like I said, I’m not really someone who shows her soul well. And honestly, it was easy just to decide not to like you. Because then there wouldn’t be a temptation to tell you things I’m scared of saying. And the fact that you were so fucking perfect just made it easier to dislike you. To reinforce this image in my head that you’re someone I’ll just never really get along with.”

Mina chuckled. “I think ‘were’ is the cue here. There’s not much ‘perfect’ left.”

“And you’d think that’d solve it in my dumbass brain, wouldn’t you?” Nayeon said humorlessly.

Mina hummed, but then felt her heart skip a beat. Because a hand lay softly on top of her own, giving it a light squeeze.

“When you kissed Jihyo, it was just an excuse to prove a screwed up point, that you thought yourself too good for us. And I know that’s not the case, trust me, I know. I saw how you were with Jihyo - you were just a giggly kid with odd feet and the same gummy smile as myself.” Nayeon sighed and adjusted, her grip on Mina’s hand tightening for a moment. “And then you kissed Jihyo. And I think I just couldn’t accept it from you because I had built this picture of you in my head that was perfect, and it made it okay to dislike you. But when you kissed Jihyo, I didn’t know how to act, because you weren’t perfect, and I couldn’t dislike you for that anymore. So I just channeled all my anger into your actions instead of trying to understand why you did it. Why Jihyo did it. I just took her side blindly because it was easy. I did nothing to help my friend get to where she is today, because I never let myself consider that she wasn’t an innocent bystander. It was so much easier to paint you as the villain and her as the innocent victim.”

Mina nodded. She wasn’t really sure why Nayeon was telling her all of this, but she didn’t want to interrupt. It seemed like something she needed to say, and somewhere Mina knew that it was something she too needed to hear.

“You know what the first thing I thought was, when I figured out Jeongyeon had fallen for you?” Nayeon asked.

“What?” Mina looked around at the older girl. Found tears in her eyes despite the calmness of her voice.

“I thought…” Nayeon blinked rapidly and shook her head. “I thought how stupid I must be not to see whatever it was that made people love you so much. And that just scared me even more.”

“It scared me too.” Mina admitted quietly. Watched the calm water softly wash over their toes and retreat. Really, she had made so many wrong choices and so many mistakes, yet somehow they were
all still here. Dahyun had pulled her back and Jeongyeon too. They had all wanted her despite her flaws. And it was terrifying. Yet she couldn’t imagine anywhere she would rather be now than right here.

What if she hadn’t made all those mistakes? Would she be sitting here then? Or somewhere else with other people. Or with none at all. She could hardly bear the thought. Couldn’t imagine her life without the roaring laughter and shrieks of her ridiculous friends wrestling and chasing each other in the water. And when Dahyun’s voice rose over the rest, Mina couldn’t help but smile. And for the first time in her life Mina considered the possibility that maybe mistakes aren’t irreparable, but merely an opportunity to grow.

“Dahyun changed something in me, you know.” Nayeon said, as if she was reading from Mina’s mind. But she wasn’t. This was herself. “Jeongyeon and Jihyo - they stick with me despite having seen all my bad sides, but they never saw them all at once. It was a process of sorts, getting under my skin. The famous Nayeon bubble.”

Mina giggled. Couldn’t help it. Jeongyeon had told about that particular bubble quite a lot, and Mina had somehow always accepted that it was something she would never see from the inside. But there was a part of her that knew that she was already there. Inside Nayeon’s bubble from the moment Nayeon had taken her hand.

“... Dahyun saw it all at once.” Nayeon continued. “She saw me when I needed someone the most, without being able to ask. She saw and she became that person and she held me through all of my fears. I’m so afraid of being weak, and being abandoned and it makes me do stupid shit, but she knows all of that and she’s still here. She thinks no less of me because of it. Honestly, if she hadn’t done what she had, I probably wouldn’t be able to tell you this. At least not yet. And... and I’d like to tell you one last thing, if you’re willing to listen to me.”

Mina nodded, hugging her knees with her free hand and looking around at Nayeon.

“Of course.”

“I really like how you love Jeongyeon. You’re good for her. You’re good together.” Nayeon smiled. “When we were younger, we were both sure that you and Jihyo were meant to be. You were hers, and there was no getting around it. I mean, even after we graduated we always thought you were meant for Jihyo. It was like, even if I didn’t like you much, Jihyo did. In her eyes, you were perfect. In her mind you were.”

Mina felt like interjecting, the black marks on her ribs practically prickling to call attention to themselves, but Nayeon shook her head as if she knew what Mina had been about to do.

“I’m not done. I think, somewhere underneath it all, I disliked you back then because I knew, that even if I bared my soul to you, you wouldn’t do the same to me. You don’t show yourself well. And that’s why I thought you were so annoyingly perfect. But the thing is, that you’re not perfect, to Jeongyeon. You’re not just the pretty sides of you, and you don’t try to be. Through her you’ve just become… you. More how you were with Jihyo privately - that person she kept trying to convince us you were. But I just didn’t know that, I didn’t feel it on my own skin. And then when I got suspicious of you two back in December, I was trying to figure out what made Jeongyeon like you so much, but I couldn’t see the full picture. Not until I saw you together openly. Until then I was just mad that she didn’t tell me and confused how she could love Jihyo’s soulmate so much, that she was willing to lie to me to protect you from whatever consequence might come of what you had.”

Mina looked down at her feet again. The waves didn’t quite reach.
“But lately I’ve come to see that you’re not perfect. In any of the ways I accused you of. You’re so… so wonderfully im perfect. And I think what I’m trying to say, is that I really quite like you.”

Something lifted inside of Mina. A weight she didn’t know was there.


“Huh?” Nayeon looked confused.

“Do you remember the time, a few days after the graduation party when we met in front of the grocery store?”

“Ugh, don’t remind me, I was such a bitch.” Nayeon groaned, looking up at the sky and shaking her head.

“You called me little miss perfect.”

“I bet, I did.” Nayeon cringed. “Sorry.”

“No, it’s okay. I think something really good is about to come of that.”

“What do you mean?” Nayeon frowned, apparently completely lost. And really, Mina couldn’t blame her. It wasn’t like Mina had ever told anyone except Jeongyeon about this particular detail about herself.

“Here, look.” Mina said, retreating her hand from Nayeon’s to pull up the hem of her shirt, showing midriff and her ribs.

“You’re kidding.” Nayeon said breathlessly, staring at it. “Please tell me that’s fake. No, please, you’re actually shitting me, right?”

“I wish.” Mina chuckled, letting Nayeon study the little black tattoo, the older girl running a finger softly over the skin.

“Damn, Myoui.” Nayeon said when Mina finally pulled the shirt down. “How long have you had that?”

“Since that day, when you called me ‘little miss perfect’.” Mina admitted point blank.

“Shit. Shit, I’m so sorry, Mina. I need to watch my words better.” Nayeon looked downright embarrassed.

“No, don’t be.” Mina said, grabbing Nayeon’s hand again, making Nayeon’s eyes snap up to meet Mina’s. “I don’t regret it.”

“You don’t?”

“No. Well, I did but- not anymore. I got a different perspective on it, and I like it. Jeongyeon, she- she made me like it, I guess. But I think maybe it needs a little change.”

“How so?” Nayeon asked curiously.

“... Imperfect.” Mina shrugged.

Nayeon looked down at their hands. Smiled. “You really are an odd one.”
“Yeah.” Mina said. “I am.”

“Can I come? When you get it done?” Nayeon asked, almost shyly.

Mina looked up at her. “Of course.”

“Thanks.” Nayeon still looked quite abashed, then shook her head. “I can’t believe you have a damn tattoo…”

Mina felt her cheeks warm and looked over the water at the others. Sana was currently stuck in a headlock under Momo’s arm and Jihyo was trying to tickle Momo to get Sana her freedom back. Jeongyeon stood laughing when Momo jumped and wriggled, losing her grip on Sana. Next moment, Momo had seemingly chosen Jeongyeon as her target, though not for fighting, but for cuddling. Jeongyeon didn’t look like she minded. She merely indulged Momo, wrapping her arms around Momo’s shoulders and swaying her lightly. Sana however, looked like it was a personal offence that Momo took safe harbor before she could get revenge. Next moment however, Jeongyeon seemed to take her payment, biting Momo’s shoulder to make her squirm and giggle.

“... The fuck?” Nayeon asked, an air of disbelief in her voice.

“Huh?” Mina looked around at her. Found her to be gaping.

“Is Jeongyeon… Is she biting my girlfriend?”

“What? Oh, yeah.”

“You’re not- she does this often?” Nayeon looked absolutely shocked.

“Not often, but sometimes.” Mina looked out at them, Jeongyeon’s laughter catching Mina’s attention. Momo was complaining, showing her shoulder, but Jeongyeon just seemed to be having the time of her life.

“... She’s biting my girlfriend!” Nayeon whined.

“Well,” Mina shrugged, “you get used to it.”

“But why?”

“No clue. She just does it sometimes?”

“And you’d think I knew my best friend after all these years.” Nayeon said, skyfallen.

“You learn new things about people all the time.” Mina said with a smile. Looked down at their still held hands.

“Does she bite… you know, in general?” Nayeon cringed, then shook her head. “No, you know what, don’t answer that, I’m not sure I’m ready for that detail.”

Mina chuckled and shrugged.

“Should I save her? Momo, I mean” Nayeon asked.

Mina nodded. “I think she’d appreciate it.”

“Okay then.” Nayeon got to her feet, making sure to pull Mina up as well. “I mean, It’s all the same too, I think I owe Momo and Chaeyoung to actually go into the water this time, so I might as well
show up as Princess Charming, saving my girl.”

Mina frowned, but then remembered Nayeon’s mood the last time they had been here, and the call Jeongyeon had gotten the next morning.

“Hey, Nayeon?” Mina asked quietly, brushing the sand from her thighs and shorts.

“Mh?” Nayeon looked around at her.

Mina hesitated. Then smiled, giving her hand a little squeeze.

“I like being inside your bubble.”

...

“No!” Nayeon yelped helplessly. “No, you can’t- Let me go!”

“As you wish.” Chaeyoung snorted, barely able to keep it together. She had a tight grip around Nayeon’s struggling legs. Then she looked over at Momo and shrugged. Momo giggled and nodded, her arms under Nayeon’s holding her up, just above the surface of the water.

“Don’t you dare, Momo, no, I-”

But it was too late. A firm swing to one side and then to the other, letting go of the oldest girl, sending her screaming into the water. There was quite a bit of commotion under the surface, and then she emerged, her once again red hair falling into her face, a complete lack of elegance.

“I’m breaking up!” Nayeon howled, trying to get her hair out of her face.

“Oh yeah?” Chaeyoung asked, launching herself at her oldest girlfriend. “You sure about that?”

“Get off!” Nayeon whined, Chaeyoung now joined by Momo, both of them hanging around Nayeon’s neck, overly pleased with themselves.

Dahyun chuckled. Watched as they kept teasing Nayeon until finally she gave up and walked the three of them back into shallower waters.

“I’d like to donate two girlfriends to goodwill.” Nayeon huffed, struggling with the weight of dragging both her girlfriends in.

“Yeah right, you’re going to die without them.” Jeongyeon said dryly before swimming over to Mina. Happily, she wrapped her arms around the younger girl’s waist, looking up at her with expectation in her eyes. Mina gave a single breathless laugh and shook her head. Jeongyeon looked very much like she had gotten exactly what she had wanted. Dahyun felt the need to look away. Very much so. And almost as if Sana knew she needed a distraction, she was suddenly there by Dahyun’s side. Placed a soft hand on Dahyun’s arm and slid it down to take Dahyun’s hand, left hand over left hand, fingers twining. It felt wonderful. And even more so when Sana moved around to stand behind Dahyun, arm under Dahyun’s, finding her other hand too.

“Had a good day?” Dahyun asked quietly.
Sana nodded. “Very. And think I love it here with all of you more than anything. Anywhere with you. I mean, if people saw me, they’d say I’m in love.”

“Oh yeah?” Dahyun turned her head slightly, just to see the way Sana’s eyes shone in the setting sun. How she smiled when looking at their friends. It wasn’t just Dahyun she was in love with. It was all of them, somehow. Different kinds of love, but all love.

“Very much in love.” Sana found Dahyun’s eyes.

“Then let them.” Dahyun hummed. “Let people say we’re in love.”

Sana chuckled. “You remember…”

“Of course. First time I ever got a girl to hold my hand just by being a fidgety mess.” Dahyun grinned.

Sana held Dahyun’s hand tighter. “It was hard not to-”

“Yah!”

Nayeon’s voice interrupted Sana from further out. She looked very much like she was in need of assistance, with Momo and Chaeyoung really giving her a run for her money. Then she turned her head, her eyes finding the two girls looking at her.

“Help!” she called begging, as Chaeyoung tugged at her. It looked mostly like a kindergarten teacher with two overgrown five year olds on a sugar high. Sana chuckled as Momo overpowered Nayeon, now clinging to her back. Chaeyoung in turn, tried to crawl onto Momo’s back.

“Oh my god, no!” Nayeon protested loudly. “No!”

“Should we help?” Sana asked, bubbles in her voice.

“You go.” Dahyun said softly. “I’m going to head in.”

Sana hesitated for a moment. Then gave Dahyun’s hands a final squeeze before disentangling their bodies and heading out past Dahyun. For a moment it looked mostly like Sana was going to side with Momo and Chaeyoung, but the next she launched herself at the youngest, grabbing her around the waist and pulling her away, screaming and squealing.

Dahyun chuckled. Turned away from the four and walked slowly through the shallow waters, towards Jihyo and Tzuyu sitting by the shore, writing in the sand. Dahyun smiled at the lyrics written. Sat down next to Jihyo and put her head on Jihyo’s shoulder.

“Hey, butterfly. Cold?” Jihyo wrapped an arm around Dahyun, stroking her cool skin.

“No, I just missed you.” Dahyun said.

Jihyo gave a few warm chuckles. “I missed you too.”

Dahyun adjusted to lean on her more. Took a deep breath and opened her eyes. Looked at the waves softly hugging the shore.

“I’m sorry, I made it seem like I chose Tzuyu’s side over yours back then.”

“You were right to.” Jihyo said quietly.
“Right or not, I should’ve been there for you too.” Dahyun insisted.

“It’s okay. I’m just happy you didn’t spread yourself too thin this time around.”

“I wish I had done more.” Dahyun admitted.

“You did plenty. Mina and Tzuyu…” Dahyun felt Jihyo shift and knew she was looking over at Tzuyu. “You were there for the people I wasn’t. That means more to me than if you had been there for me, but not for them.”

Dahyun closed her eyes again. “Can I ask you something else then?”

“Sure.” Jihyo moved her hand up to stroke over Dahyun’s wet hair. “Anything.”

Dahyun took a deep breath, feeling the last warmth of the day in her nostrils.

“... Why do days end?”

Jihyo didn’t answer right away. Just stroked over Dahyun’s hair, seemingly thinking about how to answer. And when she finally did, it was with a calm that Dahyun hadn’t heard from her in weeks. Months.

“To give people a chance to start over, or a chance to take the next step, I think.”

“Start over?”

“You know that saying, when electronics don’t work? Have you tried turning it off and then turning it back on? It’s basically the computer way of saying, have you tried sleeping? I think somewhere, by resting, letting a day end, you get a chance to learn something from the day and cherish the next more, or to try again, fight another day. Days end so you can find out what to do next. Split up infinity in little steps.”

“What if I don’t know what my next step is?” Dahyun asked, feeling the warmth of Jihyo, as if she was sitting by a bonfire.

“You step anyways. You can’t prevent the day from ending. So you just take the next step. Make the next decision. Face the next day.”

Dahyun nodded.

In silence they watched the sun set over the ocean, and Dahyun imagined for a moment what she wanted tomorrow to be. Didn’t plan further than toast. Sighed heavily, peacefully, and nuzzled closer.

“Are you okay?” Jihyo asked carefully.

Dahyun looked around at older girl and let her lips split in a smile. Felt her heart burst with bubbles and the crackling of a bonfire. She nodded.

“I’m great.”

The words were gone by midnight. As were the girls who had written them.
I don’t wanna do a damn thing without you.

With love,


-fin-

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